Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

Case study: Martha

Referral:

Martha is aged 7 years old; she is White British and resides with her foster carers, Mr and Mrs Platt, in a small rural community. Her sister Ava, aged 13 years, is also residing at the Platt's home. Mr and Mrs Patt also provide childcare for their granddaughter, Chloe aged 3 years, at least 2 days a week.

You are the worker for Martha within the Looked After Children's Team, Martha's carer contacts you to say that she is giving notice on the placement for Martha as she has just seen Martha kissing and licking her granddaughter vagina. She tells you that she walked into the living room where the girls were playing house and saw what was happening. She shouted at the children, who both became upset. Martha and Ava have lived with the Platts since their entry to care around 18 months ago.

Background:

Martha is a 7-year-old child who is looked after by the Local Authority. Martha and her two older siblings, Ava and Jordan, came into care when Martha was 6 years old. Martha and her siblings are subject to a Full Care Order after being removed from their parent's care due to their parent's failure to protect them from harm. Jordan resides in a residential children's home for boys with behavioural difficulties, around a 3-hour journey away from where they live. The children have contact with each other during school holidays. Contact with their parents occurs at 3 monthly intervals and is supervised.

Chronologies indicate that Martha is a child who was known to services pre-birth, with both statutory services and support services being involved with the family throughout her life. From file information it appears that the children have been subject to both child protection plans and child in needs plans in relation to neglect on a few occasions. During these periods home conditions are noted to improve, although the needs of both parents have remained high.

Concerns reached the threshold to move into Public Law Outline following a number of referrals received by Children's Services. These included concerns reported by neighbours, school and health, including sexualised behaviour by Martha, challenging behaviour at school by Martha's older sister and criminal exploitation for Matha's older brother. Neighbour concerns related to house parties, the children being left unsupervised and being left in the care of adults of concern. Which lateral checks undertaken by Children's Services latterly confirmed.

The chronology indicates that Martha and her older siblings have been exposed to domestic abuse within their parents' relationship, poor maternal mental health, substance use by both parents, and neglectful home conditions. This included physical, emotional and supervisory neglect of the children.

Prior to her removal into care Martha's behaviour at school is noted to have included sexualised play, a lack of boundaries with other children and adults, poor toileting, and self-touch at times where she is anxious or during quiet times, for example at 'story time'.

Martha also told her teacher that 'Uncle Marty peed in my flower'. The school made a referral to Children's Services, and a Social Worker spoke to Martha about this. While she did not repeat this statement, Martha shared that Uncle Marty's beard tickles her and she doesn't like it. File information notes that she became teary and hid her face in her hands when talking to the social worker, who did not explore the concerns further as it was felt Martha was unable to talk any more about it. After discussing this with their manager it was agreed that 'safe touch' work would be undertaken using the 'Talk Pants' resource as a preventative step and a safety plan be implemented at the family home.

Current information known:

Martha has developmental delay across a number of areas. Martha is reported to struggle at school; she is a child who is desperate to have friends and fit in but plays on the edges of her peers. Despite their young age, her peers are rejecting of Martha at times.

Martha continues to struggle with boundaries both at home and school, she will hit out if things don't go her way and has bitten one child in her class recently. Martha uses self-touch at bedtime or when she is anxious, she is described as being overly tactile with adults and is desperate to gain acceptance from those around her.

Difficulties with toileting persist. Martha soils herself and does not wipe herself properly after using the bathroom, Martha bed wets at least 3 nights a week and has nightmares frequently.

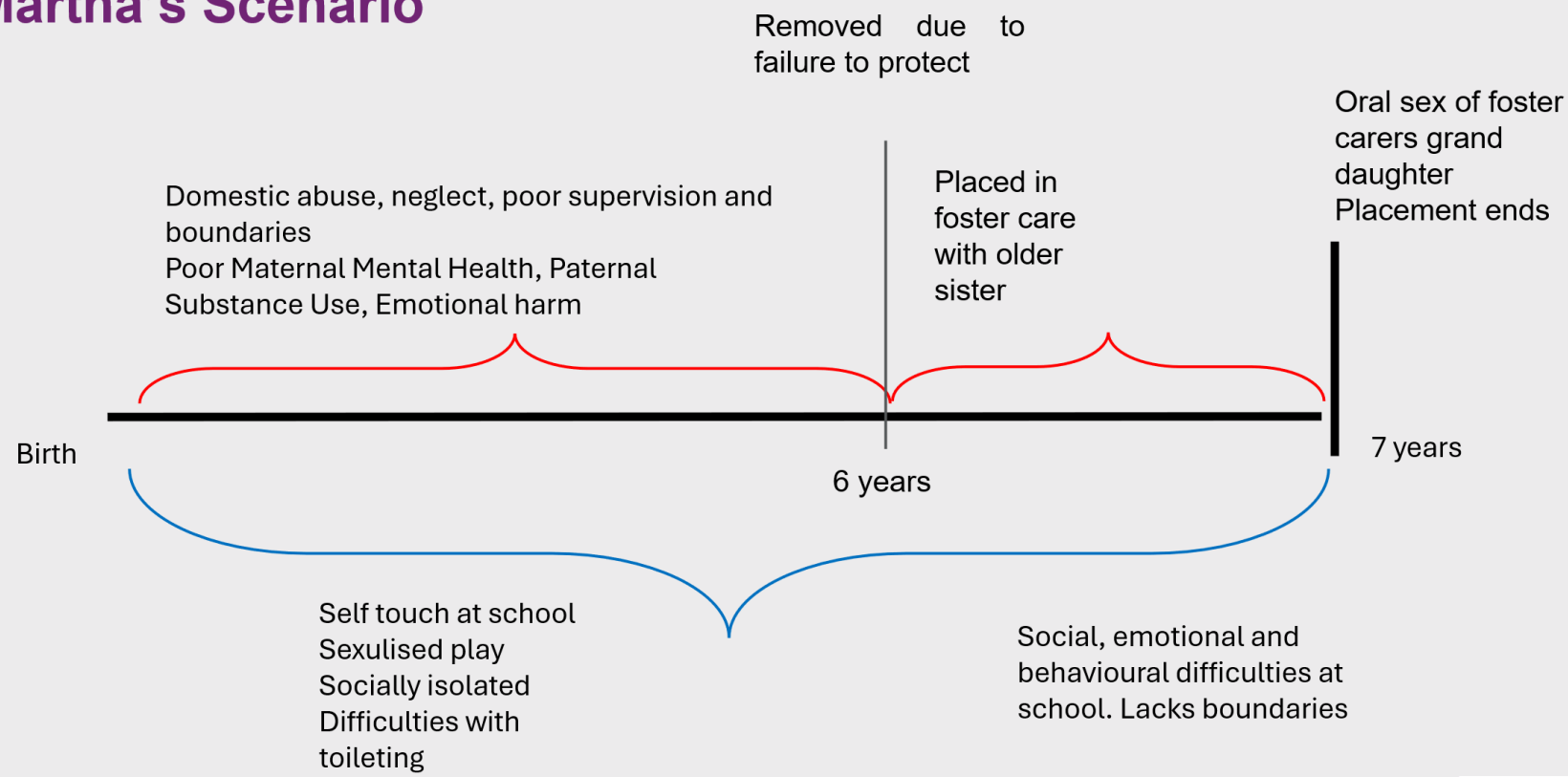
Martha is receiving play therapy to support her processing some of the hurts he has experienced, as it is felt that she is not yet ready to share anything verbally.

- How does this information help us to understand Martha?
- Use the signs and indicators template alongside this information to help build a picture of the concerns - consider which factors are present for Martha, what areas we may need to know more about, and how we may go about gaining further information.

Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

Case study: Martha

Martha's Scenario



Uncle Marty peed in my flower
Don't Like it when his beard tickles me

