

Case Study of Melanie

Melanie is a nine year old Hispanic female who, up until two months ago, lived with her mother and father in an apartment in an urban area of Pennsylvania. Melanie's father had a history of alcoholism. He frequently beat Melanie's mother and would physically abuse Melanie by beating her with a belt and by squirting lemon in her eyes.

Melanie's abuse came to the attention of Children and Youth when her third grade teacher spotted an unusual bruise on her right arm. The nurse examined Melanie who reported that she fell off her bicycle creating the bruise on her arm. The nurse called Children and Youth.

The caseworker investigated the case. Melanie admitted that the father had inflicted the bruise on her arm with a belt. The mother and father denied that this occurred. Melanie was placed temporarily with the maternal grandparents, who lived nearby Melanie's parents, until further options were explored. Shortly after this incident, Melanie's father stabbed her mother to death. Melanie was on the scene when the murder occurred, but did not actually witness the murder.

Since her mother's death two month ago, Melanie has experienced nightmares and has developed fears about leaving her grandparents. She also "plays out" the events of her mother's murder. She frequently complains of an upset stomach. She has become withdrawn at school and doesn't want to play with friends at home or at school. She is frequently distracted and has difficulty concentrating at school.

Melanie's grandparents are in their 70's, but are in relatively good health. However, they have let the caseworker know that they are feeling overwhelmed by the demands of raising a nine year old. The caseworker arranged for Melanie and her grandparents to see a therapist and they have seen the therapist twice so far. Melanie has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.