

HOT TOPIC

OUR DAUGHTER HAS WITHDRAWN

Q We are worried about our 16-year-old daughter. Up until about two years ago she was a joy to be around: she was helpful, funny and easy to please. She now spends most of her time in her room and barely converses with anyone in the family. She won't do anything we ask and there is lots of conflict. She is about to take her exams and is bright so could do well but has done no revision at all. When we try and help her by suggesting some revision time, she shouts abuse and then retreats.

She is our adopted daughter and came to live with us at the age of 4 after several moves in foster care. We'd always assumed she wasn't carrying trauma from her past and just got on with family life, but now we're not so sure.

We feel unequipped to deal with this situation. Do you have any advice?

A I can hear so much loss and frustration in your letter and I am sorry for you all. Often, no matter how well we set things up for our family, there are key points in life when everything goes out of the window. The move from adolescence to young adulthood is up there with the most difficult of times for families.

I am going to start with your feelings around unresolved trauma for your daughter. When families adopt children, the full picture of what life was like before adoption will never be known. The child may have experienced extreme neglect or abuse, with feelings of danger becoming their normal way of life. When a child experiences this, they will sometimes revert to type: the way they coped with this difficulty in their birth home could be the way they deal with all danger. This might be fighting – being aggressive, self-harm, acting out – or fleeing – retreating into their own inner worlds where they can control things. It is at times of life transition, such as the move to young adulthood, where these patterns become more present and noticeable for parents. Especially when they are sensitive to such signs anyway.

The difficulty for adoptive parents is that they will never know what happened in the birth family and unless your child is great at talking about how they feel and identifying patterns, you might not know that your child feels unsafe.

Adolescence for any child is stressful – never mind with the added dimensions of being adopted. Your daughter has GCSEs coming up, hormonal and puberty changes, questions around identity and what it means to 'grow up', navigating peer and intimate relationships, wondering what the future is going to be. I know as an adult, I would find this a challenge! I am saying this because your daughter may need some space. She may need to switch off in her room, and with all this pressure, the only place she can put those frustrations is on to you. As her safe place, you are her anchor in these changeable times and the relationship that she will come back to as she moves onwards and makes her own life.

Dan Hughes talks about Blocked Care in his book, *Brain-Based Parenting* (2012). Simply put, blocked care is when either the parent or the child refuses to engage with the other and communication breaks down in the family, with the concern of turning in to a full crisis. There are four types of blocked care and the one that jumps out here is 'stage-specific'. This is directly related to a transitional moment in the child such as adolescence. In normal development, adolescents have a huge shift in brain development, and they become, in therapist speak, egocentric. That is, they become much more self-centred and less empathetic (it does change, honest!). Their emotions take over all interactions, often making them explosive, oppositional, or withdrawn. As a parent, we might try to interact with our child as we always have but the constant rejections and friction may mean that we start to feel defensive and worn out. We become angry and inflexible and, probably most importantly, unable to think about the reasons underneath the behaviours of our child. Being in our lovely family home with our children can start to feel awful and all family members may pick up on it.



The first thing to suggest to you and your family is, in Pat Crittenden's words, to "change the danger not the child (or parent)." Ask yourself, what feels so unsafe right now for my daughter, for me, for the other family members? It might be that you each have different reasons for feeling unsafe. Try to find a way to hear each person and how they feel. Perhaps you and your daughter are worried about the future and what it means to be without each other. Perhaps your daughter is feeling so stressed from the pressures of school and friends that she can't think. Perhaps you are worried about her not reaching her full potential and you having failed somehow. Once you have started to understand those

base reasons for your worries, you can begin to find a new way to communicate. Parenting an adolescent is a bit like being a consultant, rather than a manager. You step in when needed and try to facilitate your child's thinking so that they can make their own mistakes in a safe way. Ask yourself, how can I step back so my daughter has space? How can we talk together to find a way to be a team? And finally, keep your consistent and loving boundaries in place. Your daughter needs some where to bounce off and to bounce back to. By remaining consistent and available for your daughter, you are helping her know she is loved and safe, and that you are there for her.

Are you happy for your child to receive a large cash inheritance?

If you die without leaving a will, following your death (if you are single or co-habiting) or following the death of you and your spouse, your adopted child will inherit your estate equally with any siblings once they turn 18. At 18 they will become entitled to the whole estate which could be a substantial sum.

Many of our clients tell us that due to the emotional and other challenges their children face, that they do not feel that it is in their child's best interests for them to inherit everything at 18.

We are specialists in advising adoptive parents about the most effective ways of ensuring that their estate passes to their children in the most suitable way for their child and their needs.

We are offering free initial consultations to all adoptive parents to discuss their specific circumstances and requirements.

Call us on 0800 860 6265 and quote 'Adoption UK' to receive your free consultation.



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Call us now:
0330 440 1838
referrals@wearechroma.com

Chroma continues to offer online therapy services for adoptive families

Music Therapy | Dramatherapy
Art Psychotherapy | Assessments

We have developed an online therapy service in response to COVID19

We are taking new referrals, so please get in touch



If you or your children need our support contact us on:

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