

Case Study: Learning Disabilities

More than Academics

Steve Williams is a fifth grader. He has a learning disability. His teachers and parents realize that his difficulties are more than academic.

Steve Williams is a fifth grade student at East Bridge Elementary School. At the end of fourth grade he was identified with a specific learning disability by a multidisciplinary team of professionals. During the initial identification and IEP conference, Steve's academic needs were the main concerns of participants. Because it was the end of the school year, special education services began in the fall.

Ms. Fuentes is Steve's resource room teacher. Since September, she has worked on reading and written language skills with Steve. She has noticed some gain on the goals and objectives stated in the IEP. Steve comes to the resource room three times a week for forty-five minute periods. Most of his instruction is delivered individually or with a small group of students. He completes his work and has done well in the resource room.

Every few weeks Ms. Fuentes checks in with Steve's fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Andrews. Lately she has noticed that the progress reports she has received from Mrs. Andrews are not positive. They indicate that Steve has been having problems with his behavior and completion of assignments.

Mrs. Andrews states that Steve works ineffectively in cooperative group learning situations. She also notes that Steve has difficulty interacting with his peers and has refused to work with his classmates the last few weeks. Many of Steve's peers have complained to the teacher that they do not like working with Steve. They find he "goofs off and doesn't do any of the work." Mrs. Andrews adds that Steve has few friends and spends a good deal of recess time in the classroom or nurse's office.

After consulting with Mrs. Andrews, Ms. Fuentes suggests a few interventions to try with Steve. First, she suggests that a daily homework assignment sheet be used. On a daily basis, homework assignments could be listed and shared with the parents. Additionally, she makes some suggestions about how to structure Steve's participation in cooperative learning groups. She

recommends that Steve have a specific assignment to complete.

After a few weeks, Ms. Fuentes again contacts Mrs. Andrews. Mrs. Andrews reports that Steve's assignment completion is improving. He is completing more homework assignments and more work in groups. However, she still is concerned about his interactions with peers. She states that Steve continues to have few friends in the class. She has observed that he often teases peers inappropriately and tattles to adult authority figures.

Because it was time for the regular quarterly teacher conference, Ms. Fuentes decides to set up a conference with Steve's parents, Mrs. Andrews, and herself. Steve's mother attends. Steve's mother is quite pleased with the information she receives about Steve's progress in the resource room. She also states that the homework assignments sheets have helped her monitor her son's schoolwork at home.

When Mrs. Andrews begins sharing some of the concerns she has about Steve's peer interactions, Mrs. Williams becomes upset. "I thought once he got the help he needed with his schoolwork, everything would be better," she expresses. "Why is he having all these other problems?" she asks.

Questions

1. What specific nonacademic difficulties is Steve experiencing?
2. How might Ms. Fuentes discuss with Mrs. Andrews and Mrs. Williams social skills characteristics and needs of students with learning disabilities?
3. What are classroom accommodations or modifications that might assist Steve in improving task completion and in working with peers?
4. Are there specific areas that might be added to Steve's IEP? What are they? How might these areas be addressed at school?

Case Study: Balancing Independence and Safety

Amanda Everly is eighteen. She has intellectual disabilities. Lately, she has shown a desire to do many of the things other teenagers do, such as dating. Her parents are concerned and protective. They are worried about her safety and her future.

Amanda Everly is a sociable teenager. She enjoys spending time with friends both in and out of school. In fact, being with her friends is her favorite reason for going to school. Her teachers describe her as affectionate. Amanda attends a local high school and receives special education services. She has received special education services since preschool, when she was identified as having mental retardation. Her cognitive abilities and adaptive behavior skills are several years behind those of her peers. She does have good personal care skills. The focus of her current school program is on functional academics and life skills. This will be her last year attending high school. Next year, her special education services will be provided in a community-based program for older students with disabilities.

At home, Amanda is the oldest of three children. She has two sisters, ages fifteen and twelve. Her parents have always shown involvement and interest in Amanda's school and personal life. They have devoted extra time to make sure she has many opportunities available to her. By arranging activities such as private tutoring for reading, a bowling league for teens with disabilities, and summer camp, Mr. and Mrs. Everly have sought to provide Amanda with fulfilling life experiences. Sometimes her sisters complain that the family's life revolves around Amanda's schedule.

Lately, Amanda has been disinterested in some of these activities, even refusing to attend. She is more interested in her appearance and has expressed a desire to date, to make her own choices for activities, to have her own phone, and to drive. Her parents are worried about Amanda's growing independence. They want her to be safe, yet happy.

At school, Amanda spends most of her day in a self-contained special education classroom with students with similar disabilities. She also goes to a supervised job site at a local

restaurant in the afternoons. Amanda has always been a hardworking student, seeking to please those around her. Her friendliness extends to frequent hugs of affection to those around her. However, for the past few months, her teacher and job coach have also noticed changes in her behavior.

Amanda has been performing poorly at school and at her job. She seems to talk about nothing except "boys," and flirts not only with other male students in the class and at school, but also customers at the job site, often unaware of their reactions. Despite discussion and reminders about appropriate interactions with peers and others, Amanda has continued her overly affectionate behaviors. The school staff is concerned about the potential impact of this behavior. Because of this concern, a conference is arranged with Amanda, her parents and school staff.

At the conference, Amanda's teacher and job coach describe the changes in Amanda's behavior. Mr. and Mrs. Everly also share their concerns about Amanda's growing independence, her safety, and her future. They ask, "What will happen when someone is not there to make sure Amanda is not taken advantage of?" "What is going to happen next year when she's not at the high school?"

Discussion Questions

1. What changes have occurred in Amanda's behavior? What are some possible reasons for these changes?
2. What specific adaptive behavior skills is Amanda lacking? How can the absence of these skills affect her independence and safety?
3. What type of interventions would you recommend to address Amanda's adaptive behavior needs in each setting?

4. In planning for Amanda's transition in services for next year, what types of support would you recommend? Why?