

Identifying Information

Client Name: Natalie Loftin
Age: 29 years old
Ethnicity: Caucasian
Educational Level: College graduate
Occupation: Administrative assistant

Intake Information

Natalie Loftin contacted the Marriage and Family Counseling Center due to concerns about her relationship with her boyfriend, Larry Watkins, over the past 6 months. She reported that she has been so upset that she hasn't been able to function at work, and her coworkers told her she needs to get some help.

When the intake worker asked her what she meant by "upset," Natalie stated that she felt so depressed and empty that she didn't think she could stand it. A friend of hers gave her the name of this agency since it has a sliding-scale fee structure. Natalie said she also was having financial difficulties and hoped her insurance would cover the cost of counseling. The intake worker assured her that the cost of sessions was based on the client's ability to pay and that if Natalie had insurance coverage, the cost would be minimal. Natalie agreed to come in for an initial interview the following week. Her case was assigned to you.

Initial Interview

You find Natalie restlessly moving around in the waiting area chewing on her fingernail and flipping through a magazine while she walks. She is a petite, well-groomed woman wearing a dark blue suit, a yellow blouse, and small heels. Her long, brown, curly hair is pulled back in a large clip, and she has applied a considerable amount of makeup.

You introduce yourself as the counselor and ask her to come with you to your office. Natalie readily agrees and begins talking as you walk down the hall.

"My friend, Denise, told me that this was a good place to come to talk to someone. Do you know Denise?" she asks.

"No, I'm afraid I don't, but even if I did, I couldn't tell you because everything we discuss here is confidential. We don't even tell anyone that someone is being seen by a counselor at this agency," you reply. "Won't you come in and have a seat?"

"Oh, I see. Well, I guess that's a good thing," Natalie responds. "What is your degree? I have a bachelor's degree in math and computer science."

"That's impressive," you respond. "My degree is in mental health counseling. All the counselors at this agency are master's level counselors, and we work with people who are attempting to cope with a variety of emotional issues. Everything we talk about is confidential, but I must tell you that if you tell me that you may harm yourself or someone else, I cannot keep that confidential and I must report that information to either the police or my supervisor. Do you understand that?" you ask.

Natalie thinks for a minute and then replies, "Yes, that makes sense. I haven't really thought about suicide this week. That's what you're talking about, isn't it?"

You decide to note that Natalie inferred that she has thought about suicide in the past but to wait before delving into that issue since it might be too much divulgence too fast for Natalie to handle. "Yes, maybe we could begin by you telling me why you decided to make an appointment."

"Okay. Well, I've been dating this guy, Larry—Larry Watkins—for about the last 6 months. He and I just seemed to have a whole lot in common, and I really thought this was going to turn into a permanent relationship. We just seemed to get along so well and, you know, after seeing each other for about a month, he moved in with me and it just seemed to be great. I just don't know what happened." Tears well up in Natalie's eyes, and she looks as if she's about to burst into tears.

"I see. You were living together for the past 5 months and everything seemed to be going well. Then what happened?" you inquire.

"Well, we got into this big argument about my parents. I mean it was a huge argument one night. We stayed up all night arguing, and in the morning, he just said he couldn't take it anymore and packed a bag and left."

"Okay. Did you ever argue before this?" you ask.

"Well, sometimes, usually over little things. One time I remember thinking I had some kind of love-hate relationship with Larry, but then things got better, and I just felt like this guy could really take care of me. But since the other night, I'm wondering what's wrong with me. This has been the sixth time I've been involved with someone and had the relationship just blow up in my face. I hate it and I hate myself when this happens." Natalie slumps down in her chair, and tears well up in her eyes again, but she doesn't actually cry.

"Okay, so you've had other relationships that have ended abruptly," you suggest.

"Yes, five other relationships that were serious. I guess I dated other boys in high school, but those don't really count. I just don't understand it."

"Can you tell me what you and Larry were arguing about the other night? You said it was about your parents," you acknowledge.

"Yes, you see, Larry doesn't like my parents or, at least, he thinks I'm too involved with my family. He got mad because I talked to my mother on the phone about the car accident I had a few weeks ago, and she just infuriated me because she refused to help me out. My car was totaled, and I really need to get another car, but I don't have enough money to get the one I want. My parents have plenty of money and could help me if they wanted, but my mother can be a real 'witch' sometimes. She said that they had already bought me two other cars, and they weren't going to buy me another one. I couldn't believe what a witch she was being. She can be crazy, I'm telling you. She had the nerve to suggest I need to get a better job where I could use my college education, but she doesn't realize how hard it is to get a job in the computer industry, and besides, I think she just hates me. Sometimes I think I hate her, too."

She continues, "So, I'm just telling Larry about this conversation, and he gets really angry and says I'm too dependent on my parents and that I still act like I'm a teenager and should let go of them since they always make me furious. He knows that the whole subject of my parents is a 'hot button' for me. I think he said that just to make me mad and he did. He knows what a temper I have! He made me so angry I thought I was going to explode. Actually, I did explode. I told him what an idiot I thought he was. Just because he doesn't have a relationship with his parents doesn't mean I shouldn't have one with my parents. It's weird—sometimes

I am so in love with Larry and other times I hate his guts. Is that the way it is for most people?" Natalie curiously inquires.

"I don't think it's unusual to have disagreements with people you love," you suggest. "How did the argument end?"

Natalie stares out the window for a moment and then says matter-of-factly, "He just said he couldn't take it anymore and went to the bedroom and packed a suitcase and left. I actually thought he was joking. I told him if he walked out the door, he'd be a stupid fool. And then when I realized he was serious, I begged him not to leave me, and he just shrugged his shoulders and said, 'Life is too short, Natalie; you are always running hot and cold. I just can't take it anymore.'"

"What do you think he meant by that statement?" you ask.

"Well, I think he's referring to the fact that I sometimes hate him and then, other times, I love him. It just seems too empty inside when he's not around. I wonder if it's all really worth it," Natalie responds.

"So, sometimes you feel really empty when you're not involved in a relationship. Is that right?" you ask.

"Maybe that's why I've had so many," Natalie ponders. "It seems like the times in between relationships are awful, like sitting in the bottom of a black hole. Nothing, there's just nothing worth living for. And I hate everyone and everything. But sometimes, I feel that way when I'm in a relationship, too. I don't know. It's very confusing to me." Natalie rubs her forehead and pulls her legs underneath her.

"How do you feel about yourself when you're in or out of a relationship?" you ask.

"That's simple. I usually hate myself when I'm not in a relationship. I think I'm stupid and ugly and can't do anything right. I feel that way when I'm in a relationship sometimes, too, but it comes and goes. Initially, when I first meet someone, I feel really good about myself, but then it gradually disappears."

"And when you're thinking you hate yourself, how does that make you feel?" you ask Natalie.

"Very down in the dumps and worthless and hopeless," Natalie replies. "Like I said before, sometimes I've been so depressed I've felt suicidal. Like I just want to end it all."

“Have you ever actually tried to hurt yourself?” you ask.

“A couple of times when I was a teenager, I scratched my wrists and a couple of times after I broke up with a boyfriend, but I haven’t done anything serious lately,” Natalie replies.

“Okay, can you make a contract with me that if you start feeling suicidal, you will not do anything before talking to me?” you inquire seriously.

“I think so,” Natalie states. “I’m sort of feeling more hopeful about things now that I’ve talked to you. Do you think you can help me figure all this stuff out?” Natalie asks pleadingly. “I’m just scared to death I’m going to be left alone for the rest of my life.”

“Natalie, I think I may be able to help you, but you have to make a commitment to counseling, and sometimes it may feel uncomfortable for you. I’d like you to think about whether or not you really want to get involved in counseling, and if you decide this is a good idea, call and make another appointment. Okay?”

“I’m pretty sure I need to get some help,” Natalie considers.

“Okay, but why don’t you think about it overnight, and if you are still sure tomorrow, you can call and make an appointment.”

“Okay, that will be all right,” Natalie sighs. “I guess this isn’t going to be easy.”

18.1-1 Describe Natalie’s presenting problem. Do you think this is her primary problem? Why or why not?

18.1-2 What are some of Natalie’s strengths?

18.1-3 What potential diagnoses would you want to rule out in this case?

18.1-4 What resources might be helpful for Natalie to access?

18.1-5 What is your preliminary diagnosis for Natalie?

Identifying Information

Client Names: Sherry Black and Kyle Monroe
Ages: Sherry, 25 years old; Kyle, 28 years old
Ethnicity: Caucasian
Marital Status: Cohabiting couple
Occupations: Sherry, airline flight attendant;
Kyle, operating room technician

Intake Information

Sherry Black contacted the Marriage and Family Counseling Center for assistance with a relationship that she is having with Kyle Monroe, her live-in boyfriend. Sherry is a flight attendant, and Kyle is an operating room (OR) technician at the local hospital.

Sherry told the intake worker that she and Kyle have been having increasing difficulty with their relationship due to Kyle's suspicious nature and constant questions about Sherry's loyalty to him. Sherry feels that Kyle has become overly possessive, and when she tries to talk to him about this issue, he states that her desire to be more independent is evidence that she can't be trusted and that she must be seeing someone else.

Sherry states that Kyle has become more and more suspicious of her whereabouts while she is flying and every phone call that she receives. Even though she has told Kyle he can listen in on the phone conversations, Kyle resents her accepting phone calls from anyone he doesn't personally know. In addition, he has told Sherry that her desire to get some help is just a way for her to get support when she leaves him.

Sherry states that his suspiciousness has "spilled over" to his job and is causing Kyle problems at work. For example, he feels that the OR nurses can't be trusted and that they may be trying to get him fired. He told Sherry that his friend Arnold at the hospital told him that the head OR nurse thought he was an excellent OR technician. Kyle felt that the comment meant that he wasn't as good as the nurses and he had to be careful about what he told the head nurse. The intake worker scheduled an appointment for the couple to come to the first interview together.

Initial Interview

Sherry and Kyle sit together on the couch in your office. You introduce yourself and explain to them that you provide counseling to couples who may be experiencing difficulties in their relationship. Kyle is very concerned about how this appointment will be reported on insurance forms and about issues of confidentiality. You explain that the appointment is confidential and that the agency operates on a sliding-scale fee. Kyle appears to be assessing you.

"What made you both decide to make an appointment for counseling?" you ask.

Sherry looks at Kyle and begins. "Kyle and I have been having some problems in our relationship," Sherry comments. "I think we care a lot about each other, but we've been getting into some big arguments lately." Kyle appears to be inspecting the office and your desk. You realize he's staring at the file with Sherry's name on it.

"Can you tell me what the arguments are about?" you ask. Kyle remains fixated on the file folder on your desk.

"Kyle seems to be having a hard time trusting me while I'm away at work," Sherry states. "You see, I am a flight attendant for Southern Light Airlines, but I fly locally and I'm always back in town each evening. So, I'm a little confused about why he thinks I'm playing around on him when I'm home every night."

Kyle grunts and continues to stare at the folder. Pointing to the folder on your desk, he asks, "What's that folder got in it?"

"Just the information that the intake worker got when Sherry called to make the appointment," you say.

"Wait a minute. Before we can go any further, you need to show me that folder."

"I'll be happy to show it to you at the end of the session," you remark. "Right now, I'd like to find out what you have been arguing about."

"Oh, no. I'm not giving you anything until I see what's in that folder," he insists.

Sherry blushes and says, "Kyle, I'm sure it's just basic information. Don't worry about it. It's nothing."

"Nothing? My personal life may be nothing to you, but it's my life, okay? It's bad enough that you tell everyone our business. Now it's in print!"

"Is this how the arguments go at home?" you comment. Sherry and Kyle both look at you and appear taken aback by your comment. You decide to gently reframe by stating, "Privacy seems to be a tense issue for you, Kyle, and Sherry doesn't seem to be so concerned."

Sherry quickly responds despite Kyle's glaring, "This is exactly the problem at home, only at home he's suspicious about my whereabouts and what I say to anyone."

Kyle leans back in the chair, nods, and says, "You've both already talked about this, haven't you? You don't even need me here, do you?"

Sherry sighs in resignation. "Do you see what I mean? Kyle doesn't trust anyone about anything!"

You realize that you have to establish some rapport or Kyle will leave. You say, "Kyle, this is the first time I've had the opportunity to talk with either of you, and I'd really like to get your perspective on how things are at home."

Kyle eyes you and then Sherry.

Sherry says, "Come on, Kyle. She's a counselor and wants to help."

Kyle looks pensive and begins hesitantly to discuss the relationship. "Well, as anybody can see, Sherry is a very attractive woman and flirty by nature. She's on that plane every day with all those businessmen and you can't tell me that they don't make moves on her. It all started when I picked her up after her Houston trip ..."

"Oh, God. Here we go again!" Sherry says with disdain.

"Will this help me understand the situation?" you comment.

"It sure will. It explains everything. Let me finish. I go to pick her up, and there she is bending over her purse at the baggage claim, and this idiot guy is standing there with her bags in his hands. It's quite obvious what's going on. Makes me sick to think about it."

Sherry says, "It was just a nice man trying to help me with my bags while I took out my claim stubs. I didn't even know his name. It was a 30-second interaction."

Kyle exclaims, "Bull! I saw how you looked at each other, and you were giggling away. It sure didn't look like 'nothing' to me."

Sherry sighs and throws her hands in the air in utter frustration. "This was one of our worst

arguments, and he brings it up every time we try to deal with things. He's so jealous of everything I do. He can't let it go!"

"Have your arguments ever become physical?" you question.

"No, except he once threw my carry-on bag out the door of the house, telling me never to come back."

You respond, "Okay, so the arguments focus on Kyle's worries about your commitment to the relationship, and you feel these worries are unfounded. Is that correct?"

They both nod. Sherry urges Kyle to tell you about the work situation. Kyle glares at you again and says, "That's not what we're here for. We're here to figure out what's wrong with our relationship. If you weren't messing around on me, we wouldn't have any problems. Then I wouldn't have to be so concerned about my job."

Sherry in utter exasperation stands up and says she's going out for some water. "Maybe this is enough for today." She leaves the room, with Kyle glaring after her.

In one last attempt to establish some rapport with Kyle, you say, "How is all of this making you feel, Kyle? It's pretty hard to talk about personal stuff with a stranger."

He says, "Sherry just needs to get her ducks in a row, and everything will be fine. How about giving me a look at that chart?"

You hand him the chart and say, "Really, Kyle, this just contains your names and address."

Sherry returns with a cup of water. "Where do we go from here?" she asks you.

"I'd like you to consider becoming involved with some counseling. I think it could be beneficial to you at this time. I'd like to start with six sessions and see if you feel your relationship is improving. How do you feel about coming in for six sessions?" you inquire of both of them.

Kyle shrugs his shoulders and says, "If you think it will help, I'm willing to do it."

Sherry nods her head enthusiastically and agrees.

"Okay, so we'll schedule an appointment for next week," you reply. "If you need to talk before the next appointment, here is my card. Call me and if I'm not available, I'll call you back as soon as possible."

18.3-1 Describe your perceptions of the presenting problem.

18.3-2 Do you think Kyle and Sherry will be able to maintain this relationship? Why or why not?

18.3-3 What other information would you like to gather about Kyle? Include additional questions you might like to pose to him as well as collateral information.

18.3-4 What is your preliminary diagnosis for Kyle?

18.3-5 What, if any, diagnoses are you considering for Sherry?
