



Scenario



Adult concern and child concern

Police Scotland staff on making a referral to the reporter



Police Officer:

I want to discuss the possibility of referring a child to the reporter and I am looking for some guidance.

Reporter:

Of course, tell me the details of the situation.

Police Officers attended at the home of Ryan aged 5. The child's school had reported that Ryan had not come to school that day. The child's social worker had attempted to contact the child's mother, Chantelle, but had no answer. There were increasing concerns for Ryan's welfare and the police were asked by social work to attend at the property.

When they attended, Chantelle eventually answered the door, after a long time, and by now it was 12 noon.



Chantelle presented as possibly under the influence of substances although she did not appear to be unable to care for Ryan. She said that Ryan had not been well last night but that she had forgotten to phone the school. Ryan appeared rather unkempt and tired but otherwise well. He was still not dressed for the day. The living room was extremely messy. The floor was cluttered with items - plates with old food, dirty washing, and half empty cans of beer. There were also dog faeces in places that had not been cleared up. There was very little food in the kitchen. The officers suggested she should do something to make things a bit more hygienic for her and Ryan's sake. In the officers opinion mum didn't seem to be concerned by the situation.

While they were concerned, the officers felt that there was no immediate, serious risk to Ryan so there was no basis to take immediate action. They told Chantelle that the police would need to speak to social work about the visit and concerns about Ryan's wellbeing, failure to attend school and the conditions within the home.

Officers spoke with the school. They said that there have been issues with Ryan's attendance since he started Primary 1 earlier this year. Chantelle does not always contact the school with a reason for his non-attendance and she can be difficult to contact. They have been concerned about how he is sometimes when he does come. He can be quite unkempt and has said he's hungry a number of times. They told me that they had contacted social work because of this and gave me the name of a social worker.



The officer then spoke to Ryan's social worker. She said that she had been trying to meet with Chantelle for a number of weeks now without success. She said that talking on the phone, Chantelle did not seem to accept or understand why there was any concern about Ryan. Ryan's social worker also said that they were aware of a history of drug misuse in Chantelle's past but there was no evidence of current misuse. The officer reported that they thought Chantelle had been under the influence of something when seen earlier that day. SW indicated that they were content that Ryan was safe and no immediate action was required at that time, they took note of the update.

Should we make a referral to the reporter?

Reporter:

First of all how concerned are you about Ryan? How high is the risk to him? What do you think?

Police:

Ryan is only 5 and his mother did not seem concerned about him not getting to school or about the state of the house. There is a history of non-attendance and how he presents at school sometimes. There's the history of drug misuse and how she presented that day.

As to the level of risk, I suppose I would have to say it's not high in terms of any immediate serious harm coming to Ryan. But there are signs that his basic care needs are not being met. In the longer term this would be a real worry.



Reporter:

And what do you think about whether the risk is ongoing?

Police:

There appears to be a pattern developing of the child not going to school without good reason. The conditions within the home were a real concern, but I couldn't say whether that was a one-off or not.

Reporter:

What are your thoughts about the mother's response in terms of accepting responsibility and engaging with services?

Police:

She was not receptive to the advice given to her about the house and has not been engaging with school or social work. Things clearly need to change and there's no sense that she's accepting responsibility for making those changes.

Reporter:

Okay, now we've asked ourselves those questions, let's think about the statutory criteria ... firstly do you think that Ryan needs protection, guidance, treatment or control?

Police:

I think he does need protection. He's very young. He needs to go to school, be properly dressed and fed, and live in a home that's safe. Those things aren't happening, and someone needs to make sure that they are.



Reporter:

And do you think that it might be necessary for a compulsory supervision order to be made in relation to Ryan?

Police:

I suppose it's possible that things could be turned around if Chantelle were to accept the support that would be available from the school and social work. But it's far from certain that she will. So, yes, a compulsory supervision order maybe the only option necessary for Ryan's protection and to make sure that his needs are met.

Reporter:

So, do you think Ryan should be referred to the reporter?

Police:

Yes

Reporter:

It's not for the reporter to say whether that's the right decision or not – referring a child is entirely a matter for the referrer. What I will say is that it's important that a referrer asks the right questions and engages with the statutory criteria. And that's what you've done here.

