

Claudia

Age: 8

Grade: 3

Pronouns: she/her

Claudia, a grade 3 student, lives with her biological mother, stepfather, four-year-old sister, and an older brother in Serpent River, Ontario. Her biological father is not a part of Claudia's life. Her mother's biological family lives on a First Nation reserve nearby. Claudia's mother struggles with addiction and her stepfather has been charged with abuse and is now living at home with them. There have been reports to the police of neglect and abuse (physical and emotional) of all three children.

Claudia was diagnosed with fetal alcohol syndrome at birth and has struggled to meet developmental milestones. She is a soft-spoken, kind young girl. Claudia has a group of three friends that she plays with and has been friends with since junior kindergarten.

Claudia loves to help her teacher, Ms. Taylor, and often asks to stay after school to assist. Claudia often spends weekends at her friend Julia's house. Julia's mother regularly packs additional snacks in Julia's lunch for Claudia. Claudia appears to be clothed and there are no visible signs of abuse. Claudia insists on wearing her jacket at all times in class and will not take it off despite rising temperatures. When asked to remove her jacket, Claudia often says she does not have a top underneath. Claudia seems to be very shy and reserved at school. When talking to her teacher, Claudia often states that she wished she had a mother like her teacher and wished she lived with Ms. Taylor.

Despite being developmentally delayed, Claudia has an advanced vocabulary regarding sex, sexuality, and other mature themes. Because of this, she sometimes needs to be redirected in conversations with peers. Although she presents as shy, Claudia is known to teaching staff as being overly affectionate, wanting to hug and be cuddled by teachers, as well as any other adults in the building.

Claudia's stepfather picks her up from school every Wednesday and Thursday, stating that her mother is out of town on a "business trip." When her mother goes away on these "trips," it is well known around town that she is working as a sex worker. On the days that stepfather picks her up, the school staff notice increased anxiety in Claudia. During interactions with her stepfather, Claudia very visibly looks down, appears stiff and does not speak.

School staff have approached the principal with their concerns and suspicions about Claudia's stepfather. The concerns include possible trafficking of Claudia's mother and inappropriate sexual language and contact with Claudia.



What are the immediate concerns?

What are your long-term concerns?

In your role as school administrator, what future staff development arises as a result of this case study?

Ask yourself

- What is your duty to report/refer? To whom?
- With whom and what services can we connect the mother for support?
- What information in the student's IEP may be critical in this case?
- Are you aware of/informed about the student's culture and possible implications for this case?

What would it look like if...?

- Claudia was a boy or two-spirit?
- Claudia's stepfather was Black and/or non-Indigenous?
- Claudia lived in a downtown large metropolitan city.