Child Case Study

ABC 2024

Billy was referred to you after his Christian school principal met with his parents about some “concerning behavior” at school. According to the initial call his parents were both upset and felt the school did not understand their son. They felt he was being bullied, was been made fun of for way he dressed and his acting out was just a reaction to such unfair and unaddressed issue with others. They did not condone his swearing at the teacher or the refusal to do school work but they felt that was not the real problem.

Both mom and dad came to the initial session with Billy. He sat off by himself as the parents talked with you. You got the sense they almost ignore the fact he was in the room. They talked about his situation with the mindset that he was a victim of a poorly managed school and a declining culture in general. Mom did most of the talking but the father seemed genuinely concerned. You learned he has a cell phone but that there were strict limits on usage. That was not so true of his iPad where he spent a lot of time playing games, watching videos, and sometimes texting. You turn to address Billy and he immediately looks at his mom. You try again to engage him more directly but he seems to be hesitant to talk. You decide to send his parents out and try again. Once his parents are gone he is more responsive but only gives minimal answers to questions you asked. You do find out he was not just made fun of at school but a few older boys at school were bullying him on Instagram. His parents did not have knowledge of this and he did not want you to tell them.

You get a release to talk to the school counselor and ask the parents to fill out a more detailed personal data inventory. You plan to see him again in a week. From the call with the school counselor you find out that Billy may be struggling with some early signs of gender identity issues. He wears more feminine clothes then most of the boys, hangs out with the girls more at breaks. When you get the forms back from parents you see a pattern of anxiety, withdrawal, anger, he has made some dark drawings, and there is some suspicion from mom of inappropriate video watching on his iPad. Billy apparently verbalized in a fit of anger that he’d be better off dead. This was a big part of the reason his parents really wanted you to help him. They are scared, don’t know what to do and don’t trust the school for help.

In your next session it’s just mom and Billy. You invite the mom in alone for a brief update before talking with Billy. You find out Billy’s dad travels a fair amount and while a loving husband and father is a bit absent from the day to day. His mom is more engaged but you sense may be overprotective. He has a two-year-old brother who requires a lot of attention and his mom admits Billy probably needs a bit more supervision particularly on screens. She asks if you have any suggestions. You tell her you will send some guidelines for his age and then ask her to send in Billy and wait in the waiting room.

Billy comes in more relaxed and sits on the couch close to you. You ask about his hobbies, and about his friends. You find out he is more artsy and loves cats. He has a “girlfriend” named Paige. They talk about movies, music and clothes. When asked about guy friends his mood changes. He said he thought he had friends but they turned on him. He looks hurt and upset. He tries to change the subject. You ask him how they turned on him. He is vaguer but says a few 6th graders called him gay and turned his guy friends against him. He says he doesn’t care anymore and says Paige tells him they are stupid. When you ask him if he’s ever wanted to escape all the drama and bullying he looked down. He admitted he got really sad and told his parent he wanted to die. When you explore this further he has no plan or immediate motivation to act on this feeling. When asked what he would change in his life he said he wished the mean older boys would leave the school, that he did not have nightmares, and that he could spend more time with his dad.

Billy goes to church and Sunday school. He likes his homeroom teacher but does not like his science teacher who always monitors the hall. He is a decent student but the kids that are mean are in a few of his classes or in the halls. He doesn’t like being at school and has blown up at kid and sometimes teachers. You find out one of his teachers has encouraged him to experiment with new pronouns. He was initially confused but looked up what she was talking about and found a whole new world on the internet. Again, he did not want you telling his mom. You realize you are beginning to get into an awkward place with confidentiality.

As the session ends you have more clarity on some of the main issue that need to be addressed. You are thinking about a few questions.

What do you need to share with parents?

What risk is Billy of self-harm?

How do you address the gender identity issues?

How do you help the school and how do you share concerns there?

How will Billy react as you begin to coach parents on more guidelines, engagement, and takin the lead on discipleship/discipline with Billy going forward?