Participant: F10

Title: How do foster carers and teachers attribute the challenging behaviour of Looked after children?

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Location: Foster Carer House

Interview: CFB (I)

Interviewee: Participant F10 (P)

Age: 52

Sex: Female

Foster Carer Years: 3 years

I: Great, ok, so I don’t know if there’s a particular child that you have in mind that kind of stands out as having had particularly challenging behaviour or if there’s been several children, that yeah you’ve kind of looked after, I dunno?

P: I’ve only had two, the first one was a baby so he went back at seven months, but the second one I got three weeks later, we’ve still got him, and he, he was four when he came to us turning five, he’s now six and he’s been diagnosed with ASD. So his behaviour is more challenging because of his condition. So it was quite difficult in the beginning because he came to us and erm, he walked into the house and he was basically screaming his head off and I thought maybe he felt, because he had been taken from his mum, he was upset, but apparently he just cried all the way from [location] to here, which is a long drive it’s a 2 hour drive. In the social workers car. So we had him, so the first week was about sort of getting him settled in here and getting him into school, he hadn’t been registered, well he had been registered with the school but never went to the school, so he was supposed to start reception here, so he started reception here three weeks later. So there were a lot of challenging behaviours with him and we couldn’t figure out if he was just a really naughty boy or if there was something more to it, because we had no background of his history, why he’s come to us at that point, it was just basically, he’s been taken off his mum, mum was in social care for 19 years, nothing’s changed, and he’s neglected. That’s all we got. So we kind of like took this little boy in and he, the first two weeks he was incredibly challenging and it was meltdown after meltdown for everything, y’know we had no clue what we were doing or what we were dealing with so I did say to social services, there’s something wrong with this child, he’s completely traumatised with everything. Anything you do anything you say anything how you do things in the house or how we get him to do things he has a complete meltdown and I said to her, I don’t think that we can manage this because we’ve got my 16 year old, 15 year old at the time she was sitting her GCSEs and then I’ve got my other daughter, older one who lives here as well, but we also had two other children coming on the weekend as well which is my partners children, and y’know the impact that he was having on the family it was it was quite hard really because everybody was trying to calm this child down but nobody knew what to do, how to manage it. And erm, we eventually had a chat with the social services and they said, well they couldn’t place him anywhere else because they’ve got no available foster carers at the time. So we said look we don’t want to feel like we’re letting him down but we haven’t really started anything with him because we’re not getting anywhere with him but there’s definitely something wrong with him. And he also walked on his toes, so I kind of googled things why he’s walking on his toes and it came back to ASC, so I spoke to the social services, social worker, and I said to her, I think that he needs to be seen by, he needs to have all his medicals and dentist and whatever else which I’ll do, but he needs to be seen by a professional and be assessed. He was then most looked after children are fast tracked anyway, so his was fast-tracked and by the 15th February, so we had him from the September, erm, and by the 15th February 2018 he then got diagnosed with ASC.

I: Gosh that is quick.

P: Yeah, so thats a lot quicker but then...

I: It’s still a long time...

P: In that period of time we still have September, October November, December, January, so we had four months to try and deal with him, so because I’m very structured very organised and my whole family are pretty, everybody’s got a routine and everybody’s structured. So we thought right let’s find a routine and a structure that suits him. But it wasn’t about us working around him, it was about us managing him so it was more about, ok, so we have a set time for dinner, set time for bath, set time for bed, and how we manage it, so we didn’t work around him as if to say we’ve got to fall into his routine, it was about putting him in a routine and managing that routine, which is what we did. So we started doing that and he started getting better. So he seemed a lot better within himself, he was settling. It was incredibly difficult at times, because we couldn’t really go out with him, he wouldn’t go out, he wouldn’t do anything, he didn’t want to be in places he’d never been before, he was blatantly rude to people, he’d actually perform, he’d just sit on my lap all the time glued to me. He was just very clingy and then if it didn’t suit him, he’d have a complete meltdown in the middle of nowhere, shopping centre or anything. So for example, this is a perfect example, we took him shopping, it was two weeks after we had him. We had to go to the shops so we took him with us, we went to Home Sense in [location] and we had a trolley and we had some things in there, so when we were at the – I don’t know if you’ve been into Home sense there...

I: No I haven’t, no...

P: ok, so you have the like you have to go down an aisle just to get to the till. So we push the trolley down, we got to the till and we were standing there and a lady had finished paying and she was trying to get past, and [partner] said to [child] “[child’s name], can you move your trolley a little bit?” and he said “no”, “just move it a little bit so the lady”, so [partner] just moved it, well, all hell broke loose and he went into a complete meltdown, threw himself on the floor. He was just incredible, so I picked him up and took him out. So a lady behind basically said to [partner] “you need to teach your children some appropriate manners”, and [partner] turned around and said to her “thank you for your patience, but he is a child with possibly ASD” y’know this is before we’ve kind of like y’know, but [partner] and I already knew he had ASD because we’ve got family members who have got similar traits. And I took him out and we realise that when there’s a situation we have to take him away from it because it distracts him, so it was about managing him then at that time, so over the next few months we managed his behaviour, but then we implemented I’ve got like colour cards in the kitchen, because he couldn’t read, he couldn’t write, he was a level, he was a four year old, but at the level of like a 3 year old.

[cat walks in, participant leaves to take cat out]

P: erm, yeah so we, we then, what did we do then, ok so, when we took him into school, he was really difficult he was clingy he was hanging on me, screaming his head off, eventually I said to his teachers, look, you’re the teacher, your experienced you need to take him away from me and then I need to just say goodbye and walk off, anyway, it got a lot better, after a year he was pretty much settled and he was doing very well. But there were a lot of incidences where his behaviour impacted my family, impacted my relationship with [partner] because [partner]’s trying to do something with him, I’m trying to sort him out, y’know and it’s y’know you just end up in a bit of an argument about it, it’s like right, this is not working, we can’t we’ve got a busy lifestyle we both work we both have busy family lifestyle, because so it was just really difficult. But I think erm, probably over the last year, he’s made massive improvements he’s a completely different child. He’s got table manners now, when he came to us he’d just scoff his food like that, he’d just sit on the chair like this with his leg hanging down and just...I had to teach him to sit at the table, had to teach him to eat with a knife and fork, y’know, going back to basics when you have a child, and it was about, when you ask for something please and thank you, not I want or give me, or whatever, but I was going to talk to you about the colour cards.

I: Oh yes.

P: Yes, so we got coloured cars in the kitchen which say warning, loose privilege, good to go, well done and stuff like that, so I use the cards with him, so if he misbehaved, he’d get three warnings, which would be the orange card for a warning, if he didn’t listen then he would have a privilege taken away. And he likes his iPad, so his iPad is his life so we used to use that to take it away and we would follow through, we wouldn’t just say we’ll take it away and then we didn’t, but we did follow through so he knows, and he knew, and he knows now that if he misbehaves, he doesn’t get the step any more but he gets his iPad taken way because he thrives for his iPad, he only gets his iPad in the evenings, he doesn’t, we don’t allow him to sit on it all day because we prefer if he plays with his toys, or he’s got his Scalextric there but em. So rather than him sitting glued to the iPad, rather watch a nice Disney film or play with your toys, got lots of toys, then sit on the iPad all day, and he’s quite obsessed with the iPad.

I: Oh really?

P: Yeah and then he had YouTube on his iPad, but for some reason, he was looking up, coming across some strange things, and I thought it was child friendly but it wasn’t actually, so I took the YouTube off his iPad and found the kids YouTube and put that on. He was not happy about that, he just wanted me to put the other YouTube on, I said no, I said no not after what I’ve seen on your iPad. He’s quite a high functioning ASD child, so or child with ASD, so he’s very good with numbers, he’s he doesn’t read and write a lot. He refuses to read, he can say some words, and he can write some words, he hasn’t got to the point where he’s writing sentences yet, and he’s in year 1 really. So he’s still behind he’s still at a lower level than a normal child his age which is 6 now. So, there’s still a lot of work to be done, but the school feel that he will catch up eventually. And he’s also learning to manage his emotions, and most children with ASD don’t know how to express their emotions, and they come out with aggression a lot. So he did show a lot of aggression initially and he did physically hit me on a few occasions, but that soon stopped once we tried to make him see that he needs to make the right choice, rather than hit me, or show aggression, take him away from the situation and then say to him, right, what is the right thing to do, what is the right choice you wanna, and give him that choice, rather than us say “right, you doing this and you doing that” because he’s not going to do it. So I think by allowing him to make the right choice he soon realise that he can manage his emotions. And it’s kind of very rare for him to be quite affectionate, he’s not the most affectionate child. He likes to sit on my lap or he likes it, not so much now because he’s six now and he’s getting bigger, or he, if he’s walking down the road he’ll hold my hand all the time, but he’ll walk on his toes. And I say to him “right, I’m not holding your hand until you walk on your flats” because every time he walks on his toes he’s quite wobbly and then he’s sort of pulling me around so I said to him, I can’t walk with you when you’re walking like that. So he knows. And if [partner]’s with us, he’d rather hold [partner]’s hand. You know one day [partner]’s his best friend and the next day I’m his best friend, so it just depends which way the wind is blowing so. But it actually, he was very challenging the first six months, and we really struggled a lot. And I found it really exhausting but I think I have a very strong character and I’ve bought my children up as a strict parent, so my daughters 17 and she still has curfew for half 10, so y’know and she’s quite happy for that y’know she’s not fighting me or giving me a hard time or anything like that, but about rules as well, we also implement rules that is for all around, rather than rules for that one rules for that one rules for that one. So we have like a few simple rules in the house, that everybody abides, even [partner] and myself, we’ll abide by the rules so we expect [child] to abide by them, we expect the girls, and we expect [partner] and [partner]’s children to abide by them. And it works well because I think I’m quite strict with [child] and I make sure that he keeps his routine, so during the school holidays and weekend we have the same routine, apart from weekends it’s a little bit different, we kind of go out to family or we go out to the shops and that, and he’s ok with that now.

I: Oh that’s good.

P: Yeah, yeah, he’s learnt to like go into the shops and say like “could you buy me this?” where he would never ask even for a chocolate in the shop, never ever. It was quite challenging for the first couple of months but soon got to the point where he’s an absolute pleasure to have now.

I: Ahh, that’s really nice. Can I ask was there something that was particularly challenging, or a particular behaviour that was particularly challenging in that kind of starting point.

P: Erm, yeah, his mannerisms and his I think it was about it was about teaching him where we have dinner, and him challenging us by saying “mummy lets me have dinner in the living room” or “mummy lets me eat in the room” or so so it was about teaching him the basics of good, how can I say, not good behaviour, but just etiquette so it was like trying to turn him from a caveman into a gentleman, and that was quite challenging because it was about how he dressed. He wanted to wear some scruffy old shoes all the time, which I finally got rid of and he refused to wear anything that I bought him, y’know he just wanted to wear an old t-shirt with a hole in it, he came to us with trousers. So it was about teaching him how to look after himself, and I found that very challenging. Like bathing as well. He wouldn’t bath, he wouldn’t wash his hair or anything. So I found like having to teach a child – when you get a baby, you teach them the grounding from the day they come into your home, so when you’ve got a child that’s had four years of that grounding and missed it all, you’ve got to give it back to them again in a small space of time, so that for me was quite challenging as well.

I: Yeah, why do you think he struggled with the table manners or like wanting to wear certain clothes, like the scruffy clothes, like why do you think, why do you think that was something he wanted to do?

P: I think it’s because he was neglected and parents just let him do what he wanted. And food as well, he would try and store food in his room, so I get the feeling he wasn’t very well fed, so I had to teach him, you don’t need to do that, you don’t need to put food in your room. You can have anything you want in the kitchen, any time of the day. So erm, so I think because of the neglect and also the lack of routine and structure, yeah, so that he was lacking. And if he had stayed in his family home, it think he would have just ended up pfff, possible, who knows where, prison or something, y’know so. Because he’s not been taught anything, he’s not been shown from right and wrong.

I: Yeah, that sounds, that sounds challenging, as you say its that whole thing of when you have them from a baby you can kind of instil all of that from birth, but when they come to you slightly older you kind of relearning or reteaching some patterns and things. You mentioned earlier that he sometimes hit out or was aggressive, or kinda hit. When, can you kinda talk me through an example, of when that happened and what you thought was going on at that time for him?

P: Erm, I went, on two occasions, one occasion I recall he, actually yeah. I ran his bathwater and I went to the bathroom and I said to him “ok take your clothes off” and I’ll help you in the bath. And he said “no” and I said “[child’s name] you’ve got to get in the bath” and basically adamant he wasn’t going to take his clothes of and wasn’t going to get in the bath, so I then took his clothes off and he started getting quite aggressive with me and he goes “I can’t do it, I can’t do it” and I said, well I’ve asked you to do it, it’s getting late now, it’s nearly bed time, and he just basically screamed at me, and then started punching at me like that. So, I moved away from him and I said to him, [partner] do you want to come and take over here because he’s got quite aggressive. So that was on one occasion, another occasion we were sitting here, and we asked, we told [child] that he had to go and take all his stuff upstairs now because it was getting late, and he just took something and he just threw it and it missed [partner]’s face. It was something hard and heavy and he just threw it at us. It missed [partner]’s face, sliced past his face, landed on the sofa and he sort of like. You could see the aggression in him it was so y’know I took him upstairs and I said “what you did was really wrong” explained to him that you can’t do things like that, he’s never done it again, he’s never been, he’s not been aggressive and he’s not thrown things, he’s thrown things on a few occasions but that’s one occasion when I remember with [partner] I have said. And I think the other day when I asked him to pack up his toys, and he said to me “no”, and this was just a random one. He picked up something and [partner] said “come on little man, [foster carer’s] asked you to pick up your toys now”, and he went “no” and he just threw it on the floor, so [partner] took it away, and said “right you don’t want that” and so I’m taking it away, then he changed, he was like. It’s like he doesn’t actually realise what he’s doing and then he walks away like nothing’s wrong, so, but we do, we do implement discipline and we implement a privilege to be taken away. Because there’s not much you can do with children when they’re misbehaving anyway, and we need to distinguish between bad behaviour of a naughty child and behaviour of a child with ASD.

I: Yeah yeah, so like when he threw the object across the room and he just missed [partner]’s face, what was your, why do you think he did that, where do you think that came from?

P: It’s hard to tell really because like I said a child with ASD does not show emotions, so when you, I think when we asked him to pick up his toys and said that its bedtime, he didn’t want to go to bed, and I think he got aggressive about it and thought that he could just manipulate us into staying up late. And with him, you can’t keep him up late because it he wakes up in the morning he’s the worst child ever, he really is not a morning person, so he’s got to have a reasonable early night. Same time every night if possible and then just have a good night’s sleep. And he takes a long time to fall asleep because he’ll put him into bed, and he’ll get up and he’ll say “I need some water”, go to bed, “I need the toilet”, go to bed, “I can’t sleep” “my duvet has come off me”, y’know so it’ll take him about an hour before he actually goes to sleep, but why he did that I don’t know, we were watching TV and he was playing here on the floor, and then I said to him “Come on, time to pack up now we’re going to go to bed”, he just like, “no” and then he just like picked up the object, no, [partner] said to him “come on, you need to pick up now because we’re going to put you into bed”, and he just picked up the object and threw it and that was it. Yeah and then he...

I: Gosh, quite unexpected...

P: ... Then he went upstairs and was a completely different child, so we’re talking about something totally out of the ordinary, which is what he does most times.

I: Oh ok, what kind of goes from one extreme to the other?

P: He does, he does, he can he can have a tantrum, and then he’ll just. It’s almost like he’ll get up, forgot he had a tantrum and he’ll be a completely different [child] again. Yeah. He’ll be different.

I: Gosh, why do you think that is? How does that work do you think?

P: It has a lot to do with his ASD and his behaviour in terms of ASD, because I don’t know if you know much about children with Autism, but they, most of their behaviour is because of their emotions, they don’t know how to express emotions, so he’s got no mannerisms when it comes to talking to people, he’s blatantly rude and y’know, if a person walks in and they’re a rather large person then he will ask them “why are you so fat?”, which he has done and I’m like “just kill me now!” [laughs]. Yeah, cause now I’m like “I’m really sorry”, and I explain. Yeah so, but erm, yeah, but I have, when that happened I actually had to say to him, you need to apologise to her, and he came, he did the next day he was standing by the door waiting for her and he said “[name] I’m really sorry, I didn’t mean to call you fat” and she said, “its ok” y’know she took it quite lightly but it’s still embarrassing, but he does, he’s very much an impulsive person. If you give him a box of toys and its not been opened yet, a box with Lego, he’ll rip that box to pieces, yeah, he won’t just take the Sellotape off, open it, take the stuff out. He will just get it opened, he’ll get half the toys out and then he’ll push it aside and find something else, that’s how he is. But I think sometimes he can be quite, I don’t think [child] is uh, I’m not sure, I’ve never seen him ever hurt a child, or be horrible to a child. In fact he’s a bit like a mother hen...

I: ...Oh really...

P... with other children, yeah, and he mostly he’s mostly popular with the girls at school, so he’s got two best friends, so the boys: [name] and [name], but he I think he, he doesn’t include himself in groups, its usually they will say to him [child’s name] come and play with us. Yeah, so he’s a bit of a loner as well, and I think he, he settles in quicker now than he did before, but I still think his challenging behaviour is more to do with his ASD than being naughty, being a naughty child, because when he’s yeah. He’s incredibly good. He wants to help, he wants to help me cook, and I’m like - “can I boil the kettle?” “Nooo you can’t boil the kettle”, y’know so he’s pretty much, he’s a very good boy and he’s quite happy to go up to his room and play with his toys, watches very little TV but looks forward to his iPad in the evening. So when it comes to a child being, you know you get a child that’s really naughty and say for example you’ve got a 9 year old that’s learnt behaviour of smoking because his parents do it, he doesn’t he doesn’t seem to have that learnt behaviour any more of eating like caveman or wanting to eat in his room, or not bathing or, y’know he’s no. so I think I think if [child] had been in the environment he was in I think his parents would have had a hell of a time with him, because of his ASD as well. He wouldn’t have been able to learn to manage his ASD, he wouldn’t be able to cope with social situations, generally. School would have been a no no because dad would have just turned around when they saw him having a meltdown and walk away as he did before. Y’know whereas I was persistent I would say, you’re going to school it’s really important, explain to him why he’s going to school, and why he needs to be there. If he cries well then, he cries for a little while and then you just go. But I think his behaviour, his challenging behaviour is mostly when his ASD is a bit up and down and things are not what they should be in terms of change or routine and stuff like that.

I: Ok, yeah. And, just to kinda begin to wrap up I guess. Is there a particular kinda positive memory or, something that stands out over the time that he’s been with you?

P: Erm, Yeah. I went to watch his sports day one day, and I know – If I go to any of his school functions he always looks for me and he finds me and he’ll sit and stare at me all the time, he won’t take his eyes off me, so unless his teacher prompts him to move. And we went to sports day and I was sitting there watching him and he watch me all the time, and then it was his turn to race. It was hilarious and I, I said to [partner] this is always going to stick in my mind, because it was so funny and I just laughed, it was so funny. So he was in the row and he was going to race, and they were all supposed to be running. So he’s jogging behind, walks past, but looking at me to the side and going [smiling and holding a thumbs up], like that, all the way up to the, he was the last one there, they were waiting for him, but that, he had to put his thumb up. So it’s kind of a really good funny memory of him.

I: Yeah, that’s so nice.

P: I think it’s just incredible how he’s actually changed, and even when I think about his dress up days at school, he was adamant he wasn’t going to dress up. Anyway, he wanted a harry potter outfit, so we got him a harry potter outfit for book day, and he dressed up and he was well chuffed with that after. Yeah so, he’s learnt to do things in the norm of life, so what we do is we actually treat him like a normal child. We don’t treat him like he’s got a disability or he’s a special child, or he needs different kind of upbringing or anything. We treat him like he’s just one of us, and in a normal capacity because I think he learns more in that way, because he’s quite clever as well, he’s got the most amazing imagination, and children today don’t often have that kind of imagination because it’s just iPads and phones, so. So, but he does have a really amazing imagination and he likes to put gadgets together, so he’s done amazingly well and I’m really proud of him so.

I: Yeah, no it sounds like it, it sounds like it’s been a huge amount of progress that’s been made

P: and y’know even if I have to y’know, say credit to my family because they’ve all been really supportive in helping me with him and helping me and [partner] really because they have a big part in his life, so the girls will do a lot of things with him, take him to cinema, to the park, y’know, take him out for the day, so they do.

I: Oh yeah that’s nice

P: Yeah so he’s, from the time he came to us and I thought “oh my god, what next?” y’know, he was just really challenging to where it is today, he’s massively improved. Still room for improvement, but we’re getting there.

I: Yeah yeah, oh good. Thank you

P: Oh you’re welcome, I hope that was enough information?

I: Yeah yea, well I was just going to say is there anything else that you particularly wanted to share or think would be relevant at all?

P: No, I was just thinking about some of the foster parents that I actually know and that I’ve spoken to and how challenging some of their children are, and they’ve had older, and personally I think I would have preferred babies, because I had a baby, but I found it really hard letting go when he left me at 7 months, so when we got [child] I thought y’know what, that age group is fine for me, and I don’t think I would want an older child, because I think I would struggle with... the older child they’re already, their life is already been ingrained in them y’know and say for example you’ve got a 9 year old or a 10 year old, they’ve had 10 years of their life been ingrained in them already whereas [child] only had four years of his life ingrained so it was easy to work with him. You have a ten year old they become quite mardy, but if I got the opportunity and I got a ten year old I would deal with it anyway.

I: Yeah, very true, yeah.

P: But my preference is small children

I: Little ones, yeah I get that. Ok, great. Thank you very much.