

The New Normal

When 'the knock' came to my door, like most others, I was shocked and unprepared and thought my life was over. I felt suicidal but didn't make detailed plans because I had children and knew I had to come second through it all. I searched desperately for help but couldn't find any and I could never get through to the Lucy Faithfull Foundation helpline. After a while, I gave up trying to find help. I spoke to generic counsellors about it but they seemed to know less about it than I did.

My husband was finally charged and sentenced for possessing and making cat c images. His offending also spilled over to voyeurism and he used opportunities to take pictures of my family members (adult and child alike). My family disowned me because I wouldn't divorce my husband and never let him see the children again. I didn't agree with not letting the kids see their dad again, so they cut me off.

I did not condone what my husband did. I was disgusted by his actions and it took a long while to understand it better. I hated the sin but loved the sinner and I couldn't switch off my love for my husband. It was very difficult for me to reconcile what he had done and then me being with him. It took a long time to separate myself from his offending. I internalised a lot of the shame and stigma and it led to my mental health suffering enormously.

After The Knock - I reacted with extreme hypervigilance. This was because I freaked out to begin and hyper focused on every little detail from the past, interrogated my children and wrote down everything they said and reported it to Social Services. Social Care had to tell me to stop doing this. I got no support from anyone and felt like I was going mad. One day I caused my son to have a panic attack because I was grilling him so much. I also conveyed all of this to my relatives who later brought it all back up again with the police. This would all lead to huge trauma for us a few years later, as I will explain below.

My GP prescribed antidepressants and sometimes diazepam too. The medications helped, but I wanted to talk to people in the same boat as me. I frantically searched online but only found horror stories.

With the stress, I had to leave my job and concentrate on the children. I was very routine based in my care for them, ensuring they had everything they needed. I initially separated from my husband as that was what Social Services, the police, and my friends and family wanted.

After a number of months and supervising my husband with our children in the community, we began to reconnect and realised we wanted our marriage to work. At times, I thought we would divorce, but any time I talked about it with the children, they begged me not to.

At first, I didn't know whether to wear my wedding ring or not. What would people think if they knew we were reconciling? My husband was not allowed to live with us after his arrest, but he would come over a few days a week and help me with housework and the kids loved seeing him. Some days I could not look at him because of the anger. I was devastated at how much ruin he had brought into our lives. His family helped him and he still had them. I was the one who had done nothing wrong, and my family cut me off. It wasn't fair.

Nothing about The Knock is fair. Social Services scrutinise the wife and think there is something wrong with her for not divorcing. They are suspicious of partners who don't sever the links with their

spouse. Many times I was treated like the offender, or accused of being manipulated by my husband. Neither were true. I was the one who usually wore the trousers in my house.

I chose to stay in the relationship with my husband for many reasons. The bottom line was he was remorseful, sorry, being rehabilitated, the children and I loved him. I thought we'd always been happy together despite stressful years because of our children's disabilities.

I allowed him to remain in our lives, it was good that the children could maintain a relationship with their dad but it was very stressful for me to supervise all the time. It reminded me of the riddle with the fox, the grain and the chicken.

Over the many months between his arrest, being charged and sentenced, my husband and I talked and talked. I learned a lot about his offences and the reasons why he was offended. I believed him when he said he was not a 'P'. It took me a while to come to terms with what was happening. The many hours that I interrogated him trying to catch him out were wearisome. I was mentally exhausted and wanted to run away to another country.

Some of my friends were understanding and those are the ones I kept in touch with. It was strange making new friends and not telling them what was going on with me. Some guessed that there was something deeper at work in my life and I did confide in a few new friends. I felt like I wasn't being honest with them by not telling them about my husband. It was a barrier for me to make new friends and I definitely didn't attend community activities like I once had. I was careful about who I told. I was paranoid about cars and vans outside the house. I thought many times it was the police trying to 'catch us out'.

My family cutting me off pained me horribly, especially the rumour mill that went with it. It was very traumatic to be rejected by them and this triggered a lot of past emotional trauma from my childhood. I found that I had to have therapy to help me deal with residual trauma from my past before I could even attempt to process this new trauma from The Knock.

After the first year went by, I started to feel a little bit better. I found the more time that passed, the easier things got. I think I just got used to the new way of life. The stigma was one of the hardest things to reconcile and as I said, I internalised a lot of shame. It wasn't until I reached out to other non-offending partners like me, that I started to shake off all of that shame. That was a big turning point for me.

I had done nothing wrong. In fact, I was helping the justice system. By supporting my husband through his rehabilitation, I was helping reduce the chance of him reoffending.

The attitudes of others are hard to bear especially when people refuse to look at the bigger picture or mitigating circumstances that contributed to offending. It doesn't excuse, just explains it better.

Some people don't want to understand.

In their mind, anyone who looks at indecent images of children are automatically a 'p'. This is what the media tells us and I once believed this too. I know now that these offences are often very much to do with addictions and maladaptive coping mechanisms and not a sexual orientation towards children.

Social care were very invasive towards me and my husband. After 3 years, they suddenly put my children on the child protection register. Social care and the police believed the Chinese whispers. It was devastating to be falsely accused. We spent many months fighting for our vindication. Meanwhile during case conferences, we were treated like we were guilty and were on the receiving

end of hate from social care. It was one of the most traumatic times of my life, to be looked at disgustingly by 10-15 professionals, even though we were both innocent of the suspected charges.

When we were vindicated, and the children removed from the child protection register, the professionals started to treat us with respect again. They were nice towards us. We never got an apology from them but the shift in their attitude towards me and my husband was enough for us to be thankful. We became to recover as a family and we underwent all the courses and risk assessments asked of us.

After 5-years, I am now very pleased to say that my husband and I are fully reconciled and he is back living in the family home. We have all been given a second-chance at life, a reboot. My husband used to have a high-pressure management job and was always on his phone and laptop. Now I am glad to say, he no longer works there. Sure, it's less status but we are happier.

As I said earlier, a big turning point was connecting with other non-offending family members. I met them all online and through openly talking about my husband's offending, a lot of the internalised shame I had absorbed, was rendered powerless. I've met some of the most kind and loving people through this experience and I often say that I wish people IRL (in real life) were as nice as these people. Many of them now have become my best friends. They make me laugh, they comfort me when I cry, they soothe me when I'm anxious. Most of all, they validate what I'm feeling and what I'm going through. Without them, I wouldn't be where I am today.

I used to work in the business world but through the experience of The Knock, I reconnected with my empathetic and support skills. This has helped me retrain and I am now working towards becoming a counsellor whilst doing support and voluntary work for others.

At one point throughout before being charged and sentenced, we doubted we'd ever be allowed to be a family again. We were undergoing a risk assessment at the time (ordered by Social Services). We decided that if I was not allowed to supervise contact then, we would divorce. At the time, they were investigating us and only my mother-in-law was allowed to supervise contact between the children and their father in the community. That period lasted 9 long months.

By way of insight to others, my husband and I underwent invasive questioning as part of risk assessments and thankfully the outcome stated that not only could I supervise, but my husband could come home! Hooray! It took another 2-years though for that to happen due to funding restraints and a lack of training providers to tailor educative training for my husband and me. Meanwhile, we both did the INFORM courses and extra Safeguarding courses too. This all helped in the end.

Our last risk assessment revealed my husband was no more of a risk to children than Joe Bloggs off the street. This greatly reassured social care and probation and the go-ahead was given for him to come home. He hadn't stepped across the threshold in 1.5 years whilst the kids were at home. He had to stand at the door and hug them goodbye when we came home from days out. He wasn't allowed in.

We were overjoyed at my husband coming home as at one time we were expecting to have to divorce. My husband returned home gradually and began having unsupervised contact gradually. We are all now living as any normal family would, except of course, we will never be the same again.

In the wake of The Knock, I now know what red flags to look out for that may indicate my husband viewing porn again. He took a vow never to watch porn again as that was part of the pathway of addiction that led to his offending. He used to stay up late, but now we go to bed together. Life is

better now. We have a much more transparent relationship and we encourage one another to talk about issues. Previously, I was very dominant in the household and so now I am learning to give my husband his place in the home with decisions we make in consultation with one another. My husband attends weekly support meetings and helps others experiencing sex/porn/masturbation addiction. I am proud of whom he has become and how he helps others.

I understand why some people don't get why I am back with my husband. They believe what the media says that everyone who looks at iioc (indecent pictures of children) must be a 'p'. They haven't had the training nor conducted the research that I have, so I get why they are stuck in those old assumptions. The media should do a better job at reporting on the phenomena and the families that stay together. We are hidden from the public eye, but there are thousands of families like us.

Today, I understand why it is important not to judge other people. I used to say things like "Oh she must have known", but all of the non-offending partners that I know, had absolutely no idea. It came as a complete shock to us. Then instead of being supported, we were treated as offenders ourselves, all because we supported our partners throughout this ordeal. My husband like many others, was very close to suicide and I know without my intervention, he would be dead now. Non-offending partners do a wonderful job despite the disenfranchised grief (unpermitted grief) we face, we have to be strong to help our partners and our children.

I am now happy to say that we are being signed off by social services in the next couple of weeks. We have went from being hated and treated suspiciously by them, to us being respected and even admired by them. The turn-around in our case has been staggering. This is unbelievable and we attribute our success to holding onto the hope that God gave us. Right at the very beginning, I begged God for a miracle, and He has truly delivered.

If I could go back and tell myself any nuggets, I would advise myself to go with the flow as to regard to what the police and social services want. Fight when you have to fight, there will be battles and you'll know when those times come. Try to get used to living with uncertainty and tell yourself that "this too will pass". At the time, it can feel like it will go on forever, but one day you will look back at this as 'just' a 'phase' of your life. You can survive the extreme PTSD, and thread water during the bad days. As time goes on, there will be more and more good days, especially when social care are a distant memory.

Risk assessments are an excellent way to determine the level of risk that your partner has. Keep calm and wait for these reports. The truth will always be out in the end. Social workers, policemen, friends, family all told me that we could never be together again. But they were all wrong. If you your partner has owned up and committed to rehabilitation and you still love them and want to be with them again, chances are that it will happen. You just have to be patient. Don't ever be afraid of supporting your partner. You may be saving their life.

When they are down and out and broken, many people will come along and kick the m. You can give your partner (or family member) hope and a hand-up and at the same time, this will also help you. Always reach out for help to the many growing lists of organisations like [StopSO](#), [Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#), [Children Heard and Seen](#), [Safer Lives](#), [The Knock](#), [ActsFast](#), [Affect](#), [Thames Valley Partnership](#), [Circles South East](#) etc. You can talk to and become friends with other people going through the same experience. We can all help one another move from surviving to thriving.

My husband was sentenced to probation but his SHPO was very restrictive. We later managed to get it overrode by social care because of the results of the risk assessments. Ensure that

Finally, don't ever lose hope. Life can and does get better with time whether you choose to stay with your partner or leave. Try not to internalise the shame from society. You have done nothing wrong. In fact, non-offending family members are true heroes.