

The Parenting Puzzle

Parents and parents-to-be are bombarded with information about pregnancy and ante natal care, birth planning, breastfeeding, routines, playing with their child, managing their behaviour and so on and on and on.....

The Government's SureStart Programmes all over the country work to enhance children's emotional development, health and learning opportunities by providing a range of services for parents and young children, some of which address the causes of a problem; many of which deal with the symptoms. Many parents might find such services very useful. Ask your Health Visitor or go to the SureStart website to see if there's one in your area.

However, I am left asking why, when we've been bringing up children for millennia, haven't we got it right? Well, it's not that easy, is it? If the midwife said "congratulations Ms Bloggs, you've got a

lovely baby boy and here's the manual to go with him" it would be so simple. Just like buying a new washing machine, we'd read the instructions and follow them, probably getting it right first time.

The chapter headings might read "being firm, being consistent, letting them explore safely, understanding their stage of development, encouraging their learning, acquiring skills and techniques for addressing challenging behaviour, setting aside time for yourself and partner and quality time with your child.

How difficult can that be? **Very!**



We come to parenting having been parented. OK, that's obvious but what does it mean?

We come with a set of ideas, values and priorities and a whole host of messages from our own parents. Some parents think that caring for their child means providing material things, for example, and others think that teaching a child to be able to provide for themselves is more helpful in the long run. Some parents believe in physical chastisement and others think that other ways work better. Some parents place a high priority on education while it's not so important for others. Some parents instil in their children a positive sense of self and others are highly critical.

Because of all these entrenched, subliminal views, parents give us messages, mostly without knowing they're doing so, that stay with us for life such as "you could play for England" or "you'll never be good enough" and we're all very familiar with "big boys don't cry" and "little girls should be seen and not heard".

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If I look back at my childhood, I can recall all the things that adults in my life said to me. Some I like and hold precious to this day. Others I disagree with and have found ways of rejecting out of my life and the ways in which I think and behave.

But not many people think about it. Many parents have children because of strong anthropological and cultural desires to do so, and repeat the giving of positive and negative messages without a second thought. Some people, when considering embarking on parenthood, review what their parents did that they appreciated and what they could have done differently.

For many, it only becomes important when things go wrong, relationships are strained or break down completely and we wonder why.

That's when we need to think about what we bring with us to the role of parent, how our history affects us and how it

has a knock-on affect on our children. And that's when we know that the manual doesn't work and we have to look deeper at what's going on.

Doing this is not easy and because it's often uncomfortable, even painful, it helps to have someone to help you work out the puzzle.

Professionals able to do this are few and far between.

Counsellors may be available through your local SureStart Programme or you could be referred by your GP but, not only is this unlikely, but the participant has to be clear about who their information is shared with. A service provided by "the system" may mean that information is shared within that system.

Alison Byrne Associates offers a service for those living in the South East of England. Alison works with parents to help them find positive solutions to family problems that enhance the parents' self esteem and confidence.

She will work with any family issues and anything else that impacts upon the person's ability to reach their full potential and achieve their goals in life.

Children can't wait for years for their parents to make positive change so Alison's work is often short term and focussed. There is a sliding scale of charges for this service.

If you would like to talk to Alison to discover see how this could benefit you and your family, you can contact her on 01622 600010 or email: Alison@byrne-coaching.co.uk

This article was written by Lonnie Morris a SureStart Manager.