PParticipant: T6

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

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Interview: CFB (I)

Interviewee: Participant T6 (P)

Age: 48

Sex: Female

Teacher Role and Years: SENCo

I: So I will start off with just the boring questions of just asking you your age if that’s ok, and also how long you’ve been in your role and your experience of working with looked after children as well.

P: Yep that’s fine, I’m 48, nearly 49, will be 50 next year! And I am SENCo, DSL looking after the, I’m part of the LAC team as we say in school, but as because I came into this role as a new assistant headteacher, had a huge like SENCo assistant head, like really big caseload, but I started, one of the first things I did was go on the LAC conference, it was a big one at [location], probably didn’t realise the enormity, or how many children we had here, who have either been looked after, looked after or are being fostered, because we’ve had quite a few. And as we’ve gone on my experience has just been, I’ve been getting more involved with PEPs etc I actually haven’t done my own PEP yet, but I’ve been involved in the meetings, and if social workers are coming in I’ve held those meetings before. But yeah and I’ve been to every LAC, Virtual School meeting as well. So yeah, I try not to miss them, so yeah.

I: Ok, great, thank you. For the purposes of this chat it would be useful to, I mean you can draw on your experiences of multiple children that you’ve worked with, but it might be interesting to pick kind of one to focus on a little bit more when we’re thinking about, and I don’t know if there is one, a child that comes to mind if we’re thinking more about the context of challenging behaviour and whether there is.

P: Yeah, currently there’s two that I could probably talk about, ones in foster care, and ones actually been looked after, in fact they’ve been adopted, so is there a preference in what you would like.

I: we’d probably go for the one that’s still in foster care, because that tends to be the focus that we’ve gone for with everyone else, so if that’s ok? We’ll stick with them, and I guess if I could ask you just to start off by describing the child generally really?

P: Yeah, so, it’s a boy in year 3, he was fostered two years ago, he’s come with his younger brother to school as well, the younger brother doesn’t present with any behaviours as such, there. It’s interesting because this morning there’s been a meeting, because they’ve actually come from [location] so [local authority] is involved as well, is that, is that alright, or would you prefer,

I: Yeah that’s fine

P: You don’t care what authority they’re under? And erm, so the behaviour he’s presented with physical behaviour like from day one really from being here, it’s funny he sort of makes up things, so things aren’t, his reality is different to what is actually happening. He would hide under tables, doesn’t naturally form relationships with adults. The foster carer is sort of, I mean she’s the one that I would suggest that you speak to as well actually. She hasn’t got a bond with him like she has the youngest that’s very, that’s very clear, but then behaviour at home is the same. He has attacked, recently, it’s got, so they are going back to dad, but nobody really thinks it’s a good idea, because there’s another three children in the mix in different areas and he’s just disclosed some sexual behaviour, well they’ve actually had that as well, so that’s all under, but the judge said that they’re going back.

I: Wow, ok, that’s tough.

P: Its really tough, and its and especially at the moment because we’re doing this sort of, we’re trying to do this transition, so he’s not been here today because he’s been at his new school and erm, yeah I just, its heart-breaking, absolutely heart-breaking, but his behaviour, we are just trying to keep him safe, keep others safe. So, he’s got a 1:1 at minute because he can’t be allowed to go to the toilet on his own or any of that sort of thing either.

I: What sort of things might occur, that example of going to the toilet on your own, what sort of things have happened.

P: Right so so, he, his younger brother – shall I bit explicit, are you allowed to know?

I: You can name if you want, I will anonymise everything when I write up

P: So he has put his finger up the younger brother’s bottom, there’s been a disclosure that the same thing happened to him to the older brother when he was the youngest brothers age if that makes sense, so there’s obviously been some sort of history around that. And he’s also now trying to do it in secret and y’know he’s been caught again even though he was caught before, and he’s also done it to, he’s been honest and said that he’s done it to the grandchild of the foster carer as well, which is very difficult.

I: That’s really difficult, yeah.

P: Very difficult, so at the moment in the meeting this morning it was, there was somebody from CABS, have you heard of it

I: Yeah...

P: The harmful behaviour, erm, and obviously she hasn’t met the family yet, the boys yet, but she said its finding out what that behaviour’s for, is it for pleasure is it for, y’know other, I don’t know what the other three things, but it’s actually finding out what it’s for, but it’s quite a worry, it’s quite a worry for school, because if we know about it which we do and something happens, so the fact that he’s wanting to do it. He’s talked about wanting to do it to the dog as well, so.

I: And he’s making those disclosures in school and stuff is he?

P: Yes, yeah yeah he has, yeah.

I: Gosh that’s a challenging one for you guys to be dealing with

P: Yeah yeah yeah, very much so.

I: Ok, and you talked about him having a different reality and kind of that sort of thing. What sort of things, yeah give me kind of an example?

P: so, erm, he, erm, well let me think about it. If he’s on the playground he thinks that he’s been, what’s the word, he thinks something’s been done to him when actually it hasn’t, and then it’s a - he’ll lie about what’s happened when actually you know, so he’ll you know, it’s nothing to worry about sort of thing. So yeah he’s not, it’s, what’s the word, I mean I know children don’t rationalise as much, but, it’s almost like he doesn’t feel, do you know what I mean. It’s almost like he’s “oh what’s the point, why bother” sort of thing

I: In terms of, with kind of his interactions generally?

P: Yeah generally definitely

I: So I guess where, you, somebody might ordinarily be motivated to behave in a certain way...

P: ...Yes, that’s it...

I: ...because of how they feel or how it might impact on someone else that, that’s not something that you’re seeing?

P: No, that motivations not there, he’s very much, it’s me, and it’s this is what I want to do and erm, y’know he was better at the beginning of the year when I first started with his behaviour, he was in class y’know he was following instructions, but that has gradually I think it’s probably since Christmas has got much more like, if you say ok we’re doing French “I don’t wanna do French” so he’ll be out on the stairwell and he’ll be, sit on the window sill and just and he won’t actually engage at all if you say “come on [child’s name], y’know let’s go and find out what’s going on in class” he’s like, he just doesn’t even engage he doesn’t even speak to you

I: Really?

P: yeah yeah, unless it’s something that he wants to do, so I’ll say he loves lego and he loves being on the computer, but he will, if you want him to do something, it’s that demand thing, he won’t, he won’t even engage.

I: what’s your kind of, like understanding of that behaviour, like where it, what’s driving it? Where its coming from?

P: Yeah well I, I mean I don’t know I mean attachment without a doubt and I just, I just feel that he’s, y’know he, I dunno he’s not erm, he’s not it’s not not wanted, but he’s just he’s on his own. He hates his brother, he says he hates his brother, he says he wants to kill him, quite literally and there was an incident a few weeks ago where just happened to look out the window and he was he was very violent towards his brother. Very violent, I mean you don’t see that level of violence towards others in school with him, he might give them a whack or whatever but not in the same way, he, I think he probably did wanna kill him. Yeah yeah. But my understanding is that he is very damaged and y’know I can’t see it getting any better going back to that situation, y’know removed for a reason, neglectful, y’know ok they’ve come back to, y’know getting their life sorted and whatever, but, I just, yeah I just I feel like he’s going to be a statistic lost in the system because a judge ruled that that should happen when it really shouldn’t, that’s my feeling.

I: Yeah

P: I think if he was in a stable family, I mean obviously he’s got issues, he’d probably have attachment disorder of some sort, but y’know I think if he knew he was loved and cared for, and I think that’s the thing, I can see from the outside that the foster carer hasn’t got the same – she absolutely adores the little one and he doesn’t present with the behaviour in the same way, he can withdraw and that’s exactly what he does he does withdraw but erm, it worries me that he hasn’t had that bond with her either and I think possibly if that was err. But again, very difficult isn’t it if your fostering to, y’know. Yeah I don’t know...

I: Yeah yeah, I guess there’s been kind of additional behaviours that can create that barrier that makes it harder to make those bonds.

P: Yeah its difficult.

I: Yeah yeah, ok. Can you think of a particular kind of incident or example of a challenging behaviour, so I know you’ve mentioned that he’s been quite violent I don’t know if that is what you would consider to be most challenging, or if actually some of the low level refusal stuff is more challenging, but just, kind of an example to talk through...

P: Yeah, I think the absolute refusal to move off like a computer, so y’know if he wants to finish his game, and finish that then unless you give him a carrot that’s come off it then he’ll, and he won’t engage in lessons and that’s the thing, in education you want to educate but we’re not getting him in even in class at the moment and that, it’s all on his terms, erm, and I think that’s, when you can see him being unsafe like when he yesterday he was on the stairwell and he was climbing on the banister, it’s almost like he doesn’t care enough about himself to really think about the danger, if you see what I mean. That’s more worrying than him hitting or punching because we do it, we can deal with that, but yeah he will throw chairs, y’know, mostly, mostly actually he does lash out at peers, he doesn’t lash out at adults, so he’s not aggressive to adults, he lashes out at his friends, or peers, but he will mostly run, hide, get y’know, I mean if you’ve seen our lunch trolleys, the other day I got him half way down the corridor, to see what was going on in class just to see if he wanted to do it, erm and he went, literally underneath and in the sandwich trolley and just stayed there, and he’s quite a big boy so to physically move him. And y’know he’s hidden under all the coats as well, and yeah so, and just on his own agenda as well, if you think that we’ve been trying to be really careful with having 1:1 so somebody knows where he is all the time, I mean that’s challenging in itself just having the staff to do that. But he disappeared the other day, and err, the class teacher was like “oh my god where is he where is he?” and she’s not kind of aware of the whole situation, but she was like “where is he where is he?”, I think about 10 members of staff just did those woooh like trying to find out where he was, and then I came out I was like on the landing there, and [child’s name] just walked past me, like this, he’d just taken himself off to go and get changed into his shorts, cause for y’know for PE I mean to be fair, but he’d taken himself off instead of telling anyone and that’s the thing there’s no, sense of, I mean there’s a little bit of authority but there’s that y’know...

I: kind of that you would need to defer to an adult, or to tell them that you’re going to do something, or get permission to do something

P: Yeah there’s, yeah not really, it’s on his own terms and agenda yeah. He uses it to his own as well, so if he feels like doing it he’ll agree and carry on and do it.

I: Where do you think, or like why do you think he, you talked a bit I think about that almost like a need for control or like, where do you think that kind of comes from?

P: I mean he’s probably got no control himself has he, he’s got no control in his life has he, and this is somewhere that’s probably safe to do that to be able to, he’s probably had no control over what’s happened to him so far has he, that’s part of the attachment thing.

I: Yeah yeah, have there been any thoughts about, is it quite hard to get him into class at all at the moment?

P: at the moment, yeah, so that’s one thing that we’ve been doing is transition, so instead of coming straight in he’ll go and do something, he’ll take his busy box, so, and those transition times are particularly difficult especially coming in from play, I mean he’s not, because he’s had the 1:1 he’s choosing actually not to go on the playground at the moment and he’s coming up anyway to go on the computer because he gets a bit fixated on that as well he gets lost in that so yeah, and erm, yeah he’s not, he’s not attention seeking, more avoidant, more would run and hide, be in a y’know, just shut himself off.

I: ok, and how do you think your understanding of where his behaviours are coming from has impacted or has it impacted your, how you’ve then managed the behaviour that he’s showing.

P: Erm, I think, accepting that that it’s not him, that it is because of what he’s going through and y’know putting the things, we’ve done the emotional regulation we’ve been trying to do that with him and I mean, trying to get advice as well for what to do through CAMHS and things have been in, but, yeah I mean, giving him space actually that if he needs to then that’s fine, but as long as he’s safe. But it is that difficulty of its education and I think that’s the understanding from like class teachers don’t always y’know get that as well they’re like “oh y’know” I think that’s certainly the case with this teacher in particular that he’s got this year that she’s not really that understanding despite, y’know so she, yeah, I wouldn’t say that caring attitude is in that classroom – that won’t go anywhere will it?!

I: No no no, you’re fine, you’re fine. And do you think that’s impacting on then how it’s, like not having that understanding do you think that’s impacting on how she might then manage the behaviour

P: Yes yeah, it will be passing on to somebody else, y’know oh if someone’s leaving the classroom it’s down to us and “where’s my adult?” that sort of thing, and so yeah, it. He relates to different people better, we’ve got a good relationship, he’ll y’know he will come with me, but I know how to, its dangling those carrots isn’t it and knowing what will make him tick and what he is interested in erm, and err, but yeah he will just refuse with some people absolutely.

I: Are there particular kind of characteristics of people that he will kind of go with or not go with?

P: I think if he feels safe with them then I think that I y’know with our family support worker has been doing some ELSA work with him and although she did say that the other day she doesn’t feel that even with the ELSA, she doesn’t quite, because she’s only just done, well she did it in October, she doesn’t quite feel equipped to the level that he needs, especially because he’s going through a transition, he’s going back to parents and stuff. She’s dealing with the emotional side is fine, trying to talk it through, and he will, he will talk about things, it does take a lot longer for him to start to open up to her, but he feels safe with [name], I’d say he feels to a level safe with me, but then, y’know because being senior management we’re where the buck stops with behaviour so often it’s like, y’know go and get Mrs [name] go and get Mr [name] or whatever, and yeah, so, so I do think he feels safe with me. He feels safe with, there’s another TA, who will just let him do what he wants, so he, y’know she said yesterday, “he’s run me ragged today” but she’s not strong, she’s just, she will, she’s a mum and she will just let him get on, but when it comes to like going home or something like that, then she finds it difficult if she’s putting a demand on him so that’s when we normally have to get involved. Yeah, but I don’t think he’s got a particularly good relationship with the class teacher, she’s, she’s very firm, very old-school is what I want to say.

I: Yeah yeah ok. I was wondering if you could kind of talk a little bit about, so you’ve said that him and his brother are quite different in terms of how they represent and just whether you had any thoughts about why that might be given that I guess, I presume, were they both brought up in the same environment?

P: Yeah

I: Yeah I just don’t know if you had any thoughts about that?

P: I think the experiences that the youngest one had, he was still very young when he was removed so I don’t think he had the same level of, I mean I would say that the oldest one, he had a little bit more responsibility, he was probably expected to look after or to, to be older than he is and y’know there’s one between them who has actually gone back to dad already who I think he has got special needs as well so I think relationships, he was probably closer to him or, I don’t know how that relationship was, but I don’t think it was great. So I should imagine, there’s probably resentment, that’s how I feel I just think that he was the baby, the foster care, I mean it’s obvious to me so I would say that it’s probably obvious to him that he’s [the younger brother] liked more, and I should imagine that’s why he wants to kill him. and the little one gets very much, and he’s reverted back like he has, he had really come out of himself, he’s delightful, he had come out of himself, but he’s gone back to very much, playing solitary, like ordering his game his way, doing it his, like he’s not aggressive, he had the potential in the beginning where he was like, oh I’m not sharing with you, not doing this. But he yeah he has just recently gone back to not engaging with his peers or his friends

I: That’s interesting, why do you think that might be?

P: I think, erm, he’s just really confused about what’s happening. He really is, he when you’re doing a timeline y’know of going back to dad and stuff because we’ve been doing that time to talk with him as well and erm, well even the oldest one he was confused as well about, he thought he was going to be going into - I can’t remember what year group it was - but it certainly wasn’t into the next year group, when he goes to his new school, and they all, y’know they’ve both said “oh I’m going back tomorrow” or “I’m going back to dads this weekend” and the timeline and the understanding about who’s who as well and where mum is and brothers and I think it’s just so confusing for both of them, to rationalise that and to understand that at that age is...yeah..

I: Yeah really tricky

P: And whenever they’ve had contact, the youngest one has often been hurt by the older one, just y’know in, that sort of, I dunno. Yeah so I think it’s, I dunno I dunno, I mean the little one did say before he said that he wanted to stay with the foster carer he didn’t want to go, he didn’t want, he was quite happy to stay with her and that’s changed now as in he’s talking about going back with dad and stuff so but I think just the upheaval and the change its just, tough. And it’s heart-breaking for all of us do you know what I mean, for both of them because I think regardless even if the decision is changed which I don’t think it is going to be, but if it is, they won’t stay with that foster carer anyway I very much doubt y’know, I wouldn’t have said that was a good thing either, like either way

I: No it sounds like a change either way would be...yeah oh gosh, well that’s really tough. Well we’ll take a slightly kind of different tact just to wrap up which is to ask you to think about a positive memory or experience that you’ve had I guess with either of them that we’ve been talking about just to wrap up.

P: erm, just, y’know I’ve had a real laugh with the eldest one, we’ve joked and stuff and that’s that, I don’t know when we’re talking about – I can’t think of an example as such – but just y‘know I really do like it when you get through to him, not about any of that, just, y’know when he’s got excited about something or he’s talking about his lego, what he’s made, and he made this absolutely amazing, yesterday actually, he made this amazing star wards model and he was so proud of it, and he was just making all these noises and stuff that it makes, and then he was telling me about all the characters and stuff and then that was it, and then I’ve got a fan in my office and we were making robot noises, so there some nice memories. And the little one I just, just how excited he is when he sees me that’s just lovely and he’s sort of, and he likes to show me his work and everything, yeah so he’s, and just, seeing the progress that he’s made academically the youngest one, because I’ve had more to do with him in the sense that I’ve taught him more, so yeah, so just, they’re lovely they are lovely boys, really lovely boys and I just and I think that’s even more heart-breaking when you think potentially when you’re looking into the future of what, yeah I just wanna take them home myself, but then I do for several children.

I: that’s the problem isn’t it, if you started, you’d never stop

P: Yeah yeah, I’d have a hotel!

I: Yeah, well thank you very much

P: Has that been helpful?

I: Yeah it is. Are there any other thoughts that you had either coming into this or you had as we’ve been going through that you haven’t had an opportunity to share at all?

P: Erm, no, no, that’s I think, there is the child that was adopted, y’know that I, that’s an interesting situation where the behaviour he’s got quite severe attachment disorder where the behaviour is quite extreme, and that escalates and that’s what I would really like is more support for how we go forward, I mean we’ve just, I think, I think because I’ve only picked it up in the last year and I’ve only just really started to get what it’s all about because I did have children in my classes before where they were adopted or fostered but in this school it is really interesting because of the dynamics because of well the cohort, where they’re coming from, the demographics is what I’m thinking. And, I’ve just been really, I didn’t ever think that things could shock me, but coming here and I’m just surprised actually about who can foster and who can adopt. I just, yeah.

I: Yeah its sort of, it can be quite a surprising one that

P: Yeah and I just think, that I don’t I mean I know they have to go through training and everything else, but I just, I dunno, I dunno I just think, because I can see that it’s not, that sometimes they haven’t got the right approach or they’ve left it too late to deal with stuff or just not understanding themselves about what that attachment looks like or that it’s not just because they’re being naughty, they’re looking for that support and I just, that’s been my biggest surprise.

I: Yeah, I mean I remember though because my parents are foster carers and I remember when they went through the application process and they got to the point of being approved, and they were just like “they’ve never seen us with children” like ”how can they approve us to look after children when they’ve never seen us interact with a child”, like you can have all the references in the world but if you haven’t seen them interact with a child, then you don’t, you couldn’t possibly know what they’re going to be like, and yeah so that was a bit eye opening I think

P: and yeah, and I’m, I’m sure y’know that you’re mum and dad have been brilliant, it’s not in, it’s not that, the ones that we’ve been talking about, she is brilliant, she has got y’know a really good attitude and she does her very best, I can’t, but its more the adopted ones actually the two families that we’ve got here who have adopted children, I just think, “how?”

I: I think there’s even less support for adoptive parents as well because as soon as...

P: Yeah as soon as they go then the social workers like, oh that’s one then, and they’re all fine. And I agree to some level because I’ve got a friend that adopted a little girl and I, absolutely know that that’s right and know it’s y’know all good, so and why would you want social care involved if its, that’s her daughter and its why would you want social care, but there’s some families that I’m just thinking, how were they left with so, with so y’know

I: Its maintaining that, I guess in an ideal world, maintaining that support and that kind of potential training I guess that’s also there, without it being a monitoring process, which I think sometimes it is still when your foster carers it’s a little bit still monitoring how they’re doing where as if you could still have the support in place.

P: Which is something that has just happened with Virtual School with [name], she’s been involved with us like now with the two families that I’ve been kind of about. But yeah it’s just, but like she said she’s just signposting really to the extra training. But if they’re not going to take it up...

I: Yeah it’s a tricky one, it’s one of the difficult things working in school and things you kind of, there’s only so much you can do. You can do between 9 and 3 when they’re in school with you, and that’s kind of it

P: Yeah, and that’s with the same with the children that are fostered, that’s yeah. But that’s with a lot of children, not just.

I: Yeah absolutely.

P: I was saying did you hear about the news this morning about all the mental health for children

I: referrals all going up? I know. It’s not good is it.

P: No not at all

I: Well, thank you very much

P: You’re welcome.