



*Family Links*



Lena Cressey works in a Sure Start Centre in Marfleet in Hull. She took part in Family Links' two day Parent Support Skills Training in September 2007. She has two daughters.

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“ I'd done Family Links training previously in 2003, as part of my induction to a new role as Family Support Worker at Sure Start, Marfleet, Hull. Doing Family Links gave me some solid ideas for parenting in the future, and much of it I had remembered although not really used in my role since then.

To be honest, I thought the new training would be 'nicey nicey', giving out stickers. From the first hour I realised that this training would be very different. For a start it didn't feel like training, it felt like I was being let in on a fabulous secret.

I generally get quite emotional, due to my own family background and issues I have. The first day I kind of went away thinking 'my goodness, what a terrible parent I am'. Then having had time to reflect overnight I awoke with renewed enthusiasm to learn. I tried new things at home, and to my surprise, they worked. I did choices and consequences and fed back to the group how it had gone. I realised very quickly that my children were not necessarily the problem, my own feelings, experiences and attitudes were having a profound effect on the way my children reacted.

Writing down how I felt in a group setting alerted me to how my own children may feel and how when I react in a certain way I compound those feelings and make a situation much more stressful. In only a few short weeks since the Family Links training, I have tried and, in the most part succeeded, to use the Four Constructs as a base and be more aware before acting. I've realised that like many of the families I work with and support, my own feelings about my own situation has an often negative effect on the way I respond.

Praising has affected my family the most. At first, praising was a little stilted and awkward but I soon got the hang of it and in return my children praise me, which is the best feeling in the world. The best praise isn't about how well I cooked for them, or helped them with their homework, it's about who I am as a person and who they are. I often tell my children what fabulous smiles they have, what I've missed about them during the day. I've started to tell stories and funny tales about when they were babies and what they got up to. They love these and it gives me a chance to share my memories, and feelings and reflect on our relationship. For me to feel like that as an adult, and for the positive effect it has on me, I marvel at what the effects are to the child when we praise. And on a negative note, how profound the effects are when we belittle them, talk down to them, order them. I try so hard never to do that anymore.

I'm so glad I did the training as a parent. I have new ideas, [I] have gained in confidence and I think the children respect my new attitude although it takes some getting used to. The end result is still the same, [for example the] child going to bed, but the getting there is so much less fraught. [It's] a bit like getting to the top of Everest repeatedly without the correct climbing equipment and then being equipped and thinking 'oh, that was so much easier!' I have a better outlook on life, simply because some little changes in my behaviour has had such a positive effect on the children's behaviour and the domino effect of that is a happier mum, and happier family life all round.

As a support worker, I'm able to use the Four Constructs to remind myself [to] empathise and really listen. I listen to the child more too, where possible, and observe and to try really put myself in their place. I can use simple language to help parents to understand some of the things I've learnt, and it's much easier than I thought it would be. I love the feeling of seeing a small light bulb light up in someone's eyes when they realise that finally, someone gets what they are talking about, understands how their life makes them feel. I'm able to do this non- judgementally because I've been the parent with the difficult situation and I know that some simple techniques do work. I use the knowledge I've gained, in some way with most of the families I work with, without even realising myself. [For] those families with more difficult challenges, I work though *The Parenting Puzzle* with them and take the time to allow them to understand it. So far, it's working well.

*The Parenting Puzzle* book is now my new best friend. Life is still at times difficult and I do occasionally forget everything I've read and learned but for the most part, things are improving. The training I was given [and] *The Parenting Puzzle* are invaluable, they will help me personally and professionally.

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