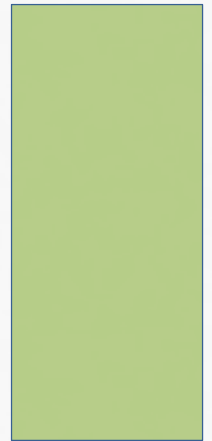


# PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING: THE CASE OF AMARIKA

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# CONTACT WITH MS. CHUNG, HOSPITAL SOCIAL WORKER

- Makisha, Amarika's mother, is still hospitalized with a gunshot wound to the chest.
- Series of post-op complications, but improved and moved from ICU to Surgical Floor
- Police report that the shooting was a case of innocent bystander caught in gang crossfire
- Someone who knew family led police and Amarika from the park back to her grandmother Mrs. Lawrence's house, where Amarika and Makisha live

# CONTACT WITH MS. CHUNG, HOSPITAL SOCIAL WORKER

- Unsure what Amarika saw
- Ms. Chung believes Mrs. Lawrence is overwhelmed as she spends all her time at the hospital
- Unsure who is caring for Amarika at her grandmother's home
- Mrs. Lawrence does not want to bring Amarika to the hospital to see her mother connected to machines
- Amarika has not seen her mother since the shooting

# NEXT STEPS

- Meet with Mrs. Lawrence to gauge interest in receiving services for Amarika and family
- Find out about Makisha's prognosis
- Find out who is caring for Amarika when Mrs. Lawrence is at the hospital
- Find out about the relationship between grandmother and granddaughter
- Determine how Mrs. Lawrence is doing (is she overwhelmed?) and what supports are available to her
- Determine what Mrs. Lawrence has told Amarika about her mother
- Determine the appropriateness of Amarika's current living conditions

# INITIAL CONTACT WITH MRS. LAWRENCE

- Amarika becomes upset when grandmother leaves the house and Amarika is difficult to console
- Latanya, Makisha's 15 yo sister watches Amarika when Mrs. Lawrence is at the hospital
- Amarika has been told that her mother is in Las Vegas; Makisha was in Vegas a few months ago and Amarika was in her grandmother's care
- Mrs. Lawrence fears her daughter will die without her mother being there to comfort her
- Mrs. Lawrence is trying to have faith in God to watch over her daughter
- Mrs. Lawrence does not trust hospital care and believes she needs to be with Makisha to be sure her daughter receives proper care

# NEXT STEPS

- Determine why Mrs. Lawrence is concerned about hospital care and feels a need to be with Makisha at all times
- Determine what other concerns Mrs. Lawrence may have regarding the shooting and its aftermath for all concerned
- Discuss why Mrs. Lawrence is telling Amarika that her mother is in Las Vegas
- Again, find out about Mrs. Lawrence's support systems

# INITIAL MEETING WITH MRS. LAWRENCE

- Mrs. Lawrence, an African American woman, appears for meeting dressed in a suit and carrying a Bible; she states that she prays with and for Makisha.
- She states that she must take care of her baby so that her [Makisha's] baby can have a mommy.
- She recognizes that Amarika is having problems and needs her mother.
- Mrs. Lawrence believes that God spared Amarika and she hopes that God protected Amarika from witnessing what happened to her mother.

# INITIAL MEETING WITH MRS. LAWRENCE

- Mrs. Lawrence's spiritual beliefs are important to her. Through her beliefs, she both copes with and makes meaning of what happened.
- Mrs. Lawrence realizes that Amarika may know more about what happened than what she has been told, but she is reluctant to acknowledge that Amarika may have witnessed the shooting.
- She appears sad and apprehensive when Carla points out that Amarika's behavior suggests that she witnessed and remembers her mother being shot.



# NEXT STEPS

- Gently provide some education for Mrs. Lawrence about what Amarika probably saw and is able to understand.
- Help Mrs. Lawrence acknowledge (and tolerate) that Amarika is in distress and needs intervention.
- Acknowledge that Mrs. Lawrence is taking care of two “babies” (plus a 15 yo) and is feeling torn and overwhelmed about how to care for them all.

## INITIAL MEETING WITH MRS. LAWRENCE (PT. 2)

- Mrs. Lawrence feels run down and emotionally depleted; she is stressed by what happened to her daughter.
- Mrs. Lawrence is often unable to calm Amarika, especially at night when her granddaughter wakes up screaming.
- Mrs. Lawrence reports that Amarika does not appear to have lost weight.
- Amarika is drinking milk, but not eating solid food.
- Amarika sleeps during the day without sleep disturbances.

# NEXT STEPS

- Learn more about the family configuration. (Amarika's father? Grandfather? Others in the home?)
- Find out more about the family history. (Other experiences with violence, major losses, or separations?)
- Find out about Mrs. Lawrence's understanding of Amarika's sleep difficulties.
- Develop a plan to help Amarika feel safer at night, so both Amarika and Mrs. Lawrence can get more rest.

# 1<sup>ST</sup> OFFICE VISIT WITH AMARIKA'S GRANDMOTHER

- Mrs. Lawrence comes to meet Carla at her office, reporting Makisha is improving but is still in the hospital. Mrs. Lawrence cries about how scared she was that Makisha might die.
- The shooting was a trauma reminder for her previous traumatic loss of her husband.
- Mrs. Lawrence has trauma symptoms of hyperarousal, feelings of loss, traumatic memories, and anger.
- Makisha's father was murdered for his wallet when Makisha was 8; the police "asked if he was on drugs" and "didn't do nothing."
- Mrs. Lawrence is saddened by the rampant violence in her neighborhood. "Kids are getting killed every day." She had hopes her girls would be safe b/c they're female and not in gangs.

# 1<sup>ST</sup> OFFICE VISIT WITH AMARIKA'S GRANDMOTHER

- She was indignant the police misconstrued the shooting as gang-on-gang violence with the perpetrator at large.
- Mrs. Lawrence reports Makisha is a “good kid” and a good student.
- When Makisha found out she was pregnant, she took care of herself. She dropped out of school to care for Amarika on her own (unmarried).
- Mrs. Lawrence cut back working to allow Makisha to return to school.

# 1<sup>ST</sup> OFFICE VISIT WITH AMARIKA'S GRANDMOTHER

- Mrs. Lawrence is beginning to trust Carla and allow her to help her understand what Amarika has experienced
- She is preparing to tell Amarika that her mom was hurt and is in the hospital rather than Las Vegas.
- Mrs. Lawrence is seriously considering bringing Amarika to visit mom in the hospital and wants to be prepared.

# NEXT STEPS

- Meet with Makisha.
- When it's medically okay, assess her acute posttraumatic reactions.
- Help Makisha prepare to meet with her daughter by assisting her to understand Amarika's reactions to the shooting, the separation, and the reunion with mom.

# INITIAL CONTACT WITH AMARIKA'S MOTHER (PT. 1)

- Amarika cries more now and has “big” temper tantrums.
- Amarika does not want to let her mother out of her sight and follows her everywhere (including into the bathroom).
- Makisha appears to be affectionate towards her daughter, but is concerned (and a bit frustrated) about her daughter's clingy behavior.
- Makisha is worried about Amarika and wonders whether she will ever be “normal” again.
- Makisha wants help and reassurance.



# NEXT STEPS

- Try to understand the experience from Makisha's perspective.
- Begin to evaluate what types of posttraumatic reactions Makisha has been experiencing thus far.
- Work to understand how reminders of the shooting are affecting each member of the family and family life.

# INITIAL CONTACT WITH AMARIKA'S MOTHER (PT. 2)

- Makisha says it is too hard to think about the shooting and does not want to see a therapist on her own yet.
- Makisha identified Amarika's doll, Kiki, stating that it was present at the shooting, somehow accompanied Amarika home after the shooting, and was "there for her."
- Kiki is a reminder to Makisha of her inability to "be there" for her daughter.
- Makisha and Carla are negotiating a set of respectful guidelines for working together to help Amarika.
- Makisha is open to learning about what her daughter currently needs.

# NEXT STEPS

- Gain an understanding of the critical moments of Makisha's experience in order to both help her and to better understand Amarika's problematic behavior, including identifying Amarika's traumatic reminders.
- Continue to provide education and support to Makisha about her own symptoms, and those of her mother and daughter.

# MAKISHA'S EXPERIENCE

- Makisha was sitting with Amarika in the sandbox at a local park when shots were fired. First day out after period of rain.
- Makisha stood up to investigate the noise when she was shot in the chest, falling backward.
- When the ambulance took Makisha to the hospital, a neighbor who recognized Amarika took her to Mrs. Lawrence's house.
- Mrs. Lawrence screamed when she found out what had happened and rushed out leaving Amarika with a neighbor until Latanya got home. She watched Sesame Street and cartoons with Latanya.
- One other person shot (leg injury). No shooter identified.
- Makisha extremely upset/angry being asked if she knew any of the boys—"What is it with this?"
- Makisha no longer feels safe and does not feel she can keep Amarika safe.

# NEXT STEPS

- Determine trauma reminders for Makisha and possible reminders for Amarika.
- Discuss reasons behind extreme upset when asked by Carla and police about knowing boys involved in the shooting.
- Discuss with Makisha her feelings and thoughts around her safety and her daughter's safety.

# AMARIKA FALLS DOWN

- Amarika's problems with eating and sleeping have improved.
- Amarika's tantrum behavior is persisting (falling backwards and staring for a long time up at the ceiling).
- Makisha is open to learning about developmental regression and re-enactment.
- Makisha is struggling to retain her sense of being in control as a mother given her lengthy hospitalization and dependence on her mother and younger sister; she states that she has spoiled Amarika since the shooting.

# NEXT STEPS

- Help Makisha to cope with PTS symptoms so that she can help Amarika with her distress reactions (especially since she has chosen to forego treatment for herself).
- Help Makisha understand how young children like Amarika tell their stories and communicate their needs through their behavior (e.g., re-enactment, tantrums) and of the importance of “listening” and responding appropriately to those nonverbal messages.
- Help Makisha develop realistic expectations regarding Amarika’s behavior as they both recover from their traumatic experiences. This can be accomplished by providing psycho-education regarding how children typically react to traumatic events, and how long developmental regressions tend to last.

# NEXT STEPS

- Help Makisha understand that it is not necessarily “spoiling” a child to hold her when she is upset (which helps her learn to self-regulate), even if she has misbehaved.
- Help Makisha re-establish herself as the primary parent, even while she lives in her mother’s home and depends on her in the aftermath of the shooting.
- Help Makisha, Mrs. Lawrence, and Latanya discuss their experiences related to the shooting in appropriate ways, to help them become more sensitive to one another’s distressing reminders, primary concerns, and become supportive towards one another.



# AMARIKA SAYS “BANG BAM”

- Amarika throws her toys and makes noises like bang bam bam. Mother extremely bothered by this and tells her to stop and threatens with spanking. Amarika throws herself to the ground.
- Amarika repeats this behavior at Carla's next visit with the family. Carla interprets this play for Makisha, helping her to understand that Amarika is acting out what she saw and how scary this may have been for her daughter.
- Carla puts words to Amarika's play for the child and states “[Mama] had an ‘owie,’ but now is OK. Mama doesn't fall down now anymore.”
- Makisha expresses wish that event never happened and that Amarika did not remember any of it.
- Carla empathizes and reassures Makisha that she and Amarika will be OK.

# NEXT STEPS

- Continue to provide psycho-education to Makisha about posttraumatic play and possible reminders.
- Help Makisha develop appropriate coping skills for herself and her daughter.
- Help Makisha learn new ways to address Amarika's behaviors.
- Identify strengths in all members of the Lawrence family.