

Three Silver Bullets



**The role of behaviourism, tough
love in a modern society.**

David Bartlett MBE

Training Information for Pear Tree Staff

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About the author



David Bartlett founded Pear Tree Projects in 1990. He was motivated by a fundamental desire to provide an environment in which children in the care system could thrive. He used his rural roots and understanding of the natural world to guide this journey which today has six residential homes and a special school based on the organization's five farms which cover over 500 acres.

David has assessed thousands of children and young people, providing long term care and education to hundreds of children. He has interviewed thousands of staff of which hundreds have been employed, some for many years.

He has developed a system to measure, monitor and promote emotional wellbeing in children.

The system was subject to an independent research project

which looked at a group of children over a ten-year period and concluded the children who were involved in the “marginal gains” process are helped to make significant psychological progress. He has fine-tuned the system for over thirty years and philanthropically made it freely available to all children in the UK and an international version which can be used by any child at any age and stage in any setting throughout the world.

A development of this marginal gains process is the creation of two ‘apps’ entitled - “Preparation for Employment” and “Emotional Well-being Indicator”. These ‘apps’ are freely available for anyone to use at any time, giving detailed advice on areas identified.

David was awarded the MBE in 2016 for founding Pear Tree Projects and services to children and young people in North East of England. The school has only ever been rated Outstanding by the UK regulator; The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills of His Majesty’s government (OFSTED).

Foreword by Christine Sketchley, Educational Psychologist

David's latest publication, *Three Silver Bullets*, generously provides us, the readers, with a valuable amalgamation of knowledgeable reflection, top picks from informed literature review and immense expertise in the positive social and emotional guidance of children and young people. Its culmination provides a wealth of precise analysis for informed intervention, better understood having walked its journey accompanied by combined wisdom, courage, sensitivity and care. Its contents are difficult to argue against, for its rationale sits so comfortably with the reality of our increasingly fragile world. The result is a textbook of supreme logic, and intelligent rumination at its best.

August 2025

Foreword by Dr P J Kennedy Clinical/Forensic Psychologist and Author BSc (Hons), MSc, D Clin Psych, PgCert, C Psychol, AFBPsS

'A sage 21st century reflection on developmentally sensitive human social learning. It reads like having an authentic, warm and genuine conversation with a pragmatic wisdom that seeks to openly engage, inform and ground practitioners, systems and policy makers alike'.

September 2025

Preface

“If I had more time, I would have written you a shorter note”.
Mark Twain. This makes reference to the concept that the more you know of a subject the less you should need to write as a result of the ability to articulate key points concisely.

What does the “Silver Bullet” mean? This saying is a metaphor for the best solution to a complex problem. The “silver bullet” means getting to the heart of the problem with an effective solution putting all other distractions or complexities to one side. With this in mind, this book is concise and doesn’t bombard the reader with detail but tries to give the right information at the right time within the context of promoting a discussion.

As I reach the 35th anniversary of the formation of my organisation, I find it’s time to reflect on where we have come from and consider where we are going as a society.

I started Pear Tree in the summer of 1990 when the world was a very different place. Only a few people had a mobile phone, there was no internet, just a land line, which you rushed to answer before the bell stopped ringing because if you missed the caller you had no way of knowing who had tried to call you. Calls were short to keep the cost down, especially if it was long distance.

Later we had a fax machine to send messages and documents. We made the rules up as we went as regulations were limited and we had to base our practice on common sense and keeping everyone safe. We had to think for ourselves.

I drove a big red Land Rover that could carry 12 people, around the area collecting children that wouldn't go to school for a short journey to my small farm to learn skills on the farm and lessons in the farmhouse kitchen. The reputation grew quickly but also because after a day at our service, they always wanted to come back, even though the first lesson was how to follow instructions. The adults were in charge and as a result they felt safe.

This was to grow into the multi award winning and multimillion pound service, but its roots started with a row of welly boots at the back door of a semi derelict farm cottage as some very complex and challenging children were engaged in their education.

The children we looked after were very similar to the children we look after today. We didn't have issues to do with technology and social media as there were none. Most children who came to us appeared slight and in need of sustenance. Good care and a good feed went along way. Today it's regulating intake and ensuring exercise and activity are part of the daily plan to reduce weight instead of trying to put it on.

There was a high ratio of long serving social workers, most had been around the block a few times, as they say, whatever you presented them with, "it was not their first rodeo". They were experienced and more like the police than the police are today.

Employment was simple and there was a good supply of ex-professionals from a wide range of backgrounds who were

not yet ready for retirement and wanted to do something practical that would make a difference. Indeed, the belief that we were making a difference was the key selling point of our recruitment campaign. Their life experiences in other sectors meant we had a wide range of people and skill base, that were hugely important to a growing organisation, today we would call it “cognitive diversity”. That section of society is no longer available as burn out and the option of not working at all has removed these people from the jobs market.

This is not to say “things were better in the past” as many would expect, far from it, there are so many things that we do much better than before. Information technology for one, important information can be sent to many relevant people in a nano second. Which is just as well as the amount of information we have to process is significantly more. Time saved by improved technology is used up by the increased expectation of more and more detail, much of which adds value to the service as just one example. However, I do worry we have forgotten the basics.

Today in social care and education, we are at a pivotal moment in time as the sector is subject to scrutiny and micromanagement on a level never seen before. In many ways we have lost sight of what we are trying to achieve and overwhelmed by administrative procedures and expectations. The regulatory process has become toxic, and the impact of well-meaning support has placed a huge financial burden on the state with little to show for the investment in terms of a progressive society. If anything, society is deteriorating within

a context of world conflict. The growth of knife and gun crime amongst young people is in itself an indicator to failing values. Why are our teenagers killing each other? When did it become ok for boys to attack girls or indeed girls attack boys or the most vulnerable members of the community?

The western world is fragile and countries near to us are considering the need to conscript young people into their military. In the UK it is thought that only 10% of fighting aged people think they would fight for their country, although many are happy to fight each other. The United Kingdom is far from united.

In this book I have tried to tackle an important subject to understand. Where did we go off track and if we can identify that, can we get back on track?

Taylor Sheridan the well-known and hugely successful script writer, actor, and producer presented a character in one of his productions that stated - "When empires reach the end of their life cycle, the emperors believe they have become Gods, all the people believe they have become Emperors and stop wanting to do things for themselves. As a result, they import solutions for the jobs they don't want to do. They reject everything that built the empire in the first place. They attack their own symbols and those that defend their empire". In a self-destructive mode they become vulnerable and untimely destroy themselves or allow others to do so.

As someone who values western society and democracy, I find

the prospect that we are approaching the end of a progressive cycle difficult to even think about. However, this fictional observation seems to close for comfort and appears to be relevant on so many levels. This must resonate with us all as our position in this world is fragile. We mustn't fall into the trap of thinking we are so secure we can take without contributing and have the right to live for ever at others expense.

There are times when we see a significant societal shift. I believe this happened more recently in the forty years from the 1980s to 2020. We saw the abandonment of behavioural theory in education in the last half of the 20th Century, which had an impact on all of society as we are all educated as children before we grow into adults. Also, at the beginning of the 21st Century we saw the development of the smart phone and social media which has had a significant impact on childhood development and again on society. The way we educate our children, the expectations we have and the values we promote will determine the society we have in the future. Therefore, this is not about education, it's about all of our futures.

In this book I try to offer an explanation as to how this may have come about and the solution or silver bullets to start a discussion about suitable ways forward.

So, what are the ‘Three silver bullets’?

There are many potential silver bullets in the arsenal of solutions to problems, these are the “silver bullets” I wish to highlight as I believe they are significant to societal development.

- **Silver bullet 1:**

Allow the return of behaviouralism to have a role in our everyday lives and practice.

- **Silver Bullet 2:**

Increase the speed and effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System.

- **Silver bullet 3:**

The solution to social problems is ‘employment’, how do we make more tax payers?

As we begin the second quarter of the 21st Century, we are at a time of huge political change. Indicators of societal decline both nationally and internationally are evident and we have had to realise that for the first quarter of the 21st Century we were content in the belief that the horrors of the 20th Century would never be repeated. The war in Ukraine and the Middle East make it absolutely clear this was a false perception.

At the end of 2024 I watched the news with degree of alarm as President Putin made it clear that as a result of the use of British weapons on Russia we were now “in the war”.

Part of my alarm was not just the pretty clear declaration of war against my country, but the fact that this news item was second on the list of news headlines giving way to the funeral of a pop star. The power of popularism clearly evident, if only as a comfort blanket to hide the reality of the world we live in.

This was in sharp contrast to the summer of 1939 when every household in the country was sitting around the ‘wireless’ eagerly hanging on to every word of the prime minister as he informed us of the failure of negotiations, as war was declared against Germany.

It is worthy of note that the horrors of the Second World War that seem so long ago and so far removed from anything we understand today, are still within living memory for a small number of remaining few.

Although the Second World War feels like a long time ago, in the grand scheme of human development, it's not. Just because we've seen huge advances in technology (phones, the internet, medicine), we assume that we've also advanced in our behaviour, values, and morals. But that assumption is false—our basic human instincts and behaviors haven't really changed much. If we can accept, we'll be better equipped to develop realistic strategies for dealing with challenges and strategies that fit with how humans actually behave, rather than how we wish they would behave.

Understanding the limits of human development and the difference between progress in technology versus progress in human nature is a central theme of the entire book.

In the second half of the 20th Century the academic world turned its back on the idea that as natural beings in a natural world we responded to the world around us, our environment and this impacted our behaviour. 'Behaviourist theory or behaviourism.'

The reason for this was the belief that our 'beings' were directed by a deeper more complex range of factors and thus 'cognitive theory' superseded 'behaviourist theory'.

This I believe is the silver bullet in the process of understanding the problem. Rather than accepting both had a place in the understanding of human science, behaviourist theory was rejected and ignored as wrong.

The consequences of this shift of thinking is the impact on the

ethos of British (if not western) society as significant parts of the process of learning and development both individually and within the scope of the development of society are inhibited, delayed, for some nonfunctional I believe the root cause of our perceived societal decline.

“Why do we feel we are experiencing societal decline”?

The answer to this question will vary hugely depending on who you are and where you live. For those living in a privileged position in society, both socially and geographically it may be down to the frustration caused by watching what appear to be bizarre behaviours of others and the constant demand for more taxes to pay for the ever-increasing cost of perverse behaviours.

For others, the societal decline is felt daily as the risk of the impact of crime is ever increasing. From the inevitable increase cost of products due to shoplifting (the term minimises the perception, this is theft with intimidation and threat of violence) through to anti-social behaviour on the streets. The societal decline has huge negative impact on people’s quality of life.

Meanwhile, it is also felt that there is no one there who can help. The support of stoic neighbours within a community is no longer relevant. As the perception is they would most likely be in more trouble than the perpetrator if they were to take any form of action and ultimately redirect the threat toward themselves for whom there is no help or support.

(Indeed it is thought that the lack of confidence in the local community to safeguard and help keep in order and therefore safe, local children is the reason so few children have the scope to play freely outside. In days gone by parents could be confident of many sets of eyes looking out for their kids. Those eyes are now elsewhere. The absence of free play is likely to have other

impacts on children unable to learn social and communication skills at the right age and stage.)

The police are perceived to be too involved in other matters, including the comments made online by children to children. This used to happen in the playground and for whom the online experience has become a digital playground. The belief that the police can help with antisocial behaviour has in many cases disappeared along with shoplifting.

In the case of shoplifting, the police actually announced to all criminals, current or aspiring that they would not attempt to investigate shoplifting under a certain value measured in pounds Sterling, not in fear of physical or emotional harm to those shop owners and their staff. This announcement demonstrates that behaviourism is no longer at the forefront of modern policing and why this needs to be corrected.

They (the police) completely failed to recognise the impact of this announcement or the cumulative impact of thousands of incidents of low monetary value thefts on the high street, the shop owners or the retail industry as a whole.

It was the most significant ill-considered announcement on the high street since the 1990's when the head of Ratner's Jewelers announced to the world that the reason they could retail their products at such cheap prices was because the jewelry was "total crap". In this case the consequences were only felt by themselves, they went bankrupt.

In the case of the police force, the consequences were felt by everyone in the retail industry and eventually us all as the impact is a deteriorating high street and this is only the start of it. How many young criminals start their careers with low value shoplifting and progress from that starting point to much more serious crimes.

As a result, the high street is considered “free access” to all without paying to those who had no problem with their deteriorating reputation or any moral responsibility. This has even led to a new term in our language - “Kamikaze shoplifting” where thieves brazenly walk into a shop and remove goods in full view of other paying customers and shop workers. The same process is happening to pub landlords and restaurant owners providing meals to those who simply leave without paying. The new term for this behaviour is “Dine and Dash”.

The concept of fear has transferred from the criminal of being caught and who would then suffer ‘consequences’ to the public with the perceived likelihood of no form of any official support. This is inverted behaviourist practice.

- The criminal would not suffer consequences.
- The victim would not experience support.

A good example of behaviourist practice is simple.

The criminal must believe there is a high likelihood of being caught and suffering negative consequences. The old-fashioned

term used to be “punishment”. As a result of cognitive theory this is now thought to be wrong, and the focus should be on rehabilitation and compensatory experiences for the reasons for being a criminal. Negative consequences in my view are actually hugely important in the rehabilitation process as a way of reinforcing the negative behaviour and changing that behaviour.

The term PICNIC - positive immediate consequences for positive behaviour, negative immediate consequences for negative behaviour as identified by the behaviouralist Monty Roberts (Horse sense for people) is the simplest and most accurate way of describing what is required.

The victim must feel that they will be responded to by the Police, that they will do everything they possibly can to catch the perpetrator, and the perpetrator will experience negative consequences when caught by the police and subjected to the justice system.

This simple process is no longer the perception of most, and unlikely to be the reality for any person who makes wrong choices that negatively impact on others.

In situations where there is no expected police support, people will try to take some form of action themselves, whether this be increased physical security, group action like neighbourhood and farm watch groups or in some cases direct action.

In August 2025 ITV news reports of a shop owner who decided to post the CCTV images of shoplifters on social media. The impact

of being shamed was immediate. Public humiliation resulted in thieves or their families returning to the shop to offer to pay for the items taken in return for the posts being removed to avoid the public shaming. This is the digital 21st Century version of the village stocks. Immediate negative consequences results in immediate behaviour change.

Silver Bullet 2 - Increase the speed and effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Restorative justice

As explained above, the role of the justice system is to maintain the balance in society between those who negatively impact on others and those who are impacted by others.

The reality is we are all impacted by crime even if we aren't a victim of crime. The cost of criminality is huge and has to be paid for by taxes we all contribute to (that is those who continue to engage in an economic society. At the time of writing, we have nine million people who either can't or won't contribute). This is at the most obvious basic level. The truth is we are all impacted much more than the cost of taxes by fear and anxiety on various levels depending on your circumstances.

Whilst we may have concerns about where we are and where we are going, the truth is British Society is one of the safest in the world. Compared to other countries we have possibly one of the best justice systems in the world and subsequently one of the safest societies also. We mustn't hide behind this as false reassurance that all is well and will always be well. A deterioration is a deterioration, without change who knows where we could end up.

At the time of writing this chapter, I am back in South Africa. A country with a chequered past with both admiral qualities such as the "truth and reconciliation" process the country undertook, led by the most respected and eminent leader Nelson Mandela following the disbandment of apartheid.

This process influenced the peace process in Northern Ireland and subsequently benefited everyone in Britain. However, today South Africa is a country crippled by crime and the fear of crime.

Communities in rural areas use electric fencing to form game reserves to protect themselves from the beasts of the jungle, while in urban areas they create gated communities sometimes within larger gated communities to protect themselves from becoming a victim of crime.

This mass-produced green fencing is now visible in the UK and is likely to become increasingly more popular, as the need for secure areas in both rural and urban communities becomes more and more necessary. Those that can, try to exercise what control they can by increasing their own security rather than relying on the police and justice system to support them.

South Africa is indeed a country that may well represent a contemporary vision of our future. The only hope is that the criminal justice system finds the balance needed to maintain a harmonious society. This is not aspirational but the only way to avoid a deteriorating situation. To do this it has to recognise the problem which I believe is forgetting the need to embrace a behaviouralist approach and not fall to the thinking this approach is outdated and has no place in the formulae of the multi-faceted approach that is needed.

A good example of how this can happen is in the teaching and

promoting of restorative justice which has become victim itself of the process called 'concept creep' (The coddling of the American Mind). This is the process when you start out with a really good idea that over time is slowly altered and key points missed to become something very different to how it was originally intended.

The restorative justice system originated in Canada in the 1970s and was developed by Mark Yantzi a Mennonite pastor in Ontario who discovered that conversations between victims and offenders was hugely successful in changing the emotional impact of the victim and the behaviour of the offender. A "win win" situation.

"Restorative justice is a broader application in respect of people and relationships. It makes the person who has offended responsible and accountable with the ultimate aim of repairing what's damaged, at its core relationships. When possible, trying to prevent issues before they start. This process puts victims at the centre and is valuable in terms of providing emotional support."

However, it must be remembered that this process doesn't fit every misdemeanour, mishap or crime. To start with there has to be an identified victim that can engage in the process. The process has to be voluntary, and the offender has to want to engage. This I feel must also be genuine and not just a desire to minimise the impact to the offender with a reduced consequence, sanction or punishment.

The training currently being offered to those that work with young people promotes that it must not replace consequences, sanctions or punishments but run alongside when appropriate. When meaningful then these consequences can and should be reduced.

Current regulatory requirements have lost sight of the detail. The ‘concept creep’ has gone as far as there are to be no sanctions at all, which are now considered bad practise, whilst any form of punishment is thought to be downright wrong.

The Guide to Children’s Homes Regulation 9.38 regulation 19 (2)¹ states that “Sanctions for poor behaviour should not be punitive but should be restorative in nature, so that children are helped to recognise the impact of their behaviour on other children, the staff caring for them and the wider community. In some cases it will be important for children to make restitution in some form to anyone hurt by their behaviour”.

This advice is wholly important and not to be minimised in any way, however key word here is “should”.

“When the text uses the word ‘must’ in guidance it refers to a statutory requirement under primary legislation, regulations or case law. Where the text says ‘should’, it refers

¹ Department for Education. (2015). Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations including the Quality Standards (para. 9.38). London: Department for Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-2015-guide-to-the-quality-standards>

to a recommendation guidance and good practice”.²

The concept creep here is that this is currently being inspected by OFSTED as ‘must’ when it should be ‘should’. There are times when incidents occur that simply don’t meet the criteria for restorative practice, and as such some form of sanction that provides restitution is required but this is not recognised at inspection. Managers in social care and education need to be both cautious and skilful in the way they navigate such circumstances.

The view is that restorative justice should be applied in every circumstance, leading to a situation where young people being brought up in regulated environments are left with a completely false view of the world which doesn’t prepare them for adult life and the real-life implications to relationships.

A recent consultation inspection by a credible national organisation stated ³- “ UK law tells us clearly that people are criminally responsible from the age of 10 and whilst a children’s home will usually (and hopefully) decide not to criminalise a young person, the same cannot be said for other places / people with whom the young people will interact on a daily basis. Therefore, we have to be mindful of not giving young people a false sense of the wider world, so educating young people around this is important in terms of their general life education and awareness”.

² The Children’s Homes (England) Regulations 2015, SI 2015/541, Regulation 19(2). Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/contents/made>
³ NYAS, report available on request.

The above statement clearly acknowledges that expected professional practice creates a false sense of 'being beyond the law' which unless strategised for can damage young people's development.

Yet not that long ago in 2008 'The Authentic Warmth Dimension of Professional Childcare' stated "in short, we know that parental rejection, abuse, neglect not only causes grievous developmental harm, but bodily harm as well. That the way our young people have been brought up and experiences of life can have an impact on the way a young person's brain has developed. Therefore, a carefully considered approach is nearly always necessary without it undermining good parenting styles and important natural reactions, in preparation for how the rest of the world may deal with these young people, once they are more exposed to the wider community".⁴

The above recognises that young people with a history of adverse experiences have been damaged both mentally and physically, however, the authors also recognise the importance of good parenting and natural reactions. Perhaps the best clue to what is required is in the title, 'Authentic Warmth'. In this world of micromanagement and an overzealous regulator that scrutinises and criticises every comment, natural reactions are contained and this comprises good parenting styles.

Those care managers and educationalists in whatever capacity of course are left to make sure as managers they 'do things right'.

4 Cameron, R. J., & Maginn, C. (2008). The authentic warmth dimension of professional childcare. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(6), 1151–1172 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23724053>

What is needed is 'leadership' which is 'doing the right thing'.
(Peter Drucker, father of modern management theory.)^{5 6}

As a result, those that are paid to look after and educate young people to prepare them for the adult world reinforce the problem by failing to ensure that negative consequences are imposed for negative behaviour.

Many young people repeatedly offend as a result, but the statistics are impacted by the fact that many more incidents of crime are not reported, as stated, it is expected practice not to criminalise, leading to false statistics and information.

Restorative justice works, it must do! It does but not in every circumstance.

The next piece of the puzzle is if professionals are to engage in the process what is the process?

Restorative Justice = what happens in the criminal justice system.

Restorative process = how those working with young people interpret the lessons learned in the criminal justice system and apply this in every day situations.

Restorative practice = how the above process is implemented.

Restorative practice is important, and I also believe what every positive parent does as a matter of good parenting. It's just not given a name or identified as a process. It is simply this ~

⁵ Drucker, P. F. (1954). *The practice of management*. Harper & Brothers.

⁶ Rao, M. S. (2021). Peter Drucker's principles, philosophies, and practices. *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership*, 14(2), Article 16.

1 -You have two children, one hits the other, this causes harm and distress. The parent takes control of the perpetrator. As a result, the offender is remorseful and indicates regret over the damage caused.

2 -The parent talks with the perpetrator and the victim together and gets the perpetrator to acknowledge the harm caused and the impact on the victim. This should include reassurance that this will not occur again. If not, the process has not been genuine.

3 - The victim acknowledges the perpetrators regret and reassurance it will not happen again and feels supported by the parent. Their emotional needs have been met and relationships restored.

Whilst this is at a most simple level and should be built on depending on the circumstances, the above process has happened in every home and playground since time began and playgrounds were invented. The restorative process is a way of ensuring all teachers and carers provide appropriate parenting by putting a framework around this so that everyone does the same thing.

Within this process anyone involved in group management of any size has to factor in the need for justice to be seen to be done. To do this we must think about the issue of suitable “deterrent”.

The two words crime and punishment have gone together for centuries. It is only with the abandonment of behaviourist theory that ‘punishment’ has become a taboo word.

The purpose of punishment in a historical context is to deter the offender from repeating the same crime again. However, its primary role is to deter others who have witnessed an offence from copying or repeating the same crime.

The role of a 'deterrent' is not to be used in the form of action taken. No one wants to inflict negative punishments on anyone. What is desired is that others see the potential for negative consequences and are 'deterred' from doing the crime or negative actions in the first place. As such the 'deterrent' is actually used as it is present in the mind of those being 'deterred' every day. A factor currently missing from the equation of options when it comes to restorative practice. In my view the concept of a deterrent is slipping from the national consciousness.

Whatever you want to call it, natural consequences, sanctions or punishment, there must be some form of deterrent or further episodes of the same kind of behaviour must be expected.

Regardless of current trends, human behaviour is slowly evolving but not as quickly as we may think or wish it to be. When managing a group of people, the threat of some form of deterrent is fundamental to managing the group. It is how society works in an unwritten contract. 'These are the rules of the group, this is what happens if the rules are breached and the contract is broken'.

The challenge for the group leader is to find an acceptable

deterrent in the complexity of a progressive society. These are unique and vary depending on the circumstances of the group. However, the most likely effective deterrent is exclusion from the group on whatever basis. Human beings are social animals and usually want to be included and part of the group they are in.

In a restorative process it is not the exclusion that is important but the conditions upon which the person may return and be accepted back into the group.

This process is reflected in the join up and follow up process which was developed by Monty Roberts and has a positive impact as the focus is on the way in which the subject is allowed back into the fold of the group or the relationship with the adult in charge. ⁷

School exclusions are an interesting subject to consider here as the word suggests, a student is 'excluded' for a period of time. As with a restorative approach this only works if the student is a) engaging and b) remorseful and c) regrets their behaviour and subsequently wants to return to their group.

In my view this should be led not by a predetermined time but this process of remorse and regret along with the desire to return.

Those that won't engage, are not remorseful and don't regret their behaviour the process of exclusion doesn't work as they

⁷ Roberts, M. (2001). *Horse sense for people: The man who listens to horses talks to people*. London: HarperCollins.

don't want to be there anyway and are happy not to return. These students require constant engagement and not exclusion. The question is what kind of engagement?

The growth of 'alternative educational provision' in the UK has helped to develop quite creative ways of engaging young people who by their very nature are difficult to engage. Their challenge is to find ways to effectively alter their behavioural trajectory and not to pacify and reinforced their misplaced beliefs . In the absence of challenge reinforcement is often the outcome.

The use of a deterrent

The spectrum of deterrents used both individually and internationally are far reaching with common marker points.

Internationally my observations are the most obvious extreme is the use of the fear of death by a nuclear attack. The midpoint is financial sanctions or fines. The subtle other low point is to ask a countries agents to leave. A form of exclusion. "Perhaps you can come back if you've learned the errors of your ways and your country behaves better."

In respect of individuals, internationally the extreme is the death penalty or "Capital Punishment" decreasing in severity to "Corporal Punishment" the inflicting of pain as a stimulus to behaviour change. Reducing to imprisonment the length of time served depending on the severity of the crime. Followed by lesser sanctions such as fines. The lower end of the spectrum some form of exclusion.

The death penalty was last used in the UK in 1964. Whilst I fall short of advocating its return, the murder of three little girls in Southport in the summer 2024 in such a horrific way by a young person intent on such fear, pain and death must encourage everyone to consider their view on the death penalty.

Only in a well advanced first world society can a country afford to pay for the offenders care for many years if not the rest of their lives. As this person was so young this is an incredibly long time.

Even if rehabilitation is effective, in these circumstances saying sorry doesn't quite cut it.

However, we are where we are and I don't believe in going backwards, we must go forwards, whilst the death penalty is still used in other countries, I am glad it is not part of our society.

The use of corporal punishment was banned in the UK in 1986, meaning both Capital and Corporal Punishment are all still very much within living memory. Thankfully both have now been abandoned in British society.

The Southport murders caused so much distress they resulted in riots across the country.

If ever there was any doubt of the effectiveness of a behavioural approach it was demonstrated in response to these riots. Highly unusually rioters were caught, arrested, imprisoned and put before a court within a very short space of time. On conviction they received custodial sentences that went beyond what any of those convicted expected. The impact was immediate. The riots stopped. A behavioural approach in operation with clear and unquestionable impact. The deterrent worked!

There are of course other examples of a behavioural approach internationally. In Africa, the poaching of Rhino has had a serious impact on the world's population. The reason is the desire to harvest its horn for the Chinese medicine market.

A good example of a behavioural approach is in one of the many strategies used to prevent its economic success by damaging the trade and the motivation to buy the horns.

In parts of Africa, they inject a poisonous substance into the living rhino's horn. This has no impact on the rhino who can go about its life unaffected. If this particular Rhino is killed and the horn harvested, the poison impregnated within the horn is strong enough to kill the user.

This non direct lethal punishment has a strong impact. You won't buy something you think is good for you if it may kill you. Talking to 'keepers of big game' it is a very successful strategy needed if they are to stop this majestic creature from becoming extinct. Its life and death whichever way it is played as skirmishers between poachers and game keepers often result in armed conflict and death. In these circumstances the use of a lethal deterrent results in much less death and destruction for humans and wildlife. As poachers and consumers never know which horns are injected, it is as much a physiological deterrent as an actual one.

The evolution of morality

In the 'The evolution of everything' by Matt Ridley⁸ also the author of 'Nature via Nurture' he explains that morality has evolved in society without any grand plan or specific decision by an individual but by a constant process of interaction and reaction. 'Cause and effect, action and reaction'.

Ridley's view is that the interaction between people is finely tuned over time. To demonstrate this, he put forward the comparison of information in the form a medieval guide to etiquette designed for the educated literate adults of the time and what we today may advise a three year old child.

- Don't greet someone when they are urinating or defecating.
- Don't blow your nose on the tablecloth, in your fingers, shirt sleeve or hat.
- Don't pick your nose while eating.

This then led to further expectations such as don't stab your neighbour. The development of the common law meant this became a crime with punishment as opposed to violence to be avenged.

(In the UK we benefit from common law which developed as a result of the common people confronting King John to have a charter of expectations for all including the King to abide by. This became the Magna Carta which is the foundation of our law which was transported to many countries that were part of the

⁸ Ridley, M. (2015). *The evolution of everything: How new ideas emerge*. London: Fourth Estate.

British Empire or have the UK in their history like the USA. This law is described as working from the bottom up. Unlike European law which is based on Roman Law which works from the top down and is imposed on its citizens.)

These medieval expectations for the more educated reflect the way today we educate a toddler. So, we have made huge progress with our social skills, subtle changes over the years and the reason Matt Ridley explains is the reaction of others when you fall short of the expectations of the group, or wider society and the far-reaching consequences of your behaviour. In short, the fear of shame. Shame is the motivational factor to change behaviour.

In today's professional expectations working with children and young people 'shame' has been removed from the tools available to use or experience. Is there another way of describing the emotional response in the biochemical reaction created by those around you when you get it wrong? Is it simply that our desire to meet the expectations of the group and the fear of getting it wrong are a strong motivational factor.

For this to occur we need to respect the group, its expectations and want to be seen in a positive way by those around us.

This means a degree of self-worth and empathy for others, all of which can build over time. In the absence of these internal responses other forms of external controls are needed or there will be no change, and the negative behaviour continues with consequences for the person behaving in this way but also for those around them in their group or community.

What is empathy?

The importance of please and thank you!

Dr Robert Winston explained in his book “The Human Mind” that within the brain are what are called mirror neuron’s.⁹ It is these neuron’s which are activated when you see someone get hurt and feel their pain, like a bang on the head. Other examples are when you find yourself reflecting the same body language in a meeting or feel emotional after a powerful film.

The brain like any other muscle needs exercise. Encouraging people to think of others is an important part of creating an empathic ethos or culture. This requires clear expectations that are lived by leaders.

Robert Winston also describes how a young child came into hospital to have investigated why he couldn’t see out of one eye. It was apparently a normal functioning eye that simply didn’t work. On further investigation it was identified that the child’s eye was infected at birth. The conclusion was that we have in our bodies systems that need to be activated at the right time in order to work. This nonfunctioning eye missed its opportunity to be activated at birth due to being bandaged.

It is my hypothesis that this is the same or similar for mirror neuron’s which may well explain why some people have little if no empathy for others, as during their early years they lived in

⁹ Winston, R. (2003). *The human mind: And how to make the most of it*. London: Bantam Press.

an environment where there were no expectations to think of others. It's so important that those that work in social care and education promote an environment where everyone thinks of others and are considerate in their actions.

Aristotle stated that - "By imitating virtue we become virtuous, starting with politeness, the beginning of respect". This means the process of teaching children to say please and thank you is the first time children are exposed to the concept of thinking of others. When children fail to say please and thank you and are reminded by their parents it is the feeling of shame that is unpleasant which motivates them to remember. By doing so they are also learning how to deal with shame as an emotion. Shame is the opposite to pride which is the reward for positive actions. This range of emotions are entirely normal and necessary in terms of building consciousness and character.

"Shame, guilt, embarrassment and pride are a family of "self-conscious emotions" that are evoked by self-reflection and self-evaluation. This self-evaluation may be implicit or explicit, consciously experienced or transpiring beneath the radar of our awareness. But importantly the self is the object of these self-conscious emotions".

"As the self reflects upon the self, moral self-conscious emotion's provide immediate punishment (or reinforcement) of behaviour. In effect, shame guilt embarrassment and pride function as a moral barometer, providing immediate and salient feedback on our social and moral acceptability"

“When we sin, transgress, or err, aversive feelings of shame, guilt or embarrassment are likely to ensue. When we ‘do the right thing’ positive feelings of pride and self-approval are likely to result”. ¹⁰

The spectrum of emotional feelings can be easily remembered in the following

- Pride
- Embarrassment
- Guilt
- Shame.

PEGS- (Christine Sketchley.) ¹¹

As Professor Harari explains in *Homo Deus*, the feelings and emotions we have in our body are a biochemical process. ¹²

The range between shame and pride is an emotional response. You can't say children should only experience half of the range, as this means they don't get to fully understand or learn how to manage their full range of emotions. Likewise, only praising children is supporting the restriction of experiences in the same way. They miss half of the experience and have a misperceived perspective of relationships as a result. (Prepare the child for the road not the road for the child.) Children with capacity to learn at all ages need to experience the full range of emotions and learn how to manage both ends of this spectrum.

Professional expectations for those working with children and

¹⁰ Tangney, J. P., Stuewig, J., & Mashek, D. J. (2007). Moral emotions and moral behavior. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 345–372. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.56.091103.070145>

¹¹ Sketchley, C. (n.d.). *Pride, embarrassment, guilt, and shame (PEGS)*. PEGS.

¹² Harari, Y. N. (2016). *Homo Deus: A brief history of tomorrow*. London: Harvill Secker.

young people have made allowing a child to feel ashamed of themselves for wrongdoing as wrong in itself. Whilst adults can and should question the manner in which these feelings may have been created, they cannot 'ban' the biochemical response produced by emotional feelings as a result of getting it wrong and being told so by peers, carers, parents or teachers as shame is as said a biochemical process that will be present anyway. What it's important is that the child is given coping strategies to deal with this and it is not allowed to develop into anxiety. In others words reflection but also support to reflect constructively.

The way that children can be asked to reflect on their behaviour can be done in a wholly unacceptable way, creating a negative cycle of further feelings of guilt. Or it can be done in a positive and constructive way encouraging the child to repair damage done and relationships that have become stressed. However, encouraging children to think of others is difficult if you cannot ask a child to consider how their actions may make others feel for the 'fear'of creating feelings of shame.

It is important to ensure the child is properly debriefed at this stage in a constructive way, so they don't get stuck in the cycle of negative feelings of low or no self-worth.

The degree in which these emotions are felt is different for each child or young person depending on their sensitivity and receptiveness to the subject. However, trying to teach a child without addressing when things go wrong is like trying to drive a car that can only turn right. You go round in circles.

The current message is children must not feel shame, which as I've explained above is only half the story. As with the use of consequences, concept creep has impacted the way these issues are inspected in regulated environments and as a result the way they are implemented. This is part of the dumbing down of expectations. 'We can't trust the process to be done correctly so stop it altogether'. The issue is magnified as the inspection body has the monopoly on social care. Therefore no one wants to do the wrong thing and challenge the concept creep.

Concept creep is evident in other models of behaviour also. For example, PACE model which means "playfulness acceptance curiosity and empathy" which is a very good basic model of parenting, but nowhere did the founders expect that this would mean an absence of parental boundaries and control. Far from it, its literature explains that "accepting the child's intentions does not imply accepting behaviour which may be hurtful or harmful to another person or self. The parent may be very firm in limiting behaviour whilst at the same time accepting the motives for the behaviour." However, this important point is often missed or misunderstood, due to giving favour to the cognitive element and forgetting or missing the behavioural element.

PBP's which stands for Personal Behaviour Support Planning¹³ is another example. This is a model for children with a severe learning disability. This should not be confused with a learning difficulty. This model avoids any criticism or challenge, because the child doesn't have the ability to learn from the experience.

13 The Challenging Behaviour Foundation. INFORMATION SHEET Positive Behaviour Support Planning: Part 3 <https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/003-Positive-Behaviour-Support-Planning-Part-3.pdf>

This is more relevant for clinical environments however from my own experience professional misinterpretation is that this model can be used for any child even with the capacity to learn which can be hugely harmful.

“Unconditional Positive Regard” (in a family setting this could be described as unconditional love) is a plan used in developing a positive relationship between therapist and child. It is about accepting a child’s motivations without giving approval to negative behaviour. Yet this can be interpreted as complete acceptance regardless of actions and can be seen by the child as approval for inappropriate beliefs and actions.

The other end of the spectrum of responses from “Unconditional positive regard” is “Conditional regard”, where the relationship is as it says conditional and based on an understanding of the requirements of the relationship. All relationships have a context and within this context are issues like mutual respect, boundaries and what is and is not appropriate behaviour. In my view unconditional regard doesn’t reflect the reality of relationships found outside of the therapy room.

All relationships should be based on mutual respect and boundaries depending on the context. If it is not and it is one sided it becomes an abusive relationship. Having spent my entire working life helping children who abuse other children relearn how to develop positive and appropriate relationships, this is very important. Therefore, in my view all relationships are conditional, it’s how those conditions are applied that is important along with the level of patience and tolerance decided upon.

I have some respect for the confusion, the term “unconditional” implies no conditions however this model does have the expectation that you do not condone or support inappropriate behaviour or beliefs especially if they are harmful to others. By definition this is a condition.

Pure 100% unconditional positive regard without implementing any boundaries has the potential to promote an abusive relationship which must be avoided at all costs.

Whilst I have sympathy for many in social care who find themselves looking after young people who won't respond to any boundaries and for whom using unconditional positive regard is a strategy to be used to gain appeasement and from there hopefully some positive influence. To do this they take the first half of the expectations regarding what constitutes “unconditional positive regard” and forget the detail like making sure you don't condone or give approval to negative or harmful beliefs or behaviours. Where I think they cross the line of professional acceptability is when they then try to promote their hybrid version as a model for all children in all circumstances.

This is a crucial mistake made by leaders in this field and is an example of the withdrawal of a behavioural approach, as the consequences are that those looking after children are so fearful of doing harm this becomes harmful in itself. The fear of addressing issues and encouraging reflection on one's actions results in failure to challenge wrongdoing which is also harmful. As said earlier it is natural reactions, authentic relationships and

good parenting that is required.

As Matt Ridley explained,¹⁴ the evolution of morality has taken centuries without any direction or single person decision. The withdrawal of a behavioural approach represents a break in this cycle which is an alternative path brought about by certain individuals, which is in conflict with a natural process.

It is perhaps worth discussing at this stage in our discussion the point there is a need to encourage resilience in children and young people. Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning have promoted the concept there are three types of behaviour cultures that are relevant to consider. ¹⁵

‘Honour Culture’. - This is where those concerned would fight for their honour. In days gone by this would mean a duel, or close quarter combat of some description. This is still important to some sections of society and is harmful to all concerned.

‘Dignity Culture’. - This is where resilience is assumed under difficult circumstances. The saying “sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me” is a good example of the use of a dignity culture. (Dignity being the foundation to respect.) ¹⁶

‘Victimhood Culture’. - This is where people present themselves as victims in need of protection. This culture has three elements prevalent. a) they regularly make complaints of a relatively minor issue. b) they make these complaints to a third party rather than the source of the complaint. c) they present as a victim of

¹⁴ Ridley (2015) – see Footnote 8

¹⁵ Lukianoff, G., & Haidt, J. (2018). *The coddling of the American mind: How good intentions and bad ideas are setting up a generation for failure*. New York: Penguin Press.

¹⁶ Hawkes, N. (2013). *From my heart: Transforming lives through values*. London: Independent Thinking Press.

wrongdoing in need of protection. This culture appears to be growing rapidly within the UK and may be the side effect of a helpful society which inadvertently promotes it.

It is clear to see that both Honour culture and Victimhood culture are at opposite ends of the spectrum and are both negative in nature and harmful. Only the use of dignity culture represents a balanced way forward. The promotion of dignity is hugely important in terms of feelings of self-worth and growing resilience.

Today's systems that encourage the use of the organisations complaints procedure need to be careful not to promote a victimhood culture. It may well protect the organisation from criticism but should fall short of allowing this to become harmful to those vulnerable to this kind of influence. The promotion of a dignity culture needs to be factored into any response.

Victimhood culture appears to be an increasingly prevalent factor, as is another aspect. Jonathan Haidt co author of "Codling of the American Mind" expands on his above hypothesis in his latest book, "The Anxious Generation." He explains children and young people are either in Discover mode or Defence mode. ¹⁷

In Discover mode, they want to

- embrace life,
- scan for opportunities,
- overcome challenges and

¹⁷ Haidt, J. (2024). *The anxious generation: How the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness*. London: Allen Lane.

- discovery new things.
- They grow.

Those in defence mode are always

- concerned for their safety or the safety of others.
- They scan for dangers to avoid,
- they have a scarcity mindset, cling to your team, keep me safe.
- They don't grow. As a result they are unable to discover new things in case something bad happens. In today's risk adverse society, the increasing need to remove all risk is promoting the defence mode attitude and as such reducing the opportunities for young people to grow and develop their character.

Developing empathy for others and dignity for oneself are perhaps the most important building blocks of a person's character.

Internal and external controls

Internal controls are the ability to regulate one's own behaviour. The ability to know when to lower your voice, say less or keep quiet. How to remain calm when cross or feel anger towards others.

External controls are physical boundaries put in place by others to protect you or others from you. A play pen, to contain an infant. A stair gate to prevent a child from going up stairs. School gates as we start school. As we get older, we learn internal control. These allow us to regulate our behaviour and perhaps follow instructions. Those that are unable to learn these skills may require external controls. These can range from physically stronger adults to get hold of them when required. A secure unit or a prison cell are the ultimate examples of external controls.

Throughout our lives we come into contact with external controls in different ways initially to keep us safe. However, those who are unable to develop internal controls are likely to encounter external controls being imposed on them by authorities.

In 2024 the early release of prisoners was introduced in the UK with much controversy. Many prisoners found the absence of external controls difficult to cope with and made sure by their behaviour they were returned to prison very quickly indeed. They had clearly built a reliance on others controlling their behaviour.

Many of our prisons are old buildings modified over the years.

There are not enough of them for the current population never mind the expected increased population in the near future. The purpose of prisons we are told is to rehabilitate. This is the message required as a result of removing the behavioural approach to 'crime and punishment'.

However, the true situation is prisons become colleges of learning how to offend from more experienced prisoners. The cycle of reoffending is promoted not reduced. Anyone who works with people who need rehabilitation, knows to place them with others with the same problems or worse are unlikely to help the rehabilitation process. The way we help them is to place them with people who don't have these issues and have positive attributes to copy. Role models.

The reality that needs to be discussed is avoided in our post behavioural and now cognitive world. The purpose of prisons is to remove an offender's liberty and by doing so their ability to offend for a period of time. The impact of this is hoped to be a deterrent to others who may commit the same or similar crime.

In our modern world we do have other options that are more effective but may be seen to be less palatable especially if you refuse to accept a behavioural approach.

Today it is possible to have an ankle bracelet fitted that denied an offender their liberty by transmitting an electrical impulse to varying degrees depending how far they went outside of a predetermined perimeter. This is the only way I can think of that would impose a boundary that would be both respected and

enforced. It works very well with other sentient beings dogs!

This would give multiple options. If we did a straightforward positive and negative analysis of this proposal. How would it compare to prison as an option.

House arrest with electronic tag enforcing a perimeter.

Positive aspects.

- The prisoner has their liberty removed.
- The prisoner would be allowed to serve their sentence at home. They could continue caring for and seeing their family.
- They could continue working or learning from home if possible. The environment is more conducive to learning or rehabilitation. They would not be forced to come into contact with negative influences of other prisoners. This would not only prevent the learning of more effective ways of offending but safer also.
- The range of the perimeter of their liberty could be increased with time served. Thus, allowing the introduction of perhaps returning to work during specific times or collecting children from school. This providing a motivation to comply with the boundaries of their reduced liberty.
- This would be significantly cheaper than building more new prisons.

Negative aspects.

- The acceptance that discomfort leading to pain is used as a

way of enforcing the boundaries. However it is only present if the boundaries are broken in the same way it hurts if you walk into a wall.

- It is perhaps less of a deterrent to those that wouldn't want to go to prison.

Custodial sentence in prison.

Positive aspects.

- The prisoner has their liberty removed.
- This is a deterrent to others.

Negative aspects.

- Overcrowded accommodation.
- Unsafe population run by prisoners.
- Potential to become a victim of crime.
- Contained within a small cell for many hours in a day.
- Environment not conducive to rehabilitation.
- Learn more offending skills from older more experienced offenders.
- Need new buildings
- Need more prison officers.

The list above is not exhaustive and I'm sure others could add many other issues.

Simple maths -

House arrest - 8 positive 2 negative.

Custodial sentence in prison - 2 positive 8 negative.

The above is unlikely to be accepted by any decision maker at this time as the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) states that pain cannot be used as a punishment. I would argue that pain is not the punishment. It is only experienced if the boundaries are broken. Just like walking into a physical wall, this would be a virtual wall. Perhaps this is an example of how Laws need to keep up with technology and evolving changes in society.

However, as the years go by, and the cost of the prison service increases along with the population it is in my view only a matter of time before it is considered. It won't work for all prisoners, but it would for a highly significant number reducing the burden on the current provision.

Decision makers may feel it would take us to an Orwellian world we want to avoid, this may be true, but it may also be better than the chaotic world we will encounter unless we can get the harmony we need between those who are victims of crime and those who offend.

Whist I have written this to demonstrate a point and realise this is an unlikely option, there is a lesser step before this that may have a place in the actual systems. That would be linking the bracelet to a GPS tracker with predetermined boundaries to be respected, without any form of shock deterrent. This could still deliver an enforced lockdown by consent that again could be effective in limiting someone's liberty but with the kind of variations

mentioned above to allow for work and family responsibilities.

The result would be more like an adult version of being grounded with further consequences if the contract was broken. The important point is that the criminal justice system is currently very outdated and would benefit from considering the benefits of technology in its core aims.

The above is not dissimilar to the current trend of issuing Deprivation of Liberty Orders, or 'DOLs' for children.^{18 19} The population of children who need this level of care historically was provided by secure units. At the time of writing numbers of children in secure accommodation is at an all-time low, significantly reduced on ten years ago, despite the 'Sir Martin Narey report of 2016'²⁰ which warned against the closure of secure accommodation in favour of solo placements in the community and the fact that many social care managers appeared to have an antipathy towards the use of secure accommodation and believed it to be wrong as a point of principal. This may at first glance seem to be indicative of improving situations, however, it is not.

More and more children are made subject to DOLs orders which involves the same process as above, keeping a child often in isolation in a property, except to enforce the boundaries they use high level staffing specifically to monitor and take control where necessary. The cost of this service is significantly more expensive and in my view in many ways reinforces negative beliefs and

¹⁸ Mental Capacity Act 2005, c.9. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/9/contents>

¹⁹ Cheshire West and Chester Council v P [2014] UKSC 19. <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2012-0068.html>

²⁰ Narey, M. (2016). Residential care in England: Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of children's residential care. Department for Education. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-residential-care-in-england>

in contradiction to the above hypothesis stops appropriate socialisation and group learning in small well managed groups, the benefits of secure accommodation for those that need that level of care was also highlighted in the report at the time.

In my view this process is inverted. Children need to learn where the boundaries are and the possibility that physical boundaries may be imposed is more important at an early stage than in later life, as part of a learning and rehabilitation process as well as a management process. Once physical boundaries are understood, internal boundaries can develop.

I can see a time in the future where we look back on keeping large numbers of people detained in a small space in overcrowded conditions, which is the reality of prisons as inhumane especially as we now have the technology to do different. The failure to use technology on the basis of an outdated principle is another example of where the world of behaviourism and cognitive theory collide.

Perhaps my suggestion is a natural process of evolution, once you can understand the need to accept human beings are natural beings in a natural world and a behavioural approach is still needed for many. The above is perhaps a good example of how we currently avoid behavioural approaches because of its withdrawal from our understanding of its value.

By having external boundaries in place or the threat of these being implemented we learn to impose internal controls ourselves. The absence of a deterrent or the presence of external

boundaries reduces the motivation to develop internal controls.

However, times may be a changing. I began writing this book in February 2025. The motivation was brought about by a belief we have lost the concept of behavioural approaches.

In May 2025 the prospect of chemical castration of sex offenders has been raised for consideration. This appears to be early signs of the emergence once again of a behavioural approach. However, it is here I must temper the emergence in a way as not to be over enthusiastic.

Having worked with sex offenders in one form or another for most of my working life, I can honestly say that for many who often were sexualised early by their own childhood victimisation, the option of chemical suppression may well be a blessed relief. This being part of a rehabilitation process could be a significant help to offenders.

The compulsory chemical castration, meaning a one way no return ticket to sterilisation seems to be most definitely a “punishment” to help manage risk but also a deterrent and a politically popular one with little risk to those looking for solutions. Whether this is acceptable will become apparent over time. My word of warning is that the reintroduction of a behavioural approach needs to be based on sound ethics and not populism. If that becomes an issue, I’m am confident it will backfire and reduce its chances of any meaningful helpful change.

The rise of Cognitive Theory and its impact on Behavioural Theory

As someone who has spent their life in Social care and Education, I was completely unaware of the shift in thinking until I read 'The Coddling of the American Mind' by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathon Haidt. ²¹

In their book they set out how the combination of the development of both smart phones and social media has impacted the way young people have developed, the subsequent reduction in life skills which has impacted on American society. It is within this I saw for the first time the suggestion that the deliberate decision to abandon behaviour theory in favour of cognitive theory was also a factor in terms of impact on society. So, what's this all about?

In the research I have been able to find on this subject one commentator describes behaviour theory being about how when we walk down the road we are impacted by the environment, the weather, people we meet etc, which makes us behave in certain ways. Cognitive theory is about what we are thinking about when we walk down the road.

This very simple analysis presents a possible hypothesis for what's happened. Those in a position of influence in the field of education thought (and perhaps still do) that everyone was like themselves, high functioning thinking beings able to look deeply into the world around them and beyond. However, most people

²¹ Lukianoff and Haidt – See Footnote 15

are just walking down the road thinking about the weather and the people they meet. A section of society is only able to do this.

Another commentator made the point that this shift away from behaviour theory was because we didn't want to think of ourselves as animals merely impacted by our environment. This thinking which has had huge impact on societal development is based on what is referred to as creationist thinking (that man was designed and created by a creator) and is now over 100 years old. Today we have much more knowledge and understanding of all animals and mammals, most people would now agree we humans are simply complicated animals. To think we are some kind of distant relation to the natural world and not part of it could very well explain where things have gone off track. As Professor Harari explains we are all mammals, we all have the same biochemical systems.

Matt Ridley in his book "The evolution of everything" explains how even today the scientific world wraps itself in knots about the debate over Darwin's theory of evolution, often favouring sometimes by default a creationist belief. As I've said earlier, he also explains that the development of human morality has evolved over thousands of years completely on its own without a single persons (or group of people) decision making and influence. I would suggest this break away from behaviourism is an example perhaps for the first time of a decision-making process which may have impacted the evolutionary process. The consequences of this are we are moving away from the natural checks and balances, which allow the ebb and flow of society to develop and dare I say continue to evolve in a balanced way.

Within care and education, carers and teachers find they continue to lose the very tools they need to be able to control a school, classroom or residential home. The level of scrutiny they are subject to has now gone from disciplinary measures to individual comments. Children are not even allowed to feel ashamed of themselves as a result of poor behaviour. This levelling out of emotional responses and negative impacts takes away the motivation to change.

This belief has gone as far as lifestyles and employment. “If you don’t want to work, don’t worry, we can compensate for that”. The result, many people don’t work. The well-meaning support then becomes harmful. Not only to themselves as they lose everything employment can bring in terms of self-esteem, social network, as well as wealth creation and the important thing, the ability to contribute to those who “can’t work”. ‘The people have become emperors’!

Why has right wing politics appeared to embrace behaviourism?

Thomas Erickson, author of “Surrounded by idiots”, explains in simple terms four personality types and attributes a colour to these to aid his description.²² These being

- Red - strong black and white leadership, bold and brave. My way or the highway! The downside is they sometimes get it wrong but by the time this is known have moved on to the next issue anyway.
- Yellow - creative leadership, analytical and not risk adverse. Good at presentation, diplomatic.
- Green - kind caring but risk adverse. 80% of the population are in this category.
- Blue - focused and detailed but often so absorbed in the detail they find it difficult to deliver.

It would be fair to say that most psychologists and academics can be described as Blue detailed people, analytical deep thinking.

It would also be fair to say that Donald Trump is a strong, really strong red leader. My way or the highway way! A good way to see the diversity of thinking is the way these personality types demonstrated by the academic world and Donald Trump have treated the issue of gender identity.

The deep-thinking analytical academics have looked into this

²² Erikson, T. (2019). *Surrounded by idiots: The four types of human behaviour (or, how to understand those who cannot be understood)*. London: Vermilion

subject. Concluded that the most important issue is how a person feels about themselves, their body and their being. The facts around their physiological makeup are irrelevant. It's all about feelings and emotions.

Donald says, that's irrelevant, "there are only two types of gender, male and female" if you're born with male or female genitals, that's what you are, end of!

The fact is most people are not deep thinking analytical 'detailed' people. The vacuum created by the lack of clarity over this subject has caused many to question their identity in a way they would never have considered if the opportunity to change hadn't been raised. Likewise, the knock on effect of subsequent issues created results in considerable chaos. The chaos is removed by the unambiguous clarity of biology.

On the 16th of April 2025, the UK Supreme Court determined that if you were born male or female you could not declare yourself any different later in life. As Victoria Atwood explained "we need to use common sense language that everyone can understand and reflects the realities of life".

It is perhaps the case that behaviourism promotes the pragmatic approach, which is simple to understand and relatable to the majority. Right wing politics are identifying this and making it their own. However, days after the Supreme Court ruling newspaper headlines stated that left wing politics saved the right wing from the embarrassment it created.

To be absolutely clear this book is not about politics or promoting an ideology. It is also not about the return of unacceptable measures such as capital and corporal punishment. I am simply saying in order to achieve balance it was a mistake to abandon behaviourism in favour of cognitive theory exclusively and the correct way forward is not to abandon cognitive theory but to accept both have a role to play and are mutually beneficial.

If the debate has come down to thoughts and feelings versus action and behaviour, what are feelings? Professor Harari explains in his book, 21 lessons for the 21st Century, that feelings are not the some “uniquely human spiritual quality and they do not reflect any kind of ‘free will’. Rather, feelings are biochemical mechanisms that all mammals and birds use in order to quickly calculate probabilities of survival and reproduction. Feelings aren’t based on intuition, inspiration or freedom - they are based on calculation.”²³

“Moral feelings such as outrage, guilt or forgiveness derive from neural mechanisms that evolved to enable group cooperation. All these biochemical algorithms were honed through millions of years of evolution.”

If we can understand that feelings are a biochemical process based on calculations to ensure our survival (which requires social cohesion) and survival of the species which requires reproduction. The role of cognitive theory is to help us understand our thinking, cognitive therapy is to help us

²³ Harari, Y. N. (2018). 21 lessons for the 21st century. London: Jonathan Cape.

understand when the calculations have gone wrong, possibly as a result of incorrect data being calculated within our internal algorithms as a result of environment or childhood experiences which create cognitive distortions. Therefore it is the role of behaviourism to support cognitive theory. Cognitive theory provides the explanation within any form of discussion or counselling, behaviourism reinforces this with actions and consequences, both positive and negative. There is huge marriage value when the two come together. This value is lost if behaviourism is ignored.

How to engage in an economic society?

In the Summer of 2025, I also visited Canada. Both South Africa and Canada have a place in my childhood history. Visiting Canada reminded me of how much my early years were impacted by living in such a wonderful country. Some of my early childhood memories clearly influenced my thoughts and feelings around how as adults we interact with each other. Just as South Africa gave me a disturbed vision of a negative future, Canada illustrated at the other end of the spectrum how a culture can have such a positive impact on the quality of life of its inhabitants.

At sporting events the public toilets were immaculate and those using them waited in a que to wash their hands. Drivers slowed down to let pedestrians cross the road. Throughout our visit polite good manners and hospitality ensued.

An unashamed patriotism with a pride for their country was evident everywhere. There was clearly a culture of expectation and a strong feeling that if my behaviour fell short of expectations it would be those around me that would inform and advise me of such facts. These are indeed qualities that have been missing for some time in British society as a side effect of our increasing tolerance.

One Sunday afternoon as we drove through a suburban area, we came across a site that caused us to stop and explore further. The kind of thing that had once been a distant memory but long since

faded away. On the corner of the street sat a 10 year old child, all alone and looking for others to interact with. This was not as you may think a potential safeguarding situation, although some may fear it would lead to that.

This was Emma, a young entrepreneur who had prepared homemade ice-cold lemonade and was selling it on her stall, a table at the edge of her drive way. She charged two dollars a cup, however, a sign also gave further insight into the values this child had developed, it said “ICE COLD LEMONADE 2 DOLLARS - FREE TO POLICE, RCMP, NATIONAL PARKS CANADA”. In other words, if you helped to protect the people or the environment you could have a glass of Emma’s homemade lemonade for free. What better way to allow a child to explore the mechanics of business and make her contribution to her community. Her parents were most likely watching from the window, however they never interfered with the business transaction.

This was not an isolated incident. A week later at a national sporting event, we came across John, an 11 year old boy who had bought bottles of water for one dollar and put them in buckets to sell as ice cold water for 2 dollars. His father was sat back, there to provide support but not to interfere. John will have made his unashamed profit for adding value to his product by reducing its temperature and providing a much needed service on an extremely hot day.

This was not a new idea, I am sure it is part of a culture of preparedness for engaging in an economic society. The reason

of my certainty is that I had encouraged my children to do the same, with little effect as they didn't see the benefit as they knew they would get their pocket money anyway, now hold that thought!

This was not an original idea. Trawling through my memory banks I think I know where it came from. "Snoopy" the dog from "Peanuts" had a character Charlie Brown that sold lemonade on a table on the street. This facet of North American society must have been written in the 1960's and still influences children today. Whether the author Mr Shultz came up with the idea or more likely he observed other children on the streets. The impact of John and Emma will stay with me as exemplars of young children learning how to do business and displaying their values and those of their parents.

Creating a Work Ethic and Employment Culture

Why is it important to create a work ethic and employment culture?

Matt Ridley explains in his book “The Rational Optimist” the one thing that separates us from other mammals was quite simply our ability to trade. To begin with we shared foodstuffs amongst our nearest and dearest within our immediate community. Other animals do this, but the next step was the defining moment. We traded one item for a different item. This led to other items being traded. The development of tools meant that the products of tools were traded and then the tools themselves. [24](#)

Labour, skills, products which all became increasingly complex. Not just with our own communities but most importantly other communities. Free trade is a natural and possibly the most important development of basic “human” behaviour. Our economic society was the spark plug to all of society. It is also what keeps us safe. Tribes who traded with each other were much less likely to fight with each other. Through trade relationships are formed.

“Whenever the way of man are gentle, there is commerce, wherever there is commerce men are gentle”. Charles Baron de Montesquieu. [25](#)

[24](#) Ridley, M. (2010). *The rational optimist: How prosperity evolves*. London: Fourth Estate.

[25](#) Montesquieu, C.-L. de S. (1748/1989). *The spirit of the laws* (A. M. Cohler, B. C. Miller, & H. S. Stone, Trans. & Eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

If we get down to the very basics, countries that have high levels of economic activity are safer more quickly. In simple terms:

The 10 richest countries are the safest in the world.

The 10 poorest countries are the most dangerous in the world.²⁶

In order to maintain a progressive society, engagement in the economy is vital. Within my own field of practice, helping young people achieve a meaningful daytime activity on whatever level, but hopefully employment, is the single most important thing we can do to reduce the likelihood of future offences and break the cycle of abuse.

When young people become employed, the positive energy results in the fact they are automatically receiving support from colleagues, the structure and routine of the workplace, the expectations of employers and money to be self-financing. It all works. If they are not employed the downward spiral of negative energy is damaging in the opposite direction. None of the above, it doesn't work, literally.

The authors of *The Codling of the American mind* ask us to face some hard facts around the way we prepare young people to be part of an economic society. They make it quite clear that not all cultures are equal in the way they prepare their young people for the workplace. The UK is failing many young people as it is acceptant of the fact that some young people will not be employable, and will rely on a benefit system paid for by other

²⁶ Ridley, M (2015) – See Footnote 8

people who 'are' engaged in the economic society.

The benefit bill is growing along with the culture that working is optional. It's a lifestyle choice. ("The people have become emperors" so much wealth that outside solutions are imported to do the things no one wants to do".) The solution has been to import workers from other less well-off countries that are still motivated enough to ensure their young people are prepared and engage in an economic society. But how has this come about?

One possible explanation is that the benefit system is not conditional. It is there as a support blanket regardless of your subsequent behaviour. It is also at a level which has become more than is needed to survive and get by. It is at a level some find gives a lifestyle that makes going to work not worth the difference between the support blanket and earning potential of achievable jobs available. The cost benefit analysis favours the autonomy given by not committing to employment.

Dr Graham Hill was one of the UK's top cops. He was significant in the investigation of many high-profile child abuse abduction and murder cases. He stated in one of his presentations, when we consider what motivates people, his experience has drawn him to the conclusion that human beings are motivated by only three things in life.

Autonomy-Control- Relationships.

He explained that if you were to ask a Policeman what motivates

him, if he was honest he would say the ability to exercise control over others. If you ask a social worker she would probably say it was the relationships with the people she was helping. I would add to this explanation if you ask a self employed builder it is the ability to work when and where you want to, autonomy.

It is my hypothesis this model is relevant to all people at different levels. Some may be motivated by all three in different proportions, it is perhaps when one factor becomes dominant at the expense of the others that problems arise like control. It is also when they are balanced you have a balanced life.

The cost benefit analysis of current benefit system verses going to work for young people who value their autonomy and want to remain in control would find employment compromises these values. Employment as a young person means you have to make a commitment and lose your ability to come and go as you please. It also means you have to follow instructions subsequently losing control of your time. It would mean you have the opportunity to develop new relationships, but this may not be a high priority. It may also be quite frightening if the preparation work has not been completed properly. When placed against the cost benefit analysis the increased income may just not be worth the effort required or the values compromised.

There are also outside influences to consider. Children in the care system are routinely encouraged not to enter the workplace as this would compromise their housing benefit, if their accommodation is dependent on housing benefit they may not have anywhere to live. This is at an age and stage where these

habits and lifestyle decisions are likely to remain with them for the rest of their lives. We have to be able to do better than this!

A behavioural approach would time limit any benefits and then requirements become conditional. There should be “Nothing for Nothing”!

Benefits continue to be paid providing the person is doing regular meaningful voluntary work, education or training. They must be fully engaged in their own progress, helping their communities and not break the law. How can we pay people a basic platform of income for them to be involved in criminality?

When you say you can have income for nothing in return it says you consider they don't have any value. This is the message. It's the wrong message.

The message must be “we give you financial help, benefits but it is a contract. We expect something in return, and this is what you have to do to deliver”.

Professor Harrari sets out in his book, “21 Lessons for the 21st Century” that in the future 2050, the impact of artificial intelligence, AI, may mean as a result of job losses, that we develop what he flippantly calls the “useless class”.²⁷ This is where everyone who hasn't got a job who he thinks will be most, is paid a “Universal Basic Income” (UBI) the issues are many and complex, but as Harrari says “we must find a way of looking after

²⁷ Harari, Y. N. (2018) – See Footnote 23

people's emotional well-being and self-esteem". To do this we must not give away anything unconditionally as this undermines the natural need for human beings to trade their skills or sell their time.

As for housing benefit, this support should continue for those young people leaving the care system who need somewhere to live. They most certainly should not be held back or stopped from working in fear of compromising their benefit which may be crucial to where they need to live. This is my direct experience time and time again over many years.

There is also the hypothesis that over the years the increased fragility of young people has been brought about by the over protectiveness of children. This emerging culture results in less and less young people engaging in activities that could develop transferable skills and a work ethic. Activities such as weekend jobs or similar experiences that develop transferable skills.

Not that long ago children engaged in newspaper delivery rounds, milk rounds, and other forms of paid work. The autumn half term week was traditionally known as 'potato picking week'. Increased regulation around employment and particularly the employment of children has reduced such options along with an advancing society that has less need for menial tasks.

Political Scientists Yair Ghitza and Andrew Gelaman looking for voting patterns in Americans and childhood experiences on political views identified a window of higher impressionability in terms of forming views and opinions ranging from 14 years old

to 24 years old peaking at 18 years of age. In their view during this time views and opinions are formed and become established often for the rest of their lives. ²⁸

This correlates with my view that it is necessary to establish a work ethic and preparedness for engaging in employment during this time, particularly important prior to 18 years of age. If we leave it until after graduation from university the opportunity to establish a strong work ethic is lost.

In the USA this acknowledgment has resulted in the call for a compulsory gap year prior to the university stage to undertake a form of 'National Service', not military but the form of a community service in a working environment.

If you think about the role of Local Authorities in professional departments ranging from the Police, Hospitals, Parks and Gardens, the opportunity for 'mentorship' in an authentic working environment is huge. Not to mention engagement with local businesses. We just need to recognise the importance of training our young people properly. This being all students, including those most capable not just those you need to keep occupied to keep out of trouble.

Currently a harmful trend is emerging. Normal expected stress has become harmful to your mental health and being asked to do something you don't want to do by an employer or line manager is bullying. This trend is extremely dangerous and one of the

²⁸ Lukianoff, G., & Haidt, J. (2018). – See Footnote 15

indicators of a downward trajectory in societal development.

During the Blair government the push was to get as many young people into University as possible. An admirable aspiration. The attendance rates rose from 16% to 50%. The possible consequences to this are the focus on University as a life experience when the focus should be on how to engage in an economic society. The end result of an education process should be employment. The hypothesis that to have a worthwhile life you need to go to University may well reflect policy and decision makers experience but it grossly undervalues all other trades and opportunities.

The concept of “MENTORSHIP” is one I feel is worthy of much more thought and exploration. David Cameron’s “The Big Society” was getting close but in my view not close enough. The growth of the human being has been as a result of a range of developing skills shared throughout the community.

Even the most simple primitive populations take time to pass down skills to the next generation to prepare them to be self-reliant and sustainable in their environment. We must not think that the environment occupied by the long term unemployed is either acceptable and therefore to be prepared for or sustainable.

Indeed it is the normalisation of unemployment within social care and education I find prevalent and completely unacceptable.

The hypothesis put forward by Matt Ridley makes it clear, the

need to 'work' or 'trade' with others is a basic human need. It is what defines us and creates our identity. If it cannot be facilitated within our economic society, it may well be created outside this within the 'black market' or other negative misperceptions that fulfil these needs.

This process of education and learning to engage in an economic society is not confined to the classroom. The role of Mentors should be acknowledged and promoted at all levels.

'Individual'

- Care giver to child.
- Teacher to student.
- Employer to employee.

'Regional'

- Community organisations.
- Employers.
- Local Authorities.

'International.'

- Financially active countries to support less financially active countries.

The influence the European Empires had on poorer countries in history has been significant. Forget about the badly behaved stuff and focus on the good stuff. What if we could do the same with only the positive elements of the experience? How would this impact on the need to migrate to a better place? However, this

needs to be in the form of advice and support not instruction and control.

Matt Ridley explains that the most effective way of reducing 'over population' is by increased prosperity through education. In all countries where this has happened their population becomes stable or reduced over time.

The role of 'Mentorship' should be promoted within a formal structure to recognise its importance.

The role of the education system in preparing students for employment

It is important to understand that the process of preparing a child or young person for employment doesn't start when they leave education. It must start at a young age. It is important that teachers recognise their role in the development of character and aspiration and don't just focus on test results.

Teachers must 'inspire' their students to have ambitions and to see the world through the lens of opportunity. This will enable the teacher to 'motivate' their students to be an active participant in their own lives as well as their education.

If they are 'motivated', they can be 'educated'. If they are 'educated' in all of the skills necessary to be employed, many of which are soft skill, like good manners and the ability to follow instructions, then we can 'train' young people to be 'employed'.

Inspire

Motivate

Educate

Train

Employ

This has been my mantra throughout my career to good effect. It works with some of the most disadvantaged in society. So, the beginning of this process starts at a very young age with please and thank you, learning the importance of following instructions and being inspired to have ambitions. This is the role of all

parents, carers and teachers at as young an age as possible. We need to encourage children from all walks of life to move from 'defence mode' to 'discover mode'.

In my view the current education system looks to achieve test results, and this has become the primary focus of attention. The result is we 'value' what we measure. Much of the important things in life are not measured and we make huge effort to try to get everyone through this process of passing test. This process requires children to focus on remembering facts that can be recalled in an exam and not learning how to grow as a person, educationally and emotionally.

The original purpose of exams in history was to be able to give potential employers a guide to the suitability of a candidate. If everyone is the same and to achieve this, we overlook important attributes like values and conduct, how does this help employers to make those important decisions?

Likewise, many don't know where they will be or what they will be doing as adults. Where will the jobs be? The economic market requires people to be flexible and to have transferable skills, these start with soft skills, communication, empathy, good values.

The impact of heavy industry since the Industrial Revolution resulted in some communities developing a total dependence on these industries. Young people knew when they left school, they would work down the mines, in the shipyards, in the steel mills. When these industries closed, they were left completely devastated. Today, many in these abandoned

communities still don't know what they should train for? Long term unemployment has become the norm. Generation after generation.

It is thought the demand for skills has transferred from physically demanding tasks to the care, education and service sectors. Therefore, it is more important than ever that these soft skills are given the chance to have some importance in any curriculum and given the opportunity to develop.

The direction of travel I would like to see would be to place much more importance on values, good conduct and character. To achieve this much more needs to be done in the way of providing experiences for students to learn from both at home, at school and out of the classroom. This is not at the expense of good grades, far from it. To start with better conduct in the classroom has at best the likelihood of increasing the knowledge transferred to students but it's more significant than that.

Healthy brain development depends on getting the right experiences at the right age in the right order. It often amazes me that horse trainers know this only too well, but it is rarely discussed in the education of people. As Harari has explained in his book *Sapiens*, we are all mammals functioning with the same biochemical systems.

He also explains that for experiences to be converted to Knowledge there has to be "sensitivity" $K=ExS$. I find this easier for people to understand if you use the same formula but describe it differently. Experience (E) plus Sensitivity (S) or for

another word “receptiveness” = KNOWLEDGE (K). In other words, focusing on experiences out of the classroom and good conduct is not at the expense of good grades but much more likely to improve them, as these experiences increase the receptiveness or sensitivity of students. In brief as an example, positive experiences in the countryside can improve the outcome of a maths lesson regardless of the maths taught on the day. Our current system provides the learning regardless of sensitivity and as a result much of what it taught is lost.

In both mammals and birds, the process of learning through experience is called “experience - expected development”. This is not the same as just receiving information. At the ages of 9-15 these ‘experiences’ are most likely to be imprinted, and personalities formed. At this stage of development children and young people are subject to two forms of bias. 1) Conformist bias, where children copy what they see as being the most common forms of behaviours. 2) Prestige bias, they copy those who appear most accomplished. (source “ The Anxious Generation”.) This is the time we need children to be surrounded by positive role models and experience activities that will help shape their lives in a most positive way. At the same time protect them from negative influences that may be harmful, such as poor conduct of others and negative online experiences. [2930 31](#)

In my experience, this is something that is understood much more by the independent sector than in mainstream education. The importance of the arts, which encourage creative thinking, of

[29 Haidt, J. \(2024\) – See Footnote 17](#)

[30 Harari, Y. N. \(2018\) – See Footnote 23](#)

[31 Harari, Y. N. \(2016\) – See Footnote 12](#)

sport, which promotes physical fitness and teamwork, of outdoor pursuits walking, camping, and water sports, which encourage both and promotes good mental health. All of these things are promoted within the independent sector, as they understand their value to promoting character whereas in the mainstream sector these subjects have often been given less of a priority in the pursuit of creating more time to get better grades. 'Passing tests.'

Those of us who can remember our early years education when we arrived at school and the first thing we had to do after being in the right place at the right time and enjoy time in the playground was to stand in order during an assembly. This created expectations (a transition from free play) and then the singing of hymns.

We now know that early childhood brain development is benefited by children learning how to do things in a synchronised way. Singing, dancing, skipping and even table tennis are examples of learning synergies and developing skills sets. It appears our predecessors knew more instinctively than we appreciated and much of the value of this has been lost to other priorities.

Yet we are at a time in the development of the education system where efforts are being made to make the independent sector more mainstream. There is even a desire to remove the inspection process from the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) to Ofsted which will undoubtedly result in a race to the bottom rather than looking at what works well in different ways

and how we can achieve better outcomes. We don't all want to be the same, and some of us can do things differently. When we do it creates ideas for others to the same or different, in their own ways. Creativity stimulates evolution.

Teachers need to be made more aware of the language of values and the importance of using this language within schools. To have the confidence to challenge poor conduct and 'vices' or bad values and to know they have the support of the school in doing so. Not just the school, but the community and broader society, represented by Ofsted and the justice system if it goes wrong.

The work of Dr Neil Hawkes has been significant in this area on an international level. His book "From my heart, transforming lives through values" was hugely influential to myself on this journey of educational exploration. He has spoken of his quest to the United Nations and is recognised as a world authority on the teaching of values. It is a frustration that his work is more appreciated outside of the UK than within. I for one hope this changes.³²

The road this takes us down is one of increased employability amongst those that currently are unlikely to be employed. To do this schools need to be relevant in the lives of students and the community and work towards reflecting the workplace at incremental stages.

³² Hawkes, N. (2013). *From my heart: Transforming lives through values*. Carmarthen, Wales: Independent Thinking Press.

One of the ways this can be achieved is to consider the school holidays.

The first account of a formalised education system was according to the educational historian Stephen Davies around 1806 following the defeat of the Prussians by Napoleon. ³³

“In response to the embarrassment the Prussians decided to impose a system of compulsory and rigorous education to replace the soldiers lost in the conflict. This consisted of formalised classroom environments and a form of pedagogy within the classrooms setting unlike the Greek version of walking around together. This system is very similar to the education system we have today. However, its motivation was to keep a population in order and to learn discipline to fight off an oppressor. In 1852 this system was specifically copied by the Americans in Massachusetts and then New York.”

Whilst Matt Ridley expresses a view this wasn't for the benefit of the individual. I would certainly express a view it was for the common good and similarities between then and now are clear. What would the outcome have been for many if the oppressor was to succeed? Today we have a society in need of cohesion around a common cause, for their own sake as well as others and this may in time be incredibly important.

The school holidays in the United States of America were based around environmental factors such as the long hot summer.

³³ Ridley, M (2015) – See Footnote 8

The UK brought in compulsory education in 1880 and adopted the American version of holidays, this happened to coincide with the needs of the people by reflecting the farming calendar. Many people were rural, families depended on the success of the farm and children were needed to help at key times of the year, lambing time, hay time and harvest. These being at Easter and Summer holidays. The school year was intrinsically linked to employment and lifestyles. Today we have such a diverse range of employment needs as a society, the correlation between school life and employment is getting less and less.

This is highlighted by the increasing number of parents who take their children on holiday during school time. Like many things in life school attendance now appears to be optional (like employment). This reflects the belief that boundaries are non-existent and life is literally a 'free for all'.

Perhaps it's time for a rethink? How do we engender respect for boundaries and foster the values of responsibility?

Leadership is also about recognising limitations and picking your battles. In today's society if parents stick rigidly to the school calendar, there are many families who would never be able to go on holiday with the whole family. Their employment responsibilities would prohibit this regardless of the reduced cost of holidays outside of peak times.

In March 2025 Bridget Phillipson the Secretary of State for Education explained on national news that taking children on holiday during school time was unacceptable and fines were

an appropriate 'consequence' to parents. It was clear she was trying to keep to script and use the same language of 'crime and consequences'.

We know that people return library books much later if they are fined than they do if there is no fine. It's as if the fine becomes a cost worked out in the contract. In the case of school holidays the fine is much less than the increased costs of going on holiday in peak season and factored into part of the cost benefit analysis.

If we want to see the current arrangement have impact perhaps using behaviourism may help. Increase the fines to make the cost benefit analysis less appealing but also use the right language. The fine is a 'punishment' for wrongdoing. Make it clear! The lack of clarity to a population of straight talking hard working parents leaves them just having to get on with this as just another kick back without the message there has been wrong doing.

However, do we really want to punish hard working parents for wanting to give their children valuable life experiences? The very kind of experiences needed to develop character and life skills?

As much as I value education, I also value as hugely important 'family time'. Parents are not idiots either. In schools that are disorganised and disordered, time away will be of little loss. In schools that are organised and ordered the time can be made back.

It's time for that rethink, how do we meet everyone's real and present needs?

Is it time for schools to once again reflect the workplace? Flexibility is key to creating a harmonious working environment. Fixed holiday time of three months of the year does not reflect any working environment other than within the education system.

The silver bullet for this particular problem.

Students and teachers are to be allowed an allowance of two weeks a year flexibility that can be used at any time within the school year. However, these two weeks must be paid back at the beginning of the Summer Holidays. This reduces the summer holidays for those that use it from 6 weeks to 4 weeks.

Schools to provide activities during the summer holidays and evening classes also for those behind in their learning and or those that want to develop mastery. The school needs to be relevant and at the heart of the community. Perhaps this is the time that could be used for those positive experiences that help to develop character.

This will need a rethink about how the curriculum is delivered, but the COVID pandemic confirmed when we have to we can find ways to solve problems. This is a problem that's not going to go away and will continue to be a source of conflict unless we can resolve the issue in a way that suits everyone. The solution also fits my view that schools need to reflect the workplace much more than they do currently. Flexible working is just one aspect that needs consideration.

The rise of the use of technology and increasing developments such as AI means we can and may have to review how we organise our education system. As I discussed earlier in respect of the prison service, the use of technology in education today can take on many forms including ‘online’ seminars which demonstrate how effective learning can be transferred to the many regardless of the quality of teacher.

The term “Self-organised learning environments” or SOLE are going to become increasingly important especially in higher education where the cost of a degree can be brought down significantly and delivered more consistently with the use of technology.

If I may let Matt Ridley have the final say on education-[34](#)

“We need to get away from creationist thinking in education and allow it to evolve. Education done properly, is an emergent, evolutionary phenomenon”.

“Education is dominated by creationist thinking. The curriculum is too prescriptive and slow to change, teachers are encouraged to teach to the exam rather than the pupils or their own strengths, the text books are infused with instructions about what to think rather than how to think, teaching methods are more about instructing than learning, the possibilities about self-organised learning are neglected, government domination of learning

[34 Ridley, M \(2015\) – See Footnote 8](#)

is accepted without question, and spending on education is justified in terms of supposedly what it does for the country rather than the individual. None of this is meant to imply that education would happen without schooling, that teachers need not exist, that child centre learning in primary schools is the answer, or that some kind of government policy on education is not desirable. Of course these things matter. But there is a path here not taken, in which politician and teachers both allow best practice to evolve and emerge, in which the state acts as an enabler rather than dictator, in which students are encouraged to learn rather than what to think, in which the eager learner is the boss not the servant of the system. Let education evolve.”

Social Media

How would behaviourism tackle the challenges of the online world? This could be summed up in one word - Australia.

As I discussed earlier, in life we experience external boundaries until we are safe and competent to navigate the world around us safely. Why is this not reflected in the online world? Even countries like China, that have no concerns about using a behavioural approach recognise the need to protect their young people from the digital world and implement appropriate boundaries restricting screen time in stages that reflect age and stage of development.

In Australia the straight-talking behaviourists have kept it simple. No social media under the age of 16 years old. Clear unambiguous leadership. I understand Mark Williams, PhD author of 'The Connected Species'³⁵ and one of Australia's leading neuroscientists has been instrumental in this quest to protect children and young people.

Jonathan Haidt, co-author of "The Coddling of the American mind" and author of "The Anxious Generation"^{36 37} states four of what he calls foundations for a healthier childhood in a digital age. These being -

1. No smart phones before 14 years of age. Basic phones

35 Williams, M. A. (2023). *The connected species: How the evolution of the human brain can save the world*. Bloomsbury / Rowman & Littlefield.

36 Lukianoff, G., & Haidt, J. (2018) – See Footnote 15

37 Haidt, J. (2024) – See Footnote 17

without internet access can be considered before this stage of development.

2. No social media before 16 years of age. To allow children time to get through the most vulnerable stage of development before they are exposed to social comparisons and algorithm chosen influencers.

3. Insist on phone free school time so that children are not distracted from giving the school experience of multiple interactions every day the full attention it deserves.

4. Encourage far more unsupervised play and independence. As he says, this is how children naturally develop social skills, overcome anxiety and become self-governing young adults.

In the UK we take the view that access to the internet is akin to Human Rights. Liberty to 'access all areas' is thought to be more important than sensible adult protection. In my view we are not ahead of time in thinking and rights, we are behind, well behind because the role of our responsibility hasn't materialised with huge costs to many.

The toxic world of underage online content is damaging on so many well documented levels. As the authors of *The Codling of The American mind* make clear, even if you avoid the heartbreak of tragedy, young people are arriving at university a good five years behind developmentally from their contemporaries only 15 years ago. This is largely due to the fact that as they spend so much time on devices, they are not having real life experiences and interactions.

As Jonathan Haidt explains in "The Anxious Generation" healthy

brain development depends on getting the right experiences at the right age in the right order. Brain development in mammals and birds is called 'Experience - expected development'. If children are denied the opportunity for free play and young people are denied the opportunity to experience face to face social interactions and in a negative way experience the wrong kind of experiences, this is having a detrimental impact on childhood development.

The concern is that we have huge numbers of children and adults appearing to suffer from anxiety. What is anxiety? Fear, feeling frightened is the emotional response to the dangers encountered. Anxiety is the emotional response to the dangers you are frightened you may encounter in the future. When you become anxious over everyday issues that you are expected to encounter, this is when it becomes a disorder, anxiety disorder. So why are so many people experiencing mental health issues?

Haidt states that 2013 was the year we made the transition from a play based childhood to a phone based childhood. In brief, we have over protected in the real world and under protected in the virtual world. People who live in networks rather than communities are less likely to thrive.³⁸ Could this be the first "evolutionary change" due to "technological change" as opposed to "environmental change"?

Behaviourism says put age limits on social media use at appropriate ages and stages. Like rites of passage. Cognitive

³⁸ Haidt, J. (2024) – See Footnote 17

theory says, how will you feel about that, you might feel your rights are restricted? However, the online world should reflect the real world. Nowhere in the real world do you have the right to everything all at once.

It is here there is another important point to consider. At the start of the 21st Century it was feared that those from the poorest socio-economic sectors of society would lose out as a result of not having the same access to the internet as more well-off communities. Twenty-five years on and we can see that the grades of students in the poorer communities have fallen, but not because of lack of access to the internet but because of lack of supervision and protection from it.

The more educated sections of society have been able to support their young people in terms of monitoring screen time and giving other priorities and activities to do and learn from. Whereas poorer families haven't had the opportunity to provide alternative uses of time or know the importance of regulating screen time.³⁹

Yet in regulated environments the expectation is in keeping with less structured parenting styles and supervision is seen as encroaching on their liberties. The race to the bottom continues.

³⁹ Haidt, J. (2024) – See Footnote 17

Graduated Driving Licence (GDL)

April 2025 Sky News runs an article that I find demonstrates my point beautifully. They look at what's happened in Canada with the implementation of GDL's. The impact has been that fatalities amongst young drivers is down 83% per year, saving thousands of lives.

In the UK someone can take a driving course and achieve their driver's license in a week. In Canada it takes 2 years to get a full licence. Permission to drive is given in stages after demonstrated competency. There is no late-night driving and no taking all your mates out. As the Canadian police officer explained, it's not about an extension of laws but of standards, standard's that reflect their values.

“Is it irresponsible to allow the same thing to happen over and over again and expect a different result, or is it insane”? This was the view of the architect of their system. Other countries like Australia and New Zealand also run similar standards and expectations.

In the UK we take the view that liberties and freedoms are more important than protecting young people at ages and stages, in the full knowledge that every year there are young people that will not survive their first year on the road.

As Wes Streeting Secretary of State for Health and Social Care explained on national news - “We are concerned that they may

‘feel’ like they are being unfailingly restricted”.

This contrast demonstrates the practical behaviourists in Canada that know what the likely behaviour and outcome will be without protection, and as a result put safeguards in place that save lives and the cognitive thinking British who are concerned about what young people may think and feel. This epitomises the contrast between behaviourism and cognitive theory.

It is worth pointing out that within our current framework of legislation, as a simple farmer, if I was to train a 17 year old to drive a tractor in a single type environment and then expose them to multiple different environments without testing for competency, (like driving at night, driving on the motorway or a car filled full of mates as is the case for a car driving licence) should there be an accident in these varying environments which was predictable and someone was killed, the simple farmer would go to jail for gross negligence manslaughter. It is as simple as that!

Promoting Competencies

If we are concerned about what modern society looks like today, we need to realise any prospect of positive change in the future requires us to think about the way our children are brought up and their childhood experiences in today's world. It is these experiences that will shape the society of the future. It is worth recognising the childhood experiences as part of a developmental process within the context of what we have discussed in this book.

- Early Years, secure attachment, love.
- Toddler + stage, please and thank you, empathy for others, boundaries, self discipline. Left from right and right from wrong. Internal controls. Hand eye co-ordination and synchronicity.
- 9 years-15 years of age, Conformation bias, copying the common behaviour observed around them and Prestige bias, copying those who appear to be the most accomplished. This is the stage behaviour is imprinted and accents are formed.
- 14-24 years old peeking in effect at 18 are the ages political views are formed and a work ethic developed. If we know this, we should know how important it is to make sure that the right kind of positive influence happens within our education systems at the right time for the age and stage. However, if parts of this process are missed, we shouldn't merely move on without helping to catch up on what's been missed or negatively impacted.

Throughout my career I have learned again and again that whatever problems people present, the way forward in terms of meaningful help is to increase their personal competency.

Increased competency results in increased life skills, increased opportunities, socially emotionally and practically. In short it improves people's lives, from whatever their starting point. Help to increase competency results in significant positive change, not just for the individual but for us all. As Josue` de Castro, the author of 'The Geopolitics of hunger' sets out

“the road to survival (of humanity- my addition) lies in the effort to make everybody on earth productive”.^{40 41}

Over the years of working at the coal face of social care and education, I have developed a comprehensive assessment system for “looked after children” entitled “Personal Holistic Competence” (PHC) assessment and made this freely available to anyone wishing to use it. This works on the basis of marginal gains, and I commissioned an independent research paper the results of which support its use. It is to my knowledge the only marginal gains system in social care and its unique selling point is that it provides an action plan for everyone involved to work towards. Having used this system and fine-tuned it for over thirty years I have no doubt as to its powerful impact.

This is a behavioural approach to competency. Make small changes in your behaviour and things improve, the cumulative

40 de Castro, J. (1977). The geopolitics of hunger (Rev. ed.). Monthly Review Press
41 Ridley, M (2015) – See Footnote 8

effect of all of these changes can have massive impact in the most positive way.

However, making this public we found that carers and teachers all had too much to do and therefore getting people involved was not easy, even though this process could be hugely beneficial and save time in other areas.

We also found during presentations that many people don't fully understand the language of values, some were frightened it would expose the lack of impact on the child, and some carers simply didn't understand the responsibility of adults to encourage and help young people find employment. It simply wasn't on their radar and they couldn't understand why we thought it was relevant.

As a result, I decided to take the system and turn it around and put it directly in the hands of the students, making it a self-assessment in the form of a free app for the user, child or adult, to use to help with the most important things in life.

Emotional wellbeing:

www.emotionalwellbeingindicator.com

Preparation for employment:

www.preparationforemployment.com

This system gives the user an accurate overview of their skills and abilities and constructive advice for their identified areas of improvement. The overall aim to increase their resilience and

improve skills to be employable.

As we know every employee needs an employer, as a result my team are working on the third self-assessment app - “Preparation for Self-Employment” giving helpful advice to those contemplating starting their own business which I hope will be available in 2026. All of this free to use.

End note - Finding Harmony

The balance between the pressures of the modern world, the need to safeguard everyone and the reality of the world around us leave us in a state of reflection. The issues are which direction do we take to find the harmony we seek, and the balance needed to move forward?

I hope this book has caused you to pause, reflect and value the main silver bullets I started with.

‘Allow behaviourism to influence the way we deal with social problems.’ A change in the attitude of how we approach issues.

‘Recognise the need to have an effective Criminal Justice System that can respond quickly.’ The use of a behavioural approach.

‘Promote employability.’ By supporting other issues, you support the broader context. By increasing employment, we reduce the impact of crime. By ensuring an effective deterrent we increase employability.

By increasing employability and engagement in an economic society we are all safer more quickly.

David Bartlett. August 2025

PS. In May 2024 an earlier publication, “In Search of Utopia” was read by a high level parliamentarian and with my permission sent to those responsible for policy within the Labour Party prior to the General Election. The new Labour Government appears to have respected points in this publication and many have been recognised and adopted. Some policy announcements fell very short of quoting directly from the book.

This publication was written as a second attempt at influence. A draft version was given to the same people in July 2025. It has been made clear there will never be any formal recognition of its influence, however, that is not the important point. Within a month the Government announced extra millions of pounds to be spend on mainstream schools to promote the arts and sports in particular. The realisation that a deterrent is important within the criminal justice system and the use of electronic tags being made to reduce the prison population.

Whilst I acknowledge it may well be that there are like minded people drawing the same conclusions, I don't believe in coincidence especially when it reaches double figures.

I hope you've enjoyed reading this, it's a project that has been a remarkable journey to work on and my only hope is that this is helpful.

Best wishes, David.

Reading list.

The Human Mind - Robert Winston.

Horse Sense for people - Monty Roberts.

The Codling of The American Mind. Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt.

The Evolution of Everything - Matt Ridley.

Homo Sapiens, Homo Deus, 21 lessons for the 21st Century.
professor Yuval Noah Harari.

From my Heart, transforming lives through teaching values'. Dr
Neil Hawkes.

The Connected Species, Mark A Williams PhD.

The Anxious Generation, Jonathan Haidt.

The Rational Optimist, Matt Ridley.

Residential Care in England. Sir Martin Neray. 2016.

Acknowledgements.

Josh Price, Paul Glynn and Diana Hewick-Crawford for helping me
with my research.

Professor Finlay Graham who taught me the importance of
making taxpayers.

Dr Jack Kennedy for establishing the significance of a marginal
gains approach.

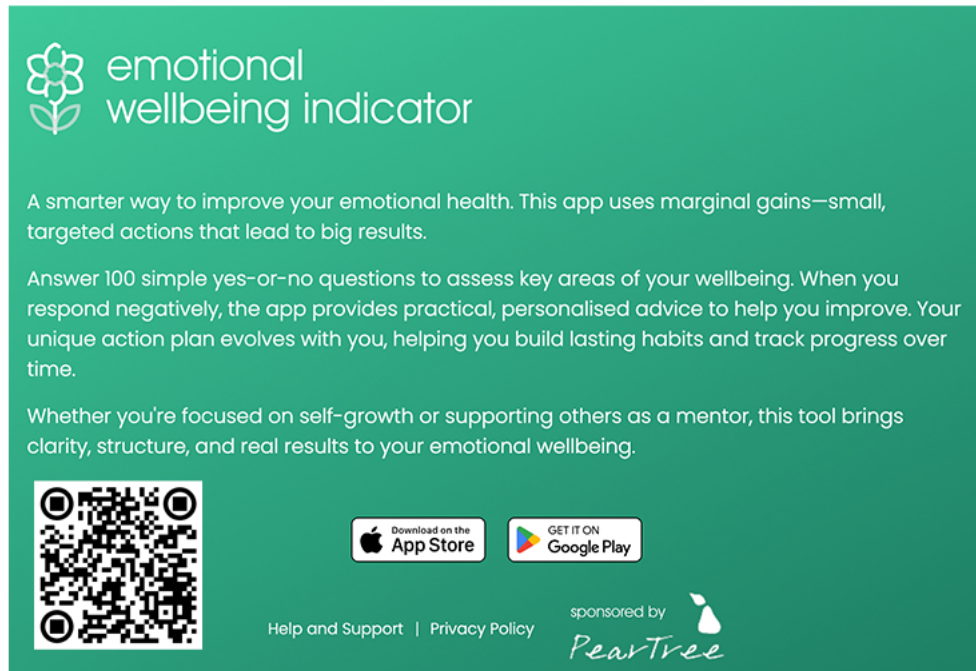
Dr Neil Hawkes for his support and encouragement, my mentor
and education role model.


Field Marshall the Lord Houghton of Richmond, who taught me

that those of us at the coal face of social care and education can influence policy makers.

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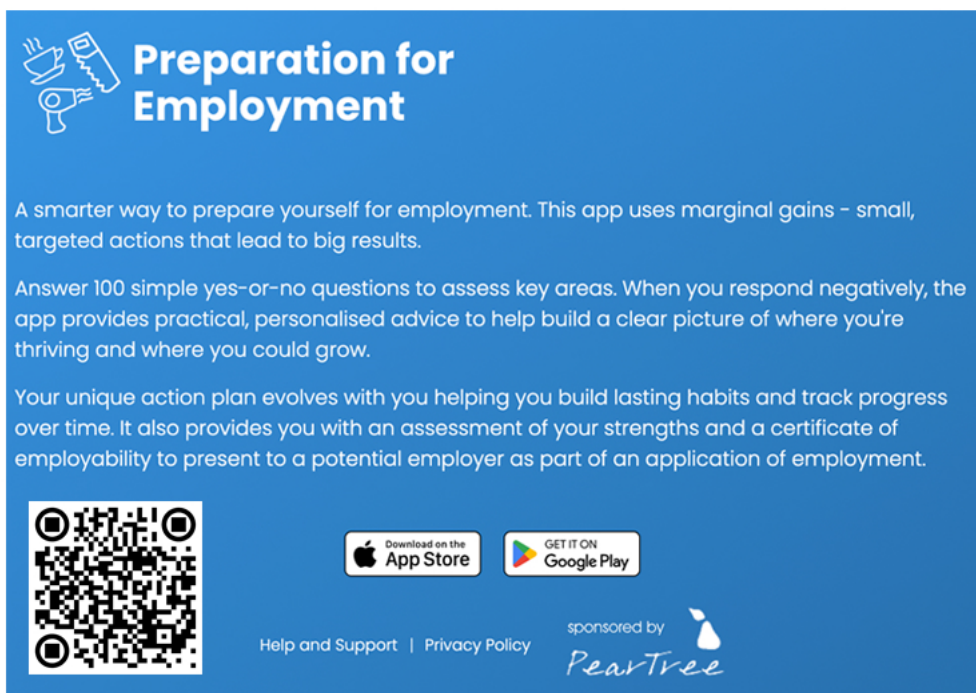
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