Janey instructs the girls in the importance of self awareness

TOP EQ TIPS

- Knowing your values means you won't be swayed or manipulated by others
- Don't forget that teenagers' developing brains are influenced by your behaviour
- Calm and predictable attitudes command authority and respect
- Preventing unacceptable behaviour is more effective than curing through punishment
- Don't react to challenging behaviour
- Teenagers are emotional – calm adult responses defuse confrontation

From small beginnings

Two years ago, Janey and her business partner, Naella Grew, began speaking to parents of teenagers, running different sessions for mothers and fathers in their own home. For many, and particularly for the fathers, the sessions were a breath of fresh air, exploring whether they were getting it right and if not, how they could improve their emotional literacy. Emotional literacy is being able to express your emotions appropriately when it comes to defusing perennial arguments about, say, tattoos or piercings, or sex and drugs.

Now, Janey and Naella are keen to take their courses into more schools up and down the country. "First we need head teachers and governors to buy into what we're offering, before it can filter down to staff, parents and pupils," says Janey. "We're writing to heads and offering a short interactive presentation which, in the first instance, allows senior management and staff to get a feel for the course material. This has to be our starting point."

At Queen Mary's, Johnson remains impressed and another course for more of the staff is planned for September. "I think I now have a better understanding of what makes a girl tick and how young brains are developing," she says. "It's about encouraging girls to help themselves but also about me not becoming too close to their troubles. I feel I'm now able to listen and talk through a problem without having to 'live' it with them. This is very important in my job, which, at times, is a bit like being in a goldfish bowl!"

Working on all levels

Janey and Naella have also been working with the school prefects and girls in Years 7 and 10 at Queen Mary's, holding a series of weekly sessions focussing on enhancing awareness of self and others to promote better relationships and calmer, more confident teenagers.

The girls enjoy listening to a non-parent. "It's been very useful, especially over the exam period when you need to keep calm," reflects Thissy Gunasekera, who is 16 and a prefect. "If I was feeling a bit stressed I now have the ability to calm myself by visualising an image in my head. It seems to do the trick. The course has also encouraged me to help the younger girls. For the first time, I'm confident that I have some of the answers."

Another prefect, Jennie Frewen, also 16, concurs. "I picked up on the body language, the way in which the vibes you give off can catch the mood of others when you enter a room. If you're feeling happy and bubbly, others will feed off the emotions you're putting out," she says. "I also found what makes people sad or bitter, and what could be the cause of such feelings, really interesting. I certainly took ideas away from the sessions that have already helped me."

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The social and emotional aspects of learning

The state system operates something called the SEAL Initiative (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning), which is a programme that helps absorb aspects of emotional learning into the curriculum, but so far the independent sector has yet to fully embrace the subject of EQ. Those that have include:

- Queen Mary's School in Yorkshire adopted Janey Downshire's course as it has an idiosyncratic and individual approach to learning
- Eton College in Berkshire has a certain amount of inset staff training in EQ
- Wellington College in Berkshire has a progressive approach to learning that considers a pupil's brainpower should not to be simply about IQ:

"Life is about learning about the joys and wonder of human relationships, nature, art and indeed the eternal. Not allowing these to be at the heart of the school is not just a shame, it is profoundly negligent," declares master Anthony Seldon, who believes intelligence can be measured in many different ways.

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