

Supporting the Wellbeing of People Experiencing a Trauma Response

Brad is in his late forties and runs a small but busy cabinet making business. He lives in a major regional town in Australia with his wife Helen and their two children, Jason, 14 years old and Joanna, 11 years old. His cabinet making business does well – they mainly fit out kitchens and the spate of home renovation reality tv shows has done wonders for the bottom line.

Brad is very proud that he has been able to give his children a better life with more opportunities than he ever had. It wasn't that he was hard up as a kid, in fact quite the opposite but he knows, even if no-one else does, that when "*that thing happened... that thing between him and the tennis coach*" something changed in him and he lost his interest in pursuing, well, a lot of things but in particular extracurricular activities.

If there is one thing he is sure of, it is that his kids will not be scared of anything because he'll protect them forever, even when they are grown up and even if it means having them on a tighter '*leash*' than Helen thinks is necessary. Helen and he have a rock solid relationship, but it is this issue and this issue only on which they disagree. Brad thinks mistakes are best avoided and Helen feels that kids learn from their mistakes.

Brad is relatively fit and strong. He could lose a couple of kilos but generally enjoys good health. He admits to enjoying a smoke '*most but not every day!*' and an occasional drink '*by the time Friday comes around I've really worked up a thirst! And once I start I can't stop. Sometimes the weekends are all a bit of a blur by Monday morning but whose aren't?*' '*anyway my drinking is nothing like it used to be*'.

When he was in his early twenties his boss offered him first dibs on purchasing the business – Brad thought he'd be crazy to miss the opportunity and almost overnight went from staff member to owner operator/boss. He started drinking very heavily then, it really helped him cope with the stress, but Helen, his fiancé at the time, asked him to do something about it. He went to the GP, in fact the same GP that he still sees, and told him about the stress and the drinking. The GP prescribed anti-depressants; he still takes those pills, every morning. It is as automatic as taking his daily vitamin pill.

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MHPN WEBINAR CASE STUDY

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The other day Brad went to see his GP following a frightening episode where he was convinced he was having a heart attack – he had chest pains and his heart was beating really fast, his palms were sweaty and he felt hot and clammy all over. He had been feeling edgy and not really sleeping well ever since the huge fight he had with Helen about Jason. One night over dinner Jason had announced that a soccer coach had joined their school and identified Jason as having special skills. The coach asked Jason to join their training squad. Helen was all for it but something didn't feel right for Brad “...*I mean Jason has never expressed interest in soccer and now this? What about his homework and evening chores? He won't be able to keep up with it all....*”. Helen and he had argued late into the night; that night and ever since she has slept in the spare room. Brad has never liked sleeping on his own.

The GP gave him a full physical and found nothing amiss. Maybe, the doctor commented, you're stressed? While Brad doesn't agree that he is stressed '*I mean I shouldn't be, things are going pretty smoothly, the business is in good shape and I've got nothing to worry about*' to keep the GP happy he agreed to accept a referral to a counselling service, although he doesn't intend to follow through on it.

But the edginess and the sleeplessness won't go away. In fact they are getting worse and he has this constant sense of foreboding that he can't put his finger on.

One night he can't sleep and starts watching the late news – he sees a report on a test case that the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse has been exploring. He feels his chest tighten. He changes the channel quickly but the feeling won't go away. That night in bed he flashes back to being 13 years old and getting a lift home from the tennis coach.

A couple of days later he decides that seeing a counsellor '*couldn't hurt*' and fronts up at the counselling service. He feels quite relaxed with the counsellor, Max. Max has shared with him that he also has teenage children and how challenging they can be to parent. Then right out of the blue, or so it seemed to Brad, Max asks '*were you abused as a child?*'

Brad feels himself go white and hot. Until the other night he'd never given '*it*' a second thought, not from the moment he decided as a 13 year old to bury it and to never think of '*it*' again, so how did this guy know and how the hell was he, Brad, going to respond?

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