

Case Study of Trauma Exposure Responses

Tina has represented children in child welfare cases for seven years. She has over 150 clients on her caseload and spends most of her day in court. In the evening she works late, calling clients and foster parents and trying to prepare for the next court day. She typically is at the office until 6:30 or 7:00 pm every night, but she never feels caught up on her work. By the time she gets home, she has no energy to spend time with her own kids. After her kids are in bed, she will scarf down a bowl of cereal and have two glasses of wine to relax.

She recently was appointed to represent a teenager who is returning to foster care after her placement with a relative guardian broke down. The social worker's report stated the client was combative with her guardian and would not follow the rules of the house. The client was struggling in school and was at risk of being held back a grade. She had been placed in a group home.

When Tina met with the client at court, she did not have much time to talk. She asked the client how things were going at the group home. When the client said she was having problems with the staff and house rules, Tina snapped, "If you don't like the group home maybe you should have tried to work things out with your guardian." When the client said she wanted to stay in her previous school Tina said, "I can ask the judge about that, but why do you want to stay there when you are failing your classes?"

After court, when Tina got back to the office, she complained to her colleagues about teenagers messing up their placements.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways might Tina be experiencing trauma exposure response?
2. How is trauma exposure response impacting Tina's work?
3. How is trauma exposure response impacting Tina's personal life?
4. What are some ways Tina can address her trauma exposure response?
5. How could Tina increase her compassion satisfaction?
6. What are some ways Tina's manager or law office could support her?