

Handout 4: Reframing the Marcus Family

Instructions

Your group has the task of reframing one paragraph in the following description of the Marcus family. The description, as it reads now, emphasizes the family's deficits. Rewrite or reframe the description to emphasize the family's strengths; make sure to use "people first" language and language showing respect for the family. Your group has 20 minutes to develop the new version.

Marcus Family

The Marcus family, plagued with multiple problems, is well known to Head Start and community agencies. Ms. Mary Marcus, the 34-year-old mother, has three illegitimate children, ages 3, 4, and 5. She currently lives with an unemployed boyfriend, Jim Sims. Mr. Sims recently punished the youngest child, Joshua, by putting him in a dark closet for a couple of hours. He insists that was reasonable discipline and is proud of this and other discipline ideas he has tried. Ms. Marcus told Joshua's Head Start teacher about the incident, which prompted an investigation by Child Protective Services (CPS). Mr. Sims' departure from the home seems likely now, since CPS told Ms. Marcus she could lose her children if Mr. Sims stayed. The conditions in the Marcus' home are disgusting. Ms. Marcus is an irresponsible housekeeper, who spends most of her free-time reading mystery novels and religious books. She is overwhelmed by economic and emotional demands of her situation, although she tries hard to keep up with the children's needs. She once made the comment that she would like to be a better parent.

The Marcus family is on welfare. Ms. Marcus dropped out of school when she was 16 to care for her mother, who was dying of cancer. Although Ms. Marcus says she would like to get a GED, she is academically weak and would need considerable help. Ms. Marcus also says she would like to get a job. She wants a part-time job as a seamstress, since she knows how to sew and mend clothes, but this seems unrealistic in light of her personal problems and failure to follow through with suggestions. Ms. Marcus' aunt occasionally takes care of the three children, but she refuses to help with the housework. There is also a girlfriend named Bess who used to go bowling with Ms. Marcus until Mr. Sims showed up. Ms. Marcus likes to be helpful to people. She was once very active as a church volunteer, but withdrew because she felt church members were rude to her because of her obnoxious and disruptive children. She wants to join another church.

All three children in the Marcus family are enrolled in Head Start. They are attractive, but aggressive and demanding children, who show the effects of being reared in a dysfunctional family. The children's acting-out behaviors are of concern to both Head Start staff and Ms. Marcus. In addition, the middle child, Leslie, has a speech defect, which makes it hard to understand her. She tends to repeat her words over and over, until she's finally understood. Ms. Marcus seems unmotivated to get Leslie involved in speech therapy, although she brought up the subject once to Leslie's Head Start teacher. Ms. Marcus blames herself for the children's failure in Head Start; she's been told the children are smart and capable of achieving more. She says she's depressed about not being able to give her children the life she wants for them.