

*You are thrown into a maze. This action happens completely out of the blue and without warning. It is a complex maze with many pathways, none of which lead to the exit. There is no map. Oh, and the light also goes out. And it's raining. In fact, it's not just rain, it's a hurricane. And you are left, alone with your children, cold, lost and frightened. With no way out and with no idea how long you are going to be there. You can't tell anyone you're in the maze, though. Your phone might even have been taken away, your children's phones might also have been taken away. You must continue to take care of yourself and your children, but please don't ask for help because there isn't any. You can't complain about being in the maze, nor about there being no help because you must pretend to be ok. The maze police (outside agencies) will make regular visits to inspect your position in the maze. They cannot assist you in escaping, and in fact will ensure that you do not get to escape. They will inspect your position by shining bright torchlights in your face. They will shine the torchlights into every corner of your and your children's existence, whether you like this or not. Please remember, these people must not have any inclination that you might be struggling. Don't admit it. Because they might take your children to a different part of the maze and you won't be able to find them.*

The above story explains how life can feel after 'the knock'. One of the most frustrating elements for me after my children's father received a knock at the door for online sexual offences was that there was no roadmap. No exit strategy. I was equally shocked that in the nine months that my children were 'held' on a Child in Need plan (under threat) that none of us were given any actions to complete. The plan was used as a holding bay whereby the children and I were placed under a lot of pressure, for no particular purpose. So, I set about researching what courses and learning we could do as a family in order to make progress. I

did not find it in any way acceptable that we were subjected to invasive scrutiny and being 'rated out of 10', whilst not a single professional suggested any way to move forward. It was the most bizarre and pointless situation (and would have cost the state around £70,000).

1) Lucy Faithfull courses for both of us. Inform course is for friends and family members, Inform Plus is for those who are accused of or have committed online sexual offences relating to indecent images of children.

2) Safer Living Foundation (him). This was very important as social care wanted to see ongoing work from him rather than a one-off course. Safer Living Foundation are so good that he was able to continue with them rather than a state mandated course after sentencing. He began work with them four months prior to sentence and continued as soon as he was released from prison.

3) Social care actually told us that they were assessing for unsupervised after they read a copy of the SHPO. There was a bit of confusion at first on their part as they hadn't read it and thought they were assessing for supervised hence he didn't see the children at all for 10 days on his release.

4) He was assessed by a forensic psychologist, and I voluntarily had a capacity to protect assessment. This was after we had moved to a new LA and social services didn't have the case open. We were proactive and had the assessment done and thus when the case was reopened the new SW said they were really happy to have all of this information (almost 60 pages) as it was more detail that they would have been able to assess. They read every page and they also spent time speaking to my ex which no social worker had done up to that point. I had been assessed as having capacity to protect hence the scrutiny was not on me, but fully on what rehabilitation my ex was doing. Our risk assessments were conducted by Phoenix

Forensic (Steve Lowe), and are also available from Lucy Faithfull, Safer Lives and many independent social workers.

5) The assessment we had had recommended us each to do work, as well as made recommendations to social care about how to work with us, and identified that social care involvement had caused trauma to me. My ex was recommended trauma work to deal with his past emotional abuse, abandonment and coercive control by parents. He had been assessed as having an addiction to porn since the age of 13 with a primary attraction to adult females and not a risk of contact offending. So he did trauma work with Safer Living Foundation and I did some therapy with ACTS FAST to deal with my own trauma (from the knock, the fallout from the knock etc). I had to pay a private therapist as well, as NHS couldn't help.

6) I did NSPCC safeguarding courses, as well as having had safeguarding training in various jobs over the years. This was whilst he was RUI I did this work as no agency was making any progress with what we were meant to be doing.

7) Both ex and I attended Safer Living Webinars to learn more about this area of offending.

8) I proactively did PANTS work with my younger ones and age-appropriate Keep Safe work from the social work toolkit online with my older children. We went over this work a few times and the social worker in our new area asked the children a few questions about keeping safe etc.

9) Told my children what their father had done in an age-appropriate way.

10) Told social care when he was released that we would be willing to escalate to family court if we didn't get the outcome we wanted for our children and asked the social worker to

explain to me the process of how we get this in front of a judge if we need to. The social worker was very helpful and said that they always encourage people to challenge things and to know their rights where they aren't happy with an outcome. I also asked what social care were stating the risk of harm was seeing as it had already been assessed. They stated a risk of reoffending, not a risk of contact offending, hence the steps to release restrictions were taken in line with the reduction of his risk of reoffending. However it has happened relatively quickly as his probation have been so supportive and he has worked so hard on himself. He still attends weekly meetings with Safer Living Foundation.

11) Since he went to prison, and beyond release, my children have had the support of an amazing charity called Children Heard and Seen.

12) My children attend Rainbows at school and one sees a counsellor. My oldest child has a mentor from the charity. Again all of this helped social care to see that a lot of people support my children and I have proactively thought of my children's needs in all of this and found support and help for them, and someone for them to talk to.

13) Social care listened to what my children wanted and my children were given the opportunity to each articulate what level of contact they wanted with their dad and why.

14) Whilst we have not been on a plan, the schools don't get updates from social care so I have voluntarily engaged with schools safeguarding leads at every point in this and therefore they are not in the dark about anything which has been helpful as they've been able to support the children and also to understand what our goals are as a family.

15) I have also kept our GP fully informed and updated. I hand delivered letters with updates as I don't have a direct email address for the GP, only a general one for the surgery reception.

The GP has been amazing and really supportive, has helped me through some awful times and has been there to talk to when I have needed. I am on monthly calls with a GP right now.

Our case with social care is now closed, after two years and eight months, and a total of seven social workers. The contact restrictions that were put in place after the knock are largely gone, with the remaining decisions being left to me to decide, without the need to re-refer to social care. It's not a situation that I ever envisaged we would be able to achieve, but it just goes to show that it is possible, It's taken a lot of time, energy and hard work. The forensic risk assessment was really key to us being able to make progress, and that's the thing I really feel is essential in all such cases, in addition to the courses and work mentioned above.

We have begun to rebuild our lives, and to find a new normal. Don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help and support because there are people out there who want to help you. There is a way forward.

There is a way out of that maze, after all.