

An evaluation of the *About Boys Course* (ABC)

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Executive Summary

This report describes the results and findings of an evaluation of the *About Boys Courses* run by the *Boys Development Project* between October and December 2012. The evaluation has two components, the first comprising a post-course survey by self-completion questionnaire of 209 mothers; the second, a follow-up with a sub-sample of 50 by 'phone interview.

This evaluation provides very powerful evidence that mothers found *ABC* informative, enjoyable and useful. There were widespread reports from others of use of the tips and techniques both during and since the end of the courses. There are strong indications at both evaluation points that they perceived the courses to be positive in terms of improving the degree of control that they feel and exercise in their relationships with sons, the quality of those relationships and their capacity to understand and manage, and in some cases reduce of instances of conflict between them. In this respect there is clear evidence that *ABC* fulfilled its aims of:

- Increasing mothers' understanding of their son's development and behavior;
- Equipping them with practical techniques to provide their sons with boundaries and discipline;
- And, boosting their confidence in supporting their sons through any difficulties that they might encounter.

Further evidence is to be found in the following results:

- Mothers reported that every aspect of *ABC* was highly relevant to them. That is, with regard to issues of discipline and boundaries, gender differences, management of behaviour, motivation, preparation for school, boys and emotions, boys and communication and boys' development more than 80% of mothers reported high topical relevance.
- Assessment of impact measured by increases in mothers' perceptions of understanding, confidence and skills in disciplining, confidence in parenting and quality of relationship with their sons. Measured along a five point scale analysis showed an average gain of 1.5 points. The range extended 1.8 for skills in disciplining my son to 0.85 for mothers' perceptions of how well they get on with their sons.
- For those items associated with understanding, skills and confidence the average increase was 1.675.

ABC works because it combines information, skills development and opportunities for discussion, debate, trialling of techniques and sharing of experience in a safe, supportive environment. The theoretical component provides a context for making sense of and to some extent normalising experience of parenting boys. By coupling this with strategies which can be easily acquired, readily tested and often times immediately effective in enhancing control of and diminishing concerns about

flashpoints in everyday life (bedtime, bathtimes, mealtimes, playing with others, and so) mothers' confidence around boys is enhanced.

Although practical methods of controlling their sons' behaviour figured most prominently in accounts of the impact of the course, there is some evidence that it may also have helped some mothers to support their sons through structural transitions – especially the passage to nursery school. In the few cases where mothers discern no impact of ABC they assign the basis of this to influence of circumstantial factors which either preclude using their new understanding and skills or negatively affect their sons

Survey data point to the high relevance of course content with more 80% of respondents indicating high levels of perceived salience. All thematic content was reported as highly acceptable.

Both survey and interview data suggest that ABC is highly accessible to mothers. The use of Children's Centres is successful. Mothers are comfortable with these venues and the provision sits well within their remit. Offering ABC in the mornings is convenient to most mothers and reflects the best fit with complex pressures that they may experience around managing childcare of younger children and attendance at school or nursery among other older children.

This evaluation suggests that the targeting of the programme on mothers of sons aged between 0 and 5 years old is appropriate and successful. The greatest proportion of mothers (just over half) have sons between 2 and 4 years old which provides both a fairly high level of consistency in terms of needs and experiences around boys and also creates grounds for effective learning within groups. Where groups are less homogeneous in terms of the age of boys represented most mothers see this as creating opportunities for sharing experience which has relevance to them in the future. This is most evident with respect to mothers of sons under 2 years old where contact with mothers of older boys made possible via ABC enhances their confidence about understanding and managing their sons as they grow up. It may be useful to explore with trainers the ways that they exploit these opportunities for learning among mothers and manage diversity in groups.

This evaluation is not designed to address questions about if and how economic position, social capital and family and other contextual features and factors may be reflected in mothers' participation in or the impact on them of ABC. For example, it may be that concerns are either experienced, surface or are expressed in particular forms by mothers dependent on their context and background. It may also be that expectations of boys among mothers may be patterned by these factors. Further research addressing these issues is warranted. However, ABC is valued because it is open to all mothers and focuses on mothers' understanding about boys. The choice of Children's Centres as the location for running courses is congruent with a principled view that ABC should be easily accessible to all mothers in a locality and, furthermore, that participating mothers benefit from interaction with diverse peers since concerns may be characterised as more rather than less common and shared.

This evaluation provides clear evidence that it is the knowledge and skills that the facilitator brings to *ABC* that are of central importance to its success. Trainers displayed comfort and acumen in terms of running groups, knowledge about boys and the course content and the ability to transmit and transfer skills in ways that felt safe, supportive and productive. While some mothers seem to be suggesting that experience of boys as a parent is important in a good trainer, it is plausible that this reflects the importance of permission-giving around sharing some of the challenges and frustrations mothers experience around understanding and their relationships with their sons which trainers display via an empathetic approach.

There are a number of important methodological limitations to this evaluation to consider in weighing these results and findings. First, this evaluation is neither designed nor powered to sustain an interpretation of impact beyond participant perception. However, the high levels of congruence between post-course survey and follow-up interviews, the plausibility of effects and explanation by which they come about are strongly suggestive that the course aim of enhancing mothers' confidence in parenting their sons, and also the quality of that experience and their relationships with their sons is achieved. Second, it is important to consider if the sample of mothers who took part in the evaluation accurately and fully represents those registered on the courses. Future research should ensure data on enrolment is collected in order to facilitate assessment on this point.

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The About Boys Course (ABC)

ABC is a short intervention comprising 4, two hour sessions targeting mothers with sons aged between 0-5 years old. ABC aims to:

- Increase mothers' understanding of their son's development and behavior;
- To equip them with practical techniques to provide their sons with boundaries and discipline;
- And, to boost their confidence in supporting their sons through any difficulties that they might encounter.

To achieve these aims the sessions cover the following topics: boys' and girls' social, physical and psychological development; discipline and boundaries including different styles of discipline; understanding boys and what motivates them; and, preparing boys for school.

ABC is delivered by accredited trainers through a variety of settings including Children's and Sure Start Centres. Further information about training and a list of accredited trainers can be found at:

<http://www.boysdevelopmentproject.org.uk/abc0-5pro/#>

The Evaluation

This report describes an evaluation of ABC courses delivered between October and December 2012. The evaluation comprises collation and analysis of data gleaned via self-completion survey administered to participating women at the end of each course and follow-up 'phone interviews which were conducted in June 2013. The overall purpose of the evaluation is to establish the impact of ABC in relation to the stated programme aims and to understand how impact is mediated by factors such as participating mothers' motivations, expectations and engagement with the course, their needs around understanding their sons and practical matters such as structure, timing and delivery of the course.

The post-intervention survey provides a mechanism for assessment of short-term impact on mothers' knowledge, understanding and confidence around their sons and also provides insight into acceptability and accessibility of the programme. The follow-up interviews provide additional information about intervention impact in the longer-term with a particular focus on continued utility, contribution to maternal confidence, any impact on mother-son relationships and other unforeseen outcomes.

Context

This evaluation builds on a similar exercise undertaken in 2008. This involved processing summative data gleaned via self-completion survey completed by 54 of the 60 mothers who participated in the course (then known as 'Raising Boys') supplemented with follow-up 'phone interviews with 24 of them. This evaluation identified that mothers found the course informative, enjoyable and useful, put knowledge and skills acquired into practice in ways that enhanced the quality of their relationship with their son and resulted in reduced stress and conflict.

Mothers associated the positive impact to the coupling of practical strategies and techniques with accessible and relevant theory in the form of knowledge and understanding about boys' psychological and social development. The salience of the course was greatest for mothers with sons aged between 2 and 5 years old. Significantly, in the 2008 evaluation there was evidence that the knowledge and expertise of the facilitator was an important factor in mothers' engagement with and assessment of the course. In addition to its principal aims stated above, the current evaluation enables us address the extent to which facilitator characteristics may be mediating satisfaction with and perceived impact of the intervention.

Further details of previous evaluations can be found and downloaded from:
<http://www.boysdevelopmentproject.org.uk/download/>

Evaluation instruments and measures

The self-completion survey

The self-completion survey (see appendix 1) was made up of around 20 individual items combining predominantly closed and scaled likert-type responses with a much smaller number of questions inviting free text responses. The survey asked about issues of relevance of themes within the course, match of content with expectations and needs, motivations for participating and a rating of perceptions of changes in knowledge, confidence and skills pre- and post-participation. Mothers were also able to provide information about resources provided via the course and contact details to allow follow-up. End of course surveys were completed by 209 mothers.

Telephone interview

The follow-up evaluation involved conducting short telephone interviews with mothers who had participated in the ABC courses. Interviews were conducted to a schedule comprising questions relating to four broad areas of interest. First, mothers were invited to reflect on motivations for participation and expectations. Second, learning of immediate and ongoing utility including views about impact on boys and on mother-son and other relationships, third, areas of new need or interest with regard to boys and fourth, reflections on course promotion and provision including facilitator characteristics.

For each interview, a *pro forma* listing these questions and providing room for responses to be noted was used to record, in long-hand, a summary of the interview. Interviews varied in duration between around 10 and 20 minutes.

Interviewee selection and recruitment

One hundred and 73 (83%, n=209) mothers provided contact details and were hence eligible to contribute to the follow-up evaluation. Selection of eligible contacts to interview and cessation of sampling was framed by three principles: achievement of representation of each of the courses in the follow-up evaluation; recruitment of a random sample of interviewees; and, attainment of data saturation. Consequently, interviewees were selected at random by picking every

third person from a listing of eligible contacts and continuing through the list until all contacts had been exhausted.

When we received no answer to a call to an eligible mother inviting their participation in an interview, we moved to the next contact on the list, working through it repeatedly until we had exhausted all eligible contacts. In total we placed calls to 155 mothers. One declined to participate, and another hung up. There was either no reply or the line was engaged in another 93 cases. Ten numbers were not recognised or unattainable. 50 mothers responded of whom we spoke to 40 at first time of calling and 10 on call back at a time of greater convenience.

The relationship of sample of mothers would we interviewed to those who completed the survey and course location is reported in table 1. It shows that we have some exit data for courses that ran in 27 separate locations. Rates of responses to requests for follow-up details varied from 66% to 100% (achieved in 11 locations). The overall average response rate to requests for follow-up details was 83%. The absence of data on course enrolment means that it is not possible to calculate the rate of response to the exit survey.

Follow-up interview via 'phone reached 50 mothers representing 21 of the 27 separate locations at which courses were run. Representation ranged from 11-60% of eligible participants (excluding the locations not represented in the sample at all).

Table 1: Participants in the evaluations

Course location	Participants completing end-of-course evaluative survey (n)	Participants eligible for follow-up evaluation		Participants contributing to follow-up evaluation	
		(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)
Elliot Bank	11	11	100	4	36
South Bermondsey	12	11	92	4	36
Southwark (Newpin)	6	4	66	0	0
Camberwell	4	4	100	0	0
Bessenden	4	2	50	0	0
Longridge	7	6	86	2	33
Oaktree	10	7	70	2	29
Jessop	12	9	75	1	11
Redding (Bushey)	6	4	66	1	25
Woodlands	10	6	60	1	17
Rosendale	15	15	100	3	20
Leaveden	10	10	100	6	60
Haslemere	10	8	80	3	38
Berrygrove	4	4	100	1	25
Stanham	8	6	75	2	33
Shenley	4	3	75	1	33
Bushey Hill	10	7	70	3	43
BECC	8	6	75	2	33
London Colney	4	3	75	0	0
Tring	5	5	100	3	60
Garlinge	7	6	86	2	33
Batford	12	9	75	2	22
Radlett	7	7	100	0	0
Brickwood	7	7	100	4	58
Borehamwood	6	6	100	2	33
Preston	1	1	100	0	0
Bessemer Grange	9	6	66	1	17
Totals	209	173		50	

Data analysis and presentation

Data yielded by the exit survey were entered into SPSS, cleaned and checked and then used to produce descriptive statistics cited throughout this report in tables and other formats. Free text comments submitted via the questionnaire were collated under themes, assigned a numerical code and included in this analysis. Data yielded by follow-up 'phone interviews were analysed in relation to the three broad themes outlined above. Comments were coded, clustered and content extracted. Data from 'phone follow-ups have been integrated into reporting of results of the survey where they provide some additional illustrative elaboration. An indication is given of the number of interviewees who referred to an issue although it is important to emphasise that this exercise should not be taken to imply that the significance of an issue relates directly to enumeration. Quotations and summarisations drawn from individual interviews are included to illustrate aspects of the findings. Citations have been anonymised to protect confidences of the interviewees in question.

Age of mothers' sons

Two hundred and seven (99%) of the 209 mothers who participated in the ABC exit survey provided information about their sons. Nearly three quarters (72%, n=151) reported being mother to a single son and a further 24% (n=50) had two or more sons. The majority of youngest sons were aged either 2 or 3 years old (52%). Roughly equal proportions (19 and 18 %, respectively) were either 1 or 4 years old and the remaining boys 5 or in two cases, 6 years or older. Among those participants with two or more sons the majority were aged either 4 or 5 years old (63%, n=35).

Mothers' motivation for participating in ABC

Information about mothers' motivations for participation in ABC was collected via both the exit survey and follow-up interviews. In the exit survey, mothers were asked to indicate the extent to which they 'agreed', 'disagreed' or were 'not sure' with a series of statements related to current concerns or experience of difficulties with their sons, curiosity about boys in other mothers' experiences and interests in personal development. Table 2 reports results for these items.

Table 2: Motivations for participating in the course

	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not sure (%)
I was just interested in learning more (n=201)	90	4	2
I love my son but find him difficult (n=194)	54	28	11
I felt I didn't understand him (n=186)	37	36	16
I was anxious about him (n=186)	44	34	11
I don't have any worries about him now but later...(n=180)	41	30	16
I wanted to find out what other parents did (n=189)	68	14	9
I heard that the course was good (n=182)	68	11	8

This data show high levels of agreement on four measures: interest in learning more (90%), finding a son difficult (54%), wanting to know about the experience of other mothers (68%) and responding to recommendations about the course (68%).

Results are more evenly divided with respect to prospective concern about a son (41% agreeing versus 30% disagreeing) and anxiety (44% agreeing and 34% disagreeing).

Follow-up interviews in which mothers were invited to reflect on motivations for participation in ABC both endorse these results and provide some potential explanations for the items where differences in views were most marked. Resonant with the exit survey, at follow-up interview by far the most frequently mentioned motivation for participation in ABC was curiosity about boys. This was most often framed in terms of interest in boys' behaviour and development and especially the difference from girls (mentioned by 20 interviewees). It could be that gender

differences figured particularly prominently since such a high proportion of mothers had one son.

Just under a third of mothers (14) explained that their motivation to learn about boys' and gender difference in psycho-social development was coupled to experience of a specific challenge or problem with their son's behaviour. Eight mothers provided some detail talking about 'acting out' in some form or other, accounts of which are exemplified by the following comments:

'...difficulties in managing the behaviour of my son and concerns about the reasons for this. Explosions of anger, tantrums, hitting, damaging things and hurting people'

And,

'My child is incredibly emotional and was hitting other children and found it really difficult to share toys'

Expressions of interest in 'understanding my boy' and 'what makes them tick' were sometimes connected to these issues (by 4 respondents). In a small number of cases (4) the struggle with managing challenging behaviour was such that mothers talked about an erosion or collapse in their confidence and a hope that the course would help to address this:

'I needed a boost to my self confidence at a time when our relationship was in trouble'

And,

'I'd lost a lot of confidence as a parent because my son was being difficult. Not doing things I asked and hitting, kicking and biting'

Despite being a significant motivation cited in interview, wanting to learn about boys' behaviour and specifically responding to challenging behaviour was not mentioned to the same degree as in the exit survey. This difference may reflect a number of factors. One highly plausible explanation is the social undesirability of conceding having a difficulty with a son. Talking about this in an interview self-evidently involves a degree of disclosure not engendered in an anonymous survey. The fact that 7 mothers referred in interviews to looking for 'new ideas' as a motivation for participation in ABC may reflect this. It is also possible that the difference reflects changes between exit survey and follow-up interview including that boys' challenging behaviour had reduced and/or perceptions of its significance as confidence in understanding of boys had risen.

In a few other cases, mothers interest in achieving a better understanding of boys was linked to experiences of having only raised daughters and/or being raised with female siblings or having lived or currently living in a family context perceived to be dominated by women:

‘I have an older sister and twin sister, had two girls of my own then a son – I felt like I didn’t really know about boys or their perspective. You realise when see course that they’re different’

Results of the survey pointed to the importance of recommendation as a motivation for mothers’ participation in *ABC*. This was confirmed and elaborated in interviews where 9 mothers spoke about friends or peers suggesting that they took part. Importantly, implied in many of these accounts was the pursuit of responses to boys’ behaviour:

‘Several [friends] who had boys said it provided a good insight into the difference between girls and boys. I was finding it quite struggle, especially as most of my friends had daughters’

Interviews give some insight into the greater degree of divergence in mother’s responses to statements in the exit survey about whether their concerns about a son are prospective (41% agreeing versus 30% disagreeing) and anxiety (44% agreeing and 34% disagreeing).

Further analysis of the survey data showed that prospective concerns captured in the statement ‘I don’t have any worries now but later...’ are much more prevalent (although not significantly so) among those mothers with sons aged under 3 years old. In contrast, mothers with sons aged 4 and 5 years old were significantly more likely to report their concerns as current. Interviews reflected this in that 7 mothers mentioned not being concerned currently because their sons were very young and were participating in *ABC* in order to be prepared:

‘I remember thinking I want to be prepared. I also remember thinking if it’ about boys then that must mean that there’s something different about them and I need to know what that is and to be prepared’.

And,

He’s starting the terrible 2s and I had a younger girl so wanted to get things sorted’.

Small numbers of mothers reported a desire to have ‘something to do’, or an interest in ‘being occupied’ as a motivation for participation in *ABC*.

Interviews added a further level of detail through questioning around expectations of *ABC*. There was, perhaps predictably, a high level of continuity and congruency between reported motivations and expectations, both which, of course, were framed in light of experience of participation in the course.

Consequently, 14 mothers mentioned in interview wanting to know more about gender differences among children as an expectation of the course and 28 mentioned expectations that participation in *ABC* would help them deal with specific behavioural challenges. These included, ‘dealing with tantrums’, ‘tips on discipline’ and, ‘dealing with boys’ behaviour’. There were small number of heartfelt

but unspecific pleas for, ‘anything that would help’ which might indicate severe frustration or exasperation on the part of participants. In a few cases (4 interviewees) these expectations were framed in terms of practical tips for enhancing communication with boys.

Ten interviews mentioned as an expectation of *ABC* that they would ‘understand him [their son] more’ and in a few cases, thereby contribute to (re)building a relationship which, perhaps it was implied, issues of control and (ill)discipline dominated and blanked out other more important concerns:

‘I want to sort out how I feel towards him in these situations. I always loved him but some times it felt like we didn’t like each other’

This last comment is particularly salient in understanding the responses to the survey item ‘I love my son but find him difficult’ (with which 54% agreed and 28 disagreed) suggesting that these reflect the complex feelings which can be engendered for mothers in their relationships with sons when they present challenging behaviour.

Relevance of *ABC* content

Table 3 report data from the exit survey relating to mothers’ evaluation of relevance of the course. Here they provided responses to 8 statements relating to the main themes covered within *ABC* using a likert-type five point scale ranging from ‘not much’ to ‘a lot’.

Table 3: Relevance of course themes

	Not much -----A lot				
	(%)				
How relevant were the different themes of the course?	1	2	3	4	5
...discipline and boundaries (n=207)	0	0	5	18	76
...difference in girls and boys (n=206)	0	1	11	25	61
...management of behaviour (n=207)	0	0	5	24	70
...motivation (n=200)	0	1	4	23	68
...preparation for school (n=207)	1	7	12	24	55
...boys and emotions(n=205)	0	0	2	26	71
...boys and communication	0	1	3	25	72
...boys’ development	0	0	3	26	71

These data suggest that the vast majority of responding mothers found every one of the themes tackled in *ABC* relevant. Indeed, for each of them no less than 80% indicated relevance at the 4th and 5th point of the scale culminating in ‘a lot’ at point 5. The small proportion (around 8%) who suggest that ‘preparation for school’ had a lower relevance were found to be mothers of sons under 1 year of age.

Seven respondents exercised an option to provide additional information via a freetext response indicating other themes of relevance not listed. Two of these comments relayed praise for trainers. The other five touched on topics such as different learning styles, the statistical information relating to boys’ development,

the value of engagement in active and participatory learning through group interaction, greater self-awareness and a plea for more advice on how to ‘enforce discipline’.

Impact of ABC on mothers

Data reported in tables 4 and 5 and figure 1 relate to mothers’ evaluation of the perceived impact of ABC via the exit survey. Mothers responding to this survey were asked to rate their pre- and post-intervention confidence, knowledge and skills about boys in relation to a series of items using a 5-point likert-type scale ranging from ‘low’ to ‘high’.

Table 4 reports results relating to these items with responses paired such pre and post course evaluations are recorded alongside each other. The ‘raw’ data show discernible increases in perceived knowledge, confidence and skills between start and completion of the course.

Table 4: pre- and post-intervention evaluation on impact of ABC

	Low-----High				
My level of understanding of my son	1	2	3	4	5
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
PRE-COURSE (n=208)	8	29	46	15	2
POST-COURSE (n=208)	>1	>1	4	43	52
My confidence in disciplining my son					
PRE-COURSE (n=207)	11	32	44	12	1
POST-COURSE (n=208)	0	1	10	48	41
My confidence in parenting my son					
PRE-COURSE (n=202)	5	25	44	23	3
POST-COURSE (n=205)	0	>1	5	44	51
My skills in disciplining my son					
PRE-COURSE (n=208)	11	37	43	8	1
POST-COURSE (n=207)	0	1	10	52	37
How well I get on with my son					
PRE-COURSE (n=207)	1	9	29	37	23
POST-COURSE (n=207)	0	1	3	32	64

These data report dramatic upturns both in levels of knowledge and confidence as a result of the course. The extent of these shifts is made still more evident by calculating the average weighting from ‘low’ to ‘high’ for each item.

This shows the following:

- Mothers’ perceived that ‘My level of understanding of my son’ increased from an average rating of 2.7 prior to ABC to 4.4 after.

- Mothers' perceived that 'My confidence in disciplining my son' increased from an average rating of 3.0 prior to ABC to 4.3 after
- Mothers' perceived that 'My confidence in parenting my son' increased from an average rating of 3.2 prior to ABC to 4.5 after
- Mothers' perceived that 'My skills in disciplining my son' increased from an average rating of 2.5 prior to ABC to 4.3 after
- Mothers' perceived that 'How well I get on with my son' increased from an average rating of 3.6 prior to ABC to 4.6 after

The greatest shifts in average rating occurred with regard to mothers' understanding and skills in disciplining their sons and that for both these items average rating began below the half way rating point of 3 and ended close to 4.5.

Even on measures relating to confidence in parenting and how well mothers get on with their sons where average pre-course rating stood as fractionally over 3, post-course ratings had increased to around 4.5.

Changes in average ratings are represented below in Figure 1 as a line graph showing the clustering on average rating prior to intervention around 2.5-3.5 on the 5 point scale and then again 4.5 after intervention.

Figure 1: Perceived changes in knowledge, skills and confidence pre-post intervention

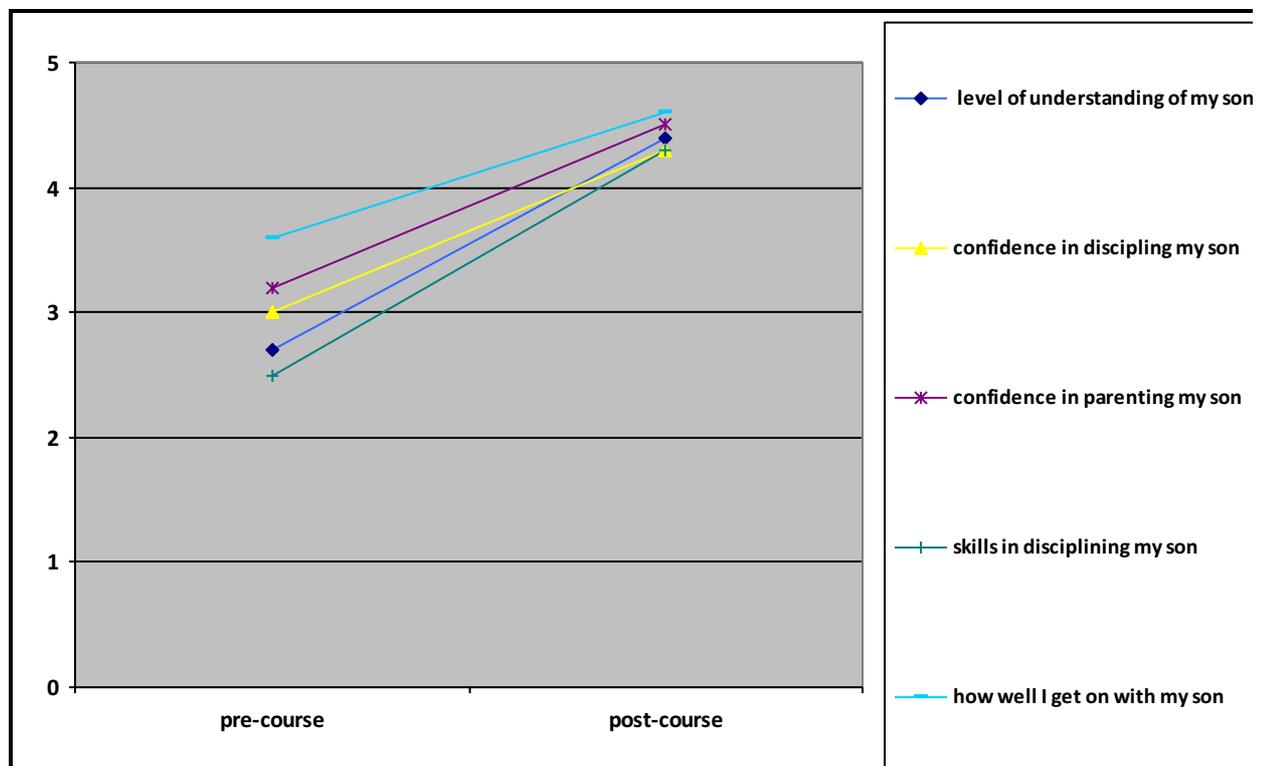


Table 6 provides a more granular analysis of the same results reporting perceived impact of ABC courses on mothers' knowledge, confidence and skills in terms of

'value-added' by reporting the degree of impact in terms of the proportion of mothers moving 1,2,3 or 4 points on the scale.

Table 6: pre- and post-intervention evaluation of impact of ABC (*gains in knowledge and skills in terms of scalar-point increase*)

	Change				
	0 (%)	+1 (%)	+2 (%)	+3 (%)	+4 (%)
My level of understanding of my son (n=208)	5	36	44	11	4
My confidence in disciplining my son (n=207)	5	38	42	12	3
My confidence in parenting my son (n=202)	11	43	33	11	2
My skills in disciplining my son (n=207)	6	35	41	14	4
How well I get on with my son (n=207)	41	37	18	3	1

Further analysis to produce average weightings on each item show the following:

- Average scalar point gain pre- to post-intervention on mothers' perceptions of 'My level of understanding of my son' was 1.7
- Average scalar point gain pre- to post-intervention on mothers' perceptions of 'My confidence in disciplining my son' was 1.7
- Average scalar point gain pre- to post-intervention on mothers' perceptions of 'My confidence in parenting my son' was 1.5
- Average scalar point gain pre- to post-intervention on mothers' perceptions of 'My skills in disciplining my son' was 1.8
- Average scalar point gain pre- to post-intervention on mothers' perceptions of 'How well I get on with my son' was 0.85

The follow-up evaluation conducted by interview over the 'phone is both confirmatory of the results of the exit survey, adds some illustrative detail to an understanding of the nature of this impact, why it occurs, its scope and durability over time.

In interviews the most frequently mentioned areas of both immediate and ongoing impact of ABC related to mothers' knowledge and skills (referred to by 46 interviewees). Gains in knowledge were enduring with mothers referring at follow-up not just to the generalities around increased knowledge and understanding of boys' development but also mentioning such specific issues as enhanced awareness of the nature of gender differences with reference to attention span and thought processes, and also concepts about cognitive and behavioural development captured in catchy phrases such as 'scientist and explorer phase' which had been used during the intervention.

Critically however, while many mothers referred to increased knowledge and understanding as 'nice to know' it was the combination of this with practical techniques for use with boys that was felt to make the course most useful both in the immediate and longer term:

'It was the combination of tools, techniques and information. So the fact that boys are interested in how the things work is still useful. I can see that in my son right now. That's he not so much naughty and imaginative. I try and do things like he might – wanting to know what the sofa looks like from the top of the wardrobe for example'

With regard to skills, mothers listed a wide range of techniques acquired and very frequently in everyday use with their sons. These included 'setting boundaries', 'touch and tell', 'the discipline ladder' and 'slow and low'. The combination of skills and knowledge could yield quick results on terms of impact on boys' behaviour and also, as a consequence, maternal confidence in their parenting. Examples abounded in the interview data:

'I felt much more confident immediately. Having a technique to try going away and doing the homework and seeing an effect puts you back in control.'

And,

'Feeling like you know what to do, what is going on and how to react is very positive.'

And,

'I realised that he [my son] wasn't listening to me, but then I learnt about how different boys are and how to use just simple commands. It was amazing I stopped jabbling on and got him to do simple things by using simple commands such as 'shoes' rather than, 'can you put your shoes on please'.

Enhanced knowledge, skills and confidence has a number of effects. A few mothers (mentioned 3 times) felt resourced to anticipate and hence avoid flashpoints in their relationships with their sons. The broader implied point about patience and planning is important especially in accounts of impact of ABC on how mothers interact with their sons. As it may be inferred from the following examples, a plausible interpretation is that patience relates here to adoption of approaches to boys which are measured, calculated, represent an appropriate reaction coupled with a degree of confidence about its effects. Cases of this kind were mentioned by 13 mothers in interview.

'Getting my head around the fact that he isn't trying to drive me wild - it's all about how you react'

And

'I was caught up in his speed of life and now I take time to really think about why he is feeling this way rather than judging and punishing'

And,

'I am able to see the world through their eyes and boys see it as a playground. I have become more accepting of this'

And,

'If they don't want to take their coat say it's ok but take it anyway and then when it gets cold I give it to him and he learns through experience'

As a result of their newly adopted tone and approach a number of mothers reported fewer tantrums (6 references) and many more that their son now listens to them (11 references) and that his communication has improved (10 references).

'I get more out of him now. Because I have become more patient and as result I encourage him to talk'

And,

'He repeats things back to me and shows he understands what will happen [consequences of non-compliance]

And,

He talks more about his frustrations rather than expressing them through violence'

A small number of mothers (5 references) had also developed confidence sufficient that they employed techniques and understanding acquired through *ABC* in new situations or with unintended audiences. One mother, for example, reported using role plays with a son in his early teens to help him get over an over-competitive streak:

'My son has become very competitive so using role plays to get him to understand good sportsmanship and not have meltdown and be a bad loser'

Techniques had also been employed with daughter and in one case, an interviewee reported that, 'I even use 'low and slow' on my husband'.

However, a number of notes of caution were a sounded among the overwhelmingly positive reflections of mothers about the impact of *ABC*. Some (13 references) reported that while information and skills acquired through the course had been interesting they had been of little use at the time and this remained the case. Generally it was reported that this was because their sons were too young. In other cases this was because mothers perceived that there was no problem behaviour to respond to:

'He wasn't a problem and he isn't but I don't want problems so I feel more confident about dealing with anything if it does arise. I often refer to the booklet for that'

Others felt that the impact of the course was difficult to disaggregate from other changes associated with boys' development. A number of mothers noted that it could be difficult to maintain levels of commitment to use their knowledge and skills after the course as the impetus ebbed away. Indeed, for a few (4 references) a combination of too much information and competing demands meant capacity to sustain engagement with course (useful as it was perceived to be) waned even during it:

'the first week I did the homework religiously, and it worked well. But then as we got more and more info as the weeks went on I had more ideas so had to think more so it was harder to implement'

Of course, it may be that comments such as these, which were very few in number, reflect a healthy level of cognitive dissonance arising at the time of participation in *ABC* which may have dissipated subsequently.

For a small number of mothers (4 references) problems with their sons' behaviour had increased rather than either not materialised or diminished. Explanations were generally associated with context and unexpected and traumatic changes to family or personal circumstances including relationship breakdown:

'Things have got worse I am now seeing an educational psychologist. Maybe I did the course too late and should have done when he was 2 years old.

And,

'Things are slipping as I have marriage problems and lower contact with his father so inconsistency is creeping in.'

Despite the overwhelmingly positive nature of accounts of impact of *ABC* on mothers' knowledge, skills and confidence about boys caution is required with regard to inferring a direct causal relationship on two fronts. First the evaluation is neither designed nor powered to do this, and second, as some mothers pointed out, there is the potential powerful intervening influence of context to account for:

'It's not a miracle cure. Children aren't daft and get an idea of what you are doing. They get wise and cheeky when they realise what you're doing. So it's not a miracle cure but it does work'

Wider impact of *ABC*

Interviewees were asked specifically if they could discern any impact of participation in *ABC* on their son's relationships with people other than themselves and also, if he attended either, on engagement and behaviour at playgroup or school.

With regard to relationships with other people, nearly half the mothers (23 references) reported no perceived impact. However, 18 mothers reported at interview that their sons' relationship with others, particularly other children has improved. Accounts focused equally on siblings and friends, for example:

'He gets on better with his sister. He used to want to do things but was too young. He is no longer frustrated, gets on better with her and can join in her activities'

And,

'He is being included with friend's daughters. He plays nicer'.

And,

'[I've noticed a difference] with his friend. He's better at sharing and understanding their feelings'

And,

'He went through a hitting stage and that has got better as we explained that hands are for painting and asked our son 'what hands are for?''

And,

'When we go to other people's houses to play I explain what is expected and him and it has a huge effect.'

Some mothers suggested that these outcomes reflected changes in their understanding of and approaches to their sons:

'If as a parent you're more open and responsive to talking they might think others will be'

And,

'I don't know. I haven't really seen a change in him it is more about how I deal with it.'

Reports of changes in behaviour at nursery, playgroup or school were less numerous no doubt reflecting, in part, the fact that only a proportion of boys were attending any of these settings. Indeed, 10 mothers explicitly said at interview that their sons were too young to be enrolled in any of these groups. Among the other mothers, 12 identified positive changes in behaviour and engagement which they felt were at least in part influenced by their knowledge, skills and understanding of boys post *ABC*. Key changes identified here include the exercise of greater clarity about boundaries leading to better interaction with others, improved communication with sons leading to improved communication by sons, and establishment of routines which reduce stress and flashpoints around playgroup and school. For example:

'He can share with friends [at playgroup] understand 'no' and for example he listens if you say 'don't push people'.

And,

'He's at pre-school now and I've got a better understanding of his feelings from his body movement'

And,

'He's more confident a combination I think of growing up and better communication'

And,

'Yes. He has had problems at school who are good at calming him down and listened to the tools that I have learnt'.

And,

'I use slow and low at playgroup and start positive about us having fun but add that if you don't share then we're going home. And I have taken him home'

And,

'He is more bossy – he will relay rules at playgroup and where his behaviour has been corrected by us [and] he will tell other children they are being naughty'

And,

'He understands that he can't always get what he wants'

And,

'We're using rewards at the end of the week for saying nice things and being ready in the morning before he can watch TV. This helped to establish a routine.'

And,

'School hasn't reported any concerns or issues. He is behaving much better at school. None of his explosive anger'

Importantly, 8 mothers reported no change at nursery, playgroup or school because there had never been a problem. In a few cases (mentioned in 9 interviews) they explicitly distinguished school from home experience pointing out that their son had always been well-behaved at school but could be challenging at home:

'He's always been an angel at nursery, he always tried to get away with things with me at home'

And,

'No complaints at nursery but he's an absolute nightmare at home – kicking and screaming'.

A further 7 mothers felt unable to comment on their sons' behaviour outside the home. These women talked about the school as being a separate and closed world about which they believed no news was good news, and did not expect or had difficulties extracting information from their sons.

'He's not good at telling me about the school day so I have to read between the lines with regard to how things are going'

And,

'I don't know, any issues the staff deal with unless it's a major problem but that's never happened so far'

Organisation, content and delivery of the course

Table 6 shows responses to 6 questions asking about 'views of the course'. These questions related broadly to course content: 'the course covered the areas I wanted it to'; 'the course was practical enough'; and, 'I would have liked more theory' and

to perceptions of the trainer: ‘the trainer understood me as parent’; ‘the trainer understood my son’; and, ‘I did not feel judged by the trainer’.

Analysis shows that exceedingly large proportions of participating mothers agreed that the course content was appropriate to their needs and felt that the trainer demonstrated understanding of them and their sons and did not act judgementally. Even on the item relating to inclusion of more theory in *ABC* still around two thirds of responding mothers reported satisfaction with current practice.

Table 6: Mother’s views of the course

	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not sure (%)
The course covered the areas that I wanted it to (n=207)	97	1	1
The trainer understood me as a parent (n=207)	96	3	1
The trainer understood my son (n=203)	91	1	8
The course was practical enough (n=208)	93	2	5
I would have liked more theory (n=200)	18	64	18
I did not feel judged by the trainer (n=208)	99	<1	<1

Reflecting the fact that the delivery of this iteration of *ABC* through a group of trained facilitators represented a major change in organisation and implementation of the programme, a particular point of attention in interviews was participating mothers’ views about course facilitation.

As the exit data show, satisfaction was extremely high with more than 90% of mothers responding agreeing that the trainer understood their son and understood them as a parent. It is worthy of note that a remarkable 99% agreed with the statement that they did not feel judged by the trainer.

The importance of the trainers’ facilitation skills was highlighted in follow-up interviews and also in the ‘other comments’ section of the exit survey where the single largest category of responses (40 comments; 19% of all respondents) related the course facilitation noting the non-judgmental, open, relaxed, needs-responsive and patient approach adopted by trainers and skills including ability to manage and lead a group, draw in and orchestrate contributions from participants, stimulate discussion, moderate and respond to mothers’ needs and concerns.

The capacity to provide concrete advice and enable development of skills was also important. This was dependent not just on trainer acumen but also the structuring into the course of ‘homework’ (trailing techniques) and opportunities for mothers to reflect back on experiences (12 references in interviews). The importance of the management of the training sessions by facilitators such that reflection by mothers and interaction between them was possible is further highlighted by the handful of interviewees (4 who commented on the impact of its absence noting that they preferred interaction and participative approaches to the odd occasions when constraints had meant that opportunities for discussion, debate and sharing experiences had been reduced.

The importance of transfer of knowledge and skills related to understanding boys was also alluded to elsewhere in interviews. A particularly interesting example is suggestive of the role that good trainers play in recognising the frustrations that mothers may be experiencing but not letting these convert what is an experience focused on teaching and learning about boys into a support group for mothers:

‘Some women come in at their wits end and need to dump and air their frustrations and the facilitator needs to be able to manage that and also teach’

Trainers’ knowledge and expertise was also highly regarded by mothers. This was sometimes framed in terms of experience of parenting although it is not clear the extent to which mothers were conflating expertise and experience of working with children and specifically boys with assumptions about being a parent. So while around half the interviews mentioned ‘experience’ as a qualification of a good trainer, and many implied this came through parenting, for example:

‘They need to be experienced. You know they understand what you are talking about. You can relate to them much better if they’re a parent themselves’

Others were more explicit that parental experience was not a prerequisite for an ABC trainer but experience of childcare noting that:

‘It’s not essential that they have kids but that they have experience. It’s really about being able to share anecdotes and having credibility’.

Location and timing of courses, constitution of groups

Interviewees were also invited to reflect on the timing and location of training and share any ideas about course promotion. *ABC* is designed to be delivered via Children’s Centres and a large majority of interviews (n=32; 64%) were satisfied with this setting. For most it is a familiar resource with which they are comfortable, is staffed by known and trusted staff and, very importantly, very often offer childcare facilities enabling mothers to access the course (28 mothers made explicit reference to the importance of crèche facilities with regard to participation in *ABC*).

Satisfaction with the provision of courses in the morning was also high (referred to by 18 interviewees) as this has the best fit with the range of commitments faced by most mothers of young children. It is important to note however that a small number of mothers (7 interviewees) felt that making *ABC* available at the weekends or in the evening would make it more accessible to mothers who worked on weekdays and during the daytime.

Interviews confirmed that findings of the exit survey (where 68% of responding mothers agreed that word of mouth was a motivation of participation) with regard to the importance of informal social networks as a means of spreading information about *ABC*. Ten interviewees noted that first hand accounts of the course provided

a means of evaluating its relevance to them as well representing a means of affirming its quality. Advertising in Children's Centres was thought to be important (mentioned by 22 interviewees) as smaller numbers also suggested placing information about ABC in other settings accessed by mothers including GP surgeries and other healthcare settings, retail and educational contexts. A handful of interviewees wondered about the scope of online media as a means of sharing information about ABC and also disseminating resources.

A few mothers also shared some reflections on the composition of groups during the interviews. A small number mentioned the differences in the interests and concerns of mothers with sons under 2 years old and those with sons over 2 years old. There were some indications that where groups were diverse this could be enriching in terms of mothers' learning. However, where a group contained only one or two mothers of much younger or older sons it could be more challenging to create an inclusive environment.

Follow-up and supporting resources

The exit survey contained a question about whether mothers who had participated in ABC would be interested in attending a follow-up session. Interest was high with 72% (n=178) replying in the affirmative. Of the 124 mothers who indicated when this should be 19% reported 'in the next month', 41% at 3 months and 40% 6 months after the end of the course.

An indication of focus and contents of any follow-up is provided by data from follow-up interviews relating to needs for information or advice that had emerged since mothers' participation in ABC.

Responses fell into two broad categories. The first (mentioned by 12 interviewees) related to a refresher session the purpose of which would be to galvanise mothers around maintenance of skills and confidence accumulated through ABC.

The second included a range of new and emergent concerns about boys. A few (9 mothers) felt that further training would be useful because their sons had been too young for them to really benefit from ABC at the time.

Other mothers were facing issues around transition to nursery/school (6 interviews) and asked for support and advice with engaging boys with homework, managing peer relationships (especially bullying) and supporting their educational development:

'I want to know about getting the best out of them [at school] where boys struggle because of how they are meant to learn.'

Responding to peer influence was specifically mentioned 3 times:

'he has problems at nursery. He is easily influenced by his older brother and others at school. At half-term he goes back to normal but once we're back at nursery he has picked up bad habits'.

And,

'How other people are going to impact on him. He picks things up from other people I don't know to deal with that.'

In addition, two mothers noted particular challenges around building self-esteem with sons who have learning difficulties.

Smaller numbers of mothers requested support with 'keeping them [boys] occupied' (2 references) management of specific issues: managing their use of technology (1 reference) and managing sleep (2 references)

Finally, 3 mothers suggested that impact of *ABC* would be enhanced by the engagement of other family members in training. Both husband/partners were mentioned as were older siblings who were perceived to play important roles in caring and also represented role models for younger male siblings.

Mothers were also asked in both exit survey and follow-up interviews to comment on the value of support provided through booklet and handouts associated with *ABC*. Responses from the 167 mothers who commented via the exit survey and those who responded to the follow-up interview were highly consistent.

63% of respondents to the exit survey mentioned the utility of the booklet/handouts as a reference point both in the short and longer term:

'A really good booklet as a reference to dip back into and as a reminder of what I have learnt on the course. Helpful advice and good to have as a list techniques to work through'.

And,

'The booklet has been helpful but mostly I am glad to keep it for later. My son is too young for motivation and some discipline methods but I can go back and remind myself'

A few mothers pointed out that the usefulness of the materials extended to them being a means of sharing learning with other, particularly partners (and less frequently other mothers). For instance:

'all the information in the booklets comes in handy although I explained each session to my partner it was great getting handouts for both of us to read.'

A few mothers suggested that the information contained in resources could also usefully be made available in other media. Particularly as fridge-magnets or via

stickers which are easy to refer to. The accessibility of materials online was also mentioned a number of times (in 5 interviews).

Participation in other interventions/courses

A few mothers (12) reported that they had attended other courses in addition to *ABC*. The 'parenting puzzle' was the most frequently cited course (9 references) and much smaller numbers had attended first aid courses (4 mothers) 'practical parenting' (3) or 'positive parenting' (2). Other courses mentioned included: 'Mind, body soul', 'Story stacks', 'Family toolkit', 'Positive beginnings', 'Active tots', 'About your baby', 'Baby massage', and 'Feeding under 5s'. A small number of mothers also mentioned searching for information on line or via books.

Motivations for participation in other courses ranged from interest, because they were part of a social network in which course participation was the norm, or because of a specific need (for example, speech and language development, having a son with autism or parenting twins). At least 2 mothers were studying for Childcare qualifications and this provided a motivation for participation in a range of courses including *ABC*.

Very few interviewees offered evaluative comments about other courses but where they did so were generally positive, occasionally noting, in contrast to *ABC*, the absence within them of a gender perspective.

Other issues

Both the exit survey and follow-up interviews included opportunities for mothers to comment on any other issue of importance to them to perceived to be of relevance to *ABC*.

The exit survey yielded a high number of 'other' comments (140) many of which did not confine themselves to single issues but raised a number of points. However, a number of overarching and inter-related themes are evident.

The greatest number of comments contained or at least began with a statement of thanks and acknowledgement of the value of the course. This was most frequently framed in terms of noting how 'helpful' it had been. Elaborations extended to associating this with topical matters: valuing the learning about emotions, motivation, gender differences and so on, and/or the acquisition of practical skills: slow and low, etc. A fairly high number of these comments (around 25) also made reference to impact in terms of either changes to approaches to parenting, styles or techniques. A number of contributions made a clear link between this and experiences of parenting. For example:

'I am very happy that I attended this course. It gave me confidence that my son's behaviour or bad habits could change and it changed my point of view and approach which is already benefiting the whole family.'

And,

‘I think this course was fantastic. I have learnt so much about my son and how to deal with him. Every parent with a son should do this course. My son is so much happier, I am calmer and I am enjoying being a parent because I understand how to deal with his behaviour.’

Reflections of this kind were also often coupled with notes about the role of *ABC* in providing reassurance about parenting practice and/or experiences common to other parents.

‘Thanks. Meeting other parents and comparing experiences was really helpful. Also reminded me that I’m in control (e.g. of how much TV we watch) it felt very supportive and welcoming. At home feels much calmer and happier already. The tips are BRILLIANT and simple but I needed them pointed out’.

Summary and discussion

This report describes the results and findings of an evaluation of the *About Boys Courses* run by the *Boys Development Project* between October and December 2012. The evaluation has two components, the first comprising a post-course survey by self-completion questionnaire of 209 mothers; the second, a follow-up with a sub-sample of 50 by ‘phone interview.

Overall, this evaluation reinforces the findings of earlier evaluations of *ABC* and its precursor the *Raising Boys* course. It provides very powerful evidence that mothers found *ABC* informative, enjoyable and useful. There were widespread reports of use of the tips and techniques for parenting both during and since the end of the courses. There are strong indications at both evaluation points that women perceived the courses to be positive in terms of improving the degree of control that they feel and exercise in their relationships with sons, the quality of those relationships and their capacity to understand and manage, and in some cases reduce of instances of conflict between them. In this respect there is clear evidence that *ABC* fulfilled its aims of:

- Increasing mothers’ understanding of their son’s development and behavior;
- Equipping them with practical techniques to provide their sons with boundaries and discipline;
- And, boosting their confidence in supporting their sons through any difficulties that they might encounter.

Contributors to the evaluation suggest that *ABC* works because it combines information, skills and opportunities for discussion, debate, trialling of parenting techniques and sharing of experience in a safe, supportive environment. The theoretical component, especially that element which is linked to exploration of gender differences in psychological and social development provides a context for making sense of and to some extent normalising experience of parenting boys. By

coupling this with strategies which can be easily acquired, readily tested and often times immediately effective in enhancing control of and diminishing concerns about flashpoints in everyday life (bedtime, bathtimes, mealtimes, playing with others, and so) confidence among participants is enhanced.

Although practical methods of controlling their sons' behaviour figured most prominently in accounts of the impact of the course, there is some evidence that it may also have helped some mothers to support their sons through structural transitions – especially the passage to nursery school. The relative rarity of references to this transition among interviews many reflect the ages of the boys involved. There were a few cases where interviews yielded accounts of less impact on the relationships between mothers and sons. Not only were these few in number but also the mothers involved accounted for this in terms of their inability to implement the parenting techniques and information that they had acquired due to circumstantial factors.

Survey data point to the high relevance of course content with more 80% of respondents indicating high levels of perceived salience. All thematic content was reported as highly acceptable.

Both survey and interview data suggest that *ABC* is highly accessible to mothers. The use of Children's Centres is proving successful. Mothers are comfortable with these venues and the provision sits well within their remit. Offering *ABC* in the mornings is convenient to most mothers and reflects the best fit with complex pressures that they may experience around managing childcare of younger children and attendance at school or nursery among other older children. In only a few cases do work or other commitments mitigate against mothers' participation in courses run at this time in these settings.

Although they fall beyond the ambit of this evaluation, it is important to note that provision of *ABC* in terms of time and location must also acknowledge pressures some others are under to balance childcare against pressure to (re)enter paid employment.

This evaluation suggests that the targeting of the programme on mothers of sons aged between 0 and 5 years old is appropriate and successful. The greatest proportion of mothers (just over half) have sons between 2 and 4 years old which provides both a fairly high level of consistency in terms of needs and experiences around boys and also creates grounds for effective learning within groups. However, even where for practical or other reasons such a high degree of homogeneity within groups is not achievable, most mothers see this as creating opportunities for sharing which has relevance to them. This is most evident is with respect to mothers of sons under 2 years old where contact with mothers of older boys made possible via *ABC* enhances their confidence about understanding and managing their sons in as they grow up.

This evaluation does suggest that in a very few cases, where groups are highly heterogeneous in terms of the ages of mothers' sons but also contain a mother of son of age which differs by 2 or more years, some of these advantages may be more elusive and demands on trainers to make the course relevant to all participating mothers all the time greater. Any consideration of responses to these issues need to take into account the relative rarity with which these situations arise and the effects of pragmatic considerations and where they exist, constraints faced by trainers in organising and composing groups of mothers for *ABC*. A good question to ask might also be how do trainer manage and positively exploit differences in mothers' experiences and needs as they arise. This evaluation suggests that there may be much good practice to mine from trainers around this issue.

Consideration of the make-up of groups of mothers participating in *ABC* also raises questions about ways that the background and circumstances of mothers may be linked to their engagement with and benefit from *ABC*. This evaluation is not designed to answer this question directly since no data is available on the social demography or circumstances of participating mothers. However, while issues such as if and how economic position, social capital and family and other contextual features and factors may be reflected in participation or impact cannot be addressed directly they warrant consideration. For example, it may be that concerns either surface or are expressed in particular forms by mothers dependent on their context and background. It may also be that expectations of boys among mothers may be patterned by these factors. Only through further research addressing these issues could this be established. However, this evaluation suggests that *ABC* is valued because it does not assume in its focus any particular association between need and demography/circumstance but remains open to all mothers and focuses on their understanding about boys. The choice of Children's Centres as the location for running courses is congruent with a principled view that *ABC* should be easily accessible to all mothers in a locality and, furthermore, that participating mothers benefit from interaction with diverse peers since concerns may be characterised as more rather than less common and shared.

This evaluation provides clear evidence that it is the knowledge and skills that the facilitator brings to *ABC* that are of central importance to its success. Trainers displayed comfort and acumen in terms of running groups, knowledge about boys and the course content and the ability to transmit and transfer skills in ways that felt safe, supportive and productive. It is plausible that comments from mothers about the value of trainers' experience of raising and working with boys while sometimes articulated in terms of direct experience of parenting are really about expertise and knowledge. One factor at play here may be that misrecognition of that as associated with being a parent reflects the skills trainers bring to groups in terms of permission-giving around sharing some of the challenges and frustrations mothers experience around understanding and their relationships with their sons. The value of such permission-giving should not be underestimated when situated against the backdrop of powerful normative views that experience of frustration and difficulty in parenting especially of boys and especially as single parent, is indicative of some deficit or failure.

There is evidence that for some mothers engage in *ABC* alongside participating in other courses. These tend have a focus either on specific issues – first aid or baby massage etc. – or on general parenting issues – the parenting puzzle etc. Comments about the value of the focus of *ABC* on boys and understanding them is regarded as valuable point of difference and an asset to mothers. However, this evaluation has identified that for very few, there may be instances in which course content can become conflated in their minds (reflected in a handful of references to skills which mothers thought that had acquired through *ABC* but which not part of the course). This highlights both the ways and possible challenges that mothers may face in engaging with and integrating knowledge, understanding and skills derived from a variety of sources.

A high number of mothers expressed a strong interest in a follow-up to *ABC*. Any follow-up whether it was in the in form of either an additional session and/or materials/resources may provide the context to address issues about meeting mothers' needs a round responding to boys' development raised above.

There are a number of important methodological limitations to this evaluation to consider in weighing these results and findings. First, this evaluation is neither designed nor powered to sustain an interpretation of impact beyond participant perception. However, the high levels of congruence between post-course survey and follow-up interviews, the plausibility of effects and explanation by which they come about are strongly suggestive that the course aim of enhancing mothers' confidence in parenting their sons, and also the quality of that experience and their relationships with their sons is achieved. Second, it is important to consider if the sample of women who took part in follow-up interviews is representative of all participants. Although selection bias cannot be discounted, internal reliability in terms of selection of respondents did have the capacity to yield a large and at interview random sample of eligible mothers. The extent to which the sample as a whole reflects mothers who enrolled in *ABC* cannot be assessed because data on registration is not available.

Appendix 1: Post-intervention questionnaire

About Boys Course (0-5) [2012]

Where your course was held:
Trainers Name:
Your name:
How old is your son:

1. How relevant were the different themes of the course? (circle for all)

	NOT MUCH				A LOT
Discipline and boundaries	1	2	3	4	5
Differences in girls and boys	1	2	3	4	5
Management of behaviour	1	2	3	4	5
Motivation	1	2	3	4	5
Preparation for school	1	2	3	4	5
Boys and emotions	1	2	3	4	5
Boys and communication	1	2	3	4	5
Boys Development	1	2	3	4	5

Others not mentioned _____

2. Your views of the course? (please tick)

	AGREE	DISAGREE	NOT SURE
The course covered the areas I wanted it to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The trainer understood me as a parent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The trainer understood my son	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The course was practical enough	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would have liked more theory	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I did not feel judged by the trainer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Give some thought to what you knew before this course and what you now know. (Circle the number that best represents your knowledge and skills **before** then **after** this course).

	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH		
My level of understanding of my son					
Before this course	1	2	3	4	5
After the course	1	2	3	4	5
My confidence in disciplining by son					
Before	1	2	3	4	5
After	1	2	3	4	5
My confidence in parenting my son					
Before	1	2	3	4	5
After	1	2	3	4	5
My skills in disciplining my son					
Before	1	2	3	4	5
After	1	2	3	4	5
How well I get on with my son					
Before	1	2	3	4	5
After	1	2	3	4	5

Anything else? _____

4. What best describes your reasons for attending this course? (circle all relevant)

	AGREE	DISAGREE	NOT SURE
I was just interested in learning more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I love my son, but find him difficult	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt I didn't understand him	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was anxious about him	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have worries at the moment, but later... <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I wanted to find out what others parents did <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I had heard that the course was good	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I just like going on courses!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Would you like any follow up session? (please circle)

YES NO

If so, when would you like them to be? (please circle)

**IN THE NEXT MONTH?
MONTHS?**

NEXT 3 MONTHS?

NEXT 6

6. You may have been given a course booklet or handouts during the course, we would like to know what you think would be useful to you as reminders of the course content, please comment:

7. Any further comments about the course (please continue over)

We would like to phone you in three months to see whether the course has made a difference for you. If you are happy for us to do this, please give us your contact phone numbers.

Home:

mobile:

Thank you for completing this form



Appendix 2: Schedule for follow-up 'phone interviews

Interview date

Interviewer

SF SH SL

Preamble

Hello, is that [INSERT RESPONDENT NAME]? My name is [INSERT OWN NAME] I am a colleague of [INSERT TRAINER NAME] who ran the *About Boys Course* in which you recently took part. You were kind enough to provide us with your contact details at the end of that course and we wondered if you had a few minutes to help us understand if and how it has been useful to you? It would take no more than 10 minutes of your time. Is that ok? Do you mind if I take some notes as we talk. This is because we'd like to be able to include your views in a report. Of course we won't use any names or other information that would identify you or any other participant. Is that ok?

If this isn't a good time to talk is there a better time when we can reach you?

1. First of all, can tell me why you decided to take part in ABC?
2. Do you remember what you expected from the course? If so what was that?
3. Did it help you with your son at the time?

If so how?

And, were there things that didn't really change at the time?

4. What was the most useful thing you got from the course?
5. Is there anything that you've done or used since then with your son? If so what?
6. Do you see any changes in him as result?
And, if so what?
And, if not, why do you think that is?
7. Did the course have an impact on your relationship with your son?
8. Did the course have an impact on your son's relationship with other people?

9. Is he at school nursery or playgroup? If so, did the course have an impact on how he is there?
10. Are there any new things that you'd like to find out more about with regard to parenting your son?
11. Have you been to any other courses? If so, which ones and what were they like?
12. And finally, if we were to try and make ABC available to other mums what would need to think about in terms of the follow:
13. Who runs the courses?
14. Where they are run and when they are run?
15. How we advertise them?

That's it! Is there anything that you like to add or mention about ABC?

Just so you know, when we have finished this evaluation we will be writing a report in which reflect your view but DO NOT name any mum who took part. We will put this on the ABC website where you will be welcome to find it. That's www.boysdevelopmentproject.org.uk/ Thanks again for your time.