

The differences between traditional parenting and NVR parenting from the viewpoint of different family members

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As an NVR parent, Dawn often draws on her own NVR experiences when speaking to other parents, carers and professionals about the differences between NVR and traditional parenting approaches. The atmosphere in her home has improved immeasurably and she has begun to wonder how different members of other families perceive their own NVR journey.

This article reflects the views of one family's lived experience of NVR from the viewpoint of the parents and their children. Rachel conducted interviews with each participating family member separately. Dawn then drew the responses together into this document. All three authors then reviewed and edited the article.

All interviewees have read this article and consented to have their words presented as they are. For reasons of confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used.

About the family and the interviews

The family is of dual heritage (White British mother and Black British father). The parents, Julie and Henry, have four children, the older three are "home grown" – 26-year-old son, Jerome, 22-year-old daughter, Jasmine and 19-year-old son, Ash – and one adoptive daughter April who is now 17 years old. They live in a cosmopolitan and leafy suburb of a UK city.

April joined the vibrant family just over 15 years ago. "She was feisty and fun (and still is!) and, as she is also of dual heritage, fitted in to the family 'look'." It was not long after her arrival, however, that April's behaviour deteriorated. She became a "little hedgehog on acid!", gorgeous on the inside, but when she felt 'strong feelings' the spikes came out and someone got hurt. Sometimes she hurt herself, sometimes family members and sometimes students and staff in school.

Having successfully parented their three older children, the parents persisted with their usual parenting style – traditional, loving but boundaried, incentivising good behaviour and punishing undesirable behaviours. With encouragement from professionals, family and friends, Julie and Henry persevered with this parenting style for seven years. It did not work for April

who responded with 'strong feelings' and behaviours that challenged, such as physical aggression, scratching herself and others, putting herself at risk of harm and screaming. The situation became untenable and almost brought the family to their knees.

Six years ago, Julie and Henry encountered NVR – the 'non-violent resistance parenting approach' ... and "the rest is history".

All members of the family were invited to participate. The older son, Jerome, declined to take part. Family members were interviewed individually, by telephone, with broadly the same format. The questions focused on parenting styles, resulting changes in young people's behaviours, relationships between family members, with an opportunity to add anything else they wanted to say. The interviews lasted 20 to 30 minutes each and were recorded and transcribed.

Themes:

1. Change

Both Henry and Julie believe they have dramatically altered their parenting styles over the last few years. Henry reflected, "It was quite difficult to apply" the principles. However, only one of the children, 22-year-old Jasmine, concretely noticed a change: "I definitely

felt a shift in their parenting styles" and "as we got older, their parenting style became more like trying to get to understand in a different way how we were in the wrong or how we had to change". April, the youngest, also said she had noticed a change but felt "like it's been more gradual" and didn't "think I've noticed it drastically".

2. Shouting versus calm

One key action both parents report working hard on, is not "putting fuel onto the fire and making it worse," and not "matching [...] anger with being angry". It is noteworthy that without exception, all three children commented on how much calmer their parents appear in recent years. Ash now experiences Julie as "less angry, less shouty" and he prefers when his parents are not shouting because "when they start shouting, it can escalate the situation". April also said "I don't think they shout anymore" although also stated her father "has a very, very loud voice. It booms through the house". Ash, in contrast, still believes his father "does shout quite a lot," and it "puts me in a mood". Jasmine revealed that "[at home] it's a lot more calm and relaxed".

3. Outcomes of calmer home

As mentioned above, the effects of Henry and Julie implementing the NVR

principles with their family, notably de-escalation, has impacted each of the 'children' differently. Jasmine feels she is "not worried about what my parents' reactions are going to be". She commented "it was definitely a positive thing for my relationship with my parents because they spoke to me with respect, which made me in my turn respect them more". April noticed her parents demonstrating an increasing amount of understanding of her actions and feelings which is helpful.

4. Punishments

Having worked very hard to move away from a more traditional 'rewards and consequences' parenting style, Julie was somewhat disconcerted that only April mentioned this change. She asserted "punishments didn't work" and that "little kids aren't going to learn by you telling them off. They need to learn themselves". April shared that by allowing her to make and address her own mistakes, it helped her learn from them.

5. Change in April's violence

Henry found "learning to prioritise what's really important" via the 'baskets' principle was extremely useful. The first priority behaviour was April's violence and as April herself acknowledged, she is no longer violent. April believes "that comes with maturity and the way my parents have parented me. They treat me like an adult". The parents do not think this is strictly true, but they do actively increase their 'parental presence' with April, listen attentively to her verbal and nonverbal communications and respond using the 'communication model' when appropriate whilst taking into account her perspective and needs.

Ash saw a change in April's behaviour: "In the last few years, there's been a big improvement in her behaviour. Maybe that has been different because of my parents' parenting".

Jasmine has also "definitely noticed that now she [April] doesn't have tantrums in the same way she did when she was a kid they [the tantrums] were a lot shorter and a lot more controlled as a result, I think".

6. Announcement

April was specifically questioned about the two NVR Announcements Julie and Henry have delivered. She acknowledged her parents had "done

that a couple of times" and found it "a bit upsetting because I didn't think my behaviour affected them". As a result, she "was more conscious and aware my 'lash outs' were less because I was keeping it in and I didn't want to upset them".

7. Relationships with April

Since April has reduced her 'lashing out', having tantrums and meltdowns, Ash recognised that his relationship with his youngest sister has "improved recently, is improving". Previously, "the way she'd shout or be rude to my parents negatively affected my relationship with her". Jasmine also observed a change in her relationship with her sister "in a positive way, because as a result, I wasn't seeing my parents as stressed which then made me less resentful to her. There were still always ups and downs. It was never perfect, but definitely a big impact".

8. NVR is not a quick fix

An open question at the end of the interview resulted in Jasmine speaking about NVR and how "it's definitely not a quick thing. It's something that needs to be worked on. It can't just be one adult or parent or guardian that's doing it. It has to be everyone, otherwise that child is going to feel very confused and not going to behave". Consistency, for this young person appears to be key; this idea fits very well with what we as NVR practitioners teach parents, carers and professionals when embarking on their NVR journey.

Conclusion

Exploring the differences between traditional and NVR parenting from the viewpoint of different members within a family has been illuminating and extremely useful. Clearly all three children noticed their parents' intentions to stay calm and appreciate the positive changes that have resulted from these endeavours, namely a reduction in April's difficult outbursts and improved family harmony. Both daughters believe some of these improvements are down to maturation. Whilst maturation has played a part, without Julie and Henry making important changes to their parenting style by adopting each and every NVR principle to the fullest, they would not be seeing such significant changes to either their family dynamic or April's life prospects.

All three authors are directors of NVR Practitioners Consortium CIC:



Dawn Oliver (lead). Please see page 41 for Dawn's biography.



Rachel Braverman (interviewer) is an NVR-informed practitioner and parent expert by experience.



Sophie Doswell is a clinical psychologist and NVR-accredited practitioner (collaborator).

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