

MELLOW PARENTING

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11th March 2009

Mr Tom Jackson
Clark to the Children and Young People's Committee
Parenting Action Plan
The Welsh Assembly Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Dear Mr Jackson

Parenting Action Plan

I am aware of the Welsh Assembly's Parenting Action Plan 2005 to 2008 to support parenting in Wales. I also understand that the Committee has taken evidence from a range of witnesses, including: Children in Wales, Children are Unbeatable, the Caerphilly Parent Network, Flintshire County Council, Home Start, Incredible Years and the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.

We have had some interest from Parenting Commissioners within Wales in our Mellow Parenting Programme, who are keen to commission training and begin to run their own Mellow Parenting Groups. I therefore thought it would be helpful for me to send you some of our literature and a copy of our promotional DVD. Mellow Parenting has been particularly designed to meet the needs of families with complex problems. Mellow Parenting groups set out to support the parents, but evidence is that this alone does not change parenting, and so the groups combine personal support for parents with targeted video feedback on parent's own interaction with their children. Video feedback is one of the elements identified by a meta-analysis of the research data as being helpful in increasing parent's sensitivity to their children. This is a little different from packages such as Triple P or Incredible Years which use vignettes of parent-child interaction to promote discussion but is also different from Video-Interaction Guidance alone in supporting parents to identify for themselves what works in their management of and communication with their children. In a very full one-day-a-week over a fourteen week period, parents and children learn to have fun together.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information on our programme, and thank you for your time.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely



Rosemary A S Mackenzie
Mellow Parenting

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Are you mellow?

Mellow (dictionary definition) Good humoured, tolerant and approachable, especially as a result of maturity or a feeling of security

Since 2006 Mellow Parenting has been an independent charity, training a wide variety of professionals to run parenting groups to support parents in making better relationships with their children.

In a field where there are many programmes being offered it is useful to pause and ask how Mellow Parenting is different from the other programmes. Although Mellow Parenting meets the NICE guidelines¹ for effective parenting programmes for children with conduct disorder or oppositional disorder, it was not initially designed for the treatment of disruptive behaviour, rather for parents who had difficulties in making a good relationship with their children. The roots of their difficulties often lay in the poor relationships they had always experienced in their own lives with their own parents, schools and helping agencies. After all, if you have never had a trusting and rewarding experience of relationships how can you provide this for your children? When they got to trust the group they would explain that they did not want to inflict the same punitive treatment on their children as they and experienced, but were at a loss to know what else to do. These vulnerabilities were then often compounded by material disadvantage, maternal depression and strife with their partners. Mellow Parenting groups set out to support the parents, but evidence is that this alone does not change parenting, and so the groups combine personal support for parents with targeted video feedback on parent's own interaction with their children. Video feedback is one of the elements identified by a meta-analysis of the research data² as being helpful in increasing parent's sensitivity to their children. This is a little different from packages such as Triple P or Incredible Years which use vignettes of parent-child interaction to promote discussion but is also different from Video-Interaction Guidance alone in supporting parents to identify for themselves what works in their management of and communication with their children. In a very full one-day-a-week over a fourteen week period, parents and children learn to have fun together.

Mellow Parenting has been particularly designed to meet the needs of families with complex problems. The first contact aims to set a new model of interface between a service and the family many of whom have had a record of poor engagement with other services. The first contact is usually a home visit in which the family hears about the programme with no pressure to answer questions or reveal themselves. While written information is given out, it is all read aloud during the meeting, as many of the parents lack confidence in their literacy skills. Only when a family agrees that they are interested in participating are they asked to tell something about themselves. Part of the simple first interview asks about how what the

¹ Parent-training/education programmes in the management of children with conduct disorders. NICE Guideline 102, July 2006

² Bakermans-Kranenberg Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J., Van IJzendoorn, M.H., & Juffer, F. (2003). Less is more: Meta-analyses of sensitivity and attachment interventions in early childhood. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 195-215.

parent has experienced as children has influenced what they want for their children, already starting to make links between past experiences and current parenting. A further task of the first interview is to point the parent towards setting some aims for the children and for themselves. This is a puzzle to many parents who never stop to consider their own needs, but reflects a dual commitment to helping parents as well as supporting their parenting. There is no doubt that it is difficult to draw water from an empty well!

Mellow Parenting has been extended from the original base which was in running groups for mothers of children under five in a family centre. Groups have been run for mothers and babies under one year of age, dads, grannies who are caring for their grandchildren when their own children have failed to provide a safe environment for them and for couples. Formal evaluations of the under-fives programme and the babies programme have shown increases in positive interaction, decreases in negative interaction, better wellbeing in the parents and for the older children an improvement in behaviour and a substantial increase in language and formal tests of IQ. As well as the UK, groups are now being run for parents and carers in several countries including Germany, Sweden, New Zealand and Russia with new groups starting up soon in Iceland. As the programme helps parents to set their own goals, different cultural practices or values are readily incorporated within a broad framework of what we know about fostering secure attachments and optimum development in children.

Three day training courses are now run on a regular basis throughout the country either as in-house training or open courses. Supervision throughout the first group is included in the training fee and encouraged on an ongoing basis. A further additional day of training is offered for those wanting to use Mellow Babies. All the printed and video materials needed to run a group are included in the initial training

The last word should lie with the parents.

“The most important thing I learnt was that I am worth it.”

“The most important thing I learnt was how to be more interactive with babies”

“ I think without Mellow Parenting I would probably be in a mad house by now and children out of hand.”

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