## Case Study #2

Shelly

**The Situation**

Shelly is 12 years old when she suddenly refuses to change for gym class. She becomes extremely evasive when asked why she doesn’t want to, simply telling her teacher that she will not participate in class under any circumstances. She has also begun to skip lunch and has been noticeably losing weight. During her sex ed class, Shelly volunteers detailed information about how men and women interact with one another when they’re sexually involved.

Shelly’s mother and father, Jane and Bob, are at every parent-teacher meeting and Bob particularly shows great interest in how Shelly is doing in class. He’s domineering when he’s with Jane, cutting her off when she tries to voice her opinion. When he’s with Shelly, he’s observed to be extremely protective of her, keeping her close to him as opposed to letting her meet up with friends. Before he drops her off for school, he’s observed to spend several minutes talking to her before she exits the car.

When confronted with Shelly’s new behavior, Bob states that she’s exhibiting normal behavior for her age. She’s trying to save money for new shoes by skipping lunch, she’s learned about sex from her friends, and she’s refusing to change for gym class because she’s testing her boundaries. Her mother confirms this, but offers no additional details or statements.

**The Assessment**

This case is a particularly tricky one to handle. As Shelly approaches puberty, her father is correct in that it is normal for her to be curious about sex. If she’s taken it upon herself to find out the facts, she may want to share this with the class. It’s also normal for her to alter her behavior in an attempt to become more independent. However, Bob’s protective nature and Shelly’s sudden radical shift in nature suggest sexual abuse more than it suggests typical pre-teen behavior. A sexually abusive parent will try to isolate the child both out of jealousy and paranoia that the child will reveal the truth to an adult or a peer. Shelly would benefit from a more in-depth investigation to determine the root causes of her new behavior.