

Analysis

Kelsey is 4 years old. She lives with her mum who is a single parent. Kelsey's mum gave up work when Kelsey is born as she wanted to be a stay at home parent to Kelsey. Kelsey was an 'easy' baby but her behaviour has become increasingly difficult for her mum to manage since she turned two years old. They struggle over who is in charge constantly. Her mum is at the end of her tether.

A clear push pull pattern in the relationship emerged throughout the observation. Whenever Kelsey's mum attempted to take a hierarchal position with her, Kelsey reacted angrily and pushed her away or hit her. Her mum quickly gave up and walked off. Kelsey then chased after her mum and tried to get her mum to respond to her, but she said no. Kelsey then ran off and her mum ran after her. This sequence repeated a number of times.

At four years of age, Kelsey needs a parent who can take charge of her, set limits, provide her with comfort and keep her safe. Her mum is not able to do this consistently (we learn she has tried 'everything') even when Kelsey's behaviour is dangerous e.g. running away whilst on a busy road. If this pattern of interaction continues there are a number of potential risks to Kelsey:

- (1) Kelsey could get hurt if she runs in the road;
- (2) The relationship may break down completely;
- (3) Kelsey might get hurt if her mum loses control in response to Kelsey's defiance;
- (4) In the longer term, Kelsey's social and emotional development is likely to be impaired. She will probably find relationships difficult and struggle with authority.

Questions:

- (1) We don't know anything about the mother's childhood and why she wanted to stay at home with Kelsey. Was it because her mother was busy at work and not available enough to her in her childhood?
- (2) We don't know why she is a single parent. Does Kelsey see her father? Is Kelsey and her mum's relationship being affected by an unresolved issue in the parents' relationship?
- (3) Why has mum found it so hard to take a hierarchal position with Kelsey? Does she worry that Kelsey won't love her/reject her if she takes charge? Where does that come from?
- (4) It's clear that the experience of parenting Kelsey has not been as rewarding as she hoped it would be. Her representation of the relationship is wholly negative with responsibility being attributed solely to Kelsey. When are the exceptions to this? Currently and in the past? Can we help her bring an appreciative eye to her experience?

Plan

A strengths based interaction aimed at identifying exceptions to the problem is indicated.