

Supervignette - Celia

Celia is an 8 year old Mexican-American girl. She lives in a two bedroom apartment with her mother, her 10 year old sister, and her maternal great-aunt and uncle. Celia's family members all speak at least some English, but her mother prefers to communicate in Spanish. Spanish is spoken exclusively in the home. Celia's father died of a heart attack about a year ago while he was driving on his way to pick Celia up from school.

Celia started a new school this year. She attended the first three weeks of school but her attendance was not consistent. In response to Celia's intermittent school absences and concerns that she appeared distressed and isolated while in school, the school developed a 504 behavioral plan to slowly introduce Celia to her third grade classroom. However, before this could be implemented, Celia started refusing to attend school, and this refusal has continued up to the present time. The last time her mother tried to drive her to school, Celia screamed, cried, and kicked her mother. She currently stays home each day with her mother who does not work outside of the home. Celia has become very reluctant to leave the house even for small outings, but will play with her cousins when they come to the house.

You are a part-time, child psychiatric consultant to Celia's school. With these problems that Celia is having with school attendance and isolation the school staff have asked that you become involved. Celia's school counselor believes that Celia may need a medication, and has read that medicines like lorazepam can help anxious children return to school. The principal wants the school team to develop a plan for Celia to return to school as soon as possible.

Your role with the school is such that, with appropriate parental and youth consent and at the request of the principal and school counselor, you can provide psychiatric evaluations for any student in the school. The number of contacts with the child and others as part of the evaluation, and the total time spent, can be determined by you and the principal. However, your school consultation role stipulates that you are not able to provide ongoing treatment to students, once the evaluation has been completed.

You also have a small private practice in the community, but you learn that, while Celia has health insurance that would cover medically necessary psychiatric care, you are not currently a part of the provider network and there are no local psychiatrists who accept the family's insurance. You speak very little Spanish, and historically there have been minimal translation services at Celia's school. Celia's school counselor has asked to meet with you on a priority basis, concerned about Celia and experiencing pressure from the principal. The school counselor asks you to complete a psychiatric evaluation on Celia as soon as possible.

Celia's mother, Ms. Hernandez, has already taken her to see the family doctor who talked with Celia about the importance of attending school, but felt that a medication was not indicated. Ms. Hernandez reports that she was relieved that the family doctor did not think medications were indicated, because "my daughter is not crazy."

Celia has always done well in school and there are no suspicions of a learning disability. Last year in the second grade, she liked her teacher very much, had many friends and was involved in the afterschool club where her favorite activity was the field trips to the community swimming pool. She also loves soccer. Celia's mother recalls that Celia seemed more anxious returning to school last year immediately following her father's unexpected death, but Celia was able to settle into her class quickly. Ms. Hernandez states that after Celia's father died, financial circumstances forced them to move in with Celia's great aunt and uncle which meant she had to change schools to attend the third grade. Celia frequently misses school because she complains of severe stomach aches when she wakes up in the morning. Ms. Hernandez reports that although the family doctor did not think Celia's stomach aches were due to medical causes, Ms. Hernandez has lingering concerns that there is something medically wrong, and would like for her to have further medical testing.

When you speak to the school counselor, she relates that if Celia does not return to school, Celia's mother will be subject to legal action by the truancy board. The school counselor also tells you that she has been communicating with Celia's mother, Ms. Hernandez, in English. According to school policy, she can provide only 3 more counseling sessions for Celia. Celia is not eligible for public mental health services because the family's income level is too high, and she has not been designated as "seriously emotionally disturbed" by the school.

Past Psychiatric History: This past summer, Celia and her family participated in a six-session family group at the local hospice for support in their grieving process. Her school counselor has met with Celia and her mother once at school.

Past Medical History: Celia has asthma and needed treatment four times last winter in the emergency room.

Family History: Celia's mother remembers that Celia's grandmother was always "nervous." Before his death, Celia's father was known to be a very anxious man. "He never wanted the children to go out in the neighborhood. He said it wasn't safe."

Social History: Celia's family maintains close ties to family in Mexico and travel there each year. Her father was a well-loved school janitor who worked at the high school. The family participates actively in their church. Her maternal great aunt and uncle both work and are not home much. They are very concerned for Celia and her family and are supportive.

Celia's mental status exam is significant for her initial refusal to enter your office on the family's first visit. She is clearly in distress and repeats over and over to her mother, "let's go, let's go!"

6. What **specific roles** can you have based on the information in the vignette? (*Minimum 2 correct answers*)

Diagnostic and information-gathering role:

Advocacy and systems-consultation role:

7. What are limitations of your role?

8. What are some **access-to-care issues** for Celia? (*Minimum 4 correct answers*)

9. Given the complex circumstances, what actions can you take to most effectively facilitate the necessary psychiatric evaluations for Celia? (*Minimum 2 correct answers*)

10. What are some important **cultural parameters** to be considered for Celia and her family in this case? (*Minimum 4 correct answers*)