

Applying The Decision Tree: N.M.

History:

N.M. is a 3-year-old Caucasian/Latino male who was drug exposed in utero but without a positive toxicology screen. N. stayed with his biological mother who was trying to stay clean but was abusing substances off and on for the first two years of N.'s life. She initially lived with maternal grandmother (her mother) but moved out of the home when N. was 1 year of age. N. and his mother lived with mother's boyfriend who was in and out of their lives, sometimes incarcerated for up to 3 months. When there, N. was exposed to substance abuse and domestic violence incidents, including the most recent one where mother went to the emergency room to get treatment following a severe incident. At that time, N. was 2-years-11-months of age. The nurse at the ER called DCFS because of the significance of the DV. Upon further investigation by DCFS, it was found that both boyfriend and mother tested positive for methamphetamines and their apartment was excessively dirty and there was little food in the home. N. was also behind in some of his most recent health checks, and there were questions regarding his development and other health issues. N.'s mother was cooperative and asked that he be placed with maternal grandmother while she entered a substance abuse shelter. N.'s mother's boyfriend was not allowed to visit, and a restraining order was recommended. N. is not sure about the whereabouts of N.'s father who left soon after N. was born.

Reason For Referral:

The DCFS social worker made a referral for mental health services when N. was 3 years-1-month of age, because the maternal grandmother caregiver felt unable to manage N.'s behaviors. She said that N. never listened to directions, tantrummed whenever she said *no* to him, refused to go to bed on time, engaged in unsafe behaviors (e.g., running into the street instead of holding her hand), and had meltdowns that lasted at least 30 minutes 2 to 3 times a week. Additionally, he is aggressive with her and his peers, and has just been expelled from preschool for biting other children in his class. She knows she cannot spank him, but she does not know how to parent him and help him to calm down when he is distressed.

The intake therapist interviewed the grandmother and asked her to complete the CBCL, the ECBI, and the TSCYC. On the CBCL, N. was clinically significant on externalizing behaviors (T=71), especially in the area of aggressive behaviors (destroying property, hitting others, screaming and temper tantrums). On the ECBI, N. was also significant (Intensity raw score=145), including getting angry, acting defiant, refusing to go to bed, temper tantrums, and physical fights with peers. N.'s caregiver says that he has tantrums that last 15-20 minutes daily and longer ones at least 4 times/week. On the TSCYC, N. was barely clinically significant on PTSD-Total (Raw score = 41), and was highest on Anger, PTSD Arousal, and PTSD Avoidance.

During the interview, the grandmother reported that mother's boyfriend was violent with mother in front of N., and she suspects that he may have been violent with N. She said N.'s mother never set rules for him and was inconsistent in parenting, letting him stay up late and feeding him inappropriate foods.