

Practice strategies for working with children with disability

Case study – Steph

Steph is 11 years old. She lives at home with her mum (Michelle), dad (Tim), and older brother (David).

Steph is friendly, confident and outgoing. She uses a wheelchair to get around and enjoys being physically active. She takes weekly dance classes with her best friend, Emily, and likes to play soccer at home with her father and brother.

Steph enjoys school, especially math class and her lunchtime dance club. But she also has a lot of regular medical appointments, which often take place during school hours.

Steph has a close group of friends at school who have always been very inclusive. But lately they've started to leave her out of activities. Steph needs the help of a School Services Officer to get from the classroom to the yard at lunchtime. Recently her friends told her that she couldn't be part of their dance club anymore because she takes too long to get there.

Steph often has friends over to visit but finds it hard to go to other people's houses – not all places are accessible. Michelle often has to stick around to help Steph out, which Steph finds embarrassing.

Steph and her brother David used to be best mates, but they've been fighting a lot lately. They're not playing soccer or video games together like they used to, and they're bickering over seemingly little things, which is getting on Michelle's nerves.

Michelle says that Steph has become increasingly sensitive about things that never used to bother her. She acts defiant when asked to help out around the house or get ready to go somewhere. These meltdowns and tantrums have been gradually increasing in frequency and are starting to wear the whole family down.

Tim, Steph's dad, works long hours and is rarely home. Steph receives six hours support from a Disability Support Worker each week. Michelle coordinates all of Steph's appointments, takes care of the family, and does some volunteer work on the side. Without Tim around, she is usually the one who cops the brunt of Steph's frustrations.

Michelle understands that Steph just wants to be independent and live her life like any other 11-year-old. She wants her to be happy but is tired of being the 'bad guy'.

Watch the clinician introduce herself and her role to Steph: <https://vimeo.com/725887268>