



Get in the Huddl

Being a good parent is one of life's biggest challenges, so when Kate Lawson moved to Essex she saw an opportunity to help

Words by Sybilla Hart

When Katie Lawson moved to the Suffolk/Essex borders nearly five years ago, she didn't plan to 'go into parenting' in any sort of professional capacity. But what she did want as a parent of three young children was to have the facts at her fingertips in order to successfully navigate modern day parenting and work at the same time.

So after 15 years in London as

a sports event organiser, Katie founded Huddl, a parenting platform that organises informative parenting events. The idea is to equip parents with all they need to bring up children and young people in an age where, according to charity YoungMinds, one in nine children aged between five and 16 years of age suffer from a mental health problem.

There are two types of Huddl events that Katie organises –

firstly large-scale talks that can accommodate up to 300 people and secondly smaller workshop-style groups called Huddl Ups.

You will find parents and head teachers alike at both of these types of meetings as both address topics such as eating disorders, nutrition, self-harm and internet safety. It is sobering but vital stuff, with hospital admissions of children who self-harmed having more than doubled in six years according to NHS figures.



ABOVE: Parents gather for a huddl presentation



Katie with her family



KATIE LAWSON

Katie Lawson lives in East Bergholt with her husband James and their three children, gerbils, chickens and a much-loved cockapoo. Having moved from London five years ago, they are enjoying all that the countryside has to offer. The family are regular visitors to Aldeburgh, where Katie's parents and Granny live. It is there that Katie's children participate in all the activities that Katie did growing up. You can find them on the golf course, tennis courts, at the yacht club or perhaps most frequently eating ice creams by the boat pond on the beach. Before setting up Huddl, Katie worked for 15 years in sports marketing where she organised events such as the International Rugby Awards Dinner and the Players Cricket Awards at the Royal Albert Hall.

'The people who attend the sessions are so honest, which is so refreshing,' remarks Katie, who explains the spirit of camaraderie and understanding that abounds at Huddl – most useful when it comes to the tricky subject of parenting.

'Huddl is a form of early intervention aiming to bring parents and carers the most up-to-date factual and research-based advice so that they are better equipped to spot signs early and offer support as soon as it's needed.'

Take the first Huddl talk back in 2017 where one of the speakers was Lorin LaFave (her son Breck was groomed online and subsequently murdered in 2014). Lorin and Jonathan Taylor, a covert internet investigator who worked within the Metropolitan Police Child

Abuse Investigation Command for ten years, gave a talk at Trinity Park in Ipswich. Both advised emphasising to your children that they should never arrange a physical meeting with someone they meet online and equally that children should let their parents know if someone tries to arrange this. Jonathan also recommends exercising extreme caution when it comes to giving out personal details, such as addresses or school names.

Aside from these two keynote speakers, there are many other experts on the Huddl panel. Take

Dr Rosemary Taylor, for example. In response to the broad question of how to be a good parent, Rosemary puts it beautifully concisely: 'Be the adult that one day you would like your child to become.'

Oh, and don't forget that when you next go head to head with your teenager, you are the adult with stable neurochemistry, not them.

Dr Hazel Harrison, a clinical psychologist, explains how to teach your kids about the brain. Hazel does this most eloquently when she describes how the upstairs and downstairs of the brain work as the 'thinking' and 'feeling' parts, respectively. It is

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fascinating stuff for adults and children alike and is easily digestible and applicable for all ages.

Dr Ruth MacConville is

another member of the Huddl advisory board and she makes the point that parents and carers should take the time to look after themselves, a worthy point that is easily forgotten in the myriad of challenges faced by parents today.

Interestingly Ruth is of the opinion that a manicure or dog walk does a lot more to boost self-esteem than an indulgent shopping spree. She also promotes the importance of learning to say 'no' as an adult. These are just two more useful nuggets of information I

have learnt thanks to the Huddl resource. Keep the wisdom coming please; I cannot get enough of it. ♦

The next Huddl event is a Huddl Up with Suffolk Mind on Eating Disorders on Friday, May 3 from 9.30am to 12.30pm at Quay Place in Ipswich.

