

SATURDAY 21ST OCT 2023

With Lavinia Donling

BUSY TIMES

It has been crazy busy. Not just because of clinic, but because of clinics, Local Authority review reports, unpacking!!!, sorting, and finding new homes for things. We thought John might have a whole stable to himself for DIY stuff, but the floor was very uneven and has no power sockets or lights! But it makes a great garden tool shed, and allows Yasmin and I the opportunity to pot plants in the dry, as well as somewhere to store the tools and the bird food. Our new pod cast studio is coming along nicely (oops, might have just let the cat out of the bag), but needs painting, and the flooring laid so it is insulated for the sound recordings - all very exciting. The boxes have gone down considerably, but only because of my determination - we are on a mission as our lovely accountant, Charlotte, is due to meet with us this coming Friday.



Whilst it is not quite an inspection, she is coming to “look over” the property that she supported us getting in order for both businesses’ to grow. She is also bringing me our end of Year accounts for me to sign, so as to send them over to companies House which is an official requirement.

THE NED'S ANNUAL MEETING

The NEDs have been busy themselves with having the big Annual meeting 2 weeks ago. It was Ron’s turn this year to write a brief report, which has just been signed off by the NEDs and myself, which I will upload in the morning. They are planning on having a meeting to consider the new academic year’s ambitions for TMW - I do not know whether to be nervous or not - I have given my brief as to my wishes - however they plan to have a meeting this week (it is quite hard for them to juggle a mutually convenient time for all of them), following the Annual meeting, to discuss further, without me, as to what they deem is in the best interests of TMW and our clients.



BEHAVIOUR & LIFESTYLE

I had a really interesting conversation with a Dad, around one of my young client's and their behaviour. I know so many parents can relate to this. Our children's lifestyle is very different to our childhood experiences, as it is for our parents. This Dad relayed that he struggles with his children "shouting and screaming" all the time, to the point that he gets wound up and shouts back. Whilst he does not do it to the volume of his children, or throughout the day, never the less, there comes a point of where he cannot tolerate anymore. Like many of our families, Dad is the sole earner for the family, as Mum is the main carer to the children with SEN needs unable to attend school. However, in our session together, what became very obvious is a real mismatch of the Dad's expectations, based on his childhood and his parents' expectations, and the reality. But, what was really interesting, was that Dad was most worried about what other people thought of him as a parent unable to control his children. The weekend had been very challenging in that he wished to take his children out, but it came with its challenges - the children squabbling, not being considerate of each other's sensory triggers, and a PDA profile clashing with one another, despite Dad ensuring they had their own space in the car and keeping queuing time as short as possible. Whilst both parents have a high chance of being neuro-diverse themselves, in the moment, the last thought they have on their mind is that they are being triggered by their children's challenges. No, the biggest thought on their mind, is what must other people be thinking, or, rather, 'they are judging me for being an incompetent parent'. And that may very well be true. However, if these same perceived people judging knew what SEN parents go through, day in, day out, 24/7, I think their perception would instantly change, if indeed their perception was of negative criticism.

Many parents have come to TMW for help and relayed how they were sent on parenting courses because professionals deemed them weak ('you are letting your child manipulate you') or incompetent ('you need to set tighter boundaries'), which may well be true. Yet, many of these professionals do not appreciate parents feel they are in a war zone, and have been for many months, if not many years, and are exhausted, permanently on edge ('walking on eggshells'). Having been a parent for a couple of decades with a PDA child, I too have been through that war zone, as well as sharing so many parents' experiences of their war zone. I know how easy it is to focus on the negative, unhappy, and challenging bits. Yet, when parents admonish themselves for not being a 'better parent', their self-esteem becomes more eroded, which then impacts on their mental health. Their resilience is severely weakened, and they are at



GERHARDT, S. (2004) WHY LOVE MATTERS: HOW AFFECTION SHAPES A BABY'S BRAIN. BRUNNER-ROUTLEDGE, HOVE.

increasing risk of poor mental health. Given that our SEN children are totally dependent on parents being able to provide emotionally and financially (e.g. Maslow's theory), it is really important that we support parents as much as we can. They do not need more judging, but more scaffolding about what they need to consider in tweaking their parenting skills around their child's different needs, and a huge reminder of what they do well - like the Dad who told me he "really loves" his children, is "really good at cuddling them" reminding them he loves them, and he loves being funny around them and "acting the clown" making them laugh. These may seem insignificant, but, according to psychologist Sue Gerhardt (2004), this helps wire our children's emotional brain. It builds their self-esteem, their self-worth, and their confidence. This is part of the work we do through The Expert Parent program, and, in doing so, we help repair parents self-esteem and confidence where they no longer worry what other parents think because they are too engrossed in supporting their children with needs. They learn to be and feel like winners - remember Esther Blackman's update a couple of weeks ago - she was relaying exactly that having gone through the EPP. They thought they would need me forever, and then realized they were doing it and surviving, just by tweaking their parenting skill sets. Sometimes, a parenting course just needs to hone in on what you are already doing well.

Have a great weekend!

Lavinia