

#3 A story of losing trust



Issues around trust and mistrust were recurring themes in the stories: the problem of knowing who could be trusted to talk to, or who could be trusted to help.

One story in particular is a strong example of how breakdown in trust between people, and between people and services, could result in the deterioration of a situation when someone was experiencing psychosis. The reluctance of this family to work with or involve the police because of racism – and the consequent lack of trust in the police – was also an issue in this story.

Our storyteller is a mother who spoke to us about her son's descent into paranoia and psychosis. She described how she experienced him change from being a well behaved and caring child, who did well at school and further education. By sharing her story, she was piecing together the events that happened and how her son changed so drastically.

He was a really good child, very quiet, a nice kid. He did everything. He cooked, cleaned, whatever. He was a really good kid. He finished school, finished uni. I had no worries about him. All my friends were having problems. I was worried about teenage problems, nothing at all like that. [Storyteller 13]

The son she had raised, knew and trusted gradually became a person who was difficult to understand and communicate with. At times he seemed to be an angry shadow of the person he used to be. Eventually the relationships he had with his mother's partner, his godfather and his mum appeared to break down through instances of misunderstanding and mistrust. In this story, in particular, a number of the characters appeared not to trust each other or believe each other's version of events.

The first clear incidence of this mistrust was when the family home was broken into; only her son's room was targeted, and all of his things were stolen.

He lost valuable possessions and his artwork, which could not be replaced, while the rest of the house remained untouched. She described how her son became extremely mistrustful and suspicious after this event, and pinpoints this incident as the beginning of him becoming unwell.

It was definitely somebody he knew because he was having all these people in the house. They cleaned his room out, proper, everything out, including all his artwork because he's an artist. All of his work, they took his computer which had all his work from uni and from school because he got an A at art in his A-levels. So they cleaned out all of his work, took even his hard drive. So even though we could replace the equipment, you couldn't replace all the work, plus all his music as well because they were doing... he had a lot of beats and stuff on it.

So all of that I think really is where it started because then he became really paranoid, suspicious of everyone, couldn't trust anyone. I think that's, for me, where it all... well I mean we didn't think anything of it. I didn't think it was that serious anyway but I think that's where it started.

She described thinking that the burglar probably had inside knowledge of the layout of the house and planned exactly what they wanted steal. It appeared to her son that the person who robbed his room must have been one of his friends. This resulted in him cutting off contact from many of his social circle and becoming isolated. He stopped trusting the people he knew.

But like I said, the whole point is the effect it had on him. This is where I think this psychosis came from because he was going to every single shop [looking for his things], he was being suspicious of everybody. He banned some of his friends. He even banned... he had his really good Chinese or Korean friend and he thought it was him who broke into the house so he just banned him from coming to the house. He stopped speaking to him.

Perhaps the betrayal of trust was as hurtful as the loss of material goods. It was later revealed the person who had robbed his room was not one of his friends but a relative, bringing a new level of mistrust into the story. While her son believed he knew the identity of the thief, our storyteller did not believe him; she put her trust in the family, which was in turn betrayed.

Yes, after that robbery, I think that's where it really affected him and we didn't know. The reality is, we later found out, the police contacted [son] about a year after the robbery because his passport was stolen, money, everything as well. So we were all scared about identity theft but it later turned out it was my brother's son who broke in the house and he had the same name as [son]. [Son] was suspicious of him and I'm saying, "No, I don't think he would have done it." So it was only when they found the passport, the police found the passport when my brother's son was arrested. The thing is, my brother is a [name of profession] so that was a shock to him so he phoned [son] to see if [son] had given him the passport. [Son] goes, "No, it was stolen," so then we knew.

Then [son] phoned me to say, "See, I told you it was [brother's son] who broke into the house.

The robbery happened at a time when a breakdown of trust was a feature of a number of relationships that are central to this story. Our storyteller believed that her son's godfather, a longstanding friend, had a negative effect on her son's perceptions of her new husband. She described how the godfather changed in the way he related to her and her son, and suggested this may have been because he was jealous of her new partner. This caused her to question how a close friend, who she trusted enough to appoint as godfather, could do something so spiteful. It appears the son may have been used as a pawn for this man's hurt feelings.

Then [godfather] started influencing my son negatively. My son was okay with my husband, my partner at the time, but once we got married my friend switched, then he totally twisted my son. My son wasn't speaking to me for a while.

The situation deteriorated significantly over time. While our storyteller was working abroad, her son was sharing her house with her partner. There were arguments between the two men that were impossible to resolve. The two men's stories of the conflict were very different so the storyteller was unsure who she should believe, her son or her husband.

So [husband] was in the loft, [son] had the whole house to himself. He keeps going up to [husband] to harass him and started getting really rude. Even his cousins would notice how rude he was getting to [husband] to the point of snatching [husband's] phone away, this and that and the other. He was getting more and more aggressive.

After more disagreements between the two men, the situation got so bad that her husband was talking about divorce. The situation could not continue, and the two men could not find a way to live peacefully in the house with each other.

[Husband] was chatting about is, "I want a divorce. I'm not living like this forever." Then [son] is telling me about the altercation, he's not saying what happened, "The guy's a loser," "He's this and that". But what turned out, what I found out from [husband] was [son] went up there with an afro comb and grabbing his phone, he was chatting on the phone, grabbing his phone saying that he'd disrespected me.

[Son's] story is that [husband] was on the phone disrespecting me, or he heard [husband] disrespecting me so he went up there to ask him why is he dissing his mum and then... but [husband] story is he's chatting to his friend, because they're both into music, chatting about music. [Son] comes up there and started shouting at the phone, "You stink of..." and really being disrespectful and shouting so that the person on the phone could hear. Anyway, so yes, he came up to attack him and [husband] goes, "Yes okay, come."

It seems the son was hostile and unable to get along with any members of his family. Our storyteller could not allow her son to move back into her house. She was becoming increasingly concerned about her son's behaviour. The police were called to the house again and her partner made it clear that he could not live in the same house as our storyteller's son. Our storyteller described concerns about being a black woman and having a black son. She, and other members of her

family, did not trust the police following experiences of working with them in a professional capacity in the past:

I know, dealing with the police, I'm a black woman... The thing is, as a black person, the police come to the house to remove one person, they take two black men. I know, I've worked with the police and they are proper racist.

Our storyteller described various events that put a strain on her relationship with her son, including renting out the family home, her son's fears around who will inherit the house, her new husband, and her son's unsettled living arrangements.

I don't feel he's [husband] going to kill me. I have told him [son] that. [...] He [son] thinks that [husband] is going to kill me and get the house. I said to him, "okay. Funny your name is on the will and in the will you will get the house, with or without me being married to [husband]. This will goes to you."

At this point our storyteller had agreed to help her son financially so that he was able to rent a place of his own. When he moved out of this accommodation, the landlord informed her there were rent arrears. She discovered that her son had been spending the rent money on cocaine, although he denied this. Once again, her trust was tested.

She described an incident in which her son had been very concerned the police would come into his accommodation – which now made sense.

The correlation between weed and the fed [police] doesn't make any difference to me. But now I realise why he was so concerned about the fed,

because I got an email from one of the other tenants that he was sniffing coke all day and that shook me to the core because for the life of me, I would have never ever guessed that [son] would have been taking coke. Weed, yes, but coke, that was shocking.

Her son later went to the home of his childhood friend and the police were called. This friend also had no trust in the police but the storyteller advised the friend to get her son to the hospital by whatever means it took. She told him:

"When the police come, use the opportunity. Talk to the police and tell them to take him to the hospital. Just tell them he's had a mental breakdown. Whatever means tell them because he's telling the police people are chasing him with guns and somebody pulled a gun at him. Just tell the police he's had a mental breakdown."

Her son's friend could see how much his friend had changed and he went to the hospital with him. Although our storyteller's son denied hearing voices, his friend suggested that he was experiencing hallucinations. The son saw a psychiatrist in the hospital A&E. He was put on a Section 2 (which allows people to be detained for 28 days for assessment and short-term treatment) and then a Section 3 (which allows people to be detained for 6 months for longer term treatment). Her son responded to medication and although he is much better, our storyteller is still unable to trust him enough for him to move back into the family home.

It's really sad because I would love to give him back his key but I don't want him there when I'm not there and then he's never going to leave.

MISTRUST AND THE CONFLICT OF DISTRACTIONS

Gary's reflection

“ It feels like the breakdown in trust across a number of relationships may have hindered the storyteller's understanding of what was happening to her son and her ability to get him help.

While he was displaying erratic and aggressive behaviour, it was difficult for this storyteller to make sense of the situation. It seems that the involvement of multiple people making accusations against each other, may have made it difficult for her to recognise that the changes in her son's character were related to mental ill health, rather than due to a confusing and fractious set of personal relationships.

Mistrust in the police, due to fears of racist behaviour, may have resulted in missed opportunities to get help for her son. ”