

# Getting Violence Out of Your Home



*Catherine Marcus looks at how Non Violent Resistance courses and support groups are helping parents living with aggressive children.*

Parenting wisdom tells us that the secret to happy, healthy, well-behaved children is boundaries: rewarding good behaviour and removing privileges, where appropriate. But what about the minority of adopted children, whose earliest experiences were marked by the early trauma of neglect and abuse, for whom 'Super Nanny'-style discipline doesn't work?

A joint survey by the BBC and Adoption UK in 2017 found that more than a quarter of adoptive families are in crisis, with more than half reporting the experience of living with a child who was violent, of 'being punched, kicked or threatened with knives'.

Many parents attend eight-week Non Violent Resistance (NVR) group courses for adoptive parents, run by PAC-UK under the Child-to-Parent Violence (CPV) Project, in the hope of finding a solution.

NVR was used by great historical leaders such as Martin Luther King and Ghandi to create political change and Professor Haim Omer from Israel adapted NVR into an approach to parenting.

Practice Manager/Integrative Child



Psychotherapist Sue Dromey said: "We believe that CPV has its roots in trauma: these children have experienced trauma, have witnessed it, they 'know' it viscerally. Many children will re-enact this and they do.

**Sue Dromey**

"In the groups, many parents arrive exhausted,

depleted and hopeless, because of the relentless demands and the violence. Parents came to adoption with the desire to love and care for a child, and they feel they are failing.

"NVR doesn't say 'we are going to change the child', it says we are going to change the atmosphere at home. It gives parents the tools to look after themselves, teaches them how

to de-escalate, how to re-connect with their children and put relationships at the heart of their family life. A shift in parents produces a desired shift in the relationship with their child. NVR is not a quick fix and persistence is required, but the results are worth it."

NVR groups help to relieve the suffering and shame felt by families living with CPV; allows them to reach out and realise that they are not alone – but what about when the group ends?

Dawn Oliver, an NVR-UK practitioner and adoptive parent herself, facilitates the eight-week groups and has been a member of the follow-on WhatsApp chat groups where parents can find support after the course has finished.

"The parents find the group chats are a superb tool – they felt so isolated before. Having a space where they can say some strong things about their children, without anyone thinking that they don't love them, is so helpful. They let off steam, support each other and remind each other about the principles of NVR."

Rebecca is an adoptive mother with a teenage son, adopted at 18 months, who came to NVR in desperation.

We first heard about NVR through an adoption support group in our borough. Our son has loads of different diagnoses, he struggles with impulse control and he has always had problems with violence, hitting and that sort of thing. We tried everything, but it got to the point where the adoption placement was in danger of breaking down. It wasn't normal for home to feel unsafe, or to send up a prayer before opening the door, but what was abnormal had become normal for us.

NVR isn't the easiest thing to do as it's counterintuitive. Our son would hit out and my instinctive response would be to cringe, cower, run away, because it hurt and it was scary and it was happening on a daily basis. We were constantly walking on eggshells because we didn't know when the next explosion was going to happen. NVR tells you to increase parental presence,

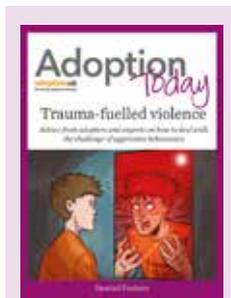
**"The parents find the group chats are a superb tool - they felt so isolated before."**



which is against all your instincts at the time, because it is so physically and mentally exhausting to be even more 'there' in the face of this onslaught. The first time I did it, standing and just being there in the while he was threatening me with a knife and being there waiting for him to calm down was exhausting but incredibly, it worked. As time goes on, I get more and more used to it, less scared, and my son comes down a lot quicker. Now we are in a place where we can look at other things we can tackle.

One of the great lessons of NVR: pick your battles. There is the red basket which holds the big issues which you have to tackle – unacceptable behaviour (which for us was the violence). Then there's the amber basket, which is stuff you want to mention but not 'life or death'. Then there's the green basket, which is stuff you completely let go.

Sharing with others was amazing and one of the most helpful things was to be with people who had been through similar experiences and discover you were not the only one. When people told me their story, I didn't say 'you should have done this or that' and 'you are a bad parent', I just found myself very compassionate towards them in way that I wasn't compassionate towards myself.



Copies of Adoption UK's special edition magazine on Trauma Fuelled Violence are still available from head office at £3.00 each.

Seeing how things affected somebody else made me realise that I deserved the same compassion back. I realised that I didn't have to expect this behaviour; that it was not normal to send up a quick prayer every time I came home; that it was not 'normal' to feel unsafe all the time.

The people in the WhatsApp Group group understood these particular issues in a way that other people just don't. There is nowhere else where I can go and say: 'I hate my child and I want to kill him!' (My social worker is very understanding, but this would probably ring some alarm bells). People on the WhatsApp Group really understand that what's going on can bring up these enormous, really difficult feelings for us, as parents, and that I don't actually want to kill him.

Not only does NVR work, but we have tried everything. If I am sounding evangelical, it's because we were in a position where this adoption placement could have broken down and we are not there today. NVR is the only thing that helped with the violence and believe me, we tried everything. We are still here. I am still here, much as I might want to walk out the door. I made a commitment to be a parent and I am still here.

Catherine Marcus is Practice Manager at PAC-UK. For details of NVR courses go to [www.pac-uk.org](http://www.pac-uk.org)

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