

Record of Service

CONFIDENTIAL

Name: Sandra

Agency: Bronx Family & Community Services

Professional Helping Area: Interpersonal Obstacle

Date: March 21, 2007

1. Background Information Regarding the Client

Ms. Jenkins is a 47 year old, African American, single mother of two children, Bradley, age 13, and Fran, age 9. Ms. Jenkins was receiving public assistance, however it was recently terminated. The family currently resides on the second floor of a two family home, which is subsidized by section-8. There have been numerous complaints filed by both Ms. Jenkins and the landlord, due to disagreements regarding back rent. Ms. Jenkins recently received her certification as a Home Health Aide but has not been able to work frequently due to hospitalizations. Ms. Jenkins reports that she has ovarian cysts, as well as severe back pain. Her ex-husband, who is also Fran's father, is currently supporting the family. Bradley does not currently have a relationship with his father, who was recently discharged from prison.

A report of educational neglect of one of Ms. Jenkins's children, Fran was made to the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), because Fran reportedly missed 45 days of school last year. ACS determined that it was not necessary to remove Fran from the home and ACS referred the family for preventive services. Included in the referral, Ms. Jenkins and her children were mandated to complete certain services. Ms. Jenkins was drug tested and tested positive for high levels of cocaine, hence, ACS required that Ms. Jenkins enroll in a drug treatment program. Preventive services were required to monitor both children's attendance and Bradley was to be enrolled in an anger management program. The referral also recommended that Fran be tutored in reading and have an educational evaluation. It was speculated that Bradley suffered from Attention Deficit

Hyper-Activity Disorder, and ACS requested that his behavior in school be monitored as well.

I have carried this case from the initial intake into our Program, about six months ago. My role in this case was to act as the case planner our agency's preventive service program. Acting in this capacity, I have referred Ms. Jenkins to drug counseling, Bradley to anger management and have been monitoring both of the children's attendance, health, and safety alternately through both monthly home and office visits. In December, Bradley was suspended from school for three months for cursing at one of the security guards. He was required to attend an alternative suspension site, which was extremely far away from his home. In order for Brendan to get to his "new school" he would have to take two buses and a subway. He stayed at this site for a month, and then was transferred to another site which was slightly closer to his home, however this time he was placed in a class where grades ranged from 4th through 9th grade. Bradley experienced considerable stress during the suspension and transition. In early March, he returned back to his regular school and attended it for nearly two week but was recently suspended again. Ms. Jenkins strongly conveyed the need for Bradley to improve his behavior at home and in school.

In December, it was discovered that Fran had missed twenty-five days of school this year, and the school reported this to ACS. Ms. Jenkins currently now has another open case, under investigation by ACS.

2. Discuss and evaluate what your client and you have agreed to work on. Discuss the degree of mutuality about the focus of your work together.

During the intake, Ms. Jenkins agreed to have her family partake in all preventive services and to complete all services, mandated by ACS. I informed her that my role and intentions were to provide supports and to prevent her children from being removed and placed into foster care by ACS. I informed Ms. Jenkins that I would be conducted one home visit and one office visit a month, more if necessary, and during these meetings we could speak about her current situation. I also told her that she could reach me at the

office and feel free to come in as problems arise. During the intake, Ms. Jenkins denied having problems with drugs. She reported that she has been sober for eight years. I had to inform her of her positive toxicology report and requested that she attend drug counseling services. Ms. Jenkins appeared very willing and thankful that this agency was willing to help with her current life situation. Although many referrals were made for family therapy, drug counseling and anger management the family's inconsistency in keeping appointments resulted in the loss of services.

In reflecting on this case, I believe that there was, at one point, a degree of clarity and perhaps mutuality, about the focus of our work. However, I believe that this has deteriorated due to the growing emergence of the interpersonal obstacle. While I established a relationship with this family, the focus of the work was concentrated on Ms. Jenkins, her behavior and meeting ACS mandates. I did not attempt to redefine the focus of our work when she was repeatedly and desperately seeking help from me regarding her son's behavior and other stressors in her life. Due to this, I believe Ms. Jenkins became indignant since she felt like I was yet another worker blaming and giving directives rather than helping her with her children's behavior and other stressful family issues.

3. Identify the interpersonal obstacle. Describe what the obstacle looks like and how both the client and the worker contribute to the obstacle. Identify all of the sources that may have contributed to the obstacle.

As I reflect on the sessions that follow, I realize that beneath Ms. Jenkins' anger are her feelings of helplessness and pleas for help with her relationship with her son. I approached both of these sessions with a strong agency voice, reverberating in my mind, saying, "You have to protect the children". The ACS voice said get the client to go to all the mandated services I heard but did not take into account all the stress Ms. Jenkins was experiencing in her personal life, including the loss of her public assistance grant, health problems, a son with difficulties, etc. Rather I became extremely focused on deterring Ms. Jenkins from taking behavioral action towards Bradley, rather than reaching for and listening to her concerns for him. When she did express her concerns, I focused on her anger and offered quick solution-, mainly to calm her down. Ms. Jenkins was referred for

services yet did not consistently attend her appointments. The agency believes that Ms. Jenkins should get better, through attending her appointments, and her family life will improve, (i.e. if Ms. Jenkins discontinues her drug use, her children will not act out and she may be able to control them). This is also a difference of perspective between Ms. Jenkins and the agency's which contributed to the tension between us. Going into the sessions I believed that Ms. Jenkins was the one with the problem, and that Bradley's behavior was simply a result of him reacting to her. I saw Bradley as the "victim", rather than the family as a whole.

Ms. Jenkins has threatened the use of physical abuse towards her children. Instead of exploring her belief and why it has come to this, I focused on finding an alternative solution. Her threats are extremely hard for me to handle, and bring up many feelings- most of which are anger. This also parallels many issues still current in my own life, specifically the relationship between my own mother and my brother. Both my mother and Ms. Jenkins's desire to control their son's behavior, and their feelings of hopelessness resonate within me. As I became more aware of the counter transference I was able to realize that while situations between them, parallel, they are not the same and I had to work to separate out my experiences and reactions from those of the Jenkins' family.

4. How and when did this obstacle come to your attention?

I have been working with Ms. Jenkins for many months now, and nothing seemed to be alleviate the pain and stress she was experiencing. Ms. Jenkins was not following through with appointments,. I always thought there was something I could have done differently. In the beginning of my work with Ms. Jenkins I thought she was simply reluctant to participate in the services, which were mandated for her. As her pleas and threats emerged, I began to feel angry but helpless, probably the same feelings she was experiencing. Actually following my presentation in your class, I realized how disconnected I was to this client and the factors that may be contributing to the tension between us.

Summary of your practice in relation to the specific interpersonal obstacle being presented.

This following session took place during a home visit in February. Bradley had not yet returned home from school, although it was after four o'clock.

- 1) **Ms. Jenkins:** Bradley did not come home until 11:30 last night and now he's out doing who knows what with those friends of his.

Worker: Did you make a police report?

- 2) **Ms. Jenkins: (Very Distraught)** Yes. I called the police, but what are they going to do? I have no control over him. They gave me a PINS report to fill out. He is going down the wrong path. I want to beat some sense into him. (Gets up and looks for a belt. She can't find one and brings a large wooden spoon into the room). I am going to beat the sh** out of him when he comes home. He knows he is supposed to check in but he never calls to tell me where he is going. You can ask Fran (his younger sister); she tells me to beat him all the time.

Worker: I know you don't want to do that. It is only four o'clock maybe he will come home soon. Fran thinks you should beat him too?

- 3) **Ms. Jenkins:** Yes. I have no control over this child and I don't know what else to do- he needs a good a** kicking.

Worker: I understand that you are very frustrated but hitting him is not going to help the situation.

Evaluation of Work:

- 1) **A. Transaction:**

Ms. Jenkins: Bradley did not come home until 11:30 last night. And now he's out doing who knows what with those friends of his.

Worker: Did you make a police report?

B. I am so worried for my son. I don't know where he is now or whom he's with. His friends always get into trouble. I don't want my son involved in them.

C. She wants to know if I filled out a police report? I don't want to get him into trouble with the law but I am at a panic. Doesn't she understand how worried I am? Doesn't she care?

- D. I was extremely disconnected. I am angry that Ms. Jenkins appears unable to control her child and I feel put on the spot to “do something” about the problem. I focused on what she could do rather than letting me tell me about her worries.
- E. That must have been hard to deal with last night. Could you tell me what it was like for you last night, not knowing where your son was?
- F. The new skill reaches for how she was feeling, while conveying empathy. Hopefully this will let Ms. Jenkins know that it is understandable to feel frustrated and reflects her the strength of her concern as a parent.

2) A. **Transaction**

Ms. Jenkins: (*Very Distraught*) Yes. I called the police, but what are they going to do? I have no control over him. They gave me a PINS report to fill out. He is going down the wrong path- I want to beat some sense into him. (*Gets up and looks for a belt- can't find one and brings a large wooden spoon into the room*). I am going to beat the sh** out of him when he comes home. He knows he is supposed to check in- but he never calls to tell me where he is going. You can ask Fran (his sister) she tells me to beat him all the time.

Worker: I know you don't want to do that. It is only four o'clock; maybe he will come home soon. (*Pause*) Fran (*younger sister*) thinks you should beat him too?

- B. No one wants to help me with this.....not you, not ACS, not the police. I don't want my child to have a PINS report on him. I don't know what else to do anymore. Maybe I have to show him. It's not just me, even his sister sees it.
- C. Come home soon? That's not the point he doesn't listen to me. I just want him to be safe in my home where I can watch him. Of course I don't want to beat my son. I don't want to hurt him, but I don't know what else to do. Why isn't she listening to me?
- D. This intervention was also disconnected. I was not paying attention to Ms. Jenkins's desperation in this situation. I was angry and nervous when she went looking for a belt; an object that she implied was what she was going to use to hit Bradley. I didn't know how to respond, and I felt stuck. In an attempt to calm her down I just reminded her of the time, which did not connect to anything she had previously said.
- E. You must feel like no one is helping you, even though you are asking for help. I remember the story you told me of how much you went through when Bradley was born,

- and how much he means to you. I can only imagine how hard it is for you right now to deal with his behavior and I know that you don't want to lose him or see him get hurt.
- F. From the beginning of the work with Ms. Jenkins the focus has been on what she has been doing wrong. I think that she has been feeling this throughout our work together. I am hoping to re-contract with Ms. Jenkins in order to help her develop with her concerns about Bradley.

3) A Transaction

Ms. Jenkins: Yes. I have no control over this child and I don't know what else to do. He needs a good a** kicking.

Worker: I understand that you are very frustrated but hitting him is not going to help the situation.

- B. I keep telling you the same thing I do not know what to do anymore. He doesn't listen to me and he does whatever he wants!
- C. You say that you understand that I am frustrated but you come up with quick solutions that don't work. You hear my angry words but not my fears or helplessness.
- D. Again I am disconnected. I chose to focus on the solution rather than the message. I am intimidated by the words from ACS, "protect the children" but fail to reach out to this mother who has grave concern for her child. I am so worried for this child that I have forgotten that his mother is also worried and scared. Most of all, I am angry that she is still telling me that she is going to hurt him. She frightens me and I pull away.
- E. I know if you feel like beating him that you are trying to convey how upset you feel. Can we talk about your worry right now and how you want to handle this situation when you son returns home.
- F. Hopefully this will help Ms. Jenkins realize that I am listening to her and that I am deeply concerned, not just for Bradley's safety but for their relationship. I want to let her express her concerns and then strategize on how to handle her son when he returns home.
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This interpersonal obstacle also followed us into the subsequent meeting, which took place a week after the previous example. Ms. Jenkins showed up at the office extremely distressed, having learned that Bradley was suspended at school for the second time this year and only a

week after his previous suspension. Ms. Jenkins' original plan was to come in and pick up a letter that the director had written for her. Ms. Jenkins was extremely agitated and started yelling the minute I walked into the waiting room. Ms. Jenkins, accompanied by Bradley, followed me to an empty session room where the following occurred.

- 4) **Ms. Jenkins:** I called the police after you left last week, because again he did not come home until late at night. You know what they told me? They told me they knew exactly who my son was and then they came to the house, woke him up out the bed and spoke to him about going down the wrong path. I think he is in a gang. (*Yelling*) He is so young- he can't defend himself and something is going to happen to him if he keeps this up.
Worker: Have you told Bradley how you feel about this? (*Since he was sitting right there*).
- 5) **Ms. Jenkins:** (*Screaming*) What do you think I'm doing? I'm telling him now. I am sick and tired. Whatever I do he does not listen!!
Worker: I disagree-. Right now you are telling me, not Bradley. Why don't you turn to him and tell him how all of this is making you feel.
- 6) **Ms. Jenkins:** (*Still screaming but facing Bradley*) You are supposed to check in with me after school. The police already know who you are and you are going down the wrong path. All you do is get into trouble with the gang you hang out with. They are thugs and you should not be hanging out with them until all hours of the night! (*Bradley tries to defend himself but Ms. Jenkins won't let him. When he continues to speak she gets up in his face*) SHUT THE F**** UP! (*Bradley gets up to move but Ms. Jenkins won't let him and pushes him back into the chair*).
- Worker:** (*involuntary non-verbal reaction probably showing disapproval*)
- 7) **Ms. Jenkins:** (*still screaming*) What you have something to say? Call ACS I don't care anymore!
Worker: I apologize if I had a reaction- I just was not expecting for that to happen. I think that we should calm down- there are a lot of people who can hear you.

Evaluation of Work

4 A. Transaction

Ms. Jenkins: I called the police after you left last week, because again he did not come home until late at night. You know what they told me? They told me they knew exactly who my son was and then they came to the house woke him up out the bed and spoke to him about going down the wrong path. I think he is in a gang. (*Yelling*) He is so young- he can't defend himself and something is going to happen to him if he keeps this up.

Worker: Have you told Bradley how you feel about this? (*Since he was sitting right there*).

- A. I did what you said and now look; I find out they already know who my son is! They came to the house and spoke to him but it's not getting any better now he's suspended from school again! I am in a panic. I don't know what to do. Why don't you see how much I need your help???
- B. Why do I need to tell Bradley he's right there he can hear me. He knows how upset I am but he chooses to continue this behavior and follow his friends. It's bad idea to talk to him now because I am too upset.
- C. This was disconnected because I still did not pick up on Ms. Jenkins's desperation. While my intentions were to engage Bradley and Ms. Jenkins into a discussion regarding the suspension and Bradley's unwillingness to follow rules it completely backfired- partly because Ms. Jenkins's anger level was so high. I am scared of her anger and embarrassed by her yelling. The office can hear her. She feels helpless and I feel helpless.
- D. I can hear how overwhelming this situation must be for both of you. (*Said gently*) Can you tell me more about what happened.
- E. I feel that being more empathetic instead of focusing on her anger would have calmed her down much more. so that she would be able to express herself in a way where she could be heard.

5) **A Transaction**

Ms. Jenkins: (*Screaming*) What do you think I'm doing? I'm telling him now. I am sick and tired. Whatever I do he is not listening!!

Worker: I disagree-. Right now you are telling me, not Bradley why don't you turn to him and tell him how all of this is making you feel.

- B. I have tried everything and you are not listening to me! Please listen to me so that my son can listen to me and I don't have to worry anymore about where he is or whom he is with.
- C. He can hear me he has ears! Why are you making me tell him I just told you he doesn't listen to me. Why don't you tell him and see if you can get through to him.
- D. This response was disconnected. Ms. Jenkins is begging and pleading for help and I just told her what to do. I didn't help in any way. I was so frustrated that I was in the room with my client who is screaming and cursing, I froze. I didn't know how to address the situation. I felt torn between the two. I didn't want to take sides. Often I have been drawn into similar disputes between my mother and younger brother. This situation triggered personal feelings which affected my ability to be helpful to both.
- E. Sounds like this suspension triggered things for you again. You brought Bradley along, and he looks upset too. Let's try to talk about what's been going on for both of you.
- F. I should have intervened more quickly and calmly. This would have alleviated some of the stress Ms. Jenkins was feeling and reiterated my own involvement in this family's functioning.

6) A Transaction

Ms. Jenkins: You are supposed to check in with me after school. The police already know who you are and you are going down the wrong path. That gang you hang out with all you do is get into trouble- they are thugs and you should not be hanging out with them until all hours of the night! *(Bradley tries to defend himself- but Ms. Jenkins won't let him when he continues to speak she gets up in his face)* SHUT THE F**** UP! *(Bradley gets up to move but Ms. Jenkins won't let him and pushes him back into the chair).*

Worker: (involuntary non-verbal reaction of disapproval)

- B. Bradley you don't listen to me! What do I have to do get you to behave. You are going down the wrong path. I don't want to see you get hurt or in trouble. You are going to get us into trouble with ACS. I am at my wit's end. I am losing control.
- C. How dare she judge me like that? I just want my son to listen to me I didn't do anything wrong and I don't know why she looks shocked. She should have more control over her emotions.

- D. I remain disconnected. I was so shocked and appalled that Ms. Jenkins would push Bradley like that in front of me I did not know what to do. She has been in this office screaming her head off, and then she pushes him in front of me? I was caught off guard and responded by showing how I was feeling.
- E. It upset me when you pushed Bradley and I didn't want you to do that to him. I do want to help and that may involve listening to both perspectives.
- F. I need to be honest about my reactions si I will be credible I need to help her gain control and reopen the dialogue.

6. Where things stand now

Since both of these sessions I have conducted a school visit and spoke to many of Bradley's administrative team. I have also met with Ms. Jenkins and Bradley again. I felt it was necessary to apologize to both of them, and explain that the focus of the work was what Ms. Jenkins needed to do for ACS and it should have focused on the family as a whole. I apologized privately to Ms. Jenkins because I did not pay sufficient attention to her concerns about her son and how to handle the situations she raised with me. Once I put my feelings about the situation out there, it was easier for me to move beneath Ms. Jenkins' threats and hear her concerns.

7. Based on your discussion in #4,5,6 specify your next helping steps.

After discussing the interpersonal obstacle at great length, and realizing the disconnections, I will approach the situation very differently. I will explain that we can work together and I will not place blame on Ms. Jenkins and what she should or should not be doing. While the agency voice was very strong in my work with Ms. Jenkins, I will try and do what is in the best interests in helping the family, rather than becoming preoccupied with paperwork, documentation, and agency requirements. I will broaden my role from case planning to providing more support and counseling. I need to understand more fully the factors affecting Bradley's behavior and what services he may need. Becoming more aware of my own thoughts and feelings will better able me to address the threats and Ms. Jenkins's strong desire to get help. Instead of feeling animosity towards

Ms. Jenkins since she was inconsistent with completing services, I would try and understand why at this point makes it hard for her to do so.

Lastly, I think that Bradley needs help from the agency. My focus has been more on "monitoring" what has been going on at school rather than acting as an advocate and providing other supports. There needs to be a dual focus in providing help to both Ms. Jenkins and Bradley, and in turn, I think she too will feel more supported.

8) Cite and Discuss Literature

Germain and Gitterman (Chapter 11: Reducing Interpersonal Stress Between Worker and Client

According to this chapter there were many things I contributed to the interpersonal stress between Ms. Jenkins and I. While I was not completely aware of the obstacle I knew that there was something I was contributing to our work which was affecting Ms. Jenkins' current reactions. Based on the discussion in this chapter, I avoided messages from Ms. Jenkins, failed to explore, referred her to help elsewhere and offered overly simple solutions. In reading this chapter I became more aware at my inability to connect to Ms. Jenkins' to anxiety about and exasperation with Bradley. . Because Ms. Jenkins was not compliant with some the mandated services, her behavior connoted to me that I had to get her to comply. The agency voice implied that Ms. Jenkins was the "bad parent" and the work should focus on her unacceptable behaviors. It hadn't occurred to me that the definition of the current problem was different than what was mandated by the agency. Ms. Jenkins has a wide variety of problems. The authors stress that clients often need help with immediate life issues in contrast to those framed by an outside agency unfamiliar with and sometimes unresponsive to her current life situation. I would have liked to address these issues in order to alleviate her current stress. Lastly, I understand how my own countertransference, based on a parallel life situation, drew me away from more directly facilitating the escalating tensions between Ms. Jenkins and her son.

Arnold, E.M. Walsh, A.K. Oldham, M.S. & Rapp, C.A. .(2007) Strengths-based case management: Implementation with high-risk youth.

This article presents a very interesting and appealing model for work with high-risk youth. It is based on a strengths theory of case management in which factors are identified which are impacting the youth and how these personal and environmental factors can be changed. Clients have greater roles in self determination in defining their own objectives that would serve as a sharp departure from the vulnerability Bradley now experiences in regard to family, school and community. The authors also discuss what they term "seizing the opportunity" in crisis in which they feel there is greater opportunity for child-parent receptivity to each other and to obtaining help. Crisis occurred several times in my work with this family and I focused more on calming matters down than using it as an arena for mutual work. Since there is so much negativity towards Bradley and the behaviors viewed a problematic, I think he would be more likely to involve himself with me if I take a different approach and offer him direct help, though as the article highlights, it can take perseverance!

Freeman, E.M. & Couchonnal, G. : Narrative and culturally based approaches in practice with families

In reflecting on my work, this article outlined some strategies I could use in helping Ms. Jenkins.. While I tended to listen to Ms. Jenkins's anger, rather than her stress, it would have been helpful, if I assumed a counseling role and asking more in depth questions about what her past life experiences. According to this article, focusing on families' past experiences through the use of narratives, help clients to better understand how their own family experiences and personal struggles may impact them in their current roles and to more actively approach their areas for change. The use of narratives can also help the worker to reaffirm the client's strengths. When a client is telling their story it points out not only the facts but also the meaning behind and the importance of each fact. For Ms. Jenkins, learning about her earlier experiences in life, could have been helpful to reaffirm her strength as a mother of two children. While, I am sure if she has had similar experiences in dealing with earlier issues and feeling impotent, at this point she hasn't stopped "fighting" yet.

9. What did you learn from doing this assignment?

This assignment allowed me to look at my relationship with my client from various perspectives. When a session occurs there is not enough time to view all of this in your own mind, and in taking the time out of my practice to complete this assignment, it allowed me to focus on my thoughts, and feelings during each transaction and see how that affected the connectedness and effectiveness of my intervention. Instead of looking at Ms. Jenkins as a "resistant" person whose drug use and other life stressors took precedence over her children, I can now look at her as a parent who feels that she lacks control over her children and is desperately asking for help in the only way she knows how. This assignment awakened me to the many factors that have influenced my work with this client. It freed me to acknowledge openly my client that I had not sufficiently heard her pleas and wanted to establish a new way of working together.

REFERENCES

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