

Role playing: participation of parents and children in multidisciplinary team decision-making

Casus Mitchell

Situation

- ▶ Who are present? Mitchell, his parents, Mitchell's tutor at school, child protective services, adult addiction services, adult mental health services, youth care provider. The trainer can add other disciplines and describe the positions or points of view of these persons.
- ▶ What decision should be made? The child protective services worker asked for the multidisciplinary meeting, because he has serious concerns about Mitchell and his family and thinks that several services are needed and that the care they provide should be in line.

(The organisation which is involved may be different, depending on the situation and point of departure in each country for the decision making process)

Roles

Mitchell

Mitchell is 14 years old. His gym teacher is concerned about him, because Mitchell does not want to participate in the physical education classes. The teacher discovered that Mitchell has severe bruises on his legs and back. He thinks these may have been caused by Mitchell having been beaten. He reported his concerns to Mitchell's tutor and asked him to speak with Mitchell.

Mitchell already told the tutor his story. He and his tutor decided that his tutor will speak on behalf of him in this meeting. Mitchell is worried that his parents will be very angry at him, because he "caused trouble" (e.g. involvement of child protective services in their family, this meeting that really upset his father).

Stepfather

Mitchell's stepfather thinks that he has to be tough on teenagers and that there is no harm in spanking them.

Stepfather lost contact with his own family.

Mother

Mitchell's mother thinks that his stepfather is sometimes too harsh. However, she also thinks that it is Mitchell's own fault, because he challenges his stepfather by his own behaviour.

She longs to be a good parent. She has no problems with the younger children. However, she finds Mitchell slow and thinks he is lazy – just like her husband. She says she has to repeat assignments often. Mitchell has to do a lot of chores. His parents determine what he has to do and how and they are not easily satisfied. She is not able to mention anything positive about Mitchell. They are not aware of what is going on at school. She is scared when she hears that Mitchell's school results are deteriorating.

Mother visits her parents once a month. Sometimes she takes the children with her.

Child protective services worker

He spoke to the parents and Mitchell after he received a report from Mitchell's tutor.

The child protective services worker saw signs of drug abuse in the house while he was there. On entering the house, he smelt the typical smell of weed. On the table in the living room, the worker saw small plastic bags with the weed icon on them. Both parents reacted slowly during the conversation. The parents do not want to answer questions about their drugs use. The worker did not see signs of hard drug use. They say they have financial problems. They fight a lot about their finances.

The child protective services worker has phoned the family doctor. The family doctor did not see Mitchell over the last few years. He knows about the hard drugs use of both parents. As far as he knows, the parents are not receiving help to deal with their drugs use at the moment. He relates that both parents are unemployed.

He knows something about the history of the stepfather, that he has been in residential care facilities for years during childhood and adolescence. The stepfather also received mental health services for a mood disorder.

Mitchell's tutor

The tutor spoke to Mitchell about these signs. Mitchell looked very pale and tired. His tutor observed that Mitchell did not react alertly in classes and during their conversation.

The tutor reports that Mitchell does not have friends in school. The boy is introverted. His classmates tease him sometimes. Since half a year, his school results are getting worse. Mitchell does not regularly make his home assignments. Mitchell told his tutor that there are a lot of arguments at home, in particular between his stepfather and himself. Mitchell has a half-sister who is 10 years old and a half-brother who is 5 years old. Mitchell told his tutor at school that he often has to baby-sit, because his mother and stepfather are frequently away from home.

The tutor asked the school advisory service for an assessment of Mitchell. The school advisory service administered the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL; youth self-report, parent version and teacher version). Mitchell indicated in this questionnaire that he is feeling withdrawn and depressive. His parents did not report any problems. His tutor also reported withdrawn and possibly depressive behaviour.

The tutor wanted to speak with Mitchell's parents about these test results. However, he did not succeed, because the parents failed to show up three times in a row. The tutor feels that he cannot do any more than he already did, but he has serious concerns about Mitchell and his parents. Therefore, he reports Mitchell to the child protective services.