

## **THE FEMBLE CASE**

### **INTAKE REPORT**

Terry Femble, age 1½, was brought to the Emergency Room (ER) by his mother, Mrs. Mary Femble. The doctor who reported the case indicated that Terry had second and third degree burns on his buttocks, ankles, feet, and hands. The ER staff does not believe that the injuries were accidental; rather, they believe that the injuries could only have occurred as a result of Terry being placed in scalding water. Mrs. Femble told the doctor and FSS Smith that she had been running a tub for Terry when the telephone rang. She stated that Terry must have climbed into the tub of hot water and sat down when Mrs. Femble went to answer the telephone. Because of the severity of the injuries to the child, the doctor recommended hospitalizing the child for both treatment and observation.

At first, Mrs. Femble was reluctant to follow the doctor's recommendations; then she agreed. This action will support the child's safety for at least 72 hours.

### **I&Is**

#### **March 1 - Dr. Elder, Alexandria Hospital**

Dr. Elder was the Attending Physician for Terry Femble at Alexandria Hospital. Dr. Elder reported that Terry had second and third degree burns on his buttocks, ankles, feet, and hands. Dr. Elder believed that the mother's explanation of how the injuries occurred was not feasible. He indicated that Terry's injuries were consistent with immersion burns.

The doctor stated that Terry displayed a blunted affect during examination and treatment. Dr. Elder ordered a long-bone series of X-rays for Terry, and found a previous spiral fracture of Terry's femur. Dr. Elder suspected the possibility of previous abuse of Terry. Aside from his current injuries, Terry is in good health.

Dr. Elder indicated that Mrs. Femble was very hesitant to leave Terry during the treatment. He noted some possible attachment problems between Terry and his mother. The doctor believed that Mrs. Femble appeared very nervous. Dr. Elder told Mrs. Femble that he was going to bring in a CPS worker to talk with her.

#### **March 1- Telephone Call to Commonwealth's Attorney and Law Enforcement**

Because of the seriousness of the child's injuries, FSS reported the case to the Commonwealth's Attorney and Law Enforcement. FSS requested that a law enforcement officer meet at the hospital to talk with Ms. Femble jointly.

**March 1 - Detective Grant and Mrs. Mary Femble, Alexandria Hospital**

Detective Grant was called in on the case because of the seriousness of the child's injuries. He and FSS conducted an interview with Mrs. Femble at Alexandria Hospital. Mrs. Femble, age 26, looked much older than her chronological age. Even though it was very cold outside, Mrs. Femble was dressed in a short-sleeve dress and a light wind breaker. Her hair was disheveled and she had dark circles under her eyes. She reported that she has a diagnosis of Major Depression.

After FSS Smith and Detective Grant explained who they were and the purpose of the interview, Mrs. Femble became visibly nervous. When asked her how Terry's injury occurred, she provided the same explanation she gave Dr. Elder. FSS mentioned the X-rays that Dr. Elder had taken and the previous fracture of Terry's femur, and asked her when that occurred and how it happened. She seemed surprised that investigators were aware of that injury. She stated that Terry broke his leg when he was about nine months old. She stated that he was lying on her bed and his 8-year-old sister was watching him. Terry fell on the floor and broke his leg. She indicated that he was treated at Fairfax Hospital Emergency Room.

Mrs. Femble has four other children – Tony, age 3, Mandy, age 4½, Jerry, age 5½, and Connie, age 9. Mrs. Femble does not work outside of the home. Her husband, Mr. Alan Femble was laid off nine months ago and has been unable to find a job. They are living on unemployment and SNAP benefits. Mrs. Femble reported that they are barely able to make ends meet. She stated that the unemployment check barely covers their fixed expenses, such as rent and utilities. She says that there is no money left over for clothing for the children or gas for the car. She is concerned about how much longer they can continue without Mr. Femble finding a job.

Mr. and Mrs. Femble met in high school, and they were married after graduation. Mr. Femble is 28 years old and had been working in construction as a brick layer. Mrs. Femble has never worked outside the family. Mrs. Femble described Terry as being a very “slow” child. She said he did not start walking until two months ago. She said that he has been much slower in his development than all of the other children. Terry was born full-term after an uneventful pregnancy. However, Terry did remain in the hospital for one week after his birth, but that was due to postpartum complications suffered by Mrs. Femble.

Mrs. Femble described the other children: She reported that Connie is an average student. Mrs. Femble indicated that Connie is a big help to her with the younger children. She watches them and helps get them dressed. She also helps with meals and clean-up.

Mrs. Femble stated that Jerry is a very active child. He tends to bully his younger brothers and sister and he is a behavior problem at school, too.

Mrs. Femble described Mandy as a very shy child who cries easily. She stated that Mandy is like a shadow to her.

And, Mrs. Femble reported that Tony is very active and forever breaking things. He and Jerry get into physical fights, with Tony usually getting the worst of it because of his size.

Although Mrs. Femble seemed resistant at first, as she talked about her children, she began to open up. She seemed to respond well to interest, attention, and positive reinforcement.

### **March 1 - Det. Grant, FSS, Mary Femble and Terry, Alexandria Hospital**

After interviewing Mrs. Femble, Detective Grant and FSS Smith conducted a face to face visit with Terry in his hospital room. Terry seemed withdrawn. He was not responsive to his mother in the room; he did not smile at her or respond to her when she touched him. Mrs. Femble seemed somewhat awkward with Terry. Aside from kissing him on the forehead, she did not seem to know what to do to comfort him. Although she had become more relaxed during the interview, she seemed very anxious again. She was asked to leave and investigators attempted to talk with Terry privately. He did not respond to investigators and would not make eye contact.

Terry will remain in the hospital for observation and treatment.

### **March 2, FSS, Detective Grant and the Femble Family, 3291 Russell Road, Alexandria, VA 22302**

The Fembles reside in a small, three-bedroom home. Although it appeared that the Fembles attempted to clean the house, there were toys and clothes on the floor throughout the home. The visit was scheduled for after school so that investigators could see the entire family. The children did not seem to respond to the parents' attempts at disciplining them. They seemed to be in constant competition for their parents' attention. They would continually fight among themselves.

Consequently, the interview was interrupted frequently by the screams of a child. Mr. Femble periodically would lose his temper and scream at the children. Mr. Femble blamed his wife for not having control over the children. At times, Mr. Femble was very critical of his wife. She was very quiet during the interview; she seemed more relaxed when she was alone with investigators at the hospital.

In the beginning of the interview, Mr. Femble watched television and would not talk with FSS Smith or Detective Grant. Eventually, he became involved in the conversation; however, he maintained a belligerent tone when speaking to FSS. It was 4:30 p.m., and he was drinking a beer; based on his slurred speech and the empty containers beside him, FSS ascertained that he had been drinking prior to the interview beginning.

Mr. Femble indicated that he was home when Terry's injury occurred, and his explanation was identical with his wife's (for both the current and past injuries). Mr. Femble said he couldn't understand why the Department of Social Services and the police were called in. He reported that the only thing wrong with his family was that he couldn't find a job. When FSS told him that the doctor did not feel that Terry's injuries were consistent with their explanation, Mr. Femble became very angry and stated, "Are you accusing us of abusing Terry?!" He ordered FSS and Detective out of the house.

Mrs. Femble walked investigators to the car, apologizing for Mr. Femble's behavior. She stated he had been under a lot of stress lately. When FSS stated that it seemed like she was under a lot of stress, too, her eyes filled with tears, but she did not cry. FSS explained the concerns about Terry and her family and that FSS wanted to make sure that Terry was safe and would do whatever FSS could to provide assistance to her and her family. She said she would talk with her husband.

### **March 3 - Mrs. Mary Femble, Telephone Call**

Mrs. Femble called to report that her husband was still very angry and didn't want to have anything to do with FSS Smith or "Social Services." She said she was afraid to push him any further. FSS thanked her for trying to convince her husband and for her concern for Terry.

### **March 5 - Detective Grant and Mrs. Mary Femble, Alexandria Hospital**

Dr. Elder indicated that Terry could be released from the hospital tomorrow. However, he will need very special care. Mrs. Femble still seemed somewhat awkward with Terry, particularly when the nurse was showing her how to care for his burns. Mrs. Femble told investigators that her husband had been drinking a lot after the home visit and that she was unable to convince him to let FSS help the family. FSS explained that because of the seriousness of Terry's injuries and her husband's reluctance to become involved, FSS did not feel certain that Terry would be safe from harm if he returned home. Mrs. Femble cried and seemed resigned to Terry coming into foster care.

## **DISPOSITIONAL ASSESSMENT**

This is a case of founded physical abuse (Burns). Terry Femble sustained second and third degree burns on his buttocks, ankles, feet, and hands. Dr. Elder believed that his mother's explanation of how the injuries occurred was not feasible. He indicated that Terry's injuries were consistent with immersion burns. FSS is unable to definitively determine who injured Terry. Either parent could have injured him. However, it is suspected Mr. Femble did as a result of stress of the loss of his job, his drinking, and his volatile temper.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

Terry is at high-risk because of his age, the severity of his present injuries, and the possibility of previous abuse. In addition, the family is under a great deal of stress. Both parents are denying any involvement in Terry's condition.

All sibling children were observed, and attempted to be interviewed. The two oldest children were successfully interviewed, but say they have no knowledge of how Terry was burned. Connie reiterated her mother's story about Terry falling off the bed and breaking his bone. Although Mrs. Femble appears receptive to help, Mr. Femble is extremely resistant.

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What is your course of action?

- Removal?
- Protective Order?
- No Court Involvement?

If you do seek court involvement, what would you specifically be asking for?