



When Family Life Hurts: Family Experience of Agression in Children

An update to Family Lives' October 2010 report

Executive Summary

Family Lives produced a comprehensive report on the experience of families suffering from aggressive behaviour in children in October 2010. This report is an update, reviewing Family Lives' data from July 2010 to June 2011 and updating the recommendations. We have also conducted another survey of our web users who have experienced aggressive behaviour.

The updated statistics show that calls to Family Lives about aggressive behaviour have increased by 2% since last year, continuing the growing trend our family support works have observed.

Key Facts and Figures

Statistics from Parentline, Family Lives' free telephone helpline for families showed that:

- calls about a child's physical aggression have risen by 2% and calls about a child's verbal aggression have risen by 4%
- 42.9% of calls about behaviour related to children aged 13-15 years
- Parents calling about their child's aggression were 30.3% more likely to suffer from stress than other callers, and 8.3% more likely to be suffering with anger.
- Children are more likely to suffer from identified or unidentified depression if they have behavioural issues compared to all long calls. They are more likely to self-harm, feel suicidal and suffer from hyperactivity and feelings of isolation.
- Compared to June 09 - June 10 statistics, stress, confusion, isolation and anger have increased by an average of 5.3% where a child is being verbally aggressive and by 5.4% in calls where a child is physically aggressive.
- Children who are physically aggressive were significantly more likely to be using drugs and to be in with a bad crowd

Respondents to our web survey reported that in 44% of cases the children misbehaved almost every day and in most cases this misbehaviour involves angry outbursts (70%) and swearing (37%), aggression towards parents or carers (55%) and towards their siblings (38%). This report draws a distinction between normal misbehaviour and behaviour that is out of control or entrenched such as a conduct disorder.

Why children's behaviour spirals out of control

We asked respondents to our web survey why they felt that their child behaved aggressively, what they felt influenced that behaviour and why they felt it was worse in the home.

Large numbers identified their children's friends, or other members of the family as influences on their child's aggressive behaviour, but a significant number (38.8%) were unsure, expressing their frustration with comments such as "That's the \$10,000 question".

Parents talked about bullying, domestic violence, disabilities and mental health problems as triggers for the aggressive behaviour and identified inconsistent parenting and divorce and separation as other contributing factors.

Seeking help

In our most recent online survey, **only 56% of parents had sought help for their child's aggressive behaviour**. This figure remained consistent with the findings from our 2010 survey, showing that families are still trying to cope alone with difficult behaviour. An alarming 35% had not sought help because they did not know where to go to find that help, and a further 11% did not seek help because of the stigma.

Despite the impact on their family life, 20% of families did not seek help for fear of damaging their child's life chances and instead suffered in silence trying to manage the behaviour themselves.

In this report we make new recommendations which we will share with Government. Children's violent and aggressive behaviour in the home is a hidden and stigmatised issue, and we must work to support families who are experiencing these problems to help change their child's behaviour and improve their life chances.

Recommendations

- The Government should consider, in its response to the Family Justice Review and its implementation of the recommendations, how it can ensure that parents receive the support they need to meet their child's needs during separation as early as possible in the process
- Government must recognise the particular needs of many parents of older children and teenagers, and ensure that in focussing support on the early years, we are not further stigmatising the seeking of support for families experiencing difficulties with older children.
- Government should commit to looking for sustainable ways to better integrate family support services with universal services.

Parents supporting one another on Family Lives' web forum

Parent 1

Hi everyone, I got so tired of the constant arguments with my son last November that I had to run out of the house and tried to commit suicide. I then got in touch with Parentline and it really helped when I spoke to someone each week to let it all out and I felt stronger and in control.

Last Sunday, my son...was trying to pick an argument with my husband by calling him names from the top of the stairs...and I slapped his face...He pushed me away and went back into his room and came out pointing a pellet gun at my face.

I couldn't believe he could do this and I felt sick and ran downstairs and rang the police...took him to the station and I went to give a statement. I feel scared with my son in the house and I don't want to go home after work because I cannot take the stress.

Please, please, tell me who I can contact to say I cannot live with [him] anymore? I am afraid that I will hurt myself again which is what the kids are waiting for so they can say that I am mentally ill. I am not mentally ill but simply want a quiet life which I have not had for 10 years with my son.

Parent 2

Your son's behaviour is out of line... I'm afraid I don't know where you could go for help, but please don't hurt yourself, as your husband and (although you might not believe it) your son would be devastated. If you feel really bad then call Parentline or even the Samaritans so you can talk things through. Best of luck

Parent 1

Thank you for your reply. I have spoken to someone on Parentline and it helped get things off my chest. I am in contact now with social care and they will help me get through this and they will explain to him what he is doing is not going to get him what he wants. ... He did try to hit me with a big litre of coke yesterday so I think he should go to a shelter as he is getting violent and I feel scared everyday in his presence as to what might be next. Thanks again for your reply.

Introduction

In October 2010, Family Lives published a report exploring an issue that has been a growing trend on our helpline over the past few years: Family's experience of aggression in children. This report seeks once again to highlight this under-reported issue, adding new statistics

Every year, Parentline, Family Lives' free, round the clock family and parenting support telephone line receives thousands of calls from distraught parents seeking help to manage their child's violent or aggressive behaviour. Last year's report analysed 83,469 long calls (classified as calls of a duration of 20 minutes or over) between the months of June 2008 and June 2010. This update looks at the 39,258 calls received by Parentline between July 2010 and June 2011.

Incidences of physical or verbal aggression are a part of normal child development, and dealing with them presents important learning and growth opportunities for both parent and child. However, our data suggests that a steadily increasing minority of families are battling with more entrenched and complex problems that point towards concerns around their child's emotional and mental health. It is the growing minority that form the focus of this report.

My son, Harry, had a temper tantrum last night, over not doing his homework. I restrained him, as he was attempting to smash up his bedroom. My other children were terrified, my husband doesn't know what to do. Harry ripped my jeans I have a huge bruise on my leg, he has smashed a hole in his door and ripped his light fitting out. We are all going to have to suffer this week because we have to pay to fix the damage. Harry just thinks it's all unfair on him! We are in a dark place right now, I know I need help with this, but am terrified of the consequences for Harry.

(Mother of 13-15 year old son)

Data from Parentline shows that families calling about aggression in children are more likely to report that their children are not enjoying good mental health and wellbeing. Many appear to be displaying behaviours associated with conduct disorders and a number of families are already in contact with specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Conduct disorders are the most common childhood psychiatric disorders¹.

At a family level, interventions that are known to reduce levels of violence and abuse include parental mental health promotion, parent training and early intervention for child emotional and behavioural disorders.² Yet Family Lives' experience is that all too often, by the time many families seek help they are in a desperate position and some require intensive interventions, such as children being taken away by the police or social services. The stigma attached to the abuse can prevent families from seeking help early and preventing the problem from spiralling out of control.

Case Study

I have been a single mother for the last 6 years. My 15 yr old son didn't know his father, but he came into his life about 3 years ago, disappointed him and now doesn't bother. Along with that, the teenage hormones started to rage in my once lovely caring and polite child. He grew into a monster who verbal bullied me, spat at me and damaged my property. I had him arrested twice and eventually put into care when no-one would help us.

I was referred to CAHMS by my doctor who stated in her letter, "mother not coping with a teenage son." (not quite how I would have described the situation). Social services wouldn't help.

I didn't have the support of my mother and grandmother for having my son arrested and put into care, even when I wasn't coping, got severe depression and put a knife to my wrist.

Having great friends helped, but the biggest help was Parentline/Family Lives. Having someone to answer the phone in the middle of the night when I couldn't cope anymore. Having other parents on the forums telling me I was a good mum and doing the right thing kept me going and made me realise I wasn't alone and far from the only person suffering from their teenager.

Key Findings: Parentline Call Data

A large number of calls to Parentline – Family Lives’ free, national helpline, have consistently concerned children’s behaviour. This section highlights the trends and points of difference in our data between the last report, which looked at calls between June 2008 and June 2010, and a new set of data looking at calls from July 2010 to June 2011.

The most striking finding from the data is that calls about aggression have continues to rise: In this report calls about a child’s physical aggression have risen by 2% and calls about a child’s verbal aggression have risen by 4%

Much of the data in this report was consistent with the last report:

- **Aggression in the home:** the vast majority of callers were concerned about aggression in the home, rather than in school or another setting. This had risen by 1% to 89% of those calling about their child’s aggressive behaviour.
- **Mothers:** Mothers bear the brunt of their child’s aggressive behaviour, although in many cases this does spill out to others in the family. 72% of all long calls were from mothers, yet 80.5% of calls about children’s behavior were from mothers.
- **Girls and Boys:** Contrary to public perception, this is an issue that crosses the gender divide. Boys and girls are physically and verbally aggressive in similar numbers, although boys are slightly more likely to be both physically and verbally aggressive.
- **Early Teens:** Aggressive behaviour is reported in children of all ages, but peaks in children aged between 13 and 15 years old. In calls to Parentline, 42.9% of calls about behaviour related to children aged 13-15 years, compared to 26% of all long calls relating to that age group³.

Verbal aggression has marginally increased since June 09- June 10 for children up to 9 years of age.

Physical aggression has increased by 4.5% since June 09- June 10 for 10-15 year olds.

- **Experience of parents:** Parents and carers facing aggressive behaviour from their children report feeling desperate, helpless, ashamed and out of control. Parents calling about their child’s aggression were 30.3% more likely to suffer from stress than other callers, and 8.3% more likely to be suffering with anger.
 - **Children’s mental health:** Where aggression was the main feature of the call to Parentline, children were more likely to have emotional problems, poor wellbeing and/or mental health problems. Children are more likely to suffer from identified (2.1%) or unidentified (4.9%) depression if they have behavioural issues compared to all long calls (1.2% and 2.5% respectively). Self-harm is more likely to be reported (2.6% compared to 1.3%) as is suicide (2.4% compared to 1.2%), hyperactivity (3.3% compared to 1.3%), and isolation (5.1% compared to 3.2%).
- Compared to June 09 - June 10 statistics, stress, confusion, isolation and anger have increased by an average of 5.3% where a child is being verbally aggressive and by 5.4% in calls where a child is physically aggressive.**
- **Crime:** Aggressive behaviour was also linked to higher incidences of involvement with the youth justice system, gang and weapon carrying, smoking, anti-social behaviour and children wanting to leave home. Children who were verbally aggressive were more likely to be involved with the youth justice system (3.6% of calls compared to 0.9% of all calls) and significantly more likely to have issues with lying (18.4% compared to 4.5% of all calls). Children who are physically aggressive were significantly more likely to be using drugs

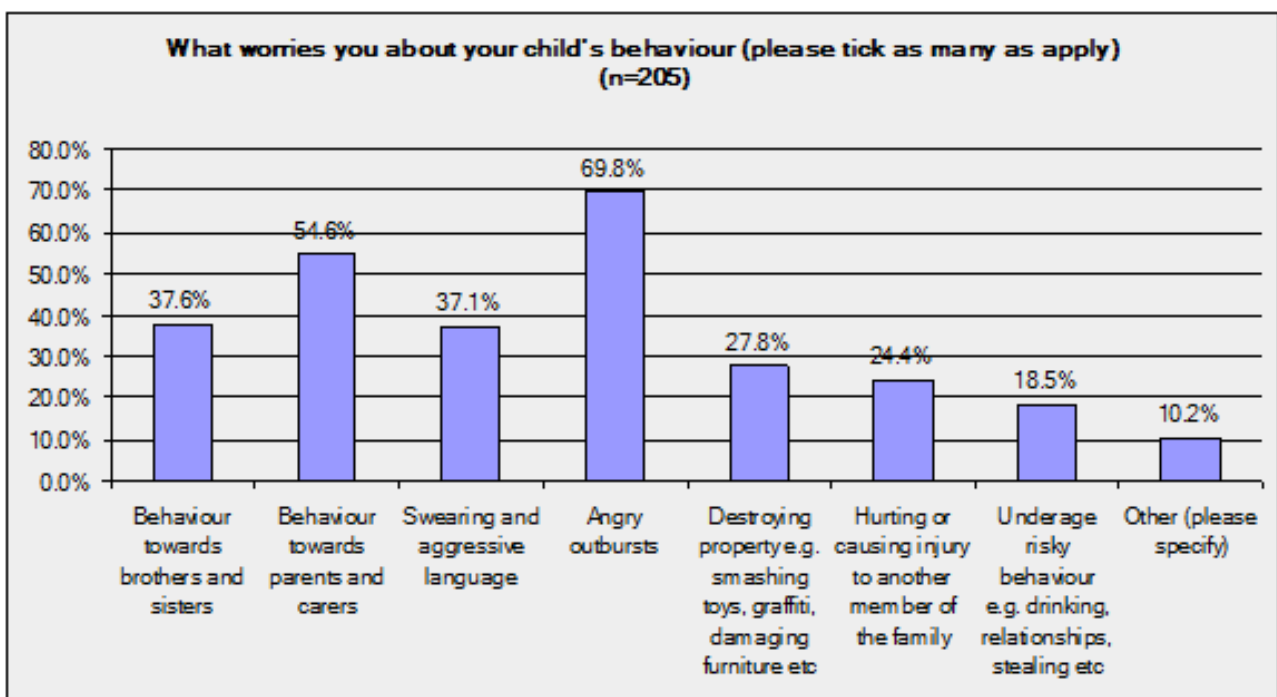
(10.1% compared to 3.2% of all calls) and to be in with a bad crowd (10.9% compared to 3.4% of all calls).

The table 1, below, shows the kind of behaviour experienced by parents who responded to our web survey (a survey of our website users posted between 14th September 2011 and 10th October 2011 aimed at

parents who had experienced aggressive behaviour from a child. 205 parents and carers completed the survey).

Respondents reported that in 44% of cases the children misbehaved almost every day and in most cases this misbehaviour involves angry outbursts (70%) and swearing (37%), aggression towards parents or carers (55%) and towards their siblings (38%)

Table 1



“Other” responses include among others:

- Using drugs
- Self-harm, low esteem, depression, mood swings
- Shoplifting and taking money
- Bullying
- Attention seeking
- Threatening to harm
- Eating issues
- Easily led astray/ unsuitable role models

Children's aggressive behaviour: Influences identified by parents

Our first report in October 2010 examined in detail the factors contributing to children's aggressive behaviour, explored the academic evidence base and detailed the findings of a survey of our web users undertaken at the time and data from across our local and national services.

As there are a spectrum of behaviours and conditions, there is also a range of different likely factors which contribute to, or are associated with the serious behaviour and difficulties that children and families face and are reported in the Parentline data.

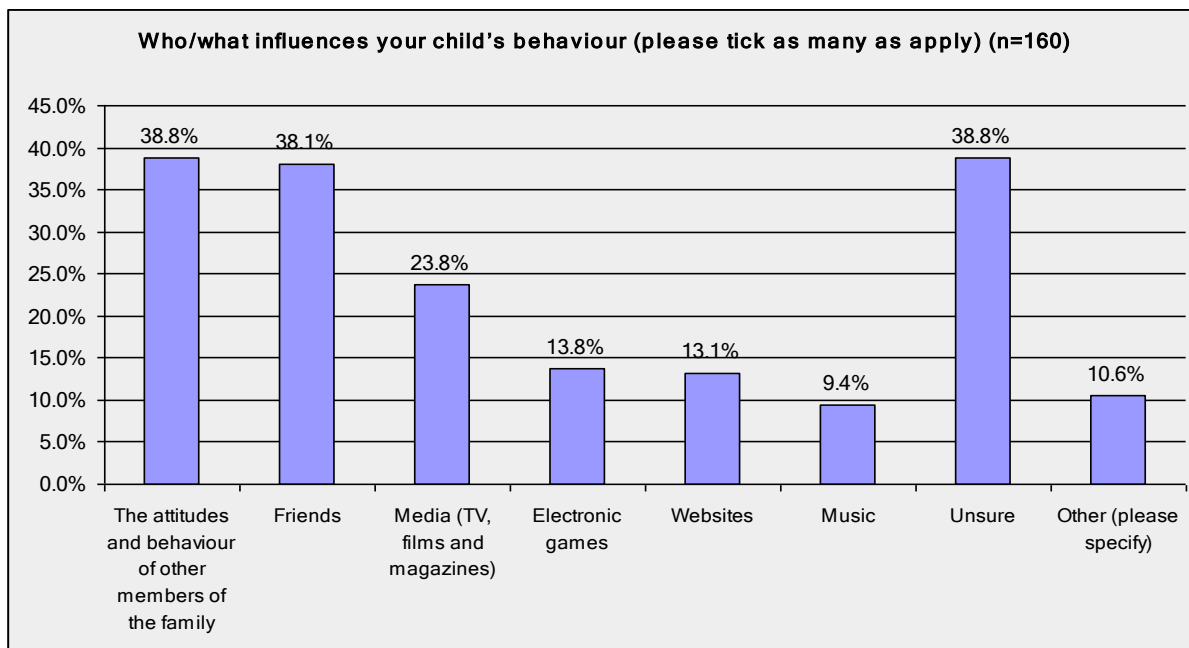
In this update, we examine new data from a survey of

over 200 of our web users who have experienced their child's aggressive behaviour undertaken in September – October 2011.

Who or what influences children's aggressive behaviour?

In our 2011 survey we asked parents directly what they felt influences their child's aggressive behaviour. Table 2, below, shows their responses. Large numbers identified their children's friends, or other members of the family as influences on their child's aggressive behaviour, but a significant number (38.8%) were unsure, expressing their frustration with comments such as "That's the \$10,000 question".

Table 2



"Other" responses

- Homosexual
- Bullying
- Mental cond
- Certain food
- Tiredness, b
- Facebook
- Absent fathe
- Being denie
- saying "no"

Bullying

A number of parents responding to our web survey identified bullying at school as a factor contributing to the aggressive behaviour their child displayed.

Our eldest daughter started getting in trouble in school at about the age of 11. We tried being strong disciplinarians but it just made matters worse. Her behaviour deteriorated to aggression, violence (smashing her bedroom up), rudeness and self-harming. We asked for help but to be honest the Ed Psych was worse than useless. The school was a nightmare. We eventually found out that serious bullying was going on, and in turn she was bullying and playing truant to keep on their good side. When we got nowhere with the school we pulled her out and decided to home school... We have learned how to deal with her outbursts of misbehaviour (as outlined above) and continue to listen to her and support her, even when she won't listen and makes mistakes. She is now in a new school studying for GCSEs and enjoying it and her friends. She still has her 'moments' but it's what I would call typical teenage moments rather than disturbed behaviour. It was really tough but you must never give up on your child even if they say they hate you and even go and live with someone else. That doesn't mean you have to be a pushover at all, you still need to remain firm and consistent in your rules and boundaries but equally consistent with your love and support

(Mother of 13-15 year old)

Data from Parentline calls taken between July 2010 and June 2011 shown that verbal or physical aggression was mentioned in 10% of the calls received about bullying.

Domestic Violence

A significant minority of respondents to our survey had experienced domestic violence (17.9%) and a number identified that domestic violence was a factor in their child's aggressive behaviour.

My ex was very abusive towards me and children, we were always walking on eggshells... I had always taken the children out when I knew he was getting angry, made it into fun days out. 5 years ago [because of a family

crisis] he had to take on a parenting role and he would grab and shove the boys, he was intimidating and left bruises. I asked social services for help because we were struggling (I never told them about the domestic violence – too scared) they said there was nothing they could do.

At 14 our oldest son started to take drugs and drink, he would run away, he was too scared to come home, he would ask to be put in care, he would talk of suicide.. I would always drag his father off him and stand between them. ..When our other son hit adolescence he would get the same treatment.... Social services were contacted 3 further times following complaints from our sons; every time their father convinced them he only used reasonable force with his sons due to their challenging behaviour.

Our older son spent more time away from home and our younger son became angrier. He would become violent with his father and it seemed like I was always in between them...he had an argument with his dad which resulted in his dad beating him around the head and being arrested. 2 weeks later the children and I moved away from their father after living with him for 20 years.

I suffer from anxiety and depression now and it is dawning on me how wrong our life has been. The children are all relieved to be living away from him...However my sons' anger can be out of control usually connected with their girlfriends. The younger has smashed up the house, put holes in the walls and cut himself on 3 occasions over the year that we have lived here, following arguments with his girlfriend.

The older one ... has carved messages in his walls and put holes everywhere, sometimes this is daily. He asks for money for drugs and if I say no he threatens to steal, damage, suicide. He has not harmed a person but he has threatened to. He talks about cutting people up, my daughter has hidden knives from him. Over the past 2 years he has seen CAMHS, domestic violence worker, [mediation], family counsellor, Youth Offending Team, he does not engage with anyone does not turn up for appointments and just won't take responsibility, blames his dad, me, his girlfriend....

Everything is such a mess, I fantasised for years about getting away from their father now we are but things don't seem much better.

(Mother of 16-18 year old son)

Divorce and Family Breakdown

10.3% of respondents to our web survey identified a time of family change such as divorce or bereavement as the point at which their child's aggressive behaviour began. NPC state in their issues paper on parenting, Caring for Children: "recent research suggested that children of parents who separate are four times more likely to develop emotional disorders than those in families that stay together."⁴

Other evidence suggests that the impact of entrenched conflict in the couple relationship is what causes harm to the child, rather than the act of family separation. In a report for the Policy Research Bureau looking at interventions for children at risk of developing an anti-social personality disorder, researchers found that conflict in intact couples had as significant an impact: "Persistent conflict between parents, whether between intact couples or those in the process or aftermath of separation, has been associated with children's disruptive behaviour and conduct disorder. An end to conflict may see children's conduct problems improve to pre-stress levels."⁵

My marriage broke down and this coincided with the birth of our second child. I had a breakdown so there was a lot of unsettlement around that time. As soon as my son started school he changed from being angelic to being very badly behaved and aggressive towards me, and this has continued. Family life has been very stable for the last 6 years but his behaviour has not improved

(Single mother of 10-12 year old son)

Evidence shows that divorce and separation can have a significant long lasting negative impact on children, but if the child's needs and wellbeing are central to the process then these negative impacts are less likely to be long lasting.⁶

Inconsistent Parenting

There is a wide body of evidence that shows the impact of parenting style on children's behaviour and outcomes, the risk factors and the protective factors which influence a child's life chances. A 2009 report by Demos, Building character, explored different types of parenting and found

that parenting was the single most important factor influencing children's outcomes: "improving the quality of parenting, especially for disadvantaged children, is a key priority for policy aimed at generating a fairer society"⁷

Many parents' stories identified points of difference between parents as a factor contributing to, exacerbating, or hindering their ability to cope with, their child's aggressive behaviour.

We're from a mixed race family and found it very difficult to stick to a moral code which we (my wife and I) could agree upon in raising our daughter. This was exaggerated by the fact that my step daughter, the elder of the two, was brought up in a Muslim family whose values were very different from my own. I think our youngest daughter's attitude was in part due to 'natural' teenage issues, but was also heightened by the difference in expectations that both my wife and I had of her.

(Father of 19-21 year old)

Divorce and separation can exacerbate this inconsistent parenting if co-parenting strategies are not discussed, agreed and implemented. Children can end up playing one parent off against another, or the non-resident parent may end up taking a back-seat in the discipline as they spend less time with the child.

My daughter's father sees her only once or twice a week, doesn't work or pay maintenance for her or help discipline her. Therefore he can spend more time being "nice" she then sees me as the bad guy because I am working and sometimes late into the evenings. I don't get the time to be with her and when I do it feels like it is being squeezed because she doesn't realise that when she is being rude and abusive to me we have to stop doing the fun things and concentrate on discipline.

(Single mother of 7-9 year old daughter)

Children's Special Needs

A number of parents identified that their children had medical or emotional conditions which made them unable to control their aggressive behavior.

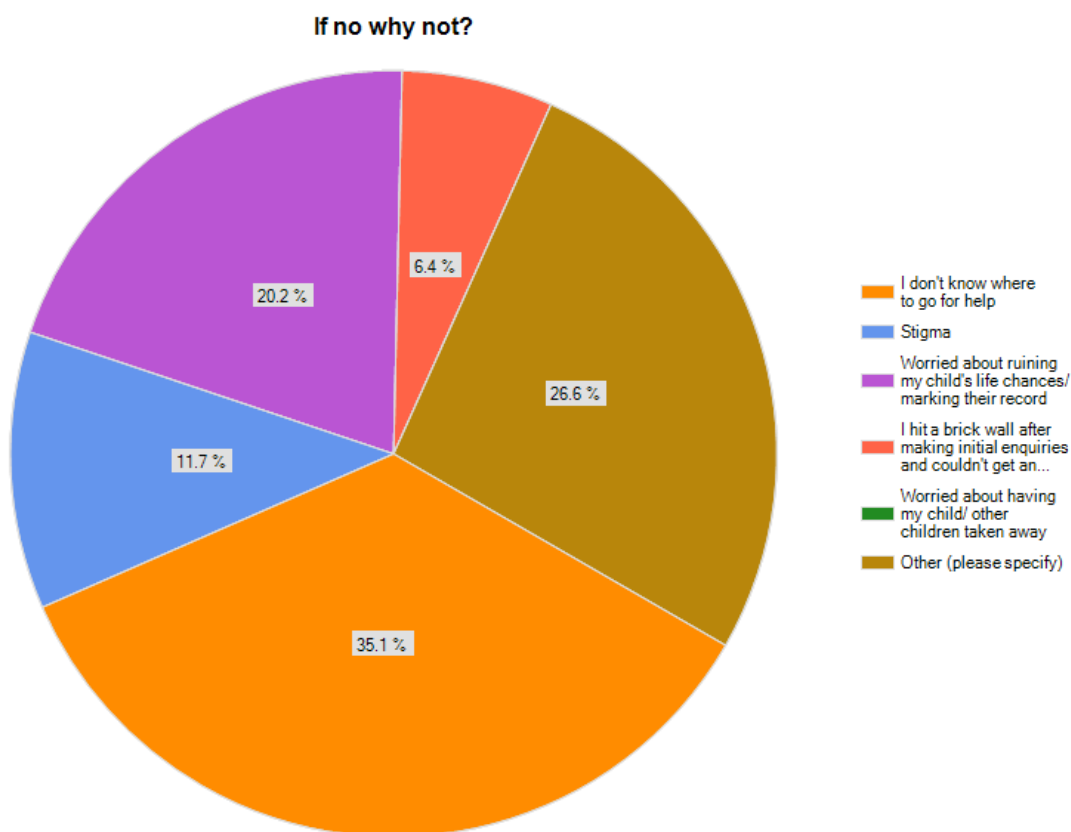
Seeking help: Where do parents go?

Seeking help at an early stage is critical to preventing a child's aggressive behaviour from spiralling out of control. Our first report examined the evidence surrounding early intervention and parenting support, and found that it is important to get help to a family as soon as possible, but that family interventions can be an effective treatment at any stage⁸.

In our most recent online survey, only 56% of parents had sought help for their child's aggressive behaviour. This figure was the same as for our 2010 survey, showing that families are still trying to cope alone with difficult behaviour.

We asked those families who had not sought help why they had not. Figure 3 shows a breakdown of their answers

Figure 4



An alarming 35% had not sought help because they did not know where to go to find that help. Amongst the "other" section, answers included not thinking the problem serious enough, believing that the aggression was part of normal behaviour and being concerned that advice or help may go against a deeply held parenting philosophy.

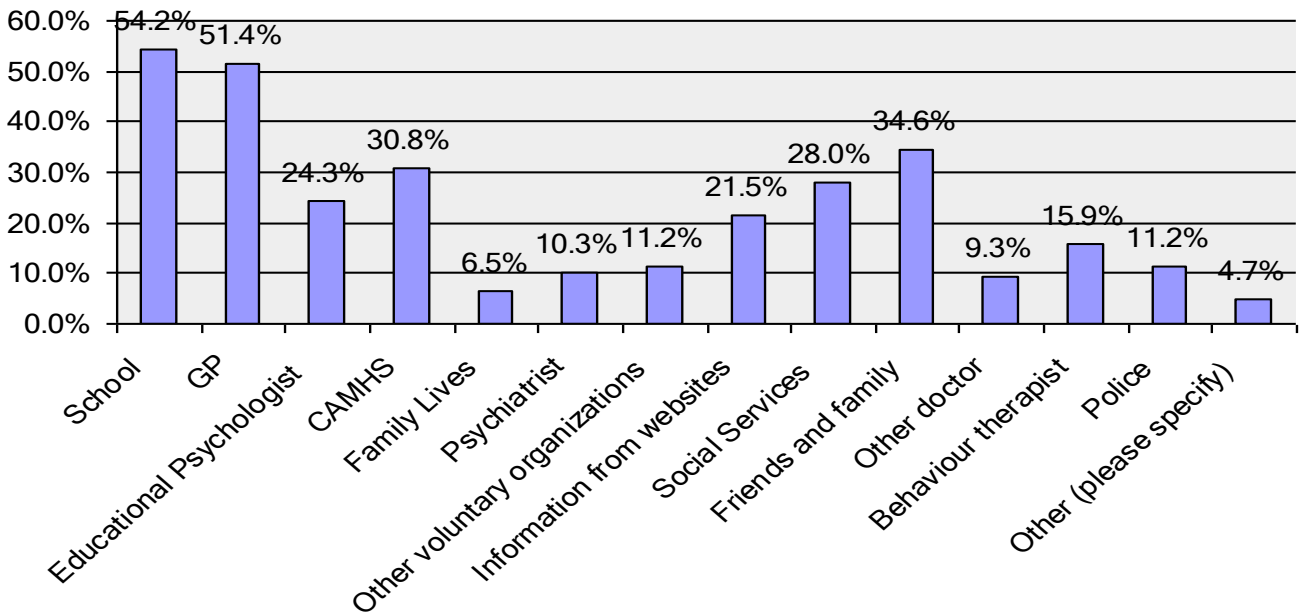
Also of great concern is the 11% of families who are suffering in silence because of the stigma associated with their inability to cope with their child's aggressive behaviour. Whilst 20% of respondents were concerned about seeking help for fear of damaging their child's future prospects, it is heartening to see that no respondents were concerned about having their children taken away if they sought help.

We asked respondents to our web survey who had sought help where they went for that help. Table 4 below shows their responses. These results were consistent

with last year's survey, when we asked the same question. It is noteworthy that the majority of parents go to their GP and their child's school to seek help.

Table 5

Where did you seek help? (n=107)



Family Lives' surveys consistently shown that families experiencing challenging behaviour are seeking help from universal services such as GPs and Schools. With the criminal and dangerous nature of some aggressive behaviour, it is unsurprising to see that the police are another universally accessible service 11% of respondents sought help from. Under 'other' the most common answer was school nurses.

Family Lives works locally with other professionals including schools, GP practices and prisons and youth offending settings to try and ensure that parents attempting to access help and support for family problems are able to do so. Our recently launched 'Instructions Not Included' project, aims to ensure that links between universal services and family and parenting support services are as seamless as possible.

The project will work with different groups of practitioners, including Youth Offending teams, GPs, Health Visitors

and Teachers to develop strong local links and national tools to facilitate joint working to ensure the best service for families.

Why bother seeking help?

My son got kicked out of 3 senior schools by the age of 14. He has been arrested about 9 times mainly for criminal damage. It also doesn't help that the only real punishment is a fine which he doesn't have to pay because they are put in mine and my husband's names,

(Mother of 16-18 year old son)

A number of parents reported feeling that the help they were offered when they tried to access it fell short of what they hoped for. This story is also reflected in the 6% of survey respondents who reported that they did not seek help for their child's behaviour because they made initial enquiries and then hit a brick wall.

Update on the recommendations from our October 2010 report

Family Lives made a series of recommendations for Government in last year's report. In this chapter we look at what progress has been made on those recommendations, and seek to identify potential areas where more could be done to support children and families to manage aggressive behaviour.

Targeted support for separating families

Recommendation from October 2010: *It was clear from many of the respondents to our web survey that family conflict, divorce and separation can contribute to anger and aggression in children and adolescents. Family Lives endorses the call from a respondent to our web survey for an appropriate form of parenting support to be made available to all families going through a divorce. The court process is rarely a positive experience for families and can have long lasting ill effects on children.*

There is still further progress to be made on this recommendation. The Family Justice Review, which delivered its final report on 3rd November 2011, recommended that an online portal and helpline be set up for those separating which would include advice and information emphasising the importance of shared parental responsibility⁹. The review also recommends rebranding alternative dispute resolution as "Dispute Resolution Services" and states that there will be an expectation that parents will have sought such a service before accessing other interventions, and if they still cannot agree then they should attend a Separated Parents Information Programme (SPIP).

Family Lives eagerly awaits the Government response to the Family Justice Review. Whilst we welcome the recognition that SPIPs should form part of the process, we are disappointed that there is not greater emphasis placed on ensuring that SPIPs are made available and promoted to parents who are separating earlier in the

process. Parents must be encouraged to think about their child's needs as early in the process as possible.

Diverting families away from court and statutory services is also now a stated aim of the reforms to the Child Maintenance system, published in consultation form by the Department for Work and Pensions in January 2011. Family Lives welcomes the principle of supporting families to reach more collaborative agreements.

The reforms to the child maintenance system present a real opportunity to deliver to separating families the emotional support that they need to ensure that their child's needs come first during that process. Government must ensure that parenting support is a key part of any package of support offered to families at this crucial point of engagement with the state.

November 2011 Recommendation: The Government should consider, in its response to the Family Justice Review and its implementation of the recommendations, how it can ensure that parents receive the support they need to meet their child's needs during separation as early as possible in the process.

Government must ensure that its reforms of the child maintenance system include an offer of parenting support.

Invest in Interventions that work

Recommendation from October 2010: *Many families seek help to deal with their child's violent and aggressive behaviour, but large numbers of children fall through the gaps in provision and are not able to access any support at all. It is essential that investment in early intervention in mental health is prioritised and support is made available to families. Approaches that promote and treat parental mental health are, arguably, doubly important since*

parental mental health has a direct influence on the children's mental health. In light of the wider society, cross-government nature of the issue, Family Lives calls on the forthcoming Public Health White Paper, the Mental Health strategy, the Independent Review on Early Intervention and the Child Poverty Review to recognise the role and effectiveness of parental support and training programmes in improving outcomes for children and families and its power to break damaging intergenerational cycles. Cost-benefit analyses confirm the economic case for parenting support.

Family Lives welcomed the November 2011 White Paper from the Department for Health; Healthy Lives; Healthy People¹⁰. However, there was scant mention of parenting programmes as a strategy for improving health outcomes. The recognition that these programmes do have positive impacts was there, as was the commitment to investing in support for the most troubled families.

There does, however, seem to be a growing recognition about the importance of parenting support, and recent Government initiatives aimed at reducing the stigma around parenting support and encouraging take up, such as the piloting of a universal entitlement to a support session for parents of 0-5 year olds is a welcome step.

Much of the debate about parenting talks about early intervention and focuses interventions on the early years. Family Lives agrees with the need to frontload investment early in a child's life and acknowledges the strong academic evidence base and rationale around this. However, there are a large number of parents of older children who suddenly find themselves in need of support. Government must recognise the wider view of early intervention, as identified by Professor Eileen Munro in her review of safeguarding¹¹, that an early intervention is one delivered at an early stage of an issue.

November 2011 Recommendation: Government must recognise the particular needs of many parents of older children and teenagers, and ensure that in focussing support on the early years, we are not further stigmatising the seeking of support for families experiencing difficulties with older children.

Statutory sector-Voluntary Sector partnership

Recommendation from October 2010: *Families who are struggling with an angry, aggressive child rely on services such as Family Lives. Users frequently report that they value the confidential, non-judgemental approach of our services and often report they find help more accessible and easy to engage with than their experience of statutory services. Our family support advisors work in a number of ways to help empower parents to redress the power balance and reinstate their authority, supporting their child to manage their behaviour and work through their problems. When necessary, we help families to negotiate the support that they need from CAMHS, social services and the police.*

The Government must ensure that non-statutory services which support families are protected from austerity measures, as disinvestment is likely to be a false economy. We call for a more equal and productive co-production relationship between voluntary and statutory services in the NHS and local government in relation to evidence-based parenting interventions.

Services across the voluntary sector and statutory sector are feeling the pinch, and a number of valuable services to families have been cut. However, a large number, including Family Lives' services have been largely retained and still deliver the same high quality support to families who need it.

A new project, funded by the Department for Education, 'Instructions not Included' aims to bring our services closer to universal statutory service to create a more holistic support for families. We welcome this investment from Government and are working on ways to make this work sustainable. However, there should be wider systemic commitment to integrating family support services within the statutory services that our evidence shows many parents turn to for help.

November 2011 Recommendation: Government should commit to looking for sustainable ways to better integrate family support services with universal services.

Conclusion

In Family Lives' October 2010 report into children's aggressive behaviour we outlined the causes and contributing factors to conduct disorders and aggressive behaviour, the cost to the economy of failing to support families and children suffering, and the positive benefits of parenting programmes for improving outcomes and saving money in the long term. This November 2011 report shows that the trend for children's aggressive behaviour continues, with a rise of 2% in the year since we published our last report.

In this report we make new recommendations which we will share with Government. Children's violent and aggressive behaviour in the home is a hidden and stigmatised issue, and we must work to support families who are experiencing these problems to help change their child's behaviour and improve their life chances.

References

¹ Green H, McGinnity A, Meltzer H, et al (2005) *Mental Health of Children and Young People in Great Britain*, 2004. Office for National Statistics.

² Royal College of Psychiatrists (2010) *No health without public mental health: the case for action*, Position statement, PS4/2010

³ In our websurvey, the majority of respondents (24%) were concerned about aggression in 10-12 year olds.

⁴ New Philanthropy Capital (2010), *Caring for Children; briefing on parenting*

⁵ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit/Department of Health Policy Research Bureau (2007), David Utting, Helen Monteiro and Deborah Ghate, *Interventions for children at risk of developing antisocial personality disorder*

⁶ cited in previous Family Lives' reports (2008/2009)

Recommendations

- The Family Justice Review should consider what other ways it can prioritise the needs of the child in its vision of a reformed system.

Government must ensure that its reforms of the child maintenance system include an offer of parenting support.

- Government must recognise the particular needs of many parents of older children and teenagers, and ensure that in focussing support on the early years, we are not further stigmatising the seeking of support for families experiencing difficulties with older children.
- Government should commit to looking for sustainable ways to better integrate family support services with universal services

⁷ DEMOS (2009) Lexmond and Reeves, *Building character*,

⁸ Dretzke J, Davenport C, Frew E, et al (2009) *The clinical effectiveness of different parenting programmes for children with conduct problems: a systematic review of randomised controlled trials*. Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health, 3,

⁹ Norgrove et al *Family Justice Review*, November 2011,

¹⁰ *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our Strategy for Public Health in England*, Department for Health, November 2010

¹¹ p25 *The Munro Review of Child Protection Part One: A Systems Analysis*, Professor Eileen Munro, 2010