

INSIGHTS

Use your words Dad



Seven-year-old Thomas lay crying on his bed wrapped in the arms of his father. Thomas was upset and his dad was trying to find out what was bothering his son. His voice was quiet, and his words were soothing.

Gradually, Thomas opened up, sharing with his father how his best friend had embarrassed him in front of others at school. Unable to articulate his disappointment and anger, Thomas's father did so for him. "I guess you feel let down. I'd be really mad too if that happened to me."

Thomas let out a sigh, relaxing even more into his father's embrace knowing he understood how he felt. Empathy has a soothing effect on upset children.

Popular parenting author Steve Biddulph is correct when he wrote that activity is the main language of fathering. Dads use physical touch and play to build relationships and as a tool to develop self-control, teamwork, fairness, and other values.

However, if activity is the only way a man relates to his children, his impact will be limited. As Thomas's father discovered, physical touch may provide an entry point but it's through talking that we get to the heart of matters that bother children and young people.

Anecdotally, talking with kids about their worries and anxieties is still largely a mother's preserve. Sexuality educators report that mothers do most of the talking when it comes to sexuality, respectful relationships, and consent.

Talking through personal problems with a son or daughter is a new role for many men, especially for a generation whose fathers stoically advised them 'get on with it' when problems emerged. Many males feel more comfortable giving advice rather than solace to kids who are struggling.

The most effective parents are those who adapt to the times in which they live. The COVID-19 era requires parents to be even more patient, calm and focused on children's wellbeing. Parents of both genders need to communicate from their hearts as well as their heads, finding words to support and heal, as well as to advise when children and young people struggle.



Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.