

CHILD PROTECTION

Gabriel is a really good learner. He's always eager and willing to help in class. But he's been missing school a lot lately. He's less focused during the lessons and he has even been sleeping in class sometimes...



Sorry, what are you saying?

I was saying that Gabriel has missed a lot of classes lately. I am worried about his progress and his supervision at home.



I don't think you are in good shape to have this talk today. Let us postpone our meeting. I am concerned about your situation.

Oh I really need some air! I am sorry, I think I drank a few too many beers today.



People who perform professional or official duties for children must alert police or a government social worker if they become aware of signs that a child may need protective services. Failure to report is a criminal offence.

Hello, Matthew. I am calling you to report my concerns about Gabriel, one of my learners. His mother is drinking a lot and it is affecting his attendance in class.

Social Worker
Office

This is worrying. How old is Gabriel? And how do you know his mother is drinking?

Gabriel is 8 years old. He has been missing classes a lot, and sometimes coming to school dirty and hungry. He said his mother is sick and often asleep. But she was drunk when she came to the school today, so I decided to report the situation.

You did the right thing, Selma. Are you aware if Gabriel's father is around, or any other family members?

No, Gabriel told me he was living alone with his mother.

Your report has been recorded. I will review the situation in the next 24 hours to see if Gabriel is in any immediate danger. Is there anything you would like to add?

Yes, I would prefer it if you do not mention to the family that I was the one who reported the problem to you.

No problem, I can keep your identity confidential.

Following a report that a child may be in need of protective services, police or a social worker can remove the child from the home and take the child to a safe place right away if there is an immediate risk to the child's safety or well-being. If someone in the home is endangering the child, it is also possible to remove the offender from the home. The **best interest of the child** is the key factor. The views of the child must be considered where possible.



Children's court

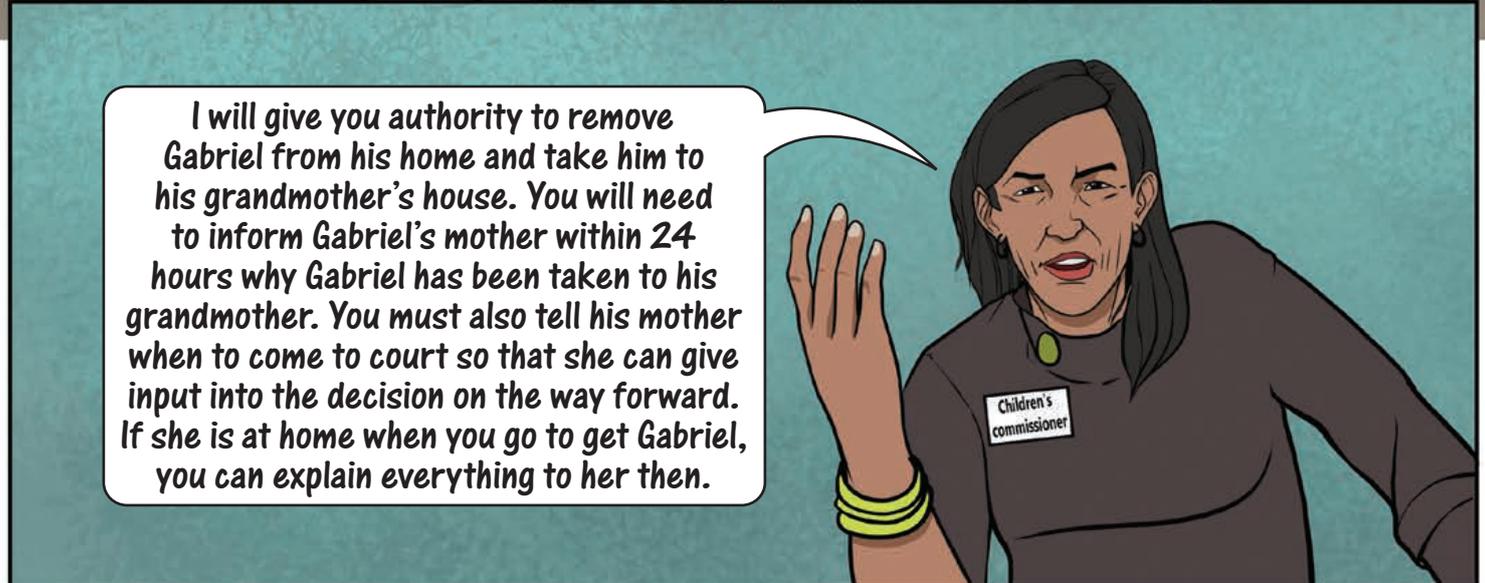
The scene is set in a meeting room. A man with a beard, wearing a light blue shirt, sits at a desk with a laptop. He is gesturing with his hands as if speaking. A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark grey top, sits across from him, also gesturing. In the background, a sign on the wall reads 'Children's court'. There is a whiteboard and a bookshelf with books.

I believe that Gabriel is in danger. I think an immediate removal is necessary to keep him safe while we investigate his situation. Anna, his mother, is not in a position to take care of him right now.

There are two options. Gabriel can be placed in a place of safety or in temporary safe care – such as with an extended family member.

I think he should stay with his grandmother for now. I contacted her and she is happy to look after him. Her house is a bit far from Gabriel's school, but he will be safe there.

I will give you authority to remove Gabriel from his home and take him to his grandmother's house. You will need to inform Gabriel's mother within 24 hours why Gabriel has been taken to his grandmother. You must also tell his mother when to come to court so that she can give input into the decision on the way forward. If she is at home when you go to get Gabriel, you can explain everything to her then.



Children's commissioner

The woman is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark grey top and a name tag that says 'Children's commissioner'. She has long dark hair and is gesturing with her right hand. The background is a plain teal color.



Gabriel is going to stay with his grandmother for now. The children's court will hold a hearing in 5 days to see what is best for Gabriel for the moment.

Until then, I am giving you permission to see him as long as you are sober when you visit.



We are here because Gabriel was removed from his home. We need to decide what will happen to Gabriel while we investigate the underlying problem. The court may confirm the temporary placement with his grandmother, or put Gabriel in some other safe place, or send him back home to his mother.

I removed Gabriel from his home because the mother has a serious drinking problem that is affecting her ability to take care of him. She is a single mother, and there is no one else living in the household. I think that Gabriel needs to stay with his grandmother for now to be safe.

Yes, it is just me and my son. But I do not ever leave him home alone. I am doing my best. I am prepared to try a rehabilitation programme to get help to stop the drinking.



CHILDREN'S COURT

I spoke to Gabriel privately and he seems to be happy with his grandmother, although he is worried about his mother. I think it is in Gabriel's best interests to remain with his grandmother until the social worker's investigation is complete. This will also give you a chance to focus on your drinking problem, Anna. I confirm the removal of Gabriel from his mother's house and his temporary placement in his grandmother's care.



After a removal, the social worker must complete an investigation within 30 days, looking at the family's circumstances and possible next steps. The social worker will write a detailed report for the court to consider.

It can be very difficult to stop drinking. We can give you support to help you through this difficult time. We will also help you think about why you developed a drinking problem, and how to stay sober and healthy when you go back home.

REHABILITATION CENTRE

I am really glad I started this alcohol abuse programme. I am learning how I can change things for the better. I used to spend time playing with Gabriel when I came back from work instead of drinking. I would like to start doing that again.

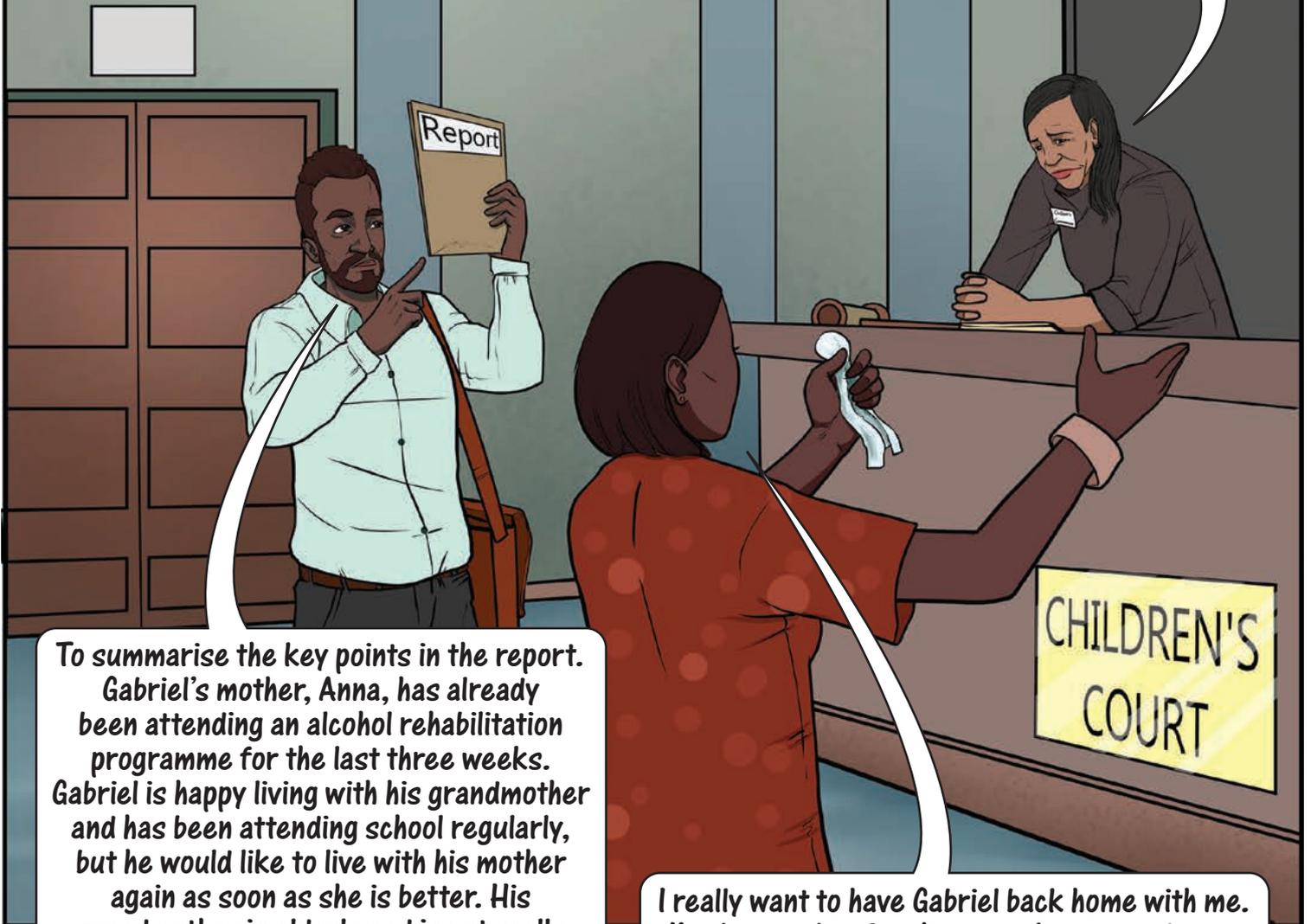


I miss my mother, but I also like being here with you, Meme. Your food is very good!

I am glad that you can stay here for a while. But I know your mother misses you too. I hope that she will be better soon so that you can go back home to her.



We are here to consider the next steps for Gabriel in light of the social worker's report. The court must decide if Gabriel needs any protective services to keep him safe and help him to be reunited with his mother if possible.



To summarise the key points in the report. Gabriel's mother, Anna, has already been attending an alcohol rehabilitation programme for the last three weeks. Gabriel is happy living with his grandmother and has been attending school regularly, but he would like to live with his mother again as soon as she is better. His grandmother is elderly and is not really able to care for him for a longer period.

I really want to have Gabriel back home with me. I've been sober for three weeks now and want to continue with the rehabilitation programme.



I believe that it will be safe for Gabriel to go back home to stay with Anna as long as she continues with the rehabilitation programme. The social worker will make regular visits to monitor the situation and report back to the court. I will ask everyone to come back to court in six months, so that we can check on the situation again.



I am so happy to be back home. I like living with grandma but I missed you!

Oh, you know I am also very happy to have you back, Gabriel. I promise that I will do my best to make sure we are fine from now on. Now that I am better, I was able to get a job at the shop nearby. That is going to help me take better care of you.



Look mommy, my teacher said that she is really proud of my neat work. I am one of the best in the class now!

I am proud too! Let's play a game after you finish your homework. I am so happy that we are together again!

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, or experiencing some other kind of problem, contact the police or any government social worker. Then the children's court can arrange steps to help with the problem. The well-being of Namibia's children is EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY!

For more information about child protection, contact the Legal Assistance Centre:
SMS: 081 600 0098
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An electronic version (PDF) of this publication is available on the LAC website: www.lac.org.na



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Project management: Dianne Hubbard
Printing: John Meinert Printing (Pty) Ltd
Funding: Embassy of Finland
Publisher: Gender Research & Advocacy Project, Legal Assistance Centre
Year of publication: 2019
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