



**ROWAN
HOUSE**
SOCIETY

BUILDING VIOLENCE FREE COMMUNITIES

MELODY: ROUTINE SAVES THE DAY

Melody* was no stranger to the staff at Rowan House Emergency Shelter having reached out for help twice before. Like many other women we see, she faced her own struggles with mental health disorders.

It is not uncommon for the women we see to suffer from mental health issues on top of the trauma of their abuse. The complexity of domestic abuse often leads to anxiety and depression, or, some women could have had mental health issues before they met their partner; couple that with domestic violence and an exacerbated level of mental health issues ensues.

Melody has a 4-year-old daughter named Abby*. The last time Melody came to Rowan House, she came without her daughter because she was dealing with active mental health issues and drug addiction. She really missed her daughter, so she spent a lot of time in the playroom; being near the other children brought her comfort.

By the time Melody came to stay with us for the third time, Abby's father had been granted full custody with additional support coming from his mother. Melody on the other hand, had limited access to Abby through visitation rights.

Consider for a moment that Abby's short life included witnessing domestic abuse, and, ultimately, the breakup of her family. Throw in one parent's mental health issues and we end up with a little girl who was struggling to cope while having to navigate around uncertain territory; a far cry from the stability that comes from a well-adjusted home with two loving and nurturing parents.

Gaby, who works in the Children's Program here at Rowan House, noticed that when Melody had Abby in her care, she was very strict with her and at the time, Gaby did not know why. It was during a regular meeting that Gaby learned that Melody was trying to get Abby to act her age. On further investigation, it turned out that Abby's Dad was

treating her like a baby, giving her many bottles a day, not encouraging her to use her words for anything that she wanted, and he insisted on putting her in diapers.

In addition to everything else going on between mom and dad, there was now a struggle between them about the way Abby was being parented. Abby was definitely caught in the middle and her behavior made that apparent; with all the milk Abby was drinking, she was severely constipated, she would complain loudly at bed time, and she was also very picky about the food when she was in the playroom. This behavior signaled to Gaby that she needed to step in and support Melody in her parenting skills.

"The best part though was that both Melody and Abby were a lot less stressed when they were together and the connection between mother and daughter had grown stronger."

Gaby asked Melody how she could support her and together they decided on making a Routine Chart that centered on food, hygiene, and bedtime. Melody and Abby were given creative license to design and personalize the chart with stickers. The chart was also shared with Abby's dad and grandmother, who were pleased to finally have guidelines on how to parent Abby.

Melody was very committed to sticking to the Routine Chart and as a result, Abby started being more open to trying new foods in the playroom, she no longer complained about getting ready for bed and went to sleep without a fuss. The best part though was that both Melody and Abby were a lot less stressed when they were together and the connection between mother and daughter had grown stronger.



Learn how you can make a difference, visit rowanhouse.ca