

Linda Wilson and Tara Exercise

Directions: Review the information outlined below. Then document your risk assessment of the family. The trainer will be available to answer any questions that you may have during this exercise.

Linda Wilson is a 20 year old single mother, who lives alone with her daughter Tara, age 2 ½. Linda was previously employed, but currently supports herself and Tara on public assistance. Tara stays with a day care provider for three hours, two days a week, while Linda attends job training. Tara's day care provider recently noticed several serious bruises on Tara's buttocks, legs, and back, and what appeared to be a burn on her buttocks. She called the child welfare agency. The day care provider told the caseworker that in the past month, Tara cried and fought when staff tried to take her to the toilet, and she crouched in a corner and hid when she wet or soiled her pants. She also exhibited considerable fear when anyone at the day care home mentioned the bathroom. The day care provider said this was a real departure for Tara, who was usually a loving and sweet child, and who interacted easily with both staff and the other children. The provider also said she really liked Linda, and that Linda and Tara seemed to have a very affectionate relationship.

The intake caseworker went to the Wilson home to conduct an assessment to determine whether Tara had been abused, and to calculate the risk of leaving Tara in Linda's care.

At the initial assessment visit with Linda, the intake caseworker described Tara's bruises, and why it was believed they were inflicted rather than accidental. The caseworker also provided considerable support and encouragement to talk about it. Linda staunchly denied that she knew how Tara had been hurt. She claimed she had never seen any bruises or burns, and insisted, " I would never do anything to hurt my child." When the worker said some of the bruises were more than a week old, Linda said she had noticed a few black and blue marks, but said they were no big deal, and figured Tara had fallen at the day care center. When asked about the burn, Linda didn't know how that had happened. She thought perhaps Tara's bath water was too hot, probably when her sister had watched Tara. When asked whether anyone else could have harmed Tara, she said there was no one else. She said if anyone had hurt her child, it had been at the day care center.

When asked about her recent history, Linda told the worker she had become very ill three months earlier, but was on medication and seemed to be doing better. She had also lost her job because of her illness, but it was in a job-training program and expected to be re-employed soon. The worker asked who would take care of Tara while she worked. Linda said she would place Tara

at the day care center. The worker asked if she had been trying to toilet train Tara. Linda said she had, since the day care center expected children to be trained before they were accepted. She said it was going well – Tara had accidents now and then, but that was pretty normal. In general, Tara was basically trained. When the worker asked her why Tara reacted so violently when the day care providers tried to take her to the toilet, Linda said that should be clear evidence that the day care providers had been hurting her.

The caseworker asked Linda to get Tara and bring her into the living room. The caseworker noted that Linda handled Tara roughly, dragging her into the living room by her arm, and pushing her down on the floor by her toy chest, telling her, “stay there, play with your toys. Tara looked suspiciously at the caseworker, and crouched in the corner with her doll. The caseworker asked Linda to show her how she took Tara to the potty. Linda refused, saying Tara didn’t have to go. The caseworker said that it was important that she try. Linda approached Tara, grabbed her arm and said, “Okay, lets go to the potty.” Tara began to scream, fell on the floor, and began to kick her feet. Linda looked at the caseworker and said angrily, “See what they’ve done to her? She’s even afraid of me now!”

The caseworker gently stressed to Linda that Tara’s injuries were serious enough to warrant protective intervention, that the caseworker didn’t want to have to place Tara, that she knew the day care providers hadn’t abused Tara, and that she needed Linda to help her find some answers, if she was going to help Linda keep custody of Tara. She told Linda if they could together figure out how to keep Tara from being hurt again, she wouldn’t have to place her. Linda became enraged, jumped up from her chair, and screamed, “You just try to take my child and see what happens to you! I have friends and I’ll get you. We’ll find where you live. Don’t expect to live long! Now get out of here before I hurt you!” At the sound of her mother’s angry voice, Tara recoiled and ran from the room.

The caseworker left the home. She stopped and talked with two neighbors, who both said that Linda often had violent temper outbursts and often screamed at Tara. They had seen Linda hit Tara on several occasions, often with little provocation. Tara would be playing in the yard, and Linda would come storming out of the house, grab Tara and drag her by the hair or the arm. They concurred that generally, Linda seemed to be a nice person, but she had her moods.