



## James House BEST Proactive Parenting Programme: experiences of South African parents<sup>i,ii</sup>

*James House Programa de Parceria MELHOR Proativa: experiências de pais sul-africanos*

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**Abstract:** The parent-child relationship often becomes challenging during the period of adolescence and it is community-based organisations which take on the role of educating parents to improve the parent-adolescent relationship. The contribution of these interventions or programmes is often not documented in South Africa. The James House BEST Proactive Parenting Programme prepares parents to manage the challenging behaviours of their adolescents. This was a qualitative study exploring the experiences of 24 parents living in “at risk” resource-constrained communities who had attended the training workshops. Four themes emerged from the data (a) experiences of attending the proactive parenting workshops; (b) the meaning of being a parent; (c) approaches to parenting and (d) the role of the father. In general, parents had a very positive experiences and found that their relationships with their adolescents had improved. In particular, the results suggest that children require parental support, guidance, and parental involvement.

**Keywords:** Parents. Adolescents. Externalising behaviour. Parenting. Low socioeconomic communities.

**Resumo:** O relacionamento entre pais e filhos muitas vezes se torna desafiador durante o período da adolescência e são organizações baseadas na comunidade, que assumem o papel de educar os pais para melhorar o relacionamento entre pais e filhos. A contribuição dessas intervenções ou programas muitas vezes não é documentada na África do Sul. O Programa de Paternidade Melhor Proativa da James House prepara os pais para administrar os comportamentos desafiadores de seus adolescentes. Este foi um estudo qualitativo que explora as experiências de 24

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pais que vivem em comunidades com recursos restritos em risco que participaram das oficinas de treinamento. Quatro temas emergiram dos dados: (a) experiências de frequentar as oficinas pró-parentais; (b) significado de ser pai ou mãe; (c) abordagens para parentalidade e (d) o papel do pai. Em geral, os pais tiveram uma experiência muito positiva e descobriram que as relações com os adolescentes haviam melhorado. Em particular, os resultados sugerem que as crianças precisam de apoio dos pais, orientação e envolvimento dos pais.

**Palavras-chave:** Pais. Adolescentes. Comportamento externalizante. Parentalidade. Comunidades socioeconômicas baixas.

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## Introduction

Parents form the foundation of a family, providing guidance to other family members. They are responsible for the basic needs of their children such as safety, food, education, love, and promoting healthy cognitive, social, moral and emotional development (South African Children's Act, 38 of 2005). Beneficial and appropriate parenting skills are required if parents are to be effective and proactive in meeting the needs and offering guidance to their children (LANDRY, 2014). There are different avenues for the acquisition of beneficial parenting skills. These include observation, support, guidance from elders and peers, experimentation, and through parenting programmes or interventions (GRAY, 2010; THIJSEN *et al.*, 2017). Research shows that appropriate parenting skills ensure children become productive, are healthy and successful adults (LANDRY, 2014; THIJSEN *et al.*, 2017). However, many parents find themselves challenged by their context, experiences, or circumstances (COREY, 2009; PIKE; ATZABAPORIA; KRETSCHMER, 2016) such as having high levels of stress, chaos, lack of resources, poor health focuses, and lack of control (MORRIS *et al.*, 2017).

Holtrop, McNeil-Smith and Scott (2015) identify parenting as a family process that is strongly associated with the way children behave. Shelton, Frick and Wootten (1996) discuss five domains of parenting: (a) parental involvement; (b) positive parenting; (c) monitoring/supervision; (d) discipline and; (e) corporal punishment - associated with externalising behaviours of children. Parental involvement refers to the amount and quality of participation parents have with their children (FOURIE *et al.*, 2017). This aids positive parenting (LOUW; LOUW, 2007) and includes being supportive, affirming and affectionate, while providing effective communication (TULLY; HUNT, 2016). A crucial component of parenting involves monitoring and supervising children in an age appropriate manner by communicating expectations of and responses to a child's behaviour (ZAJAC; RANDALL; SWENSON, 2015). Together, these aspects contribute to how, when, and why children are disciplined (FOURIE *et al.*, 2017). Consistent and appropriate discipline strategies are important for children as it trains them to obey rules or a code of behaviour. Whereas unpredictable parental punishment for incidents of child misbehaviour or termination of discipline due to lack of energy to follow through, will create confusion and an environment for externalising behavioural problems to be fostered. Essentially, discipline is about guiding children and helping them learn what is expected as opposed to punishing them, causing pain and suffering (MACKENZIE *et al.*, 2015).

Studies suggest that an increase in parental involvement and positive parenting and a decrease in poor parental monitoring/supervision, inconsistent discipline, and corporal punishment, will improve the parent-child relationship and contribute to children displaying fewer externalising behaviour (ESSAU; SASAGAWA; FRICK, 2006; SCHUIRINGA *et al.*, 2015). Programmes that focus on effective parenting may be what is required to enhance parenting approaches (KNERR; GARDNER; CLUVER, 2013; SHAH *et al.*, 2016). However, the importance of these interventions cannot be underscored in resource constrained contexts where there are limited resources, services, psychoeducation, and assistance available (CLUVER *et al.*, 2016; LACHMAN *et al.*, 2018).

From a policy perspective, South Africa has instituted many legislative and constitutional changes since 1994. This legislation speaks to violence, children and families aiming to promote family well-being and functioning. These include policies addressing issues of marriage, maintenance, domestic violence, mental health, equality, divorce, child care, substance abuse, as well as housing, social and legal assistance. Policies around parenting falls within these categories (RYAN; ESAU; ROMAN, 2018). Family life in South Africa is directed according to guiding principles laid out in the White paper on Families in South Africa (DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, 2012). The white paper on families is a policy used to direct all ratified international declarations, regional commitments, as well as national legislation. This defines what a family should be, how families should be protected and supported. The white paper describes what the family is entitled to, how equality in marriage should be and discusses the commitment to the care of children within families (DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, 2012; RYAN; ESAU; ROMAN, 2018)

Although several programmes focusing on parenting in low socioeconomic contexts exist (AARONS; HURLBURT; HORWITZ, 2011), many are not disseminated within the South African context. Often community-based organisations do not document the evidence of their programmes nor share the results of their parenting models. Fewer programmes explore the beneficiaries' experiences of the intervention (AARONS; HURLBURT; HORWITZ, 2011; TURNER; SANDERS, 2006). This makes it difficult for government and policy makers, professionals, families, donors, organisations and academics to have a clear understanding of the interventions that exist with regards to parenting as well as what support, resources and interventions are still needed (TURNER; SANDERS, 2006). That said, this study focused on parents of adolescents displaying externalising behaviour living in resource constrained communities in the Western Cape, South Africa. These parents had attended the James House Proactive Parenting Workshops as a component of the Building Emotionally Strong Teens (BEST) Programme. As such, this study was interested in parents' experiences of these workshops to reveal how the sessions offered influenced the parent-adolescent relationship.

### **BEST Programme**

James House Child and Youth Care Centre is a Non-Profit Organisation in the Western Cape, South Africa which implements the BEST Programme in low socioeconomic communities in both rural and urban settings. Presently, there is a lack of services and intensive programmes

addressing adolescents with externalising behaviour and their parents in terms of preventative care. This is owing to the lack of resources offered to these types of programmes. In South Africa, government departments are stretching their resources in order to address the multiple social challenges in the country. Whilst there is a great need for programmes like this, not only in the province but the country too, the BEST Programme is this the only one of its kind. Within the school setting, the programme is desired because it improves the learner's academic progress, attendance in school and interaction with teachers and peers making the programme an asset to not only to the children and parents but the teachers and principal too.

The BEST Programme is an 18 month (6 months intensive programme + 12 months after care) non-residential solution to prevent "at risk" adolescents with externalising behaviour entering a path that may be destructive to either themselves or others. The BEST programme is a holistic programme focusing on the different facets of an adolescent's life. This study primarily focused on the parenting component of the BEST Programme, referred to as *Proactive Parenting Workshops*. These workshops are both educational and supportive in nature. The James House Proactive Parenting Model is consistent with the views of Shelton, Frick and Wootton (1996); Essau, Sasagawa and Frick (2006) and Schuiringa *et al.* (2015) who argue that the five dimensions are essential for improving the parent-child relationship and minimising externalising behaviour.

## Method

A qualitative methodological framework with an interpretivist approach was applied in this study to explore the subjective experiences of parents who attended the Proactive Parenting component of the James House BEST Programme.

## Recruitment

Two hundred and forty-two parents had participated in the proactive parenting workshops since 2011. Participants were invited via the programme staff who work in the BEST Programme in the area where participants reside, to voluntarily participate in the study. Table 1 describes the demographics of the participants. Twenty-four parents participated in the study, all of whom were from the three communities which host the BEST Programme. There were 8 participants from each community (Hangberg, Imizamo Yethu and Vredendal). The majority of participants were female (n = 20), Coloured (people of mixed race, n = 17) and Afrikaans speaking (n = 14).

**Table 1: Demographics of Participants**

|                                  |    |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Location                         |    |
| Vredendal, West Coast (Rural)    | 8  |
| Hangberg, Hout Bay (Urban)       | 8  |
| Imizamo Yethu, Hout Bay, (Urban) | 8  |
| Gender                           |    |
| Male                             | 4  |
| Female                           | 20 |
| Race                             |    |
| Coloured                         | 17 |

|               |    |
|---------------|----|
| Black African | 5  |
| Other         | 2  |
| Home Language |    |
| Afrikaans     | 14 |
| IsiXhosa      | 8  |
| English       | 2  |

## Context of Study

The study was conducted in three resourced constrained communities in the Western Cape where the BEST programme has been implemented. One community is rural (Vredendal) and two communities (Hangberg and Imizamo Yethu) are urban. All three communities are characterised by high rates of poverty, trauma, violence, female-headed households, substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, domestic violence and low service delivery levels (SAVAHL, 2010; KADER, 2015). Family violence is rife in South Africa and presents in many of the homes of the beneficiaries. Family violence impacts the identities of the adolescents and family members thereby creating emotional, psychological, and behavioural difficulties (PETERSEN; GROBLER; BOTHA, 2017). In order to get a better understanding of the parents' circumstances and their experience of the programme, semi-structured interviews were undertaken either at the participant's home, the school their child attends or James House.

## Proactive parenting component of the BEST Programme: A RE-AIM Framework

The RE-AIM framework is used to report on key points related to the implementation of the Proactive parenting effects (GAGLIO; SHOUP; GLASGOW, 2013). RE-AIM is an acronym for Reach (recruitment and target population), Effectiveness (impact of intervention on outcomes), Adoption (setting or context, stakeholder and partners, accessibility), Implementation (intervention properties), and Maintenance (sustainability of results), all of which are discussed below. This is a good model to determine decision making and guidelines for interventions (GAGLIO; SHOUP; GLASGOW, 2013). RE-AIM can be used from the planning phase of an intervention to the evaluation phase of the intervention.

**Reach.** The BEST programme targets children aged 12-16 years old who display externalising behaviour in the home, in the community and at school. A referral form is completed by the teacher and a list is then made up by the team to determine the severe cases. Severity is determined by the number of externalising behaviours and frequency of behaviours. This list is then corroborated with the child's parents, principal and the local Department of Social Development. Thereafter, ten boys and ten girls are selected per school for intake. This process occurs twice a year (June and December). Children who are substance dependent, younger than 11 years old, older than 16 years old, have been in the programme before, do not meet the criteria or who have an intellectual disability are excluded and not considered for the programme. Children are only officially accepted after they, and their parents, sign consent and commitment forms. The parents of the selected children are expected to attend the proactive parent workshops.

**Effectiveness.** The BEST Programme has four outcomes: (1) children have improved behaviour and they are socially and emotionally competent; (2) children’s attendance at school increases and they are interacting positively in the school environment with teachers and peers; (3) children have a strong parental/caregiver relationship as evidenced by positive parenting, improved discipline strategies, monitoring and supervision and; (4) evidenced-based model available to influence policy, facilitate replication and sustainability. The proactive parenting workshops are predominantly focused on outcome three when conducting the workshops.

**Adoption.** The proactive parenting workshops occur either at James House, the community school or the community hall. Consultations are held with the leaders of these institutions to provide a venue at little or no cost. The venues are very accessible since they are within walking distance from participant’s homes. Sessions are usually held in the evenings or Saturday mornings to accommodate parents who work or look after children during the day. The proactive parenting workshops are generally well known in the communities as there is constant engagement with community leaders, schools and other organisations in the area. Parents are reminded by telephone, home visit or text message on the day of the workshop to attend the sessions. This usually helps to retain all the parents. These sessions indirectly benefit the children, the family and the community as the skills and information learnt in these workshops either gets implemented or shared with the indirect beneficiaries.

**Implementation.** The BEST Programme has 16 activities in order to meet its outcomes. Table 2 provides an indication of the different activities. Proactive parenting falls within the family-based interventions. Six proactive parenting workshops are offered to any aged, male or female parent(s) or caregiver(s) of the children recruited for the BEST Programme during the six-month intensive phase.

**Table 2: BEST Programme Activities**

| Therapeutic Interventions  | School Based Interventions  | Family Based Interventions   | Community Based Interventions  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breakthrough Camp</li> <li>• Group Therapy</li> <li>• Individual Therapy</li> <li>• Family Therapy</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life Skills</li> <li>• Educational Support</li> <li>• Sport and Recreation</li> <li>• Classroom Interventions</li> <li>• School Liaison</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father’s Group</li> <li>• Fathers Camp</li> <li>• Home Visits</li> <li>• Concrete Support</li> <li>• Proactive Parenting</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness Campaigns (1 community-based campaign and 1 School based campaign)</li> </ul> |

These sessions aim to improve the parent – child relationship and assist in creating structure within dysfunctional families. Each session lasts approximately 90 minutes and takes place monthly. The sessions are developed and facilitated by registered counsellors, Child and Youth Care Workers or Social Auxiliary workers. The workshops are supplemented by follow-up home visits carried out by Child and Youth Care Workers. The format of the sessions includes PowerPoint presentations, discussions, role plays and written exercises. The structure of the session is as follows: 30 min welcome, registration and socialising with facilitators and other parents or caregivers and 60 minutes interactive PowerPoint presentations comprising of information related to proactive parenting. The sessions are conducted in English, Afrikaans and

isiXhosa. At times when the need arises, sessions are conducted in mixed languages to meet the needs of the participants, for example English and Afrikaans. The workshop allows parents to learn new skills, guide each other, speak about the challenges they face as parents and explore healthy coping mechanisms mainly in terms of parental involvement, positive parenting, monitoring, supervision and discipline.

At times, although reminded and encouraged, it is a challenge to get parents to attend all the sessions. Therefore, the Child and Youth Care Workers conduct the missed session with parents either at their home, or at another time. At the end of each session parents are provided with an opportunity to share their experience of the session and what they have learnt.

**Maintenance.** Follow-up home visits take place with the parents to ensure positive results are maintained and areas of development are supported so that parenting skills can continue to improve. Parents complete a questionnaire which is a nine-item assessment to determine the parenting practices of parents who have children who display externalising behaviour. This assessment is done at onset, 6 months, and 18 months. Thereafter it is done annually for five years. This information allows the team to determine how well families are doing and identify the need for support.

### **Data Collection for the current study**

Twenty-four semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to understand parents' experiences of the proactive parenting workshops offered as part of James House BEST Programme. An interview schedule consisting of 15 questions was used to collect the data. The interviews were between 20-30 minutes. Interview questions were focused on parenting, parental involvement, discipline, monitoring and supervision, parent-child relationship and the proactive parenting sessions. Participants were informed regarding the purpose of the study, their rights to confidentiality, anonymity, non-participation and withdrawal from the study. Participants provided permission to have the interview recorded. Interviews were conducted in English, Afrikaans and a translator used for the isiXhosa interviews. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, independently verified, and thematically analysed.

### **Data analysis**

Thematic analysis was used in this study to identify, analyse and report patterns, referred to as themes within data (BRAUN; CLARKE, 2006). The thematic analysis techniques of Braun and Clarke (2006) were employed in this study. They recommend six phases of analysis (1) familiarising oneself with the data (2) generating initial codes (3) searching for themes (4) reviewing themes (5) defining concepts and (6) report writing. As such, the researcher followed each phase and derived at three key themes.

## Results

Four core themes were identified from the data (a) Experiences of attending the proactive parenting workshops; (b) Meaning of being a parent; (c) Approaches to parenting; and (d) The role of the father. Within theme (c), a number of sub-themes emerged namely; positive parenting; responsible parenting; being a role model; respect; discipline; communication; monitoring and supervision; and parental involvement.

### **Experiences of attending the proactive parenting workshops.**

The parenting workshops had a holistic approach to the needs and challenges of the parents, encompassing the overall well-being of the parents/caregivers. A number of the parents who had participated in the workshop demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm as a result of the services rendered. The workshops explored the challenges of parents and assisted them in acquiring new skills, such as behaviour management, which they could utilise and implement at home. Parents indicated that the workshops provided them with the necessary coping mechanisms as well as problem solving skills. Overall, the parents expressed that they enjoyed the information and insightfulness of the sessions. Furthermore, parents expressed an improvement in their relationship with their children as well as behaviour management as a result of attending the workshops. Some of the responses were as follows:

*The most of which I found interesting was like to learn how to speak to him how to deal with his weaknesses and strength and how to rebuild my relationship with him all that kind of stuff (Participant 2).*

*How a parent should be... I have learned so many things there and how I should be that it makes one realise that it brought us closer to each other (Participant 4).*

### **Meaning of being a parent**

Parents were asked about their description or understanding of being a parent, from which their responses contributed to the emergence of this second theme. Overall, they described a parent as being responsible, loving, caring and providing (both financially and emotionally) for a child. Through the workshops, parents developed a clearer understanding of the role of the parent in a child's life. In understanding a 'new' approach to parenting, they shifted from a previously more dominant, controlling approach to a more engaging and structured means of disciplining their children. There were parents who also described parenting as being very difficult with lots of hard work.

Parents expressed the following: *Parenting comes with carrying responsibility... parenting is more than just providing a roof over the head, or food to eat or clothes. There are many things like love, caring and if you don't have it then you should forget about being a parent (Vredendal Participant 8).*

*You must be there for your children at all times. When they fall you need to pick them up if they hurt you need to cuddle them...if they go through stuff (challenges) you need to be able to be there for them through the whole ordeal whatever they going through... a role model and you need to activate respect and discipline...if you activate that they will be respectful to you also because it is how you act people will act again (Sentinel Participant 8).*

One of the participants provided a very interesting generational insight of the difference between parenting in the past and the types of parents today. She stated *in this day and age you know children want to be parents and you [the parent] must be the child but if you put your foot down and you say 'this is this is my rules and I am the parent here and you are the child and you need to obey'... I remember... my mother... we didn't have an easy life because my father was a fisherman and my mother was working in a factory but there was enough food to eat, there was enough love...there was so much respect... there was so much honesty trust in the family because parents were role models to us... there's sometimes I saw my mom at a the pots and she dish for everybody and there was other people also coming in and she will dish up for everyone you know... she didn't eat but she don't worry you know because as long as the kids eat... that is a parent you know always looking out for her children... (Sentinel Participant 8).*

### **Approaches to parenting**

The proactive parent workshop was aimed at improving and stabilising dysfunctional families. Parents and caregivers were encouraged to communicate more effectively with their children and to listen attentively. At the beginning of the workshop sessions, it became clear that parents started with very controlling, inhibitive and often punitive approaches to parenting their children. However, as the sessions progressed, parents adopted a more positive stance in their parenting approaches. They adopted attributes of being a role model, they became more involved and became more aware of their children's activities through monitoring and supervision (which had been absent previously). In the theme of approaches to parenting, there were 8 sub-themes which evolved. These included positive parenting, responsible parenting, being a role model, respect, discipline, communication, monitoring and supervision as well as parental involvement.

**Positive parenting.** Once parents attended the sessions, they preferred to implement parenting approaches which they thought were more beneficial to their children and their parent-child relationship. For example, parents learnt about the importance of understanding their own individual behaviours; how their behaviour shapes and moulds a child's future and behaviour. As a result of attending these workshops, when parents reflected on how their approaches have changed, they mentioned being less controlling by avoiding power struggles, they would praise good behaviour demonstrated by their children by positive affirmations, adopted coping mechanisms from the sessions and believed they developed ways in which they could positively influence their children by being interested, supportive, involved and understanding of their children. This includes being proactive in their children's personal and

academic life as well as involving their children in setting house rules. The responses were as follows:

*I'm the mother and you the child and you need to listen to what I say but after we've attended the group sessions we now know that yes I'm the mother but we a family so it's not just me making the rules the end of the day (Sentinel Participant 7).*

*Yes... yes... I use to... I punish her with food 'you not going to eat food if you don't clean that room' then she tell me 'you then said you not going to do that anymore now you doing it again' but what I've learned from the programme is that you have to face the consequences in the decisions that you make and so I try sometimes... I'm not perfect so sometimes I do make mistakes but I do try to handle it much better now by... not punishing her with things that really hurt her... I would take something away that she... she would value... because for food she just tell me I can go eat somewhere else so I, I've learnt not to do that anymore (Vredendal Participant 6).*

**Responsible Parenting.** The workshop sessions were designed in a manner that the parents/caregivers would learn not only about the children they are raising, but about their individuality and parenting perspectives. The aim was not to dictate how parents should raise their own children but rather to find strategies that can enhance parenting approaches in a way that the child does not find extremely controlling nor too indulgent/lenient but rather to parent in a manner that is socially and legally acceptable. Upon reflection of the workshop and the changes post the workshop, parents began to understand their parental role and responsibility in their child's life by being able to discern and acknowledge their lack of responsibility in ensuring that their children were attending school and behaving well at all times. Additionally, the workshops enabled parents to come up with solutions that reinforce parental responsibility. Parents reported that taking responsibility for their children and also teaching their children to be responsible is essential in parenting. Parents responded as follows:

*It is a wonderful feeling to be a parent and it's also a big responsibility and it is also a challenge because they are different children (Sentinel Participant 4).*

*When you are a parent you must take responsibility of your own children and you must teach them at home to do chores and to share chores amongst each other even if you is not around at home they know what to do (Vredendal Participant 6).*

**Being a Role Model.** Some parents have had unpleasant life experiences, making it difficult for them to be role models to their own children. These parents grew up without people to look up to in their communities, therefore being a role model becomes somewhat a challenge and a difficult factor to accomplish. However, the workshop with the assistance of fellow parents and caregivers demonstrated ways in which a parent could become a role model to his/her own children. Parents shared the notion that children do what their parents do and not what they say. The role plays and discussions in the workshop sessions enlightened the minds of the parents. They learnt the importance of practicing what you teach your children. Parents reported that

their children started to respect them more as their words were in-line with their actions. Parents also started demonstrating good communication skills within the family. One of the comments shared was:

*Yes I need to... I practice to communicate more you know in order to listen because sometimes we just too hasty to talk and not listen... that's the most important the family that pray together stay together so I've got good plans (Sentinel Participant 8).*

**Respect.** The parents, who attended the workshop, have children who have at-risk behaviour which could lead to serious offences. After attending the workshop, the parents reported that the behaviour of their children was more positive and respectful. This was not only noticed within the household, but also comments from the neighbours and school teachers. The techniques and mechanisms implemented in the workshop allowed parents to establish ways of coping with their adolescent children. Communication levels were reported to have improved and changed for the better. Parents reported on the importance of respecting each family member's views and emotions regardless of their age. Parents stated the following:

*I see okay James house teach me right because I see now my children [are] getting right. I am not rude with them I talk nice with them, they understand me. Yes if you are a mother you are rude to your children they will never give your respect (Participant 3).*

*After the sessions I could start getting control over the situation and the discipline started to improve slowly and I'm also working hard to remove the disrespect from them so that they can have full respect for me (Sentinel Participant 2).*

**Discipline.** During the workshop sessions parents were taught different disciplinary methods. In the session focusing on discipline, parents would learn of the different styles of disciplining their children. Parents learnt the difference between discipline and punishment. They were encouraged to become realistic in setting out boundaries in raising their children because unrealistic boundaries could lead to turmoil and conflict between the parent and the child. Reflecting on the workshop sessions, parents concluded that the disciplinary methods they used before attending the programme, were not working successfully. Overall, parents viewed discipline as a process whereby there is less shouting and fighting but more understanding and listening. In particular, parents stated that consistency was the key in positive and successful discipline. They presented their perspectives as follows:

*My viewpoint plus discipline changes... later it is the same again... discipline... you should keep your hand on it... do not take it off. You should keep it there. And that is what those sessions we had as parents taught us. You learn how to handle the behaviour and sometimes they also look at your body language and your attitude because it also sends out a message (Vredendal Participant 3).*

*It is like listening to the child and not act immediately... walk away calm count until ten before you act and it worked, it worked to calm (Sentinel Participant 4).*

**Communication.** The family context of participating parents presented poor communication levels or none at all. This poor communication is often rife with conflict and

sometimes violence. Furthermore, parents were raised with the notion that adults should always be in control and are always correct because they know better. For children, this in turn depicts the manner in which communication is conducted as violent, abusive and controlling. Parents reflected on the manner in which they communicated with their children before the workshop sessions and stated that they would belittle their children. After the sessions, parents became more aware and mindful of the tone of their voices and attitudes when they address their children. They also now understand that they need to hear the opinions and perceptions of their children, through their children. Communication patterns and styles have changed both for parents towards their children and for children towards their parents because parents have acquired information and communication techniques to implement with an adolescent. Parents highlighted the following:

*I was not listening to my child... the way I was talking to the child was really harsh... as I started to attend the sessions I learned that you need to be calm when speaking to a child instead of raising your voice... maybe that is why my child is acting like that I am pushing her out of the way (OK Participant 4).*

*Well... you learn a lot of skills there because at the end of the day sometimes you like to shout at your child but you need to talk. You know sometimes it's not about screaming and shouting at your child but you need to talk so that the child can listen to you. If you scream at the child that child won't listen but if you speak in a soft voice the child will listen to you... then you'll be so amazed by just only talking that soft gentle words (Sentinel Participant 8).*

**Monitoring and supervision.** When participating in the workshop sessions, parents were able to discern if the behaviour of their children regressed. This included being aware of their children's favourite place to hang out with friends, knowing if the place was safe or not. In turn they were able to better monitor the coming and going of their children. This is clear from the following statements made by parents:

*My child had a lot of friends so I could not monitor or supervise where she was going to. She would say 'I am going to this friend' but when I go look for her there, she wasn't even there. I wouldn't know where she was. Now after I attended the sessions, my child now tells me okay I am going to this friend and I know the friends and the parent's friends [friends parents] (OK Participant 4).*

*It's not easy monitoring them because why I'm not always there... I try to give them a curfew... but sometimes they do still do their own thing and then sometimes they listen and will do as I say, but that is still a challenge but we working at it very hard (Sentinel Participant 6).*

**Parental involvement.** The proactive parental workshop was aimed at improving family functioning and family relationships focusing on both parents (mothers and fathers) and children. It, therefore, had a holistic approach in delivering the service of strengthening families and getting parents more involved with their children. In this sub-theme, parents reported quite a few changes. For example, parents reported attending meetings with their children if required, they went for drives and on excursions with their children and communication and understanding improved between parents and children. The workshop sessions helped parents see the picture they portrayed to their children by increasing the self-and child awareness of

parents. This meant that parents were able to identify and recognise who they were and how they portrayed themselves in their children's eyes. Furthermore, parents experienced an increased awareness of their children's strengths, weaknesses, friends, interests and hobbies. Having this awareness has helped parents in having the ability to recognise the change of behaviour in their children's lives and in this way equip them in discerning behavioural patterns that could be risky in future. Some of the comments were as follows:

*Okay... I do help him especially with the homework stuff and other stuff even though I am not educated. I will go with him and look for someone who's going to assist him with his homework (OK Participant 5).*

*I was less involved in the past I would say, I had little interest and did not follow up on the things that was going on around her... now that she is at James House, I'm much more involved and goes to school when there are things that need to be done and I also see who her friends are and I am more focused on her now (Vredendal Participant 7).*

### **The role of the father**

Although the majority of participants in this study were females, there were four fathers who participated. The role of the father in raising children was seen to be an important factor as some mothers within this study highlighted that support from their children's father would be of great assistance. In terms of the father-child relationship, the workshop sessions improved the relationship between the father and the child with, fathers being more involved with their children after attending the sessions. The fathers stated that they had improved the way in which they communicated with their children especially those who were raising young girls. However, single and biological mothers who were in another relationship, found that communications with the biological fathers of their children were minimal, perhaps even non-existent. They were then solely responsible for their children and were often assisted by a partner or other family members. Parents stated:

*By going to the sessions, as a single parent not getting anything from like their father's side, children by me going there [attending sessions] just give me more strength, at least I do have other people that encourage my son while I am like not there especially and maybe his father's like side is maybe not there into his life but at least I can make sure that I am not alone (OK, Participant 2).*

*Before the sessions the father was still staying with us that time, everything was in order that time... Now I can talk, I said eight o'clock he will come half past eight... now I am alone... so the monitoring and supervision is not so good 'cause the father is not here (Participant 3).*

Research shows that when parenting approaches improve, the behaviour of their child and/or adolescents improve (HOLTROP; SMITH; SCOTT, 2015; RYAN; ROMAN; OKWANY, 2015; SHELTON; FRICK; WOOTTON, 1996). This is also evident in the reports provided by parents who participated in the study, as the changes in their parenting approaches as taught to them through the workshop sessions contributed to noticeable changes in the behaviour of their children. Thus, while the environment, community or context outside of the family is challenging and the adolescent experiences the normal stress and strain of adolescence, having an intact parent-adolescent relationship may be a protective factor in reducing risk for the adolescent.

Moreover, Simmons *et al.* (2018) found that fathers involvement can contribute to a decrease in adolescent at-risk delinquent behaviour.

## Conclusion

The overall study was aimed at retrospectively exploring the experiences of parents who had attended the proactive parenting workshop of James House BEST Programme. The following limitations were identified: this study only provided a retrospective account of experiences of parents, it did not explore adolescent's accounts of whether or not they are being parented differently. While methodologically challenges may arise, a longitudinal explorative approach could provide the basis for changes and subsequent effectiveness testing. Secondly, a limitation is the 'genderedness' of the participants with more mothers participating than fathers. If more fathers participated in this study, the results found could possibly be different.

As a way forward for this programme, fathers should be more involved in the programme. To attract fathers, special effort should be made to include activities in the programme, which are of interest to them. Based on participant feedback, there should be a consideration of extending the time and number of sessions as this may improve the programme and make it more effective. Homework between sessions should also be considered so that the skills can be practiced and discussed between sessions with CYCW during home visits. The Proactive Parenting component of the BEST Programme has proven to have merit, but it needs to be tested for feasibility and effectiveness.

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