

Abstracted from an unpublished paper by Elena B. Glekas, MSW

Practice Context and Case Presentation

The mission of the sectarian agency where the social worker is placed is to enable people to strengthen and transform their lives by empowering those most in need, by supporting families, and by engaging the broader community in its work. Although the agency believes in the resilience, strength, and healing power of families, it is also fully aware that under stress the family support system can break down, endangering children's welfare. In such cases, children are often placed in the agency's Foster Care Program.

Kendra is a 2-year-old female whose crack cocaine-addicted mother abandoned her with a caretaker at 1 month of age, with no interest in further contacts. The caretaker refused to continue to care for her and was unable to locate the mother. After Child Protective Services (CPS) intervention, Kendra was placed in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Doe. The foster family and Kendra are supervised by the caseworker through the agency's Foster Care Program.

Kendra has adjusted well to the Does' home and the Does love her very much. They would like to adopt her, and this is being planned, although parental rights have not yet been terminated. Kendra's mother has not been located, and the agency is initiating termination of parental rights through the court system.

The Does have a 24-year-old son, Tony, residing in their home as well. Tony is suffering from schizophrenia. He desperately wants to leave the Does and live independently, but they feel that he does not have the mental ability to do this successfully and that he continues to need their protection.

Tony recently confessed to the worker that he has sexually abused Kendra. The Does claims that Tony is doing this only because he wants to live independently, hoping that they will ask him to leave their home. However, an investigation by CPS, the Youth Squad, and the police department was immediately begun, and Kendra was taken to a local hospital for examination, where no evidence of abuse was found. She was removed from the Does and placed in a temporary foster home.

Since the sexual abuse issue was revealed, the Does have abandoned their opposition to Tony's leaving. They have participated in planning sessions with Tony and his worker, and Tony has located an appropriate living facility, where some supervision will be provided. He is eager to move and plans to leave in a few days.

The Does would like to continue their plans for adoption, offering Kendra a permanent placement. With them, she would be able to establish secure lifetime relationships with nurturing caregivers. Separation from the only parents she has ever known could

have a serious impact. However, placement in a foster home would offer protection from possible physical harm to this little 2-year-old girl. It is difficult, if not impossible, to foresee events in regard to Tony and his future. Should he fail at independent living, would the Does take him in, thus possibly placing Kendra at further risk?

The worker must recommend a plan for Kendra. There are several ways in which her dilemma might be phrased. However, she has determined that the most important considerations in making a permanent plan for Kendra are as follows:



Human Rights & Justice

Practice Behavior Example: "Incest" is proscribed in all 50 states, and is defined by degree of blood relationship, although in some states nonblood relationships, such as stepparents, are included in the prohibition.

Critical Thinking Question: In this case, the relationship between Kendra and Tony may or may not qualify as "incest" in all states, as it is not biological, not legal, and not permanent. Research the incest laws for your state, and consider whether these would apply to Kendra and Tony.
