

John talked about the Parenting Support Programme currently being offered in West Lothian. 30 courses/services are delivered every week by a wide range of professionals and agencies, covering a wide range of areas. A website has also been developed for parents and professionals: www.parentingwestlothian.org.uk. The programme was developed out of the Sure Start initiative in 1998 that was aimed at supporting very young families. The current programme supports families with children of all ages.

John went on to describe a couple of the parenting courses in more detail – ‘Mellow Parents’ and ‘Getting Through the Day.’ These courses help parents to see things from the child’s perspective and to understand why children behave the way they do. Parents are encouraged to learn from each other and to develop new skills and responses to encourage more positive behaviour. The ‘Mellow Parents’ programme includes a ‘personal’, more therapeutic element, to allow parents to offload some of their issues from the past. The course includes 14 to 16 sessions of 5 hours each. ‘Getting Through the Day’ is a shorter programme of 2 hour sessions over 10 weeks. The courses have been tailored to suit specific settings such as those delivered through primary schools. The programmes have common components – worksheets, discussion, experiential exercises, video input and handouts.

John facilitated an experiential exercise where workshop participants were asked to work in pairs – one as a parent and one as a child. The ‘child’ was asked to draw something, badly, and the ‘parent’ was asked to criticise the picture. The pair then swapped roles and repeated the exercise. Participants were then asked to repeat the exercise again, but this time with the ‘parent’ being ‘encouraging’ and ‘positive’. The group feedback highlighted that criticism was much easier to give than praise, but that praise was much more motivating. This is an example of the experiential work that is done with parents to help them to see things from their children’s perspective.

John commented that the parenting programme works well in West Lothian because of the strong reputation of Sure Start and also the high level of commitment to prevention work in the Council. On-going, follow up support is an essential part of the future work for some families. It is hoped that an even wider range of courses will be delivered in the future, and that more parents will become involved in the delivery.

Questions from the floor focussed on the practical aspects of running the courses, accreditation, networking or sharing learning with other local authorities, and how to meet a wide range of service user needs, including those with learning disabilities.