

**Engaging with Parents Impacted by Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities**  
**Child Abuse and Neglect Conference, 10/21/19**  
**Practice Vignettes**

Jenny

Jenny has two children, 9-year-old Mikey and 12-year-old Jolene. They all live in a house with the grandmother (Jenny's mother) in a small suburban town, where they have some extended family who live nearby. The father of Jenny's children left when they were very young and Jenny and her mother have co-parented the children ever since. A call was placed to DHS because Jenny's 12 year old has excessive absences from school. When school personnel or DHS has called Jenny, she replies that Jolene has been feeling sick, but she is unable to provide a doctor's note. The school was also concerned about Jenny's comprehension when they called her.

Jenny was diagnosed with a mild intellectual disability several years ago but she does not know what it means. Jenny and her mother have been co-parenting for some time, but recently Jenny's mother has become less active, as she has health complications impacting her mobility and energy -- she is no longer very present for the kids and spends a lot of time resting or sleeping. This situation is challenging for the family. Jenny was good at parenting when the kids were younger and their needs were concrete, such as getting them to and from appointments and school, and making sure they were clean, clothed, and fed. It has become more difficult as the kids get older and exert more control. However, the children are bonded with their mother and have been doing relatively well in school. When DHS conducted their initial home visit, they were alarmed at what they thought was Jenny's lack of understanding of the situation, with very long pauses before she responded to their questions.

DHS had a family team meeting and generated a service plan: Jenny needs to cooperate with a preventive caseworker and ensure that her daughter goes to school; attend an updated evaluation to get support services for herself; and cooperate with supervision. Jenny is not in compliance with her service plan. She has not attended the evaluation and is frequently either not home or doesn't open the door for the case worker.

You are a case worker or social worker. Your role is to to explain the three things she needs to do, and also make clear the ramifications if she doesn't comply. Typically when you've asked her about the absences from school, she states that "Jolene says she is feeling sick, I'm not going to force her to go to school, that's neglect" (and says it repeatedly). Jenny doesn't understand why she needs an evaluation, she thinks things are fine. If Jenny doesn't comply with the service plan, you are considering petitioning the court and asking for a removal.

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Danielle

Danielle is a single mother with four kids ages 6 months, 3, 10, and 12 years old. Danielle's children have different fathers who are either living in different states, incarcerated, or uninvolved. Danielle was living with Christopher, her current boyfriend and father of her 6 month old. Christopher paid the bills and took on a lot of primary parenting responsibilities including interfacing with schools and medical professionals. While things were okay for a short period of time, it was discovered that Christopher was hitting the older children with a belt. The 12 year old came to school with a bruise, and disclosed the cause to the teacher. Christopher, who has an extensive criminal history, was subsequently arrested.

Danielle has an undiagnosed intellectual disability. She had a learning disorder growing up. She was very slow to learn, was held back from several grades, and did not graduate from high school. She has issues with comprehension and tends to react defensively and angrily when she doesn't understand. She also has a scattered work history either cleaning or bagging groceries, but has not been able to hold onto jobs for long. She is good at concrete tasks, but she is functionally illiterate, and has a hard time talking to professionals.

DHS held a family team meeting (child safety conference) with Daneille. Danielle wavered back and forth between denying the allegations against Christopher, or defending him, saying "so what, that's how I was raised." She was angry, emotional, and volatile, constantly leaving the room and coming back in, and cursing out the case workers. The case workers made a plan that if she was able to exclude Christopher from the home, abide by an order of protection, complete an evaluation, and follow up with support services, that the children could remain in her care. Additionally, the two older children were not doing well in school, and the case worker requested that the children have an educational evaluation, which made her even angrier, stating "there is nothing wrong with my kids!"

Danielle would not agree to the plan and the kids were placed in foster care. Since that time her attendance at visitations has been sporadic, she has not followed up with referrals for an evaluation for herself, and refuses to consent to the IEP. She still sees Christopher, who is incarcerated, regularly. Danielle wants to get her kids back and still does not understand why they were removed. You are a social worker, case worker, or advocate. Your role is to talk to her about what she needs to do to get her children back.