



Family Links

Speaking out for fathers



Mike Tivey is a Fathers' Worker in The Rainbow Children's Centre in Portobello, Wolverhampton.

He took part in the Parent Programme in 2006 and then trained to lead Parent Groups. He is a single dad with a teenage son, Martin.

“ What do you think the particular issues which face single dads are?

I started off as a weekend Dad, there's not really a lot that you can do and you miss out. I think most single Dads find that you're expected to discipline your child for something that happens when you're not there, and that's quite difficult. I think it's keeping up with everything, being a single Dad.

What was your relationship with Martin like before you did the Nurturing Programme?

He came to live with me about three or four years ago, He was about thirteen or fourteen when he came. It was quite rocky when he first moved in because he'd been set hardly any boundaries and then he suddenly had to stick to times and homework. There was a lot of conflict and he was quite argumentative at times. It was all new to me having someone there all the time as well.

Why did you decide to take part in the Parents' Programme?

Reading the book I thought I'd like to give it a go, and I thought before I trained as a Parent Group Leader it'd be nice to do the course and find out what it's all about. I did think it would be interesting as well, not just because of Martin. I do voluntary work at Base 25, which is a young people's information and advice service in Wolverhampton. I counsel 11 to 25 year olds, a lot of issues are to do with anger, parents and how they were brought up so I thought it might tie in with that as well.

What skills do you feel you have learnt and how do you use them in everyday life?

Well, I learnt lots actually. The negotiating, and choices and consequences are great. Family Rules I think is really good, I do those at home and I've brought it into the counselling when the children are in conflict with their parents. I found 'I' statements very useful, again that's in the counselling. It's just getting people to get that self-esteem - a lot of 11 to 25 year olds who I work with can't explain themselves very well, they get quite angry about it. By teaching them about the 'I' statements and different ways to say it, they're keeping calm and they're getting what they want through doing that.

What feedback have you received about the techniques used in the Nurturing Programme?

Very positive. My relationship with Martin has really changed since we've been using it there and he admits it as well. He doesn't say a lot but he does say 'yeah, it's better now'. Even the parents from the last group they see the change over the ten weeks and you'd get a lot of positive feedback.

How do you think the ideas of the Programme worked with a teenager?

Well I didn't do the 'I' statements with Martin, I told him about them but I haven't had to go in and use them. I sat down and got the book out and explained that I wanted to try these things. I didn't think that the star chart would work, but it did! He would say 'have you noticed I've washed up, can I have a star?'

With Family Rules we just sat down and he was saying to me 'be a bit more patient with me' or 'ask me how I've got on at school or college'. Because they don't want to talk to you all the time, sometimes you don't ask them questions about what's going on.

That's probably one bit I did struggle with, praising him and asking him about his day. But he likes to be asked and he likes to show me his work – that was another good thing actually, stopping what I was doing and focussing on his college work, he likes to show me his assignments. Because they're older you think you can get away with just shouting from the kitchen 'yeah, lovely'. You don't realise that has the same effect as when they're younger.

So would you say that the Nurturing Programme was as relevant to a teenager as it is to younger children?

Yes, definitely. I think it can be adapted well to teenagers. You've got to remember that they're still children. They're still like that feeling, that one to one attention and it's easy to let that slip as they get older.

At first I thought this is too young for him, but as you go through it's great. It's nice to be able to talk to him about it, because he's quite grown up so he's quite happy to talk about things like boundaries.

What difference do you feel the Programme has made to your professional life and to you personally?

Personal life - life's a lot happier at home, let's be honest. We get on a lot better and he seems more grown up as well, probably because I'm treating him more grown up with certain things like the Family Rules. I used to label Martin and you don't think it has any effect. But then I remembered that that's what bought it back to me because Mum and Dad used to label me at times and you don't realise the effect until you think back. The course really does make you think.

Professionally as well, the way I interact with the children in the centre actually listening to them and getting more involved – I think that makes a big difference. And even with the Dads' groups because you can get 12 to 13 dads and their children turn up and sometimes the Dads would rather sit back than get involved with the children. By talking to the dads about the Nurturing Programme they get more involved.

Would you recommend the Programme to others, or have you done so?

I have done to my partner [and] to lots of people – other parents and even family members like my brother. I've definitely promoted it to people around the area as well - the first group we ran here, I sat in for the first few weeks and nearly everyone I spoke to turned up on the course! And that was just through saying 'come along'. You really felt supported and listened to and that you're not being taught how to be a parent. If you said something you weren't criticised for the way you were parenting. It was like 'that works for you that's great' but then there might be a little suggestion on top which might improve the skills you've already got.

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