

Three Part Structure of ‘WIC?’

The first part of the programme aims to change parental attitude, and in particular reduce blame, guilt and shame. A variety of exercises are used to deconstruct some of the unhelpful myths that parents have absorbed about their child’s behaviour. We aim to help parents and carers to understand that children’s bad behaviour is multi-causal, and we explore the nature of abuse, styles of parenting, entitlement and power and the social changes that make CPV more likely.

Excerpt – Eddie Gallagher – 2015 (Working with Adolescent Violence and Abuse Towards Parents; approaches and contexts for intervention.)

The second part of the programme explores the use of consequences to change unwanted behaviour. This has similarities to the content of mainstream parenting programmes, but there are important differences. Most parenting advice assumes that children are co-operative. However, most parents who attend Who’s in Charge? typically have children who have stopped co-operating, who often appear to care about very little, who may deliberately sabotage parents attempts to apply consequences, and who may escalate their violence when parents implement behavioural control strategies.

In the group we explore the difficulty of identifying consequences that the parent can implement, is willing to control, and the child will care about (at least a little). We do not see the consequences in terms of behaviour modification, but in terms of empowerment of the parent; increasing the child’s respect for the parent, enabling the parent to be more assertive and altering the balance of positives and negatives that the young person experiences from their violent and controlling behaviour.

Excerpt – Eddie Gallagher – 2015 (Working with Adolescent Violence and Abuse Towards Parents; approaches and contexts for intervention.)

The third part of the programme supports parents to make changes within the home while working on a few advanced topics; anger; assertiveness; self-care. The order of these topics is important. Until parents have made some attitude changes and become more empowered they are not usually ready to work on these topics. The anger topic is about their anger, as well as dealing with the young person’s anger. However, parents may not be ready to admit to, or work on their own inappropriate behaviour early in the group process.

So, the structure aims to first support and empower, second to encourage practical changes (usually in terms of rules and consequences) and third to reinforce these changes and cover some advanced topics. There is a steady reduction in content during the course of the group – the idea being that the group becomes more positive and helpful and thus discussion increases and facilitator directed exercises reduce.

Excerpt – Eddie Gallagher – 2015 (Working with Adolescent Violence and Abuse Towards Parents; approaches and contexts for intervention.)

Overall aims of Who's in Charge?

- Reduce parent's feelings of isolation.
 - Challenge parent's feelings of guilt.
 - Lessen deterministic thinking about causes (e.g. "he can't help it.. he has ADHD" or "... he saw his father be violent") – it is **always** multi-causal.
 - Reinforce belief in possibility of change (without giving false hope or creating complacency).
 - Clarify boundaries of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (harder than it sounds as there are many grey areas and we need to avoid imposing our own values).
 - Arm parents with some simple concepts that have proved empowering: e.g. entitlement, the power of being irresponsible, etc.
 - Examine strategies for creating meaningful and practical consequences for unacceptable behaviour. The approach of most parenting courses and materials is to assume that children are basically co-operative and only need encouragement and positivity to be good. These approaches usually have failed miserably with the oppositional children of the WIC? parents. Finding consequences for children who care about little and don't want to co-operate is very difficult.
 - Explore anger, both children's and (often more usefully) parents'.
 - Encourage assertiveness.
 - Encourage self-care.
 - Reinforce progress and provide emotional support while parents are attempting to become more assertive parents.
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