

Box 11.1 (continued)

mental health agency. Finally, through contacts with people I'd known in the past, I found help in both places. A friend and colleague from the local university CPS training unit agreed to talk with the family about a voluntary placement, which would qualify the family for intensive services. To everyone's surprise, the family agreed.

Angie was placed in temporary custody while her father went into treatment and her mother was hospitalized. Angie disliked the foster home. By now it was summer vacation. The protective services training unit arranged with the mental health agency to let me see Angie several times a week during the summer so that she would feel connected to the school. We often went out for ice cream or to the park with Angie's CPS case manager. Sometimes we were joined by Mrs. Sundstrom, who would be Angie's third-grade teacher in the fall.

Meanwhile, the school had worked on Angie's attendance throughout the year. If she did not show up in the morning, someone went to her home to bring her to school. We had finally reached the required number of days, and she had qualified for testing. Dr. Stevens found that Angie had a learning disability, and she began to receive special education services. Because this was now

an active CPS case, the mental health agency approved a psychiatric exam. Her psychiatrist prescribed Ritalin, which immediately helped Angie focus on both her academics and peers. The school placed her with a teacher who had exceptional skills in establishing rapport with children.

Angie returned to her family just before school started in the fall. By the end of third grade, she was reading at a second-grade level. She had also made a few friends in her class, and she loved her teacher. On Angie's last day of third grade, I asked her to write another story about herself. This is the story of Angie. Last year she used to be a monster. Now she's just a kid. The End.

Angie's case was successful because of collaboration and relationships. My contacts with people in the child welfare and mental health systems helped me intervene on her behalf. The new professionals in Angie's family's life used their ability to establish relationships to pursue new solutions for Angie's mother and father. Most importantly, Angie's third-grade teacher had exceptional relationship skills, and she created a safe haven at school for Angie. By the end of third grade, Angie saw herself as someone quite ready to cope with all that life had dealt her. Consider the questions posed in Box 11.2.

Box 11.2 What Do You Think?

What do you think about Angie's case? Should the social worker have done anything differently? The school social

worker did not have to visit Angie during the summer, and was not paid to do so. Would you have made the visit? Why?



EP 2

increased use of structured play over the past several decades. Many of the activities that children engage in at school and at home are much more structured than they used to be. For example, computer games provide users a structure for the situation and characters involved. They require little imagination or creativity. The loss of free play where children use their imagination to create their own scenarios, characters, and games may be partially responsible for children having fewer executive function skills, including the ability to self-regulate. This can result in children who misbehave in class, have poor self-control, and generally lack self-discipline. Programs to improve executive function skills for children as young as preschool age have been showing success. Social workers can research programs that seem to have good potential to reduce classroom problems and advocate that schools utilize these programs.

Knowledge and Skills

Estimates are that about 2.5 million children (1 out of 30) experience homelessness each year in the United States (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2014). The number of homeless children in rural areas may be even higher. Homeless families like Jamia's are often forced to move from shelter to shelter because of length-of-stay restrictions, or they may stay with relatives and friends for short periods of time. These conditions make it very difficult for the children to enroll in and regularly attend school.

NASW identifies the following as primary skills needed by school social workers:

- The ability to strengthen the connections with home, school, and community by identifying and linking these constituents to create the best learning environment for the student
- The ability to build mutual communication and support among all participants in the school system, including parents, students, staff, and the community
- The ability to develop preventive and healing intervention programs for problems in the school system, such as sexism, heterosexism, or racism
- The ability to provide meaningful and relevant consultation and in-service programs to teachers and school administrators concerning student needs and rights, and counterproductive school policies
- The ability to provide training and support for conflict resolution programs and other student support programs, such as drug prevention, sex education, alternative suspension programs, and parent education programs (Student Social Work Association [SSWA], 2017).



EP 7c



EP 7b

Within the framework of systems theory and the ecological perspective, school social workers draw from a broad research and knowledge base that includes information from child development, education, psychology, neuroscience, communication theory, social learning theory, behavioral theory, case law, political science, and social work. The field of neuroscience has revealed that a child's brain best absorbs and processes information when the child is immersed in compelling and lifelike situations, is in a state of relaxed alertness, and has an overall sense of safety in the classroom and the school (Sori & Blank, 2016). School social workers use this information to promote and encourage thematic and creative teaching and the use of relaxation techniques in the classroom. It also suggests that students' security and safety concerns should be a priority for school social workers (Arthur, 2016).

Growth and development research is important to school social workers because the public school experience spans a 12-year period for most children, from age 6 to age 18. Social workers must be familiar with the physical, motor, cognitive, moral, gender-role, and psychosocial growth and development that normally occurs during this period (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013; also see Chapter 7). The school social worker must also understand how the school's environment and social rules affect a student's growth and