Reflecting on Abuse and Neglect

This is a fictionalized account of actual events that occurred on a U.S. military installation. The names, exact dates, locations, 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. Although much of what you will read here is fiction, the sequence of events and the tragic consequences are very real.

Learn more about the scenario that you read in Lesson 1. This time, look for the signs of abuse and neglect. Then answer the reflection questions. When you are finished, share your answers with your trainer, supervisor, or coach.

Timothy’s Story: Part 2

In the Child Development Center:
Timothy joined the infant classroom in the CDC in July. His primary caregiver, Beckett, adored the baby with chubby cheeks and a quick smile. Timothy’s dad, Trevor, always dropped him off in the morning and picked him up in the evening. He seemed like a quiet man who valued his privacy. He did not talk much with the CDC staff, but he was always on time and respectful. Trevor did not seem especially “cuddly” or nurturing, but he seemed to meet Timothy’s needs. Beckett gave Trevor credit for being so involved in Timothy’s life. In fact, Beckett had begun to assume that Trevor was a single dad. He never mentioned a wife or Timothy’s mother even in passing. Beckett saw Candice’s name on Timothy’s enrollment paperwork, but he had never met her. He assumed something must have happened between the couple. There never seemed to be a right time to ask Trevor about her. He didn’t want to offend Trevor or open up a difficult subject. He figured Trevor would bring up his family situation when he was ready.

By August, Beckett had begun to notice some signs that worried him. After a month in the program, he felt like he knew Timothy pretty well. He wondered, though, whether the signs he was seeing were just part of Timothy’s temperament or whether they were a sign of a problem. For example, Timothy sometimes seemed reactive to touch. He startled easily when touched and would cry as if he was hurt. Sometimes it was difficult to calm him down. Once he was calm, though, he was the happiest baby in the room. He and Trevor talked once briefly about colic and reflux. Beckett had also noticed that Timothy did not seem to move around as much as the other infants did. He did not reach for his toes or kick his legs into the air like other babies. Beckett just assumed his motor skills were developing at a different rate.

When Timothy was out for a week without notice, Beckett was concerned. He tried calling the family, but no one answered. It wasn’t too unusual for children to be out for extended periods of time, though. He figured Trevor was on leave, and they were out exploring the local country or visiting friends. When Timothy came
back the next week, though, Beckett knew something wasn’t right. Timothy cried more than he ever had before. When Beckett picked him up, Timothy screamed so loud that a trainer walking down the hallway stepped in to make sure everything was OK. Beckett wasn’t sure what to do. When he laid Timothy down on the changing table to check his diaper, Timothy screamed again as soon as his shoulders touched the pad. Beckett gently lifted the baby’s shirt to investigate. That’s when he noticed the burns. He had never seen burns like that on a baby. The trainer was still in the room and came over to look. She was very upset by what she saw and called Trevor to ask about the injury. He said the baby had been burned by hot water in the bathtub. He said he had not taken the baby to the doctor because there didn’t seem to be any sign of infection.

Beckett and the trainer looked again at the injuries. Beckett did not know how a baby could get burned like that in the bathtub. He could not imagine a parent accidentally putting a baby in bath water hot enough to leave those marks.

At Home:
Candice loved her baby and her husband, but she had to admit that life was not going the way she had planned. She was bored, lonely, and unhappy. She rarely left the apartment. When Trevor got home, he was always too tired to go out.

The move overseas was hard on everyone. She barely recognized the baby she had carried on the trans-Atlantic flight just two months earlier. He had grown so much, but his personality seemed different, too. He didn’t seem as happy or energetic as he used to. His eye contact wasn’t very strong anymore, and he cried a lot. He didn’t seem to squirm or wiggle as much as the babies she had grown up around at home. When she mentioned her concerns to the pediatrician, he encouraged her to read a few pamphlets. He said Timothy was developmentally on-track.

Candice began to doubt herself and what she was seeing. Over the past month, Trevor had made it clear that he didn’t think Candice was a very good mother. He criticized the way she held Timothy, the way she bathed him, the way she talked to him, and the way she fed him. Gradually, Candice stepped back and let Trevor do most of the household tasks. Candice found it hard to even get out of bed some days. When Timothy cried at night, Trevor often told Candice “she’d just make it worse” and took care of the baby himself. One night she heard him getting more and more frustrated about Timothy’s crying. When she walked in, she saw the baby’s head whipping back and forth as Trevor shook him. Candice grabbed the baby, and Trevor stormed out of the room. They did not talk about the incident again.

A few days later, Candice came home from a quick walk to the pharmacy. She heard Timothy screaming from outside. She came inside to find the baby’s shoulders covered in terrible burns. She began to cry and asked Trevor what happened. He told her the baby was fine and that he had just gotten burned in the bath. She knew better than to question her husband. She looked up treatment for burns on the internet and did her best to comfort the screaming baby.
Reflection Questions:

What signs of abuse or neglect did people notice?

There were several signs that Timothy was experiencing abuse or neglect. Timothy’s behavior seemed to change. He went from being a happy baby to crying a lot and reacting negatively to touch. The physical injury (severe burn) was clear evidence that Timothy might be experiencing maltreatment. Timothy’s mother also noticed some signs that things were not right. She noticed a change in interactions, eye contact, energy levels, and movement.

Based on what you read in Part 1, what additional signs of abuse or neglect were present but unknown to people outside the family?

No one outside the family (even Candice) recognized the extent of Timothy’s injuries. Candice knew he had been shaken once, but there was evidence that the injuries occurred over a longer period of time. No one recognized that the baby had fractured bones. No one knew that Candice was experiencing social isolation and potential emotional abuse herself.

Think about Timothy’s family’s situation. What was going on in the family’s life that might have caused stress? What should have triggered some supports for the family?

- A new baby was born.
- The family was separated at the time of the child’s birth due to Trevor’s military career.
- The family was reunited after 5 months. During that time, Candice lived as a single mother and Trevor was separated from his family.
- Candice moved away from family, friends, employment, etc. to join Trevor overseas.

Think about the five protective factors. What supports might have helped the family around each of these factors? Note: These answers are intended to help extend your learning. You are not expected to know all of the resources listed here or every resource that could have helped this family. Talk to your trainer or manager about specific resources on your installation or in your program.

Parental Resilience: This family was dealing with a great deal of stress: the birth of a new infant, an international move. What community or installation resources might have helped?  
A New Parent Support Program might have helped them recognize signs of stress in themselves. It might have helped them identify strategies to use when they were feeling overwhelmed by parenting or angry with the baby.
A support program for spouses might also have helped Candice feel less isolated. Such a program, with professional facilitation, may also have helped Candice realize that she was in an unhealthy relationship. This might have helped her bounce back from challenges and seek mental health support.

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<th>Social Connections: As military service members stationed in a remote location, this family was isolated from extended family and friends. What could have helped them build social connections?</th>
<th>This family was isolated from extended family and friends. Candice was particularly isolated, and Trevor seemed to discourage her from building connections. Trevor also avoided building social connections at the CDC. This family might have needed targeted outreach from social workers or family services personnel to help them engage with the community.</th>
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<td>Concrete Support in Times of Need: What concrete supports did they need?</td>
<td>This family might have benefitted from concrete supports around job placement services or support with accessing local transportation for Candice.</td>
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| Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development: Timothy’s father struggled when Timothy cried. What supports might have helped the family? | Timothy’s family might have benefited from information and support around comforting a crying infant. Trevor may not have known the risks of shaking a baby.  

*Candice had concerns about Timothy’s behavior and development. A support network might have helped her understand what to say or do about her concerns.* |
| Social and Emotional Competence of Children: What could have been done to promote Timothy’s social and emotional development? | Caregivers like Beckett consistently responded to Timothy’s needs. Nurturing, responsive relationships are the foundation of social and emotional competence in infancy. |