



Is it POSSIBLE to *feel* SAFE  
when you can't *escape*  
VIOLENCE at home?  
*We believe it is.*

## Toby is learning to be a kid again

**Traumatised by the violence and insecurity of the first four years of his life, Toby, now nine, is making great progress in the care of, Caroline and Peter, who recently adopted him.**

It's been a long journey for Toby and his little sister, Lilly. Last year we told our donors how they came into our care after their mother and her violent partner were imprisoned for murder. It's been five years since they were placed permanently with Caroline and Peter by our Find a Family team and while there have been hurdles along the way both children have realised that they can put the past behind them.

While living with their mother and her violent boyfriend Toby was physically abused and both he and Lilly suffered extreme neglect. It took huge amounts of patience, love and understanding for Caroline and Peter to calm the fearful and aggressive little boy that first came into their home. However a bond was established and when they adopted the children Toby finally accepted that he now had a secure, forever family. However, his behaviour has still been challenging at times.

Barnardos works hard to ensure children maintain some kind of relationship with their birth parents so that they understand where they came from, and while Toby's mother didn't consent to the adoption, she did wish for ongoing contact. Toby and Lilly have supervised visits with her a couple of times a year.

Over the years Toby has also had trouble at school. Difficulty dealing with his emotions, learning difficulties and his lack of trust in adults made it

hard for him to cope with formal schooling in the beginning. He also found it hard to make friends because he felt 'different' and ashamed of a past that he felt he had to hide. So, prior to the adoption, he was enrolled in our Two Trees Project, a group therapy course designed specifically to address the abandonment, identity and self-esteem issues that children like Toby, who have been permanently removed from their birth parents, typically experience.

Two Trees gave Toby the opportunity to explore friendships with other children who have had similar experiences. He used to make up stories about his life – pretending that his real mum was a celebrity, or that Caroline and Peter were his real parents – but over the course of the project this story-telling became less frequent and he began to share his real experiences and use the social skills he learnt to make friendships. Most importantly Toby was able to show his appreciation to his foster, now adoptive, parents – calling Caroline his 'permanent mummy who loves me no matter what,' and telling the group facilitator that, 'she is teaching me to be a kid again.'

Caroline and Peter have noticed that lately Toby is enjoying far more carefree moments. "I'll catch him when he's playing football or in the garden playing a silly game with Lilly and see something I thought I might never see – a kid without a care in the world," says Caroline. "He and Lilly will always carry their past with them but we hope that, with Barnardos' help, we have been able to heal the rawness of those wounds, and give them both a chance to be the fun-loving kids that they should be."