



## Nina's story

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Nothing in this story constitutes a finding of fact by the Commission of Inquiry. Instead, these stories have been published to show how people are experiencing the current child safety system in Queensland. Any views expressed are those of the person who shared their experience, not of the Commission of Inquiry.

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Imagine this...

Amicable co-parents for years. Separated during pregnancy. Never any need for formal parenting orders because they were agreeable on all fronts: schooling, child support, visitation schedule. No concerns of safety. Never felt at risk.

One day, your child tells you what daddy did to them. What they disclosed shakes you to your core. After I put them to bed, heart in my throat, I called a hotline for advice. Imagine discovering that this is child sexual abuse, and that no, kids don't have capacity to make this up at that age. That yes, I should believe them and protect them immediately. Afterwards I howled with tears, a sound I've never heard my body make before.

I followed the mandatory reporting laws. I participated openly and willingly in the police investigation. Imagine dealing with the father during this and explaining why he suddenly shouldn't visit his child anymore. Imagine being told only I could control the communication with him about this. Imagine having to prevent his next visit to keep the child safe. We wanted him not to know about the police investigation straight away. Imagine the bind that puts the protective parent in, managing the father on their own.

Throughout it all, once the father did know about the police investigation, he understood why no contact was allowed. But it didn't stop. A few weeks would pass, and it would have to be explained

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why there was to be no contact yet again. Imagine the pressure being put on the protective parent who has already had their world turned upside down.

Imagine calling the Department of Child Safety for support, and being told nothing, because they wouldn't confirm nor deny if they were investigating.

Imagine being told on the down-low by a Child Safety employee over the phone that they probably won't get involved because I'm a protective parent protecting the child.

Imagine fully realising no one was going to help me stop this man from attempting contact with the child or dragging me through court for being protective.

Imagine being told by police and the Department of Child Safety that if I don't protect my child, I will be investigated or have my child taken off me. Imagine the bind that put me in, left alone to stop the contact with no support. Not even a phone call or piece of paperwork to explain what they explained to me: that they won't investigate while the child is with a protective parent.

Nothing at all provided to the abuser to make them understand that eyes are on this.

Imagine the father then cutting the child support and school fees they paid above the legal minimum. Imagine having to provide round the clock emotional support for the child that is suffering. Imagine not qualifying for Legal Aid because you have a mortgage. Imagine not having enough money to engage a lawyer.

Imagine the black hole where there is no support, no intervention, just a "good luck, you better be protective" warning.

Imagine that the father denies it forever. Imagine there isn't enough to charge him within the threshold of criminal court. Imagine the Department of Child Safety still provides nothing, never even met with the mother once.

Imagine the burden remains on the protective parent who has become overburdened now with:

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- Navigating emotional and and psychological support for the child;
- Educating school staff to support the child;
- Learning and navigating the criminal court AND family court systems;
- Navigating the black holes of support from police and Child Safety combined;
- The loss of finances and burden to work and earn more than ever at a time where they are needed by their child, or police, or psychologists or lawyers.

Imagine how a mother might make ends meet on their own navigating this.

Please, please, please address how protective parents can be better supported, to support their child who is at risk.

Being a protective parent currently means nothing in terms of access to meaningful support that contributes to the burden of protecting the child.

A protective parent has only the pathway of the family court – which is wrought with its own problems – and this is a huge financial burden on the protective parent who has been thrust into this situation against their will. Never did they want this to happen to their child. Never did they want to spend every penny on protecting their child. Of course they will. But why are they expected to sail into emotional and financial ruin for something they did not choose or do?

They want to be able to give the school some kind of paperwork that protects abductions from school. Children of domestic violence get such an order. But not these children. Not the ones who don't yet have a family court order - because we had been wonderfully amicable.

Protective parents want to be able to have better legal counsel and legal access without going into financial ruin.

They want better communication and responses from the department of Child Safety. Better intervention to halt or deter or explain to the abuser.

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They want better in so many ways.

They don't want to be in a black hole where support doesn't exist... where they are told 'be protective or else'.

They want to divert all their energy to their child and a safe future. They want to spend their energy and time healing the trauma in their child so that they have the best outcomes in the long term.

They want to find pockets of joy and create new better memories for their child. They need energy and money to do these things. Not have their energy and money destroyed by the gaps in the system.