

Emotional Disorders: Case Studies

Case A

Charlie is a four-year-old Caucasian boy. His mother had hoped to enroll him in preschool this year, but when she attempted to leave him at the school for the morning classes, he panicked and threw tantrums. He clung to her, screaming until she was able to comfort him by taking him out of the school building with her. Until this time, Charlie has spent brief periods of time under others' care while his mother ran errands or visited with friends. He tended to become upset as she left the home on these occasions, as well. He does not usually throw tantrums; the tantrums seem to occur only when he anticipates being left by his mother at school.

Case B

Nyah is an eleven-year-old African-American girl beginning middle school. In August, just before school began, she started having difficulties sleeping at night. She reported to her parents that she was worrying about school—she was worrying about being assigned more homework and anticipating difficulties with making friends. She had also been biting her fingernails. Her parents describe Nyah as intelligent, hardworking, conscientious, and prone to worry. Apparently, she has always had more worries than other children. When her parents argue, she worries they will divorce. When her friends do not answer her calls, she worries that they are rejecting her. Throughout elementary school, she often feared that she would fail her spelling tests or math exams, despite regularly receiving strong grades.

Case C

Sindhu is a sixteen-year-old Indian-American girl. Her parents and friends describe her as quite serious most of the time and often sad. She is extremely talented in art; she paints and draws so well that she has been recommended to participate in the countywide gifted-and-talented art class every year since elementary school. She seems to express deep, intense emotions in her artwork. Her mother became quite concerned recently when she heard Sindhu tell a friend that "life is too hard," and that she "can't imagine how she will make it in college." Her best friend admits that lately, Sindhu seems more sad, more tearful, and preoccupied with dark subjects of conversation, such as tragedy, war, and death. When Sindhu's grades began to decline and she seemed increasingly sad, unmotivated, and lethargic, her parents sought help for her.

Case D

Asia is an eight-year-old Korean-American girl who has been having difficulty falling asleep. Once she falls asleep, she often wakes screaming from nightmares. At times, Asia seems quite distracted. When she is distracted, she seems fearful. Her mother reports that Asia describes fearful daydreams and memories related to a recent car accident the family experienced. The accident had been serious; a passenger in the other car was killed. Although Asia did not witness the death, she is haunted by the impact and events after the accident. The themes in her play are related to fear, accidents, sirens, and hospitals. Her parents report that Asia has only had the impaired sleep, fearfulness, and distraction since the accident; she did not have these symptoms prior to the accident.