

## Case Scenario: Tots and Toys Child Care Center

Chelsea Rivera, an investigator in the Complaint Unit of the local licensing agency, has just received a new complaint. According to the complaint, three college students who regularly walk to classes through the playground at Monument Park all claim to have seen a child “physically and psychologically abused” by an adult. The park is frequented by classes from the nearby Tots and Toys Child Care Center, (TTCC), and the students believe the abuser was a teacher and the child a student at the center. The first incident was witnessed by two of the students on Monday morning; the second incident witnessed by the third student on Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon.

To begin her investigation, Chelsea set up interviews with each of three students separately, scheduled for the following morning. Her notes at the end of her first morning of investigation state:

- A. Met with Student #1 at Monument Park at 8:45 am, the same time as the reported incident earlier in the week. As we talked we re-traced her steps. She described an incident on the morning of Monday the 25<sup>th</sup>, at approximately 8:45 (as she walked to her 9:00 am social work class). During that incident she witnessed a child being hit by an adult and then shaken “violently” by his arm. She described the adult as a white female approximately 20-30 years old, dressed in blue jeans and a red sweatshirt. The adult had light brown hair “cut short,” which she further defined as “shorter than chin length.” She had a “medium” build and was of average height – nothing else remarkable about her appearance. The child was a young boy “about 3-4 years old” with dark hair.

During our interview we did not see the adult she had seen on the 25<sup>th</sup>, and in fact there were no child care groups in the park while we were there. Student #1 reported that she could not be sure if the class was regularly in the park during her walk to her 9:00 class, although she said “there are always lots of little kids”. On the day of the incident she could not remember whether or not there were other children nearby or other teachers present. The interview ended at 9:45.

- B. Met with Student #2 at the park at 10:00 and together we retraced his steps. He reported walking with Student #1 to the same social work class on the morning of Monday the 25<sup>th</sup>, at approximately 8:45. He did not report that he witnessed the adult hitting the child, but did report that he saw an adult “shaking a child” and screaming “curses” at the child. When pressed he could not recall what words he heard the adult yelling, but said his “impression at the time” was that the adult was cursing at the child.

Student #2 described the adult as a white female in her “early 30’s,” average build, and dressed in blue jeans and a brightly colored shirt or jacket. The adult had “short blondish” hair, which he further clarified as “cut above the ears” with a color “darker than true blond.” The child was a young boy probably 5 or under; he could not be sure of his hair color.

Student #2 reported that he wasn't sure if the child care center was there every morning; he really hadn't paid much attention to the children until the incident occurred. In fact, until Student #3 mentioned that TTCC child care classes are frequently in the park, he generally assumed the children in the park were with their families. He could not recall how many other children were in the group (other than to say that there were always many children in the park) or whether or not another teacher was present. The interview ended at 10:45.

- C. Met with student #3 at the park at 1:30 and retraced her steps. On this particular afternoon the child care group was not in the park although there were a number of small children and a group of mothers.

Student #3 described the second incident that she believes took place on Wednesday the 27<sup>th</sup> (but could have been Tuesday the 26<sup>th</sup>) at approximately 1:30 as she walked to her daily 2:00 pm time in the psychology lab. In that incident a teacher "went berserk," hitting and shaking a child who was "screaming with fear". She was "horrified" and concerned "both for the child's physical and psychological safety." No other adult intervened; she was not aware of other adults being present.

The perpetrator was described as a white female in her late 20's or early 30's with "dirty blonde" hair cut "fairly short" (she could not be more specific). She wore blue jeans and a gray top and was of average height and weight. She did not see what the child had done to trigger the incident, but she continued to say that the teacher went "berserk" in response, hitting and shaking the child. The child looked to be a young boy with dark hair aged 3 – 5.

While we were there a group of children from Tots and Toys came into the park for a picnic lunch. (I asked one of the two teachers where the children were from.) Student #3 was certain that the teacher involved in the incident was not there and neither was the child. The interview ended at 1:50. I stayed on to observe the interactions between teachers and students for another 45 minutes and saw nothing of concern.