

A Guide to the Dot Com Family and Getting to know you journal



Dot Com Children's Foundation

Charity No. 1154994

Foreword by Sharon Evans

It's impossible for parents or teachers to be with young people all the time and to protect them from all the risks of 21st century life, so it is vital that they value themselves and have the information they need to make the right decisions about their own safety.

My own passion for this work and my desire to help children stay safe comes from my experiences of violence and abuse as a child. My father was extremely violent to my mother and she tried to protect me by leaving me with my paternal grandfather. She had no idea that when I was left alone with him that he sexually

abused me. The experiences left me unable to read in the first two years of school, but after my mother and I escaped to a place of safety I quickly caught up and went on to become an international newsreader for the BBC, ITV and Sky. But the most fulfilling thing I have ever done was give up my job as a newsreader and create the Values Versus Violence learning programme with my husband Neil, a former Metropolitan Police officer. We worked with children and many other professionals who are passionate about keeping young people safe all over the country to create the resource you see today.



Left: Len Goodman and Sharon.

The programme was first endorsed internationally by Nelson Mandela, who believed passionately that children are not ours to use and abuse, but should be loved and nurtured. He set up the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund donating a third of his annual income to the charity. In the UK actress Lynda Bellingham became the first celebrity patron to support the programme which was launched by Tony Blair in his own constituency in 2003 when he was Prime Minister. His daughter Kathryn is now a trustee of the Dot Com Children's Foundation and she supports the charity by visiting schools and raising public awareness of the programme. Kristina Rihannoff is another trustee who is a professional dancer from the BBC Strictly Come Dancing show. Kristina also suffered a childhood blighted by the effects of violence and used dancing to help overcome the trauma. Other trustees come from the finance world of the Institute of Chartered Accountants England and Wales and from the Civil Service who have supported the development of the programme over many years. Volunteers from the Civil Service and ICAEW are available to visit schools and support lessons on the 'value of money' and also 'dreams and aspirations'.



Trustees:

James Goodman (Trustee and Len Goodman's son) Paul Wright (Chair of the Charity and Director of Oxford Football Club) Terry Rogers (Trustee and civil servant HM Treasury) Simon Thompson (ICAEW and Oxford parent) Neil Evans (Trustee and Chief Operating Officer Charity) Sharon Evans (Chief Executive and former news reader) Kathryn Blair (Trustee and Child Protection Barrister) Front row from right: Sumita Shah (Trustee and ICAEW) Kristina Rihannoff (Trustee and Strictly Come Dancing Dancer) Sally Ann Hart (Advisor and PB People)

The programme is based on the Protective Behaviours process which has at its core two themes: 'We all have the right to feel safe all the time' and 'We can talk with someone about anything, even if it feels awful or small'. Working through the Dot Values programme children develop an awareness of their rights and responsibilities for themselves and to others in conjunction with practising personal safety skills. Helping children feel empowered and confident when communicating with adults about the most sensitive issues is vital in terms of feeling safe and staying safe. Our specialist adviser is Sally Ann Hart, endorsed PB trainer and co-founder of PBPeople and included in this guide is an outline of the Protective Behaviours process.

In 2010 Neil and I were privileged to become part of an EU programme to help teach values to young people. Our programme was specially chosen to help deliver values education and we adapted the materials to focus on the importance of learning values and demonstrating them in our daily lives.

As the parents of twins my husband and I took great comfort in this quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson which we found in a book called Unlimited Power by the life coach Anthony Robbins, **Success** - "To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded." **Here's to your great success and the great success and safety of your children!**



Above: West Midlands Police Sergeants Paul Street and Tom Dobrovic receive an award at HM Treasury with actress Lynda Bellingham on behalf of the Birmingham Partnership for their enormous support in rolling out the programme to 112 schools in Birmingham.

Below: Dot Com trustee Kathryn Blair with her Dad Tony Blair (centre) and fellow trustee Kristina Rihanoff with her dance partner Robin Windsor with Sharon and Neil Evans.



Introduction

Family Journal and Getting to Know You

The greatest gift you can give a child is to teach them to value and believe in themselves. If they believe in themselves they will believe they deserve good things to happen to them and they will make better and safer choices in life.

“Whether you believe you will succeed or fail you will!” Anthony Robbins Life Coach

Children need to be empowered to understand that they have a choice about how they think all the time and they have a choice about how they choose to behave. We cannot change the things that life throws at us and we cannot help our feelings, but we can choose how we behave and understand our actions have effects and consequences or rewards.

Children naturally model those around them and it is therefore important to be aware of the models that exist in their environment. You may not always be conscious of it, but as a parent you are providing them with a constant model to copy and so are other adults and children around them.

The values that are instilled in children also come from the models in their environment and having good values is key to children making good choices on a daily basis.

Perhaps the hardest thing as a parent is getting into the mind of your child and understanding how they really think. Getting to know them on a level beyond the day to day physicality of caring for their wellbeing.

The Dot Com family journal and the Getting to Know You Journals are tools designed to create special one on one time with a child so you can discover more about how they are thinking, who they are modelling and hopefully guide them towards the role models and values that will help them to make their best of their lives.

Values

Values are the fundamental beliefs that we hold about what is important ...freedom, democracy, kindness, honesty, integrity ...are all values and it is vital that your children really understand the fundamental beliefs that those around them hold dear. Often individuals allow themselves to be lead into doing things that they are ashamed of afterwards simply because they have not taken time to think about what is really important to them and their belief systems. If we look at people who have made fundamental change in the world and a huge success of their lives, they are usually people like Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela with a clear sense of what really matters. It is so important for children to work out what really matters for them.

Using the journals

The journals belong to the child. They have the right to decide what they write inside, what pen they use and when and how they share the information. The sense of ownership and taking responsibility for this piece of work is truly important.

It is also vitally important that they get the sense that working on this journal together is important to you. It is important to you to understand and respect what they think. It is also ok for you to gently challenge or encourage their thinking, but it is still up to them to decide what they write.

The idea behind the contract in the family journal underpins the child's belief that you are taking their thoughts and beliefs seriously and will make time for it.

WHAT WE VALUE WE MAKE TIME FOR

While it is important for all the adults to share their thoughts and values it is also important the child decides their beliefs and values for themselves.

The journal should create time too for discussing some of the very important issues in life that we perhaps take for granted that they understand, such as 'what is love'?

Would someone who truly loved and valued us want to hurt us or make us do something against our will or against the law? This should help children in their ability to form friendships and relationship as they grow.

Also research shows that those who are part of a subculture of violence also have values. Children will come across these negative values and need to be certain of positive values so they can make the best choices.

It is difficult to identify the distinctive values of the subculture of violence, but those involved in the life style indicate that members evaluate each other in terms of their conforming to a macho life style which emphasises such things as:

Leading an exciting life

Achieving Status

Protecting one's honour

That is why questions such as what is love, honour and courage are in the journal to give parents a chance to present a balanced view. Children need an opportunity to understand that they can have love, honour, courage, wealth and status by following good values and working hard.

The Helping Hand

This is the opportunity for the child to draw around their hand and identify the five people on their safety network who they can turn to in trouble. It is important that a number of people are on the hand so that if the child has options on where to seek advice and a range of people to go to in case they feel they cannot tell someone in particular about a problem.

It is also important for children to identify the safety network that exists in the community through the emergency services. It is important for children to learn that the job of the police, fire and ambulance service is to keep people safe. If people break the law or threaten to harm themselves or others then they will be arrested so we can all be safe.

It is critical that children are not afraid of the emergency services because if they are lost or in trouble they need to be able to ask for help and should not feel afraid to do so or it may endanger their lives in a serious situation.

Uh-oh Signs

This is a child friendly way of teaching children to listen to the early warning signs or their own body signs of danger. When we don't feel safe our body tells us by giving us butterflies in our tummy or making us sweat. It is our adrenalin kicking in and preparing us for fight or flight. It is important that children learn to listen to these signs and that if anyone is giving them this feeling then they need to tell someone that a person or situation does not make them feel safe.

It is better to teach children to listen to their uh-oh signs with all people and situations than to teach them to be afraid of strangers. What is a stranger? A paedophiles or anyone intent on grooming your child into criminal behaviour will be experts in befriending children and young people and gaining their trust. They look for children who are vulnerable and lacking in confidence and offer to become their special friends.

Secrets

Children can learn about good and bad secrets. A surprise birthday present is a good secret, but a secret that gives you uh-oh signs is not a secret that should be kept. Secrets can cause children a great deal of distress and it is important that they have a strategy for dealing with them.



Jokes

My internet friends are Mr Mouse who is a cheeky friend from Canada who is funny but a bit rude sometimes! I sometimes have to remind him of the saying... 'is my fun, fun for everyone?'.



Humour can be used to cause a great deal of misery and can disguise passive aggression which can be very hurtful to children. The Protective Behaviours network has had great input into the Dot Com journals and they have a great phrase which is wonderful for children to learn and that is:

'My fun, fun for everyone'

If it's not funny and fun for all, then the chances are it is at somebody else's expense and that person could be you next time.

Risking on purpose

It is important that children are allowed to push the boundaries and can understand when they choose to take a risk on purpose and can distinguish a risk that can harm them. A risk on purpose will have an element of choice, control and a time limit, if any of these aspects are missing then there is a good chance that it is an unsafe risk. These are important conversations to have.

The three main themes of protective behaviours:

We all have the right to feel safe all the time

We can talk about anything with someone even if it feels big or small

Others have the right to feel safe with us

If children take on board these three main principles they are likely to make safer choices in their lives.

Mistakes

Another important message for children to learn is that we all make mistakes, but what is important is that we learn from them. It is good to share some of our own mistakes and learning.



Failure

The best way to help a child aim for success is to teach them that there is no such thing as failure - there are only results.

What is important for children to learn is how to put themselves in a positive and resourceful state of mind. Negative feelings of failure are not helpful to our state of mind, so if they can learn to see actions and results it will be more helpful to their state of mind. A child that learns that if the result is not what they want, then they can try again and modify the approach until they succeed is a child that is likely to achieve their goals.

True success only comes with practice and commitment. Children who grow up in homes where they are constantly pushed to succeed can sometimes lack in confidence as they can eventually feel that nothing they do is ever good enough and that they are not of value. This can be dangerous and lead to self destructive and risky behaviour in teenage years.

Feelings

It is important that with the journals the issue of feelings is explored and they come to the understanding that feelings happen all the time, but we make choices about our behaviour. There are no right or wrong feelings, it is only our actions that have results.

Something that children find empowering is the protective behaviours message that nobody can **'make'** us feel anything. We choose all our feelings and our actions. It might be that we feel a certain way when someone says or does something, but we can choose to change that. The power lies with us and not with the other person.

We can because we think we can.

Physiology

In relation to feelings it is important for children to understand the link between their mind and their body.

We can use our body to change our feelings.

Think of how someone looks when they are depressed. They usually have rounded shoulders, their head is down, their eyes are cast down, they often tuck their arms around their body.

If we feel depressed and we want to change the feeling, we can start by putting our head up, taking deep breaths, looking up and pulling our shoulders back. We might choose to go for a walk or do a physical activity which can put us in a more positive frame of mind. The physical actions immediately start to affect our state of mind.



We need always to be mindful of the internal conversations we have with ourselves that create our state of mind. If we are feeling depressed what is the conversation that you are having with yourself to feel that way?

What are you telling yourself?

When you feel happy – what do you tell yourself?

When children feel a lack of confidence they can think of a certain conversation they can have with themselves that makes them feel empowered. They can learn to walk as if they are confident. What does a confident person walk like? You could practice confident walking with them to make them feel better even if they think a situation might be difficult.

And finally....

I hope this explains some of the thinking behind the family Journal and the Getting to Know you Journals which are designed to help children develop a sense of self belief and values and to help parents, carers and mentors to open the gates to communication with children about some of the most difficult and sensitive issues.

As the parents of twins my husband and I took great comfort in this quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson which we found in a book called Unlimited Power by the life coach Anthony Robbins

Success

“To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.”

Here's wishing you and you children great safety and success!

Sharon x



Getting started

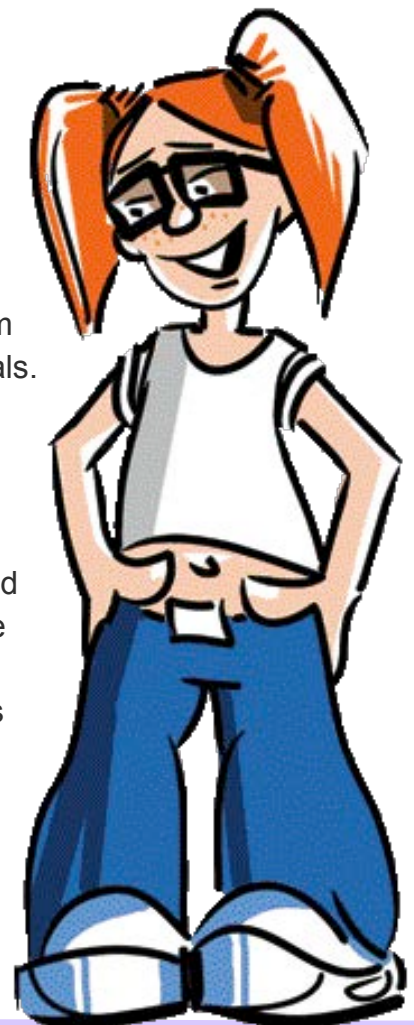
The purpose of the Family journal and the 'getting to know you' journal is to reinforce to the child that they are:

1. Individual and Special
2. Have individual strengths
3. Feel part of their environment and know it is a place where they can feel confident to learn and make mistakes

Increasing children's self esteem and sense of self worth is a vital part of the values journal. All children are individuals with their own strengths which are separate to anything their parents or carers have as strengths. As adults we have a role to play in helping children recognise their strengths and learn to feel good about them. Children who feel they are valuable and have good self esteem easily learn to interact and develop with others. They will be more confident about solving problems and seeking help from adults when they need it.

Who is Dot Com?

Dot Com is a friend to children who helps them practice how to do the right thing. Good values have to be practiced and children need to learn that they will make mistakes, but it how we deal with our mistakes that is important. Miss Dorothy Com or Dot Com to her friends is the central character in the journals. She is a 9 year old girl who is learning like other children to value herself and others. Dot makes mistakes, but always does the right thing in the end no matter how hard it is. She is a child speaking to other children in their own language. She empowers children to make the right decisions and understand they are always making a choice about how they behave. She also helps children identify their own network of support and who exists in their community to help them stay safe. Do boys like Dot too? I am pleased to tell you that they do because in the words of one 10 year old boy "she's a mate and not a babe" ! There are also other characters you will find on the missdorothy.com web site who are friends of Dot, including her friend Wizard the dog.



How values keep you safe

Treat others as you would like to be treated yourself

I believe this is a great value to instill in our children. Asking a child to think about their behavior and think if they would like that to happen to them is a really simple way of teaching values.

Dot journals help children believe in themselves

A child who has a strong sense of self value will work towards goals because they believe that they will achieve and they can do anything they put their mind to. A child who has no sense of self worth will want instant gratification and will take what they want and don't care who they hurt as a consequence because if they are worthless and don't matter then nobody else matters either.

I have learned that the key to showing children that they are valued is TIME.

We have been part of an EU programme on values education and it has been proved that the key to showing children that they are loved and valued is by giving them quality

time. People give time to the things that they love. A child who grows up in chaos where there are constant broken promises will have little chance of feeling they are of value. My dream of becoming a newsreader was put into my mind by my grandmother who cared deeply about me learning to read and tell the time. The fact that she believed that I could do it meant everything to me.

Dot helps children learn about real life

The Dot Com Values vs Violence journals help children understand the real life risks that exist in the world and what they can do to stay safe in different situations. They learn about the choices that they can make in life and that positive behaviour has rewards and negative behaviour has consequences. They learn about the role of the emergency services and the value of the emergency services in society. They also learn who they can turn to for help in difficult situations because a parent can't be with their child all the time and children have to learn that they can keep themselves safe by making choices based on their values and they learn how to ask for help.



We all have the right to feel safe

In many evaluations with children over the last 10 years it has been proved that owning the journal is very empowering for the child. It is a gift from you – but it is **their** special book and you can reassure them that nobody will read it unless they ask them to.

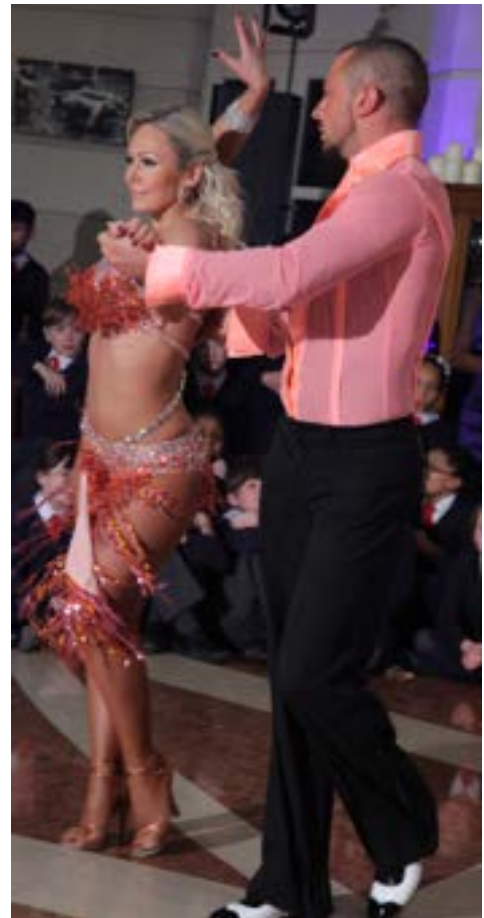
In this way you create a safe place for the child to write their feelings and inner most thoughts and you will have a chance to share those feelings and thoughts as you work with them on the pages. It should be a way to increase the trust and bond that already exists between you.

The journals are designed to help children feel safe to express themselves and realise that they won't be criticized for anything they write because there are no right or wrong feelings. But there are right and wrong choices about how we behave as a result of our feelings and this is where you can help to guide them to develop good personal values and help them to practice those values.

In this way we can empower children to understand that they are in control of their behavior and help them think before they act. Good values have to be practiced so it is important that they learn that we will make mistakes, but we can always learn from them.

Over the past ten years we have had many emails to Dot from children sharing their worries with her about everything from being bullied, to worrying about their mummy or daddy crying all the time, bereavement, pets dying and even not being able to cope with sports or drama activities. It is impossible to guess what might worry or frighten a child because they

are all individuals, but if they feel they are valued and listened to they will learn that there is always someone to talk to about their problems and if we know what the problem is that we can help them. The hardest part is starting the conversation.



Kristina said: “Dance lessons were where I felt safe. I want children growing up now to know that if there are problems at home, there is something that can be done and to encourage them to talk about it.”

Useful tips

There are many ways adults can empower children. The words we use are very important. You can help by saying things like;

1. **You have great ideas!**
2. **Good thinking!**
3. **Well done!**
4. **I love that idea**
5. **Aren't you clever at thinking of things to write and draw!**
6. **I am really proud of you!**



Helping to develop confidence and self worth

It is important that children know that it is ok to make mistakes. This all part of learning. As adults we can help by talking about some of the mistakes we have made and smiling about them. We can talk about the positive things we learned from something that at the time felt awful.

Take time to engage in conversation with the child which is lead by them. This will tell a child that you are listening to what they have to say and you enjoy their company too.

Help the child understand that it is not them you dislike ever, but sometimes you dislike their behavior. Help them see the difference between them as a person and the behavior that they choose. Ensure that the child is getting the message that we all have feelings, but it is what we choose to do with the feelings that matter. Make them understand that they choose how they behave



Try not to criticise the child. Instead of pointing out mistakes all the time, try a different approach and different words, such as 'shall we think about a new way of doing that?' or 'do you think it might feel better if you tried this?'

Why is it important that a child feels valued?

What is important to know, is that if children feel that they are loved and valued and understand what good personal values are they will make safer choices in life. They will choose friends with good values and are less likely to find themselves in risky situations where they can be hurt. If they value themselves they will also believe that they can achieve in life and that nobody has the right to hurt them.

Ways to show a child they are valued

Make quality time to spend with them even if it is only an hour a week, if you always give them an hour of one on one time that will make them feel special

Praise their ideas

Encourage play and join in if you can

Praise small milestones

Use positive language whenever you can

Remember a child has all the same feelings as you, but less tools to deal with them so treat them as an equal

Tell them you are always there to help them whenever they need it

Help them to see what they can learn from their mistakes and admit you make mistakes too

Follow their interests do not impose your own

Accept their decisions without criticism

Focus on putting yourself in the child's shoes

Try not to judge but encourage

Support their independence

Be positive and optimistic about their future

Show them you are listening

Show real interest in what they tell and try to remember

Assume everything can be done

Share their risks and worries

Challenge the child in a supportive way to try new things

Be available to them



Nanny Com is my super cool grandmother! She says getting old is all in the mind and if you keep learning it keeps the mind young. She has lots of hobbies and is always trying new things. I think she is very wise. I feel I can talk with her about anything.

A lack of self value can be caused by ...

Ignoring children

Being authoritarian

Being negative about everything they do

Making them dependant on you

Criticising them

Being disapproving

Behaving as if you are superior to the child

Making fun of the child

Imposing decisions on the child

Deciding how they will respond to things

Not making time for them

Always sticking to routines and never being flexible

Mocking their suggestions and ideas

Being domineering to them

Interrupting them and failing to listen

Being impatient and aggressive

Cross examining them

Giving no feedback or positive reaction to anything they do

Not attending or celebrating important milestones

Showing little interest in them



What is the role of the Police? - The role of the police is to keep us safe.

"PC Tim Bonnett also comes to my school and sometimes he brings Bobby the police dog. The police are there to keep us safe along with the fire and ambulance service."



I often hear parents in shopping malls or supermarkets shouting at their children that they will get the police to arrest them if they don't behave and I understand why that is said, but it worries me every time I hear it. The reason for this is that if your child is lost or if they are approached by a paedophile or criminal their best chance of staying safe is to turn to the police, but if they are frightened of officers they will not ask for the help they need if they are lost.

I believe it is a very important message to teach children that the role of the police is to keep children and the community safe and that really is their job. But if we are going to be safe then people will be arrested for our protection. Everyone has their own experiences of the police, but for the safety of children I believe that the true role of the police and emergency services should be taught to children as a way to keep them safe.

Why are children used as a 'weapon'?

Speaking from my own experience and from the many childhood stories that have been shared with me when I have spoken publicly or trained professionals, something that affects many children when relationships break up is that they can easily become a weapon to hurt a partner with. Once my parents split up I found life even more frightening. Although I was safe living with my grandmother I became a weapon that my parents could use to hurt each other. They both told me secrets about each other and made horrible comments about each other. I became very anxious and afraid at every custody visit and the front door became the scene of constant aggressive battles between them. I also had no real relationship with my father when they split up because he had never spent any time with me, so I was very afraid of being with him. I very much hope the Dot family journal will give children a way to express their fears and help parents recognise if any of their behaviours are causing their children distress. It is easy to forget that children are often absorbing all the pain of both parents and often have no way to express their confusion and fear.

Optional activities: Make displays of the family photographs of the child as babies and now. Talk about how they have developed over the years and what they can do now that they couldn't do when they were babies. Encourage children to think about and draw pictures of what they dream of being when they grow up. If they don't know then look at pictures together of people doing different jobs. On the plain side of a piece of old wallpaper draw round the child and get them to colour it in or fill it with lovely family pictures. Get the child to write a book called 'Things I can do' or make a poster. Play some of the Dot Com songs to your child from the missdorothy.com web site. Try to tell the child regularly that they are loved and mention some of the things you love about them.

What are the effects of domestic violence on children?

Many parents have asked over the years why their children should learn about risks that might frighten them and that they believe their child will never be exposed to. What I explain to them is that you can't be with your child all the time and you never know when they might experience negative behavior from others. If they don't understand the behavior and the risk, they will have no idea how to deal with it and may even think it is their fault. For example my mother grew up with a very loving and gentle father, so when her husband started to beat her she didn't tell anyone because she felt it was her fault.



Domestic Violence is a pattern of behavior about power and control over another person and it happens I believe, because of a real lack of self worth. Controlling another person gives a sense of power and importance.

I watched my father cut my mother off from all her friends and from her family until there was just the two of us and him. The victim eventually is sucked into the belief system of another person who tells them that they are stupid, worthless and that nobody will want them and nobody will believe them if they tell. Money is used to enhance control, not being allowed to go to the doctor or seek medical attention and the perpetrator is often charming and funny and very clever at grooming the victim.

Domestic violence affects people in all walks of life. One of my dearest friends is the actress Lynda Bellingham. She was a victim of domestic violence and put up with years of abuse which she worries very much affected her sons. She has been a great support in promoting our work.

Kristina Rihanoff the Strictly Come Dancing star is another friend and supporter because of the violence she suffered in her childhood in Russia. Like me she found refuge in a dance school and found dancing made her happy and forget the problems in her life.

It is very important for children to understand that nobody has the right to hurt another human being and if they feel valued they will be less likely to ever allow this to happen.

Domestic violence and sexual abuse are very often linked and the perpetrators rely on making victims keep secrets so understanding the difference between a good secret like a birthday surprise and a secret which makes them feel afraid is an important lesson.

I have worked with Northern Ireland Women's Aid on this material in the early days and the methods used have been piloted with children all over the country, including children in refuges and in the most violent communities where terrorism has been a long term threat.

Children watch the news and absorb everything adults experience so they also need a way to talk about the things that worry them.

Why does the child feel it their fault?

One of the things that many children share with Dot is the fact that when things go wrong in grown ups lives they believe that something they have done has made this happen. When adults lives go wrong children very often think it is their fault. It is important to reassure children that nothing they have done or can ever do can be the reason for a divorce or break up.

Is smacking children okay?

I know this is a subject which causes very strong feeling, but for me the issue is really simple if you bring it back to values. If you smack a child then you teach them that violence is the way to solve problems. If you want your child to learn that violence is never the answer then it is not an option to hit them yourself. When we feel the need to hit out then we have lost control of our feelings. I know that many parents think a smack is a short sharp shock and a quick way to teach good behavior, however if the police pulled you over to give you words of advice about your driving and gave you a good slap to help you remember the lesson, you might have something to say about it!

Again I would encourage you to have strong boundaries for your children and warn them there will be consequences for poor behavior choices, but make the consequences non violent. Also make the rewards for good behavior memorable – everyone likes to be praised.



Left: Kristina with her dance partner Robin Right: Children meet Kristina, Kathryn Blair and Sharon at an event to launch the programme in London.



www.dotcomcf.org

