Book News

Your Defiant Child: Eight Steps to Better Behaviour
R. S. Barkley & C. M. Benton

This is a ‘How-To’ book, and I imagine this is what many parents, desperate to find a way of managing an unruly child, would really like—‘Spare us the theory and the jargon and just tell us what to do’. If that is the case, they need look no further. Dr Barkley is on hand to lead them through his ‘eight steps’ to a better relationship with their child.

The book is in two parts. Part I surveys the background to child behaviour problems, providing rating scales for the reader (I just managed to avoid writing ‘mother’) to fill in, about the child and about the parent, to help to assess the type and severity of the problem. Part II contains the nitty-gritty of the book, the Eight Steps. Step 1, confounding those (and there are still some) who think behavioural programmes are all about punishment, prescribes the setting up of a ‘special time’ each day for the parent and child in which the parent catches the child in some favourite play, watches, and joins in, while rigorously abstaining from directions, corrections, and intrusive questions. This ‘special time’ lays the foundation for the ensuing steps, covering the usual behavioural repertoire—attention to acceptable behaviour, rewards,token programmes, fining and time out—and finishing up with some useful tips for working alongside the child’s teacher. The material will be familiar to anyone with a behavioural background, but it is put over clearly, non-didactically (mostly), and with welcome glams of humour. There are numerous examples and scenarios, many apparently from real-life: my favourite is of the mother having her ‘special time’ with her son who had elected to do some cooking, and her mother, scrupulously refraining from directions, corrections, etc., watched, horrified, as her son put an egg into the microwave. (It exploded, and she mildly remarked on how interesting that was.) Memorable catch phrases are introduced—‘Act, don’t react’, and one that I will make use of in future when I am working with parents who think that everything has to be explained to a fractious child, ‘Act, don’t yak’. Snags and objections are foreseen and dealt with, drawing on a wealth of experience. The crucial intention, often stated, is to make the situation between parent and child friendlier.

I can muster only two small criticisms. First, fading out programmes is dealt with with a touch cursorily, and parents who ask about this come in for some censure (p. 144). To me it seems not unreasonable for parents to feel daunted by what they are being asked to do, and to wonder if they will be doing this forever. Second, the author is keener on punishment than I am, seeing it as an inevitable stage in the process, although not ‘until you have laid down a dependable base of praise, attention and rewards’ (p. 152). In my own work with children with learning disabilities, punishment usually turned out to be counter-productive, although I have to concede that the situation may be different with the population addressed by Dr Barkley.

Overall I like this book very much. If I knew a family with a defiant child I would recommend it to them. Come to think of it, I do, and I will.

Janet Carr
Surrey

Increasing Competence Through Collaborative Problem Solving
Gerda Hanko

The aims of this book are laudable—to promote understanding and joint problem solving as central supports to good teaching practice. Since writing her initial book on this theme in 1985 (Special needs in ordinary classrooms), which outlined her peer consultation model of enhancing teacher confidence and competence, Gerda Hanko has widened her focus. This book tries to address the needs of all children, not just those causing concern, and tries to embed the peer consultation model with a framework of continuing professional development for teachers.

Despite these worthy intentions, the book disappoints. Gerda Hanko’s message about the importance of understanding to support management and teaching is obscured by her own written style and by the way in which the book has been structured. Although I wholeheartedly support most of what she says, the manner in which she says it frustrates and sometimes confuses. Hanko has revisited material from her previous books and has tried to re-present it using the language of the late 90s. Reference is made to current developments and thinking in education and to research, but her central message remains the same as 10 years ago, despite the vocabulary.

The best section is the chapter on the case studies. These studies enliven and enlighten, but only appear in the one chapter. Reference to the case studies is made throughout the book and they might have made more impact had they been more numerous and spread more evenly across the text.

I was left with the feeling of being overwhelmed by generalities. The method Hanko espouses in trying to enhance understanding—the attention to detail—is somewhat subverted by her tendency to use generalisations. For each chapter, I longed for her to present more detail, such as that contained in the case study section, to exemplify the points she was making.

The style is dense and repetitive and the book would have benefited from stricter editing. Crisper sentence structure, more use of bullet points or subheadings, and more ruthless pruning, would all have helped to clarify Hanko’s arguments—but might have shortened the book considerably. Certain chapters could have been omitted in their entirety, e.g., chapters 2, 7, and 10, with little sense of loss.

In conclusion, much as I support the message and believe in Gerda Hanko’s method, I do not feel this book does either justice.

Elizabeth Kennedy
Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, London
The book presents summaries of 12 Department of Health funded research studies that between them explore the children’s experience, the culture and structure of the homes, the nature of staff and training issues, and, finally, the management procedures used by local authorities. The central text is an overview essay, putting forward a framework for planned change that, it is argued, should be based on research findings about the needs of young children in residential care.

The nature of residential care has changed dramatically over the last decade; there are far fewer homes, and provision is in small units, both local authority and privately run. The studies overall look at the children’s needs set against the available provision, recognising that children who spend long periods in care are often amongst the most damaged and troubled young people in society.

The 12 excellent studies highlight many different aspects of the children, their histories and their care. One of these, Elaine Farner’s study of sexually abused and abusing children in care, tells of the high incidence of abuse amongst children admitted to care; that in many cases information about the abuse had not been passed on, making any thought of treatment impossible, and that a high percentage of these children went on to abuse other children in care. Staff could not be prepared, and only half the children had ever received any therapeutic help. Given that we know such children can be helped, these findings raise many questions about assessment and planning. Similar accounts appeared throughout the studies. By contrast, the study of outcome in secure units (Bullock), and of the work of the therapeutic community (Little), give a far more hopeful account of what can be achieved with available resources, even with the most damaged children.

Other studies look at the homes, with discussion about what constitutes good leadership and a coherent and containing structure necessary for both staff and children (Brown). The stress of the work is acknowledged, and the youthfulness of many of the workforce, many of whom stay a relatively short time, give great commitment, but with danger of burnout. Another study is an evaluation of the time-limited Residential Child Care Training Initiative (Hills). Aimed at increasing the numbers of qualified managers in residential care, it was seen to be effective, but a drop in the ocean, leaving many questions open about the way forward in training, dependent as it is on the secondment of employment authorities.

The discussion essay considers the research evidence, and argues for an overall policy in the residential sector, centred on the needs of the children, rather than directed by local management arrangements and what happens to be available. It highlights the need for thoughtful assessments, including prognosis and future care alternatives, so that appropriate placement plans can be made. It expresses concern about the isolation of residential establishments and urges the development of a policy of a continuum of care, the homes looking outwards to other professionals and services for treatment and aftercare. Attention is particularly drawn throughout to the appalling lack of educational achievement of the majority of children leaving care. Recognising staff training needs, it advocates joint training across all services in work with troubled children. Alongside many of the research studies, it emphasises the central importance of good management within homes.

This book makes a valuable contribution in advocating a policy for the way forward in this difficult area of work, making good use of research evidence. It is important reading for all those in the field of residential care, and for those allied professionals who work alongside residential establishments to help these very troubled children.

Gillian Miles
Social Work Department, The Tavistock Clinic, London

It Hurts You Inside: Children Talking About Smacking
C. Willow & T. Hyder

The current debate on smacking (a good thing, a bad thing, right or wrong?) has presented a challenge to children’s professionals and organisations. A recent discussion on the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Internet chat line illustrated the wide range of views on this subject. Whilst most children’s organisations have come down against smacking, there remains widespread resistance to the kind of measures that have been taken in some European countries where smacking has been gently outlawed.
This monograph, published jointly by the National Children’s Bureau and Save the Children, reviews the current position in the U.K. The results of a study of the views of 5 to 7-year-olds, based on discussions about smacking using the character ‘Spodge’ in a specially written story book, form the main part of the text.

Children are clear that a smack is a hard hit that hurts and that it’s not very nice. Mums head the list of smackers, closely followed by Dads, and, interestingly, Grannies, but lots of other people smack. The children describe in detail their thoughts and feelings about being smacked and the text is illustrated with examples and simple tables. The children show remarkable understanding of the issues involved in smacking and acknowledge that adults do not smack each other (some children questioned this, confirming the existence of domestic violence). The study challenges many of the widely held beliefs about smacking, e.g., that it is a gentle tap, it doesn’t hurt, and that it doesn’t harm children. Foremost in importance is that this publication provides an opportunity for children to be heard in a debate that is predominantly adult. This is an encouraging aspect of the way people are thinking about this complex issue. It must be hoped that the Government, in its consultation on physical punishment, has heard these findings. Anyone interested in this issue will find this book useful, entertaining, and stimulating.

Christopher J. Hobbs
Community Paediatrics, St James’s University Hospital, Leeds

Making Research Work: Promoting Child Care Policy and Practice

The need to promote an evaluative research culture in child welfare and to bring the fruits of such research to the attention of practitioners and policy makers is an aim well worth supporting, and this book is therefore welcome. It is written by staff allied to the Centre for Child Care Research at Queen’s University, Belfast, and presents a positive, but not overstated, search at Queen’s University, Belfast, and allied to the Centre for Child Care Research. The Web Site provides a list of charitable trusts that support child care research. The Web Site at Queen’s University can be visited if news of their current projects is sought.

The connection between the findings themselves and the way they are interpreted and implemented is not always, if ever, straightforward. This theme is touched on several times but especially in one of the most contentious, and therefore liveliest, chapters, where a critique is offered of the implications that have been drawn from Rowe and Lambert’s classic ‘Children Who Wait’ study. Greg Kelly argues that alerting us to the plight of the large number of children ‘in limbo’ in the care system should not by itself have led to the assumption that the need for permanence is best met by means of stranger adoption. He points out that the social workers questioned, in fact, saw foster care as the key placement choice. However, it is plausible that this was given as their preference because they may not have thought the typical adopter, at this stage in the development of family recruitment, would be willing to take on these children. Many of them would have been older and with psycho-social problems arising from unhappy and unstable lives. Had adoption not been preferentially resourced, but other options favoured instead—like foster care, return home or more support for birth families—the outcomes may have been better for some, but these options are also known to carry some risk of instability. The analysis of placement options for children at risk still needs a stronger research base.

Alan Rushton
Social Work Department, Institute of Psychiatry, London

The book draws on the considerable experience of the individual authors when offering advice on writing research proposals, securing funding, setting up research centres and disseminating findings. Chapter 1 is the place to look for a description of recent progress in the initiation and co-ordination of child care research. The Department of Health is praised for funding and publicising research on family support, residential care, adoption, the effects of the Children Act 1989 and, more recently, the Supporting Parents Initiative. Other chapters cover research into effectiveness, single case designs and how to involve children in research. Much of the book is valuable at a practical, information-giving level, even providing a list of charitable trusts that support child care research. The Web Site at Queen’s University can be visited if news of their current projects is sought.

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Boy Crazy: Remembering Adolescence, Therapies and Dreams
J. Sayers

Sayers’ premise in Boy Crazy is that adolescence is a neglected area in terms of its impact in shaping adult life and that this is linked to resistance by adolescents and adults to thinking about their teenage years. She draws widely from literature, philosophy, psychological theories and case studies and, true to her ‘Freudian roots’, gathers memories and dreams by free-association. This qualitative method allows the collection of symbolic episodes.

In the second part, Sayers contrasts women’s experiences of adolescence to men’s, as involving ‘love-hate divisions in their closeness with others’. Should they be close to, or have an abbreviation of intimacy to, their mothers? Can they confide in and trust their friends? Sayers explains how depression and anorexia nervosa can become the dysfunctional expressions of this stage of female development.

The third section details how men and women seek to escape the conflicts of adolescence through male-centred idealisation of themselves or others, as ‘Gods and Heroes’. This is ‘Boy Craziness’. Sayers believes that this process can facilitate the transition from being tied to mother to becoming an independent adult. However, there are dangers to unfettered idealisation, illustrated by two case histories.

Throughout, there is a thread of feminist theory that lends weight to Sayers’ view of a male-dominated society creating a driving force for adolescent boys and girls to falsely idealise men as heroes.

Boy Crazy is an interesting book that examines a neglected area of psychological and, until very recently, medical theory. However, the text is often difficult to follow. Multiple quotes/examples are
plucked from the ether to support various conclusions. At times it is hard to know how much Sayers’ hypotheses are supported by case history, literature or philosophical theory, and which of these is being utilised.

There appears to be only one possible ‘truth’ in Boy crazy. This is exemplified by the relative absence of discussion about any of the infant/child developmental theories. Sayers does not set out to expound attachment or object-relation theories, but perhaps she could have led the reader to these important areas via the introduction. To a lay person, Boy crazy could suggest that adolescence is solely responsible for shaping adult life.

Simon Lewis
Tavistock Clinic, London

Middle Childhood: The Perspectives of Children and Parents
M. Borland, A. Laybourn, M. Hill, & J. Brown
£14.95 (pb).

Very few popular or academic writings have focused on older primary school aged children and their families. The authors of this book aim to redress this by identifying the needs, experience and stresses of parenting 8 to 12-year-olds. This book reports on the findings of two interview studies carried out by the authors on behalf of the Health Education Board of Scotland. The book is well organised and easy to read.

An Introduction sets out the changing social context of childhood and parenting and the methods of the study. The interviews cover a range of topics, including general themes and concerns of parents and children, safety and danger, physical health, well-being, stress and support within and outside the family, children’s rights, and support for parents, which are reported in separate chapters. The authors’ approach of interviewing groups of children as well as parents, in order to gain a dual perspective on parenting and childhood, is timely within the context of recent childcare legislation that exhorts consulting children for their views and wishes. As a result, a major mismatch between parental and child concerns and priorities was identified, which has hitherto been unrecognised. For instance, parents worried about out of home dangers, peer and media influences, and how to balance protection and guidance with allowing greater independence, whereas children were preoccupied with peer and personal relationships.

The final section of the book interprets the rich qualitative findings in the context of relevant sociological and developmental psychological theory and research and draws out implications for families, professionals and policy makers. A key message is the importance of listening to children of this age group and increasing communication and negotiation between parents and children in order to manage the complex transition from dependence to greater autonomy.

This book could be very helpful in facilitating these dialogues and would make very useful reading for professionals working with this age group, researchers, policymakers and parents.

Naomi Dale
Great Ormond Street Hospital, London

Books by Members
Rachel Bryant-Waugh & Bryan Lask
Eating Disorders: A Parents’ Guide
£7.99 (pb).

Paul Cooper (Ed.)
Understanding and Supporting Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
£14.95 (pb), £39.95 (hb).

Paul Cooper (Ed.)
Pupils with ADHD: Research, Experience, Practice and Opinion

Philip Graham, Jeremy Turk & Frank C. Verhulst (Eds.)
Child Psychiatry: A Developmental Approach (3rd edn.)

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