Reflecting on Abuse and Neglect

Timothy’s Story: Part 4
You have learned a lot in the past few lessons about Timothy and his family. Take some time to reflect on Timothy’s experiences and the experiences of his family.

1. As a CDC staff member, it is important for you to know that the child development center staff members in Timothy’s program did everything they could to protect him. They did everything right.
   a. What should we learn from this?

   First, communication is critical. Child abuse and neglect is complicated. Often, there are many witnesses across many different locations. Each witness only has one tiny piece of information. It can be very challenging to put all of the pieces together. Our systems must be designed to help collect information and make accurate decisions. When our systems fail, leaders must evaluate those systems and take action.

   Second, education is critical. At several stages in Timothy’s story, people suspected something was wrong. His caregiver at the CDC and his mother both noticed warning signs. However, the signs can be easy to miss or to blame on changes in routine or development. Child abuse is complicated, and a false accusation can have serious repercussions, so people are naturally hesitant. When multiple signs point to child abuse or neglect, though, our systems should be able to recognize a pattern and provide the family with preventive supports.

   Third, resources and protective factors are critical. Timothy’s family clearly needed support. As soon as Candice and the baby arrived on the installation, a community support network (mental health support, new parent support, violence prevention) could have been put in place to help Candice and the family make a smooth transition.

   b. What can you do to make sure you do your part to keep children safe?

   Take these stories as a clear message that we must all work together to protect children. We each play a role, and we must do our jobs well. Your job is to report your suspicions. You must trust that everyone else does their jobs well, too. Talk to your manager about Family Advocacy Programs. Know who your FAP teams are and talk to them about the work they do and how you can support one another’s work with families.
2. Imagine Timothy were a child in your classroom:
   a. Describe your emotions when you start to wonder whether Timothy’s recent behavior changes (crying more, reacting negatively to touch, not moving around much) are signs of a bigger problem.

   You might feel concerned for Timothy’s well-being and development. You might feel pressure to figure out what is wrong and to support the baby. You might feel bad even thinking child abuse or neglect is a possible cause of the changes. You might feel doubtful that it is abuse.

   b. Describe your emotions when you see the burns on Timothy’s shoulders.

   You might feel angry. You might feel scared for Timothy’s safety. You might feel the need to take action. You should feel proud for speaking up for Timothy.

   c. Describe your emotions when you know that FAP and law enforcement are involved in Timothy’s story.

   You might feel relieved that Timothy’s parents are getting the help they need. You might feel reassured that Timothy is safe. If Timothy is still in the home, you might feel frustrated or continue to fear for his safety. You might also feel a strong need to know more about the follow-up Timothy is receiving, but confidentiality laws will prevent you from getting more information. This might feel frustrating, but it is important to respect the privacy of families.

3. Now imagine that your best friend was Timothy’s teacher. What would you tell him? How would you support him? What do you think he would need?

   It would be important to listen. Let your friend talk, cry, and get angry. When he is ready, make sure he knows that he did everything he could. He did the right thing. Encourage him to consider counseling if the stress of suspecting child abuse is challenging. As Timothy’s teacher, your friend might feel empowered to advocate for children and for additional supports and resources for families.