

# Acute Training Solutions

## Appropriate Adult - Case study

### Peter

Peter is aged 16 and has been detained by the police following a fire at an empty shop. Peter approached the fire crew who were fighting the blaze, seeming unduly interested in, and exited about the progress of the blaze. The fire officer alerted the police in attendance, who spoke to Peter and asked him to empty his pockets, the content of which included a box of matches. On being asked if these were what he used, Peter replied 'yes'. He was then arrested.

Peter is described as his mental age not matching his chronological age. He lived with his elderly aunt who is in poor health. He is now in Local Authority care. The police contact the out of hours number, requesting the attendance of an appropriate adult at the police station.

On arrival at the police station, the appropriate adult checks the custody record and notes that Peter's aunt had been informed of his arrest but, as yet, no solicitor had been called. Peter has been examined by the forensic physician, who has said that he is fit to be interviewed.

The appropriate adult interviews Peter on his own to explain Peter's rights to him and the appropriate adult's role at the police station. Initially Peter seems bewildered. He won't make eye contact and it's difficult to get through to him, but eventually he agrees to see the duty solicitor to discuss what happened that morning.

When the solicitor arrives, the appropriate adult advises her of his concerns about Peter's ability to understand what is happening. They agree to have a joint meeting with Peter after the solicitor has interviewed him alone. At the joint meeting, Peter says he wants to tell the police about the fire and the solicitor confirms she advised Peter to answer the police questions.

At the beginning of the interview, the investigating officer explains Peter's rights and the role of the appropriate adult and cautions Peter again. The appropriate adult asks Peter to explain his understanding of the caution in his own words. Peter says it means that he doesn't have to answer any questions but, if he does answer them, his answers will be recorded on the tape recorder so there is a record of what he says in case he has to go to court. He says when he answers questions he has to try very hard to remember and say what happened because, if he goes to court and then says something he doesn't say now, they might think he made it up.

Peter is then asked what he was doing near the fire. He starts to get very excited and says he had to set fire to the shop because it was contaminated and setting fire to it was the only way of getting rid of the contamination. Peter is asked how he started the fire. He begins to get very distressed and starts rocking backwards and forwards, saying that there is a lot of contamination in different places and you have to burn them down or the contamination will spread. The police want to question Peter about other fires that have recently been started in the neighbourhood, but at this point the appropriate adult intervenes and it is agreed that the interview should be terminated.

It is then decided that Peter should be subject to a full mental health assessment and the police contact the local criminal justice mental health liaison scheme so this can be arranged.

### Questions

1. What are you thinking?