

Case Study Client: “DOROTHY”

MEET DOROTHY!

Dorothy is a 32 year old mum. She has four children and looks tired and stressed. She contacted you about wanting to quit.

Dorothy's partner is Dave. He works as a labourer for the local construction company. Sometimes he has to go out of town with the work gang when they have a big job up the line, but usually he works in town.

Dave and Dorothy are both from the same region and, even though their families went to the same church when they were little, they had not really met until they were in their mid 20's. Their uncle and auntie had introduced them at a big family gathering. Those big gatherings still happen from time to time.

Dave and Dorothy have three children of their own aged 2, 4 and 6 . Dorothy has one older son too. It is a busy house, to say the least.

The older son, Johnny, is 16 and seems to come and go from the home. To date you have not really been able to work out what he does and you haven't had the chance to meet him.

Over the years Dorothy has got used to Johnny getting a good hiding from Dave, his step dad. After all, as Dave says, “My house, my rules. Do as I say, all of you, or bugger off!”

Dorothy says she worries about Johnny and the friends he hangs out with, but there is only so much she can do. Johnny's dad took off years ago and her new partner, Dave, does not seem to like Johnny.

The three younger children are typical busy little people, screaming and yelling, laughing and crying, running and sitting and sometimes hitting! And, like many little ones, they seem to each have a runny nose.

In your first and other visits you notice they seem to be always saying, "Mum, what's for tea?" "Mum, I'm hungry." "Mum, why can't we have some milk?" Their requests seem never ending.

The youngest of the three is covered in what looks like mosquito bites that have been scratched and got a bit infected. Maybe they're flea bites, but the poor wee thing is covered in them.

The three of them look like little ragamuffins, no shoes, no cardigans or sweaters, no clothes that seem to fit properly. Even on the cold days they have no sweaters and the house seems really cold and damp.

The kids think it is great that they all get to bunk down with Mum and Dad in the one bedroom. There are three little mattresses in the corner...well...sort of. Really it is more like three piles of old blankets forming three wee nests for the kids. There is nothing to show where Johnny would sleep if he was home – maybe on the old couch by the TV.

Dorothy sometimes seems quite on edge when she talks with you. It is as if she is afraid she is going to get caught! She says Dave smokes. Even though she has suggested he quit too, he says, "Who made you God? I can do what I want? Quitting is for weak people."

All Dave's friends smoke and Dorothy believes it's not just cigarettes. Dave is often glassy eyed and pretty stupid when he comes home some nights and then other nights he never comes home at all.

When he eventually does return, he's often in a really bad mood and won't eat. That's pretty odd for Dave as he likes to eat like a horse – even if there is not quite enough for everyone. His moods are all over the place after these all night sessions.

Dorothy's overheard Dave on the phone talking about deals and money and drops and stuff... she's not too sure what all that means, but it does not feel right.

Surprisingly, sometimes Dave has loads of money and lets her get some extra groceries, but usually there is little or no money at all. As Dave says, "I earn it, I own it. If you want money, get off your arse and get a job. And be thankful you've got me! I am a damn good catch for someone like you!"

How can Dorothy get a job with the little ones around especially now her mum can't visit?

Another thing that really, really bugs her is how controlling Dave is. It is as if he has all the power and all the control and she has none at all. Over the years he has made sure her friends do NOT come to the house. "They belong in their own bloody houses!" is what Dave says. "They're not welcome here – EVER!"

She used to go for a walk four mornings a week with some other mums, but Dave stopped that. She gets no exercise now – other than running around after three little ones.

Even Dorothy's own mum and sister aren't allowed to come around any more.

Dave has said, "Those leeches aren't welcome here. They fill you with stupid ideas that you can make something of yourself and as far as I am concerned you are pretty useless at most things. Even as a mother you're not that good. Look at Johnny...nothing to be proud of there!"

Dorothy just feels powerless, but the one thing she might be able to change is her smoking. After all, she has figured out that she is in charge of what she puts in her mouth, so she can stand up for herself with this...maybe.

She has tried to quit many times over the years and Dave has done nothing to help her. If anything, he has made such a fuss when she has tried to quit saying, "You get all proper and up yourself, as if you're God. A real snobby bit*ch. You're much nicer when you smoke!"

That lack of support makes quitting hard but she is determined this time.

Before Dorothy met Dave, she used to take inhalers for her asthma. She never really got bad asthma, but the inhalers certainly helped. Now there is no time and money to get to the doctor's office or to get the inhalers. She just wheezes her way through the winter and so far so good – no major attacks.

Thank heavens the kids don't get asthma. The house is so damp and stuffy it would be a perfect asthma den! She has been noticing a growing damp patch on the walls in the living room, so there must be a leak somewhere. Dave just says, "Well, fix it if you are that worried about it."

What has surprised you the most about Dorothy is how she refers to or talks about Dave. It is as if she's starting to open up and tell you something, but then she suddenly changes tack and smiles and says, "Oh well, I should be grateful. He's a pretty good catch." She has said this phrase so many times – it's as if she has to tell it to herself to remind herself.

The first time you visited Dorothy she had shorts on. A huge bruise on her upper leg looked really sore. It didn't look like the sort of bruise when you bump into a table – it seems really big and angry.

You also noticed on that visit that the top Dorothy was wearing was quite loose around her neck. When she bent down to pick up one of the kids, you could see a series of ugly bruises on her chest - round bruises, three in a line. You didn't get a clear view and didn't want to stare, but you were 100% sure those bruises were real and they were quite new. When you said you noticed bruises, Dorothy just laughed it off as being a clumsy fool when she was moving the garden chairs. She said she was always walking in to things.

Dorothy told you her sister Lucy thought Dave was a controlling bully. Dorothy explained that Lucy really never saw how lovely Dave could be. Besides, Lucy took medicine for bi-polar stuff. Lucy was either hyper-super-duper happy, wanting to do all sorts of wonderful things or she was crippled with misery and really depressed.

Once Lucy had told Dorothy that Dorothy seemed to suffer from a bit of depression too, but not half as bad as she did. Dorothy had laughed and said, "I have to remind myself that I am lucky to have Dave."

Lucy had said that the way Dorothy moped around sometimes, coupled with the fact that she had given up on her friends and family and basically locked herself away with the kids and Dave, was a clear indication she must be depressed. Lucy had told her these were all signs she had given up on wanting to be a whole person herself.

Lucy often said, "Where's my sister? You know, the happy one I used to have. Where's that person gone?"

Dorothy had also said to you, “You know, Lucy is really kind. When the health person said Nana was being neglected, Lucy took her in and cared for her. Everyone else in the family was ignoring Nana. She couldn’t look after herself and no one seemed to care because they were all too busy. Everyone was neglecting her. Not our Lucy though, Lucy helped. I think Lucy wants to help the world!”

As Dorothy said, “Lucy is one of those people who can advocate for herself. She stands on her own two feet and does lots. She takes her medicines the way she has to and belongs to a few self-help groups. She is really in to all that stuff.” “Even when she quit smoking she was really careful with all her medicines,” says Dorothy. “Dave thinks she is an absolute wing-nut, but she is my sister and I love her very much.”

At one point, Dorothy started to chat about how she dreaded the thought of having another baby. She said, “We just couldn’t do it. There’s no money. But, he’s so pushy about sex. I keep telling him, ‘No, not now. Wait till we know I won’t get pregnant’. But no, what he wants, he gets. He doesn’t care about me or what can happen.”

You were quite surprised when Dorothy said quietly, “You know what he said to me once? He said, ‘You frigid bitch. If you’re not careful I’ll get my mates over and show you how bad it can really get.’ Can you believe he would say that to me?” she said quietly.

Then, as if the flood gates had opened, she said, “One night he even raped me. My own husband! I was sound asleep and he came home drunk or high or on something. He pinned me down and raped me. The kids were asleep, thank God. But, oh well, he doesn’t act like that all the time. I should be grateful. He’s a pretty good catch really.”

There was a car door bang outside. Dorothy went white and started to visibly shake. One of the kids whispered, “It’s Dad!” The 2 year old started to cry.

Dorothy said, “Oh my God, oh my God! Tell him you are with the church collecting money or something! Don’t let him know who you are! Please don’t tell him what I said!”

While you were there, you did manage to get the following information:

Dorothy has smoked since she was 18.

She smokes when she is nervous and stressed. She also smokes around Dave.

She smokes about 30 smokes a day, but she is never too sure because Dave takes her smokes.

She has tried to quit so many times. But it is hard because Dave still smokes and doesn't like it when you she quits.

She has tried the cold turkey approach and never made it more that 36 hours. When she quits she finds it hard to concentrate and becomes restless.

In some ways, with everything that is going on with Dave, it has just been too darn hard to quit.

DOROTHY approaches Quit Day

Well, Dorothy did show up for her appointment. You had wondered if she'd attend, after her behaviour at her home, but she has.

Dorothy seems really committed and is happy to set the QUIT DATE and stick to it. She continues to be a bit fearful of her husband finding out she is trying to quit, but seems to show you that she is totally committed.

She has no idea how to make it work, except that for once in her life she wants to do something for herself.

Dorothy did not appear to be a strong person when you met her a few weeks back. She seemed as if her life was in chaos and her husband an awful bully. However, today she seems to be really determined.

You notice again that Dorothy has an enormous bruise on her jaw and red marks on her wrist. You mention to Dorothy that her wrist looks sore and her jaw looks painful. She said, "Oh yes, they are. It's very painful, but it has made me realise I have to quit and I will quit and nothing will stop me quitting." It seemed a bit of an odd answer, so you enquired about how things were going at home. Dorothy looked down towards the floor and said quietly, "They're OK."

You told Dorothy there was lots of support to help her quit and to help her with all sorts of issues. You offered her a list of the community support groups in case she needed other support down the road.

She seemed so committed at this appointment, as if something had really changed. Dorothy admitted she was still smoking quite heavily, but she was gearing up to quit.

She talked about upcoming events and said that her husband's brother was getting married, so the quit day has to be after the wedding in three weeks. She said she is going to try and have a few less ciggies everyday so that she is a bit more prepared for QUIT DAY. The stop smoking medicines you had talked to her about earlier were discussed again.

You couldn't know for sure, but Dorothy seemed fragile, but quietly determined. You praised her on her determination and reminded her of the next QUIT DAY appointment and then went through your usual 'getting ready for quit day' stuff.

Dorothy left seeming quite pleased with herself.

Quit Day came and went. Dorothy didn't show up. You called her and she didn't answer on three different occasions. When you finally reached her, she said she would come soon, but not for a few weeks.

On the phone, you both planned another QUIT DAY together and again she seemed determined. This time, Quit Day arrived and so did Dorothy. She had the younger kids with her and even her older son Johnny was there. He kept saying, "You can do it now, Mum! He's gone. You can do it!"

You didn't want to pry further than necessary, but you told Dorothy it was great to hear of all the support and asked her if she was OK.

She said quietly, "Yes."

Her CO readings showed she had a little less carbon monoxide in her system than previously, which was a good sign.

She had her stop smoking medicines with her, the ones you had both discussed together, and she seemed all set.

Her older son said, "Mum will be OK now. Dave, the dirt bag, has gone. He won't be back for a long time!"

You asked where he was and when he'd be back and Johnny said he was in prison at last! He'd not be back for a few years. Nan had come to stay.

At that point the little ones piped up that, "Nan made the coolest dinner with pasta and stuff. It looked really weird and it had lots of veggies, but it tasted so yummy."

Even Johnny seemed genuinely pleased with things. He went on to say that he hated it at home since Dave had moved in. He hated seeing his mum get hurt. He hated it so much that the last time, he took off up the road and called the cops.

Of course, Johnny had no idea of all the other things that Dave had been up to. Needless to say the police were happy to catch a person with a list as long as his own name for things he had been involved in. The cops arrived to see Dave whack Johnny's mum across the jaw. They arrested Dave. He was on remand and about to be locked away for years.

You glanced at Dorothy and saw a quiet smile...and you saw her shoulders move in what seemed like a gentle sigh of pure relief.

DOROTHY: After Quit Day

Dorothy arrived for every appointment. Johnny was in tow too. Even Johnny said he was going to quit and had cut down to show support for his mum.

Her weekly CO readings dropped dramatically when she stopped smoking. This gave Dorothy a massive boost in her confidence. Each week the CO reading was below 5ppm.

She was starting to walk with a bit more confidence and no longer stared at the floor when she spoke.

She said getting Dave out of her life has been just as good for her as getting smokes out of her life!

She attended her last post-quit meeting as a new woman. Her mum had gone back home, but Dorothy was settled in to a healthy routine with the kids. Johnny had taken over as the 'man of the house' and it seemed like all he had ever needed was to be loved and respected.

Dorothy said her Mum was so happy Dave was gone and was happy to help her go back to school and get some sort of qualification.

In the mean time, her Mum had suggested she did some work for a family friend as a care-giver for the elderly.

Dorothy had started doing one shift a weekend and Johnny was able to look after the little ones.

And her sister...well she just kept saying, "I have my sister back at last!"

It was all working.

Success!