

CHAPTER 8

WORKING WITH VIOLENT FATHERS: NEW PERSPECTIVES FROM AFFECT THEORY

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Working towards respect-based parenting

Opposition, defiance and hostility from children are not matters for desperate measures, yet defiance is what most often triggers men into an abusive or violent response. Finding themselves in a fierce power struggle, men panic and use force if they think they lack the control they believe they should have. Afterwards they regret going ‘over the top’ by shouting abuse and hitting. In talking about these painful events in counselling or groupwork we may invite comment on the most commonly heard justification for hitting children: “I hit him to teach him a bit of respect.” Exploring this claim, men often acknowledge that hitting instills fear, not respect. Given a choice, they would prefer genuine respect, based on love and high regard, rather than fear.

In trying to bring men to place their trust in a non-abusive parenting style, the most important objective — without which our whole project fails — is to convey that parents can set firm rules about abuse only if they keep these rules themselves. When men use abuse and violence, children without fail learn these things by example. Men who use disrespect as part of discipline lose their children’s respect, gain their contempt and turn them into enemies and rebels. Fortunately, the converse is also true: men who model self-control and talk through difficulties respectfully instill these things deeply in their children. Usually men are able to see the contradiction in modelling disrespect to teach respect. They can see it is hypocritical to ‘hit for hitting,’ as if to say: “I’ll teach you to hit someone smaller than yourself!” A motto for our work with men who are parenting could be: ‘The child you get will be a copy of your own behaviour.’

Developing this work in a mental health counselling setting

The 'Men Relating' programme at the Family Mental Health Service in Christchurch is a groupwork and individual counselling programme run by Brian Archer and myself under the direction of Dr Lynne Briggs and the supervision of Ken McMaster. The men who come to the programme are typically referred for depression or anxiety, but most have relationship and parenting issues they also seek help with.

We find that parenting issues are always keenly discussed in both group and individual work. When asked to say what they think about how they were disciplined, at first men often defend harsh methods their parents used to keep them under control. However, as trust is gained and their childhood fear and trauma explored, men often become tender and reflective and express a wish not to visit on their own children what they experienced. Most agree that continuing a hostile, abusive and violent parenting style means that, just as they are unable to forgive their own parents, they in turn will be resented and even hated.

A favourite theme in our discussions, which provides an opener to talking about positive parenting, is that of *fairness*. Men usually agree that children and teenagers, even when they have become rebellious and hostile, maintain a strong sense of fairness. Men easily recall their own strong feelings about fairness at home and at school and how quick they were to spot any unfairness towards themselves. They can also agree that children are able to extend the idea of fairness into consideration of others. For a child's sense of fairness to come into play, however, the dogs of anger must be called off. Ideas of fairness go out the window when there is shouting and threats. Talking about fairness with children implies reasoned discussion.

What is said in anger, men will agree, is not the truth but only an expression of the strong feelings of the moment. In examining their own responses to opposition from children, they see that in the height of the struggle they often shout untruths, e.g. that the kids 'never' listen and 'always' do whatever they like. In the heat of battle they may use shaming terms such as 'hopeless', 'useless', 'stupid', 'selfish' etc. On sober reflection these expressions are seen to be only briefly, if ever, true. These were the shaming terms used of them when they were young.

Conversation on these themes invites men to see that threats, criticism, repeated 'telling' and 'telling off,' blaming, complaining about the child's actions, and loud, escalating confrontations, add up to a provocative

parenting style which buys into conflict. Any healthy, strong-willed child subjected to such a regime will join the parents in generating a family style of loud, aggressive exchanges, insults, threats and ultimatums, inflexible position-taking, hurt feelings and defiance, culminating in physical attacks.

Parental example is picked up by children with devastating accuracy. As children mirror men's confrontational parenting style, this in turn reinforces a further restraining belief holding men back from committing to respectful parenting practices: the belief, passed on from earlier generations, that children are intrinsically lazy, selfish and untrustworthy, and therefore a 'permissive' approach to parenting must fail. Men often say, "my parents had to sort me out with a hiding when I was a real little shit."

We may counter this restraining belief by suggesting that kids need both love and limits, as Barbara Coloroso says in her bestsellers about parenting. She calls the permissive way the 'Jellyfish Family'; its opposite, the harshly strict way, the 'Brick Wall Family'. Traditional brick-wall methods are restricting freedoms, demanding certain behaviours, giving commands and expecting obedience. Brick-wall parents tend to overlook things for a while, then explode and lay down the law with all sorts of threats and severe removal of privileges. The middle path she calls the 'Backbone Family,' in which values are communicated vigorously and problems solved by negotiation. A backbone family has flexible strength.

William Doherty takes a similar approach in *Take Back Your Kids: Confident Parenting in Turbulent Times* (2000), saying that when parents are afraid to parent, children are abandoned to the toxicity of the consumer culture and the peer culture:

To bow to the consumer culture turns our kids into demanding brats.
To bow to the peer culture endangers our kids. Parents who talk often to their teenagers about avoiding drugs, drunk driving, unsafe sexual activity or being slack about studying are much less likely to mess up their lives in these ways than kids of parents who avoid these more difficult subjects. (p66).

Doherty talks of the over-use and under-use of anger, terms that we find useful in groupwork in addressing the restraint to change of fear of anger. The male culture tends to keep the subject of parenting anger in the 'guilty secret' category. Men's under-use of anger (which tends to alternate with explosions of rage) we have found usually stems from fear of repeating

past failures to handle anger safely. It is vital to discuss how to use anger safely and respectfully.

Arguing for a broader theoretical base for working with parental violence

Workers with family violence know well the frustration that men often continue to abuse and hit their children in a crisis, even after many conversations painstakingly reviewing situations in which they resorted to violent methods, and exploring non-abusive alternatives. Real change in parenting practices remains difficult for many men. The sticking point is always the prospect of losing control over the child. Achieving authority through fear is the only way of keeping control that many men trust. Yet they know it doesn't work. We encourage them to ponder whether they ever have more control than they have earned through the quality of their relationship with the child. Real influence on a child's behaviour, even with the most skilful parenting techniques, tends to be in proportion to the affection and respect that a parent has won. Research shows that children allow themselves to be disciplined by parents who are positively emotionally involved with them. In contrast, rigid, authoritarian parents who use shaming and humiliation alongside threats and physical punishment foster rebellion in their children (Doherty 2000). Saying "You just shut up and do what you are told" is an attack on a child's rights to speak up and make choices. Children treated continually with such disrespect tune out such parents and stop listening.

The men whose parenting troubles we now work with grew up under the parenting styles researched in New Zealand by James and Jane Ritchie in the 1960s and '70s. They write that in those decades "New Zealand parents disliked and distrusted positive control methods and put their faith in such negative techniques as shouting, threatening, scolding and smacking. . . . In the mothers' view, praising children could lead to stuck-up little brats with swollen heads. Too much praise would 'spoil' children" (The Next Generation: Child Rearing in New Zealand, 1997, pp38-9). In the decades in which our clients were children there was little faith in using language as the mechanism of control and the basis of the mother-child relationship. Talking things over and reasoning with children about desirable and undesirable behaviour were not widely trusted ways of parenting. Forty percent of children were physically punished at least once a week. Men were generally not there. "Hers is the hand that spans," the

Ritchies write (1997, p41). We may now add, “and his is the hand that today hits his partner and children.” The Ritchies were describing the parenting legacy that we now meet in men fathering alone or with a partner.

To place a new template of respect-based parenting over the old fear-based practices requires more than discussion of abusive incidents. Reviewing critical incidents remains a valuable method that advances men’s thinking about their choices, shows them their patterns of tension-building and encourages genuine efforts to change. However, there is a deeper issue of men’s fear and shame about losing authority. Unless we are able to work with complex emotions involved in parenting, force will continue to win out in a crisis.

To work with complex emotions does not mean abandoning a cognitive approach, or the fundamentals of our Power and Control analysis which applies to fathering as much as to the partner relationship. Our primary focus may still be motivational discussions that develop insights sufficiently potent to invite men to choose their own preferred direction. Generally men respond to cognitive approaches and are intrigued by ‘new thinking.’ They are interested in why they over-react and are open to the suggestion that their problem is using the tactics of fear rather than building respect.

A challenge to post-modernism

In New Zealand our work with family violence is well established in the cognitive, respect-based model derived from the Power and Control analysis developed in Duluth, Minnesota, combined with motivational methods from Narrative Therapy. The ‘invitations to responsibility’ developed by Alan Jenkins, also now fundamental for our practice, have at their core the insight that self-respect arises only through respect for others. This theory base is strongly influenced by post-modernism and social constructionism, which hold in suspicion all substantive theories about human nature. The orthodoxy is that violence is a learned behaviour, not something instinctually programmed or innate. If violence is learned it may be unlearned. To underwrite a humane social agenda we distanced ourselves from biological theories, preferring the idea that all behaviour depends on people’s upbringing and opportunities. No behaviour was seen as inevitable, ‘hard-wired’ or biologically determined. It was especially important to view gender roles, men’s beliefs about the right to dominate and above all the entitlement to use violence, as products of cultural conditioning.

After 30 years of post-modernism it is perhaps possible to reconsider these issues without losing our bearings. There were good reasons for holding biological determinism in suspicion after the terrible excesses of the Nazi holocaust. The idea that there might be a biological aspect to human behaviour, especially to violence, remains deeply tainted by association with the ideologies of fascism, racism and sexism. Meanwhile science has moved on. Neuroscience is showing us where emotions are generated in the brain and which neurotransmitters activate and attenuate them. Neuropharmacology is finding chemicals that can modify anger and violence by influencing the ratios and activity of these neurotransmitters. We need to find a new accommodation with evidence about ‘human nature’ coming to light even in the last decade. Post-modernism, in characterising scientific discourse as blind to its own power-mongering and driven by hubris, unfortunately downplayed the importance of evidence-based theory building. Now the post-modern aversion to theories of human nature may in turn be blocking the way to new insights. Post-modernism may itself have become a power-wielding discourse that cramps freedom of thought.

The contribution of Affect Theory to understanding violence

Among new developments, perhaps most relevant for our work is Affect Theory. Paul Ekman and Richard Lazarus have identified ‘affect programs,’ building on American psychologist Silvan Tomkins’ work describing the innate affects. Because of intellectual fashion, his work was neglected for decades. Now it seems strange that something so important could drop out of sight. Affects are the group of hard-wired, pre-programmed, genetically transmitted mechanisms responsible for the foundations of emotional life. Beginning in the 1940s, Silvan Tomkins — called by some the American Einstein — closely observed toddlers using a camera that could take 500 pictures a second to capture images of their bodily responses and facial expressions as they became interested, afraid, distressed, angry or happy. He then developed a systematic account of the innate affects underlying all emotions and moods, publishing his work in four large volumes, the last of which appeared after his death in 1992 at the age of 88.

Some definitions are necessary for clarity. The word **affect** applies to the strictly biological portion of emotion. Each affect unfolds according to its own inner programme and lasts for a fixed period of time from a few hundredths of a second to several seconds, and is part of our evolutionary

heritage. **Emotion** is the complex of feeling states that is assembled from all of the affects, together with the drives (particularly hunger and sexuality), reinforced by memories. An emotion lasts for as long as we keep finding memories to re-trigger affect, which may be seconds, minutes or sometimes hours. **Mood** is a persistent state of emotion, arising from an area of unresolved distress such as loss or grief, or from accumulated scenes of happiness.

Affect Theory holds that everyone at all times experiences the inner state of a current affect. The engine that drives us is affect. Our being is under its influence at all times, even when we are primarily engaged in thinking. Affects are urgent, involuntary mechanisms that set up sequences of neural activity throughout the body, creating feeling tone at any point in time. Each affect has a range of intensity, for example interest–excitement can range from mild interest to passionate excitement. Most importantly, all affects are ‘contagious’ or empathically transmitted between people and even animals and people.

Tomkins used photography because the face is the ‘display board’ of the affect system, showing the tears, blushes and movements, particularly of eyes and mouth, linked to innate affect. Studying children not yet socialised into complex patterns of response, he distinguished nine affects. His work is immensely technical and detailed, filling 2000 pages, and since he did not summarise his ideas the following attempt must certainly be an oversimplification:

Positive affects:

interest-excitement eyebrows down, tracking, looking, listening. The intrinsically pleasant amplification of a stimulus in our surroundings such as the presence of another person. In Bipolar Affective Disorder, when a person is manic everything is exciting and when depressed nothing brings excitement or interest.

enjoyment-joy smile, lips widened and out. The intrinsically pleasant release of tension, e.g. the contentment and pleasure that the tension release of smiling and laughter brings.

Neutral affect:

surprise-startle eyebrows up, eyes blink. Sudden removal of attention from whatever was occupying it to focus on a new stimulus with full focus and readiness to respond.

Negative affects:

fear-terror frozen stare, face pale, cold, sweaty, hair erect. A response based on pattern matching, resulting in acute arousal, fixed gaze, attention amplified, pulse accelerated, whole body activated.

distress-anguish cry, rhythmic sobbing, arched eyebrows, mouth down. Unpleasant stimulus. Triggers may be hormonal or other physical states such as tiredness.

anger-rage frown, clenched jaw, red face. Very high noxious stimulus density triggers an instrumental raising of tension and energy throughout the body. Because of its intensity we learn to mask its display.

dismell upper lip raised, head pulled back. Operates to limit the hunger drive when food is toxic. Earlier in our evolution much more information was conveyed by smell. Olfaction connects directly to the amygdala with data from body smells, pheromones, food odours, etc. It plays important part in interpersonal rejection, as in racial prejudice. Those treated with dismell experience shame because of the avoidance.

disgust lower lip lowered and protruded, head forward and down. Operates to limit hunger drive like dismell, but offending food is expelled from the mouth forcibly when it tastes foul. This reaction becomes part of the system of aversion and repugnance towards things that are perceived as contaminated. Both dismell and disgust facial expressions appear in the reaction of contempt. The affect is involved closely in obsessional hand washing.

shame-humiliation eyes down, head down and averted, blush. Operates to interrupt positive affects when it is unsafe for them to continue. It is a painful stopping of what we are interested in or enjoying, like a burglar alarm going off. The positive affect suddenly curbed by shame is not, however, switched off in the way that disgust switches off hunger. Interest continues but with a painful and distressing 'Can't have.' The more excited we are by the enjoyed stimulus, the more shame is experienced, e.g. sexual shame is in proportion to the interest. Most occurrences are fleeting, but can become chronic and indwelling.

How Tomkins' Affect Theory explains the shame-rage spiral

In relation to violence the most significant aspect of Tomkins' theory is the innate links between fear, shame and anger. In shame we are suddenly at a loss, unable to think clearly, struck speechless. (There is probably a

subcortical release of a neurochemical, judging from the way blood vessels dilate causing blushing). In shame we turn our face away from what has caught our interest, as a child hides behind its parent's leg in reaction to its interest in a stranger. Everyone develops intimate experience of the shame affect, coming to know feeling states of shyness, embarrassment, humiliation, discouragement and even at times mortification, the most extreme level of shame. 'Mortified,' (from the root 'mort') implies being shamed to death. To lose love is the most mortifying shaming experience, bringing a crushing sense of loss, after which the shame-filled mood lasts a long time. We know that violence or suicide are most likely after a relationship breakup.

In Tomkins' theory shame as a hard-wired affect is functionally an innate attenuator circuit for positive affect. Its psychological importance lies in its roles in determining mood and in forming the sense of self. Shame is felt in proportion to the interest or pleasure it cuts off, being activated most strongly when we are most interested in something or potentially most happy. In explaining the great power of shame Tomkins writes:

shame is the affect of indignity, or transgression and of alienation ... while terror and distress hurt, they are wounds inflicted from the outside which penetrate the smooth surface of the ego; but shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul. It does not matter whether the humiliated one has been shamed by derisive laughter or whether he mocks himself. In either event he feels himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity and worth.

(1963, p118).

Shame always involves a sudden drop in self-esteem and self-confidence. Our rise and fall on the shame-pride axis is the stock-in-trade of comedians and clowns. For example, John Cleese in *Fawlty Towers* unerringly shows shame turning to rage as he struts in front of his guests, has his pretensions humiliatingly seen through, then goes out and mercilessly beats his servant Manuel.

Shame is the affect of withdrawing, sinking down, slumping, turning away the face ('losing' face). It is painful to the precise extent that interest remains; we do not feel shame when there is nothing to lose. To protect ourselves from the danger of love refused we steel ourselves and become aloof, developing ritualised forms of social address, dancing around the issue of trust and safety from being shamed.

Pride and confidence (the opposite of shame) are generated with each

step in a human being's growth towards full size and strength, dexterity and skill, independence, mental ability, communication ability, sexual ability and the ability to relate to others. Conversely, shame is generated by each failure in this developmental process, leading to isolation and withdrawal. The 'borderline' disorders, caused by intense shame-bound early experience severely impeding positive affect, are characterised by severe emotional instability, terrible intolerance for loneliness, great difficulty in establishing close relationships, a persistent sense of emptiness and an inability to develop a solid sense of self. The perpetrators of family violence most difficult to progress with are often sufferers from this disorder (Dutton 1995).

Donald Nathanson, who has developed Tomkins' ideas in the field of psychiatry, argues that treatment of violence is unlikely to succeed unless the methods used are designed to free people with a shame-based complaint (1992, p185). Because shame is a sudden undoing of whatever has been pleasurable or exciting, every instance of shame is a moment of painful incapacity to continue those actions that give us a sense of competence. Thus shame creates a sense of an incompetent self of which we are painfully aware.

As our sense of failure is magnified, shame becomes our teacher. We have a stratification of possible selves available to us imaginatively and we bolster our inner representation of the shame-pride axis with heroes to provide ideal images of the self, and villains as models of inferiority to despise and avoid.

Affect Theory and Attachment Theory

In Nathanson's view, Bowlby's work on attachment took for granted that cognition precedes emotion. This led to his extraordinary idea that even in a baby emotion is a cognitive labelling of a visceral response to an initial cognitive assessment. Tomkins' work was ignored, despite the fact that it was available to Bowlby and well known at the Tavistock clinic. Tomkins had already explained how affects are triggered by meaning-free alterations in biological systems, causing changes all over the body, and how we learn to appraise these changes with growing sophistication as we grow older. The vital relevance of Tomkins' work for Attachment Theory lies in his observation that affects cause external display at the same time as altering internal function, so that others can intuit what we are feeling. Thus affects provide the first interactions between infant and caregiver. Attachment behaviours are all derivatives of affective expression.

Mary Ainsworth's three patterns of attachment: 'Anxious/Avoidant', 'Secure' and 'Anxious/Resistant', are finely observed and powerfully predictive of later behaviours such as bullying and submissiveness, but her theory overlooks the affect systems activated in these attachment styles. Nathanson remarks: "... the entire fabric of Attachment Theory is but another example of 19th Century rationalism, a philosophical position that avoids emotion as an interference with proper cognition or as a derivative of proper cognition." (1992, p234).

Tomkins' theory of the origins of love and its relevance to parenting

Love, in Tomkins' theory, grows out of 'affective resonance' or empathy, especially in response to the two positive affects (interest/excitement and enjoyment/joy) which confer by turn excitement and ease or comfort. The pain of love comes from the shame affect, which wounds in proportion to the power of the affect it restrains. Love's first patterns are laid down as each mother responds to the needs of her baby, rocking, touching, holding, soothing, talking, smiling, gazing and feeding. Mother and baby call to each other in the language of affect. Children teach us how to parent through their display of affect, their needs calling forth the qualities we need for parenting.

As parents we respond through the affective patterns that shaped us as children, which in turn reflect the affective temperaments that our parents formed in growing up. In Tomkins' theory affective experiences are linked into structures held within the mind and remembered as 'scenes.' These scenes from our childhood are replayed in our parenting, especially key scenes of love and comfort, anger and shame. Sequences of scenes link together to form a 'script,' somewhat like computer software. Thus scenes of loving or hitting in childhood are reactivated unconsciously in our parenting.

Nathanson comments: "So complex and pervasive are the habits and skills of script formation that we adults come to live more within these personal scripts for the modulation and detoxification of affect than in a world of innate affect." Innate affects are hard to grasp, being mediated through many layers of personal experience and culture. We lose sight of them as the most fundamental building blocks in our make up.

The four main defences against shame

With the aid of Affect Theory we may better understand the sequence of

anger arousal. When a trigger event for shame occurs we subconsciously fit it into a script, matching it with our archive of prior cases. This in turn generates new affect, magnifying the feeling into a far more intense quality of experience. In seconds we generate defensive anger, so rapidly that we have only fleeting awareness of being shamed. Any affect feels better than shame. Nathanson identifies four patterns of defence against shame. The following is a summary of four of his chapters (1992, pp305-377):

Withdrawal is the defence of retreating into privacy from public exposure. For the sake of privacy we wear clothes, live in houses and draw the curtains. Momentary avoidance of eye contact and the morbid withdrawal of severe depression are opposite extremes of shame-based avoidance. Reticence and modesty are the healthy end of the spectrum.

Avoidance is drawing attention away from our sense of defective self. Evading shame may easily become obsessional in activities such as body building or in extreme sporting competitiveness, or obsessively seeking physical or intellectual prowess. Trophies represent the wished-for self free of shame. Art collections, diplomas, possessions designed to impress with conspicuous wealth and display, large houses, jewellery, designer clothes and flashy cars are frequently shame-avoidant acquisitions. Fictional heroes and popular movies supply shame-avoidant images of self. Advertising says beauty can be bought. Swaggering avoids the slump of disgrace. Heavy drinking is chemical avoidance of shame. Telling lies, being a shameless con-man and the grandiosity of religious claims are defences against feeling we can never be loved for ourselves.

Attack Self is an intentional display of shame to win sympathy and prevent rejection. At best it uses light-hearted self-disparagement, leading to friendliness and laughter. At worst it employs masochistic grovelling that wins no respect, a 'doing unto self what we fear others may do to us.'

Attack Other is the most dangerous defence against shame. An old Chinese proverb says "He who lands the first blow is the first to run out of arguments." The triggers of rage occur most often when the self is under threat, when something makes us feel like a child in danger and in need of the most forceful protection. Shame-cognitions that cause most pain are those of weakness, smallness, incompetence, clumsiness and stupidity. When these are triggered we burst into rage to prove our power, competence and even size.

Whereas the first three types of defence against shame function to preserve relationship and connectedness, rage risks everything. It is

frightening, alienating and destroys intimacy. Rage relieves one part of shame only to magnify another, that is our unlovableness. The Attack Other defence deflects attention from the self through blaming and paranoia. It arises in the failure of empathy and respect. Belittling and diminishing others, it affords a false sense of superiority, employing the compensatory strategy of shifting shame onto others by humiliating them, making them afraid or physically injuring them, as if to prove their weakness and inferiority.

Applying these ideas to respectful parenting practices

From the standpoint of Affect Theory, our efforts to create ‘irresistible invitations to change,’ following Alan Jenkins, are likely to work precisely because we are addressing the problem of recovery from shame. Invitations to responsibility are ‘irresistible’ because they offer ways to raise oneself up from disgrace. People respond to the hope of reinstatement in the good feelings of others and restoration into the affiliative world of shared positive affect. In accepting an invitation to stop their abuse men are drawn by the prospect of reversing the isolation and rejection that result from the Attack Other defence. They get the chance to escape their ‘devil’s bargain’ of trading love for power.

Jenkins’ invitations to responsibility rest on the observation that self-respect depends on treating others with respect. An invitation might take the form: “Do you hold yourself in greater respect when you back off in a bad argument without insulting, frightening or hurting your partner?” Given such an invitation, men at first often complain about the provocation and difficulty of the situations leading to their abuse. However, they usually see it as showing more courage and strength (more manliness) to back down and leave an angry scene safely and respectfully. If we ask, “No matter how bad the argument?” they often say that they do not want to go on with abuse “because the kids see it.” This can be a turning point. Safe, respectful ways of showing anger are not widely modelled in male culture, so there are strong restraints to change for men in a parenting role. We can invite men to participate in a pioneering challenge, in the best New Zealand tradition. Invitations to fathers might develop some of the following ideas:

- Are men in a crisis able to be sufficiently cool-headed and clear-thinking to stop themselves from mirroring their children’s rages?
- Do we still believe in the primitive principle ‘If you hit me I’ll hit you harder’?

- Are we able to impress our children by showing a mature, adult response of gentleness, self-control and reasonableness that soothes a situation?
- Are men in the midst of conflict and anger able to remember their loving connection with their children and to remember good times in the relationship?
- Can men tell children even during a struggle that they love them and then take control in a fair and firm way?
- Can men demonstrate what behaviours are unacceptable in the family be setting an example of restraint?
- Can men be unafraid of kids' tears, anger and defiance and assert authority and even show anger (if really necessary) in a self-controlled and non-abusive way?

To further communicate these ideas I have written a small handbook for the 'Men Relating' programme entitled Don't Panic — it's Only Conflict. Panic is not an emotion men are proud of. The title is an invitation to cool down and not over-react to children's defiance. The following are some 'Guidelines for Respectful Parenting' from this handbook:

1. Speak with respect to children: Would you say to a friend "Get your filthy fucking shoes off that chair?" Men don't use aggressive swearing, name calling, ridicule, sarcasm, put-downs or shaming to a friend. Do we take such care of our children's self-respect? If not, it's because we still carry around a bunch of old, false ideas about child-rearing. The old way was to shame kids into obedience. But attacking self-respect doesn't work. Parents merely provoke rebellion and hatred when they insult children, or tell them they're stupid and can't be trusted. Ordering, threatening, lecturing, blaming, name-calling, ridiculing, humiliating and interrogating will make a rebel of any child with a bit of vitality and self-respect. When we attack their self-worth, the most valuable thing they have, healthy, strong children fight back with fierce anger. To be told they are lazy, thoughtless, dumb, stupid, hopeless, pathetic, etc attacks their ability to maintain a positive self-concept. If they are weak, insecure, rather depressed kids who are ready to accept a very negative self-valuation, they may be compliant for a while. But if they have any inner strength they will secretly brew rebellion. They may be inwardly thinking: "You have the power now, but wait till I get out of here!"

2. Get involved and spend enough time with your children to be an influence in their lives: Influence depends on the quality of time we spend

relating to our children. They let us control them only when they sense our high level of nurturing involvement with them. Research shows that people need to have many more positive interactions than negative ones if a relationship is to remain strong. A ratio of at least five to one positive to negative has been observed in relationships that are happy. If the ratio is less and there are too many incidents of criticism, fault-finding and angry outbursts, a relationship will feel predominantly negative. Criticism hurts disproportionately. Many hugs, touches, smiles, words of praise, caresses, loving looks, expressions of thanks or approval, are needed to outweigh the shaming effect of criticism, blaming and anger. Children need an even higher ratio of positive interactions than adults. They can't build self-esteem without praise for the good things they achieve. A steady diet of criticism will destroy them unless they rescue themselves through rebellion. Strong, spirited children go down the rebellion path as a way to preserve their positive sense of self. The less strong ones become submissive but resentful, while the least strong sink into depression or become suicidal. On the other hand, giving lots of praise and encouragement and having a close relationship makes a child care how we feel about their behaviour. To them we are a loved person, not the enemy. We have earned their respect and the right to influence them.

3. Invite children's own views on a problem: Good 'door openers' to discussion with children are invitations for them to say more about their own judgments, ideas and feelings, e.g. "It sounds like you've got some thoughts of your own about this. I'd like to hear what you think," or "You've a right to say what you think. I want to hear your point of view, and I'll tell you mine." Children respond to trust placed in them, feeling stronger and more resourceful when encouraged to solve problems themselves. Parents are also changed by active listening in this way, discovering that they knew less than they thought about their children, gaining new perspectives from children's angle of vision. Children respond to parents who show they are human, able to change and can admit being wrong. If we habitually give children our solutions to their problems we are taking away their initiative. Children most actively own their problems when they are really keen to do something. If we take over and tell them what to do, they no longer own the problem, we do. Without offering adult solutions we can still offer help. For example, if we are worried about a teenager handling the temptations of sex, alcohol and drugs and getting home safely at a reasonable time we can ask: "What are your thoughts

about how you will keep safe tonight?” Mobilising children’s own thinking starts a fruitful chain of events. Flexible parents are not afraid of changing some ideas of their own in this process.

4. Be honest and real about your own feelings of anger or frustration: An effective father is able to be real about his own faults, hopes and disappointments. In a relationship as close as the parent-child relationship feelings can’t be hidden. If we speak out our frustration and anger we are much less likely to over-react. We’ve told our truth and our anger immediately begins to subside. When we shout abuse, use put-downs, make threats or hit our kids, this is just recycled stuff from our own childhood experiences, combined with our own self-doubt and feelings of incompetence as parents. (Can any of us become competent parents without working on it, sharing ideas, taking courses, reading books?) The knee-jerk angry response doesn’t work. Kids just fight back, as we probably did ourselves as children. If we get abusive our child doesn’t learn much about consideration for others. The best way to avoid futile battles is to shift from giving ‘You-messages’ to ‘I-messages.’ This requires us to stop and notice how we are feeling before we say something. If we only give our kids critical, fault finding You-messages they will stop caring what we think and say, “Fuck you, then.” To avoid dismissal as parents ‘just going over the top’ and provoking escalation, our I-messages need to be carefully modulated, e.g.:

- “I’m annoyed that you haven’t put the tools away.”
- “I’m disappointed. I was hoping you’d do that without having to be asked again.”
- “I’m frustrated that you’ve left a mess in the kitchen.”
- “I’m fuming that you haven’t stuck to our agreement. I’ve been up for two hours worrying about you.”

5. Model physical self-control when you or the child are really angry: If a small child is throwing a tantrum, put the child over your knees in a straddling position and say: “I’m going to hold you while you are angry.” Look the child in the face and hold their arms down if they are trying to hit or scratch your face. After a few minutes the child’s rage will subside and be followed by tears and relaxing into your arms. Then talk quietly about what was happening. An older child who is hitting or fighting can be invited to wrestle with you. Jokingly say: “Come and fight someone your own size!” Demonstrate self-control by a gentle use of strength. At first the child will try to hurt you. Control the child’s arms and hands with safe

use of force until it can be turned gradually into a friendly fight, ending in release of tension and the possibility of talking through the problem. Wrestling is far more effective than hitting. Children who are hit behave worse. Using holding or wrestling, both you and the child experience a safe release of anger. Talking calmly is easy after the anger on both sides has been settled.

Conclusion: Can a substantive theory about human nature lend support to our work and encourage our creativity?

Affect Theory is so humble in its origins and quietly empirical in method that it has been hidden from view by many noisier ideas. Yet it provides a missing link in our understanding of human nature. It has many implications for working with violence, perhaps most significantly the idea that ‘affective resonance’ (empathy) is the central, innately programmed mechanism underlying the development of all relationships from infant attachment to adult friendship and love. Enabling us to know one another’s feeling states as if to the core, through touch, body language and facial display, ‘interaffectivity’ makes the world go round.

Affect is what makes things matter, or fail to matter, for human beings. If we are depressed we have an ‘affective’ disorder or illness (depression, anxiety) in which the very basis of our mental functioning is working poorly, we cannot concentrate, feel unmotivated and cannot enjoy ordinary activities. Instead we feel overwhelmingly magnified negative affect: anger, shame, self-disgust, even that everything about us stinks (the operation of dissmell). When we become well again we are again motivated by deep interest and enjoyment, experiencing again the empathy and love that arise from interaffectivity.

Affect Theory gives us grounds for reassurance that we are on track in our work against violence. Alan Jenkins, a most valuable guide in our practice, has mined the same territory as Affect Theory for two decades with rich results. Because he paid such close attention to the foundations of self-respect and respect for others, he came to a similar understanding of the role of shaming in the formation of the self. Affect Theory tends to confirm the central insight guiding our work — that violence is based on the exercise of dominance through creating fear and shame, and respect is its antithesis or antidote.

If the Tomkins-Nathanson theory is right that the Attack Other strategy is primarily a defensive reaction to shame, this suggests we might work more deliberately with the phenomenon of shame, looking

more closely at how it functions as a restraint to respectful parenting. We may also develop further our repertoire of non-shaming facilitation methods. Affect Theory, in giving fresh emphasis to the developmental importance of empathy ('affective resonance') and the formation of attachment through sharing positive affect, encourages parenting styles that are empathic and involve play and laughter with children and restraint in the use of anger.

A further relevance of Affect Theory is its clarification of why our reactions towards our children, of consoling, reprimanding or hitting, are initially outside voluntary control. At the point of being triggered, parenting reactions are 'scripts' or programmes that begin to run of their own accord, like booting up a computer. The extent to which voluntary control can be re-asserted over programmed shame and rage behaviours laid down in early life experience is critically important for our work.

Even if some aspects of violence are innately programmed (e.g. shame triggers rage) we may still validly ask: "How do we learn not to be violent?" Freudian theory holds that we develop one part of our nature to control another part (ego to control id). Affect Theory invites us to ponder afresh how best to cultivate the positive affects, limit the damage of the negative affects and enhance the marvel of empathy. If there is such a thing as human nature after all, we may be inspired to think more about how to give ascendancy in our values and actions to our innate capacities for joy and love over our equally innate tendency to give in to fear, shame and rage. If this view is mistaken, what is 'self-control'?