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.

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.

Kate’s Story: Part 2

In the Child Development Center:
Diane, a preschool teacher at the child development center, called her manager for help. “Hey, Sandy, will you come look at some marks on Kate’s arms?” The two women knelt down while Kate pulled up her sleeves. There were dark scars up and down her arms. Some appeared fresher than others. Others were in various stages of healing. Some simply looked like dry skin. All were roughly the same size and shape.

Later, Diane overheard Kate’s stepmother talking to another parent about their children’s behavior. She hears, “It’s OK to whip a child. Just don’t leave any marks.”

Diane and her team had only worked with Kate for a few months, but they were growing more concerned about her behavior and social development. She seemed to be regressing in some ways. She was having more toileting accidents, but she would try to hide the accidents from staff members. She would hide under tables or other furniture any time she had an accident. The team knew some children regressed on toilet training when a new baby was born in the family, but Kate’s behavior seemed extreme enough to worry them. Kate began having more frequent outbursts of crying and screaming. When the center staff tried having a conversation with Gigi and Alan about their concerns, the family did not respond as Diane had hoped. They were friendly with Diane, but she sensed that they were angry with Kate for causing trouble. The family seemed to avoid Diane after that conversation. They dropped Kate off and picked her up as quickly as possible with little time for conversation. They did not attend any family events or conferences at the CDC.

In the Community:
Neighbors often heard shouting and crying from the house. Tonight felt different. Kate’s neighbor, Tammy, paced her back porch. She had heard the crying begin about an hour ago. Over the past hour, Kate’s cries had turned to screams and sobs. “Something’s not right. I’ve got to do something.” She asked her husband to
come outside and listen. They both agreed that something didn’t sound right. Together, they called the military police. When the police arrived, they found Kate naked in her bedroom with feces on the carpet. There were scratches and bruises of various shades on her face and body.

In the Family:
Kate’s stepmother was on the phone with her cousin, Mia. Through the phone, Mia heard Kate’s stepmother swear and berate the child. “You stupid little [****],” she screamed. “I can’t believe you are still peeing you pants like a [****] baby. I hope my baby’s not a dumb [****] like you. You ruined my floor. You ruin everything. Alan, get the belt. She did it again.” Then she heard the sounds of Kate’s father stepping in. She could hear the child’s crying and screaming as she was whipped.

Reflection Questions:

What signs of abuse or neglect did teachers and neighbors notice?

There are many signs that Kate was being abused. Unfortunately, it can be difficult for all the people who care about a child to put the pieces together. Here are signs that people noticed:

At the child development center: Diane and her supervisor noticed a variety of scars on Kate’s arms. This raised suspicions because there were so many, they were in various stages of healing, and they were relatively uniform. They also had some concerns about Kate’s behavior and social development.

In the Community: Kate’s neighbor heard verbal signs of abuse. Extended crying, screaming, or other distress is a likely sign that a child is in danger.

In the Family: Mia heard an example of emotional abuse. She heard Kate’s stepmother swear, insult, and threaten the child. She then heard physical abuse begin.

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 knew the extent of abuse Kate was experiencing. No one knew that she was forced to remove her clothes when she had an accident. Nor did they know that all of the furniture was removed from her room and that she was forced to sleep on the floor. They did not know that she experienced daily whippings and beatings from her father. They did not know that Kate’s father and stepmother were verbally and physically violent towards one another.
Think about Kate’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?

- Alan and Gigi were experiencing rapid changes in their lives: They were young adults expecting their first child when a preschool-child was introduced into their home.
- Alan and Gigi had high-stress careers stationed on an installation far from extended family and friends.
- Kate had experienced developmental delays and failure to thrive. Her parents might not have felt equipped or prepared to meet her needs.
- A new baby was born.
- The family had a history of violent behavior and poor coping skills.

Think about the five protective factors. What supports might have helped the family around each of these factors?

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<tr>
<th>Parental Resilience</th>
<th>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 their children.</th>
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<td>Social Connections</td>
<td>This family was isolated from extended family and friends. Kate’s biological mother lived several time zones away. Gigi’s friends and family were all far away. Neighbors clearly cared about Kate’s well-being, but the families might not have been close. Opportunities to get involved — and give back — to the community might have helped this family build connections and feel less isolated.</td>
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<td>Concrete Support in Times of Need</td>
<td>Concrete supports for anger management and mental health are needed. They also might need concrete supports like babysitters or respite from the demands of parenting.</td>
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<td>Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development</td>
<td>Kate’s experience is a classic example of unrealistic expectations for behavior. As part of parenting a child with developmental delays and bringing home a new infant, the parents could have been warned to expect changes in Kate’s development. They might have learned concrete strategies for helping Kate learn self-care skills and positive ways to respond when challenges occurred.</td>
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<td>Social and Emotional Competence of Children: Given the severity of Kate’s situation, we might expect her social and emotional development to be impacted. What might have helped her?</td>
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<td>The team at the CDC began having some concerns about Kate’s social development and behavior. It is clear, too, that her family considered her accidents to be challenging behavior. This created stress in the family. The following strategies might have helped Kate:</td>
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<td>• Counseling or therapy with a mental health specialist. Kate needed help to understand and deal with the emotions of moving into a new home and family. She also witnessed violence between her father and step-mother. She might have benefitted from help processing that experience.</td>
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<td>• Promoting social skills. Kate might have benefitted from strategies to help her communicate her needs and solve problems in the classroom. They could help her learn appropriate ways to express fear or anger in the classroom. They could continue building nurturing relationships with her, so she continued to feel safe at the CDC.</td>
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