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Teen tamers need to get real

Rachel Browne
 October 4, 2009

TELEVISION programs claiming to tame toddlers and troubled teens may do more harm than good, parenting experts have warned.

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The families of Australian teenagers who appeared in World's Strictest Parents on Channel Seven – in which the teens were sent overseas for a week to learn discipline from strict parents – said the program helped turn their lives around.

But the methods used have been questioned since the final episode, aired last week, revealed how the teens have fared since going home.

Serial runaway Jono Denny, 16, was sent to South Africa to live with Portia Bethe and her family.

After returning to his home at Ballina on the North Coast he re-enrolled in high school and behaved himself for six weeks. Then he was arrested after a night of heavy drinking. He was released after being cautioned.

Psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg said World's Strictest Parents, Brat Camp and Supernanny offered unrealistic solutions to behavioural problems.

"I would prefer to see programs which are more instructive," he said. "Obviously, no one is going to send their teenager off to a different country for a week to teach them a few life lessons. It's just not practical or realistic."

Mr Carr-Gregg said his research showed 80 per cent of parents lack confidence in their ability to raise their children. World's Strictest Parents drew more than 1 million viewers a week.

He said most child psychologists would not recommend the strict discipline promoted on the show.

"What I would like to see from these shows is a focus on authoritative parenting rather than authoritarian parenting," he said.

"The problem is that authoritative parenting – which teaches parents about creating boundaries, negotiating skills and so on – does not make very exciting television.

"Authoritarian parenting, with a focus on strict discipline and punishment, is more likely to create fireworks."

A parenting guide author and chairwoman of Early Childhood Australia's publications committee, Pam Linke, said the programs provided a simplistic view of managing behavioural problems.

"The families being filmed would have to be influenced by the fact that there is a camera on them.

"It's not a realistic approach to solving behavioural problems with children. There is no instruction about how these parenting

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models would work in real life."

Source: The Sun-Herald

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