

MARTHA

PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE:

Using an extensive and realistic case, the student (or professional) is challenged to think about possible actions when confronted with worrying behavior.

TIMING:

30 minutes.

NEEDED MATERIAL:

Copies of the case.

HOW TO CONDUCT THE EXERCISE:

Please read the following case and discuss the questions put to you.

CASE:

After allegations were made by her 7 year older half-sister Jeanette of sexual abuse by her stepfather, Martha has been placed in temporary foster care. Jeanette claims that the abuse started shortly after she and her mother Anna moved in with her stepfather Theo five years ago.

Prior to this they lived with Jeanette's biological father. Due to severe domestic violence by her father, she and her mother took refuge in a women's rescue centre. During their stay in the rescue centre her mother started going out with Theo who she met in a bar close by. After spending 6 months in the centre Anna and Jeanette moved in with Theo. A year later Martha was born.

Three months ago Jeanette ran away from home and child protection services became involved. It was stated in the report that Jeanette has frequently been sexually abused by her stepfather, starting from touching and fondling and progressing to sexual intercourse. Jeanette felt that she couldn't refuse her stepfather as he said he needed the attention and would leave her mother otherwise.

In the report Jeanette is quoted as follows: "I love my mother to bits but she is really half-witted. I didn't want to leave her and Martha behind with that freak. Who knows what he would do to them. I just don't want to put her through this again but I simply couldn't take it anymore." Jeanette finally told her mother about the abuse but was blamed for provoking Theo and jeopardizing the relationship. It was at that point that she ran away from home. Following the child protection investigation Jeanette was placed in a residential care facility and much to Jeanette's relief, Martha was placed in foster care. The foster family consists of the foster parents Mary and Tim and their two sons, 11 and 13 years old.

You are appointed as Martha's case manager and recently concerns have been raised by Tim, the foster father. It's family routine that he takes a shower together with the children and puts them to bed afterwards. While showering Martha has frequently tried to touch or grab his

genitals and tried to rub her face against his penis. On these occasions Tim has gently tried to remove her face and hands but Martha seems to persist.

It has also come to the attention of Mary that Martha often rubs and scratches her vagina in the presence of their own two sons. They consider Martha's behaviour harmful to herself and inappropriate to their sons. Tim also feels worried that his wife might think he has provoked Martha's behaviour in some way.

Both foster parents are at their wits end and you fear a foster care placement breakdown.

QUESTIONS:

- What is your assessment of Martha's behaviour?
- Which concerns do you have when you read this case?
- Which strengths can you identify in the scenario?
- What issues should be addressed?
- Discuss what advice could be given or actions that could be taken.
- Decide in what way and in what particular order the advice (or actions) might be put to the foster carers.

SUGGESTIONS:

To help assess this case, you might want to look into the Signs of Safety- approach (<https://www.signsofsafety.net/>). Or you can refer to the Flagsystem (<https://www.flagsystem.org/>).

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