

BACKGROUNDS OF CHILDREN AND WHY THEY COME INTO CARE

5. MENTAL HEALTH

TRANSCRIPT OF PETER'S STORY AUDIO

Fiona talks about the mental health issues she encountered with her son, Peter.

[Intro Music]

Fiona

I adopted my son Peter about 3 years ago – he came to me as older child, he's in key stage 1 and he has a background of neglect and his birth parents have mental health issues. The sort of behaviour that Peter presents is mostly defiance and on a very low key but constant level. In the early days when he first arrived we didn't really have a honeymoon period that lots of children have. We kind of had a little bit of that and then full on rage, he has never attacked me, he has threatened to smear poo in my face which is not very pleasant, in a kind of joking way and you know that he's not going to do it but it's a sort of threatening kind of thing. He used to dangle off bannisters, and threaten I'm going to fall... and you're a bit stuck there, because if I went to get him it will probably be more dangerous and he's more likely to fall in an altercation than if I just stood back. Fortunately, I managed to call his bluff. There is a thread of aggression that runs through him in his reactions but he isn't out and out violent towards me.

I think being exposed to alcohol and mental health problems, it's difficult for me to describe what impact they've had on Peter, I think they are many fold and I still haven't teased out all those things. I'd say for Peter that the 2 things that really, really had a significant impact on him are definitely the alcohol but domestic violence. It's not widely known the impact of witnessing domestic violence and witnessing violence in the home has on a child and their brain development. I've been speaking recently to somebody who works with children who have witnessed domestic violence and one child she worked with was mute, the impact on development of language is really profound so every day I experience that impact on Peter because I know that his siblings don't have those issues. It's quite profound, if you met him now, you wouldn't know until you got to know him. His speech and language is delayed by about 2 years, it's quite horrendous. One of the most difficult things as their adopter, their mum, is you have to witness all of this stuff. You have to experience their trauma and the ramifications of their neglect, however that was meted out, is huge. I really didn't appreciate it and I did a lot of preparation. I really, really didn't appreciate what impact all of that neglect would have and how difficult it is to rework that impact and to try and get on to a more healthy level because even now I experience it from him.

The sort of things that have really helped in our day to day lives to help a sense of permanence – and I would advise anybody no matter what age the child is - is to have a meal planner. One of the things that I did early on is Friday is Film Club, and although we generally don't end up watching a film we watch football which is what he wants to watch, I make a pizza – I have to make a pizza, he only wants to eat the pizzas that I make which is good that's one of our bonding things and that's been continuous since he first arrived. But he's doing incredibly well and the trajectory of his learning curve since he came to me is massive.

[Outro Music]