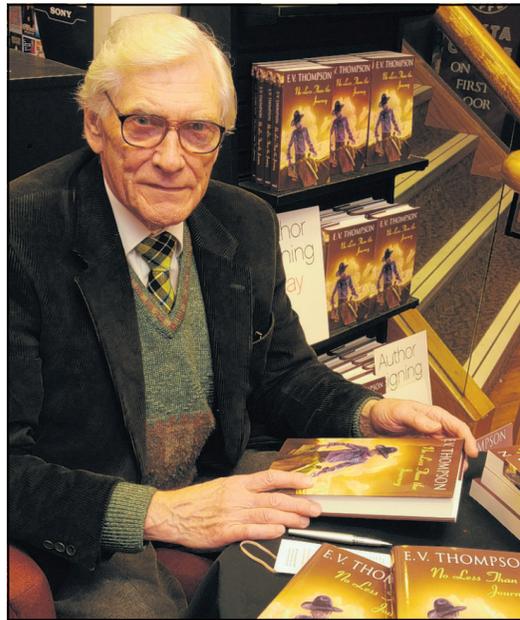


the little READ

Historical novelist **EV THOMPSON**'s newest book, *Churchyard and Hawke*, is a crime thriller set in Cornwall. Aged 78, he lives near Liskeard



IF I WEREN'T TALKING TO YOU, RIGHT NOW I'D BE...

Putting the finishing touches to my next book, *Out of the Storm*, a romance set in north Cornwall.

OTHER THAN WRITING I'M GOOD AT...

Finding excuses not to write.

BUT I'M BAD AT...

Sitting still, doing nothing. There is so much to pack into life.

MY INSPIRATION FOR CHURCHYARD AND HAWKE CAME FROM...

A couple of years ago I wrote *Though the Heavens May Fall*, set mainly in Charlestown, featuring a detective called Amos Hawke, who solved a couple of murders. Doing some research I came across the name Tom Churchyard, a real detective, and I brought them together.

I FIRST STARTED WRITING...

In the Korean War in the 1950s. I was so moved by the Korean refugees caught up in the conflict that I wrote a poem about it. Fortunately for my future career as a writer, I lost it.

THE BOOK I MOST ENJOYED WHEN I WAS A CHILD...

Was *Beltane* the Smith by Jeffrey Farnol, set in the middle ages and about knights and chivalry.

MY FAVOURITE BOOK AND AUTHOR ARE...

Exodus, by Leon Uris (about the foundation of Israel). I was fortunate to have lunch with him many years ago.

AT THE MOMENT I'M READING...

Well, re-reading, Cornish history;

Lake's Parochial History. I very rarely read fiction.

THE LAST FILM I SAW AT THE CINEMA WAS...

Bedknobs and Broomsticks, 30 or more years ago.

WHEN I'M NOT WORKING I LIKE...

Travelling and going to really good restaurants.

IT'S NOT TRENDY BUT I LIKE...

Just relaxing at home on a Saturday night with a nice steak and chips.

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE...

A Lancaster bomber pilot. When I was 15 I joined the Royal Navy.

MY FAVOURITE OBJECT IS...

A watch I bought in 1975 after I won the Historical Novelist Award. It keeps perfect time.

ON TV I ALWAYS WATCH...

The Bill, perhaps as a result of years in the police.

I LOVE CORNWALL BECAUSE...

I feel completely at home here. It has everything that a beautiful county should have and its people have always made me feel that I belong.

BUT IF I COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT THE COUNTY, I'D

Have a little more sun and fewer cars in the summer.

■ EV THOMPSON will be signing copies of *Churchyard and Hawke* at The Bookshelf, Saltash on November 30, 10.30am-1pm and at Waterstone's, New George Street, Plymouth on December 5, noon-2pm

How to tame teenage 'tearaways'

As a dad with children at **that** age, **MARTIN FREEMAN** takes a special interest in the work of behaviour and emotional health consultant **DI LOBBETT**

I'M IN a room at a large community college which is packed with 100 or so parents and I am shifting awkwardly in my seat.

I know why I'm there: for a Teenage Taming Tactics training session with Di Lobbett, a behaviour and emotional health consultant.

I need to be there because I am a bawling, stressed-out failing father of a couple of creatures who are angels one minute and monsters the next.

What I don't understand is why some of the other 100 are here, the happy, relaxed, perfect parents of polite, even-tempered, ever-helpful faultless adolescents.

Perhaps they have come to congratulate themselves on their flawless parenting which has resulted in immaculate offspring. They are here to shake their heads at, and mutter about, the likes of me and mine.

And, yes, heads do move and there is occasional muttering as Di goes through some teen-and-parent scenarios.

The super mums and dads are nodding when Di talks about typical teenage misbehaviour and murmuring agreement when she outlines a parental response that will likely make the situation worse.

Could it be ...?

Good God: Their children aren't perfect. Like mine, they are door-slammers whose tempers flare like fireworks.

And I'm clearly not the only parent who gets stressed and exclaims: "What am I doing wrong and why are my children like that?"

And why do we ask obvious questions? It's all to do with teenagers' hormones, isn't it?

Well no it isn't, says Di.

Yes, there are the hormonal surges and the social pressures.

But an adolescent's brain is different from an adult's she reveals, talking the audience through a little neuroscience.

Di explains: "Recent research indicates that adolescents process some information in the emotional centre of the brain, whereas adults use the neocortex, the area at the front, which is the preserve of higher order functions, such as empathy, analysing cause and effect, moral judgment and planning, in addition to all the learning we do."

"The emotional centre of the brain is quite limited: it is the part of the brain responsible for 'fight or flight'."

One of the things that a teenager cannot do as well as an adult is understanding and reading the facial expressions of others.

Perhaps my children aren't just winding me up. If they can't read my best 'I'm annoyed face', then maybe they can't help the sullen stare they offer in return.

Di also goes through some golden rules.

In fact, none of the advice is Earth-shattering: set boundaries and stick with them; keep your cool; be firm but fair and above all be consistent. Di doesn't use the phrase, but much of



the advice echoes the 'tough love' approach championed by the think tank Demos this month in a report showing that children raised that way become successful adults.

As the session ends there is a happy buzz around the room.

Like me, the other parents feel reassured that neither they nor their children are abnormal. As parents they are not alone in setting boundaries for their children and working hard to get them to stay within those rules.

Call it a united front, call it consistency: whatever, it is less likely to crack under the accusation "you are so unfair!" Your children are unlikely to demand to hang out on the streets until 2am if none of their friends is permitted to either.

Some of what Di advises on how to help children through the difficult years to adulthood is not new; what is very different is who she shares her expertise with.

Her unique approach involves parents, teachers and pupils and reaches

worked together previously when he was at a school in Bristol.

Di says: "A human gives psychotherapy approach starts from the premise that we all have emotional needs that must be met and balanced."

"When emotional needs are not being met that leads to imbalance: anxiety, depression and so on."

There is not a particular behaviour problem at the Callington school, she is at pains to point out, praising the efforts of staff, pupils and parents. "I thought getting over 100 parents along to a meeting like that was just phenomenal," she enthuses.

While she can offer help to individuals who are having difficulties, her Callington focus is wider.

"The focus is not on sitting back and waiting for the problems to happen," she says. "It is sharing knowledge and supporting and providing young people with boundaries and information so they can thrive."

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pupils and groups. There are plans to work with whole year groups of pupils. The 'taming tactics' session with parents was the first of many.

She has already held training sessions with teachers from all the school's feeder primaries and there are plans to extend that reach to parents of those younger children.

The aim is to have a systematic and seamless approach from primary upwards, building and nurturing appropriate emotional behaviour at a young age. Such continuity helps children settle when they move to secondary school.

Whoever she is working with – teachers, young people or parents, the basis is emotional health and well-being.

"I am not a guru," she tells me. "The guru approach doesn't work."

"This is about sustainability, building networks of support throughout the community."

"If you live near three or four parents who are trained, they can support other parents through difficult times."

DIFFERENT WAVELENGTHS: Psychologist Di Lobbett, whose work model on pupil behaviour may be copied nationally

opment ranked the UK 24th out of 29 European states on the well being of its young people.

"The youngsters I work with feel that they are not loved. That might not be the case, but that is what they feel. They feel they do not belong."

The many problems that depression and unhappiness can lead to include a greater likelihood to abuse drugs and alcohol, with the consequences for their own health and for society in general in terms of related anti-social behaviour and crime.

"The perception (in society) is that young people's behaviour is worse today leading to a moral panic. Poor behaviour is often an external manifestation of internal distress. There should be a moral panic about poor adolescent mental health. In my view that is where the problem lies," she concludes.

That does not mean a wishy-washy approach of constantly giving in to children.

Di cites a household she knows of, where two professionals are struggling, giving their children free rein and giving in to their demands.

"The children run that household. It is a miserable place."

Why, though, are so many of our children apparently unhappy, unloved and depressed?

"Parents are so busy trying to keep their heads above water financially," she says, "and they are less available to their children at an emotional level to parent them."

"A lot of single parents, some with two jobs, are trying to keep body and soul together."

The answer is to be aware of how our children feel and to be more available for them: to talk and to listen. We also need to understand why our children, especially adolescents behave like they do – bearing in mind how their brains are different, for example.

There are those all-important boundaries to be laid down; immediate rewards given (praise and small treats) when our children keep to those rules; a warning issued and then a penalty handed out when they are broken.

And tell children what their rights, responsibilities and privileges are.

Says Di: "I can fill an entire whiteboard when I ask a group of children to tell me what they believe are their rights: TVs and DVD players in their rooms, iPods, everything you could think of."

"But responsibilities? Sometimes they can't think of anything."

"And privileges? Some don't even know what the word means. If they learn that something is a privilege not a right, they won't get half as angry when it is taken away when they misbehave."

Di's sensible, down-to-Earth approach speaks as much for her own experience as a parent as it does from her expertise as a professional and is laced with humour and humility.

"I have brought up five children (now aged 32 to 23) who never did anything wrong," she says straight-faced.

"They were paragons of virtue," she adds – and then laughs.

"If they were in this room now they would be competing with each other to give examples of my parenting mistakes. Everybody makes mistakes. I can help others learn from my mistakes."

"This (behaviour support system) does not mean that things won't go wrong. But we will know how better to put them right when they do."

Given some time and understanding, the kids will be all right. And, given the same, so will the parents and teachers.

Di Lobbett's golden rules

■ Never allow a poor behaviour to go unpunished – consequences must be followed through irrespective of domestic politics or emotion.

■ Be consistent – allowing a child to defy you four or five times before imposing a huge consequence teaches them that they get to be successful on four or five 'trials' before anything happens. This approach will not change behaviour. It is the inevitability of the consequence that changes behaviour – not the size of it.

■ Never argue with children. They are highly skilled at drawing adults into conflict during which the adult can very quickly find themselves justifying their position. This tells young people exactly where the buttons are and how to press them; it also significantly undermines your status in their eyes. Children have the right not to agree, but not the right not to comply: you will never persuade a child that your view is correct and theirs is wrong.

■ Be specific about the behaviour that you want. Avoid 'fuzzy' words and phrases such as, "You've been really good today." What exactly has been good? An approach far more likely to secure the good behaviour again would be, "I'm really pleased that you have chosen to listen this morning. You have been very polite to me and you have helped by setting the table. Well done!"

■ Never allow yourself to be 'beaten into submission' by a child. "No" must mean "no". To allow any child to grind you down by their whining, arguing, defiance or tantrums teaches them very clearly that rules do not apply to them. Children who learn this are very likely to grow up to be very unsuccessful in future relationships with peers or partners. A child given too much power when young will likely slide beyond the control of parents and school during adolescence – a child out of control is a frightened child. In the face of rudeness, address the rudeness not the point being made. A poor behaviour, of any kind *must never work*.

■ Make sure consequences are concrete. Being angry or giving a child a 'good telling off' is not the sanction adults think it is and fails to change behaviour. A real sanction must be concrete such as loss of computer time, confiscation of a treasured item, going to bed 10 minutes early. Consequences must be incremental so don't ground your child for a week – that effectively puts you under house arrest trying to impose your own unworkable sanction. Instead, insist your child come in half an hour earlier and increase the time if the behaviour doesn't change.