



Family Links

Prisoners' Stories Holme House Prison

Holme House is a purpose-built local Category B prison that opened in May 1992. Primarily serving the communities of Tees Valley, South West Durham, East Durham and North Yorkshire, it houses nearly a thousand male prisoners, convicted and on remand.



Alan and Barry* are in the resettlement block. As part of their rehab pathway, they have access to many courses, including Family Links' 10-week Nurturing Programme** to help on their release. Two female parent group leaders run the programme.

Alan has two children, a son aged five and a daughter aged three. He is no longer with his girlfriend. **Barry** has a son aged five. He is still with his girlfriend. He also has an older son but doesn't have much contact with him.

* Names have been changed.

** The programme is funded and delivered by Sure Start Children's Centres, Middlesbrough as part of their parenting strategy.

The Family Matters course leader suggested the programme to the men. They picked up Sure Start leaflets from the prison and the office staff registered them for the course.

Their thoughts on doing the course, which is run here through Sure Start.

Alan: I feel that Sure Start is for Mums. I attended a group with my partner but felt out of place, as it was all women. I felt as though I was put on the spot by the Sure Start workers who said things like "Let the dad have a go". All the women were watching and I felt embarrassed.

Barry: I didn't know what Sure Start was. I thought it was for people on probation. I would give it a go now I know what it's about – not drug users.

Alan and Barry thought 'Am I going to be dictated to about how to bring my children up?'

How they felt after the first session.

Alan: Happy that there was no writing, it was group discussion. I was buzzing after the first session. It was exciting - getting grown men to sit in a circle and do stuff they wouldn't expect. I was good at the collaborative rewards because I thought I was going to get a prize.

Barry: I enjoyed it. It felt Ok sitting with men I know saying things about how I felt in front of them. I would never have got involved in anything like this on the outside I wouldn't have gone to a parenting group but I am glad I did.



What they hoped to get out of it.

Alan: To see if I was doing stuff wrong, shouting all the time. I was shouted at all the time and didn't want to be the same with my son. I was swearing too much around the kids and they pick it up. I laughed at my son when he first swore. My daughter doesn't swear.

Barry: I was battered with all sorts when I was a kid, pans, shoes etc. I don't shout at my son, I can't. I wanted to know the right way to discipline my son. I swear too much around kids and they have picked it up.

What they enjoyed about the course.

Alan: Talking in a group. Listening to others' upbringing. There's always someone worse off than you.

Barry: What other people do to deal with kids.

What motivated them to keep coming back.

Alan and Barry: We both enjoyed it. There was a good buzz.

Barry: I would like to do it again. I enjoyed it. It should have been longer.

Both **Alan** and **Barry** wanted to stay in contact on release to meet up and see how they have put the strategies into practice. Neither would have done the course 'on the outside'.

How they can practise strategies through visits or phone calls.

Alan: I told my girlfriend about what I was doing – about praise. My son was messing about during a visit and my girlfriend was on his case. I remembered about 'Choices and Consequences' and will talk to my girlfriend about this when I get out.

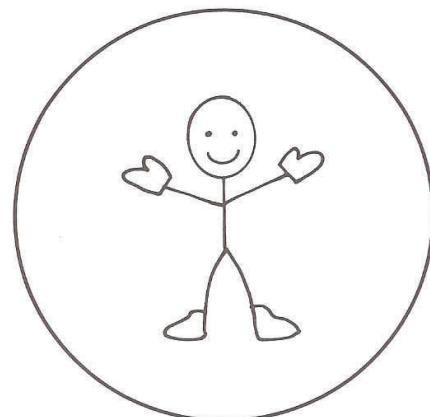
Barry: I sent some bits of *The Parenting Puzzle* to my girlfriend, but we aren't together any more.

What they thought of the course.

Barry: I would say it's brilliant. I was giving in too easily to my children. You need to share your feelings.

Alan: It's about how you want to be with your kids. The course doesn't tell you what to do. Go and experience it. There is a good buzz on the course. Some people are embarrassed, but people feel confident to go on the course, as they know everyone.

Neither man felt uncomfortable about the fact that the course facilitators were women.



Clear, consistent Safe, fair limits with clear expectations, stability with plenty of room to explore and grow – like a democracy

How being in prison has affected the men and their families.

Alan: It's my first time in prison and it has nearly killed me being away from my kids. I've missed one and a half years of helping them. It's the worst place you can be. If I didn't have kids I wouldn't be bothered. I want to work for my family. I'll have higher expectations of myself when I get out. It puts a different perspective on things.

Barry: It's my third time but last time was years ago before my son was born. It has knocked me back.

Both men recognise that their partners are struggling financially and with the worsening behaviour of their children. **Barry** said that when his son is poorly he just wants his dad. **Alan** said that he is worried that his partner will find someone else to look after his kids. Although they are not together he still loves his ex-partner.

Their views on if it is a good idea to offer parenting programmes in prison.

Barry: Yes as you have more time to think.

Alan: Yes and no. I am not there to deal with children. My partner is doing it all. Will the fact that you are going to come out of prison in four years and start saying something different – will it cause resentment? My partner finds it hard as she used me as a threat and my son was scared of me. Now she can't use me as a threat and my son is running riot.

Their hopes and aspirations for the future.

Alan: I hope I never come back to jail. I hope my children don't turn out like me. I hope they stick at their education, which I didn't and achieve what I didn't. I was battered as a kid and it made me worse.

Barry: I am going to try not to shout or smack my kids in future. I would like to move to a better area.

