

Fall 2019

Tyler* was a three-year-old with a history of exposure to domestic violence, neglect, and abuse. The impact of this trauma included tantrums, speech delays, night terrors, and intense separation anxiety from his mother, Christie*, who herself was the main victim of the violence and was struggling to gain the strength to leave her relationship with the abuser.

Christie knew she needed to get help for her son, but she was reluctant to trust the “system,” which in her mind included Tyler’s We Care therapist. Furthermore, she did not understand why she was expected to join Tyler in his treatment. As someone who had been exposed to – and been a victim of — violence her whole life, she had great difficulty understanding the connection between the trauma in their lives and Tyler’s behaviors.

In the treatment sessions, the therapist knew she needed to quickly build trust between herself and Tyler’s mother. She helped create this bond by including aspects of case management that Christie felt were more helpful than “just” therapy. Help with housing and support that enabled Christie to escape her abusive relationship then allowed a level of trust that brought her into parent/ child therapy. Once this was accomplished, the therapist was able to focus on the relationship between mother and son. She helped Christie develop empathy and healthier communication skills with her son that eased his tantrums, night terrors, and separation anxiety. Reflective play (a counseling method to help children communicate their inner experiences through the use of toys and play) was used to give Tyler a voice to express his feelings.

During the sessions, Christie opened up to the therapist about her history of trauma and how her most recent relationship had caused flashbacks to earlier abusive encounters. This disclosure helped the therapist work with Christie to help understand how her past was impacting her parenting.

Treatment drew to a close as the sessions helped craft new and healthier communication between Tyler and his mother, along with a sense of trust and security in his own home that Tyler had never experienced before. Having created this safe haven for herself and her son, Christie reported that his symptoms had reduced dramatically, and when there were occasional lapses, she used the therapy techniques to quickly address the issues. In the last session, Tyler, Christie and the therapist celebrated the new path forward that the family had created. Tyler was going to become a very different teenager and adult than what had seemed, only a year before, to be his destiny.

Cases like this are the reason We Care works so hard to help provide families with the help they need.

**Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the children in our care and their families.*

Every child deserves a life free from the impact of devastating circumstances over which they have no control.