

Role: Family support worker
Agency: Barnardo's - Community Support for Offenders' Families (CSOF)

Background

James*, aged 14, was referred by his secondary school to Barnardo's Community Support for Offenders' Families. James's father had been arrested for a sexual offence after attempting to meet a young person he had groomed online.

James was experiencing a lot of anger towards his father, and the school felt he would benefit from talking about what had happened and the impact it had had on him and his family.

Action taken

James met with the family support worker for one-to-one sessions in school. He was able to talk about his situation and explore ways he could manage his feelings and express his anger without causing harm to himself and others around him.

James was also supported in understanding the different stages of the offender journey and the Criminal Justice process; from arrest, court, sentencing and prison. This ensured James was aware of what would happen at each stage, allow him to prepare for the next stage and ask questions about what may happen.



An important focus in supporting and safeguarding James was working with him, his mother, and the school to prepare for potential media interest as the case inevitably made the local papers and news. The school were helpful by acting decisively and quickly to take down and deal with posts when students highlighted the case on social media.

James was able to recognise the level of support he needed at different times and session frequency was planned around his needs e.g., when the case was in the local media, James wanted to meet on a weekly basis. When media interest reduced and there was a long period of time when there was no change in his father's situation, he asked to meet monthly; with the proviso that he could meet with his support worker earlier if he needed to.

SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS CASE STUDY: JAMES

Another positive intervention was facilitating a meeting between James and another young person in the same school whose father had also been convicted of a sex offence. Both young people were able to recognise that they were not alone in their struggle, and they were able to share experiences.

This informal support was expanded when James attended a variety of social events put on by the CSOF team. These included family days held in the summer and informal get togethers led by young people, all of whom had experienced a family member in the criminal justice system. James also shared his experience at a national event to help raise awareness of children impacted by parental offending. James commented that: “Meet ups were good - meeting people in the same situation and meeting people with their own struggles.”

Outcome

James no longer requires sessions but is aware that support is always available to him, should he need it. Both the school and his mother have noticed a positive change in how James manages his feelings. Although James still feels anger towards his father, he now expresses this in a healthy way that no longer impacts on school and family life.

It was evident from his behaviour and attitude that the opportunity to meet and talk with other young people in a similar situation reduced the stigma and isolation James felt, and it empowered him to be able to use such a traumatic experience to help and support others.

The work with James illustrates the need for support at different stages of the offender journey and the importance of a non-judgemental, needs-led approach.

**Pseudonym*