



Working with children and families

Life as a single parent

Jan Dupree

Well we have what we call our little family that's myself and my son, we live here you know on your own, and then we have our big family so, I include my parents, Hamish's father's parents and sisters and brothers. Hamish's father kind of, but we don't see him very much, and all my sisters and brothers and all their children.

Stan Tucker

Jan Dupree is now a lone parent with one son, but that's not how she began parenthood.

Jan Dupree

I left university, I met somebody that I fell madly in love with, or at least I believed I was, got pregnant, and then everything went wrong between us, so our relationship fell apart. A lot to do with having, I believe, a completely different background and different values that we didn't discuss or investigate before us, you know, decided to have a child and so we split up when I was six months pregnant.

Hamish was born two months prematurely, so he was in hospital for a month, and I left hospital, and actually there was some sort of mess up in the system so, I didn't get a visit from anybody for a few weeks, and then I seemed to have slipped the system, because I lived with my sister, and her child and partner, we lived in a flat upstairs from each other, I was downstairs, and we supported each other and actually it ended up not having any support from anywhere else, because we had such good family support. Now, you know, I get some financial support with family credit, because I'm not earning a very high wage, and that's about it really. Friends and family.

My own role as a parent is one of guidance, and friendship, kind of, although I think that can sometimes fog the picture. I try and enforce it by encouragement, so more of a positive encouragement than a negative. You know I really feel, I really believe that if children are pushed into things, which they end up being very resentful, and in fact if they're invited in they can end up being very helpful and, you know, a joy to be with.

Stan Tucker

What does Jan Dupree see as the benefits of being a lone parent?

Jan Dupree

Having the freedom to make any decisions, needs to be made on your own. So you don't have to argue points about what school, what the rules should be, what your children should be allowed to do and shouldn't be and, the sort of things you want to do. And the freedom also to do other things like move, with your job if you want to. Often your relationship with a child can be slightly off, in the sense that you can end up having them as being, almost like an equal, or a partner. Like you get a film out in the evening and you think 'oh great, well that you know you sit and watch it with them', and so I think that can sort of push out sort of who's in charge bit, it's difficult to tell that. And also, the same things that are good are also difficult. You know when you have a decision to make, you do have to make it on your own. You get lonely because, you're in on your own, and there's a child in bed, and so you know it's not so easy to go out socialising that sort of thing. You don't get invited to dinner parties. It's a funny thing to say but you don't you know as a single parent, it's all on you. Say tomorrow it's a Saturday, and I'm running a course, teaching people some homeopathy, and, there isn't somebody that's going to be there for Hamish, so I'm constantly asking other people to 'oh would you mind picking Hamish up for just an hour or two here or an hour or two there'.

There's nobody else that's obvious that would take that slack, and if I work a normal day, i.e. a kind of nine-till-five nine-till-six, then you know I do need to get somebody to pick up my son for me.

I get lonely, and, try to, make things happen. So do things socially, so it doesn't get me down? I'm emotionally a pretty stable person. I don't really have very high highs and don't really have very low lows so... You know I do get down, I get down if things are going, are difficult with Hamish, you know behaviourally and, emotionally with him. I find it difficult not to be able to talk to somebody about it. Not having that, sort of, adult company in the evening, you know.

Stan Tucker

Does Jan Dupree see any problems ahead if she were to start a new relationship?

Jan Dupree

Well I can't see it happening, you know, immediately. I did have a relationship with somebody for three years, and that did happen and yeah, Hamish became good friends with them, but we didn't live together. But I imagine now, especially that Hamish's older and understand fully what's going on, you know, once, if I had a relationship with somebody it would have to be a pretty stable one before I'd want to involve Hamish.

Stan Tucker

Tracey Naylor was a lone parent, but has recently married.

Tracey Naylor

I'm twenty seven, Charlotte is five and James is nine months old. My husband's also twenty seven. I had a previous relationship, in which I had my daughter. That broke down, so I was a single parent for a while and I worked part time at Tesco's where I met my husband. We had a relationship got married and now we have our son. I've been with Cav for just over two and a half years. It's nice having a husband because in the evenings once your children are in bed, as a single parent you are stuck there on your own, there's nobody to talk to you, I can't leave the house. If you suddenly realise you've run out of milk its tough, whereas with a husband you can leave the house you've got somebody to talk to. The pressure isn't on you to do everything for your child because somebody else is their, it means you can have a five minute break now and again. I think it's nice for Charlotte to have somebody there to help discipline her, because as a single parent, I used to feel I didn't want to be shouting at Charlotte or disciplining her, because she didn't have a father that she was really loved and I had to go over the top with that love that sometimes things like discipline got forgotten, whereas now she has got a father and, you can do things like discipline her now because there's two of you.

Stan Tucker

What does Cav see as the advantages of taking on a "ready-made" family?

Cavale Naylor

I skipped four years of nappy changing, which I thought was quite pleasant! Well, I can't actually think of many advantages, there's some disadvantages as in, I didn't know Charlotte as a baby. I've missed growing up with her for three years, because I treat her as my own. I missed growing up with her for three years, and like she'll talk back to when she was a baby and like, you know. She'll say, 'you held me when I learned to walk didn't you, Dad?' and I'm like, 'no I didn't, I wasn't there', that sort of thing. So I can't think of being that many advantages. People think oh yeah, instant family it's cool, but I'd rather, much rather had been there from the start.

Tracey Naylor

Sometimes, I wonder whether Charlotte is being treated differently, and I don't know necessarily that she is being treated differently, or whether I'm looking for it because I want her so much to be an equal, that I, sometimes you look for things and, it doesn't mean that she isn't being treated as an equal at all it's just that, I'm really wary of it. Obviously, because I've got another child, there's bound to be slightly more feelings for him because he's a baby,

everybody like falls in love with a baby. You're growing up with him and finding his little habits. You're learning them whereas, people don't know Charlotte's habits so it's a lot harder to get a relationship with Charlotte.

Cavale Naylor

Well I think I'd be lying if I didn't say I felt as strongly for Charlotte as I did for James. There's only a really minute difference. I mean I've still known Charlotte two years, you know, nearly half her life, but there is a slight difference, but I go out of my way to try and treat her equally, so she doesn't feel left out or anything like that.

Stan Tucker

Tracey talks about her own upbringing.

Tracey Naylor

I had a very happy childhood. My mum never worked she always spent the time with us children. I've got an older sister a younger brother, my dad always worked. When my dad didn't work he always used to take us out for day trips or, we used to have holidays and things. There came a point when my dad was made redundant and money wasn't so good, but my mum's always the sort of person who would go without herself so that we had things. I look back on my childhood fondly, I think I've got a good set of parents, good family.

Stan Tucker

Does Charlotte's father have a role to play in her life?

Tracey Naylor

Yes he does want to see her. I would prefer it if we could just, like, hide him under a mat and it would go away and we could say that Cav is her father and everything, but at the end of the day he's on her birth certificate so I think if we just ignored it, there's going to come a point where she's going to find out and it'll be us who, she, you know, she's lived this life of a lie. He does want to see her so I think we're going to have to let him see her but, for a little while it's going to have to be, watched and things. Perhaps use contact centres.

I don't think I will ever really say anything. She knows that Daddy Malcolm is the one who gave me the seed, and Dad is the one who's her father. And to be honest, I don't see them myself as step brother or half brother and sister so I will never say to her that they're any different, but at the end of the day they're being brought up by the same father. The only difference is that I got the seed off Daddy Malcolm to make her.

Cavale Naylor

It hadn't even occurred to me they only were half brother and sister, they were just brother and sister it's as simple as that.

Stan Tucker

Val Pask comes from a large family with a complex set of relationships.

Val Pask

I've got seven children, six boys one girl. The ages vary from thirty down to seven. I've been married twice. My first marriage broke up after thirteen years and I've been with the husband that I'm with now, I've been with him, sixteen years. My eldest son, he's got a family of three. He's got two boys and a girl. I see them quite often because they live quite locally. I've got three more grand children coming to stop, with my daughter. Her husband works nights, so at the weekends she stays with me because she doesn't like being on her own, and I have promised Nikki, she's twelve, that we'll do some cookie making tomorrow evening, and my grandson he'll want to help and then, due to certain circumstances, my daughter's also got my other granddaughter in her care at the moment, she's for various reasons come to live with them. She's two, Lorna, so I suppose she'll be dabbling, wanting to make her own cookies. Then there's Darren, he's got the little girl Lorna. Then there's Russell, he has got one daughter Shannon, she's a year old and she's absolutely gorgeous but a monster, but I love her. They're expecting another baby in June. There's Christian, he's twenty two, and he still lives at home, and I think he'll still live at home till he's forty two, at least! I've offered to set

him up in a flat and he's not in the least bit interested. He loves his home too much. They're the first five to my first husband, and then, as I said, I've got two more, Ryan he's nine, Jordan seven, they're to my second husband, they're like chalk and cheese, fight like cat and dog, but I think they love each other. Though it's quite a nice little family group, you know, we have big get-togethers often in the summer especially we'll have a big massive barbecue, at least twenty people there, and we have mad few hours. And then very often, on a Sunday, I'll have quite a few turn up. They don't always announce that they're coming, and they just turn, so I can sometimes have twelve for lunch, and maybe seventeen for pudding, and it's just one big, not always happy family, as all families aren't always happy.

Stan Tucker

Val describes her role as mother and grandmother and how things have changed since her own childhood.

Val Pask

For instance my daughter-in-law went out on Wednesday, she had to go to the dentist and so I picked two of my grand children up, took them back to the house, my house, made them tea. I think we had a little talk about school what they'd been doing various things. Then, obviously my daughter picked them up later and they went home, you know, that happens quite often. One of them will phone up and say, 'oh mum I need you know can you come I've got to go to so-and-so'. So, they always know I'm there whenever they need me. and quite often we all go out together, we have lots of evenings when we go out together. I mean I love dancing. They're not disciplined enough. I can see a lot of things that you know they're doing wrong, and I want to say 'oh don't do that'. But you can only say so much, and I can only advise them so much. I think they're all fairly good parents in their own way. You learn from your mistakes as everyone does you know, there's certain things that you do as a parent and, I can see that, eventually they will learn. But there's lots of things, I think, are so different. When I was young, I would never have you know been allowed out the way they are now. I mean you see twelve and thirteen year old children out on the streets at eleven o'clock at night. When I was twelve, if I'd have been out of the house later than eight o'clock I wouldn't have been able to sit down for a week. You know and, it's hard to believe how... I have let mine stay out quite late, but not as young as that, and I wouldn't let the younger two now.

Stan Tucker

Val talks about the differences from her own upbringing.

Val Pask

My Dad was very strict, lots of things were definitely not allowed. Even my elder brothers, they were never allowed to use bad language, my Dad hated it. Although my Dad enjoyed going for a drink, he would never allow my brothers, to go out until they were more-or-less eighteen. But he was, I see now that, he you know it was quite fair really because it was quite hard, because my Mum was an invalid, she was quite ill for a number of years. And he knew that the least little thing used to upset my Mum. There was a lot of things that I didn't really get into trouble for, obviously till I was a lot older, but I did leave home at sixteen and pregnant. And I don't think he forgave me for at least five years, he just couldn't understand that I could do that sort of thing, and I think it was a major thing with him. We did make friends when my little boy was five years old, and he was a good grandfather to him, as he was consequently to the rest of the children.