



Family misfortunes

AS the debate on smacking children continues, and as a Scottish law outlawing smacking is currently being considered, BBC1's *A Good Smack?* was a welcome reminder of the issues involved. Instead of lofty proselytising,

the programme focused on three families who routinely use physical punishment as a means of discipline, and followed their daily routines.

One harassed dad with four amiable but unruly offspring appeared to smack as often as he blinked, and the viewing

(even as a parent used to tantrums and indignant wails) became rather uncomfortable as the blows rained down.

On hand to offer advice was childcare expert and author Karen Sullivan whose approach was that good parenting should not involve physical violence, but rather child empowerment, reasoning and rewards. This all sounded rosy but what about reality? Well, Karen's advice was taken on board by two of the families and rigidly stuck to for the ensuing weeks. It was very pleasing to see positive outcomes emerging, while the thwacks and howls diminished in the same measure.

Equally fascinating (and traumatic for those involved) was *Teen Species* (BBC2), a three-part appraisal of the physical and mental trials and tribulations of puberty. We all know that the teenage years involves dealing with moody, difficult, uncooperative, embarrassing, badly dressed geeks (and that's just the parents), but at least this series provided some scientific explanations for this troubled phase in life.

Charming children who spent their leisure hours playing with My Little Pony and building Airfix models suddenly turn into hideous monsters interested in make-up and learning intricate dance steps (girls) or retreat to their rooms for bouts of nu-metal and self-abuse (boys).

Huge praise must go to the brave tweenies baring their psyches and bodies for the unflinching gaze of the camera as their boobs grow, voices break, and zits erupt. While the science could have been more upfront the entertainment factor remained high, due in no small part to the rash of embarrassing memories from one's own teenage years that were elicited by the current experiences all too graphically described.

Teenage troubles of a more serious nature were highlighted in the Channel 4 series *Inside My Head*, which dealt with adolescent mental health problems. I didn't catch all of the programmes but the two I watched dealt with schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder and depression.

Once again the video camera was thrust unsparingly into the lives of genuinely troubled teenagers and the protagonists bravely bared their souls, tears, traumas and therapy. Informed psychological comment was negligible but the pictures told a thousand harrowing words and put into perspective 'normal' teenage problems such as growth spurts, acne, and unwanted erections.

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Pressing ahead

Every month the press office takes hundreds of calls from journalists. They are either seeking information about an aspect of psychology, or requesting a psychologist's perspective on a story they are working on.

Just over a thousand members currently contribute to the Society's work to raise public awareness of psychology and increase the influence of psychological practice in society by taking calls from journalists passed on by the press office. This service provides a breadth and depth of information that is highly praised by the media and envied by many other organisations.

A hearty 'thank you' goes out from the Press Committee to all who currently help, along with a call for any other Chartered members interested in pitching in. Anyone who wants more information about joining the ranks of the members who are doing so much to build the reputation of psychology should call the press office on 0116 252 9500 or e-mail doubro@bps.org.uk.

Media watch – your views

From the January issue, we hope to introduce some changes to 'Media watch'. Each month will cover the press, radio and TV, instead of alternating between them. And rather than mainly commenting after the event, we will also include more tips on how to get the most out of your interactions with the media.

But we'd welcome your views on how we could best use the pages to encourage the dissemination of psychological research and practice. What would you like to see included? Contact the press office on 0116 252 9500 or e-mail doubro@bps.org.uk. You can also act as the eyes and ears of the Society: if you want to make a comment on how psychology is portrayed in a current news story, we'd like to hear from you.