

Potato Group Presentation

To UK National Study Day on child-to-parent abuse - 15 Nov 2021



A Potato members view given as a Presentation to a UK national study day on child-to-parent abuse on 15 November 2021

Child to parent violence and abuse across the lifespan

A parent's perspective: what parents know, what parents struggle with, what they need from service providers

So here we are again. Discussing an issue affecting thousands of families UK wide. A 'Problem' muttered about, an 'issue' talked about recently in the media, Lives touched by CPVA , some lives ruined, stress, physical injury, coercion, verbal and emotional abuse, theft and criminal damage at the hands of our much loved, but often traumatised children.

When I was first asked about talking to the study day today I thought that I would tell you about my own personal experience of living with, without and loving my now adult children, some of whom used child to parent violence and abuse over many years, some from their primary school years and others in their late teens and early adulthood. BUT to do so would violate both their and us, their parents, privacy.

So today you will hear about the collective experiences of parents in a peer to peer support group that founder members started over 8 years ago, a group of parents that parent traumatised adopted children and adults. We had to start our own group because we were unable to get the help and support from adoption charities when as a group we wanted and needed to talk to one another in an online forum, primarily about CPVA – we didn't call it that over a decade ago because we didn't know what it was, why our much loved children were abusive to us and how on earth to get help for ourselves as parents or for our children. In 2013 many of the founder members took part in the Selwyn et al research, Beyond the adoption order . It was only after taking part that many of us realised the true extent of our children's violence and abuse, and that our local authorities children's services, post adoption support, camhs and the police seemed unable to offer the support and help that we desperately needed. Not a lot has changed since then, other than as a group, **we know** that for us, trauma is at the very heart of CPVA.

Move on ten years and although many of us that took part in that research now parent at a distance and have used many of the techniques / programmes that you will hear about today, indeed many of us would have been participants in

the research that you will hear about too. We will have been the voices that you may or may not have heard on TV, in newspaper articles and radio phone in's to try to raise awareness of the horror that is CPVA.

We have new members joining the Potato grp (Parents of traumatised adopted teens organisation) most weeks, it should shock you, this audience today, that many adopters who are experiencing CPVA have never been made aware that they may experience this sort of abuse from their children.

This week is Adult abuse awareness week. In preparation for this presentation today, our members were asked to look at their own La's safeguarding websites to see what, if anything, was there to raise the issue of child to parent violence and abuse over the lifespan. Sadly, I have to tell you, that anecdotally. Among our membership of almost 400 parents , Less than 5 of their LA's make mention of CPVA and only 3 have information on their websites about CPVA. I could only find one Police force in England with information about CPVA on their website.

I was asked to speak to the study day today about: What parents know, what parents struggle with and what we need from service providers. Sounds a very simple list of wants, but it isn't.

Those of you listening today may be practitioners, you will know what sort of abuse we suffer, I won't go into that other than to say that for the members of the Potato grp, we seem to experience the extreme end of CPVA. More often than not we are not believed by services or wider family or friends, sent on a number of parenting courses, need mh support, seen by our GP'S, need care in A&E's throughout the land and become well known to the local police force. We are frequently told by some practitioners, CAMHs professionals and social workers, if we and or other family members at at risk from our children and young adults we should ring the police, So we do. Often it is only then that we receive the sort of help we have been asking for, many of us for many years.

Each and every family, be they biological parents, foster carers, Kinship carers, special guardians or adopters each have very different stories to tell about what they know – the only one thing in common is probably that we are all suffering , our children too, not only from the abuse we suffer at the hands of our children, but also through ignorance of services about why this happens and to a greater extent due to the lack of joined up thinking and doing across the board to help us and our children.

What we know is that CPVA is damaging to us, our children and society.

Within the adoption community, anecdotally, because the research is so scant, we know that when or even if the support is there to help us to 'manage' CPVA or Adult entitled dependency, at a minimum, over 2,000 children will re enter care every yr from previous permanence. The statistics are buried in the DfE returns – SSSA 903 and have been since 2015 when they started being counted. Those statistics talk about ever increasing numbers of teenagers entering care from biological families too - and yet again very little research is actually going on to find out why. I would challenge each and every professional to look at those Statistics to find out what is happening in each of your local areas tomorrow. I would stake the lump sum of my newly acquired pension that you won't find that information easily and that it won't tell you why these adolescents are entering care either. I would further suggest that CPVA will be in the mix together with extra familial child exploitation. Where LA's (in England and Wales) seek to obtain Care orders – it will likely be on the grounds of our young people being 'Beyond parental control' and blame attributed at our door.

Some Potato statistics reflect some recent research completed during lockdowns and during the pandemic – but these stats pre date pandemic and do not change. Over 90% of Potato members have experienced CPVA - the vast majority – over 60 % for 5 or more years, before joining us, most often starting in the primary school years and early adolescence . Many know little about how to get help and support until they joined the Potato group – many of those only finding out for the first time that they weren't alone in being subject to CPVA - a common thing that they are told most often by Children's Social Care.

Potato members found the police to be the single most useful, empathetic service among all others but we wonder if that is because we are adoptive parents and it is conceived by the police that we are seen to have rescued children from the abusive homes from which they entered care. Maybe a form of positive discrimination takes place about CPVA in homes where the child has a known history of being a victim of trauma and abuse ? Some more experienced officers may have removed our children from those abusive homes. The discrimination certainly is there when one looks at support and training for parents re CPVA- a recent example being an online course to support your parenting of a child using CPVA - a once a week 10 session online course for adopters at a cost of £1,134.00 pp or £2,160.00 per couple. How lucky are we adopters to be able to access such a service if we or the

Adoption support fund will fund it. As a group we worry about non adoptive or special guardian families and how they can access or afford help like NVR. This is the support we all need. Sometimes it can feel to adopters that 'professionals' are profiting from our and our children's misery . We get that you are helping us , we get that its your job but after the session where you most likely are helping us to manage our lives, you get to go to supervision , you get to talk through some harrowing stuff, but you don't live in it, you don't have to worry about whether tonight is night your 14 yr old uses your credit card which you forgot to put in the safe after ordering their Christmas present online , about whether you will be in A&E because this time your 12yr old did manage to use the knife she has been hiding in her room for months to injure you, about how your traumatised 18 yr old will manage in custody overnight without their cuddly toy that they have to have to help them get to sleep, how and whether the magistrates will hear from you via a duty solicitor that your much loved traumatised child should not be criminalised. When it is no longer safe for your 'young' adult child to live in your home, you are not involved (or even know) that we face such a battle to help them to be housed in accommodation that understands their history, their trauma and our continued support and love from them while we parent at a distance. All of those examples are real life scenarios for many parents, day in and day out. **They are the things we struggle with**, together with a sense that not even those that help and support us can really understand unless they have been there themselves.

My personal opinion is that almost any child or adult child who uses CPVA or AED as a way of exerting control over their parents has suffered some form of trauma. Others presenting today may have a different view and I look forward to hearing their thoughts about that.

What we need from service providers is joined up thinking and doing. We need to see CPVA clearly stated in the Domestic Violence Bill, its great that the Domestic Violence commissioner recently spoke out about CPVA, but we need to see and know that our struggles are taken seriously by all service providers and a good place to start would be the evidence that CPVA exists being clearly stated, that CPVA is recorded accurately, that policies and procedures within safeguarding teams are in place, help and support are in place when we need it, at the early help stage , not just when our children have to enter or re enter care or be arrested. We need the CJS , YOTs and social care to understand our and our children's trauma and not to seek to criminalise our adolescents or young adults , but to have easily accessible programmes to help us all.

In a piece of research completed during the pandemic, the area where I live reported in a response to an FOI request about emergency calls re CPVA from June 19 -June 2020, there are a mean average of 60 such calls per month. I note that no such data exists specifically in the force area that I live in about adult child PVA. Although statistics exist re calls about safeguarding adults there is no way of knowing what proportion of calls relate to adult child to parent abuse.

A thematic review of the work of youth offending services during the COVID-19 pandemic A review by HM Inspectorate of Probation November 2020, stated that they had concerns about the experience of parents who were victims of child and adolescent violence. Their recommendation was that PCC's should work with partners to understand the levels of child on parent violence in their areas and ensure that help is available to support and protect parents who are victims and furthermore that the YJB support the development of a specific approach to managing child and adolescent to parent violence that protects the victim (albeit that that recommendation related to periods of lockdown). Case managers and other professionals they spoke to were concerned about the potential for an increase in both severity and frequency of this form of abuse. Maybe professionals should also be asking their PCC's whether they intend to seek to 'understand' the levels of CPVA in their own areas.

The work of many services , some of which you will hear about today in developing programmes to help us is great and is expanding nationwide but it remains piecemeal, its not good enough that an adopter in one area can get help and support but a biological parent can't. It's not good enough that where local CSC decide to lay blame for a child's CPVA at the parents door, can and do take care proceedings against those parents, occasionally meaning that those parents can and do lose their livelihoods. Please look at the PEGS website. Sign the [Child to Parent Abuse Covenant \(CPAC\)](#). To encourage employers to sign up to raising awareness of the issue, creating an environment where parents feel comfortable and safe to disclose their situation and seek support. We need service providers to talk to one another, to understand where their service fits into the jigsaw that is CPVA. Professional silo's are so often found to be a major contributor in serious case reviews or adult safeguarding reviews. The professional silo's is something that I have been banging on about for years – its important. In fact its one of main reasons I raised the possibility of this study day today on twitter over 18 months ago. I hope that the audience listening today will take away it's importance going forward .

That, folks is what parents know, the things we struggle with and what we need from service providers . The most important and immediate need is that all service providers, LA's , the CJS system and Government departments start to **'think' together and that they start to do.** We, parents and children need all to get on board, to understand, to help us and our children to pull through.