

patch

A
Guide
For Professionals
Working With Adopters In Crisis

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1. The Start Of This Journey

The dawn of PATCH occurred when I became increasingly concerned about the issues facing families in adoption crisis. Families are breaking, and as an adoptee, adopter and a social worker I became frustrated by the additional challenges faced by families. Simply put adopters have faced criticism and shame and blame by the very professionals meant to be giving to support. This frustration was not purely about what parents were facing but also the lack of professional energy towards appropriate interventions.

Children who are adopted are mistreated and abused in the primary stages of their lives and expected to thrive within their forever family. This view is antiquated, and when families face crisis instead of receiving hand holding, empathy, partnership, and therapeutic interventions there is an inclination towards seeking child protection enquiries, overpowering control and judgemental treatment.

As someone adopted, albeit very different from my own children's situation I understand how difficult it is to navigate the world around them. However modern adoptees have experienced a huge amount of adversity, trauma and loss in their life already which makes it more and more tricky.

Tricky, can mean so much and this is considered on a different page, but don't underestimate tricky. Tricky can be cognitive, emotional, behavioural, neurological, physical and beyond.

So as someone who has adopted children who have experienced trauma, adversity and loss and beyond it is also tricky.

Tricky can mean so much as a parent and this is considered further on, but don't underestimate it. Tricky can be experiencing rejection, dealing with complex attachment issues, it can mean being attacked verbally and physically, it can mean loving and caring for someone who doesn't feel good enough to be loved and cared for which makes it a daily battle.

Then there is the consideration of when tricky means managing complex health needs, development delay and learning needs.

So, life is tricky for everyone, and then we add the additional factors in life such as relationships, wider family, financial responsibilities, health, work, and beyond.

As a social worker I have worked hard to ensure that families I work with have support, children are protected, and interventions are implemented where required. This isn't me professing to be a perfect social worker, but I tried, I worked hard, I absorbed as much learning as possible and reflected from day one to now. But being a social worker is also tricky, working with parents with complex tricky issues such as substance misuse, mental health, being in harmful relationships and other things. Working with addicts trying to bring change to ensure they could parent to a good enough standard, working with harmful people trying to get them to recognise their behaviour to make change to be good enough parents. Tricky situations meant sometimes dealing with adults in such crisis, that they lost sight of their child so big interventions were needed, and often it meant support and hand holding.

Admittedly perspectives within social work have changed since I started and I can positively reflect that there is a much more human focus now, but I digress.

So as a parent of adopted children who faced tricky situations, I reached out to network with other parents in similar situations. I wasn't having a good time, my relationship with my now ex-husband was souring, my support network exhausted, and my wellbeing dipped. I listened and read so many stories of parents in the same situation as me. Whilst it brought me community it made me terribly sad and angry. Some of the stories fitted a mould I had expected, however others didn't. I began reading more, and realised there was a huge issue. Families in crisis due to tricky overloaded situations were being blamed for not managing. My mind BLEW! It Exploded. I felt such anger, frustration and beyond but also something else.....pure fear. It made my heart race, my brain throb and my feet stamp.

I couldn't work it out, adopters were being blamed for not managing. It didn't work in my head, so I read, and researched and read and considered and reflected and questioned and round and round this went. I felt gaslighted by the world. I was adopted and tricky, my children were adopted and tricky and I was a social worker working with tricky people.

So, just to add context, I also failed massively in education, or if you want to put it a different way, education massively failed me! Learning has never been simple for me, with the added issue of being dyslexic. Now, I love learning and I love reflecting on learning and I also love to absorb information in my own unique and visual way.

I have also suffered some of my own traumas as do most people, but let's say I have some unique insight into things.

So back to my fear, anger and frustration, I decided I needed to throw a pebble into the ocean and make a wave, so I collected voices, and made a document and sent it out. Far and wide. It was received, read and considered by a high percentage of the VIP's in the world of adoption, social work, and beyond. This led to conversations, discussions, reflections and more. Sadly, though only a drop in the ocean and soon I became fearful of just being a pebble throwing gobshite. I decided though that was ok. As long as I kept going, kept throwing my stones and kept campaigning then that was good enough. Trauma became a big part of the journey. In my opinion, experiencing any trauma at any age can impact on a person, on their functioning, their emotions and beyond, but for a child the trauma hits the fan so much harder, and sticks for so much longer. Alcohol in pregnancy can lead to foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which can have a mild or severe impact on a child.

Neglect in early life can have significant consequences on a child's cognitive and neurological development and stress responses. Witnessing domestic abuse can have a long-term impact on mental health, self-worth and beyond.

So, the above are examples of the impact of trauma, but what about attachment, relationships and connection. Trauma experts I have communicated with have told me with confident certainty that trauma can be a barrier to children forming relationships with care givers, trauma blocks a child's ability to feel secure, safe and to trust someone. The child who received trauma may not want to then receive care, love security, safety, friendship, empathy, understanding affection.

So, a child has all these tricky reasons for not wanting to accept their forever family, and this is communicated through trickiness in one form or another. The adopter struggles with trickiness and wants help, they don't get it, they cannot manage, so the crisis starts. Then builds, and then social work professionals wade in and boom raise the HARM ALARM HORN. (Some social workers)

Child protection planning is often then instigated with no consideration of trauma history.

2. Trauma

Betsy De Thierry, Graham Music, Bessel Van Der Kolk, Dr Treisman are the experts whose words I have heard, and read and considered.

Childhood trauma, an experience in childhood that makes a child feel scared, terrified, hopeless, overwhelmed. The more the experiences the bigger the impact, the earlier in life the greater the bearing.

The event creates powerlessness/ fear; the feeling of safety is disrupted, and the adversity imprints on the child, like a footprint in the sand that never quite washes away.

The event or events change the projected path of development, differing from person to person. The child learns to live with fear, to develop coping strategies, to be prepared for fear. frequent, reoccurring incidents of feel extreme fear impacts on a child's whole self.

A child changes forever, their development, their brain, their memory, their emotions, their relationships, their ability to learn, and develop, and even their body changes, and leaves impact on physical health.

The more trauma they experience the more devastating the imprint made. The consequences of trauma unable to heal, or be progress or worked through or made sense of without treatment.

Children living in unpredictable environments develop their own way of navigating life. Some children become controlling, some charming, some independent, some hostile, some aggressive, and often towards the main care giver, as it isn't safe to depend, it isn't safe to be loved, or to allow someone that close.

Children do not just recover from situations, and cannot just move on, they can become stuck, and then re-triggered and respond in survival mode – fight, flight, freeze or fawn. Triggers are fast switches in their brain ready to react, and ready be dysregulated and respond.

Any situation that a child goes through that is highly stressful, scary and frightening and traumatic can impact on a child's WHOLE life, in the here and now, or down the line.

Such as -

- Physical abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse

- Parent/ carer using substances in a frequent, chaotic or unmanaged way
- Exposure to domestic abuse
- Neglect – emotional, physical, and beyond
- parent or carer having complex mental health
- (and, or and beyond)

I don't believe that any child goes through life unscathed, however going through highly stressful and traumatic situations more than once, more than a few times leaves an impression and can have a lasting and lifelong impact on future health and wellbeing.

In adulthood this can mean there will be a likelihood of health issues, mental health issues, and issues around a person's emotional functioning. For instance, there can be a high level of likelihood to use substances in a chronic way, increased likelihood of relationship issues, and there may be difficulties with worklessness.

Trauma Impacts on the Whole of a Child.

Brain Development
 Physical Health
 Cognition
 Emotions
 Relationships
 Mental Health
 Behaviour

Trauma In Pregnancy/ In Early Life 'May' Lead To Developmental Issues Such As –

ADHD	FASD	ASD
PDA	PTSD	Learning Disability
OCD	S&L	Delayed Development

*There is a line of thought that pathway to diagnosis is missing a step - the behaviour, the need, is actually the impact of trauma and not one of the above, and a different approach/ lens is required.

Physical Abuse	Trauma			Seeing Frightening And Scary Things
Parental Drug Problem	Victim Of Sexual Abuse	Neglect Of Basic Needs	Emotional Abuse	Being Exposed To Complex Parental Mental Health
Traumatic Loss/ Grief	Neglect Of Stimulation Affection and Care or Otherwise	Domestic Abuse	Being Exploited or Forced to do things	Neighbourhood Issues
Suffering Bullying to a Chronic Level	Being Left Out or Excluded	Feeling or Being Unsafe, or Uncared For	Significant Discrimination	Exposure To Parental Alcohol Issues
Poverty	Family Criminality	Sexual Abuse	Complex Health Issues	Conflict Between Parents/ Separated Parents
AND MORE				

Understanding of Self	POTENTIAL IMPACT			Drawn to Negative Social situations
Learning Difficulties in education	Regulation difficulties	Sleep	Poor decisions making	Poor Health
Low Self-Esteem/ Self-Worth	Self-Esteem	Self-Destructive Behaviour	Propensity to try/ substances	Poor Mental Health
Eating Problems	Increased Vulnerability	Isolation	Attachment Issues	Identity issues
Thinking and Cognitive skills	Poor interest in own wellbeing	Other - probably many other		

3. As adopters we see the best bits

As any parent does, the love story, the firsts, the joys, the shared moments, the laughter, the successes, the wins, the bumps, and blows. A parent's love believing being born in their heart was enough for the love story to last forever. It's a different journey, but nevertheless the love is real, its not built on foundations but more of a scaffolding built a stage at a time. Do not doubt the love.

High Anger & Aggression	But what is communicated to us is often these bits..			Sadness
Anxiousness	Difficulties Being Affectionate	Inability To Relax And Enjoy	Manipulative And Controlling Behaviour	High Stress
Food Issues	Reactive and Increased Sensitivity	Controlling Behaviour	Struggle With Change	Heightened Distress
Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn	Psychological manipulation	Sabotages	Concentration In School – Distracts Peers	Dissociation
Physically & Verbally Distant	Blocks carers careering	Feels unworthy	Violence	Lose Interest Easily
Difficulty Trusting	Sleep Issues	Communication Issues	Overconfident Masking Lack Of Confidence	Poor Cognitive Development
Sexual Interest At Young Age	Immune System Issues	Dishonest/ Lies	Poor Regulation	Competitive
Inability To Reflect Or Empathise	Detached – Attachment Issues	Poor Readiness To Learn	Inability To Recognise Risk/ Harm	Defensive
Impulse Control	Increased Risk Of Self-Harm	Inability To Consider or plan	Low Self-Esteem	Intense Sibling Rivalry
Trust Issues	Toxic Relationship With Siblings	Poor Self-Care	Use of Substances	Language Delay
Physical Health Issues	Constant Need - Attention	Head And Stomach Pain	Health issues	Shame And Guilt cycles
School Refusal	Trouble Focusing	Regression/ immaturity	Depression	Trouble Problem Solving
Hopelessness	Anti-social behaviour	Big noise and outbursts	Identity Issues	Cant stay on task
Out of control	Spiralling behaviour	Rejection	Poor understanding /risk - exploitation	Abuse

4. Impact on US as parents

This box has words in that adopters have CHOSEN to bring to light how adoption has impacted on them. This is not about the children, but about traversing the deficient system and managing the complex needs of our children all at the same time, and then being held responsible for the trauma reaction we didn't cause, which blows our lives to shreds.

Sad Painful	Life Shattering	Secondary Trauma
Frightening	Threatened	Extreme Parenting
Unimaginable	Prison Guard	Heartbreaking
Cortisol Levels Effected	Cruel	Traumatic
Lonely	Never Ending	Soul Destroying
Misunderstood	Tragic	Abusive
Misheard	Never Ending	Gob-Smacking
Constant Fight/ Flight	Life Destroying	Impossible
Criticized	Warfare	Scapegoat
Impossible	Blamed/ Shamed	Love And War
Powerless	Devastating Destruction	Isolating
Tortured	Jaw Dropping	Reputation Trashing
Catastrophic	Life Altering	Frightening
Relentless	Tragic	Unimaginable

5. Adopters views

Adopters were asked to describe the situation they were in when they asked for help, and these were some of the answers provided -

Desperate – burnout	cruel and unsupportive
Extreme desperate	living hell
struggle, complicated, harmful	Desperate, unsafe

Adopters were asked if they felt there were barriers to accessing the right support and these are some of the answers –

- Not enough money for the recommended therapy and support
- too many, they refused to provide any
- yes, **so** I had to latch on to what I could
- this was never offered
- we got dismissed and ignored, and given poor advice
- too many, lack of understanding, lack of action, poor trauma knowledge, parent blaming

When asked what the positive outcome of support was some adopters stated -

- *ASF funding for specialist trauma therapy and support for child
- * its been awful
- *eventually there was a positive outcome but this was only after threatening legal action
- *non
- *no only negative ones
- *no positive outcomes, only negative ones

Adopters were asked to share one thing that stood out from the practise they received from RAA/LA, and some of those answers were -

- *They didn't understand desperation. They didn't believe.
- *there was no acceptance of the complexity of parenting a child with complex needs
- *lack of honesty
- *they worked with us without actually working with us, it felt like they were a secret society
- *destroyed my family, my child's future

Adopters were informed on some of the specific professional standards and asked if they felt these standards were met by the RAA/ LA when they were working with them. Some of the answers as follows -

Work in partnership with people to promote their wellbeing and achieve best outcomes, recognising them as experts in their own lives.	Recognise and use responsibly, the power and authority I have when working with people, ensuring that my interventions are always necessary, the least intrusive, proportionate, and in people's best interests.	Be open, honest, reliable and fair.
Respect and maintain people's dignity and privacy.	Practise in ways that demonstrate empathy, perseverance, authority, professional confidence and capability, working with people to enable full participation in discussions and decision making	Actively listen to understand people, using a range of appropriate communication methods to build relationships.

- Open and honest but not reliable and fair, and no to the rest.
- No too all, although social worker has built a good relationship with child
- social workers are burnt out, and this was evident, some were excellent/ some just were not
- the practise was shameful, and they had no idea of what was going on.
- none of the standards were met, no relationship with us, no communication and they worked against the child's best interests
- no, none of these were met,

Adopters were asked what would make things better for families?

- Be honest and not blame
- Non-judgemental support, transparency before adoption, thorough assess child's before adoption, comprehensive support package. Believe them.
- actually build relationships and understanding, actually for there to be joined up working and communication needs to be clear, honest and consistent.
- Actually listen and hear us
- stop being secretive, overhaul the system, be honest and direct.
- listen, provide specialist support, and stop ignoring the facts and vilifying adopters

6. POLICY OR MODEL

With most Local Authority's there is a model used to guide social work practise. For instance, signs of safety, systemic practise, family safeguarding. Social work models as noted below determine, guide and highlight critical components to working with children and their families -

Family Safeguarding Model -

- Workers who are kind and understand your family's needs
- People who take time to listen, who are focused on keeping families together
- A team who works with you and talks to each other so you don't have to repeat yourself
- Specialists who are available to support the problems your family have when you need them
- Staff who recognise what you and your family do well and support you to succeed

Signs Of Safety -

- Balancing safety and risk – by recognising protective factors and strengths where appropriate
- Being child friendly and communicating clearly in a manner that everyone involved can understand
- Working in partnership with families and external agencies
- Viewing parents and children as experts in their own lives
- Being clear, open and honest, and looking for exceptions to challenge and co-develop plans for the future.

Systemic Practise -

- Interconnectedness – understanding that individual behaviour is influenced by the wider environment, family and support networks.
- Relational dynamics – recognising how relationships between people can affect how they interact with one another and their environment.
- Self-determination – acknowledging that individuals have the capacity to make decisions that will affect their circumstances.
- Feedback loops – realising how actions and interventions can have an impact on the future of a family or system.

The reality is though often social workers and managers know their own deadlines, and their own policies, and lots about confidentiality, but they do not understand trauma, adoption, and often their own social work models, during my time as an adopter and as a social worker I have heard some awful comments, and adopters have reported some ridiculous statements made by social workers -

- Why did they adopt?
- Context is not always needed?
- They are just kids
- You need to relax your boundaries
- Your child needs firm boundaries
- a parenting course is needed
- Asking for s20 is causing emotional harm
- Just persevere, it will sort itself out
- Eventually they will attach
- All siblings fight
- Kids always hit their parents
- They are just being teenagers

So what I am seeing, and I am hearing is that as we are struggling and as we are in crisis, then we should be blamed, blamed for signing up for something that is too hard, failing children as we cannot manage and being shamed for not being good enough.

So these models, and guides, are they meaningless and make no difference to practice? When we say one thing and they say another, yet because they are the social worker their view is accepted and ours isn't. Bias and fair practise? Respect and Autonomy? When a parent who has reached crisis who reaches out and gets told it's because they are not good enough? They have rights and powers to dismiss us, to belittle our experience, to blame and shame us, but yet they are the ones with the professional models of practise.

Where is the policy and guide for dealing with adoption crisis?

There is homeless policy, dangerous dog policy, exploitation guides, specific support for children with disabilities, and teams created to work with children who are offending, but what about the one where the parents are adopters, and the children are traumatised, and have delayed development in one way or another? Nope there isn't one.

7. WHAT WE WANT?

Work within the standards

The standards are not just words, working with parents in crisis, and children in survival mode needs to be carried out carefully and sensitively – these are not just words -

Value, respect, partnership, honesty, empathy, listening, accountability, reflective, anti-discriminate and non-bias.

Trauma – impact mapping.

Many adopted children will have experienced terrifying and injuring wounds that remain invisible in the subconscious and the body and will be expressed through behaviour and emotions at different time periods as the child develops and as stressors occur.

During permanence planning a psychologist should consider the child's history and consider what difficulties a child with that history of trauma 'may' have and consider areas of what support/ styles of parenting/ and interventions may support the child's future development. This will map out a plan, which can be used for decision making around permanence regardless of what the plan is – SGO, long term fostering, or adoption. Simply put, children need treatment to recover and without it we are ignoring/ minimising the trauma they experienced, and making assumptions that they can heal from positive parenting and love alone.

Understand TRAUMA

What is it, what does it mean, what impact does it have, how is it treated. Training for social worker and adopters. What it does to the body, the brain, the world around, and how it is to parent a child with trauma history.

Transparency & honesty

According to the people who have contributed to this project there is a significant lack of transparency when information is shared with adopters. This results in adopters feeling out of their depth and struggling with multiple issues that could have been discussed openly and planned for. (*Impact Mapping)

Parents want more information, more details, and more expert views. This should be balanced with the positive but there should be no hidden information.

The Expert on The Child Is The Parent!

Regardless of the journey of the child the parent is the expert. And they need to be considered as the expert. They are the one who knows them intricately. Professionals should build partnership with parents, involving them, consulting them and given them autonomy.

Listen, hear, reflect and be present

Parental blame is oppressive, and the child's behaviour is often down to early life trauma. We are often the victims of the behaviour and often as behaviour is trauma and attachment related the trigger of the behaviour through no fault of our own.

Treatment sooner rather than later

The trauma suffered in early life can lead to dramatic long-lasting effects on the brain, the child's overall development, including physical health, brain development, behaviour, relationships, mental health and emotions. Attachments to caregivers can become triggering, unhealthy, the focus of the child's world and difficult. To keep the family together there should not be a six-month period of assessments to get to the ASF application, to then be able to source the right support. Treatment early doors means there is a possibility of stabilising and

Keeping the family together.

The network dilutes, the option(s) for support disperses. Respite helps repair, and gives parents an opportunity to reconfigure the dynamics, and break destructive cyclical behaviour. Respite is cheaper than a child entering care.

- o Parenting a child with trauma related issues etc is exhausting. Usually lots of conflict, lots of control from the child, push and pull. Parents need time to breathe.

It is cheaper and healthier than disruption and if all other resources are not available then it should be provided.

- o The child needs a break from their behaviour too. Parents get the worst of them, letting the children have some time away can stop the repetitive nature of push and pull and may help strengthen relationships, break cycles or build bonds. This also gives children a break from their cycle of shame.

Do Not Send Us on Parenting Courses!

We cannot implement new parenting strategies in crisis, we cannot learn new things when we are exhausted and overwhelmed and in secondary trauma. So please do not make

suggestions of parenting courses. We need expert advice based on a holistic view of where the family is at.

Children's Advocate/ listen to them

During assessments (ASF/ Safeguarding) or during crisis there needs to be named person who offers to speak to the child and get their views, wishes and feelings, not just to capture information but to ensure the child has an avenue of support, even if this is just someone to sit and colour with. Do not keep sending them different people, check what their words mean, do just interpret them how you wish to, ask them what it means.

Crisis and Safeguarding

When reaching crisis, a lot of families have felt workers have been judgemental, cold, ill-informed, inadequate, and acted inappropriately. A lot of families have felt their stories have been misrepresented or that professionals have lied. This also impacts on wider professional views who often respond to the social worker more favourably. Each family has experienced a different reaction to their crisis, this is confusing, unfair, and misleading. Throughout the UK there are different models of supporting families where there is a welfare issue or child protection matter.

Strengthening families, risk sensible, signs of safety etc. LAs are trying to work with 'normal' families in a more positive strength-based way to support change and keep families together. SO why are adopted families facing such blame and condemnation. There needs to be a movement from parental blame to strengthening and working 'with' not doing 'to' adopted families, to try and keep them together in one way or another.

Protocols At A National Level

There needs to be a national protocol to ensure all adopters are treated appropriately and proportionately, this is not to be dismissive of any safeguarding issues but to clearly ensure that the history and the wellbeing of the family is considered. There is so many differences noted between different LA's and RAA's.

Crisis Panel with a trauma expert

Crisis panels should be formed with PAS, Safeguarding SW, Trauma expert, and a person with lived experience who can work alongside RAA's and LAs to inform working and planning. This can be held like a strategy discussion, where professionals all have input and rather than plan next steps to safeguard plan next steps to support the family.

Named Lead Worker.

There needs to be a named allocated specialist working with families facing adoption crisis, who are trauma informed, have spent time with adopters who have lived experience and who understand each side of the dice and can advise from a position of understanding.

Better Joined Up Working

Again, there need to be better communication between Safeguarding (Children's social care – duty and assessment teams) and Post Adoption Support (RAA's) and they need to work collaboratively with each other. There is a gap, which is unhelpful, confusing and misleading. And it means stressed parents have to constantly repeat themselves. This is not to exclude parents, there needs to be transparency and the parents need to be considered as the experts on their children.

Being an adopter can feel impossible and blaming us for the not managing the often unmanageable is unhelpful at best and oppressive and harmful at worst. 'The level of terror that can be felt by families who live 24/7 with unpredictable behaviour and emotional dysregulation can be significant. This needs validating, sometimes with words and sometimes with a space to cry and be heard' (Betsy De Thierry).

Parenting From A Distance.

All parents need a break, the network dilutes, the options for support are limited, and respite options should be exhausted before the family head further into crisis. Parenting a child with trauma related issues etc is exhausting. Usually lots of conflict, violence, abuse and lots of control from the child, push and pull. Parents need time to breathe. It is cheaper and healthier than disruption and if all other resources are not available then it should be provided.

Disruption Is not The Same As Relinquish.

Facing crisis, using S20 surely does not always have to be giving your child up.

- o Love is love, regardless of where it started and how it started, not being able to manage abuse from your child does not mean your child leaves your heart. Why cannot parents parent from a distance and stay connected, linked and still a family, surely better for everyone.

- o There does have to be a focus on the child's wishes and feelings, but repair work should be the part of any plan, reconciliation should be a focus for professionals even if the child and parent cannot live under the same roof. Adopted adults need parents too.

Trauma Training – Impact On The Child’s Development

Professionals in health, education, social work, police to be trained around the impact of trauma so that there is understanding and consideration when dealing with a child whose development has been impaired. The training should be delivered at a national level to show understanding around the life of the whole family.

More Recognition Around Child To Parent Violence / Emotional Abuse From Child To Parent.

This is not just around adoption, but this is an ever-growing issue that needs to be better dealt with. Many parents suffer significant trauma from being attacked and this has significant circumstances on parents’ ability to keep being able to manage.

Data

How many parents are experiencing challenge, adversity, and crisis? Surely this needs to be part of the picture to inform practise and move adoption forward.

Child Being Beyond Parental Control (S31 1989)

Many Local Authorities are using the Law to bring ‘disrupted’ children and often their siblings into care. If a child is beyond parental control and they have suffered early life trauma and the child has not received formal treatment or therapy that has had any level of success is this a fair and appropriate use of the law. Parenting an adopted child can feel like being the victim of an abusive relationship with your child as the perpetrator. The use of this section of the Law needs to be more considered when working with families were there is a history of significant early life trauma.

8. VOICES OF ADOPTERS –

Taken from the Jarred Reality of Adoption compiled in March 2023.

Louise -

My children suffered varying degrees of significant heart-breaking, life-threatening physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect (one of my children is lucky to be alive given the extent of broken bones received at six months old, and the purposeful burns made to his body), all of which has been documented. Hence, they live in fight or flight mode with attachment difficulties, and our home is more often than not like a war zone, as one child kicks off and the other two react with verbal and physical abuse against me and each other: it is not their fault, it is how their brains work. I was never equipped to manage this level of behaviour. I have believed for years that I am failing, that I am not good enough, but I have come to realise that it is the adoption system that has failed: it is the system that is not good enough. Emotionally the cost is unbearable, and nothing is helping. I have been battered by my children emotionally and physically, they try and control my every move, and sabotage the positive steps I take. So, what do I do other than live with the unliveable, the trauma and disruption that I must face on a daily basis. I lie awake each night feeling guilty for not parenting in the 'right way', for being too exhausted to manage, for feeling inadequate – I don't even recognise myself as the person who went through the adoption process with so much confidence and hope. As siblings they also suffer some level of trauma from each other. I see the look of adoration in the eyes of the youngest sibling for his brother, who hurts him emotionally and physically. I constantly worry about the confusion this causes to that young child, and the impact it is having on his development. Nobody sees the reality, understands the complexity, the trauma, the intensity, and the pain, but they always question the love and the family makeup. Do we love each other despite everything, despite not being biologically related? My answer to that is YES, YES, YES.

Sarah

I, along with other adopters facing a failed or 'disrupted' adoption, will never get over the total injustice, disrespect and callous actions by our respective Social Services departments and staff that have continuously rocked our integrity and damaged our wellbeing and very souls forever. Adopters are not responsible for the unresolved trauma and developmental issues that our children experienced prior to being placed with us and yet we are left, unsupported or at best, fighting for limited resources to help us. Trauma training is not part of the teacher training syllabus so what hope is there when the establishments taking care of our children are not trauma and adoption aware? This must be improved upon! Adoptive parents are the most engaged, caring, inquisitive and vocal of parents who fight hard for their children from day one and we often feel abandoned and unsupported from the day of formal adoption. Our lives change forever and hopes and dreams sometimes evaporate along with deterioration in our mental health and relationships with our partners, families and employers.

Jayne

Adoption breakdown is not failure to love or try to do your best for the child. Adoption breakdown is not abandonment, lack of parenting skills, or neglect. Adoption breakdown is in the sad reality that many hundreds of families up and down the country face each year due to the trauma that their children have gone through by being separated from their birth families and their experiences before adoption. This is the reality of modern adoption in the UK. The truth is, some of these children cannot cope with normal family life; social services promise the world and then disappear when the adoption order is granted, only reappearing when we are desperate for help and can take no more of the abuse, stealing, lying, violence etc that our children subject us to daily. Are social services reappearing to help us, offer us respite or therapy? No! Quite the opposite in fact. The same service that gave us these children with promises of support are now here to accuse us of failure, bad parenting, and abuse. They may even threaten to take our other children and make sure we lose our jobs if we work with children. Some of us start to wonder if our children's birth families were targeted unnecessarily, such is the feeling of being attacked and the lack of trust in social services. Most people who adopt are professional, loving, caring people who want to make a difference to children's lives - the sad reality is that the difference that is made to our lives at the hands of social services is often irreversible, and the children end up back in the system that we tried to save them from in the first place. The answer is honesty at the outset, some children need more support than a family can give - better to keep these children with therapeutic foster carers. And for those children who can be adopted safely, continue to support the family throughout their child's life into adulthood - the cost will be nothing compared to a lifetime of public funds and the cycle continuing down the generations if the adoption breaks down. Stop demonising adoptive parents when adoptions break down - we are finding each other in this modern age of the internet and sharing our stories which are worryingly similar and offering each other support and we refuse to continue being blamed and shamed.

Diana

People go into adoption for many reasons but ultimately the outcome they hope for is to give a child a forever home. However, the sad reality is that disruptions both pre & post adoptions are on the increase. What has become clear with time is that the LA's understanding of a child's early trauma is not fully understood and plans for long term support of the child who is placed for adoption is not taken into consideration. When adopters ask for help for their adopted child, it is all too common for such requests to be rejected/dismissed. The LA & RAA are disjointed and don't work together & trying to get ASF funding is a lengthy process which in some cases is abused by the LA using funds because they can, rather than because they need to. Adopters are scape goats for disruptions, yet disruptions are the last resort and only come about when adopters are at the end of their tether (physical & mental well-being seriously impacted & in some cases adult relationships destroyed) as all requests for help from the LA have been ignored. Children who are

placed for adoption have experienced more trauma than most people experience in a lifetime. They need professional help & support throughout their childhood and into adult life to process this, yet adopters are expected to provide this without the necessary knowledge and skill whilst also living in what would be considered a war zone. The number of disruptions of children in Foster Care is also on the increase. Foster Carers are paid, receive significantly more help & professional support than adopters or guardians, in a timelier manner, yet their names are not dragged through mud when they disrupt like adopters are. We tried to work with a LA for a year before disrupting, but they chose not to listen when we asked for help. We were blamed both verbally and in writing. Yet it was only when our complaint was investigated by an Independent Social Worker and Investigating Officer that the extent of the failing by the LA came to light with a Social Worker playing "God", breaching multiple policies and procedures and basically doing whatever they wanted. The evidence we provided was significant which meant the LA's option for deniability was short lived but there is little evidence that measures have been put in place to prevent such failure happening again which puts other adoption placements at risk.

My dear children,

The weight of human imperfections has fallen heavily upon your shoulders, and my heart aches knowing you've had to endure pain and loss that no one should. But amidst it all, my greatest hope is that these hardships don't define who you are.

I'm constantly amazed by the hope and love that shines in your eyes, like a vibrant kaleidoscope reflecting a myriad of emotions. Your journey through anger and love, hope and sadness, is like a whirlwind, yet your resilience astounds me.

I've tried tirelessly to rebuild, staring at the painted picture on the wall—a depiction of a love so powerful it should bind us together. But the weight is too much for me to bear alone. I wanted more for you, for us. I wanted you to not just survive, but to thrive beyond these trials.

The guilt I carry shadows me like a dark cloud, a reminder of my shortcomings. Yet, there's a part of me that refuses to be consumed by it, pushing past the clouds and yearning for more than broken fragments of what could have been.

You may feel like distant stars in another universe but know that each step forward is a testament to your strength. Your faces may not betray the pain you carry, but I see it, and I feel it too. If love alone could mend our wounds, we would have found a way.

If only we had.....

Love Your Mum

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