



Family Stories

Jennifer's Story

All names have been changed to protect the identity of the family



“The healing can take a long time, progress will be slow but it will come. It helped me to imagine my daughter as new born when she arrived with me. She was five but needed the care, attention and gentleness of a baby. When she was sixteen she still needed the boundaries and care of an eleven year old. I discussed this openly with her and it helped her work with the parenting and feel less pressure”

I went into adoption in 1999 as a single parent. I had the positive future of my minds eye planned in full. I could give a loving home to a child who was already born but who was potentially unloved, unwanted, mistreated. I knew it wasn't going to be easy. My social work training ensured I knew enough about social issues to imagine what may have bought a child into care. But I did have the all too often naive view, that my love and the love of my family would be enough.

When my daughter arrived all scraggy and scared I had no idea what was to unfold. After two weeks of chaos, with my daughter like a whirlwind of manic energy, I wrote to the adoption team suggesting that I may not be able to go it alone.

My daughter was over confident yet completely fearful all at the same time. She needed attention at all times and was so physically attached to me that it made even a toilet trip a shared experience. She needed physical touch at all times but in return her "cuddles" would hurt me as she pinched me or pulled my hair. She put everything in her mouth including salt, glue and objects that could cause choking. If there was nothing else to hand her thumb would be in her mouth.

If a stranger came into the situation they would find her charming and funny. All I could see was her giving herself too freely, trying to sit on their knee and cuddling them whilst giving me dirty looks from across the room, a hint of anger to come when they were gone.

She would soil herself often and this extended to going to the toilet in public places such as the playground at school. When she was angry she swore and spat and hit out with the rage of a grown adult.

I was called into school so often to calm her that I became an everyday part of it. When other children were becoming hurt or scared and "somebody" killed the stick insect from the nature project I had to go along with the enforced exclusion.

Keeping her safe and occupied out of school was a full time and exhausting job and included being physically injured on a regular basis. After three exclusions from three different schools I decided to keep her at home with me.

I had stumbled upon some information about trauma and attachment through the recommendation of a friend. Reading it made lots of things fit into place. It gave a reason and explanation for a lot of my daughters issues. Back then, attachment theory was not as familiar a concept as it is today and I found myself trying to learn it so that I could teach others around my daughter.

I could sense that many professionals thought I was just clinging onto some kooky self diagnosis and that perhaps it was my failings causing problems, or that I was exaggerating what was happening. My daughter was very able to be polite, charming and funny during social work visits, assessments and reviews.

What nobody saw was the reaction she would have when they were gone. Her behaviour would regularly escalate to full blown rage and often last several days. I had to move my pet cats out after they were being strangled, burnt and for one poor soul, put in the washing machine because I had a friend around.

I have to admit I was becoming distraught. Nothing had prepared me for the enormity of the task and I could not access the right support no matter how hard I tried. I believe the saving grace, aside from her loveliness, was my ability to see her behaviour as a normal response to what she had been through. Very early on I was committed to the view that she wasn't a problem to me but that societies view and lack of understanding towards traumatised children was.

As time went by I loved her very much and admired her bravery, humour and even her defiance. She was going to survive no matter what. We were in it together. The issue was how to work with her successfully in her quest to keep herself safe and trust me at the same time.

Thankfully, at the perfect moment we met DDP psychologist. The feeling of relief and hope at being understood was immense. It was like suddenly finding an English speaking corner of a large and scary foreign country. My daughter and I began to have monthly sessions which were to take place for the next eight years.

During our sessions my daughter was able to respond to the obvious, no need for explanations understanding, and we worked on both our difficulties and our positive progress.

Unlike other therapies we had been offered and tried, this therapy moved us forward together and encouraged not weakened our attachment. There were times of great sadness and laughter, and faith and hope within that familiar room, and it really was the beacon that saw us through the darkest times.

I can't lie and pretend that my daughter and I have sailed through our problems and that they are erased from our lives, but I can say we have survived. We have been supported through therapy to turn our "victim" status to one of proud "survivors". Most importantly we can now love each other in a healthy and equal way.

We have recently started a charity together to help other adoptees and adopters who are dealing with emotional trauma in their lives. My daughter is the most wonderful young adult and I have learnt over the years to be open and calm enough to learn from her. I can listen to what she is really telling me even when the words from out of her mouth may suggest she hates me in that moment. In return she allows me to parent her and set the boundaries which keep her safe even if they include the scary word "no" We make a great team.

Our hope is that all children and young people who have experienced trauma will be able to access the DDP support we had. We hope that as more social care and health teams as well as wider society learns the very real routes to healthy attachment that this therapy offers, more families will be healed and the cycles of trauma broken.

My top tip to anyone thinking of adopting, particularly an older child who may be traumatised and scared is to be prepared to be very patient. The healing can take a long time, progress will be slow but it will come. It helped me to imagine my daughter as new born when she arrived with me. She was five but needed the care, attention and gentleness of a baby. When she was sixteen she still needed the boundaries and care of an eleven year old. I discussed this openly with her and it helped her work with the parenting and feel less pressure.

Also try to communicate with other adoptive parents through social media. Even when you can't get out you can get support, advice and a vital sense of community.

Jennifer (*not her real name*) has formed a registered charity and developed a website. She suggests another website that she has found helpful for connecting with with other adoptive parents. These are included in the Parent's section and in the Links To Websites.



About DDP Network

DDP Network is a worldwide body that promotes DDP and supports professionals, parents and caregivers in finding out about the therapy and the parenting approach. We provide information about the therapy, how to become certified in DDP, the parenting approach, resources, training courses and conferences.

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