



**EVERY CHILD
EVERY CHANCE**
Wellness and Wellbeing in Child Welfare

Navigating and Advocating for Mental Health Services

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Vignette 1

Marcus is an 8-year-old boy living with his maternal grandmother, Renee, through a kinship placement. Marcus entered her care 9 months ago after several unstable months with his mother, including a period of housing insecurity and repeated exposure to adult conflict in the home. His grandmother describes Marcus as “sweet and funny... until he isn’t.

Home concerns: yelling, physically aggressive, nightmares

School concerns: outbursts, kicking chairs, hitting peers, time in principals office, short suspensions

Vignette 2

Anaya is a 4-year-old in foster care placed with Ms. Carter, a first-time foster parent with experience in early childhood education. Anaya entered care four months ago due to neglect concerns. During intake, it was noted that she had limited exposure to routines, had irregular sleep patterns, and spent long stretches of time on screens at home.

Home concerns: bedwetting, chronic tiredness, tantrums, possible developmental delay

Preschool concerns: meltdowns during transitions, refusal to nap, trouble with sensory regulation, falling behind peers in early learning skills

Vignette 3

Eli, age 15, has just been placed in a new foster home after spending three months in a residential treatment center (RTC) for severe depression, escalating conflict at home, and suicidal ideation, including one crisis event where he expressed intent to harm himself. He was stabilized in care and stepped down with a discharge plan that included weekly therapy, medication management, and school-based supports—but the discharge happened quickly due to bed shortages, and the foster family is receiving the plan for the first time at placement. This is Eli's first time in a family-based foster home.

Home: long periods in his room gaming or sleeping, flat affect, shuts down when asked about his future, when asked directly about safety ("Are you feeling like hurting yourself?"), he replies, "Not right now," but becomes visibly tense.

School: starting new school, one grade behind

Vignette 4

Ari, age 13, has been in her new foster home for three weeks. She was moved abruptly from her previous placement after running away multiple times. During those episodes, she stayed with older peers she met online and was briefly seen with adults unknown to her caregivers. Child welfare staff flagged her as “at risk for trafficking.” Ari rarely speaks about where she goes when she runs. When asked, she shrugs and says, “I just needed to get away.” This is her 3rd placement in a year.

Home: testing boundaries, outbursts, dissociation-like behaviors, dressing “beyond her age,” avoids physical affection

School: skipping classes, appears exhausted, refusing to talk to counselor, grades slipping

Vignette 5

Mateo, age 6, has been living with his aunt, Tía Rosa, for the past month after being removed from his parents due to neglect. This is his first stable caregiving arrangement in over a year. He speaks only Spanish, and so does his aunt. Before arriving at her home, Mateo had never been enrolled in school or early childhood programs. His aunt describes him as “muy tímido” (very shy) but says he is also “muy asustado” (very scared).

Home: Rarely speaks and startles at loud noises, panicked when aunt leaves the room, talks to self, poorly controlled asthma, sleep disruption/daytime fatigue, caregiver isolation

Vignette 6

Maya entered foster care at 3 months old following concerns of neglect and confirmed in utero exposure to multiple substances. She has remained with her current kinship caregivers (maternal aunt and uncle) for the past 2 years and is now 27 months old. Maya's caregivers describe her as *“sweet, curious, and always moving,”* but they have concerns about her development. The caregivers recently heard that these behaviors might indicate autism, and they feel “scared to push too hard” because they don't want to be perceived as difficult by the case team. Overall, Maya's aunt and uncle are worried that they're missing something important and overwhelmed by the # of appointments and unclear expectations.

Home: limited expressive language, avoids eye contact, intense meltdowns during transitions, repetitive behaviors, inconsistent sleep

Daycare: not interacting with other children