Infant and Child Mental Health
Professional Development Webinar Series

CASE STUDY

Supporting the mental health of children living in out-of-home care

Case Study – Jenny

Jenny is 11 years old and currently living with her third foster family. At the age of six, she and her baby sister, Charlie, were removed from their parents due to chronic neglect and suspected abuse. Jenny's early home life was chaotic, with many different adults coming and going, heavy alcohol and drug use, and long periods of neglect for both Jenny and Charlie. Jenny has been in her current placement for several months. This foster family lives further away from Jenny's school and feel the distance is too great for her to continue attending. They plan to keep Jenny in her old school until the end of the term, after which she will transfer to a new school closer to their home.

Jenny feels confused and angry about this decision, as it will mean moving further away from Charlie. Jenny has always felt a strong sense of responsibility and protectiveness towards Charlie. The limited contact between them since their placement in different foster homes has been a significant source of distress for Jenny. The upcoming move to a new school will further reduce their interactions. It will also disrupt Jenny's wider social connections at her current school, which include her friends Zoe and Annie, with whom she plays on the school netball team.

While Jenny's current foster family is supportive, they do not fully understand the depth of her emotional struggles. Jenny has been referred to a psychologist for support after an incident at school where she threw a chair across the classroom in frustration. Jenny has never seen a psychologist before. She doesn't want to talk to anyone and is reluctant to attend and engage in these sessions.