



Spotlight 3: Episode 3

Podcast transcript

Spotlights is a series of online events and publications, focusing on a particular group of victim/survivors who are often hidden from services. As a part of SafeLives Spotlight on domestic abuse and young people, this week my colleague Deidre has met with Sarah. Sarah is a survivor of domestic abuse from her ex-husband, and now lives as a single mother with her teenage daughter. Sarah has told Deidre about how the abuse from her ex-husband has affected her relationship with her daughter, and her daughters' relationship with young men. We talk about how this has affected her both as a survivor and as a parent. We hope you find this interview as inspiring and enlightening as we have.

Please note that all names have been changed to protect identities.

Deidre: Okay, thanks for joining me. Can you just start out by telling me about yourself?

Sarah: Yes, I'm 43. I was married to my daughter's dad since 1999. She was born in 2001. I've been divorced for about eight years so I've managed with my daughter on my own since then really. We've had difficulty regarding contact and so on, just some routine really in our lives. I had to give up work a couple of years ago because things got so bad between me and my daughter. Since then we've been getting help from Services and I think we're turning the corner a little bit now.

D: What was the difficulty that you and your daughter had?

S: She started becoming very violent towards me, aggressive, and it reminded me of my marriage really.

D: Was there abuse in your marriage?

S: Yes. Yes, it was controlling a bit and would become violent on occasions. My ex-husband he got sectioned at one point, arrested for pulling a knife on my boss. So my daughter's seen quite a bit and she was, she's sort of been witness to him being arrested on occasions. On one occasion she called the police on him for smashing my car up. Yes, it's been horrible.

D: Sounds like both of you have been through a lot. And that marriage ended eight years ago?

S: Yes.

D: Did the abuse end when the marriage ended?

S: There's been incidents right up until I would say last year. You know, even at my parent's house, he's tried to kick down the door, the front door. There's been abuse. There's been threats. It's just starting to settle down now where we're quite amicable. But that's since Services have been involved with us.

D: Amicable between you and your ex-husband or you and your daughter?

S: Both really, my ex-husband as well, because we've always had quite a fractious relationship where, you know, we are able to communicate for a very short time, maybe a week or two weeks and then things slip back. But since Services have been involved and they've spoken to him and I think they've explained what your daughter's gone through and needs, and he seems to have taken that on board.

D: And do you think, what do you think about your daughter having experienced domestic abuse and witnessed it? How do you think it's impacted her if at all?

S: I feel guilty that I didn't get out of the marriage sooner. It's definitely had an impact on her. It's had an impact on her friendships, her relationship with me. Sometimes she even pulls the same faces that he used to pull when he was getting angry, and it's just a reminder sometimes. You know, she's pulled knives on me in the past and been really aggressive. Sometimes she can still be abusive if she's not getting her own way, and the name calling will start.

D: And how does that make you feel?

S: Awful. And because it's stopped, you know, we've had quite a peaceful few months because it's stopped, and on the odd occasion where she does start showing signs of being abusive again, I don't, I'm not coping with it very well. It's quite upsetting.

D: How do you cope with it?

S: I just feel like my head's in a vice.

D: In a what?

S: Just in a vice. It's awful. I start to panic I think. I think, oh not again. But they have calmed down quite quickly. It definitely is getting better but I think it's the thought of going back there to what it was like maybe six months ago.

D: Between you and your daughter?

S: I don't feel I can go back there into that situation

D: What do you think would happen if you did, if it did go back there?

S: I don't know. I don't know what would happen to me. I think I'd be quite ill.

D: So a lot of the issues have been around your daughter being abusive towards you.

S: Yes.

D: And how has she been in her other relationships?

S: She's destroyed a lot of her friendships through her behaviours, through lies, perhaps through, you know she's been drunk a few times and ended up in hospital on two occasions. And I think some of her nice friends just thought this isn't what we want to be around, so she lost a few of her nice friends, well most of her nice friends, and now she's struggling to build those nice friendships back up.

D: And what about intimate relationships?

S: She had one boy called ***. He was just, he was a nightmare. Yeah, and he showed signs of controlling her and she showed signs of being controlled. He was her absolute world and they haven't been involved now for quite some time and she's still not getting over him really.

D: How did that make you feel knowing she was in that relationship and what was happening in that relationship?

S: I just had the... well, not on her back all the time, but sort of taking notice and watching what was going on, and trying to discourage, trying to talk to her, but she was so obsessed with him.

D: How did she react to you trying to talk to her and help her?

S: Sometimes she wanted my help and sometimes when she wasn't getting her own way, she didn't want to know. Horrible time.

D: Yeah, I can imagine. And did you feel like you were able to help her?

S: Only when they broke up and she was sad and I could explain how it feels and how it passes, and that she seemed to get comfort from. But if they were involved and still ongoing, I'd say well ***, that sort of behaviour isn't acceptable or it's not right or, she didn't like it. And she was aware that sort of his behaviours weren't right as well, and she would apologise to me on his behalf sometimes, say I'm sorry about that, mum.

D: How did that make you feel?

S: Sick and I just wish she could come out of it. He's not all, all that. Because she'd become quite obsessed.

D: And has that changed at all?

S: She still talks about him a little bit and she said even on Saturday when she went out that her friends kept bringing him up in conversation, and saying look at him, isn't he really nice, and that's not doing us any good at all. Her friends keep bringing him up.

D: And when did the Young Person Service become involved, when did Jumilla become involved?

S: Maybe a year ago now would that have been? September? There's been that many people. I think before then we had... yes, that's been ongoing for a few years. And then Jumilla's been involved with us since September.

D: What led to Jumilla becoming involved?

S: I was actually on a training course away and I think *** had rung me. I don't know how it might have got referred. I don't know how the involvement happened, I'm not sure. There were just so many people, there's been so many people involved trying to help, and I think what I'd originally asked for was just some... I needed routine and stability

in mine and my daughter's life, because it was getting to the point where her grandparents or her dad would ring up or she would ring them and it was kind of like can you come and get me now, or, there was no routine in my life, no routine in her life...

D: Did you just have to drop things to...?

S: Yeah. And that's what I wanted really was to speak to them and get some routine, but no Services were able to do that without Children's Services getting involved at this level. They were the only people that could go out and say well this is what needs to be done.

D: And how did you feel routine would change things?

S: My daughter would be away when she was seeing her dad and I also wanted him, if I was trying to discipline my daughter or take her phone off her, she was just ringing up and saying my mum is taking my phone off me, and then we would get into a row. So since Children's Services have been involved they've spoken to him and said, well you know, you need to support her in this, what she's doing. If my daughter needs to lose her phone for a night then you have to really support her in this. Don't just drive up to *** and pick her up if she's not getting her own way. And there were too many lies being told. You know, she could manipulate both sides and she had become very manipulative.

D: And how has that made you feel?

S: It was awful. It was frustrating because I didn't have the relationship with my ex-husband or my ex-in-laws where you could explain what had gone on and say, well, this is really what's happened, because she would go there and tell a completely different story. I mean there was an incident just two weeks wasn't there Jumilla, where a boy had sent a picture of his private parts to her, and the response from the nanny was, your mum needs to believe you. Because *** said it wasn't a part, like it wasn't his private parts, it was his chest. And I know what I've seen.

D: You know anatomy.

S: Yes. And the nanny said well your mum just needs to believe you.

D: So it's like they're working against you and...

S: Yes. But fortunately by this point, you know, my ex-husband was on board and he actually said no, just leave it.

D: So that sounds really frustrating. You've had this abuse from your ex-husband and you've tried to put distance between the two of you, but in order to manage your daughter and raise her and minimise the harm or abuse or manipulation she's causing, there has to be communication it sounds like.

S: Yes. I mean there's been police involved where we've had PINS in place against him, but it's just, he seems to be the most sensible out of all of them.

D: Who?

S: The ex-husband believe it or not.

D: About her, about your daughter and about managing behaviour?

S: Yeah, managing the behaviour.

D: And how do you think things have changed since Jumilla's become involved?

S: Jumilla's done a lot of work making her aware of the consequences of certain actions, you know, with knife, pulling a knife on people what can actually happen; how much trouble she can get into; how injury could occur. And now you're doing work with her regarding relationships, aren't you? And she really takes notice, and some of the things are sinking in, yeah, with her. I mean certainly since Jumilla's done the knife work there's been no more incidents with that at all, no more threats of, you know, anything. She hasn't tried to attack me with any, anything really.

D: What support has been there for you in dealing with all of this?

S: I had medication from the doctor but I've been offered support from talking therapies and things. At the time when I was meant to go to talking therapies I had so many people sort of involved in our lives, it was daily, and I felt very depressed and not in a good place, and I needed to sort of do something work-wise. And I wasn't, I didn't feel I could fit anything else in. And then eventually people have just started to drop off out of our lives now a little bit, and I don't feel I need those talking therapies any more, because things have really settled down and I feel in a good head space. It's just, you know, if she does start kicking off I know if it was going to be a regular occurrence I probably wouldn't be okay.

D: What do you feel you can do safety-wise if you feel at all threatened by her?

S: I didn't feel threatened by her the other week but I did have a day where she started chucking her phone around where she broke it. I thought, oh I'll just go in the bath out of the way. So I just went in the bathroom, took everything that she could damage technology-wise in the bathroom with me, and just sat in there for 20 minutes until I was in a position to probably deal with her sort of calmly and she'd calmed down a little bit.

D: And how did you feel after that? Did you feel like that was enough?

S: She apologised, but we did have a broken phone which was a shame. But it calmed down pretty quick.

D: And how do you feel about things going forward?

S: I feel confident. I think if she could do a little bit more work on her friendships and concentrate a little bit more on trying to help herself because she's not very independent at all. So there's little things I'd like her to try and fix, put a little bit of work in herself, but she's turned herself right around. From where we were six months ago to where we are now is just it's a different world.

D: Yes, it sounds like it.

S: Completely.

D: And there might be other parents listening who've had similar experiences, maybe they've gone through abuse themselves and then either their child has gone on to demonstrate abusive behaviour or been abused in their own relationships, what advice would you have for them? What message would you want to give to them?

S: Get all the help. Don't give up. Really, you can't give up. A lot of things I've had to change my behaviours and reactions to *** and learn how to compromise a lot of things which I probably didn't. I mean still even now if *** asks to go out sometimes I just panic and think, oh, where could this lead. It's learning to trust her as well. There's so many things that will give advice and one is getting the help and advice on how to deal with a child if they're showing sort of abusive or controlling behaviour. Because I think if you just keep it all and try and manage it yourself it's not going to get any better, it'll only get worse. But I have definitely had to change quite a bit.

D: And how does that feel?

S: I'm used to it now. I don't really notice it as much, but at the time I was thinking, oh, really hard, you know, when you've got people saying, oh just trust her, just give her an hour. And I can see my daughter changing. I can see the change in her more than I can see the change in me, even though I have changed, I can see the change in her.

D: I guess it's always harder to see that in yourself.

S: Yes.

D: So it's about trust.

S: Trust, patience, time, not expecting everything to change overnight because it doesn't. It's a gradual trust thing, patience, it happens in time.

D: And what kind of help do you think should be there for young people and their parents? What do you think is necessary?

S: What I've found has worked with my daughter and me is talking, really sort of... I think if you try and go into a classroom and dictate and say you've got to behave like this, it doesn't really work. Talking and getting us to understand how each other feels. Having an understanding of what each other's going through as well.

D: Yes, that makes sense.

S: Yes. I mean a lot of my frustration was I had no time, time out. I felt when life was very difficult with my daughter it was 24/7, and I didn't feel I was getting the support from her paternal family at all. And that was so frustrating, that they could come into her life, pick and choose when they wanted for ten minutes here and there, bring her back and she was even worse behaved.

D: Yes. So you were left with all of the weight of actual every day parenting responsibilities and discipline and all of that.

S: And what's helped as well is everybody's been told what's expected of them and what they say in front of her and what not to say. Sort of support for the parents definitely in knowing how to deal with a child if she's kicking off, if she wants to get her own way, and everybody must sing from the same hymn sheet.

D: Yes. So all of the family members involved.

S: Yes. And it's getting that message across. So help involved, yes, for people to come in and do that and sit a family down and say, well, you must do this and you must do that, or try this and try that.

D: And that's been helpful for you.

S: Yes.

D: Great. Cool. Well thank you very much for talking to me to day. It's been really useful and I'm sure other parents will find it really helpful and inspiring, and I'm sure other practitioners like Jumilla will find it really useful as well.

S: Yes. Okay, thank you.

D: Thank you.

Thank you for listening. If you'd like to find out more from SafeLives Spotlight on young people and domestic abuse, please go to our website SafeLives.org.uk, where we will be uploading new content every week-each exploring a different aspect of young people and domestic abuse. If you'd like to participate in the discussion, you can go to our website to sign up for the webinar on March 3 between 1pm-2pm, and also join in the Twitter Q&A conversation on March 15th between 1pm-2pm-just go to #SafeYoungLives.