

## Practice skills of working with children who have experienced trauma

### Case study – Jenny

Jenny is eleven years old and is currently living with her third foster family. When she was six, Jenny and her baby sister were removed from their mother due to chronic neglect and suspected abuse. Jenny's home in those early years was chaotic, with a large number of different adult 'friends' of her mother coming in and out, heavy alcohol and drug use, and long periods of neglect for both Jenny and her sister.

Since being removed from her mother, Jenny has been placed in several homes. Initially, she was put into an emergency placement for just under a month. Jenny was then moved to a family with several children where she stayed for nearly two years. Due to ongoing conflict with one of her foster siblings, Jenny was moved from this home.

Jenny settled in better at her next placement and connected well with her foster parents and siblings. At the same time, Jenny's little sister started at the same school that Jenny attends, and they would often go and see each other in the playground. Jenny was settled with this family and stayed with them for three years. However, the family had to move interstate for work reasons, so a new placement was arranged for Jenny.

Jenny has been in her current placement for several months. This family lives further away from Jenny's school and the family feel that the distance is too great for her to stay permanently at her current school. They are keeping Jenny in her current school until the end of the term. After that, she will have to move to a new school - closer to her current foster family's home.

Her new foster parents have been trying to help her feel at home and accepted. However, Jenny is not settling in as well as she has in previous placements, although she has developed a strong attachment to the youngest child in her new foster home. Jenny likes to be protective and caring towards this younger child, but sometimes her actions are misinterpreted as 'unhelpful' by her new foster parents.

Recently, Jenny's behaviour at her new placement has become 'problematic'. She will lash out with loud angry outbursts and run away. This may be over seemingly 'small' provocations, such as not understanding a family rule or routine. Running away or lashing out is something that Jenny will do if she feels strong emotions, such as fear, anxiety, or sadness.

Jenny thinks about her biological mother a lot and wants to see her more often. She has infrequent, supervised visits with her mum, which are sometimes cancelled at the last moment. After Jenny sees her mum she is on a high for a short time, but then feels very sad. She doesn't talk to anyone about these sad feelings, and if she is asked about her feelings she will often lash out verbally, or shut down. Jenny's current foster parents feel that her mum makes unrealistic promises to Jenny that will only disappoint her. When they tried to talk to her about this, Jenny exploded and ran from the home. She was found later that night at her mum's.