

Santi's Story

Santi is a 3-year-old Latino boy who lives with his dad, Georgie, and dad's girlfriend, Marie. He has no contact with his biological mother, and Georgie does not know where she is. Georgie reported to the home visitor that he had met Santi's mother while they were both in alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) treatment. Their household was not a peaceful one. Santi's mother continued to binge drink, there were many arguments and some physical violence, although Georgie is reluctant to go into many details. Santi's mother disappeared when Santi was about 6 months old, and Georgie assumes she has left the state. Georgie reports that he is no longer using drugs or alcohol, but Marie worries that he might. Marie describes Georgie as a fun dad, but a strict disciplinarian. Santi loves being with his dad and he is affectionate with Marie; however, he has recently started being defiant at home, and is often aggressive toward Marie when she is trying to get through the bedtime routine; he hits and kicks and uses profanity. Marie is frequently alone during the bedtime routine as Georgie often works nights. Marie and Georgie have tried several approaches to encourage Santi to move more smoothly through the bedtime routine. He is better when his dad is home and is part of the routine. When Georgie is not there, Santi often wakes up several times during the night. He bangs doors and shouts and cries.

Santi attends a daycare five full days a week, the same day care he has attended since he was 2. Santi has had some periods of time when he has struggled to get along with other children. He went through a period of biting, aggression, and very loud profanity when he was about 2½ years old. Things gradually settled down at daycare with redirection and lots of positive reinforcement. He seemed to grow very fond of one of his teachers in his classroom last year, and she provided him with lots of social and emotional support. With her support he was successful with classroom activities, rules, and routines.

Santi started in a new classroom this September. Behaviors have resurfaced, and teachers are telling Georgie and Marie that they are concerned that they are not able to meet his needs and are considering discontinuing his placement. He has become increasingly aggressive with teachers (hits, bites, kicks), and occasionally toward children. Most of the children in the class are afraid of him because he can be

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aggressive “out of the blue.” He enters the classroom fairly easily, greets his teachers, but doesn’t always look directly at them when he does. He says goodbye to his dad somewhat reluctantly. During his day, however, he does not like to transition from one activity to the next, and transitions will often result in significant tantrums, head banging and aggression as teachers try to move him toward the next activity. He refuses to rest/nap and often disturbs the other children by making noises (clicking his tongue or grunting). The teachers think he is doing this on purpose and have begun to think of him as mean and disruptive. When the class is moving around the daycare center or playing outside, Santi frequently runs away. Teachers are concerned about his safety, as he runs from the building, and down the street. He recently pushed over an easel in the classroom and injured another child, but seemed to quickly come to the child’s rescue and apologized. During “choice time,” Santi plays primarily alongside other children, with very brief interactions that look like he is playing “with” another child. When this happens, Santi is usually directing the other child. There are a few activities Santi seems to really enjoy—art, sand play, looking at books—and he can engage in these activities for long periods of time. Teachers are concerned that he seems angry a lot of the time. They have tried using praise to shape Santi’s behavior, and he smiles when he is praised, but might become volatile in the next moment. Santi’s language skills are typical for a child his age. He follows directions when he is calm and engaged, but often does the opposite of what the teachers ask. When he is upset, he has lots of difficulty expressing himself. Teachers describe Santi as “all knowing.” He observes everyone and everything, and seems to know when anything has been moved in the classroom.

Marie reports that she has a nephew who is about Santi’s age. She doesn’t want to compare; however, she wonders if Santi’s behaviors are unusual. Her nephew sometimes has tantrums, but is not aggressive toward his parents. His parents seem to be able to count on him to move from activity to activity easily. He shares toys with friends and when he plays with Santi, he tries to include him in pretend play and other play activities. Santi is so unpredictable in Marie’s mind. She is worried about his development and the stress it causes the household.

Summary

Santi is exhibiting age-appropriate development in cognitive, language and motor domains and inconsistently performs daily living skills. Santi's family is seeking help and answers about the cause of Santi's challenging behaviors. He is unpredictable and they are feeling ineffective in their parenting. Some of his behaviors are unsafe for himself and others and interfere with daily routines and transitions. Daycare staff is having difficulty managing his challenging behaviors and are concerned about his safety, as well as the safety of the other children and staff. He does well with a specific structure and has attachments to a limited number of people. He does not generalize his ability to interact and self-regulate to other situations. They are looking for outside help in order to be able to continue him in their program.

Follow-Up Questions

1. *How often are Santi's various behaviors occurring (running away, physical aggression, head banging), and are they all occurring both at home and at day care, or in just one setting?*
2. *Are his behaviors interfering with his self-care skills? For example, does he become aggressive or try to avoid being bathed or having his teeth brushed? How is he doing with toilet training?*
3. *Has he been referred to the school district for an individualized education program (IEP) evaluation, or is he getting any behavioral intervention from a mental health professional?*