



‘I can get help’ Summary Dimitri’s Problem – Part 1

Adapted from the Protective Behaviours program.

Dimitri lived with his mum, his dad, his sister Voula and his little brother Nick. Voula, his sister, was sixteen years old. Even though Dimi (as his friends called him) was in Year 6, they got on together pretty well most of the time. When Voula first started Year 8, she started hanging around with a new group of friends. They tried to act grown up by wearing make-up and really trendy clothes. Voula often went out with them after school, even though Dimi's dad had said she had to come straight home. By the start of second term, Voula and Dad were fighting almost every night. Sometimes Mum would get involved as well. Everyone would be shouting and yelling and Voula would end up crying and sometimes Mum would cry too. Dimi and Nick would try to stay out of the fight. They'd watch TV, or go into their room and listen to the radio. Sometimes they'd leave the house and kick Nick's soccer ball in the street until it got too dark to see and they had to come inside.

Dimi really hated it when Voula and Dad had these fights. He hated it so much that sometimes his whole body would shake, especially when he came inside to go to bed. He hated seeing everyone upset, and he really hated how Dad would be in a bad mood for the whole night. Often Dad, or even Mum, would end up yelling at Dimi, even though he hadn't done anything. Then Dimi would end up mad with Voula for having the fight with them.

Things got really awful one night when Voula and Mum and Dad were having a really big fight. Voula was crying and yelling at Dad, telling him he had no right to tell her what to wear or where she could go. Dimi was in the doorway of his room when Voula came storming out of the kitchen towards her bedroom. Dad followed her down the hallway and grabbed her arm. He pushed Voula into the wall and shook her really hard. Mum was crying and making a dreadful noise and Dad slapped Voula across the face. Voula ran into her room. Dad yelled at Dimi, then went back into the lounge room. Mum went into Voula's room.

Dimi went outside and sat on the front steps. He could feel that his stomach was scrunched up really tight. His face felt hot and flushed and he could also feel his pulse thumping in his head. He waited a long time before he went inside again.

Questions

1. *What emotions might Dimitri be feeling when his dad and sister are fighting?*
2. *What early warning signs can you identify in the story?*
3. *What could Dimi do to feel safe when his family is fighting?*
4. *What types of people could Dimi talk with about his family's fighting and about how he feels when it happens?*

Dimitri's Problem – Part 2

Adapted from the Protective Behaviours program.

The next day at school Dimi couldn't stop thinking about the fight the night before. He hardly spoke to his friends as they played football before school started, and he was very quiet when the teacher came to the classroom for the first period. He just couldn't keep his mind on what he was doing, because he kept hearing his mum yelling and Voula crying, and thinking about all the other things from the night before.

At recess, Dimi went off by himself to the library. For a while he just hung around near the front desk, hoping that the library teacher, Mrs Stone, would talk to him. It was a while before she did.

"Hello Dimi", she said, hardly looking up from the pile of books she was sorting into piles. "Hi", answered Dimi glumly. "You look a bit flat", said Mrs Stone. "Is everything alright?" Dimi shrugged and kept his eyes on the floor. He could feel his stomach getting tight and his face feeling hot. "Yeah", he said. "I guess." "That doesn't sound very convincing." Mrs Stone stopped her work and frowned at him. "Are you sure everything's okay?"

Dimi shrugged again. He wanted to tell Mrs Stone about the fight, but suddenly he felt silly and didn't know what words to use. He was still trying to find the right way to begin when Mrs Stone let out a loud sigh and picked up a pile of books from her desk.

"Well", she said, her voice suddenly loud, "I'm very busy, Dimi. If you've got a problem you'd better tell me now because the bell's going to go any minute and we'll both be late."

Dimi's heart sank as he watched her go back to her books. "That's okay", he said in a small voice. "Everything's alright."

At lunchtime Dimi played cricket with some other kids from Grade Eight, but after a while he got sick of the game and started thinking about Voula and his dad again. After wandering off from the others, he decided to go and see if Mrs Allen, the manager of the school's canteen, had any jobs for him to do.

There was no-one else in the canteen. Even the parents who came to help out had left, since it was nearly the end of lunchtime and most kids had bought what they wanted.

"Hello Dimi", said Mrs Allen, sounding pleased to see him. "Hi." Dimi leaned against the counter. "How's things?" Dimi shrugged and kicked his foot against the counter. For a while he watched Mrs Allen wiping down the bench where the adults served kids their orders. "Mrs Allen ..." Dimi ignored the squirmy feeling in his stomach. "Do you ever fight with your kids?"

"Sometimes", answered Mrs Allen. "My eldest boy, Rod, can be a real handful. We have our moments." She stopped her cleaning for a moment and frowned at Dimi. "Been fighting with your mum and dad?"

Dimi shook his head, his eyes on the floor. "No. My sister has though. Last night she and Dad had a really bad fight." "Well, everybody fights with their parents, Dimi. It's part of growing up."

"This was a really bad fight", Dimi said, finally looking at Mrs Allen. "Even Mum was yelling. She never yells." "Well, sometimes we all lose our temper, Dimi. Don't get yourself all worried, now. They'll sort it out."

"I can't help worrying sometimes." Dimi felt his face getting hot and realised that Mrs Allen did not understand what he was talking about. "Sometimes I get scared that someone might get hurt, with all the fighting and stuff."

"Now, Dimi, I'm sure no-one's going to get hurt." Mrs Allen used the same tone of voice she sometimes used when younger kids got confused about what they could buy at the canteen. She had gone back to cleaning the bench. "You just have to let your sister sort things out with your parents. Leave them to it."

Dimi felt a sudden wave of disappointment flip-flop in his stomach, but he didn't say what he felt. Instead, he muttered good-bye and walked quickly out of the canteen and back to the cricket game.

That afternoon, after school, Dimi and Nick watched TV for a while, then decided to go out and play soccer on their nature strip. Because Nick was only little he wasn't very good at soccer, but Dimi was patient and knew that Nick was getting better the more they played together.

After they'd been playing for a while, they saw their neighbour, Mr Gyros, walking home from work. Mr Gyros was really nice. He'd let Dimi and Nick watch him working on his boat and his wife often gave them biscuits if she saw them in the street on the weekends.

Mr Gyros stopped and watched the boys kicking the ball for a while. "How are you today, Dimi?" Mr Gyros smiled at Nick. "How's things, Nick?" The boys both shrugged. Nick looked at his feet and Dimi rolled the soccerball around with his foot.

Mr Gyros frowned and after a moment said, "Why don't you come and look at the new paint I'm putting on the boat?"

Sitting in Mr Gyros' garage, Nick soon lost interest in the boat and soon he was kicking the soccerball out in the driveway. Mr Gyros watched while Dimi carefully went through his tacklebox, looking at the lures and wonderful bits and pieces he had collected over the years.

"You seem a bit glum today, Dimi." Dimi did not look up from the tackle-box. But after a moment he nodded. "Something on your mind?" Mr Gyros asked.

Mr Gyros waited a long time while Dimi sat in silence. Then Dimi answered. "Dad and Voula had a big fight last night. And Mum too. They were yelling and stuff."

"I see." Mr Gyros was quiet for a while too. "Did you feel upset about that?" Dimi nodded, feeling the old flip-flop in his stomach again. "I hate it when they fight like that."

"So, what did you do?" "At first I went into my room, but then ... I sort of got caught in it. Dad yelled at me, and I didn't even do anything. He was really screaming and Voula was going crazy back at him" Dimi hesitated, wondering whether he should tell Mr Gyros about Dad hitting Voula. His face felt hot and red. "Then I went outside and sat on the steps until it quietened down."

Mr Gyros drew a deep breath. "It's not nice when people fight. I used to get scared when my mum and dad used to fight."

Dimi looked at Mr Gyros for a long time. "I get scared when Dad hits Voula. I get really scared for me and Nick. Nick's only little and I get scared that Dad might hit him too and hurt him." He sighed and

started to kick his foot against the bench he was sitting on. "I don't know what to do when they fight like that."

Mr Gyros and Dimi had a long talk about what Dimi could do. Mr Gyros was able to give Dimi some suggestions of what Dimi could do when there was fighting at home. Dimi was very grateful for his help and he felt relieved that an adult he trusted knew about the problem and was there to help him to solve it.

Questions

1. *Of the adults Dimi spoke to, who do you think was the best person to be on Dimi's Safety Hand? Explain your answer.*
2. *What could Dimi have said or done when adults didn't listen to him or take seriously what he was saying?*
3. *What other types of people could Dimi talk with or put on his Safety Hand? (Remember, Safety Hand Members are trusted adults who are available, who will listen, believe us and take action, if needed).*
4. *What could Dimi do, with his family situation, to feel safe again?*
5. *How might Mr Gyros help Dimi to feel safe again?*

Remember:

- By talking with people we trust when we're feeling sad, angry, scared or confused, we can get the help we need.
- We can develop a Safety Hand of at least five adults we trust who are available, will listen, believe us and help us if we need their help.
- We should invite people to be on our Safety Hand, so they know all about their important job.
- We can approach our Safety Hand Members in person, by telephone or even via email, SMS or online.
- We need to make sure our Safety Hand Members know we are approaching them as a Safety Hand Member and we need to tell them exactly what the problem is.
- If Safety Hand Members aren't available, or if they don't listen, believe us, or take action to help us, we need to keep approaching other Safety Hand Members.
- We should only stop approaching Safety Hand Members for help when we're feeling safe again and our problem is solved.
- We need to make sure our Safety Hand Members are all able to do their important job. If someone isn't as good at helping us as we thought they might be, we need to find a new Safety Hand Member to replace them. We need to remember to invite our new Safety Hand Member to be on our Safety Hand too!