

## **An example of Educational Psychologist work to support a Y7 pupil with challenging behaviour**

### **The situation**

Charlie transferred to secondary school with a history of challenging behaviour. He had previously been referred to a community paediatrician and a behaviour support teacher because of his aggressive and disruptive behaviour. At the end of his first term in Year 7 the school raised him with the Educational Psychologist (EP) because of concerns about him 'hurting others' and his frequent refusal to stay in class. He had also made allegations against his father (his sole carer) and had been placed on the Child Protection Register. The school wanted to know what Charlie's views were and to develop an understanding of why he behaved as he did.

### **What happened...**

The EP spent time with Charlie talking about school and home. Scaling (rating using a scale from 0 to 10) was used to aid discussion and help Charlie identify his areas of success and use of positive strategies. Charlie's personal constructs were explored using the format of 'the kind of person I want to be' and 'the kind of person I don't want to be'. Together with the EP he was able to devise four steps that he felt would move him towards his ideal self. Charlie and the EP shared these with the Special Needs Co-ordinator and ways for the school to support him were agreed.

### **What happened next...**

A Team around the Child meeting was called; attended by Charlie's father, a Family Support Worker, the EP and the Assistant Head of the school. The EP fed back to the meeting about Charlie's views and these were discussed. Charlie's father shared his frustrations and explained the difficulties that he was experiencing with parenting. He described how he felt that he had reached the limits of his ability to punish Charlie and wanted the chance to enjoy being his father again, rather than his 'jailer'. Through discussion the EP attempted to make sense of some of the family dynamics, using references to attachment theory. Examples of more positive 'father/son' times were elicited and highlighted, and the circumstances and strategies underpinning these were explored. Amongst other strategies the EP explained the use of the 'language of choice', the need to see Charlie's behaviour as separate to him and how school could send home positive news, resulting in Charlie's father being able to reward him for his successes. New guidelines for dealing with Charlie both at home and school were agreed. Charlie's father looked forward to implementing this new way of parenting with the encouragement and support of the Family Support Worker. The school agreed to provide Charlie with an adult mentor with whom he could develop a trusting relationship, and who could help him to organise himself. As the meeting closed the EP encouraged Charlie and his father to hug; something that the father had said he missed, but felt was no longer possible. They embraced warmly.

## **The result**

At the next TAC meeting six weeks later school reported 'phenomenal success', with Charlie only having had to be reprimanded twice. His attendance and punctuality had also greatly improved. The school had employed a Y7 mentor who met with Charlie twice a day to check that he had the right equipment and was feeling OK. Charlie sought out his mentor rather than becoming involved in incidents and had been encouraged by him to join various sports teams.

At the TAC meeting Charlie's father reported that his behaviour at home was 'much better'. Boundaries regarding bedtime and time spent playing on the Xbox had been put in place and were adhered to without undue complaint. Father and son were enjoying the chance to rekindle a warm relationship and Charlie had repaid the trust that his father had decided (with encouragement) to show in him.

A subsequent TAC meeting further confirmed the very positive changes in Charlie's behaviour and in the relationship with his father. The school, Charlie and his father indicated that they felt the changes could be sustained and the outside agencies agreed to withdraw from direct involvement in the case.

## **Psychology used:**

Solution Focused Psychology, Social Psychology, Behavioural Psychology, Personal Construct Psychology