What Happened to LJ

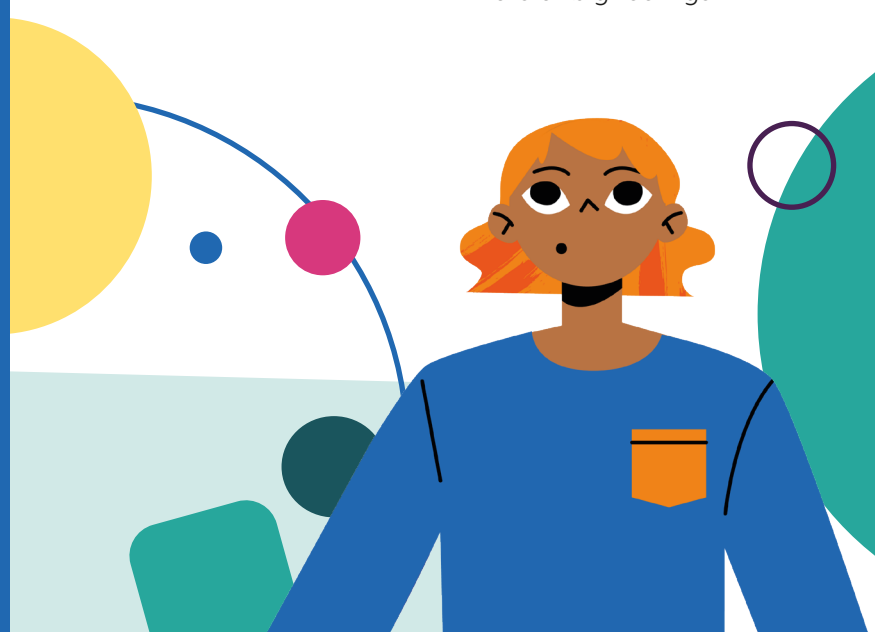
A story of help and hope
for children and their families



Introduction

Sometimes big and difficult things happen and it can feel hard to make time to think about how we are feeling about it.

Sometimes we do not want to think about how we're feeling because it's too scary but we all deserve a safe space to express ourselves and explore how we are feeling. In this booklet, this is exactly what LJ is going to do after they have experienced something that was not ok and left them with lots of big feelings.



This is LJ



LJ lives with their family in a busy house. LJ's family were just like many other families, but something had happened to LJ that others in the family did not know about, someone was hurting them.

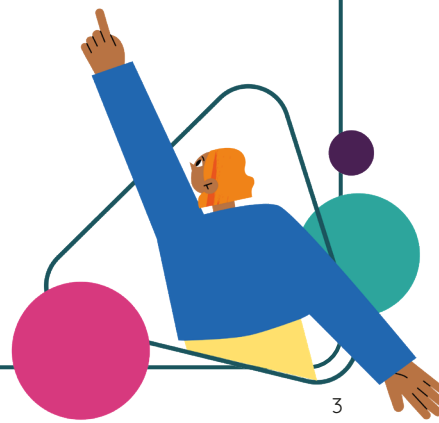


LJ did not really understand what was happening, but they knew they did not like it. The way the person was hurting LJ was not always by touching, sometimes they would show or tell LJ things that were only meant for adults and this made LJ very uncomfortable.

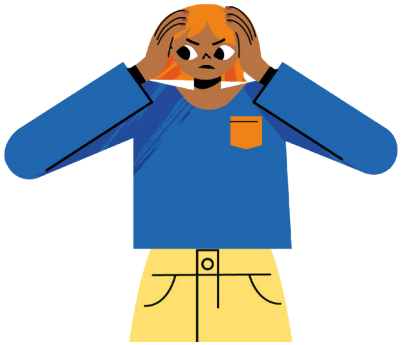
ACTIVITY: Can you create your own avatar?

Try sitting down in your favourite place, (this could be at home or in the park) and create your own avatar to follow LJ's journey. You may need lots of colouring pencils!





When LJ's family found out



LJ wanted to tell someone what was happening but did not know who to tell or what to say. They wanted it to stop but did not know how to make this happen.



LJ had many thoughts and worries about what might happen if others knew. Would they or others get in trouble? Would anyone believe them? Would something worse happen? All these thoughts and big feelings hurt LJ's head and left them feeling ready to explode.

Then one day LJ's family did discover what had been happening. The family reassured LJ that they believed them and that they still loved them very much.

The family did everything they could to make sure LJ knew that they were going to look after them.



ACTIVITY: Sometimes when LJ needs to relax they do this exercise - Do you want to try it too?

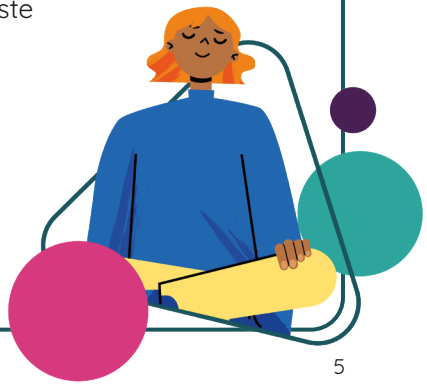
5. **Look around and name five things that you can see around you.**
   This could be something like a photograph or a plant. Think about all the colours and shapes you are looking at - What do you like about it? What do you not like about it?

4. **Focus on four things that you can feel.**
   This could be what you are sitting on, or maybe the clothes on your skin. Think about how they feel - Are they cold or warm? Smooth or rough?

3. **Name three things that you can hear around you.**
   You may be able to hear people talking or cars outside - Are they loud or quiet? Are they noises you hear often?

2. **Name two things you can smell.**
   This could be your clothing or maybe air-freshener. Think about what you like about that smell.

1. **Focus on one thing that you can taste.**
   What does the inside of your mouth taste like - Maybe you can taste toothpaste or your juice.



With thanks to NHS Lincolnshire Partnership

Special Support Services

LJ's family knew they had to ask support services for help. Sometimes people from the support services have to ask difficult questions so they know exactly how to help.

LJ wasn't sure if they wanted so many people knowing what had happened. LJ's family explained that these services would know how to make sure LJ felt safe and supported. Here are some of the people of who supported LJ and what they did to help:



Designated Safeguarding Lead at school - This person will make sure LJ feels safe and looked after in school. They may speak with LJ about the support they might need, this could be through things like helping them with their learning.



Therapist - Because LJ has lots of feelings about what has happened, a therapist will create a safe space so they can talk about how they're feeling.





Police - They are there to make sure LJ feels safe and will listen to what has happened to LJ. They will ask LJ what they want to do and will work with other support services to ensure that this doesn't happen again.



Social Workers - They will speak to LJ about ways they can feel safe and will work with other support services to make sure they feel supported.



Healthcare - They will check if LJ has any injuries and may check the parts that have been hurt - But only if LJ wants them to.



Advocates - They will help LJ when speaking to the police and make sure LJ receives all the right information about what to expect from the police.

What's happening for the family?

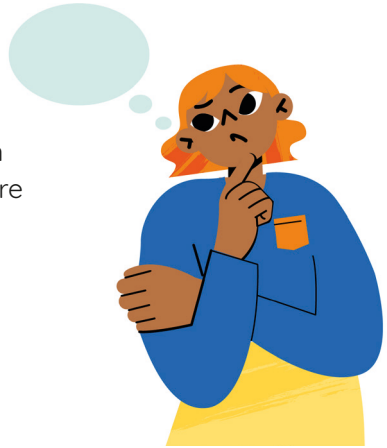


After the family found out what had been happening and the support services became involved, LJ noticed that some people in the family were acting differently.

There were some family members that LJ couldn't see anymore, which left them feeling sad and confused.



It felt like everyone had their own big thoughts and feelings about what had happened and things were not how they used to be, everything felt different now.



They felt family life was busier than before as their family members were on the phone more or in meetings about them.

LJ felt all the decisions were being made for them and this wasn't fair.

ACTIVITY: Hopes and fears tree

What you'll need:

- Posterboard or a large sheet of paper
- Markers, pens or pencils
- Paper (green and brown with a variety of other colours)
- Scissors
- Glue

Instructions:

1. Cut a rough oval to serve as the dirt for your tree.
2. Make a tree with branches out of the green paper.
3. Pick a colour, or colours, of paper to represent hopes or fears. Cut out "worm-shaped" pieces of coloured paper.
4. Write down what you are worried about on the worms and stick these onto the dirt around the bottom of the tree
5. Cut out leaf shapes from a variety of paper colours
6. Write down a hope or dream that you have onto a leaf and stick it onto the branches of the tree
7. Once it's finished, admire your fantastic work and hang it in a safe place.



With thanks to UK Fostering



LJ's thoughts, feelings and behaviour

Frustrated

Tired

Sad

Scared

Angry

Nervous

Embarrassed

Guilty

Confused



Feeling Sick

Happy

Tight Tummy

Relief

Butterflies

Head Hurts

Shameful

Hopeful

Love

Sometimes LJ had so many thoughts going around and around in their head they wanted to scream and shout!

It often felt overwhelming for LJ because they did not understand how they were feeling and did not feel like anyone else would understand.

LJ even noticed that they would get angry and say or do things because they could not contain their frustration anymore.

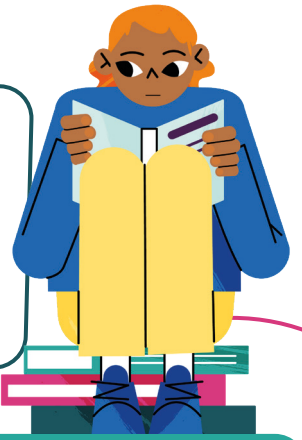


LJ noticed that their behaviour was changing too, and they did not feel like themselves anymore.

LJ used to feel comfortable and safe at home, but now there were times when LJ did not to want to leave their room.



LJ wanted to pretend that everything was ok and that it had never happened, trying to believe that what happened wasn't so bad and maybe was not such a big deal after all.



Sometimes LJ would try and avoid family and friends because they felt different and worried others may think about them differently too. It felt like no one understood what they were going through.

No matter how hard they tried, their feelings would bubble up and out of them and LJ would feel terrible again.

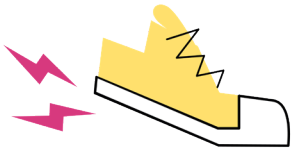


Sometimes LJ got so upset they felt like hurting themselves on purpose because they thought it would make them feel better but it didn't. Instead of hurting themselves, LJ would scream into a pillow or hold an ice cube and this helped them deal with their difficult feelings.

ACTIVITY: Here are some other things LJ could do to feel better:



Listening to music



Exercising



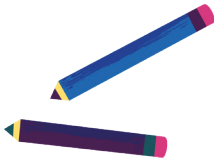
Journalling



Baking



Taking a walk in nature



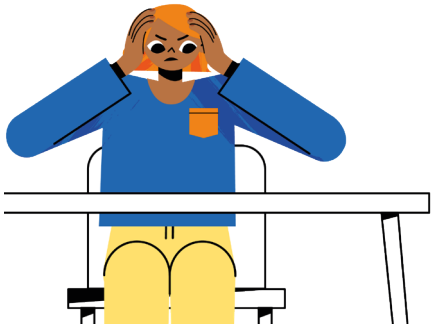
Getting creative

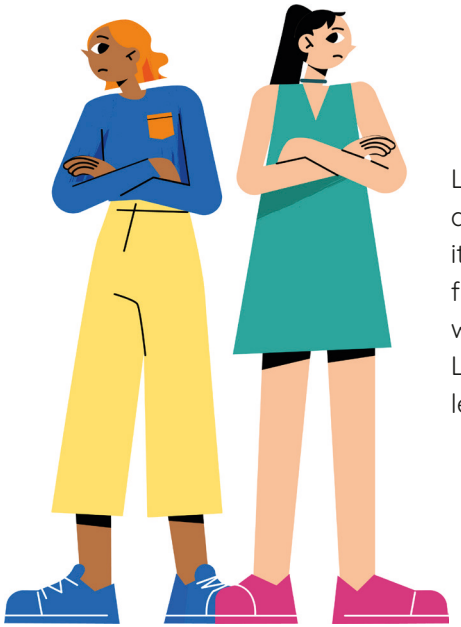


School and friends

At school LJ found it hard to concentrate and started making mistakes which made them feel even worse.

LJ's teachers tried to speak to them about ways they could help but this made them feel really embarrassed and like everyone knew what had happened.





LJ began to find it hard to be around people, they even found it hard being around their best friends. Sometimes LJ's friends would say or do things that upset LJ and they would fall out which left them feeling lonely.

To make sure LJ had extra support, LJ's family told the safeguarding lead what had happened as they would be able to help LJ at school if things were feeling difficult. They also introduced LJ to a school counsellor who LJ could spend time with when needed. Their job was to support young people with their big feelings when difficult things had happened.





This made LJ's friends curious about where they went and why. LJ felt pressured to tell them what happened and didn't want to lie to their friends but LJ also knew they needed to be careful who they spoke to about it because it was private.

Telling others

LJ's family knew that when hurtful things have happened it can be difficult to know who to share this with.

They knew they needed to let others know so they could help, but it can be hard to know who you should and should not tell. Although the information about what happened to LJ was not a secret, it was private. One family member described it as something precious that might be easily broken, so it was important to think carefully about who they share it with.



LJ and their family thought carefully about who they should tell and together they made a list of those they felt could keep their information safe and help LJ when things felt difficult.

Moving forward

Even though the hurtful thing stopped, LJ's big feelings stayed for some time but they knew that by talking to their family and possibly a therapist it would get better.





Even though it could be hard for LJ to share how they were feeling, they knew they were loved and their feelings were important.

LJ kept a diary where they wrote down all their thoughts and feelings which really helped. Eventually, LJ started to feel more like themselves again, they could concentrate at school and wanted to spend time with their friends again. There were still times when LJ felt sad or missed those they didn't see any more but their family explained why this was which LJ understood.



LJ understands that being hurt by someone can feel really confusing and upsetting, so here are some important things they want to share with others who have been hurt:

All your thoughts and feelings are ok and normal, there are lots of ways to help these feeling come out safely.

You are not responsible for what happens to the person who has hurt you.

It is good to share how you are feeling with others who know your information, they can help.

You are not responsible for fixing things or making others feel better about what happened.

Your adults believe what you have told them and are listening to what you have to say.

You are not responsible for what has happened, and you were not responsible for making it stop.

Extra Information

We understand that you may like some more information on topics that have been mentioned throughout LJ's journey.

This website has lots of helpful ideas and activities on how to manage your feelings and emotions: annafreud.org/resources/children-and-young-peoples-wellbeing/self-care/

A huge thank you to the children and families who participated as part of the project, and the professionals from NHS England, Bromley Thrive, The Havens and We Stand.

Illustrations designed by upklyak on Freepik

Follow LJ and their family as they navigate what happens after a disclosure of sexual abuse.

As LJ shares their journey, helping others to understand their own, they offer ideas and activities that can support children share their own thoughts and feelings in a safe way.

There is further information and support in the accompanying Carer and Under 8 Guide.

SOUTH LONDON CSA SUPPORT SERVICES