

Difficult Stories

The idea for this 'Difficult Stories' came from some of the adopters I visit in my Social Worker role. Many people were struggling, not surprisingly, with exactly how to tell their child's early life story to them and wanted advice on 'the words to say it with'. These adopters were those who felt their children were struggling with anger issues and a vulnerability to a sense of failure and rejection.

For some, there was a need for suggestions around exact words to use and this made me realise that even the words we use to ourselves as adults on these topics are thought provoking. I decided to write the words we might use to ourselves in black and then look at translating them to green for using with the children. They are suggestions [even if they sound proscriptive] to get thinking on the subject and you will find your own way forward, knowing your child's level of understanding and personality best.

The words and phrases in Difficult Stories may be helpful for using with children between the ages of 5 and 10. Speaking to children about the past can be uncomfortable for adopters and Social Workers alike. We can feel anxious that our words may bring back difficult memories or arouse thoughts that may make the children feel insecure. Whilst recognising that adopters are usually the best judge of what to say and when to say it and may imagine best what children's reactions might be, the larger picture is important to see.

Bear in mind that the children have themselves lived through the trauma. By this I mean the original abuse or neglect, and consequent change of carer from birth family to foster family [and sometimes more than one] to the final change to adoptive family. Talking about ideas and feelings associated with these events and revisiting them on an ongoing basis can be a vital part of processing these imposed experiences and releasing tensions associated with them. It can be an invisible load that the child is carrying and opportunities to unburden it are created by those closest to the child.

The discomfort of adopters is something we know that children can pick up on even from a very young age and they can feel disloyal too, if they voice warm feelings and thoughts about their birth family or foster family. The adults in the

child's world play a crucial role in whether 'difficult' subjects become acceptable conversation or not and how the past becomes embedded in the child's self esteem in a healthy or unhealthy way.

The Life Story Book in addition to conversations stemming from the examples below is vital for sequencing and understanding events in a way that does not result in the child blaming him or her self or feeling unloved at some level. This may manifest in a dislike of their physical appearance at a young age or temper explosions around anything that prompts a sense of rejection or failure.

It is so much better for children who have survived trauma to feel they are able to talk about anything connected with it freely with those who love them most. This action in itself can draw you closer to them.

Trigger points for a conversation on why the child is not with the birth family could be the subjects of birthdays, looking through the life story book, looking at the foster carer's photo album, or just a direct question from the child at any point. It will be difficult to find an ideal time, as this can be a painful conversation for the adult as much as for the child, so it is best to be prepared that it might happen at any time.

Take your cues from your mood as well as the mood of your child listening out for anything they might say, which could be a good opening to the conversation that you have already planned in your mind.

How we refer to the parent is a personal decision. When the children are very young many say: 'Tummy Mummy and Birth Daddy'. Sometimes it is 'Birth Mummy Sandra and Daddy Peter' or adopters may just use their first names as long as they are sure the child understands the connection to the parent.

Below are some 'difficult topics'. The suggested words and phrases are in green. The notes to Social Workers and Adopters are in black.

The life situation and background of your child will be unique and these words are starting points for talking to take place. It is hard to do justice to the enormity of some of the topics that are covered above and as parents you will want to take responsibility for your own knowledge on any specific area. Do use our website list and book list for further ideas and information.

When you feel that it wouldn't be helpful to give full details of any aspect of the child's history [that they are asking about] then you could say: 'Some things you are too young to understand properly but when you are older I will explain them to you in a way you can make sense of.'

When saying this I would advise that your tone of voice and manner express some gravity as to gloss over or make light of the questions may not prepare them for something that might be difficult to hear later on.

It may be that you want to talk further about life story work and your child's responses to conversations about their past with a therapist or Social Worker. Your local Adoption Support Service should be able to help signpost you to appropriate help or may be able to provide it themselves.

Difficult Stories

1. Abuse

Emotional Abuse

Persistent emotional ill treatment or neglect can cause adverse effects on the child's emotional development and be profoundly damaging to self esteem. For example: making the child feel worthless; unrealistic expectations; preventing normal social activity; serious bullying; seeing the ill-treatment of another person; making a child often frightened; exploitation or corruption. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of child abuse.

Sometimes it was hard for your birth mummy to think about how things she did would make you feel.

She was not very good at imagining what children feel and how sad and frightened grown ups can make them feel.

She was too involved in her life to think enough about how it made other people feel.

Because she was not feeling very happy about herself it made her feel better to be rude and hurt your feelings.

This is not right and was not fair of her as children are all by themselves with their parent a lot of the time and often don't have other grown ups to make

them feel better.

Neglect

The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or psychological needs in a way likely to impair the child's health or development seriously.

For example: not providing food or shelter; inadequate protection from danger; not enabling adequate medical care; emotional neglect

The majority of children who get looked after have done so because of neglect from their parents.

Neglect can mean many things. These will usually be applied to a baby or toddler

Being left alone in a flat.

Not being washed or bathed.

Not being stimulated e.g. being left in the buggy or cot for long periods, being restrained in this way in front of the television.

Nobody talking to them or playing with them.

Toys not being brought for them.

No sensitivity to the child's needs for affection and attention.

Having no fixed routines so bedtime could be midnight and therefore the child might be grumpy and tired in the day, as children need more sleep than adults.

This may make the adult annoyed too.

Smoking and alcohol being consumed in excess in front of children.

No regular meal times.

Not being kept safe or protected from people/things that might hurt them.

Your child's neglect will be unique to the child. Sometimes it is good to get the particular examples of it from the Child Permanency Report and then put them in to the language of a child. Poverty can play its part in neglect so it is worth explaining if money features as an issue in their particular history that benefits are not easy to live on and, if appropriate, that drug or alcohol addiction is expensive, leaving little for anything else.

E.g. your birth mummy did not have enough money for food as she had spent it on other things so you were sometimes found by neighbours looking in the bins of your flats and picking food up off the pavements that other people had dropped.

Sometimes the reasons that parents don't look after their children properly are that they do not know how to and have had nobody to teach them how to do it right. Maybe your birth parents had parents who did not look after them very well, as well.

Physical Abuse [Non Accidental Injury]

Involves physical harm to the child such as hitting, shaking, burning, smacking, poisoning or causing suffocation.

Includes fabricated illness.

Sometimes your birth mummy/daddy would get very angry. They were not very good at being grown up when they had angry feelings. One day when you were only [age] your birth mummy/daddy hit you very hard. You were very badly hurt. It was very frightening for you and Social Workers got to hear that this had happened. Although your birth mummy/daddy did not mean to hurt you and still loves you very much and feels terrible about what has happened, because you were so badly hurt, no one felt it was safe for you to stay with your birth mummy.

Babies need to be looked after so carefully as they can't look after themselves.

You can ask the child: 'What do babies need to be alright?'

Child may need to be prompted to cover these areas - to be cuddled, to be fed, to have their nappies changed, to be washed, to be put to bed, to be comforted when they cry.

Adult can then say that parents need to be good enough at being a birth mummy/daddy to be able to do all these things and not to get too angry when they are tired.

Adult can talk about all the things that were difficult in the parents life for example 'Birth mummy did not have very many friends or family around to

help her with being a parent' Sometimes birth mummies get very tired and upset as well. Sometimes birth mummies and daddies think that the children are crying or shouting or breaking their toys just to annoy them. Then they get angry when really it can be that the children need their nappies changed, or are hungry or want a cuddle. Some mummies and daddies don't understand children well enough to know why they cry and shout.

Rape

The child may eventually be going to read or learn that either their father has raped a woman/women or that they themselves have been a product of rape. The child may be a product of rape and if it has not been proven in court then it becomes alleged rape. It is important to note that unfounded allegations are the exception rather than the rule so discrediting the mother's account may not be helpful.

This is a very difficult area and it would be worth talking to your local CAMHS service or an appropriate child care professional about your particular child and your fears/thoughts on how this information is going to affect them.

The issue of not knowing who the father is and only that he is alleged to have raped the mother is emotionally very laden for anyone and all involved. Please see section on unknown fathers.

Discussion of rape for a child under ten would need to come in the context of the child's understanding of how babies are made and what sex is. This will differ widely between families and between children depending on their interest in the topic, if they are the oldest in the family, their level of understanding and how the school approaches it.

The legal definition of rape is that a man has entered his penis into a vagina without consent and involves the threat of violence.

Usually when a man and a woman have sex with each other they do it because they enjoy it and love each other. Sometimes babies get born because a man and a woman have had sex.

When a man forces a woman to have sex through being mean to her and

making her scared it is called rape. The woman has not wanted him to put his penis in her vagina. If a woman or man force their bodies on each other when either of them don't want this then this is called sexual assault. It is something that gets done by men against women and it is very wrong and it is against the law which means men can go to prison for it. It makes the woman feel angry and sad and it can hurt her very much.

Men who rape women do so for lots of different reasons to do with being angry with women and wanting to feel more powerful in their lives.

Babies grow and get born from rape just the same as any other baby for they have done nothing wrong.

Sexual Abuse- context sex and sexual awareness

Sexual abuse is when a child or young person is pressurized, forced or tricked into taking part in any kind of **sexual** activity with an adult or young person. This can involve rape [penetration of a vagina by a penis] or any other act without the consent of the other party is termed 'sexual assault' so this would include anal penetration by penis or object, unwanted kissing, fondling, viewing of sex through pornography or in reality.

If sexual abuse occurs within the immediate family [grandparent/parent to child or sibling to sibling] it is called incest which is also a crime. For a child under 10 this additional term might well be unnecessary to explain or make points about in addition to those below.

Sometimes adults touch children in ways they shouldn't.

It is fine for parents and other grown ups that look after children to give children a hug, help them get their clothes on and, when they are very little, to wash their bodies for them.

It is not all right to touch children's private parts when you are not washing them or changing nappies or putting cream on them. Adults who get good feelings from touching children and getting children to touch them are not being fair on the children. They are breaking the law and they can be called Paedophiles. If a judge and the police are sure that the adult has done this they may be sent to prison.

The children who have been touched or have touched the adult have done nothing wrong. Sometimes it can be very scary for children who are touched by adults and they can feel dirty or disgusted about what has happened. Sometimes adults who do this are good at making it feel enjoyable for the children. Sometimes they give children sweets, ice creams and treats for doing what they ask.

However the child feels about it, it is not their fault and the adult has behaved in an unkind way. Adults are there to look after children and not to play with their bodies.

Adults who do this are using the fact they are bigger and more powerful than children to boss them and control them.

These adults often don't understand how to love people and sometimes they think what they are doing is all right. They want it to be kept a secret because they always know that other adults would not think it was all right.

Children do not deserve to be touched by adults in this way and it is very important that they get help to talk about it and to make it stop happening.

What the adults have done is wrong and needs to stop. If it was your mother or father who did this to you then it is called incest.

They may love their children [if they have them] very much in other ways but it is a very bad thing they do. Sometimes they get help from talking to a doctor about it but for some of them putting them in prison is the only way to stop it happening to other children.

It is important to remember that if anyone touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable and they are bigger than you that you tell someone you trust about it.

2.Harm to Adult

Alcoholism

The Dictionary Definition is:

The essential feature of alcohol abuse is the maladaptive use of alcohol with recurrent and significant adverse consequences related to its repeated use. Alcoholism is the popular term for two disorders, alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence. The hallmarks of both these disorders involve repeated life problems that can be directly attributed to the use of alcohol.

Both these disorders can have serious consequences, affecting an individual's health and personal life, as well as having an impact on society at large.

When people need a drink [beer, lager, wine, vodka, gin, brandy, whisky, sherry] a lot of the time. Many people drink alcohol but if you drink too much too often it can be a problem. Your birth mummy drank too much alcohol and sometimes drank it all through the day and in the night times too.

Sometimes people get better from alcoholism and stop drinking but they need lots of help and it takes time to know they are really better. It can be very difficult to stop.

People often become alcoholics because they are not very happy about things in their lives. Alcohol can at first make them feel happy and relaxed. Too much alcohol is not good for a person or for children around them and all that the person can think about is having more to drink. It can make people loud, angry and clumsy. They can only care about what they want when they are drunk and not what anyone else thinks or says.

Relate the alcohol abuse to the child's particular history and give examples if you can of the type of scenario's that might have occurred for the child. If these are not in the reports that you have been given, then make sure you use the word 'might' when you give a story.

Mummy might have been asleep [as alcohol can make you sleepy] when it was dinner time or bath time or when you needed to get to school/play group/the park.

Drug Abuse

There are many types of drugs with different personal and criminal consequences attached to them. The drugs used by the birth family might have been cocaine, crack, heroin, marijuana, and amphetamines.

Drugs can make people behave in many different ways depending on which drug is depended on. It is worth finding out about the particular drug known to have been used by the birth parent so that you can describe it in a calm and measured way.

Most drugs have the capacity to distort the user's perception of reality in both positive and negative ways. Their effects can range from feelings of euphoria, peace, calm, to aggression, paranoia, and isolation.

Understanding of social interactions and thought processes can become distorted and fragmented over time.

What is common to all who are dependent on them is a perceived need for the drug. Life seems unbearable without the presence of the drug. The chosen drug originally led to an enhancement of the birth parents experience of life but over time, life for any length of time, is dominated by the need for the drug just to feel normal.

The feeling when not taking the drug is of imbalance, psychological pain and overwhelming need that can even become a physical pain. The person will go to great extremes to be calmed by the temporary peace the drug brings. The 'extremes' when living a life of poverty can manifest as stealing and prostitution as a way of obtaining money to finance the drug. This can then lead to the neglect of children as described above and result in them coming into care.

Your birth mummy/daddy did love you very much but they had a problem with drugs, which meant they could not manage their life very well. We do not know why your birth mummy took drugs but it could have been because people she knew did it or because she did not feel very happy about things. Once people start to take drugs it can be very difficult to stop and people just want more and more. Drugs are illegal which means they are against the law and the police and the Judges in the Courts can punish you if they find you taking them. Drugs are like a bad medicine that no Doctor would give you because

they can make you very ill and very mean.

The trouble is that, a bit like chocolates and fizzy drinks, they can make you feel great for a while but like chocolate if you ate it all the time you would get very, very fat and ill. Grown ups tell you how much chocolate is safe for your body to eat. Drugs are like this and are only legal if a Doctor gives them to you or you buy them in a chemist where the amount you have is controlled by someone who understands how they work. Bad drugs can even kill you if a Doctor is not controlling them [which they don't do if they are illegal]. All you can think about is getting more of the drug [which seems as important as chocolate does to you!] Drugs are expensive too.

Drugs can make them do things that are not right, like steal money to buy more of the drug and all people can care about is getting more of the drug.

When people use drugs they feel lots of different feelings. Sometimes they are happy sometimes sad, sometimes they are angry and sometimes worried. It is hard for children living with a birth mummy on drugs as they don't know what their birth mummy is going to be like. They might get ignored or shouted at even if they have done nothing wrong. Taking drugs can be a bit like taking the wrong medicine that makes you ill instead of making you better. No doctor would give you this medicine because it can make people very ill and very mean.

Drugs did not help your birth mummy behave in a way that was safe for you. Describe the particular circumstances of the neglect or abuse and their connection to drugs if this seems relevant.

Domestic Violence

This is when one part of a couple behaves in a way that is threatening or violent to the other partner. This could involve hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, biting, stabbing or hitting any part of the body with an object.

On rare occasions domestic violence can result in the death of a partner. Whether this was intentional or not would be explored in court and a verdict reached. If murder rather than manslaughter was the term that was used then the description below could still be useful in parts. Great emphasis could be put on any remorse

displayed and how dangerous violence can be. Other more positive qualities of the birth father would need to be emphasised and advice sought from professionals experienced in sharing this information.

A book called 'When father Kills Mother: Guiding children through trauma and grief' by Jean Harris, Tony Kaplan and Dr Dora Black is particularly recommended for adopters in this situation. The website Winston's Wish also covers how to talk to children affected by death from murder or manslaughter.

Sometimes your birth daddy was very unkind to your mother and they shouted and rowed together. Your birth daddy could not manage his temper and even hit and hurt your birth mummy. It is very wrong when this happens and if the police get to hear about it they know that the law has been broken.

When grown-ups hit and hurt each other it is very frightening for anyone who is there. For children they love both their parents even if they don't like what is happening and it leaves them feeling muddled about what is wrong and right. It is wrong for a daddy to hit a mummy or a mummy to hit a daddy. It means that the grown-up who is so angry that they hit people needs help with their bad temper and must learn to be kind. It can be quite hard for grown ups to change. Most grown ups and mummies and daddies do not hurt each other like this.

Suicide

Children who are adopted may have to discover at some point that one of their parents or close relatives killed themselves. It will be natural that they will want to know how and why the parent killed themselves

This is a frightening subject as it invites children to contemplate the extremes of psychological suffering and on occasions [if the act was performed in a violent way] the physical pain of a person intimately connected to them. Not only can it be seen as an act of ultimate self negation and despair but suicide can contain a reproach to anyone who cared about them. It could suggest to a child that they were not good enough or lovable enough to want to stay with, in life. It is even possible that some children due to the act being performed by a 'parent' may see it as a model of behaviour they could copy as a response to future distress and sadness.

People who commit suicide may or may not have mental health problems although one in five who kill themselves have seen a mental health professional in the previous year [UK stats]. Three times more men than women kill themselves in the UK.

` We know that the beliefs and feelings about suicide vary widely from culture to culture. The causes of suicide will exist in the social, political and cultural environment and personal context of the individual. People's attitude to their lives can be circumstantial and they can be vulnerable to the influence of other people e.g. suicide pacts between friends and partners.

It is also important to remember that many people die in a way that could be accidental or could be suicide e.g. an overdose of a drug that they were addicted to any way or extremely dangerous driving with an unexplained collision with an inanimate object.

Your birth mummy felt so low and fed up about her life [be specific about what you know was going wrong] that she wanted it all to stop hurting. The part of her that loved people and enjoyed her life she could not feel. She could not think properly and she did not have anyone she wanted to talk to so she just gave up.

If appropriate say; it was because of your mummy's illness [depression/bi polar disorder/schizophrenia] that she could not see that there were lots of important things and people to stay alive for.

For a child under 10 it is best to keep it as simple as possible and then see what path the conversation takes. They will not have all the projections an adult has on the subject although they may have conscious memories of feeling despairing which the information could tap into.

It is important not to underestimate the power of children's imagination and it could be a subject that you need to return to. The child may need reassurance that it is not something 'in the genes' and that worries and feelings do not get so huge and overpowering to result in suicide if they are shared with other loving people as they come up.

3. Life Situations

Death

It is not unusual for adopted children to have a birth parent who is no longer alive. This will mean different things to children at different times and of course will depend if they have any conscious memory of the parent.

Most children go through phases where they become preoccupied by the idea and fact of death and will ask their parents questions on the subject. Adopted children may respond strongly to other sorts of loss and the thought that you could die as well may make them feel particularly anxious.

It is important not to shy away from the subject or seem frightened by it as your feelings about it will be picked up by children. Illness in either parent may be very alarming to some children and reassurance that illness only rarely leads to death and that death mainly occurs when people get old may be needed.

Your own belief and system will dictate to a large extent how you respond to questions about what happens after death so it is hard to be proscriptive about what to say. Adopters have sometimes commented that it is easier to help the child with their grief if they have met the parent themselves. The child's grief will not be something that can occur within a prescribed period of time and can involve grieving for future relationships they will never experience.

Talking about death through literature which often features animals is a good way of approaching the subject. The reading list at the back of this booklet recommends some books suitable for 5 to 10 year olds. The website [Winston's Wish](#) is particularly recommended for details of how to talk to children on the subject and also covers death by manslaughter or murder.

Ideas that would be a comfort to children would be seeing death as an end to suffering, that the person who has died lives on in their hearts, that it is natural and happens to us all, that the person who has died would want to be remembered but want them to be happy as well.

Learning Difficulties/Disabilities

Occasionally children come into care for the reason that their mother has

learning disabilities which of course on occasions can lead to neglect. The dictionary definition of a learning difficulty is 'a condition that either prevents or significantly hinders somebody from learning basic skills or information at the same rate as most people of the same age.'

Learning disability is a term that the National Institute of Clinical Excellence favours and therefore Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services do too. They would argue that dyslexia for example is a learning difficulty.

It is important to recognise that many factors come into play when learning difficulties are perceived and labelled. These are: the role that poverty plays, inner city status, parental attitude to education, conflict with the education system, cultural bias of educational testing, and any sort of abuse or traumatic event within the family. The ability of anyone to learn is enormously affected by what is going on in their internal world.

A specific learning difficulty is often not related to a person's intelligence. IQ [Intelligence Quotient] testing is a controversial topic but when it is below 70 which covers 2.2% of the population it can be a major factor in neglect and abuse of children and one of the explanations as to why some children come into care. IQ tests aim to assess abstract verbal reasoning and a person's ability to process information in an intelligent way.

Since the 1920s four 'levels' of learning disability have been recognised and are linked approximately to Full Scale IQ scores.

- Mild IQ Score between 50 - 69
- Moderate IQ Score between 35 - 49
- Severe IQ Scores between 20 - 34
- Profound IQ Scores below 20

(International Classification of Diseases-

10 World Health Organisation. 1992)

Your birth mummy loved you very much. Babies need lots of love but they also need their parents to remember lots of things when looking after them. Prompt the child to think about all the things a baby or child needs their parents to do. Talk to the child about how much they have learnt already at school so they are reminded that they are good at learning. **Your birth mummy was not good at learning lots of things to do with looking after children.** Give an example if you have one of what was not learnt e.g. **She could not learn that you need to change a nappy quite soon after it is dirty otherwise the baby gets infected and sore.**

Nobody could be with your birth mummy all the time every day to check that you were alright. People knew that your birth mummy was not going to learn better even as she got older so Social Workers decided it was fairest on you that your birth mummy did not keep you and your brother/sister.

Unknown Fathers

Many children do not know who their father is. Adopted children will only know what their mother has told Social Workers so if they were ever to reunite with their mother there may be a hope they would discover this information.

It will depend on the child's personality how much the lack of knowledge impacts on them. Undoubtedly it will usually lead to some speculation. It is worth saying if an attribute is not known to be part of the maternal family;

'May be you got your talent at football/guitar/cooking from your father's side of the family' 'Maybe your beautiful eyes/strong legs come from your fathers side of the family'

The lack of knowledge does not have to equate with a negative conclusion. It is likely that the security a child will feel within the adoptive family set up with two parents will mitigate against any sense of abandonment through not knowing who one of the birth parents are.

4. Mental Health Issues

Mental Ill Health

This is a huge topic and a complex one. It is also important to remember that our mental health system can be racist and is of course Eurocentric. Misdiagnosis can be made at any level in the system and labels themselves change over time.

What it can mean:

It can mean that your birth mummy/daddy is not very well. Even though

there is no part of their body that hurts or looks painful they do not feel happy about their life. Sometimes because of this they can seem strange to other people and it can be hard for them to keep up jobs and to look after children or to look after themselves. They may behave differently to usual if they become mentally ill.

Anxiety:

Irritability

Tension in body and face

Worry

Panic attacks are part of anxiety

Heart beating fast, shortness of breath, racing thoughts.

Your birth mummy used to get anxious. That means she used to feel very frightened all the time. Check out that the child understands the meaning of nervous and explain that everyone feels nervous sometimes. **The trouble with her nervousness was that it stopped her from doing lots of things that children need their mummies to do. She did not want to talk to people. She did not want to visit playgrounds and parks. She did not want to go outside.**

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder can be part of an anxiety state.

Bi Polar Disorder [Manic Depression]

This has the symptoms of depression but it also contains highs where the person affected feels they are out of harms way. People can feel they don't need to sleep or eat. They can be very creative- write or paint for hours on end. However it doesn't last. Sometimes they lose touch and think they don't need to be careful- can cross roads dangerously or they may not be able to pick up on other people's needs and children's needs.

This is usually a life long condition that needs medication to control.

This illness meant that your birth mummy could be very excited and full of energy all the time. She may not have thought she needed to sleep. She may

not have been able to look after you properly because of all the important things she had to do. Usually the things your birth mummy wanted to do were not really important but her illness made them seem important to her. At other times your birth mummy would feel very fed up and sad.

You can use the explanations of depression on earlier section.

The important thing for a child when their mummy/daddy can be so different at different times is that it can be frightening and dangerous for the child to live with their parent when they are either very happy or very sad. You did not know what was going to happen next. You wondered whether your birth mummy would realise you needed to go to school or if she did whether she was going to shout at all the teachers or not. There would be a lot for you to worry about.

Depression

It can mean quiet/silence. Remember that everybody is quiet sometimes when you explain this aspect.

A depressed person may stare blankly at things and not 'see' them e.g. the TV.

Someone may be in his or her own world of negative thoughts and out of touch with what's around them. These thoughts could be sad or angry ones that might be turned in on the person thinking them gathering force in their intensity.

A depressed parent may have an inability to respond to or engage in a child's world. There may be an inability to feel positive emotion and they might be unable to show affection.

Depression may lead to a failure in initiating activity e.g. helping the child with homework or inviting friends round or deciding to go to park/play centre. Depression can be temporary and can be relieved by therapy or course of anti depressants.

Depression is something that grown ups can get. People who are depressed often feel sad about their life and don't have any energy. It can make people

not want to get up in the mornings and not see the point in doing anything. Sometimes it stops people from wanting to talk to other people because they feel too sad to bother. It is nobody's fault but it is like an illness that just seems to happen to some people. There are many different reasons for it happening which the doctors who have seen your birth mummy/daddy understand best. Depression does not always last for ever and people can get better from it.

Personality Disorder

In psychiatry this is a disorder characterized by disruption in relatedness. It is manifested in any of a large group of mental disorders characterized by rigid, inflexible, and maladaptive behaviour patterns and traits that impair a person's ability to function in society by severely limiting adaptive potential. Some kinds of personality disorders are antisocial, borderline, and passive aggressive.

A personality disorder:

Does not react easily to treatment
Usually involves anti social ways of relating
Unlikely to change.

Explanations of this condition to the child should describe the specific symptoms and ways of relating to the child that meant the child came into care. It can be said that unfortunately the birth parent isn't going to get better. A personality disorder is not hereditary. Why it happens is not properly understood but early trauma features highly in those with borderline personality disorders.

Your birth Mummy/Daddy finds making friends and being nice to people very difficult. It is hard to bring up children when you don't get on with anybody. She was not able to change as this was the only way she knew how to be. All mummies need other people around to help them if they are going to look after their children properly and make the children feel alright about life.

Schizophrenia

Seeing and hearing things that are not there. Very frightening. Voices telling you to do things. A sense of a radio in head or God.

These symptoms can go if people take the right medication. However sometimes they don't like the side effects. Side effects can be sleepiness, weight gain, feeling they have lost the spark that makes them who they are.

This is a life long condition that needs medication to control. According to the National Institute of Clinical Excellence it affects one in one hundred people.

Schizophrenia is a word that describes people who are not well in their thinking and feelings. It is an illness that can be treated with taking medicine but when the person stops taking the medicine it comes back again. Someone with this illness can hear and see things that are not there and that nobody else can hear or see. It can be very frightening like having a radio in your head with voices that are not your own.

Your birth mummy was not well and she had this illness. She did not like the way the pills for the illness made her feel. She stopped taking the pills and then the illness made her think that she did not need them anymore. Sometimes when people have this illness they can think they have special powers and this can make them dangerous to themselves and other people.

Someone who was ill might think that they did not need to wear shoes because the voices said that their feet were now made of concrete and could not be run over or hurt. Or they might think that the bus driver was about to hurt them so that could make them try to fight him off the bus. What the voices tell them is not the truth.

It is frightening for children when their birth mummy or daddy has this illness as it means they can't look after them properly and keep them safe. The child might end up believing that the things their birth mummy or daddy is telling them are true. For example you might believe you are really bad if you were told this or that you could fly because your parent told you it was true.

Sometimes children get hurt who have mummies or daddies with this illness.

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