

Case Vignette—Chris

Child: Chris

Age: 3

Point in Child Welfare System: Recent removal from family, entering CW system (placed with maternal relative)

Trauma Type: Medical trauma, neglect

Culture/Ethnicity: This child could be of any racial or cultural background.

Presenting Situation

Chris is a 3-year-old, who is about to be released from the medical center where he has been treated for a serious burn injury. Three months ago, Chris was burned when he pulled a pot of soup from the stove onto himself. He sustained second-degree burns on 40% of his body, including his face, chest, and right hand and arm. Chris was living with his mother, who was arrested for child neglect when it was found that she had left Chris alone in their apartment while she was shooting heroin in another apartment in the building. Chris will require ongoing medical care for the burns. His maternal grandmother has asked to have him placed in her home. However, she has not been certified to provide medical foster care.

Background/History

Chris is the third child born to his mother, each from a different father. Both of the others are currently living with their fathers after being removed as a consequence of the mother's substance abuse. Chris was small for gestational age at birth, and found to have opiates in his blood at birth. He was removed from his mother and put in foster care for the first month of life, but returned to his mother after she completed a drug treatment program. She started on methadone maintenance, which she continued until approximately six months ago. Chris has often stayed with his maternal grandmother and feels close to her. She notes that he has always been very active and curious and "into things."

In the hospital Chris is having nightmares every night. He often calls for his mother and grandmother, and is very withdrawn in his interactions with the hospital staff. The physicians anticipate that he will continue to need dressing changes at least twice a day after discharge, which Chris finds very painful and frightening. However, they are very reluctant to send pain medication home with Chris after discharge if this would be accessible to his mother.

Evaluation/Assessment

Chris is lying in his hospital bed in a fetal position. His right hand and arm are heavily bandaged. He has an IV attached to his left arm. He wears children's pajamas, under which you can see the bandages on his chest. His face looks red and raw. He jumps when you walk

in the room, and is initially suspicious and will not talk to you. However, once you show him a coloring book you brought for him, he is pleased and becomes engaged in coloring. He is easily frustrated by how difficult it is to use his bandaged right hand to color, and throws the crayon on the floor. He starts crying when the crayon breaks.

His grandmother comes into the room and he smiles widely and calls, “Nana!” You notice that he is groggy and slow in his movements as he sits up to greet her. He also grimaces in obvious pain as he hugs her.