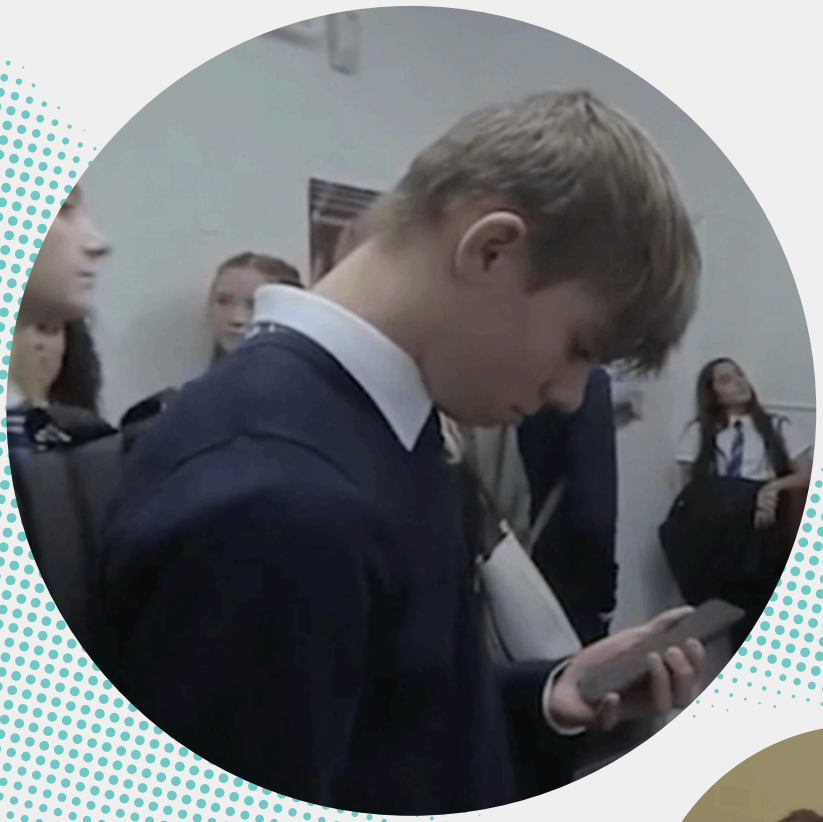
Joe's Life Journey

His Life at a Glance







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Joe (14) and Rayleigh (12) have similarly traumatic early histories, having both been removed from their birth homes at the same age.

Whilst Joe and Rayleigh share many similarities in their early life, they have developed in different ways. There are many factors in play; attachment and trauma play a significant part in all of this, but we must consider – equally - psychological, environmental, contextual and biological factors.

Children's behaviour is informed by a combination of these elements, and their interplay.



Background information

Jodie was aged 17 when she fell pregnant with Joe. At the time, she was in a relationship with Charlie (also 17). It was a complex relationship, with domestic abuse, from both parties, coupled with alcohol and substance abuse.

Jodie also suffered from depression and had often sought help from her GP, stating that her own mother had been on antidepressants for most of Jodie's life.

Charlie would describe himself to Social Workers as someone who needed things a 'certain way' and, when they weren't in his favour, he would get angry. For example: seeing the baby stuff everywhere would do his head in, and Jodie's 'laziness' and lack of cleanliness would leave him feeling incredibly aggravated.

Both leading chaotic lifestyles, Jodie and Charlie found it difficult to put the needs of Joe above their own.

Both during the pregnancy and after Joe was born domestic abuse and substance misuse were commonplace in the home environment. Often, this meant that Joe's core needs – such as food, hygiene and a safe place to sleep – went unmet.

Other dangers included unsafe sleeping especially when one or both parents were high on drugs. Joe was also left for long periods alone without kisses, cuddles or any form of positive attention. Generally crying would evoke no response at all and sometimes resulted in further abuse and neglect. Through this early experience Joe learned to keep quiet.

Joe was closely monitored by Social Services from birth due to multiple neglect factors and was eventually taken into care aged 18 months, he was placed with foster parents. He moved foster carers at the age of 3 and had a short period when a rehabilitation programme with Jodie was attempted.

At age 6, however, he was able to stay with the same foster carers until that placement broke down when Joe was 12 and he was moved to his current carer.

It is likely that these early experiences will have a lifelong impact, however the form this takes, and whether he will be able to develop resilience and happiness, also depends upon many factors.

Home Life

Joe failed to develop a strong attachment to his birth parents, but when he moved to his foster carers, at the age of 18 months, they were very sensitive to his needs.

He rapidly formed a positive and secure attachment with them, beginning to believe that he could reach out, play and interact with the world around him.

He also formed a strong bond, and preference towards his foster father who often stayed at home with him.

When Joe was 3 years old that placement ended, and Joe moved to another foster carer. Their care was good enough, but not as sensitive and attuned to his needs. Strong foundations were built with his first foster carers, who met his emotional needs. They had helped him substantially in building up his attachment and trust in people, too.

Joe's foster father describes Joe as a chilled-out boy:
"Despite everything he has been through, he's just so level-headed, you know, really positive and just gets on with life...whatever is thrown at him he seems to be able to manage. Me and him...well I guess we are pretty similar; I don't sweat the small stuff and maybe it's rubbed off on him".

When Joe was nearly 6, Jodie had separated from Charlie and was engaging with Children's Services to build consistent contact with Joe.

Jodie completed parenting work with a Family Support Worker, as suggested by Joe's social worker, to help her meet Joe's needs during contact and her GP did not raise any concerns regarding her mental health. Jodie made good progress and expressed the wish for Joe to return to her care.

Jodie attended Looked After Child reviews and appeared to be making some positive changes to her lifestyle. Unannounced visits were completed, and the home environment did not raise any significant concerns.

Given this, the decision was made for a planned rehabilitation home for Joe with Jodie. Charlie did not engage with Children's Services and his whereabouts were unknown.

Joe went for several visits, including spending full days with his mother. Joe found the transition difficult at times due to his earlier experiences of being parented by Jodie. Jodie, with the help of the family support worker, was able to manage the visits and reassured Joe's social worker that she was not in contact with Charlie.

When the family support worker went to observe the morning routine after Joe's first overnight stay, it was observed that Jodie was hurt. Joe was observed to be frozen in expression and still in his pyjamas. Jodie when pressed admitted that she had been in contact with Charlie and that he been at the property the night before. They had had an argument the night before which she blamed herself for.

Fortunately, Joe was able to be placed back with his foster carers after the rehabilitation plan was unsuccessful. However, Joe initially found it difficult to settle back into his foster placement. This was especially troubling, without a full understanding of what had happened whilst in the rehabilitative care of Jodie and Charlie. This, alongside further experience of trauma, led to Joe internalising his feelings and becoming withdrawn.

For Joe and his foster parents, adolescence could be a challenging time. However, this is not automatic and positive care may enable him to manage complex transitions in his future life.

School

Joe presented at Primary School as a quiet child, often being described – by others – as a daydreamer and a bit of a loner. He tends to struggle academically and internalise these issues, being someone who does not like making mistakes. Joe does not put himself forward for activities.

What Joe does excel at, is football. He is in the school team and focuses on practice every Wednesday lunchtime. His kit is his pride and joy, and he is quite obsessed with keeping this, along with his collection of footballs, trophies and medals, in immaculate condition. His foster carers watch every single match he plays in.

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At secondary school, Joe is falling behind in his work whereas before, despite struggling, he was able to keep up. Joe also only has a few friends, with only one that he feels comfortable to hang around with regularly, and trusts. Joe has started to take less pride in his appearance, too, and often seems pre-occupied.

Joe experienced another foster placement move shortly after his transition to secondary school due to his previous carers struggling to connect with Joe on an emotional level as his emotional needs fluctuated once he entered his adolescent years.

Joe felt rejected by his carers, stopped talking to them, began returning home later and later from school and when in placement would simply stay in his room avoiding his carers. He is now in a placement with a single carer which is not a cultural match.



