

## BEN'S PATHWAYS

### Ben, aged 12

Ben has been beaten and neglected by his mum for as long as he can remember. He knew that it was probably not right that he should be treated that way: *'Maybe I did certain things wrong myself but I did not deserve that'*.

Ben went to school with bruises but tried to hide them as he was frightened of the consequences of teachers finding out: *'I really wanted to open my mouth and just tell them everything...but I knew that I would have to go back to my mum that night...I had a massive fear of that so I dared not mention anything'*.

#### Task 1

At the first point Ben is actively trying to avoid telling because he is scared. He partly recognises that he is being abused but there is a hint that he has had to work hard to get to that point ('maybe I did things wrong myself') Self-blame is common for children who are systematically abused by their parents. Staff may disagree about whether Ben clearly recognises it is wrong, or whether he partly recognises. However, the point is to think about Ben's thoughts and feelings in relation to what is happening to him. It may be difficult for staff to intervene effectively at this point, but forming a trusting relationship with Ben may encourage him to talk.

### Ben, aged 15

Ben stopped attending school as his teachers were beginning to realise that something was wrong, *'they could see that something was going on because of the evidence around my body, like bruises, cuts, black eyes, cuts on the head, bits and pieces like that and they had a very big concern for me'*.

His mother kicked him out when he was 15 years old. He was angry, misused substances and felt suicidal. He was arrested after smashing a bus shelter. The police realised he was homeless when they tried to return him home. He was placed with foster carers.

#### Task 2:

Ben starts this phase either partially or clearly recognising the problem and showing signs and symptoms (bruises, school avoidance). He gets help eventually in relation to cause (by being placed in foster care) but he has a period of homelessness and extreme vulnerability before this.

### Ben, aged 16

Ben was neglected in foster care and left alone at home without food. He began to suffer from panic attacks, was anxious and found it difficult to eat. He sought help from the school nurse and found on-line support useful.

**Task 3:**

It may be difficult to plot where Ben is in terms of recognition from the information given, although the fact that he sought help suggests that he at least partially recognised the problem. He purposefully told about it (the school nurse) and got help in relation to the cause – a shift in accommodation.

**General points about the case study:** Despite the difficult experience in foster care Ben's past experience of help (the intervention by the police and his placement in foster care, support from school staff) means that he is able to ask for help about his symptoms (anxiety and eating difficulties) and feels positive looking towards his future. This is an important message to take away from this case study. Even in extremely difficult circumstances an earlier positive experience of help has a later impact on the child's willingness to seek out an adult to talk to.

Plotting the child's journey at different points in time allows us to think about what sense Ben is making of what is happening to him throughout his adolescence. The initial issues for school staff to consider may be how and whether to make a referral when they encounter a safeguarding concern – what to do when a child discloses. However, thinking about the child over time allows school staff to explore their ongoing role in working with extremely vulnerable young people.