

Reflecting on Abuse and Neglect

This is a fictionalized account of events that occurred on a U.S. military installation. The names, exact dates, locations, child care setting, and service-specific terminology have been changed or neutralized. To create the activities in this and subsequent lessons, we started with the facts of a real criminal investigation and lawsuit. What you will read here goes beyond the facts recorded in the criminal case by imagining details of individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Read the following scenario. Then answer the reflection questions. When you are finished, share your answers with a trainer, supervisor, or coach.

Kate's Story: Part 1

Kate's life had never been easy: In her first four years of life, she had experienced developmental delays and failure to thrive. When she was 4 years old, a court awarded her biological father, Alan (age 25), custody of Kate. She was removed from her biological mother's home and went to live with her father and pregnant stepmother, Gigi (age 21), on a U.S. military installation half-a-world away from the home she had known. Both Alan and Gigi were active duty members of the U.S. military. Unfortunately, no one knew Kate was moving into a home plagued by violence. Only a month after Kate arrived, her father moved out of installation housing after a fight with Gigi. The next day, her stepmother went to Alan's new apartment located off the installation and physically assaulted him. Kate witnessed the whole thing. Her stepmother was charged with assault and child endangerment. A social worker from the local child protection agency wrote in a report about "the presence of family violence" and the family members' inability to manage anger.

At the time of the arrest for assault and child endangerment, the local law enforcement notified the military law enforcement who notified Gigi's command and the installation Family Advocacy Program. The command issued a no contact order until a FAP assessment could be completed. FAP completed the assessment and presented it to the incident determination committee. The committee determined that the incidents met criteria for spouse abuse and child neglect. Treatment recommendations included parenting classes for both parents and clinical counseling for Gigi. The New Parent Support Program was offered to Gigi but she declined to participate.

The local child protection agency recommended that Kate remain in the home. Her father, who had moved back in with the family, administered what he called "discipline" with a belt and closed fist. During the Family Advocacy Program assessment, he admitted to "disciplining" Kate this way every day. Although both parents appeared to be making progress in the parenting classes and Kate seemed to be doing well, things began to change for Kate, after her half-sister was born. Gigi dropped out of the parenting classes and clinical counseling after giving birth. When contacted by FAP, Gigi said she was too fatigued with the new baby but would return

when her maternity leave was complete. During this time, Kate began having more accidents and soiling her pants more often. Her stepmother swore at her, called her stupid, and refused to let her wear clothes in the house. All furniture and clothing were removed from Kate's room, so she wouldn't make a mess. She was forced to sleep on the floor. One night during a weekly court-mandated phone call with her mother, Kate said she was going to get a beating because she had wet her clothes. Her parents snatched the phone away. Kate's father and stepmother stopped making and receiving calls from Kate's biological mother soon after. Kate's biological mother had to file paperwork in court to regain her rights.

Kate's family child care provider was concerned about her safety. The provider noticed marks on her that she believed might be signs of child abuse. The day after the suspicions were reported to the Family Advocacy Program, Kate's family withdrew her from the family child care home. Upon receipt of the concerns from the child care provider, FAP notified the local child protection agency, the command, and military law enforcement. An appointment was scheduled with the family for an assessment the following day.

The night before the appointment, neighbors heard shouting and crying from the house. The neighbor called the military police. Kate had been screaming for over an hour, and the neighbor was concerned for her safety. The military police found Kate naked in her bedroom with feces on the carpet. There were scratches and bruises of various shades on her face and body. The local child protection agency took Kate into emergency foster care. Gigi and Allen face legal and criminal charges. The actions of the family child care provider, neighbors, and the Family Advocacy Program may have saved a life.

Reflection Questions:

Do you think Kate's treatment is an example of child abuse and neglect? Why or why not?

Yes, Kate's treatment is an example of child abuse. She has been whipped and beaten with a closed fist. She witnessed acts of violence and lived in a climate of fear. She was berated and called names. Some of the actions against her could also be considered neglect: When her clothes were removed and her furniture and bedding were removed, her needs were not being met.

What types of child abuse or neglect do you think Kate was experiencing?

Kate experienced several types of abuse and neglect. She experienced physical abuse at the hands of her father. She also experienced emotional abuse from her father and stepmother as they insulted her, swore at her, and belittled her. As described in the first question, she also could have experienced neglect.

Think about the definition of child abuse and neglect. Respond to each component below:

- **A recent act or failure to act:** What did adults in Kate's life do to mistreat her? What did they not do?

They whipped and beat her. They called her names, swore at her, and prevented her needs from being met.

- **On the part of a parent or caretaker:** Who was involved in Kate's abuse or neglect?

Her father and stepmother

- **Which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation:** What harm did Kate experience? You will learn more about the signs of abuse and neglect in Lesson Two.

Kate had physical evidence of abuse: scratches, bruises. Also there was serious emotional harm being done to Kate (the emotional harm can be even more damaging than the physical abuse).

- **Or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm:** What situations presented an imminent risk of harm?

Kate's neighbors and family child care provider sensed an imminent risk of harm. They called authorities for assistance when they thought Kate might be in danger. The "act" was the physical and emotional abuse. She was beaten, whipped, neglected, etc. The abuse Kate was enduring was harmful and there was ongoing imminent risk of continued harm.