

Act 1

FOCUS: Identification of social and emotional issues - Application of Life Skills approach

Bryan is an overweight adolescent student who has complained to you that as a consequence of his physical appearance he is being bullied, excluded from group activities and games, and called names such as chubby, fatso and chuff chuff. He manifests many signs of childhood depression. He expresses sadness, social withdrawal and disinterest in sports. His lunch is sometimes taken away from him by students who think that he needs to lose weight by not eating. He admits that he is sometimes so depressed that he has been contemplating dropping out of school and even committing suicide. Over the past 10 weeks, Bryan has become increasingly disinterested in his studies and has been receiving failing grades in many subject areas. He has hinted that this deterioration is as a result of his parents' recent separation. He indicated that the separation resulted after a protracted period of conflict between his parents that ultimately included both verbal and physical aggression. Apparently, during the period after the separation, the parents were preoccupied with dealing with their issues and had little interaction with Bryan.

1. What do you think were the primary causal factors contributing to Bryan's depression?
2. Write a paragraph on how you would respond to this student. In your response, blame the student for the situation that he has brought upon himself through his poor eating and exercise habits. Emphasize that he needs to make changes to his lifestyle in order to be accepted by his peers and that he should find ways to deal with his home situation.
3. Describe another response where you identify the underlying social and emotional issues. Develop a plan to address the whole child utilizing the Life Skills approach. Engage the entire class so as not to isolate Bryan as well as to provide a supportive environment for him.

Act 2

FOCUS: Student Learning

Throughout primary school, Omari's teachers described him as a bright, cooperative, and sociable student. His work habits and general attitude toward school were very good. He achieved at or above grade level in all subjects and was popular among his peers. During the first few months in Form 1 all of Omari's teachers gave a similar general description. By the middle of the term, however, his behaviour changed dramatically.

Omari was absent from school with increasing frequency. He dropped out of all the extracurricular activities in which he had formerly participated. His teachers reported that he did not often complete assignments, frequently daydreamed in class, and was generally uninvolved in class activities. His grades dropped below passing.

Omari's teachers attempted to alter his behaviour by a variety of means. They gave verbal praise, additional privileges, and points exchangeable for tangible rewards contingent upon appropriate behaviour, but these techniques did not produce the desired behaviour changes. Curricular modifications were made repeatedly, but Omari remained uninvolved in classroom activities. In fact, he was absent from school more and more frequently as time went on. He was unwilling to discuss the problem with his teachers or the guidance counsellor. Phone calls and letters to his parents went unanswered. On one successful phone call a meeting was arranged with Omari's parents, his teachers and the guidance counselor.

During the conference, Omari's parents stated that he remained at home during his absences from school. The relationship between Omari and his mother appeared to be overly solicitous (they greeted each other with a kiss and held hands during most of the discussion). Omari's father was attentive but generally silent throughout the conference. Both parents agreed to make certain that Omari would attend school regularly.

Over the next few weeks, his attendance improved only slightly. The case was then referred to the social worker. Activities were initiated by teachers which were recommended to enhance Omari's self-concept, increase his dependence, and develop his sense of autonomy and control.

Demonstrable results, in terms of improved attendance rates, were not evident after a month of such efforts.

After one day of Omari's absence, the social worker made a home visit. Upon his arrival, the social worker found Omari comforting his obviously battered mother. His mother then revealed that her husband, an alcoholic, had been fired from his job a few months earlier. During this period of unemployment, he frequently drank excessively and became physically abusive toward her. When Omari was home, however, his father was usually not abusive or beat Ray's mother less severely.

- What experiences described in this case might be similar to children in school today?
- Describe how matters such as these are dealt with at your school. State similarities and differences.
- In your analysis of the case as a teacher, what would you have done differently?
- If you were responsible for Ray's education, what would be your primary objectives?