

Supporting the wellbeing of infants and children through a trauma-informed lens

Case study – Jack

Jack is a young boy who experienced physical and emotional abuse from infancy into toddlerhood. At around three years old, Jack is placed with a foster carer, Lisa. During his preschool year, Jack's teacher raises some concerns about struggles he is having in particular areas of his social, emotional and behavioural functioning. Some weaknesses in Jack's cognitive skills are also reported, including attention difficulties.

During Jack's kindergarten year, his teacher raises concerns that he often seems to be 'on edge' and 'tense'. He can also be easily startled by sudden classroom noises that don't seem to bother other children (e.g. the loud bang of a door closing; the ring of a musical bell). Jack's teacher also notices that he can quickly 'shut down' and become withdrawn, without any obvious trigger. This can sometimes make it challenging for him to complete classroom tasks. There are also some difficulties with 'daydreaming', paying attention, and understanding spoken instructions; Jack's teacher carefully uses various strategies to support these weaknesses and to optimise Jack's learning.

During his kindergarten year, Jack finds it difficult to separate from Lisa at the start of each day. When she tries to leave the kindergarten, he clings to her and shows signs of distress such as crying uncontrollably. This anxiety at separating from Lisa gradually improves over the year. Jack's teacher initially finds it challenging to gain Jack's trust - but through time, patience and understanding, the teacher is able to form a relationship that provides Jack with a sense of safety.

Midway through his kindergarten year, Jack's teacher expresses concern that he can be 'oppositional' and wonders if this might be linked to his preference for being 'in control' of situations. Jack is also prone to quick escalations in emotions. Jack's desire for control, in combination with some difficulties with social skills and emotional regulation, also seems to be making it challenging for him to form peer connections.

At the teacher's suggestion, Lisa takes Jack to see a practitioner to help understand what might be contributing to some of his social, emotional, behavioural and cognitive struggles.