**Story 1: Jennie**

This school year was the third full school year in the partnership between the Mental Health Center of Denver and Lowry Mile High Early Learning. The year brought many successes with the continued partnership between myself and the leadership at the center. As a united we team, we were able to work through many challenges throughout the year and strengthen the foundation we have been building the last few years.

This year the center had a particularly rough period struggling to support a preschool child who had involuntarily left his previous center under very difficult circumstances. Staff at our center quickly realized this child needed extra support as he was having many behavioral concerns such as kicking, hitting, biting, throwing items, destroying other children’s work, jumping on top of shelfs and running from the classroom. The behaviors were very taxing on staff as they were both physically and mentally exhausted from working to support him and establish safety.

Through consultation, staff were able to use the safety of our relationship to both name and discuss the difficult emotions they were experiencing working with this child and family. This allowed the staff to feel heard, validated and supported in the challenging work they were doing. In our reflective conversations, we were able to begin identifying some of the purposes of the child’s behaviors, so we could move towards developing strategies to support the child’s needs. We were also able to identify the importance of bringing his parents into the process to partner with them, gather more information and discuss his needs further. By doing this, we were able to develop a behavior support plan with new ideas that both the teachers and parents supported.

Unfortunately, this child’s behaviors continued to increase which was very disheartening for staff who were putting in so much effort and were still very concerned for both his safety and the rest of the class. I was able to provide psychoeducation for staff around young children who experience anxiety and depression which worked to build their understanding of how to support the child’s mental health as well as develop empathy for him. I was also able to continue sharing my observations about this child’s mental health with his mother and discuss the benefits of getting connected to mental health services.

Because of the time and relationship building we had all done, his mother soon chose to get him the mental health support he needed with both parents being involved in services. As the mental health consultant, I was able to provide the family a confidential space to discuss their own needs, continue supporting the center with the behaviors, and partner with the child’s therapist to support his mental health needs at the school. It was truly a team of professionals working together to support this child and get supports in place for him to be successful.

**Story 2: Na**

In my time consulting at Sun Valley this year one of our successful collaborations came out of the preschool room. I usually observe children during the morning routine once a week and discuss with the teachers about how they and their classroom are doing.

One day teachers at Sun Valley Preschool shared that a child has been more impulsive and aggressive with his peers lately. He is kindergarten-bound, and two of the teachers have known him since he was 3. They report feeling confused as this is unusual behavior. As an early childhood mental health consultant, I wonder with the teachers about what might contribute to this change. The child’s mother mentioned to me a few weeks ago that she lost a 32-week infant, and the children know about it. At the time there were no major concerns, but Mom wanted us to be aware. Teachers were also aware that the child’s father might move to Alaska for a job. Teachers and I agreed that staff will voice what they notice about Jose to the parents and suggest that the parents contact me for an individual consult. A few days later I received a voice mail from the child’s mom. I followed up and we agreed to meet at a coffee shop after her work.

Mom and I met at a table that would provide us some privacy at the coffeeshop. Mom cited the loss of the baby as a recent change that might cause behavioral changes in both of her children. I acknowledge the challenges can be difficult (because children and adults grieve, yet parents cannot stop parenting) but we will get through this together. Children do not have the language to express so it is normal to see changes in the way they act. It is a children’s way to communicate that they are stressed and do not have the capacity to cope yet.

From a strength-based approach, we explore her child’s strengths and wonder how we can use them to ensure his success. He is quite understanding of the situation and able to verbalize his feelings, so I suggest capitalized on this strength using a story book, visual aids, and supportive relationship to help him build up his emotional regulation skills. When appropriate, she can also speak about the loss in an age-appropriate language and assure Jose and his sister that they are safe, and Dad and Mom are doing all they could to make sure of that. I emphasize the importance of Mom current ways of taking care of herself and her children. It is also normal and necessary to reach out for friends, family, and professional support during this difficult time. We parted after we explore a few other strategies, community resources, and that I am available if she ever need somebody to talk.

After a parent meeting and working with teachers in the classroom to understand the underlying meaning of the child’s aggressive behavior. Adults around the child are equipped with tools, strategies, and a better understanding of his needs. In the classroom, teachers read books about calming big emotions, modeling breathing techniques, and provide cozy corner or talking about what other ways he could ask for help when he feels sad. Teachers report progress over a few weeks.

I met the family again at the preschool’s end of the year celebration. Mom introduces me to her husband and thanks me for how the story book and strategies have help her children. Dad also announces that he just decided today that he won’t move to Alaska. It is always a success to see that a family is in a more stable place and that the child is ready to start kindergarten.