Rayleigh's Life Journey

Her 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 20 when she fell pregnant with Rayleigh. She was still in a relationship with Charlie, although Rayleigh was born from a short relationship with another man.

Domestic abuse from both parties, as well as alcohol and drugs misuse were characteristic of a chaotic homelife, and neither of them were able to put the needs of Rayleigh, during the pregnancy, above their own.

When Rayleigh was born, substance abuse and domestic abuse continued between her mother and Charlie, and Rayleigh's core needs – such as food, safety and hygiene – went unmet. During this period, too, Rayleigh was exposed to other dangers, such as unsafe sleeping, especially when one or both parents were high on drugs.

Rayleigh was left for long periods alone, without kisses, cuddles or any form of positive attention. Rayleigh cried most of the time when she was awake, resulting in further abuse directed towards her, but this didn't stop Rayleigh. She was described by Jodie as a miserable baby to professionals, who recorded these details as an 'irritable baby'.

Rayleigh was monitored by Social Services from birth and she was taken into a foster to adopt placement, aged 18 months, where she has been for the last 4 and a half years.

Home Life

Rayleigh failed to have a good attachment to her mother and Charlie, and she then moved to a foster to adopt placement who also found her very difficult to parent, describing her as an unhappy and needy child.

The foster to adopt Mum, upon reflection, sees how she struggled to connect to Rayleigh and feels that the attachment has never really formed:
"When Rayleigh has hurt herself or she wakes in the night she does call for me, but I don't see us as being close."

Rayleigh is described by her adoptive Dad as a worrier:
"She worries about what she's eating for tea, where we are going next weekend, what time I am coming home from work...It never ends. I tell her, time and time again, she's safe. I hope one day it sinks in."

Traumatic Experiences

Rayleigh has had a more challenging time since coming into care. She didn't bond with her adoptive Mum easily, and she didn't get so many good experiences, to enable her to build a more positive narrative of her life.

Her adopters report that she is easily triggered by talk of adoption and she appears confused at details of her life story, or lack thereof:
"We have tried to speak to Rayleigh about her early life but it's a subject she doesn't like, the 'A' word (for adoption) and the 'L' word (for love). I wonder when it will sink in that she is here forever?", says her adoptive Mum.

School

Rayleigh presents at school as a difficult child, often getting into trouble and fights. She also tends to present challenging behaviour when in large groups of children, such as in assembly or at key school events like sports day and the Christmas play, for example. She covers her ears or face when things get too much for her and is prone to lashing out in response.

She cannot sit still, referred to as 'fidgety' by the Teaching Assistant. She fiddles with pens, rocks on her chair, chews her clothes and cannot settle into the learning environment.