

Vignette twenty-two

A woman arrived in a very distressed state and I quickly worked out that she was suicidal and she had a child that she was on the verge – she was going to go home and kill herself and had come to talk to me about what she could do with the child so the child wouldn't find her dead. That was the seriousness of it. That was probably one of the most difficult times I've had here. She didn't want to go and talk to her GP who she hadn't seen for a long time. Her main drive was to get me to look after the child so she could feel safe about it. So I rang CATT who put me on hold and rang CYFs. Both those services – and this is why it sticks out easily – both those agencies were incredibly slow to respond. Finally, when I did get a Child, Youth and Family worker, they were saying 'well, can't someone else mind the child' – just the view they were taking, I couldn't believe. A statutory body – I was kind of thinking that I was going to end up taking this child home. And so that sort of unfolded – that's a very short version of it. By the end of this quite long session with her I had got her to an agreement that she would not go home and kill herself and reluctantly she agreed to contact the child's father and say I need you to come and take the child today. They weren't living together but he was an active parent. She was reluctant to tell him why so we agreed that maybe she didn't have to tell him why but she needed to make it absolutely clear that the child needed to be not with her. So she made a contract with me that she would not kill herself and she would come back the next morning. She would either come back or ring me the next morning by such and such a time. And I took that home, overnight, with me in a way that I don't usually take things overnight because I thought she might get away from here and go 'Nah, no-one's there to help me ... She didn't show. She also told me that it was her birthday that day and I dilemma'd long and hard – single mother, not a lot of support – and I thought 'I'm damn well going to give her something for her birthday'. Not something I would normally do, but in the night 'you don't buy presents for your clients' and it sat there going 'come in, I've got a heart chocolate' I just thought of that humanness. And we often talk about that in our work – that sometimes a boundary transgressed is not a boundary transgressed, it's actually a woman going 'I care about you, here's a little chocolate'. I think I brought her one flower as well. And she didn't show and that was really awful for me and I rang her cell phone and she wasn't answering and that's just terrible. One of the good things that came out of it was I thought 'I'm not going to ring those agencies again, I'm just going to sit with this'. And I came to this very philosophical place where I really challenged myself and I actually talked to someone in rape crisis or somewhere – it was in the Women's Group – just to offload some of it – and to cut a long story short, I didn't hear anything in the immediate future and just gave it away. I felt I'd learnt a lot about giving it away – ticking all the boxes – did I do everything that I thought I could? ... And then, sure enough, a number of months or a year later, she rang. She said 'can I come and see you'. And I went '.... Sure' and thought 'do I raise it with her' and thought no, just go on.