

## Case Vignette—Joshua

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**Child:** Joshua

**Age:** 12

**Point in Child Welfare System:** Moved into family placement as part of foster care plan, is at risk of disruption

**Trauma Type:** Early neglect, physical abuse, possible sexual abuse, parental drug abuse, and abandonment

**Culture/Ethnicity:** Caucasian

### Case Exercise

1. Read aloud the **Presenting Situation** section. On flip chart paper (use as many sheets as you need), record what you know about:
  - a. Joshua's trauma history
  - b. Joshua's areas of strength or resilience
  - c. Domains of functioning in which Joshua is having difficulty
2. Read aloud the **Background/History** section.
  - a. Add to the list of potentially traumatic events, or other experiences with separation, loss, and/or placement disruption.
3. Read aloud the **Evaluation/Assessment** section.
  - a. What other information do you need about the child's history?
  - b. Identify list of potential areas for assessment, case management, and planning next steps.
  - c. Make predictions about short-term and long-term outcome for this child and how a child welfare worker could modify this outcome.

You will have approximately 30 minutes for your discussion. Please take notes on the flip chart paper throughout your discussion, as your group will be asked to report back to the larger group on one of the questions in Section 3 (i.e., 3a, 3b, or 3c above).

### Presenting Situation

Joshua has been in placement with his grandmother for several months. His behavior has been on the decline since his middle sibling was recently placed in the home with him. He was strongly reactive to any signs that his sister was receiving more attention than he was. He becomes easily angered by his sister, stating in therapy that being around her is like "all this old stuff coming back again." His moods shift from constricted to volatile, with frequent angry outbursts, verbal and physical aggression toward family members, and multiple signs

of arousal (e.g., difficulty sleeping, impaired concentration, edginess and irritability). He was recently diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder and ADHD.

His grandmother, who has her own history of childhood trauma, has become more depressed and overwhelmed by his emotional outbursts and she has had difficulty providing consistent caretaking to either of the children. Child Protective Services (CPS) has become re-involved and a move to a more intensive level of care for Joshua is being considered.

### ***Background/History***

When Joshua was 18 months old, a neighbor became concerned that Joshua was often dirty, hungry and he did not seem to be thriving. There had also been several instances of poor supervision and the parents were considered “hostile” toward Joshua. Eventually, CPS became involved with the family, but there was never enough evidence to remove Joshua from his home. Joshua also had a younger sister, Lisa, who was six months old at this time.

When initially interviewed by CPS the mother acknowledged that she was under tremendous stress due to an often violent relationship with her husband. She admitted that caring for Joshua was difficult because he was often irritable and rejecting of her attempts to console him. At other times, he was very restless and clingy toward the mother, especially when the father was present. She also said Joshua was “slow to develop.”

The mother admitted that she and her husband had a history of drug and alcohol abuse, although she denied any current problems with either. A service plan, including parenting classes, was put in place for the family and they were followed for about six months. Joshua and his family appeared more stable and services were terminated. Within a couple of years, a third child was born. Joshua’s parents continued to have a chaotic relationship and their drug use continued.

At the age of 11, Joshua showed his school guidance counselor some bruises, stating that his father had hurt him and that he didn’t want to go home anymore. Joshua and his two siblings were removed that day.

Once in foster care, all three children indicated that Joshua had been a target for abuse in the home, with each parent aligning with one of the other siblings. Joshua was frequently restricted to his room, and both of his parents made statements blaming him for the family’s problems. Joshua reports that he purposefully made himself a target to protect his younger siblings from being hurt. Based on the children’s statements, their father was charged and criminally prosecuted for assault and battery against his two older children.

After their removal from the home, the three siblings were separated. After court proceedings terminated parental rights, the youngest was placed in a pre-adoptive foster home, and the two oldest were placed in different relatives' homes. Joshua was initially withdrawn and quiet after removal and placement with his maternal grandmother. He spent long periods alone in his room and created an inner world that he worked hard to hide from his grandmother. Although he was polite and cooperative with adults, he had difficulty with peers and was unable to stay interested in activities.

Despite testing which indicated that he had an above average IQ with no evidence of a learning disability, Joshua consistently received failing grades in his classes, due in large part to a refusal to complete homework assignments. Joshua also had repeated psychosomatic complaints but numerous tests ruled out a physical cause. At night, Joshua surrounded himself with stuffed animals, stating that they made him feel safer.

### ***Evaluation/Assessment***

As a school-age child within his biological family, Joshua began to be blamed for all the family's problems. Joshua's mother, in particular, expected the child to clean up after his younger siblings and he was deprived of food if he did not meet the expectations of his parents. He was constantly told that he was "bad" and a "problem for the family." Joshua's parents often had drug parties and Joshua was forced to stay awake to "take care" of their guests. His younger siblings would often misbehave to get attention and many times they would complain of being hungry. They were often sleep deprived due to the all night partying.

Around this same time, Joshua's teacher reported constant absenteeism. The teacher stated that Joshua's behavior would range from very aggressive with adults and other children, to uncontrollable crying and tantrums. During a meeting with the school, Joshua's parents stated that Joshua always causes problems, and that he would be "punished" at home.

Within the next few years, Joshua would begin to feel so desperate about his situation that he began to plead with his teacher daily not to send bad reports home. From the age of 8, Joshua was not only locked in dark closets for hours at a time for being bad, he was also forced to watch his biological father fondle the youngest sibling.

At the age of 11, Joshua showed his school guidance counselor some bruises, stating that his father had hurt him and that he didn't want to go home anymore. Joshua and his two siblings were removed that day. Although multiple reports had been made to protective services over the years, there had never been sufficient evidence to remove the children because neither Joshua nor his siblings had been willing to speak with authorities.

Following their removal from the home, the children described: frequent fights in which their parents screamed and threw things; unpredictable violence by their father, including his hitting them with a miniature baseball bat; being isolated and denied food and water for over a day at a time; and ongoing substance use by both parents.