

A Human Givens Approach to Working with Parents to Reduce Anti-Social Behaviour & Youth Offending

“A lot has changed. The house is more peaceful and everyone is relaxed. We have a laugh”

It's the final session, we have had six sessions, and best hopes have risen from a 3 to a 9. Confidence has risen from a 4 to a 10 and concern about the daughters' behaviour has gone from a 0 (very concerned) to a 9 (not concerned). Gill feels that she has been developing successful parenting strategies, she is feeling emotional at the improvement she has made and the changes she is seeing now in family life as she answers my final session questions. She is now giving her daughter more praise and listening more, she is giving more quality one-to-one time which Gill feels is easier to do now her daughter is behaving, she is sticking to what she says, offering clear instructions and consequences and allowing her daughter to make choices about her own behaviour and also allowing her daughter to make amends for her behaviour. Gill's daughter is now being more cooperative and responsive to instructions. Gill has felt that it has been good to have someone to talk to that is detached from the family situation, who knew what they were talking about; having the safety net of someone there so that she can take risks and try things out whilst having someone there in case anything went wrong. This is a common outcome reported in final sessions by parents that have received Humanistic Solution Focused parenting support.

In 2007 I was given the opportunity to work with the Youth Offending Service to offer parenting support to parents of young people that were either already in the criminal justice system or at risk of becoming young offenders. The Youth Offending Service was looking for someone that was trained in a Solution Focused Approach, that knew about the cycle of change from Motivational Interviewing and Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs'. They wanted someone that would help parents to find their own answers rather than someone that will go in and tell parents what they need to do. It was important that parents felt they were the expert on their own situation. It is common for parents to feel uncomfortable with engaging in 'parenting support' because they often feel that by accepting help they are being judged as being a bad parent.

Over my time with the Youth Offending Service I gathered data on parents that had been offered support. These data has consisted of soft data, which is data that is subjective from the parent and family's perspective, and hard data, which is data that is concrete and non-subjective. Soft data included scaling questions (like: On a scales of 0-10 how do you feel your relationship with your child is now, with 0 being the worst it could be, and 10 being the best it could be) and feedback, while hard data included whether a young person had offended or not since the parent was offered parenting support and whether they had offended or not prior to the parent being offered support. The data I refer to here is based on the first four years' of support offered. This period consists of 321 families being offered support and being tracked for a year following the end of the support received or in cases where support wasn't taken up those families were tracked for a year following the offer of support being declined. To also get longitudinal outcomes, 91 families were tracked for three years following the end of support received and for parents that declined the offer of support; they were tracked for three years following declining the support.

Engaging Parents

One of the biggest challenges to overcome is engaging parents. In many cases the parents that were offered support were scared that they were going to be judged as being bad parents. Many of them had lost hope and felt that they had tried everything. They didn't want to have another professional coming in and telling them what to do. They didn't want to have to tell their whole story again. The first step to engaging these parents was to use the initial phone contact as an opportunity to build the parents hope and self-belief. During the phone call parents are empathised with about their situation and praised for coping. They are asked what they know about the parenting support that they have been referred to (the parent has to agree to the referral being made for voluntary support, some parents were court ordered to engage with the parenting support), which opens up the opportunity to discuss how this approach is different to other parenting groups and courses or support they may have received previously. Many of the other groups available to parents in the area focus on teaching parents techniques, whereas this approach helps parents to develop a new way of looking at situations. I often use a metaphor to explain how the support works. I talk about how people can sit at home watching football on TV. They can shout at the TV trying to 'tell' the players what to do but if those same people were on the football pitch they probably wouldn't even get the ball. I explain that football players are experts and are good at what they do, yet the inexperienced person at home on their couch can see what the football players can't see due to their different perspective.

I explain to parents that my role isn't to tell them what to do; it is to ask questions that help them look at things from a slightly different perspective which in turn helps to open up new opportunities for change. I usually mention examples from previous cases I have worked with where just a small change of perspective led to achieving the outcomes that those parents wanted. One example I use is a case of a mother that presented with a son who was aggressive in the home. He would damage property, be verbally abusive and had hit his mum on a number of occasions. When I asked the mother for an example incident she told me about a time when she had said no to her fourteen year old son. He became angry and they started to argue. He stormed off to his bedroom continuing to be angry. The mother followed him and the arguing and shouting continued in the bedroom. I just kept asking 'what happened next'. The mother continued to tell me that she wasn't going to let him win so she kept arguing with him and he turned up his music and started throwing things at her while she stood in his room. He was shouting and swearing at her and calling her names. She said that she gets really angry when she is being called names by her son so she began to shout even more. I asked her 'then what happened?' Eventually she said 'I just had enough, we had been arguing for about two hours, I didn't know what else to do, I had tried everything, I had tried taking things away, I had tried grounding him, I had tried shouting at him, I had had enough and didn't know what else to do so I stormed off out of his room, so he won.' I asked 'then what happened?' And the mother explained that over the next twenty minutes or so he initially carried on shouting abuse from his bedroom but then began to turn down his music and stop shouting and after about twenty minutes he was just in his room being quiet and when they next spoke he acted as if nothing had happened.

The parent had seen this as failure, yet I praised her for walking away to allow him time to calm down, we then discussed what it would take for her to be able to do that sooner in the future. We discussed what outcome she was hoping for, and when she said that she wanted her son to behave and not be angry we discussed how her strategy of walking away achieved this. She had initially seen this situation as failure and her losing control, now she was beginning to see the situation as success and her staying in control. For this mother to be able to keep calm and walk away in the future, rather than retaliate or follow her son to his bedroom the mother said that she would need to find a way of not reacting to being called names. We discussed what would have to happen for her to not react to being called names. She said that she would need to not hear that she is being called names. We discussed what she can do so that she doesn't hear herself being called

names. She decided that when arguments begin and her son storms off to his room shouting abuse she would put her mp3 player on and listen to music and go and do something like washing up whilst he calms down in his room. Following the mother implementing this strategy, which was something that she came up with for her own situation, home life improved, her son began calming down quicker and the mother felt she was more in control at home. This led to an improved relationship between the mother and her son, the mothers' confidence increased at managing her son. In the final evaluation the son felt he had more space and independence, that communication had improved between him and his mother and that she was listening to him more.

To help to make parents feel comfortable and more likely to engage sessions took place in their home at a time that was convenient for them unless they ask for it to be in a different location. Unless a parent feels that they need to talk about any of the history or reasons why they think their young person is behaving the way they are I usually don't ask for that information. My aim is to focus on what will help things to move forwards. Many parents have reported that it is 'a breath of fresh air' to have someone coming in that they don't have to explain the same old things to again.

At the time of contacting Gill to talk to her about receiving support for parenting she was unsure whether it was a parenting issue, and whether parenting support was what was needed. She explained that she does a lot with her daughter and that it is her daughter that is angry and unhappy. Gill was empathised with about how difficult this must be, to do so much with your daughter yet they still seem to be angry and unhappy. We discussed how the parenting support is to support Gill in finding ways to better help and support her daughter to make changes that she needs to make to reduce her anger and increase her happiness. I ask 'would you like me to come out to see you and we can discuss further how this support can help you to find ways of helping your daughter?' I then explained that the support is voluntary so if I come out and she feels that the support isn't for her, or doesn't think it will help, then all she has to do is let me know and I won't visit anymore. I explained that if at any point during receiving the support she decides it isn't for her we can stop the sessions. Gill agreed to see me for an initial session, just to learn more.

Working Briefly & Keeping Things on Track

The average number of sessions that parents receive is six. To achieve lasting results from an average of six sessions we have to keep focused on what the parent hopes to achieve from the support. Some people have questioned how it is possible to achieve results at all when only the parent is being worked with and not the young person who is misbehaving? The response is that by working with someone that is motivated to want things to be different change can be achieved. I often describe it to parents that question how effective it is likely to be when I won't be working with the young person or even meeting the young person, that if I had come in to their house and sat down and was rude to them and blaming them for how they have been parenting and was being judgemental they would have a different reaction and would behave differently with me than they are currently behaving with me. To keep the support focused it is established from the parent what it is that they want to achieve from the support. Often they start off describing this vaguely like 'we would have a happy and harmonious family'. My aim is to help them to become more specific. I ask for more detail. I want to know what they will see, what they will hear, what they will feel, what they will be saying to themselves in their mind, what others will notice. To help them to describe this I sometimes talk about 'if we were

watching a parenting TV show on your TV and it was the final show where we are watching how far that family has come and what they have achieved that lets us know they have been successful and that family was your family, what would we see and hear on the TV and what would they be saying to the camera about how things have changed?’

Once I have got an accurate description of the ideal situation I use scaling to establish how much of that ideal situation they would be happy with and where on the scale they are in relation to that. So I ask them ‘if 10 is that ideal situation and 0 is the opposite of that ideal situation where would you be happy with things being at? And where would you say things are now on that scale?’ Most parents say they would be happy with a 7 or an 8. Some parents may say 10. If they do I always question them on that to encourage being happy with less than perfection. Most parents say they are currently about a 3 or 4. Some parents may say 0. If they do I usually joke that ‘at least things couldn’t get worse then?’ Many parents respond to this by telling me how it could be worse and then we re-evaluate the 0 and they are normally comfortable to raise this to at least 1 or 2. Once they have told me these numbers on their scale I then ask them to describe what those numbers mean in sensory specific language in the same way I did with the description of their ideal situation. I also ask them to describe the next number up from where they are now. So if they have told me that right now things are at a 2, I ask them to describe what will be different about a 3. This often elicits information that can be useful for setting a task for them to do or something for them to look out for between now and the next session to help to bring about change that will be in the direction of the next number up the scale. As well as using scaling to establish where they are at now and where they would like to be it is a useful tool to measure progress and gather soft data to evidence outcomes. Scaling is done in each session. The three areas that are scaled are ‘best hopes’ that is a scale of what they want to achieve and where they are in relation to that, ‘confidence’ which is how confident the parent feels at making the necessary changes and managing their young person, and ‘relationship’ which is looking at where their relationship with their young person is now. By scaling in each session it gives a record of outcomes at the last session that took place even if parents stop engaging.

These three tools are what help to keep the support on track. The sensory specific descriptions and the scaling of where parents are at, what things will be like when things improve to the next number and what number they want to achieve, and then setting tasks for the parent to do between sessions that move towards the next number or help the parent to discover something new. Each subsequent session continues this focus. At the end of the sessions parents are asked what they will do between now and next time. This is usually some part of the description of being at the next number up from where they are, or it could be something from the number they would like to achieve, or it could be something they have mentioned during the session that would move things in the right direction. If the parent is quite negative in a session and perhaps has had a tough time since the last session and doing something seems like too big a task at this time they may well be set a noticing task like ‘between now and next time just notice some of the things that you wouldn’t want to change about your son/daughter’. The idea is to keep things moving forward and to build hope and confidence in the parent. If a parent isn’t likely to ‘do’ anything because they aren’t in that place right now it is better to set a task that helps them to begin to make internal changes, and helps them to build up the hope, resiliency and confidence to work towards being able to take action.

In the initial session Gill explored what she wanted to get from parenting support. She felt that if things were going well then her daughter would be happier, everyone would be showing more love and respect to each other and everyone would be holding calm conversations with each other. Everyone in the family would also be having more fun and enjoyment with each other. We explored what this meant in sensory specific terms. One thing I have learnt over the years is to lower my voice and speak minimally as parents are discussing the sensory specific preferred future. By doing this you

don't interrupt the parents' experience. It becomes like using guided imagery but in a naturalistic way. Rather than having them close their eyes, you are just waiting for them to gaze off and become absorbed in describing something to you and then you just guide them through the internal experience they are having by asking 'what else'. 'What else do you see, what else do you hear, what else do you feel, what else do others notice, what else do you say to yourself in your mind?' This is what I did with Gill to help her to almost mentally rehearse the preferred future due to the vivid nature of how she was creating it. This made it more real, motivating and achievable. We also established on a scale of 0-10 where things are in relation to that ideal scenario, where she would be happy with things being at, and what things would be like if they improved by just one point. One of the things that Gill said would improve the situation by one point was for her and her daughter to do activities together. This was set as a task at the end of the session, 'between now and next time I would be really interested to discover what activities you can both do together, at least once before we next meet, would you be willing to find an activity that the two of you can do together and let me know how it goes at the next session?'

Finding Solutions

Many of the parents that are offered support feel a sense of hopelessness. They feel that they have tried everything already. They have often been through a range of parenting courses or other parenting support and claim to have tried everything they have been told to do and nothing has worked. When working from a Human Givens Approach parents receive something different. Rather than teaching parenting skills or techniques, individualised solutions are found from the client. When professionals tell parents 'do this, do that', if it doesn't work parents often blame the professional saying 'I tried what you said and it didn't work'. With a Human Givens Approach the solutions are often developed from the exceptions, or from transferring skills from other areas of the parents' life experience. The way situations become resolved is also explored. Whilst many other professionals may focus on 'why' a child or teenager behaves the way they do, here the focus is on when they don't behave that way. Emphasis is placed on how the parent(s) and young person's basic emotional needs are being met and whether any needs are not being met enough. This can sometimes be a way in to creating change without focusing on the 'problem'. For example; if a young person seems to get most of their need for a sense of status met by hanging around with a gang shoplifting to get a sense of status from other gang members and it turns out that the young person also likes football and is very good at football but doesn't often play yet would like to join a club. The parent could encourage the football to help the young person to get the need for a sense of status met appropriately from the football team rather than the gang they are hanging around with.

Exceptions

There are always exceptions, but parents don't normally look for them. The focus is normally on why or focusing on the problem itself rather than focusing on when the problem doesn't happen and especially on when it doesn't happen but was expected or would have been likely to happen. This is where this support differs compared to most other parenting support. There is no saying 'next time you need to do this'. The focus is 'so what is different about the times when they don't respond in that way?' The important point about the information gathered is that it is about what the parent does differently, not just 'what does the young person do differently'. To have something to work with it needs to be something the parent can do. So if they say 'he just decides he is going to behave' that can't be worked with, it would require further questions before getting to

useful information. Whereas if the parent says; “he only gets out of bed in the mornings when I have got to go to work”. This can be worked with. We can explore what it is about those times that make the son get out of bed. In the situation where this was the case the difference was that when the mother had to go to work she used a different tone of voice. She believed that if she couldn’t get him out of bed she would be late for work, if she was late for work she would be sacked, if she was sacked they would lose their home. This meant that her opinion was there was no way he wouldn’t be getting out of bed if she needed to be in work, and this came across in her voice. On the days she didn’t work she didn’t have the urgency in her voice and the assertiveness. Her son picked up on this and so wouldn’t get up. Once the mother realised this she began to practice using the assertive voice and managed to get her son up every morning.

When focusing on exceptions you sometimes have to be really comfortable with sitting in silence expectantly. Sometimes parents will report that there are no exceptions, that things are always bad and that if the child or young person is good it was only because they wanted something. In many of these cases using techniques like overshooting and using the parents’ way of wording things, like saying ‘so when isn’t it as bad?’ can help to elicit helpful responses. I find that often just going with the response works well. If they say the young person only behaves when they want to or when they want something, then I will work with this and ask for what they are doing differently at those times. They may initially say that they are doing nothing differently, but often after waiting a few moments in silence they can come up with an answer. If they say things are always bad and it isn’t bad during the session I bring this exception up, I will ask if they are ‘bad’ all night even when they sleep and begin to establish that there are times they behave and if this has to be the starting point to work from then that is where we will start, looking at what it is about when they are eating, or sleeping, or watching TV, or walking along with friends that makes them behave at those moments, and then look for times that involve the parent or look for how the parent can recreate aspects of what works in other areas. So if they behave with their grandparents, what is it about the grandparents that make their son or daughter behave around them? Can the parent learn anything from this?

Preferred Future

Generally when you ask about how the parent would like things to be, you will get a description that includes information about changes that need to be implemented to make that future happen. Parents often initially answer a question about what their preferred future would be with negatives about what that future wouldn’t be, they may say something like ‘she wouldn’t be angry’. So the first step is to identify what would be there instead by asking for sensory specific information. Once you have a description of this preferred future and you have details you can explore what parts of that the parent has control over and what parts they can do now that they haven’t been doing.

Building on Strengths & Fulfilling Needs

It often surprises parents that I work with, how many strengths they have and their children or young people have. When I run parenting courses and ask parents how their week has been they will recount difficulties they have had, they will talk about how they have struggled, they will talk about what their child has been up to, then they will look back at me and see that the A3 flip chart paper I am stood next to is now full of positives that they have just said. This always gets parents thinking, because I was writing honestly based on what they were saying, and they were thinking that what they were saying was mostly negative. This discovery that so much positive was hidden in what they said often leads to the parents beginning to focus more on the positives and strengths themselves. They talk less about how they struggled and more about how they coped.

In one-to-one sessions parents are asked for their strengths and positive qualities, they often find this difficult to answer; when they do I then ask them what their friends would say their positive qualities and strengths are. Not only does this gather useful information that can contain elements of the solution to moving things forward but it can also give useful information on how to present ideas and communicate with the parent to increase the chances of them carrying out any tasks or reframing any situations. Some parents,

when asked about the positive qualities of their child or teen and about their strengths struggle to answer this because they have been thinking so negatively about their child up to this point. To help them to begin to open up to the possibility that their child has strengths and positive qualities if they struggle to answer this I frame it as 'if you wanted to sell your child and had to convince someone to buy them and had to convince them of how good your child is without lying, what would you say?' This type of question used when it is appropriate to do so, phrased to whomever I am working with often gets a laugh as the parent jokes back that they do wish they could sell their child at times, they often then go on to explain many of the positive qualities and strengths of their child. Many of these strengths can then be used by the parent in how they handle their child or teen, and can identify areas that are already going well that can be expanded on.

Through the sessions we also look at basic emotional needs to see if any of the basic needs are being met inappropriately or not being met enough. This can often elicit ways forward that seemingly aren't focusing on the problem itself yet can reduce the problem or eliminate it. For example if a parent doesn't pay enough attention to their child or teen and the child's behaviour seems to be attention seeking, then they can explore ways to increase the attention they give. If the child lives in a household where they feel that they have no freedom, where the parents have taken everything away from them and they dictate everything the child is and isn't allowed to do, that child may be misbehaving to gain control over at least some aspect of their life, so the parents could look at how they can give the child a sense of control in healthy and appropriate ways. We also look at ensuring the parent has all their needs met in healthy and appropriate ways, like having 'me time' so that they can reduce stress levels helping them to be able to remain calmer when managing their child or teen which in turn can help the outcomes of situations turn out more positively.

Discovering Hidden Solutions

Sometimes solutions are hidden in the resolutions of situations that have occurred. Many parents may look upon these situations as being failed situations. In reality if the problem isn't still occurring then it has ended, and if it has ended then something must have happened for the problem to end. The example I gave earlier about the parent walking away but initially seeing it as failure is one example of this where the solution that made the difference was hidden from the view of the parent because of the viewpoint that they held. One parent that struggled to get their teen out of bed in the morning and ready for school claimed to have tried everything, they had tried shouting, bribing, taking things away, and pouring water over their teen, nothing worked. They had had the Police out three times over the last week due to their son hitting them and damaging property because of their tactics to wake him up. They said that on the day I was visiting they had given up by then so they didn't bother trying to force their son to get up. Instead they just went up to his room once to say he had half an hour to get dressed. The parents then moved on having talked about their failure so I brought them back to this morning where they just woke their son once and asked what happened. They said that a few minutes later he got up and showered and got dressed in his school uniform and left on time. He still didn't make it in to school so they just felt this was another failure and that they had given up. We then discussed what worked about only waking him once and then letting him get up and leave himself, rather than repeatedly entering his room and being angry with him for still not being up. The parents initially saw it as failure, that they had given up and that normally they wouldn't be able to do that because they need to pester him to make sure he is up and dressed. We spoke about whose needs are they trying to meet, theirs or their sons?

When finding solutions we looked for exceptions, Gill explained that her daughter behaves well when she is one-to-one with people. She also behaves well with her grandparents and can do very well at school. We explored what it was about the various situations that resulted in her daughter behaving well, and Gill was praised for

bringing a daughter up that can behave and show respect around others. Gill was also noticing that ignoring 'tantrums' was working, rather than feeling the need to respond and retaliate to every little thing. Gill also realised that she wasn't being as consistent as she thought she was, and since being more consistent she has noticed an improvement in her daughter's behaviour. Gill also realised that her daughter didn't feel a sense of belonging within the family which was impacting on their relationship and encouraging her to try to get that sense of belonging inappropriately met elsewhere. These insights led to Gill finding ways of increasing one-to-one time with her daughter, she began to do more active listening to make sure her daughter felt heard and by the final session they felt closer to each other, the family situation had improved from 3 to 9 over just six sessions.

Outcomes

Measuring outcomes and gathering an evidence-base for a particular approach or way of working is an important part of any intervention. By measuring success you can also notice where improvements are required. For example from the outcomes gathered based on this work one observation was that when looking at the longitudinal findings there is a gradual rise in youth offending rates. To address this parenting support groups have been set up which run monthly all year round so that if any parents feel that things are slipping back to how they were, or if they feel that they are beginning to struggle again there is somewhere for them to go to get support before things get too bad again.

The data presented here is based on this approach being offered to 321 families over a four year period. Data was gathered at the time of each referral about whether the young person the referral is relating to has entered the youth justice system or not. This was compared with data a year after the parent(s) were either offered support but declined it, or a year from the date support ended if they accepted support. To get an idea of outcomes over a longer time period 91 families that were offered support had data gathered at the time of receiving referrals as to whether the young person has entered the youth justice system or not, and this was compared with data gathered over three years later. This was the basis of the hard data. The soft data that was gathered consisted of feedback from parents about what changes they had noticed at the end of working together, feedback from the young people about what changes they had noticed, scaling questions at the start of the intervention and the end of the intervention, for the parents, scaling areas like; best hopes, confidence and relationship with the young person, and scaling questions with the young people on areas like doing as their parent tells them to do, listening, being listened to, and quality of the relationship. All the scaling was 0-10, with 0 being worst and 10 being best. The average number of sessions parents received was 6. The range was from parents receiving a single session, to parents receiving twelve sessions. It was rare for parents to receive twelve sessions and in many cases parents received less than six.

Soft Data

At the first session parents were asked how confident they were at managing their teenager. The average response was 5. The same question was asked at each session; the average response from parents in the final session was that things had improved to 8. Parents were asked where their relationship with their teen was at the start. The average response was 6 at the start which by the end of the support had risen to an 8. Best hopes were the most important subjective piece of data because the best hopes are identifying how much improvement has been made relating directly to the problem situation that was present at the beginning, and comparing how things are now. The average response to asking parents to scale best hopes in the first session was that things were at about 4. At

the final session the average scaling of best hopes had increased to an 8. The average number parents said they would be happy with achieving was 7 so most parents achieved what they wanted to achieve from receiving support by the final session. With best hopes parents were contacted six months later to see where they are now. The average number parents reported at the six month follow up were that things are still at a 7.

Parents also had the opportunity to feedback what improvements they had noticed compared to before receiving support, here is a selection of comments from parents:

- It gave me a helpful insight into changing things in different ways
- I feel confident to follow through with discipline
- We are getting on better than before and can handle things a lot better
- Spending more time together
- Talking more often
- Better communication
- More positive
- More confidence

The young people also had the opportunity to feedback what changes they had noticed following their parent(s) receiving support, and here is a selection of comments from the young people:

- My parents listen to me more than they did and help me sort out my problems better
- My Mum is more calmer than last year, but it might be because we agreed on that
- No shouting and rows like before. Mum seems happier and I am staying at school
- We are together more and we go out more often
- My sister does not threaten me with her fists
- We've changed bedrooms. I think it's because me and John argue when we share a bedroom so I think it's a change and we hardly argue anymore
- When I get angry they tell me to go upstairs to calm down now
- A lot has changed. The house is more peaceful and everyone is relaxed. We have a laugh
- They are a lot calmer than they used to be when they tell me off
- Mum listens to me...My mum knows more about me

The difficulty with soft data, apart from it being subjective is that it doesn't capture information about the families where parents chose not to engage, it only gathers information relating to parents that engaged with the support. This means that there is no way of knowing whether the support made any difference to the families other than what they have reported. The parents that chose not to engage may also have moved on just as much, or outcomes may be worse but there is no way of knowing.

Hard Data

This is where hard data is useful because it allows for the capture of information relating to the outcomes of those that engaged with support as well as those that chose not to engage with support.

321 families were offered the opportunity to receive parenting support. Out of those 321 families 57% chose to accept the support and 43% decided they didn't want the support. When looking at the levels of young people that were in the criminal justice system before being offered support and a year after being offered support and declining it, or the completion of receiving support, when parents engaged 20% of the young people had previously offended and a year after the parents engaged in support this reduced to 10%. When parents chose not to engage 42% of the young people had previously offended and a year after the support was offered this had reduced to 31%. The interesting finding was when this was compared with the 91 families that were monitored over a 3 year period. Over this longer time period offending rates began to creep up as would be expected but there was a huge difference in the rate this occurred between those that had parents' that engaged and those where parents' didn't engage. With parental engagement the offending rate rose from 10% to 17%, still below the 20% starting rate. With the parents that chose not to engage the offending rate rose from 31% to 52%, well above the 42% starting rate.

The parenting referrals fell into two categories, prevention referrals, these are referrals of young people that had perhaps been involved with the anti-social behaviour team, they will be parents of young people that were at risk of entering the criminal justice system but haven't yet, and referrals of parents of young offenders, these were referrals of parents of young people that were in the criminal justice system. The young people that were in the criminal justice system were all working with a youth justice worker at the time of the parenting support referral being received. They were frequently on orders lasting three to twelve months.

With many services being cut and focusing on targeted work with high end cases and reducing the focus on prevention and early intervention these findings can show the importance of prevention to reduce youth criminal offending and the impact this has over a three year period. 225 referrals were preventative. Of these 64% engaged in the support offered and data was gathered a year after the support ended 96% of the young people hadn't offended at this point, 64 of the referrals were monitored over a three year period and 89% of the young people still hadn't offended three years later. 36% of the parents chose not to take up the offer of support, a year following the offer of support 87% of the young people hadn't offended and three years later this number had reduced to 67%. This is encouraging because it shows that many young people at risk of becoming young offenders are unlikely to do so. It also shows that when parents receive this support they increase the chances of their teen keeping out of trouble. Whereas if they don't have any support there is more chance of their teen entering the criminal justice system within a year and significantly more chance of their young person doing so within the next three years.

The hardest to engage parents are parents of young offenders. Many of the referrals for parenting of young offenders are for parents of older teens. Many of these teens are 15-17, whereas the preventative work is often parents of 10-14 year olds. Many of these parents choose not to engage, a frequent comment from parents is that their child is nearly 16 and so they only have to last a few more months, after that if they don't sort themselves out they can move out of home. Some parents comment that their teen is already 16 or older and so if they do one more thing they will be out. The engagement rate of these parents is significantly lower than for preventative support. Out of 96 parents that were offered support, only 39% engaged. Data gathered a year after support ended showed that 68% of the young people hadn't offended over that year. 27 parents of young offenders were monitored over a three year period and this rate had only dropped slightly to 60% that hadn't offended three years later. These were all young people that before parenting support was offered had committed criminal offenses and were all being seen by a Youth Justice Worker. 61% of the parents offered support chose not to engage. A year following the parents choosing not to take up the offer of support 44% of the young

people hadn't offended, which dropped sharply to only 18% of the young people not committing offenses over a three year period. The interesting finding here is that all the young people had a Youth Justice Worker during the first year, so for those parents that engaged there was support for the parent and support for the young person. The big difference appears when the Youth Justice Worker involvement ends. For the young people whose parents were supported long term outcomes were more optimistic, there was a more stable result. Whereas when parents didn't engage with support, once the Youth Justice Worker wasn't involved, so the young person wasn't being supported, the likelihood of reoffending dramatically increased so that three years later 82% of the young people had reoffended, compared to just 40% of the young people reoffending when parents had been supported and had developed ways of thinking and managing situations that allowed them to support their teen with keeping out of trouble.

So, by offering support to parents early on there is a higher level of engagement in that support. The outcomes are greater and there is significantly less likelihood of the young person entering the criminal justice system. When parents engage in support even when their teen is in the criminal justice system, they can develop skills and ways of thinking that can help them to support their teen to reduce the chances of them reoffending. In these cases the parenting support compliments the work being done by the Youth Justice Workers and when the parents have been supported they are more able to keep progress going after the Youth Justice Workers involvement ends. This way of working helps to empower parents and give them hope because they aren't being told techniques to learn that may or may not work, and may not be appropriate as their teen grows up, they are being encouraged to think about things in a slightly different way, they are being encouraged to view situations differently, be mindful of their own emotional needs and the emotional needs of their teens, and to focus more on solutions and how situations become resolved, rather than on searching for 'why' and blaming or feeling that they must be bad parents. This allows the parents to develop skills for life rather than just techniques for situations.

Dan Jones is author of 'Human Givens Approach to Working With Parents of Challenging Teens: An Evidence-Based Approach for Professionals in Social Work Practice'

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