

Case Study – Engaging Parents in Substance Abuse Treatment

INITIAL HEARING SCENARIO

A new case comes into court. Two children, a 10 year old boy (Brian), and a 6 month old girl (Julia), have been detained from their young mother (Martha) due to allegations of drug use and domestic violence between the mother and her boyfriend (Julia's Father Frank). Brian has a different Father (Fred) who has not been around for several years.

Additional information contained in the detention materials includes a short police report detailing a home call made by the police a month earlier in which screaming had been heard coming from the home, but no arrests were made and all parties denied any problems. At that time, the Mother did admit that Brian's Father Fred, whom she hasn't seen in a couple of years, used to beat her. She denies current domestic violence between herself and Julia's Father. There was no follow up until the current detention, which resulted from Julia's Father being arrested for selling methamphetamine in the alleyway adjacent to the family apartment building. A search of the family's apartment incident yielded more drugs, and as the children were present with their Mother, they were detained in the ensuing chaos. There is no police report attached relating to the events that led to the actual detention of the children.

At an interview conducted by the social worker after removal from the home, Brian whose speech is difficult to understand, made statements indicating he had seen Julia's Father hit his Mother, and also that his mother sleeps a lot during the day. Additionally, while Brian meets the age requirements for school, he has not been enrolled for the new school year. The social worker's report indicates that Mother has a sister who may be available to take the children into her home, but the children are currently placed in a foster home together.

ADDITIONAL FACTS AT INITIAL HEARING

Brian and his Mother are present at the hearing. Brian was brought in through court transportation. Julia's Father was released from custody and now his whereabouts are unknown. The maternal aunt comes with the Mother to court.

DISCUSSION POINTS

What issues need to be addressed at this stage of the case (Initial/Detention Hearing)?

1. What would your current system do to address the substance abuse issues indicated?

2. What are some strategies to begin engaging the Mother and Fathers?

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ADDITIONAL FACTS AT THE JURISDICTIONAL HEARING

The Children Protective Services (CPS) report states that the Mother continues to deny sale or use of drugs, current domestic violence or other problems in the home. She very much wants her children returned to her and has pledged to keep Julia's Father away from the children. She has been visiting consistently, but cries when the visit is over, which is difficult for the children, and they start crying too.

Neither Father is available for interview.

Brian is interviewed for the jurisdictional report and he is now saying that nobody has ever hit anybody, but still says that his Mother sleeps a lot during the day. He has no knowledge of drug use or sales in the home. After an assessment, both children were placed with the Maternal Aunt.

Further CPS investigation reveals that Mother had a child in between Brian and Julia who is living with a Maternal relative in another county. The Maternal relative was contacted and tells the CPS Worker that proceedings were started against Mother and she gave that child up for legal guardianship a couple of years ago. She doesn't know if Brian was ever involved in those proceedings. Maternal relative tells the Worker that she took the child in because the Mother was overwhelmed by caring for two children, the Mother was using methamphetamine, and the Father was abusive. The Father of this child is also Julia's Father.

Julia's hospital/birth records are attached and they reveal that no drug testing was done, but that she was a low birth weight baby and had difficulty breast feeding. Mother had no prenatal care with regard to Julia as far as the Worker can tell.

The jurisdictional report requests that the petition be sustained as pled and that all parents be denied family reunification services.

DISCUSSION POINTS

What issues need to be addressed at this stage of the case (Jurisdictional Hearing)?

1. What would your current system do to address the substance abuse issues identified?
2. What are some strategies to engage the Mother and Fathers?
3. What are additional services that may be needed by the children?

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ADDITIONAL FACTS AT THE REUNIFICATION STATUS HEARINGS

Mother has been complying with the case plan somewhat sporadically, but has been visiting often and appropriately. She enrolled late in a domestic violence class (DV), and attends occasionally, completed parenting, and has missed drug tests. She is currently employed. She continues to maintain that she has had no contact with Julia's Father. She is living in a small studio apartment in a rough area of town that she insists is appropriate for both children. The Child Support Division of the Family Court has begun search proceedings to locate the non-custodial fathers and seek child support.

Brian and Julia are thriving in the home of their maternal Aunt. Brian is in school, but a grade behind and continues to have some difficulties completing assignments. He has also been hitting other students. Julia, now close to a year old, is just beginning to sit up and is not verbalizing at all.

Maternal Aunt states that if Mother can "get her act together," she should get her children back, but in her opinion, Mother is doing the bare minimum to reunify just so she can get the welfare check. Maternal Aunt reports no problems with visits and also states that she has not seen either Father nor heard that they are around. Maternal Aunt would be interested in either legal guardianship or adoption if reunification efforts fail.

Brian wishes to return to his Mother but is happy at his Aunt's house. Even though Maternal Aunt provides day care for other children and Julia, Julia is now relating to her Aunt as her Mother, and treats Mother as a "friendly visitor," when mom visits.

DISCUSSION POINTS

What issues need to be addressed at this stage of the case (Reunification Status Hearing)?

1. What would your current system do to address the substance abuse issues indicated?
2. What are some strategies to engage the Mother and Fathers?
3. What are additional services that may be needed by the children?