

## **Child To Parent (And Sibling) Violence And Abuse Due To Early Life Trauma And Attachment Disorder**

**By Sian Cooper**

For anyone who reads this story, I would ask that you consider as you are reading, what would happen if I was not talking about a child. If I was talking about an abusive partner or parent or other adult living in the same house. If my abuser was over 18, there would be support for me to move to a safe place, counselling, therapy, assistance to escape the situation and help for me to have a new life away from my abuser. But...my abuser is not an adult. He is a child. So...to the professionals involved in our story, it did not matter that as he got older, he became much stronger than me, it did not matter that he is capable of doing some real damage, it didn't even matter that his abuse was also aimed at his younger sister. To them the only thing that matters is that he is under 18 and he was our responsibility and therefore we were left living with our abusive son and living in crisis for years.

Myself and my husband adopted 2 children in 2010 and they are now teenagers.

The eldest (our son) spent the first year of his life living with his birth mother who was a drug user and the victim of domestic violence from the birth dad during this time and whilst she was pregnant.

Due to these Early Life Traumas (ELT) and ultimately, the separation from his birth mother (no matter how necessary) which has caused Attachment Disorder (AD), our son will always have challenges in forming attachments (especially with those who are closest to him) and will reject and fight back (literally) anyone who tries to love and care for him.

Our son has therefore always responded to our attempts to love and parent him with rejection, violence and abuse. This presented as follows **to an extreme that went way above any 'typical child behaviour'**:

- From the age of 2 years (at the very start of the adoption), behaviours included biting, kicking, screaming, pulling hair, . Example- If we grabbed the hood of his jacket to stop him walking out in front of a car, he would “see red” and kick us and scream at us and bite us.
- From around 3 years old, as well as the behaviour targeted at us as his parents, he also became very manipulative towards his sister and would often hurt her to get what he wanted.
- As he got older, the violent outbursts and behaviours towards us and his sister became worse and more frequent and the events that triggered these behaviours became more minor and it became impossible to control him.
- He has threatened us with knives, thrown glasses (and anything else within reach), broken his bedroom door. I've lost count of the times I've had to sit in his bedroom next to his bedroom door with a duvet over my head while he threw things at me and screamed horrible abuse at me.
- From around the age of 12 years, his abusive behaviours towards both us and his sister evolved quite significantly. As well as the physical abuse, there was a definite increase in other kinds of abuse. Some examples are stealing, coercive control, vaping and smoking cannabis in the house, destruction of property, bullying, extreme emotional blackmail, verbal abuse, constant put downs, making us feel bad about ourselves which wore us down so he would be more in control, verbal and physical threats, false accusations, constant lies, gas-lighting and many more.
- Other teenage behaviours include drug abuse, shoplifting, self-harm, truanting, going missing over night so we did not know where he was, who he was with or what he was doing (or even if he was dead or alive).

As the abuse evolved, so did the measures we had to put in place. By the time he was 13 these measures were such that it was as if we were all living in a secure unit. Despite these measures, we

were living in constant fear of what he would do next and we were constantly treading on eggshells so as not to upset him and trigger an aggressive outburst.

These measures were as follows:

- We had a code lock on the door to our study and locked away all our knives and anything else that could be used as a weapon, any cash, any important documents (these were at risk of being destroyed or used for manipulation tactics).
- Both ourselves and his sister had a lock on our bedroom doors in order to feel safe when in the room and to keep him from destroying or stealing our things when out of the room.
- We had a safety plan in place that meant we would call the police when he started to become physically aggressive or threatening. The police were called at least once a month (on average).
- We had exhausted all so called 'support' from Social Services (the 'support' consisted almost entirely of telling us how to 'be better parents' and therefore made us feel we were doing something wrong and that it was therefore our fault).
- At the age of 15, he took his false accusations to another level and called the police and accused me of assault. I was arrested and I spent the night in a police cell. I could have lost my job and definitely would have lost my job if he did this again.
- We realised that this meant that we could no longer keep him or his sister safe due to us being unable to call the police when he became physically aggressive because of the risk of him making false accusations again.
- At this point, I had to start locking myself in the living room whenever my son was in the house. My husband couldn't go out as it would mean I was alone in the house with both the children and I would have no way to protect them or myself if he became physically aggressive.
- We made the heart-breaking decision that it would be best for him and his sister if he moved out of our home. This process involves signing a Section 20 to say that our son was beyond parental control and that we could therefore no longer care for him (or keep him safe). This process was unnecessarily traumatic for him and for us because of the way the system works. We essentially had to make him homeless before Social Services would find

him a placement. Our son is now living in foster care and is much more settled. We are still parenting him “from a distance” as he is just 10 minutes away and we are still very much involved in his life.

Although, this was the hardest decision we’ve ever had to make, I knew we couldn’t carry on living as we were because it was destroying the lives of both our children (especially our son who has struggled to live with us as his parents because of the conditions he has which mean that he actually feels unsafe and insecure trying to fit into a family environment where he doesn’t feel he belongs).

There are just a few additional points I would like to make:

- We were not told about our sons ELT and AD until we had spent years being taken down several other avenues by various services. These included having our parenting skills questioned, being sent on parenting courses and generally being blamed for our son’s challenges. So you can imagine how confused we were when we put the training into practice and our son’s behaviour became worse because the more we tried to love and care for him, the more aggressive and abusive he became. Amongst this, he had assessments for Autism and ADHD that took 3 years in total but no diagnosis was made and CAMHS referred us to the post adoption service that we’d already been dealing with for years who’s only offer of support was to send us on parenting courses.
- We were in crisis for years and the only help we seemed to get was to be told how to ‘be better parents’ when in reality trying to be loving parents only made him feel more insecure and unsafe because his brain has been programmed not to accept this love due to his ELT and AD.
- It is often the case that children with these conditions display the majority of their behaviours within the home and often are observed in other settings (where they can put on a mask) as being polite, confident and friendly (especially to adults). This makes it harder for adopters as it means they are often not listened to and not believed when they are describing their child’s behaviours within their family home because such behaviours are not seen elsewhere.

- Although there is a reason for my son's behaviour and I do not blame him for it, this does NOT change how mentally, emotionally and physically exhausting it is for parents who are trying to care for a child with these needs.
- AD and ELT do not come with an official diagnosis and are therefore NOT recognised in the same way as someone with a learning disability associated with challenging behaviours or conditions such as ADHD. Therefore, children with AD and ELT (and their families) do not get the support they need as they would if they had a learning disability or ADHD diagnosis.
- Even the support for children with a diagnosis is not enough for them and their families but for children with AD and ELT (and other conditions associated with adoption such as Foetal Alcohol Syndrome), it is even worse!
- I have also been referred to IDAS (Independent Domestic Abuse Service) but they did not help me because he is under 18 and they just referred me back to 'family services'. This spoke volumes to me and this is the point at which I realised that child to parent (and sibling) violence and abuse is generally deemed as acceptable by the professionals within adoption.

The above story is our own personal story. However, there are hundreds (possibly thousands) of other families with adopted children in the UK who are struggling with exactly the same problems because of their child(ren)s issues.