

# GIFT Case Vignette

*Please note that this case vignette draws on GIFT's work with infants and families. The vignette is representative of our work and does not relate to any one infant/family or constitute a full case study.*

*GIFT is a multiagency partnership between Glasgow City Council NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NSPCC and is a multidisciplinary team hosted and funded by NSPCC. The team has had specialist training in Infant mental health assessment, observation and intervention and has been working with infants in foster/kinship care and their parents and carers for over 10 years.*

Ima is 22 months and has lived with her aunt Lotika for 3 months. Ima's early experiences, until she was 19 months old, were of times of severe neglect including being left alone in her cot for long periods without food or interaction, while at other times, her mother found Ima a comfort and described Ima as helping her feel better.

Ima was described by Lotika and nursery as thriving in kinship care, with no concerns about her development or well-being, and to have a good relationship with Lotika. The following is an account of the observations we made of the relationship between Ima and Lotika during assessment, and the intervention immediately afterwards. *(The play observation is set up to gradually increase stress for both child and caregiver. It culminates in a brief separation which is observed by workers and the caregiver. A separation like this is stressful for any infant and allows an opportunity to understand how infant and caregiver manage this individually and together so that appropriate support can be offered).*

During play together, there was lots of comfort, familiarity, fun and delight, with shared eye contact, mirroring play with toy dolls and smiles. Ima showed when she needed help with toys e.g., when she could not get the puzzle piece to fit in. When Lotika was asked to briefly leave the room, Ima did not play with any of the toys; she went to the door and then sat on the floor next to the toys, becoming increasingly still with a blank look on her face, indicating her distress. When Lotika returned to the room, Ima immediately smiled brightly and then turned to the toys, showing the jigsaw to Lotika. Lotika smiled too and said 'you've been a good girl playing with the puzzle!' in a bright tone. The two then played with the jigsaw briefly with Ima then getting up and running excitedly round the room.

We saw that there were lots of strengths in this relationship but wondered if Ima's early experiences meant that:

- she had not learned to cue her need for comfort at times of stress.
- she might be miscuing her underlying need for comfort through her bright smile.
- within her relationship with Lotika, Lotika responded in kind to Ima's miscue smile that Ima was happy, and the stress Ima experienced was not acknowledged or resolved.

With this in mind, when the worker entered the room, he named the experience they had had of play together with fun and learning and of stress with Lotika leaving the room. 'That would have been hard to be on your own in the room'. Ima stopped running and looked at the worker. The worker said 'it's hard for any little girl or boy; we all need help when we are feeling sad or scared or angry. I wonder if you need a cuddle from Lotika?' Ima shook her head. With further gentle prompting and support from the worker Lotika moved closer to Ima putting her arms out; Ima gradually backed into Lotika, sitting on Lotika's knee. Lotika wrapped her arms around Ima who remained rigid in her arms, then leaned in and they cuddled closely for several minutes.

In this vignette, consider the impact for Ima if she continued to miscue her emotional needs in stressful situations. What would she learn about herself, her feelings, and relationships? Recognising her underlying needs and supporting caregivers to over-ride miscues as early as possible can lead to quick changes.

*Julia Donaldson, Consultant Clinical Psychologist*  
*October 2022*