

## INSIGHTS

### Use your words Dad



Fourteen-year-old William sat heavy-hearted in the chair with his father next to him, with an arm on his shoulder. William was upset and his dad was trying to find out what was bothering him. His voice was quiet, and his words were soothing.

William told his father that a friend had lied about him to a girl in his class. He told her that William had been spreading rumours about her around school. Unable to articulate his shame and disappointment William's father did so for him. "I guess you feel embarrassed and let down by your friend. I'd be mad as well if something like that happened to me."

William began to sob as he relaxed into his father's arms, secure in the knowledge that someone close to him understood how he was feeling. Empathy has a calming effect on young people.

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, then his impact will be limited. As William'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 advised them 'get on with it' when problems emerged. Many men feel more comfortable giving advice rather than solace when kids struggle.

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 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.