

# Case study: Joseph

## Trainers' notes

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Joseph is 11 years old. He lives with his mother who is estranged from his father. He has an older brother of 13 years and a younger sister of 9 years. He has a severe learning disability and limited verbal communication.

Joseph is a regular attendee at a short break service – which his mother describes as a “life-saver” as she has quite a lot of stress looking after Joseph and the other children and working part-time.

When Joseph went for his most recent break, staff at the service noticed he had a number of bruises – something they had not observed on previous stays. These were recorded on a body map and social work were informed.

The social worker interviewed Joseph’s mother who she described as caring but anxious and struggling to cope.

His mother said that Joseph seemed to be going through a bad patch and had recently started to “nip” or pinch himself which caused the bruising. His mother welcomed the offer an assessment from the disability team to see if more could be done to support her and agreed she would share information about her concerns about Joseph and any further bruising with the school and short break staff.

The school and short break unit were informed of the outcome of the social worker’s visit and agreed to monitor the situation closely and link with social work again if further concerns arose.

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### What are the strengths in the way this situation was handled?

### What are the shortfalls?

### How might this have been handled differently?

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This short case study is intended to help participants reflect on:

- How different thresholds might be applied if a child is disabled – would a more formal child protection investigation have taken place if he had not been disabled?
- How there may be a greater inclination to identify with the parent and accept her explanation when she is obviously struggling, doing her best with a very difficult caring task
- The explanation for the bruising was taken at face value. Was it caused by pinching? If it was, this is likely to be a sign that the child is distressed (as partly indicated by the mother) but what is the cause of that distress? Some children engage in self-harming behaviour as a response to abuse
- The fact that there was no attempt to communicate directly with the child and try to get his view of how the bruising came about either by the worker or by engaging another professional skilled in using non-verbal interviewing techniques