

Scene 6

Mike Come in. I was going to call you today.

Hilary Have you seen Dawn Palmer?

Mike No. That's why I was going to ring. We'd arranged another review yesterday and she didn't show up again, and this morning she didn't bring Jade in. We've heard nothing from her and every time we rang the phone was engaged. Do you know if something's going on?

Hilary Yes. I had a message from the police. Apparently Sasha left home last night. Packed her bag and walked out sometime after ten. I expect Dawn's been on the phone ringing around her friends. It looks bad. Dawn found a note telling her not to worry and that she'd be in touch. But there had been no contact the last I heard.

Mike Have you been round there?

Hilary I'm on my way but I thought I'd drop in here first.

Mike She'll be in quite a state understandably. Jade should really be here with us.

Hilary Yes. Where do you start looking for runaway fifteen-year-olds?

Mike God knows. The police of course. I've got a friend who works in that young persons refuge by the central station. I could give him a ring if you like.

Hilary It can't do any harm.

Jo Hunt Hilary has already been out to see the mother, Dawn, I think with a view to finding out why she didn't go to her youngest daughter's review, and so she needs to approach it quite carefully because on this second visit to see Dawn, Dawn's likely to feel quite defensive. One because she'll think that she's going again to ask her why she didn't go to the second review, and secondly because she has already been quite explicit about what she considers her own needs are in relation to her mother, by requesting information about residential care for her, and she hasn't had a response on that. If she can't see her manager, she at least needs to talk with colleagues to plan out how she's going to run the interview in a way that addresses the issue of potential abuse, but also doesn't further alienate herself from the mother, Dawn.

Val Williams Yvonne?

Yvonne Walker The concept of working in Partnership is what should be at the forefront I think of all the intervention, that there isn't just one person who has to make all the decisions. It's a number of people. It affects a number of people's lives and everybody has got their own sort of plan I suppose of what they want to happen. So it's about hearing what other people have got to say basically and not thinking that she's on her own and she has to make the decisions, and everybody has got to sort of look to her to be the leader.

Gillian Lodge I mean I actually thought that Dawn asking for the care for her mother was in a bit of a way a side track issue. She hasn't really been clear with this mother and she's not faced her up with what she really thinks the problems are with the little girl at nursery. She's hidden behind 'it's speech we are worried about'. But we know that there's all these other things, and why

she hasn't been, at this stage, more honest with the mother I'm not sure, and I think there's a real need for her to be more open, to really work in partnership; to look at the timing of when the review is; to look at issues of empowerment for parents in that situation. So I don't know that it would be her actual role to interview Dawn about the possible abuse of her mother. I would see that she could get the urgent referral to adult services for that.

Jo She would need to co-ordinate whatever she's doing with the worker from adult services wouldn't she? Because if she rushes out now to interview Dawn, she can't avoid referring to the fact that there are issues around her mother, because there's going to be somebody presumably, you'd hope, visiting there quite speedily, not instantaneously, but quite early on after this phone conversation to look at the issue of the mothers immediate safety etc. If Hilary herself is also going out, they perhaps need to co-ordinate something, set up some kind of multi disciplinary review, before anybody does anything, because otherwise you could have two social workers visiting in quick succession to talk about two separate things, but both having to allude to the other.

Val And it is a family. It is a unit in itself and what looks like could easily happen is that responsibilities would be split up among different service deliveries. I mean one point I would like to come back to was talking about parents, and here we are talking about seeing Hilary, Hilary seeing Dawn, Hilary seeing Mavis, Hilary seeing the children. But where does Jim fit into this in that he's also a parent in this family.

Wayne Sampson I mean I was thinking about that. I suppose again one of the keys to what Hilary has to do is about planning isn't it and think about talking to her colleagues and may be the different departments, the nursery, day centre. And I think she's got to bear in mind she's working with a family which seems quite clear to me from the tape, that's actually at quite a stressful level in terms of the relationships that are going on. And I think one of the things she's going to have to find out is how the individuals feel in that situation and what...basically what they want. How they see the problems and what sort of outcomes they want. I mean I have my perception about maybe what dad wants, and what mum wants, and the tensions around, but I think in terms of planning an effective intervention she will need to get that explicitly from the family. But bearing in mind there are lots of tensions working. It's not going to be easy for the family.

Jo And the other issue is leading on from what you have just said Wayne is that we might consider that the most immediate crisis in this family is around Mavis and her situation, although we don't know until we've asked any of these people. The fact is that Dawn and Jim's daughter has just run away or left home, and that I would imagine would be their overriding issue. Whoever goes in would need to acknowledge that, before trying to get into any other discussions. If your daughter's just run away from home and you are as concerned as Dawn was then you can't really begin to look at any other issues until you've discussed that.

Val And it would be very easy for Jade to get lost in all of this, being the youngest, being the one who's not communicating enough in a verbal way and able to stand up and say I want, I need. You can see how easy it would be that the original referral, which was about Jade, would get off the agenda very soon.

Wayne Again, Hilary will have to be quite clear about the priorities when she goes in to meet the family and in a sense she has to deal with the referral and you know the three-year-old in this situation. But quite clearly she has to bear in mind all these other dynamics that are going on: that an adolescent has just gone off; mum's clearly upset; dad appears to be coming across as quite ambivalent. But be aware. So I suppose about prioritising in terms of her contact with the family.

Val I think you've said what immediate action needs to happen, that there needs to be a referral to an adult care team, because it's highly unlikely that there would be the same social workers in the one team. And I think the other issue about immediate action you've covered and that she would need to seek a supervision at this stage with her line manager. I don't think any social worker, however experienced, would feel comfortable in just going mowing ahead with this without taking advice. I mean one issue that I think it's important to state here, I mean do you think there's any immediate concerns that leads you to take action regarding Jade? Do you think that she's suffering or likely to suffer significant harm at this stage?

Yvonne I think she would be more likely to suffer significant harm if a social worker went in heavy-handedly and removed her from the family. At the moment there isn't any evidence that she's suffering physical abuse. So I think it's about timing and gathering all the information, without damaging further Jade and the other members of the family.

Gillian It is as I said at the beginning really about not responding to other people's panic, about standing back. As Yvonne says there's no evidence that there's immediate risk other than the district nurses concern about Mavis, who needs to be referred to adult services. But I would have thought after a supervision session, Hilary could do with sitting down and planning each stage, how she's going to undertake the full assessment of the family.

Jo It sounds as though the district nurse is quite anxious from what we have heard on the tape and she would need to get back to her with what her plan was just to inform her so that she can keep a note of what action has happened. Hilary would also need to get back to the...is it the nursery that Jade attends to say 'yes, you know thank you for letting us know that Dawn rather wasn't at the review' and just let them know what they are doing. Not all the detail of it, but just so that they can be satisfied. I mean you get the impression that a lot of information is not necessarily being recorded in this case and that is obviously something that's very important. Also the reality of getting supervision at short notice with your manager in a busy local authority social services office is probably quite remote, so it might have to be somebody else who was available, perhaps a colleague etc

Wayne And I think what comes over very clearly from the tape is that the nursery has some very concrete concerns in terms of the behaviour they are seeing. And again in terms of working in partnership I suppose they would need to know something is happening and maybe the best thing they can do is to carry on monitoring the situation. Clearly from what they've seen it fits into a pattern and it feels like – I mean it's not about immediate significant harm but certainly the behaviour is something to do with the emotions, and maybe what the child is seeing in the family.