

## Case Study: Mrs Tan

Mrs Tan had two sons, one was at school and the other, who was three and a half years old, was at state nursery. She approached a newly qualified health visitor who was doing some work on a vacant caseload for a few weeks. This member of staff was leaving and couldn't commit to doing the work so asked another health visitor if she would take it on with the mother's permission.

Concerns had been raised at a routine check by the mother about her husband and her youngest son Daniel. She reported that Daniel's behaviour was so difficult that her husband dreaded coming home. He was suffering from headaches, which he had been to see his GP about. His blood pressure was raised but it was felt that this was due to stress and an inability to relax. She reported he spent a lot of his time at home shouting at Daniel.

The tension in the house was acute and the mum was tearful. The nursery had also said that the little boy's behaviour was poor and had pointed it out to the mum as an area of concern.

The health visitor agreed to do a home visit. As the health visitor had never met this little boy before, it was felt that it would be more useful to see him in his home environment and observe his behaviour and any interactions with his mum. This meant that the visit needed to be carefully managed.

As the health visitor walked through the door, the mum appeared tense and tearful. As they sat down, the mum started talking and Daniel began to ask for a drink, politely saying please. The mum ignored him and began to say how difficult things were and how she looked forward to the ironing or would think of things to do so she didn't have to be in the same room as him. Daniel became more and more insistent and louder and began to pull at his mum saying 'why don't you listen to me?' The mum continued

to ignore Daniel. This was a very interesting interaction for the health visitor to observe. It was apparent that the mum was unable to contain her own anxieties and that left her unable to give any reciprocal attention to Daniel. It then deteriorated and the mum continued to do nothing and Daniel was continuously screaming. The mum turned to the health visitor and said 'you see what I mean?' It was clear that the mum was so exhausted and lost with Daniel's behaviour, that any hope of reciprocity was not possible.

The health visitor decided that a more practical approach was needed. The mum was asked if she would like some help with the situation and she nodded. It was hoped that if reciprocity could be demonstrated the mum would feel encouraged and begin to be able to contain herself. Exploring it through listening and discussion at this contact would not be feasible.

The health visitor turned to Daniel and said in a loud voice as he was screaming at the top of his voice, 'would you like mummy to make you a drink' he instantly stopped screaming, looked surprised and said 'yes'. The mum looked up and the health visitor nodded to her. The health visitor followed them into the kitchen. The mum had still not given Daniel any eye contact. She asked him what he would like to drink to which he replied 'squash'. She got a cup and began opening the bottle. Daniel said 'let me help' she ignored him. He said 'let me help I want to do it' she ignored him. He then said 'you're making me angry' and started to shout with frustration. The health visitor looked at mum and said 'that's ok isn't it mum? What a good boy Daniel is, wanting to help'.

She responded by getting a chair and letting him help pour the squash and fill up the cup with water, the mother tentatively looked at Daniel and he smiled cheerfully at her. She looked surprised and relieved. They went

back to the sitting room and Daniel sat happily with his drink and looked at books. The health visitor asked how the mother felt about what had just happened. She said she realised that she hadn't listened to Daniel, and when she did, his behaviour improved. It was apparent that now the mother had experienced a positive outcome in which she had interacted with Daniel, she was more able to try to understand his behaviour. Now that Daniel was more contained, the mother was able to talk about her husband's strict upbringing and his expectations and how frustrated Daniel must feel sometimes.

She felt that she would have to take the lead with Daniel in terms of his management, but that her husband would not undermine her as long as he could see some sort of improvement. Perhaps from this, he might feel more able to enjoy him. Mrs Tan was asked to keep a behaviour diary and an appointment was made for her to come and see the health visitor the following week and to phone before if she needed further input.

At the next visit, Mrs Tan was very excited about the improvement she had seen in Daniel's behaviour and had found herself explaining to her husband why Daniel sometimes behaved as he did. She said that she was still exhausted but not with despair, but from the constant effort she had been putting into Daniel. She was now able to say that she didn't avoid him and that they had had some nice times together that week.

Mrs Tan said she wanted to see the health visitor again in two weeks time as she didn't feel totally confident that she could keep it up. At this appointment, she reported that the nursery had commented how much calmer Daniel was and how pleased they were with him. She had gained confidence and felt that she understood Daniel much better.

She said that her husband still opted out but that he was much less stressed and had stopped shouting. He was due to go back to the GP to have his blood pressure checked,

but she felt confident that it would have improved.

The health visitor phoned Mrs Tan one month later and things were still going well. There had been the occasional difficulty but Mrs Tan had dealt with it and realised afterwards why Daniel was getting frustrated. The health visitor said that if she ever needed any follow up, she should telephone her.

The health visitor visited the nursery six months later regarding another child. Staff commented on what a change there had been with Daniel and how Mrs Tan was happier and relaxed.