


Chapter 9

Social/Emotional Trauma and Trauma–Informed Strategies for Exceptional Students: A Case Study for Discussion

Kimberly D. Cassidy

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0698-5539>
Shawnee State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter is a case study about a 4th grade student who has some exceptionalities. His mother has requested he be tested for many years, but school personnel will not agree to provide any screenings because Ethan is not a problem child, and his work is average. Ethan complains of a stomachache often, and his mother notes that she struggles to get him to do his work. There are multiple key statements in the scenarios that should provide data for preservice teachers to use when making an informed decision about the needs of Ethan. There are also questions and activities to aid the preservice teacher in recognizing and avoiding bias, finding resources to support Ethan's exceptionalities, and advocating for his/her students.

INTRODUCTION

Ethan is a 4th grader who has struggled with writing since preschool. According to his mother, Dianne, he has always had poor handwriting and she has to force him to sit down to practice his penmanship and do homework that requires writing. Ethan is a typically developing boy, aside from the fine motor skill issue, is social, has

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friends, and performs well in class, but only because his mother constantly supports his work habits. Ethan has no siblings.

Ethan does display some signs of autism, such as hand-flapping and fixation, and Dianne has mentioned these actions to Ethan's pediatrician. Dianne has also asked for assessments to be conducted in school, but the teachers have not been receptive to the idea, citing that Ethan "is passing with average scores" and has a good support system at home. Both Dianne and Eric, Ethan's father, have college degrees, have full-time careers, and are considered upper-middle class.

Dianne and Eric make sure that they keep Ethan busy and engaged with other students by signing him up for seasonal sports, such as baseball, football, travel ball, and allow him to pursue other interests as they present themselves. He is currently fixated on Pokemon, skateboarding, and playing video games. He always has a friend over to his house to encourage socialization.

TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

Ethan is a good student. He doesn't disrupt class and his grades are average. His mother, Dianne, has asked several times if I would consider doing an assessment for learning delays. I could, but the special ed teacher says he doesn't need any services. He's just a messy writer and will improve his handwriting as he gets older. Quite honestly, he has a reputation for being lazy, so I see it as more of a motivation issue, and he does have some habits that mimic autism, like that constant hand-flapping. He has some real issues in the cafeteria when eating-chewing with his mouth open; sticking food in his mouth with his hands like a toddler; licking or sucking on the food before biting it-like he has a sensory problem. He probably should have been assessed in kindergarten, but it's too late now. Besides, Dianne and Eric are educated and can help him with his work at home, so I really don't see the need to pull in special education and give him a label. He's made it to 4th grade without services, so doing that to him now would really affect him socially.

PARENT PERSPECTIVE

Ethan has always been a happy child who just goes with the flow. He loves to read and he does well on most of his work. He struggles with writing, though, and we end up having arguments that result in him crying and me screaming at him just to get him to complete his homework. I've started doing a lot of his work for him just to avoid the situation. He is also complaining more and more about his stomach

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