**Single Assessment**

The goal for the style of assessing below is to think about the ‘problem identified person’ in a different way – to move from the individual presenting as the problem to the problem being inter relational. Not only does this shift families and systems who are stuck in problem saturated stories and pathologising patterns, it helps to liberate the entire system by considering contextual factors, exceptions to the dominant discourse around the person being the problem [as it isn’t always present/changes according to people/places/other environmental factors].

The outcome [apart from the above effect on professional and family alike] is a rich and considered assessment of the young person, their family and identified difficulties. The asking of questions in this way invites a curious and collaborative approach and the taking of an externalising position by all involved and as a result more information is gathered and considered in order to think of a way forward [especially when thinking about attempted solutions, their outcomes and exceptions to the problem]. As a result it invites hope and solutions. Asking these sorts of questions does not ignore risk as we are inviting multiple perspectives and curious about different positions [in relation to perceptions of the problem] and as a result we can be alert to issues such as minimising, denial, blaming, unhelpful beliefs/intergenerational patterns [e.g. I was hit as a child and it didn’t do me any harm etc.].

1. **What is the problem?**

Who says it’s a problem

What do they say?

When did they first notice it?

What else was happening around that time?

Is it present in every context [home/school/other]?

Is it present with all people [within and outside of family]?

Who is most affected by the problem?

Who is least affected by the problem?

How does the problem affect relationships?

How do relationships affect the problem?

When is the problem at its worst?

When is the problem not so present?

**What is the problem**?

Mrs X understood that CSC had received a referral from school regarding her son Billy and that Billy had made a disclosure of physical chastisement at the hands of Mrs X. According to Mrs X, the school did not understand the nature of Billy’s needs and, despite her requests, they had not assessed or provided support to him in the school setting.

Mrs X told us that she had struggled with 14 year old Billy’s behaviour for the last two years. She described Billy as rude, aggressive [holes in the bedroom doors, defiant, had started smoking and drinking with his new set of friends]. According to Mrs X, on the day of the disclosure she and Billy had an argument when Billy asked for money, he threw a cup at her and when she tried to restrain him she became unbalanced and Billy hit his head against the door frame, causing some bruising to his eye].

Mrs X told us that she was overwhelmed with Billy’s behaviour, she believed that he had always been a challenge and she was considering putting him into ‘care’ as she could not cope anymore.

When asked, Mrs X could identify that although Billy could be challenging at times, it was in the last two years he really began to ‘push her buttons’. Mrs X told us that at around that time, Billy’s father left the home. According to Mrs X, Billy and his father were close, his father was the one to discipline him, however since his father left the family home, contact has been sporadic and Billy had become angry with his mother.

Mrs X told us that Billy’s nan and aunt had not noticed too much of a difference in Billy and understood his behaviour as ‘hormones’. Mrs X also told us that when Billy was with his father, his friends or on holiday, his behaviour was more manageable.

According to Mrs X, she is most affected by Billy’s behaviour and the more he is angry with her the more she withdraws from him. Mrs X believes that Billy’s anger is at its worst when he doesn’t get to see his father, when she tells him ‘no’ or when they argue over money.

1. **When is the problem less present?**

Think: context change [holiday/different family members/different context];

Think relational change [when different members of the family/others present/absent/behave or respond in a different way]

Think time: [further back in time, solutions attempted, what else was happening?}

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| **When is the problem less present?**  See above. According to Mrs X, Billy’s behaviour is less present when he is with his father, with his friends or on holiday his behaviour improved.  Mrs X remembered that Billy’s behaviour was better when he was younger and when his father lived in the home. She also realised that when she is relaxed, has been paid from work and has had a break visiting friends or family, his behaviour is better. |

1. **What is the context?**

What is the history of the problem?

Has it changed over time?

What sort of things influence it’s development?

Environmental

Financial resources

Housing

Family/Extended family

Role of professional agencies

Cultural considerations

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| **What is the context?**  Being her first child, Mrs X told us that she was unsure as a mother and did not feel very supported as her partner, Billy’s father was working outside the home. However she reflected that she learned along the way, told us ‘they don’t come with books’ and picked up hints from friends and her family. Billy’s father had a good relationship with Billy and Billy would listen to him. Billy’s father also managed Billy [and his siblings] behaviour.  According to Mrs X, her relationship with Billy’s father broke down two years ago and from that time her relationship with Billy has deteriorated as he is often angry with her and breaks things in the home.  Mrs X told us that she had experienced financial stress since the breakup with Billy’s father, she has had to work part time and as he’s grown and spends more time with his peers, Billy has been increasing demanding money – this is a frequent point of friction.  Mrs X told us that she has not looked into what benefits she might be entitled to and she feels guilty if she has to ask her mother for support from time to time, she has not contacted the CSA as she doesn’t want things to get worse between her and Billy’s father, but he does not contribute financially very often.  Mrs X, on reflection, also spoke about her experience of men in her family, her father had left her mother when she was young and she had lived through the experience of her mother’s struggle after the break up. She told us that it feels like ‘history is repeating itself’, as Billy has grown he has begun to look more like his father and she told us she feels ‘let down by men’. She thought this experience/belief might also influence her relationship with Billy. |

1. **What has been done about it?**

What solutions have been attempted?

What was the outcome?

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| **What has been done about it?**  According to Mrs X, she has asked Billy’s father to have more contact with him, she has asked her mother and sister to have Billy for a weekend every now and again and she has asked school to put some support in for Billy’s anger. Mrs X told us that it is better for her to have a break from Billy and she didn’t get many complaints from her family when Billy stayed. However when Billy returned he was often ‘moody’ and this would frequently become an angry episode. On reflection, Mrs X wondered if Billy felt she was pushing him away by taking a long [a few days] break. Mrs X told us the school was ‘useless’ and could not provide any support as Billy appeared able to manage his behaviour in school.  Mrs X had realised that when she felt more rested and relaxed her relationship with Billy was improved and his behaviour improved and she tries to take shorter breaks but again worries that Billy might feel pushed away from her at these times.  Mrs X has not explored benefits she might be entitled to, she had not explored a mediation intervention with her ex-partner and she had not considered or, indeed was she aware of, local parenting support services. |

1. **Why is it still a problem?**

Contributory factors e.g. mental health, poverty, housing, beliefs, lack of resources/intergenerational patterns?

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| **Why is it still a problem?**  According to Mrs X, the impact of Billy’s father leaving, especially in terms of his previous good relationship with his father, the fact that contact is sporadic and his missing his father has not helped Billy’s anger or behaviour.  Mrs X told us that as well as this, the fact that she now has to increase her work to ensure the family can survive has meant that there is a financial strain on the family. This financial strain is compounded by Billy’s stage of development and his subsequent desire to spend more time with peers which often involves him asking for money [she suspects some of the money goes on cigarettes and alcohol but Billy denies this].  Mrs X reflected that she has been very stressed over the last two years, since the changes in the family structure. She also thinks that when Billy gets angry she usually withdraws. On the occasion of the morning of the disclosure, she did not feel she could withdraw as Billy was coming for her and threw a cup at her. Mrs X thinks it might be helpful for her to talk to someone, however she has not gone to see her GP yet to explore this further. |

1. **Beliefs about the problem?**

Think: intergenerational patterns e.g. he’s just like his father/my father/my grandfather – what does this mean for his future? What does this mean for your hope for change? What other possibilities are there for him?

Think: social graaccces – is this just how boys/girls are? Is this a generational thing? An age thing? A cultural thing? A religious thing? A geographical thing? A class thing? Etc.

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| **Beliefs about the problem?**  Mrs X told us that she felt she had ‘failed’ as a partner and mother since her partner left her. She told us that at the same time she felt stressed, Billy felt bereft, his hormones started to change and she struggled to provide for the family as a lone parent. She told us that she believed Billy’s behaviour was the main problem for her but on reflection she can see that she had multiple demands that were outside of her control. Importantly she could also see that Billy had also experienced these stressors and they were outside of his control also.  Mrs X became curious about her lived experience of men in families and her sense that she was let down by men. She became thoughtful about how this belief might influence her relationship with Billy, her ideas about the sort of man he will become and whether he had other alternatives open to him. She told us she would like to think that his experience of missing his father might help him to become a man who valued and prioritised relationships.  Mrs X had thought that she was using all the resources available to her and was pleased to hear of alternative support services [benefits, mediation, counselling, FTT etc] that she could engage with to support the family at this time of change. |

Dave Tapsell