

**Social Services have ensured I will never ask for help again.**

**By anon**

I am a single adopter of 2 beautiful girls. My older daughter suffered from severe trauma and rejection through her early years, and was placed with me when she was at the end of primary.

Just over a year after she came home, the violence started. It was frightening, and overwhelming to deal with. And no one ever saw it but me, and her younger sister.

Over the course of a year, I made multiple requests for help to deal with it, I called the MASH hotline 4 times, I made 3 post-adoption support requests, I did several CAMHS referrals. I reached out to my GP and NHS talking therapies and did everything I could to ask for help. I self-reported every violent incident to social services and to both girls’ schools. I asked for NVR training, I asked for therapy for both of us.

The violence was escalating, and I had been kicked, shoved, bruised, slammed into walls, thrown to the floor and countless things thrown at my head. I put locks on the doors to create some safe spaces and huddled terrified while my daughter tried to smash the doors down.

I found myself thinking "She doesn't mean it, she would never REALLY hurt me, it's just a few bruises, she's always so sorry afterwards, it's my fault for cooking the wrong kind of sweetcorn, or buying the wrong school skirts"

If I were in a violent relationship with an adult, people would hear me say those things and trying to justify it away and they would make me leave.

Alongside all the violence was the emotional manipulation and verbal aggression. Relentlessly. Every day. With no respite or break at all. No-one to tap in and help me when it became too much.

We slipped further and further into crisis. I started having suicidal thoughts and my GP put me on anti-depressants. I took a long absence from work on sick leave. I started self-harming to manage my feelings and trying to retain some control over my life as it spiralled further and further away from what I thought parenting would be like. I started experiencing constant fight or flight reactions, full of adrenaline, shaking all the time, and was completely exhausted and burnt out.

Social Services offered us DDP psychotherapy, but it went badly wrong, and I later found out it was not a trained or registered psychotherapist but a social worker with 2 weeks of DDP training who had been running our sessions. After telling them repeatedly that I didn't feel safe, that I was constantly in fight or flight myself, and I was too dysregulated to do joint therapy safely, they insisted I do it anyway, and when it went wrong, after I cried and told my daughter I was frightened of her, the therapist emailed me to tell me everything was my fault and I was failing my daughter and I was unable to stop being selfish and think of her needs. I wasn't allowed to think of myself and my safety in all this.

I tried to complain, but it didn't get very far. I begged for respite but was told by social services it wasn't possible.

When things reached a crisis point and I was almost kicked down the stairs, as my youngest daughter watched and screamed and cried, I told social services I needed a respite break. I wanted to keep my family together but needed some time and space to heal and deal with my own trauma from this violent and abusive relationship, so that I could continue to parent her. I told them it wasn't fair on my youngest daughter to be experiencing so much fear and trauma in our home. I told them I was going to file for a section 20, not to give up on her, but to access the respite I desperately needed that they could not provide for me. I was explicit that I did not want to disrupt the adoption, but I simply couldn't keep living like this, relentlessly every day, while my mental health was in pieces.

My GP tried to help me, and I self-referred to NHS talking therapies, but after a 45-min consultation they said they had to discharge me. They told me they could not help me. I repeated that I was suicidal and desperate for help, and they said they can only offer CBT, which deals with changing negative thoughts inside your head, but I was under very real and constant threat externally and CBT won't help with that. They advised me to try contacting a battered women's shelter, and said they could help me if my external environment changed. I contacted the police and asked to be referred to their domestic violence unit for support, but was told they could not do that as my daughter was under 16. Everywhere I turned for help I was turned away.

As soon as I told social services I had hired a lawyer to begin section 20 proceedings, they moved into action. A new social worker was sent to do an assessment, she met with me twice and my older daughter once. They told me we needed to get a child protection plan in place so we could access more resources and support. They didn't tell me until 2 days before the child protection conference that the threshold for a CP plan is if the child is at risk of abuse. They accused me of emotional abuse of my children, based on the horrific therapy session that an untrained social worker had facilitated despite my attempts to tell them I wasn't regulated enough to cope with it. I was thoroughly vetted TWICE as an adopter, went through multiple visits and checks to become an adopter, and they approved me, yet based on one woman's brief visits suddenly I was a child abuser.

I called our post-adoption social worker and asked her point blank if she really believed I was abusing my children. She said no, of course I don't think that, but children's services aren’t set up for adoption support, you are a round peg trying to fit into a square hole. I told her I couldn't accept help from them if it required me to be accused of child abuse. The system is truly broken.

I had no warning it was coming, and at the conference there were 9 people who got to vote on whether I was a child abuser. Only 3 of those people had ever met me and my kids, but they had all read the report accusing me of abuse. No one ever sat me down and explained the process, who would be there, what would happen, or why it was happening. Even after the conference I kept asking questions that no-one answered.

Thankfully the chair of the conference was sensible, and she was amazed that I had self-reported so much and had so little help. She didn't believe that the threshold of abuse had been met and put us on a Child in Need plan instead.

This plan, when it was sent to me, had no support in it at all - it said things like "Mum will pay for private therapy" and "Mum will ask her family to step in and provide respite for her".

I wish I had known before all this happened that there just wasn't any help available. I wish they had been honest about that instead of stringing me along thinking there was some help or support out there for me.

I told them multiple times over the course of that year that I felt terrified and afraid, that my life was in danger. Nothing happened. I asked them several times for a plan to keep my youngest daughter safe at home, they responded with nothing.

Only when I started S20 proceedings did they suddenly do something, and I suspect it's for a very simple reason. If I ended an adoption placement because they have failed to support us, it looks bad for them. If they end the placement because I am found to be an abusive parent, it looks good for them. I never used to be this cynical, but I do wonder where the statistics are on failed adoptions, breakdowns and placements, and how many other adoptive parents have been accused of abuse when they are unable to cope with such deep levels of trauma.

**What did I learn from all this?**

I am on my own. There is no support for me, and I won't bother asking for help from social services ever again.

My daughter is still at home with us. We moved house away from our local authority and threw the Child in Need plan in the bin. I am still getting things thrown at my head, getting slammed into walls and kicked and thrown to the floor, but I must deal with it alone. I am still on anti-depressants, and I found a private therapist I can talk to. My younger daughter has started showing signs of violence and aggression in the playground and at home too.

I don't know how long we will manage to go on, and I keep trying my best every day, and sometimes it's enough, and sometimes it isn't.

The only way I was able to keep going and come back after our crisis was to accept that my daughter might one day kill me and make my peace with it. It's a devastatingly sad thing to acknowledge, but that is how I get through the days. I won't be scared anymore because I think she might one day really hurt me; I have just accepted the violence into my life. I don't know what that means for my younger daughter and it's not fair on her, but it's all we can do now.

Back when I was a prospective adopter, fresh faced and keen, it never occurred to me that there isn't a way out. They don't tell you that part. That once your adoption order is in place, there is no way to disrupt your adoption without being accused of abuse, without lawyering up and being told you are a terrible person, no matter what you have been through, or how much trauma is inflicted on you.

I know none of this is my daughter's fault. She was let down by so many people in her life and traumatised by so many things. I wanted to be the one person who would never let her down. But I fail at that too, a lot.

I hope that we can weather the next 5 years or so, that I will still be here to parent my youngest through her own teenage years, that my oldest can get some help from somewhere, somehow.

But Social Services have ensured that I will never ask them for help again. I tried so hard, I asked so many times, and now I know the sad truth - there isn't any help out there for us, we only have each other.