

Collette Elliott: Survivor of Abuse

Précis of speech at ESCB Conference

From a tender young age I knew I was different, because I was always treated different. For a while I believed the "big people" hated me. Teachers, Doctors, Social Services, even my own parents.

Children are labelled as "imaginative", "elaborate the truth" or "good story makers", but where do you think these "stories" come from? No child under the age of eight has an understanding of abuse from parents. They are often taught in school about 'stranger danger', but not about the mental and physical abuse that children can suffer not only from strangers or family members, but also from their very own parents.

As a child with a past I find I look very hard at my children, even other children to see their actions, postures, how they interact with other children and adults. An abused child is one way or the other; either very shy, withdrawn, hates attention or alternatively wanting constant attention, bullying other children to make them feel the pain that they feel, a lack of respect for adults. No child would hate for no reason. That hate and venom towards people and property has been installed in them. If they are being raised in a household where swearing and racism is common then that shows in their actions towards their peers. If a child is being beaten and spoken to like dirt then that would also show in their actions.

I requested my social work files and it was through this I found that the failings that had followed me were still happening now. People making calls to authorities, concerned about a child's welfare only to be told that if the child goes to school, is clean and fed then there was nothing they could do because as far as the law goes, the child's needs were being met. Whilst I was reading my files I found it wasn't actually my social worker who failed me, if anything she tried to save me but my future was in the hands of a woman who sat in her office all day, never once met me or spoke to me, it was her who left me to suffer the way I did. I can't impress upon you enough how important it is to listen and talk to the child.

If you need to know how a child feels then ask, show them they can trust you. Be the adult that they could talk to. I spoke to my headteacher about my abuse and she rang my parents, social services turned up and I was sent out of the room whilst they talked. Why? It was me it was happening to, only I could tell these people how I feel. Instead I got sent home with my parents, beaten and immediately removed from the school. Now that in itself should have sent some sort of warning: one minute a child is crying abuse and then the child is removed from the school. Not once in my files did they follow through with the allegations made by myself, neighbours, friends and even family.

I tried to bring charges against my parents for the mental abuse I had suffered only to be told there was no such law. Unless I was physically disabled because of their actions then there was nothing they could do. So it seems mental health isn't taken as seriously as it should be. It doesn't matter that as a child has such low self-esteem because their parents are constantly on at them, calling them names, telling

them they are worthless. Mental abuse makes a child very vulnerable in so many different and dangerous ways.

I contacted my local MP who looked up child abuse laws in the House of Commons library and it showed that the laws hadn't been updated for 80yrs. We have so many different laws for so many different things - laws on abuse against elderly and vulnerable adults were up to date: mental torture for any of these groups is very much frowned upon, but what about the children?

I contacted Action for Children, told them my story and my findings on the law and found they too were campaigning for children's rights. Emotional Neglect has a huge void in the law system and it needs to change. Many, if not most, mental health patients have problems going back to their childhood but it is never picked up until later on in life because when that child becomes an adult then people will listen, but by then it's often too late. I was lucky, something inside me made me fight and believe me I did some fighting, in fact I'm still fighting today.

Since I wrote my book [Unforgivable](#) in 2014 I have met and spoke to adults who were in the same position I was and were still suffering to this day. It's been through the release of my book that I have made some very special friends, friends who were never given the chance I had. By the age of 30 I was finally assigned a team by my local health authority who were a constant in my recovery.

I'm now working alongside my MP to set up an organisation to help survivors like me. I want to help them fight back against the system that had let them down in childhood and try and put them on the path to recovery.