



**Impact and Outcome Evaluation: Analytical themes from
repeat interviews at five time points between 2005-2009 with
parents who attended Speakeasy during 2005**

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Young People in Focus

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Impact and Outcome Evaluation: Analytical themes from repeat interviews at five time points between 2005-2009 with parents who attended Speakeasy during 2005

1. Introduction

Speakeasy is a community-based educational programme run by FPA. The overarching aim of the Speakeasy course is to support and encourage parents to communicate with their children about sex, sexual health, and relationships. The course is run over a number of weeks and delivered directly by FPA Speakeasy trained facilitators.

The main aim of the evaluation conducted by the Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA) was to quantitatively and qualitatively explore progress towards achieving the main stated aims of the Speakeasy course, providing insights into how the course has benefited parents in terms of sustained changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours.

The Five main aims of the FPA Speakeasy course are to:

1. Increase parents' confidence and communication skills with their children
2. Help parents show a more positive and open approach to discussions of sex, sexuality and sexual health
3. Increase parents' factual knowledge around sex and sexual health
4. Provide a step towards further learning or professional development for traditionally excluded groups of parents
5. Enable health and educational professionals to give higher priority to work with parents and carers, with the backing of accredited Speakeasy training so that large numbers of parents throughout England will have access to a Speakeasy course

Through repeat interviews, this report focuses on one technique used to assess whether the first four aims of Speakeasy were met. Additional evidence of Speakeasy's effectiveness can be found elsewhere as follows:

- Coleman (2009) Speakeasy in Scotland: Database Analysis, Parent Log Data and Telephone Interviews, Year 1 Evaluation Report.
- Coleman et al. (2007) includes questionnaire data (pre- and post the course) from over 6,000 people who had attended the course from 2002, interviews with men attending the course, repeat interviews with five parents who attended the course prior to 2005, and evidence from focus group discussions.
- Ramm and Coleman (2007) report a case study of Speakeasy's effectiveness in Birmingham, looking at impacts on the parent-child dyad and effects extending to the family and wider community.
- Sherriff and Coleman (2006) report outlines the effects upon professionals trained as Speakeasy facilitators (concerned with the fifth aim of the Speakeasy course).

In summary, the existing evaluation data derived from the above (and discounting the evidence to be outlined in this report) has shown the positive impact of Speakeasy. Coleman et al. (2007), from the most extensive and wide ranging source of data conclude:

"The analysis of the monitoring forms shows that the Speakeasy course has a very positive impact on those who attend. The results suggest that the Speakeasy course is meeting its aims of increased factual knowledge, openness and confidence successfully, although less conclusive evidence was available for the aim of providing a step for further learning." (Coleman et al. 2007, p.85).

To assess whether these positive impacts extend to the interview data, this report outlines evidence from a cohort of 40 parents who attended the Speakeasy course in 2005, and who were interviewed later that year, and then again in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. These findings are structured around the main aims of the Speakeasy course (see earlier), with the repeat interviews in 2006 and 2007 concentrating on areas that confirm earlier findings and the following six 'innovative' areas of exploration that reflect the more recent interviews as follows:

- With the progressive time-lag between the course and interview, what memories and impacts of the course stand out the most – asking parents the 'top three' learning outcomes of the course in 2006 and the 'most significant learning outcome' in 2007, 2008 and 2009.
- Whether the increased factual knowledge noted overwhelmingly in 2005 was sustained, or whether some parents felt they needed 'refresher training'.
- Reported examples of where parents' learning was 'put into practice' with their children (through recalled instances of communication, openness, etc).
- Possible direct impacts of the course upon their children – including children's confidence in raising topics with their parents and potential impacts upon children's developing sexual relationships including sexual behaviours.
- The widening impact of Speakeasy to other parents and members of the family through time.
- Further learning and professional development of the parents - for example, whether the OCN credits had prompted further learning and development.

For the most recent interviews conducted in 2009, some five years after the course, the main emphasis was on examples of where the learning had been 'put into practice' and any direct impacts upon children and other members of the family.

The structure of the results outlined in this report is shown below:

2.1. Interviews conducted in 2005

2.1.1 Memories of the course – 2005 interviews

2.1.2 Parental experiences – 2005 interviews

2.1.3 Aim One: Increased Confidence – 2005 interviews

2.1.4 Aim Two: Increased factual knowledge around sex and sexual health - 2005 Interviews

2.1.5 Aim Three: Openness – 2005 interviews

2.1.6 Aim Four: Further learning and development – 2005 interviews

2.1.7 Main benefits of Speakeasy – 2005 interviews

2.2. Confirmatory and innovative findings from the 2006 interviews

2.3 Confirmatory and innovative findings from the 2007 interviews

2.4 Confirmatory and innovative findings from the 2008 interviews (the most recent data published)

2.5 Confirmatory and innovative findings from the 2009 interviews (the most recent data published)

2.6 Suggestions for improvement from 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009.

2. Results – Interviews conducted in 2005

2.1.1 Memories of the Course (2005 findings)

At the start of the telephone interviews with the 40 parents, they were asked about their memories of the Speakeasy course and to talk about anything that really stood out such as a particular topic, theme, or activity. It was hoped that this would help to jog parents' memories of the Speakeasy experience, provide a gentle introduction to the interview process, and provide an opportunity for any spontaneous feedback to arise.

In their narratives, parents reported a number of topics and activities that were of particular value and which were distinctive for them. Easily the most commonly mentioned topic was STIs. Half of the parents interviewed (n = 20) commented on studying STIs in terms of their prevalence, symptoms, and treatment. Of the 20 parents whom did not mention STIs when asked about their memories of the course, five still brought the topic up at some point during interview.

Approximately one third of parents (35% or n = 14) interviewed revealed that learning about the age-appropriateness of sexual information was a particularly memorable part of the course. For example, one interviewee stated that the 'washing-line' activity (where parents had to place cards with sexual information at different age points along the line to indicate when they thought was an appropriate time to talk about the issue in question) was a real 'eye-opener' for her:

'The discussions about when and how much to tell your children was really good, I enjoyed it and found it useful. I never would have thought about telling the children about some things like anal sex and masturbation!'

A similar number of interviewees (30% or n = 12) reported that studying different methods of contraception was a topic that was really distinctive for them, whilst a further one quarter of parents (25% or n = 10) said that exploring how the media portrays sexual messages through routes such as magazines stood out. Other topics parents remembered included exploring local schools' Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) policy, learning about puberty, drug and alcohol awareness, and discovering where and how to get information pertaining to sex and sexual health.

Whilst the majority of parents recalled quite specific memories of their Speakeasy experience, a small number of parents were more general (and positive) in their narratives about the course:

'It was fun, lots of games and refreshments, everyone had a good laugh. All the topics stood out because they were so good.'

'It was a real eye-opener. Good to know that there are people out there who care about parents. It's good that parents can get involved and educate other parents.'

'Even though there were only two people on the course, it was quite funny and open but embarrassing in parts, it was a real eye-opener.'

'[The course] was very informative, I learnt loads I didn't know before! I really feel I have gained loads from doing the course.'

2.1.2 Parental Experiences (2005 interviews)

In addition to asking parents about their memories of completing Speakeasy, interviewees were also asked which aspects of the course they found most useful and which, if any, were especially positive or difficult and challenging. The following list is not exhaustive but rather provides a flavour of the kinds of topics and experiences parents enjoyed and appreciated:

Useful Topics and Activities

- Learning where to get information from
- STIs
- Contraception
- 'Body board' activity
- 'Washing-line' on age-appropriateness of information
- Recognising the signs of puberty
- Strategies to approach children and prompt discussion
- Sex and relationship education policy in schools
- Learning young people's slang terms
- Peer pressure
- Biological knowledge of sexual organs

Positive Experiences

- Course 'library' where parents could borrow books from the facilitators
- Sharing experiences with other parents
- Social aspect of the course - '*getting together*' with other parents and making new friends
- Talking about sex in a way that you don't normally get to do with other adults
- Having frequent group discussions
- The knowledge that other parents have the same worries and concerns
- Being able to express opinions in a 'safe space'
- Discovering that the course was unlike school, very relaxed and informal environment
- The 'hands-on' approach to learning

Encouragingly, 48% (n = 18) of parents explicitly stipulated that there were no negative aspects about the course at all. As a number of parents commented:

'There were no negatives at all, I want to nip that question in the bud! Whilst some bits were not as interesting as other parts, it was all relevant.'

... 'I couldn't fault it really.'

'It was a positive experience, I enjoyed it and would recommend it. I liked getting to know new people, there were no negatives really.'

'I enjoyed the whole course. There were no negatives at all.'

Despite the overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the Speakeasy experience, over one-third of parents (35% or n = 14) did find some aspect of the course quite difficult or challenging. These difficulties mostly related to feeling uncomfortable, embarrassed, or unsure about talking so openly in front of 'strangers' at the start of the course. However, for parents whom cited this as 'difficult' or 'challenging', all reported that these feelings diminished quickly as the course progressed, and that this was due to the skill of the facilitators and getting to know other parents on the course better.

Difficult or Challenging Experiences

- ❖ Feelings of embarrassment at the start of the group
- ❖ Feeling uncomfortable with role play
- ❖ Difficulties talking in a group about sensitive subjects
- ❖ Concern that the group size small, larger groups would be more beneficial
- ❖ Facilitator not informing parents at the start of the course about submitting a portfolio
- ❖ A lot of writing from leaflets and repetition
- ❖ Finding time to complete homework
- ❖ Location of crèche sometimes meant there were interruptions during the sessions
- ❖ Disliked that abstinence is not encouraged as an option

Based on their experiences of the programme, parents were also asked whether they would recommend Speakeasy to others. The responses from interviewees were impressive with 100% of parents enthusiastically reporting that it had indeed been a positive experience, and they would recommend the course to others and in many cases, already had:

'...definitely a positive experience and I have already recommended it to others who have since taken up the course.'

'The course was great fun; I would definitely recommend it to other parents.'

'It was definitely a positive experience, a truly brilliant course, informative, excellent! I would definitely recommend it other parents, as it may well help to reduce teenage pregnancy like it has in the US.'

'I enjoyed the course, had a laugh, lots of funny discussions in the group...there were no negatives about it. I have done lots of courses and this one was the best and would probably recommend it. Problem is I don't know if it is happening anywhere now to recommend parents to it!'

'It was very very much a positive experience...I would definitely recommend the course because in ethnic minority communities, sex should be taught properly - many communities don't teach it and people need to be more aware.'

2.1.3 Aim One – Increased Confidence (2005 findings)

In line with Burns' (2004) evaluation of Speakeasy, the large majority of interviewees (99%) reported that they now felt more confident about talking to their children than they did before the course². Parents were asked how confident they now felt as a result of completing the Speakeasy course. Examples of quotes from parents' narratives include:

'I'm a lot more confident now as I have been able to talk in front of people I didn't know, now I can do it in front of my children.'

'I feel very confident - it really brings you out of your shell. I didn't realise before how important stuff was.'

'I now feel very confident in talking to my children and this is all due to doing the Speakeasy course, all of it, the whole lot was useful in increasing my confidence.'

Parents revealed that their increased confidence was due to a number of factors such as having increased factual knowledge, feeling less embarrassed, knowing where to find out further information if needed, and being able to talk to other parents about their experiences and discuss possible responses to different scenarios:

'I would say I'm 8 out of 10 confident, so very confident really'. This has been because I've now got more knowledge to talk about things, having knowledge to back-up what I am saying. I've realised I need to discuss certain issues at certain times, so can now talk more confidently about these things than I could before I did the course.'

'I'm very confident...being from a family of girls I wasn't sure how to address things with boys, now I feel I can address things with him when he's older. I think my confidence has come from having more factual knowledge, but I also feel less embarrassed than I did before the course.'

'[I] feel much more confident now...we talked about so many things, things you probably wouldn't normally talk about in everyday'

² Only one parent reported not being more confident as a result of the course. She attributed this to her professional background as a nurse and consequently already felt very confident about discussing difficult or sensitive issues.

conversations. It gave us the chance to think about what [pause] what would I say if my little boy said this or that, just thinking about the sorts of questions they might ask, and being ready to deal with the kinds of questions they might ask.'

As noted by Burns, (2004, p.24), one of the implicit 'hopes' for Speakeasy was that by achieving the aim of increasing confidence in talking about sexual matters there would be a knock-on effect in parents confidence in talking to their children more generally. Parents' narratives in the current evaluation suggest that this effect was evident in a number of cases. Moreover, a number of parents revealed that Speakeasy had not only impacted on their own levels of confidence but also on their children's confidence in terms of them being more willing to approach them and ask questions. As one parent commented:

'We can talk about anything now, I am sort of more confident with him...since the course he came and asked me what 'impotent' means whereas he wouldn't have asked such questions before. Before he wouldn't ask questions because I would go shut-up, go away, but now he now knows I can and will answer his questions, he doesn't care, he will just come out with it.'

2.1.4 Aim Two - Increased Factual Knowledge around Sex and Sexual Health (2005 findings)

When asked if they thought their knowledge of sex and sexual health had changed as a result of completing the Speakeasy programme, all 40 parents interviewed (100%) said their knowledge had changed in some way. Parents commonly described their knowledge as '*changing a lot*' over the duration of the course, and '*being more aware*' than they were before. Interestingly, over one third of parents (38% or n = 14) revealed that they were surprised just how little they really knew about sex and sexual health:

'[My] knowledge has changed completely. Before the course I thought I already knew it all, but it really opened my eyes.'

'Changed without a doubt, definitely. I thought I was clued up but there was really lots of stuff that I didn't know...it was quite scary to realise how common STIs are.'

'It's changed drastically actually – there were lots of things, lots of things I didn't know – I was really surprised.'

'My knowledge is much better now, I always thought I would be confident talking about sex, but was really surprised to find I didn't know as much as I thought I did. For example, in the washing-line activity of age-appropriate knowledge, it brought up so many other issues, not just sex, but also relationship - lots of things I would have left until my daughter was much older and so I was surprised how much could and needed to be talked about earlier.'

More specifically, parents commonly talked about their increased knowledge of STIs and in particular their ability to recognise symptoms, their increased awareness of prevention and treatments, and knowing where and how to get more information should they need to:

'I have a lot more knowledge, especially on STIs such as Chlamydia...I didn't realise there were so many diseases and now I know how to recognise them and where to go. Now feel I can spot them if they happen and how to be protected.'

Similarly, it was clear from the data set that many parents had benefited significantly from learning about contraception, its availability, the positives and negatives associated with use, and the many different forms:

'[My knowledge has] definitely changed. I'm much more able to talk to my older son now than I could before. My confidence has also increased because my knowledge has increased like learning the terminology - using the right names for the right bits - also knowledge of contraceptive methods, the fors and againsts. I can now give more detailed information to them so they are informed about choice.'

A number of parents also commented that in addition to an increased knowledge base, they had also learnt more about how to communicate their knowledge in an age-appropriate way:

'My knowledge has changed a lot, the key thing I learnt was using every opportunity as a learning opportunity. Also that sex and sexual health should be a fun topic, and two-way communication is important. I found the stuff on contraception handy and the booklets were useful, how to develop relationships with your child, group discussions and the chance to listen and talk with other parents.'

Furthermore, in one narrative a father reported that having learnt more about the physical aspects of sex and sexual health, and consequently feeling less embarrassed talking about it, he also felt more able to talk to his children more generally, about other wider issues:

'I've developed new knowledge, more factual information. As a Muslim, middle class males are too shy and discouraged from talking about sex, especially to women and girls in the religious community. I feel it's my responsibility to pass my knowledge and I wanted to learn to be able to talk in more depth...I now feel confident and less embarrassed because I know more about body parts and I can talk about it now...I am also more confident in talking about other issues as well such as politics, and social and economic issues.'

However, it is important to note that not all parents felt they had increased their factual knowledge of sex and sexual health. Some parents described the course as more of a 'refresher' for their already existing knowledge although usually admitted that their knowledge had been extended in areas such as increased knowledge about the range of STIs and methods of contraception:

'I don't know if it has changed that much really, except for STIs which I didn't know much about. The course acted as a useful refresher in terms of knowledge.'

It [my knowledge] hasn't changed at all except for knowledge of STIs and contraception. I knew some of them but not all. It was good to explore them in-depth.'

The views in the previous extracts were very much in the minority and tended to arise from parents whom already had a good knowledge of sex and sexual health through their vocations (e.g. nursing) or through previous education (GNVQ Health and Social Care and degree courses). In these circumstances, parents still reported that Speakeasy was of benefit to them albeit in other ways such as developing confidence, and learning more about where and how to find information should they need it.

Finally, and regardless of their individual prior knowledge levels, nearly all parents reported that they found the course materials (folder) and leaflets particularly useful as a point of reference or learning tool to use with their children and other family members. A typical example of a comment in this regard is shown below:

'The leaflets given out on the course were fantastic, absolutely brilliant – they covered everything young people would want to know, where to find contraceptives, very eye-catching!'

2.1.5 Aim Three – Openness (2005 findings)

In Burns evaluation (2004), parents interviewed as part of the longitudinal study were asked an open question about how useful the course had been to them. This elicited a number of responses suggesting parents felt more open, less embarrassed, and had learnt new strategies to approach their children. In the current evaluation a similar tactic was adopted. Parents were asked what impact they felt Speakeasy had on their ability to talk to their children about sex and relationships, in addition, parents were also asked to describe a specific incident when this was particularly evident or noticeable. The response to this question was overwhelmingly positive with all 40 of the parents interviewed reporting that they now felt more open and able to discuss issues relating to sex, relationships, and sexual health following completion of the Speakeasy course. For example, two parents commented:

'Since doing the course, I feel much less embarrassed and more able to answer questions...I can explain things in an age-appropriate way without giving too much or too little information.'

'It has helped me to discuss things more openly than I could before.'

Whilst interviewees were not asked about their reasons for doing the course, these were perhaps inevitably elicited as the interviews progressed and parents recalled their original motivations.

'I feel less embarrassed talking about sex than I used to. My parents were very closed with me and the has helped me realise that I want to be more open with my own family than my parents were with me.'

'I took the course very frankly – tried to recognise my weaknesses and then fill in the gaps through the course.'

The first quote reflects a particularly common sentiment amongst many of the parents interviewed, namely that because their experiences of sex and relationship education were so poor, they wanted their children's experiences to be very different.

During the interviews parents were asked whether they thought Speakeasy had impacted upon others within both their immediate, and wider circle of family and friends in terms of being more open and willing to talk about issues surrounding sex, sexuality, and sexual health. An encouraging number of parents (45% or n = 18) stated that the course had impacted others including spouses, their own parents, neighbours, and friends. Perhaps the most common response from these 18 parents was that Speakeasy had impacted upon their partners in favourable ways. For example, parents often reported that their partners would read through their course notes or look at materials whilst they were doing course homework, which often prompted discussions. One parent revealed in her narrative that her husband used to feel uncomfortable talking about sex and was initially quite 'shocked' by the material she was studying but that discussions prompted by the course material had helped him become more comfortable with some of the issues surrounding sex and sexual health:

'I think my husband is more open because I shared quite a lot of the stuff we had done. At first he was a bit shocked by some of it, but then as we talked we realised it's something we wouldn't have talk about for years. We talked about not making sex this really mysterious thing but trying to give him information bit by bit, and we decided it was a good way to do it. My husband has now taken that on board...so the course has definitely impacted on him, definitely.'

2.1.6 Aim Four - Further Learning and Development (2005 findings)

As noted in the introduction, one of the clear aims of the Speakeasy programme is to act as a step towards further learning and professional development for traditionally excluded groups of parents. In her report, Burns (2004, p.28) notes that there are two main indicators that can serve to evidence this aim:

- Participants gaining and benefiting from OCN credits
- Participants deciding to go on other courses where they had not planned to do so at the start of the course

Supporting the encouraging findings from the first evaluation (Burns, 2004), in this research all 40 parents reported that they had submitted a portfolio to

gain OCN credits at level two. However, at the time of writing no data are available with regards actual accreditation figures. Parents were also asked whether their OCN credits had been useful to them or might be in the future. The findings were that:

- 10% (n = 4) said the credits has been useful so far
- 60% (n = 24) said that it was too early to tell or that it might be useful in the future
- 5% (n = 2) said they had not used it and did not think they would use it in the future.
- For the remaining 25% (n = 10) of parents, data were not available.

Of those parents who said the course and accreditation might be useful in the future (i.e. n = 24), a large proportion revealed that they were planning to use it towards further learning, job applications, or career development including:

- Applying for further and/or higher education courses
- Putting on CV for job applications
- Voluntary work (e.g. being involved in community projects)
- Working with children
- Training to be a teaching assistant
- Training to be a play worker

Attitudes to further learning

Towards the end of the telephone interview, parents were asked a number of questions concerning their previous educational experiences (e.g. if they had done any courses since finishing school). Parent's previous educational experiences ranged considerably from having done no courses before Speakeasy since school (23% or n = 9) to those who have completed a number of both vocational and academic programmes (70% or n = 28). For the 23% of parents for whom Speakeasy was the first course they had completed since finishing school, the programme provided a relaxed, informal, and safe-space in which they could re-engage and develop confidence in learning. As two parents stated:

'It [Speakeasy] was the first course I'd done since A-levels and I was worried about going back to school and doing courses – it was scary 'cos I have visions of the teacher at the front telling us things and us having to remember everything that was said. Speakeasy was different, both facilitators and parents were relaxed, it was nothing like school. I now feel much happier about doing more courses and will do more in the future.'

'Doing the course really increased my confidence. After my second child I had post-natal depression and found things very difficult, especially going out of the house. Going to Speakeasy gave me the confidence and reason to get out and about, and to go on and do other courses'.

Indeed, over half of all parents interviewed (55% or n = 22) said completing the course had been a real 'confidence boost' for trying out new courses in

the future. Interestingly, about one-third of parents (38% or n = 15) commented that whilst the course had been valuable and beneficial to them in a number of ways, for example, providing increased factual knowledge about sex and sexual health, it had not influenced them in terms of their persuasions towards further learning and education because they were already confident learners. The majority of these parents had already completed a number of vocational and academic courses prior to Speakeasy. However, this did not mean Speakeasy had not impacted upon them in other ways related to further education, learning, and training. For example the following passage reveals how for one parent, the course had a number of benefits in terms of raising confidence and knowledge, but also developing and reinforcing his desire to conduct further study at university and get involved in community related projects:

'I've done lots of courses such as first aid, soccer skills, local courses for voluntary work, lots of workshops and stuff. Because I have been off-sick for five years, in the first two years I didn't do anything and felt really bad about myself. Recently, I've been doing lots of courses to try and keep my mind more active and I now feel much better about myself...When I go on courses it reinforces that I want to do further learning. Speakeasy increased my desire to get into further education and do a degree at the Open University...Speakeasy has also really helped me because it's given me knowledge and confidence to get involved in other things. I've been involved in a lot of community projects and I also take part in local environmental meetings, things I wouldn't have done before.'

In addition, one parent who reported having completed a number of vocational courses since leaving school (including health and safety, first aid, food and hygiene, and sign language), said that although she already felt confident about learning she didn't know what career she wanted to do. She revealed that she was now planning to do more courses and that Speakeasy had given her the confidence to go and find out about other courses and see what was available where she would not have done so before:

'I did loads of courses because didn't know what career I wanted – before {Speakeasy} I wouldn't phone places up to find out about courses, whereas now I would. Now I have the confidence to find out about what courses are going on and am intending on doing more in the future'.

In general, it was clear from parents' narratives that taking part in the **fpa** Speakeasy for parents programme was influential in changing attitudes to further learning and development. Whilst it is not possible from the data to see whether this was a real change in attitude from prior to the course, the findings are certainly encouraging in suggesting Speakeasy has an important impact on many parents' perceptions of learning and education.

2.1.7 Main Benefits of Speakeasy (2005 findings)

Towards the end of the telephone interview parents were asked to summarise what (if any) had been the main benefits of completing the Speakeasy course. This was intended to provide a useful synopsis of each parent's Speakeasy

experience. Similar to the findings of Burns evaluation (2004), 95% (or n = 38)³ of parents interviewed said they benefited in some way from the Speakeasy course. Even parents who said their children were too young for them to have seen any real benefit reported increases in factual knowledge, confidence, and feeling 'equipped' to tackle issues when they arose in the future. Easily the most commonly mentioned benefits for parents (mentioned by 85% or n = 35 of interviewees) included increased confidence in talking about sex, sexuality, and sexual health with their children, and developing greater factual knowledge, particularly in terms of STIs and contraception. Other areas in which parents said they benefited from the course included: learning where to get information and/or advice; developing relationships with their children; meeting and hearing other parents' experiences; acquiring skills and strategies to initiate discussions; becoming less embarrassed and more open, and; improving communication with children more generally.

³ Data were not available for the two remaining parents

2.2 Results – Confirmatory and innovative findings from 2006 interviews

Of the 40 parents interviewed in 2005, 28 (70%) were successfully re-interviewed a year later in 2006. In the context of longitudinal interview-based research, this was considered to be an encouraging follow-up rate. As in the first interviews, FPA approached each person to gain their consent for interview and to also let them know in advance that a researcher from TSA would be contacting them to arrange a time for interview in the next few days. Of the 12 people who were not re-interviewed, two did not provide their consent for interview, and the remainder had either moved away or were non contactable after six attempts over the course of two weeks.

2.2.1 Confirmative Findings from 2006

The interviews in 2006 reported a highly positive opinion of the Speakeasy course sustained throughout the year since the last interview. Again, the course was found to be memorable, enjoyable and highly beneficial. In more detail, parents' noted the following as the most positive aspects of the course:

- In general, a very open course, 'a good laugh' and highly positive experience, for example,

'Just a really positive experience, I learnt a lot.'

'I enjoyed all aspects of the course.'

'I always try and promote the course, because it's so good.'

- Getting to know other parents and talking about experiences, especially to those with older children because they can discover which issues they are likely to face when their children are older.
- Increased confidence about talking about sexual matters.
- Learning about contraception types and STIs.
- The exercise about the media pressure on young people, especially girls.
- Learning how sexually provocative media is.
- Informal, relaxed and not like a normal course, for example,

"The course was fun, it gave parents an equal opportunity to get rid of inhibitions and talk about things. It wasn't cloak and dagger, there were no holds barred."

2.2.2 Innovative Findings from 2006

Aside to generally confirming the positive benefits of Speakeasy identified a year earlier, there were a number of more innovative findings to report.

Increased communication

With a year in between interviews, the follow-up provided an opportunity to explore whether parents' feeling of being 'equipped' to broach topics around sex and relationships (evidenced by the 2005 interviews and through

examination of monitoring forms) had actually been put into practice. This was of key importance in the 2006 interviews, providing the opportunity to discover not just whether parents felt that the Speakeasy course had benefited them but if it had actually been of use in their daily lives. Encouragingly a number of examples of use were mentioned as follows:

"I just told him about anal sex, and I didn't even get embarrassed! I remembered from the course to say that some people do it and that's ok, but he doesn't have to!"

"Abortion is a difficult subject, and before I probably would've just brushed it under the carpet, and avoided telling him."

"You know, she's started asking why hasn't she got a boyfriend, because all her friends have. I think it's good she can talk to me about how she feels, and I think I know more about how to answer her and make her feel better."

"I knew I could explain why not, so I did and I didn't feel uncomfortable. In the past I wouldn't have know what to tell him, what reason to give. I would've been embarrassed. I explained it in a different way."

"My 6 year-old asked where babies come from and I could answer in a way he would understand for his age. I wasn't embarrassed at all! And now I know there are books in the library, I know what's available."

"We went to the toilet and my son said 'how come you don't have a willy?' I would've been embarrassed and not known what to say, but it's easy when you have someone to tell you."

"Before I would have changed the subject and felt flustered [about where babies come from], but it was fine."

"He asked me why I didn't have a penis, and I didn't mind answering that question. And he accidentally saw a condom in the house and so I explained that to him too."

"My son asked about hard-ons, and how many hairs he's gonna get! My daughter's asked about where the eggs are going, and stages of a baby's growth. I just tell them straight now, I don't mind."

"My 6 year-old asked why his willy gets big, & before I would've told him to ask his dad! But now I know how to tell him, in the right way and I think he understood."

Parents felt that this increased communication about sexual matters also helped their children to be more confident in asking questions. For example;

"Now he knows he won't get a giggly answer or a 'ask your dad' answer. If I don't want my daughter to hear I'll say 'I'll come and have a chat with you later about that', and I always do."

These discussions were not always necessarily connected to sex, and suggested that the Speakeasy course had fostered a more relaxed and 'open' relationship between parents and children.

"They know they can ask me pretty much anything, and I'll give them straight answers. I won't fob them off."

For those parents whose learning had not yet been put into practice, most felt they were confident about responding to any questions which previously would have posed a problem. For example;

"I feel like I'm ready, willing and waiting to be asked... I'm armed with all the facts but I just don't think he'll ask me anything. If I tell him it's in one ear, and then he forgets. So, I mean I wish he'd ask in a way... He's doing about sex at school at the moment, but schools don't tell you about what they're learning."

"The course has taught me to take opportunities and address things 'as and when', and not just when they ask questions."

Widening Impact of Speakeasy

A further innovative finding of the interviews was that the benefits of the course were extending to other members of the family and also to friends. Parents reported that people around them felt more confident about talking about sex and sexual relationship issues, and this in turn, reinforced their own confidence in their learning.

Although some people reported that they were unsure if the effects had extended to others, most people said that others had noticed the difference in their ability and confidence (especially their own mothers, sisters, cousins and friends) and on occasions this had inspired friends and members of the family to look at the course file, although the direct impacts of this are difficult to specify. In terms of influence upon children, some people reported that their children's friends would either talk to them directly or their children would ask questions that their friends wanted answering. An interesting finding concerned change in the husband or partner of the attendee where, on occasion, a clear increase in confidence was reported:

"He wouldn't have discussed it before, but discusses it now like it's normal."

Responsibility for sex education

It was interesting to note that some of the females on the course assumed sex education was their responsibility, rather than their male partners' responsibility. This was especially the case when dealing with questions raised by their daughters. This responsibility seemed to be reinforced where females often perceived a resistance from their male partner to raise issues connected to sex and relationships.

Retention of Information

One potential concern relating to the time-delay between the course and these interviews was whether most of the information had been retained. When asked if they felt that any information had been forgotten, most agreed to a certain extent, but reported that they had kept the folder from the course where they could look up any information they needed when required. Only two parents recommended a 'refresher' course.

Further Learning

Finally, around one-half of those interviewed had taken additional courses since their Speakeasy course. These included homeopathy, art and design, money management and various GCSEs. Many attributed the confidence gained through Speakeasy as a factor in increasing their confidence towards other courses. The remaining parents who had not undertaken any courses often reported that they were planning to do so either at a later date or at a time when they had more money (to fund the course or childcare) or time available.

2.3 Results – Confirmatory and innovative findings from 2007 interviews

In 2007 20 of the parents and guardians from the original sample were successfully re-interviewed. These 20 accounted for 83.3% of the possible pool of 24 parents details provided, 71.4% of the 2006 sample and 50% of the original sample of 40 parents who were interviewed in 2005. This is an encouraging retention rate at a three year follow up.

As in previous years FPA approached each parent or guardian and obtained fully informed consent for interview. FPA let each parent know that a researcher from TSA would be contacting them to arrange a time for interview. TSA were provided with the details of 24 parents who provided consent for interview. The parents who were not interviewed were non-contactable after six attempts over a period of two weeks.

2.3.1 Confirmatory Findings from 2007

Consistent with previous findings, the 2007 interviews found a highly positive opinion of the fpa's Speakeasy course amongst parents who attended:

“We had a right laugh”.

“It was fun as well, learning but it was fun at the same time”.

Parents remembered the course as being relaxed and informal. It was often recalled that possibly embarrassing topics were dealt with successfully in a way which minimised embarrassment:

“It wasn't embarrassing, I mean there was a man that took the course with us but it wasn't embarrassing or, you know what I mean, it was just, ask what you want, you don't have to, you know what I mean, it wasn't you've gotta answer this”.

“Can be slightly embarrassing at times so, but again with it being such a relaxed atmosphere it wasn't such a big deal, talking about sexually transmitted diseases, things like that, that's a bit 'icky', but at the same time because it was such a good atmosphere it was very easily done”.

In many cases Speakeasy was not what was expected from a course:

“I thought it would be more formal but it wasn't, it was just laid back, a friendly atmosphere sort of thing”.

“That it was quite informal, wasn't like school, which was a factor which was worrying me rather”.

Parents placed great value on the opportunity to get together and discuss intimate issues with other people who were in a similar situation as them or who had children of different ages and from whom they could learn:

“Getting together with other parents and talking and them giving their experiences cause obviously I’ve got one child and most of my friends their children are younger than mine so I’ve got no one else... I didn’t really know how to deal with children my daughter’s age, from the age of five it gets quite difficult”.

There was some suggestion from a few participants that the course work occasionally presented problems. Some found it challenging or that their commitments prevented them from being able to give it their full attention. One parent interviewed reported that she had recently discovered the reason that one of the people on her course had dropped out was because she felt unable to cope with the written work. Another parent reported that someone on her course had cheated and that she had felt upset about this as she was putting a lot of effort into her assignments and felt they were devalued through this action. However, on the whole people felt that the course had very few negative points even when asked to think about them directly.

Previous years have shown that the Speakeasy course was useful in increasing confidence in discussing sex and sexual relationships with children. The 2007 interviews were no exception, and given that parents attended the course three years ago this is a positive finding suggesting Speakeasy has an enduring effect which does not diminish with time:

“Before I went on the Speakeasy course I was able to talk to people but I can talk more openly to people now, it’s confidence really”.

“Yeah definitely, definitely was, there were a lot of things I wasn’t very comfortable, I didn’t know how to approach the subject with my daughter, how to talk about sex, it’s still not that easy but I’ve done it and it’s better’ [Did speakeasy help with this?] “Yeah definitely”.

“I still have ever so slight moments of like squirminess when you think what do I say to this but it has made us more relaxed in how I view her questions and approach answering”.

In common with other years, the evaluation found that knowledge had been increased by the course, even in those people who felt that prior to the course they had a good knowledge of the topics.

“You do think you know everything and obviously you don’t and it opens your eyes”.

“She’ll say, ‘why’, ‘what’, you know, and it’s gave me better knowledge to be able to answer her questions and not be uncomfortable about it as well”.

Increased openness and communication

In 2007 participants reported many examples of an increased openness and communication with children about sex and sexual relationships. This occurred frequently in every day situations and shows an enduring effect of the Speakeasy course:

"I wonder whether I would have been more, again, reluctant to talk about it and maybe change the subject because, 'oh no she's too young for this she's too young to talk about this so I'll change the subject and we'll deal with it later', where as now I think that, oh she's interested she's asking and I'll answer her honestly to the best of my abilities about it, and I think that she's happy with that as well, it's like any other conversation we have in the house".

"She suddenly decided to start telling me about babies and we ended up having a talk about when she was in my tummy the other day, she was next to me on the sofa and she suddenly started saying about erm, she put her hand on my tummy and said why do mummies tummies get so big when they have babies, so we had to explain about it"

Course helped with this? "I do because I think before I would have been a bit more reluctant to actually get into that kind of conversation with her."

When there's something a bit rude on telly they'll ask about it 'why was that man near that woman's bum' and S's happy to tell them about it but sometimes will ask when it's not appropriate - 'on the bus' but 'you'll say, oh I'll show you a little leaflet'".

"I had to have an internal so she says well why did they do that so I said well to make sure it was alright inside'...And obviously why'd you get your tubes tied and I said obviously so I don't have no more babies cause I don't want anymore".

"So I had to buy some at the shop [sanitary towels] and she said well why are you buying them and I said cause when I have my tubes tied I might bleed and so she said ah right and then she said to us last night she said why aren't you wearing them anymore and I said well I don't need them now and she went well can I have one and I said no you don't need them, not till you're a bigger girl".

"It's funny you should say that, he comes back from school a couple of days ago and he says, 'I like this girl you know' and I thought, here we go! ... He wants to take her out and I was on about being safe you know and everything".

Further learning and professional development

Many parents felt that by taking part and completing the Speakeasy course their confidence in learning had increased:

"I'd gone in with the idea thinking not only is it going to be quite boring and sort of really hard going but, it's, you don't want to appear thick, and what happens if you can't do it? Whereas, the fact that there was no sort of right or wrong, it was very open and easygoing, you were made to feel at ease, that you just thought, ' Yeah, you know, I can do this'".

Many also viewed the Speakeasy course as an important step towards further learning and future employment:

"The Speakeasy course was a stepping stone sort of on to that to build my confidence enough for me to actually go on and do another course".

"Well I have [gone on to do other courses] the past couple of years I've been doing an adult literacy course and now I've just got my certificate in that".

One parent mentioned that she suffered from panic attacks and that Speakeasy had been very useful in getting her comfortable in groups of people, so much so that she now felt able to pursue a career in nursing:

"Helped me getting out, and being with other people and just doing something useful...when I had that every week to go to I used to look forward to it".

Another frequent finding was that the Speakeasy course was especially useful for mothers who were at home with young children. It was viewed as a way to reconnect with adults and learning:

"I liked it having been at home. I was just at home at that the time with the children and it was just nice to have interaction with hu...adult humans and to know that you were worth talking to and had something to offer".

[Do you think it got you back out there?] "It did a bit yes, it did, yes, in fact I went on to, somebody else had organized that course but I went on to organize a drug awareness course at school".

"I think it can [be a boost to confidence], even though I'd been to Uni and done lots of other stuff, when you're a mum and you're at home and full-time, even though I'd been out to work and stuff before, I think you can lose your confidence a bit, it's kind of not the real world but you know you kind of just get used to being surrounded by children and baby things so it was good for my confidence, it was a good challenge to go and learn new stuff".

Some parents reported that they had returned to work since the Speakeasy course and viewed it as having helped in this process:

"Yeah it probably did [increase confidence to learn] because um I think that was the stage when I started, cause obviously I was at

home with children with no confidence blah blah blah do you know what I mean? And I think, I mean, look where I am if now! If someone had said this to me two three years ago I'd have laughed I'd have said yeah right do you know what I mean? So all the training and all the courses have certainly given me self-esteem and confidence and that would include speak easy cause that was when I was at home, a mum and not really doing anything".

Several of the parents reported that the accreditation that they received was valued and something that they had pride in having achieved. One lady reported that at a time when she found the course hard going the fact that she would be getting OCN credits for it motivated her to stay on the course:

"I always put Speakeasy down as well [on application forms], I don't know if it helps with my applications but I always put it down".

2.3.2 Innovative Findings from 2007

A number of new questions resulted in original data being generated by the 2007 interviews. The following section addresses the themes that arose from the parent's narratives and focuses on how, three years on, the learning from the course has been put into practice.

Refreshing memories

Most parents reported that they felt they believed that they had forgotten some of the information they had learnt on the Speakeasy course. Almost all parents reported that they now thought a refresher course would be a good idea. Parents who had children who were very young when they took the course felt the refresher would be particularly beneficial. These parents felt that they had focused on what they needed to know for the age their children were when they attended the course and would get much more from the course now that their children were older:

"Yes I do, especially because it's an evolving thing especially in my household, my children are getting older and maybe then I'd bring things that are more relevant to me now than they were then, that would be lovely".

However, as is shown in the following quotes, when parents were required to deal with situations in their day to day lives the information often came back to them and they were still able to draw from specific aspects of the course:

"Even when she was saying to me about babies growing in my tummy my first thought was what do I, how do I, age appropriate sort of, you have a flash sort of in your, it's a silly thing, but you have a flash in your head of doing that time line thing and thinking oh right am I expecting that question around now?"

"We did have a girl, I think it was last year, and she was 15 and we found out she was pregnant so we took her down the family planning,

which was mentioned in the Speakeasy talk you know, which I found was really interesting. So what I heard on the Speakeasy course really interacted with that you know and I thought that was quite useful”.

“The next day then he said to me about, what did he say, he said me and Rebecca are going to get married and ...we were talking about what it means when you get married and he said but she is my girlfriend and we were talking about what that means and that’s stuff that we covered on the course as well”.

Practical application of Learning

It is important to establish parental views of the course and also important to establish what is remembered. However, it is even more vital to establish how attending the course impacts on real life. The findings from the 2007 interviews establish that there has been an enduring change in the way parents communicate with their children about sex and that FPA’s Speakeasy course has helped and continues to be an important reason for this.

Enduring Relevance

A strong finding was the relevance of the course to daily life. Frequent reference was made to very recent situations where specific learning had been utilized in everyday life. The following quotes show examples of recent use:

“Even just this week it’s been quite appropriate um yeah I was just thinking about it all this week cause one of the little one of my son’s friends had been saying to another little girl about two children in his class having sex I knew he didn’t have a clue what on earth he was saying so I’ve been trying talk to my son a little bit this week. Oh, how this mum, when she heard, reacted! And she was shocked and she said ‘don’t you ever say that word, it’s a very bad word’ and so and I just thought, if I hadn’t been on the course - I’m not saying I would have reacted like that and I understand exactly why she did - it was very embarrassing in front of everybody - it’s just I think it’s taught me not to react, not to be shocked by anything’.

“Even this week she’s been asking me about, we’ve been talking about babies again so we’ve ended up sort of, funnily enough it’s sort of cropped up again, she was talking about where, how, babies are born in being in your tummy...”

“I do foresee it being something that’s going to crop up all the time”.

“I got my tubes tied last week and they were asking why do you get your tubes tied and what happened and obviously I explained what happened”.

[Did speakeasy help?] “Yes definitely I think I would have just avoided it otherwise”.

“Well actually I’ll tell you what I did say to them the other day, I said, if anybody like touched you down below well you’ve gotto tell us, like mam or dad”.

Tools and Techniques the course provides

The course had been very useful in a variety of situations over time and people predicted it would continue to be so. The course had provided parents with tools and techniques to deal with situations in a way they felt they would not have been able to do before the course:

“The fact that I used some of the techniques to be quite frank and open with my daughter regarding puberty and sex in a way that my parents never were with me... There’s nothing now that she feels like she can’t ask, I’ve let her know that the subject of sex isn’t a taboo thing you know, it’s not something that you have to feel like you can’t bring up with parents”.

“Yeah well her going through puberty, so some of the sheets that I’ve actually done, I’ve actually shown her what I’ve done, you know like labelling parts of the body and changes she’s going to go through and the way, how she’s going to feel and teaching her about the opposite sex”.

“She can’t store too much in her brain, you can’t elaborate on anything you have to be straight to the point and that’s what we did so if I hadn’t been on the course I wouldn’t of thought of that and I’d have been terribly stuck”.

“A bit about how boys and girls are different and where babies come from things like that it’s not something that I’ve had to go into a lot of detail cause they’re not old enough to understand it all but yeah it’s helped me cause it made you thing about things it sort of made it clearer how much information to give to them at certain times, yeah it’s dead easy to talk about”.

“My step daughter like she’s fourteen she started periods a few months back and it helped with that because of all the leaflets that I got as well from the course which I had kept hold of, it helped to go through things with her and it made it easier for me as well cause I was a bit, ‘how do sort of tell them about things like that”.

“He was playing with himself I was watching telly and pulled his pants down ‘look at this he said mummy and I was like oh yeah, I handled that, I was still a bit shocked but...’.

A growing confidence in children

Many of the participants observed a changing confidence in their children. Parents felt that this was as a result of their increased confidence in dealing with situations. This is perhaps only available for us to see through the nature of the longitudinal research and highlights the importance of follow up study:

"I think maybe as he got a bit older and started asking more questions I think I probably would've have been a bit embarrassed and tried not to talk about it which then I guess in turn would have made him the same".

"I think it's helped both of us cause obviously I feel confident in bringing up issues with her, because I'm confident I think she feeds off me and it's helped her as well".

"Maybe cause he's learnt that I'm cause sometimes I know that he knows that he says things that maybe will shock me a little bit...I think maybe if he's learnt that I'm not going to over react".

Affected child's confidence? *"Yes definitely, he knows I'm not embarrassed or shy... He's asked us questions about condoms and things and all sorts".*

"He knows we're not going to laugh or take the mickey".

"It is nice, it's a relaxed thing, I know that anything that pops into her little head she'll come up she'll ask".

There was an occasional suggestion evident mainly in parents whose children were at an older age when they attended the course that whilst they were now comfortable talking about sex, their children sometimes became embarrassed:

"I said I'm going to get some condoms and he said 'don't be so stupid and I said yeah but you never know'.

"She get's much more embarrassed than me at the minute she's like 'mum, for god's sake!'".

Most of the participants interviewed expected and hoped that their children's future relationships would be affected by their having been on the Speakeasy course. There was some indication that this may be a realistic expectation, it was often reported that children were now willing and comfortable discussing sex with those around them. However, few conclusions can be drawn at present being that most of the children of the parents being interviewed were considered too young to be developing sexual relationships.

"I like to hope that when he gets to the age where he is going to have that kind of relationship that he knows that he can come to us, I've always said to my husband there'll be a draw where there's condoms in that he just takes them when he wants them he hasn't got to tell us".

"Because we haven't made anything like a real taboo subject she doesn't see a problem with discussing things quite openly with other people".

He'll have respect for the girl or whoever, he'll know about being careful".

Wider effects of Speakeasy

An important finding of the 2007 interviews was the way in which information gained through attending the Speakeasy course was passed on by word of mouth. Perhaps due to the significant time gap, in general, people had not recommended the course to others very recently. This was often due to people being unsure if the course was still being run. However, the evidence in 2007 suggests that Speakeasy still has a positive impact upon people who have not attended the course. Parents reported giving advice to friends, children of friends, and also to relatives. As in previous years several participants felt that their spouses had also been affected by the course. An important and novel finding of the 2007 interviews was the passing of information between children. Whilst only mentioned by a few parents this finding was significant in that it provided evidence that peer education was occurring:

"The leaflets do pop up a lot anyway, cause my son's thirteen, so he asks for different stuff... he'll just say 'you got one of those leaflets'?... he's even shown them to his mates".

"I've put them down and he knows exactly where they are and a couple of his friends have come in and they've picked up the book and they're sitting there reading it".

"My sister was going through some problems with her daughter and er and I did pass some information on to her you know just talked over what I'd done and gave her one of the leaflets, it was about changes that happen for girls".

"Even this week a friend of mine who's got teenage children, and I was telling her about what had happened at NAME's school and she was saying 'oh I think I need, I should have really been more open with my children and we were just talking about making sure that we don't, as much as we want our children to be informed and be able to make sensible choices, I don't want them to grow up thinking it's a bad thing".

"Gave me a bit of confidence [in their work with teenagers] to say, 'look you need to keep yourself safe, this is why, we've got this this this', do you know what I mean, to protect yourself".

"Word soon spreads when I think of other people who I know here that have got younger children, and I'll often get a phone call you know, "my son's seven years old and he's just asked me so and so, what do I say"? Well actually if you go on the speakeasy course it might actually help".

Sex Education Policy

About half of the parents were aware of the school's policy on sex education and had approached the school as part of the Speakeasy course. Parents felt that this had highlighted the importance of knowing what children are taught in schools:

"It made you think you know when your child starts school it's important to find out what that particular school does".

"I think it's just knowing what they're taught in school so to know what input to put at home and to know what stuff isn't being covered at school so you can talk about things if you want to as and when they come up".

However this involvement was not enduring. When asked in 2007 if they were aware of sex education policy, most parents reported that they did not. Some reported surprise that they did not, and the interview served to remind them that it was something that they could or should do. One parent reported that it might be something they would find out on a refresher course indicating that whilst it had been an important part of the course it had not been internalized as something which they could do by themselves.

"We found out they don't teach about contraceptives until fifteen and we think, well they should be teaching it a long time before that".

"Has it changed"?

"I suppose that's something we'd find out if we did this refresher".

"Now at my daughter's school I can kind of ask them for an SRE policy".

"Have you done that then"?

"I haven't actually done that yet but it's something else to think about you know".

"Do you know what I don't to tell you the truth which is quite crap really isn't it, well I don't know cause I know sex ed will be covered at some stage but is that primary or secondary I don't know actually so it might be worth me finding that out you know, when you said that I was like oh I don't know and when you've got a child you want to be knowing really don't you".

As an exception, one parent who was actively involved in community and volunteering work approached a school independently. This participant had a positive effect on the school's attitude to policy and seemed quite proud and empowered after having seen the effect and with the realization that he motivated and prompted change:

"I went up there to interview the headmaster and he was quite shocked and he got out of it by saying, 'we're just on the verge of updating our sex education policy'... and I said to him, can I see what you're working on now, you know? And it was just the very very

basics, but they have in the last year updated it, you know, to more graphic details, which is really good actually'.

This suggests that it could be beneficial for parents if facilitators make it clear that parents have a right to know what their children are being taught and that they should feel able to approach their children's schools whenever they feel the need to without being a member of a Speakeasy course.

2.4 Results – Confirmatory and innovative findings from 2008 interviews

In 2008 19 of the parents and guardians from the original sample were successfully re-interviewed. These 19 accounted for 95.0% of the possible pool of 20 parents from 2007, 79.2% of the 2006 sample and 47.5% of the original sample of 40 parents who were interviewed in 2005. With only one parent unobtainable from the previous year, this suggests the drop-out rate had stabilised at the fourth year of follow-up.

As in previous years FPA approached each parent or guardian and obtained fully informed consent for interview. FPA let each parent know that a researcher from TSA would be contacting them to arrange a time for interview. TSA were provided with the details of 20 parents who provided consent for interview. The parent who was not interviewed in 2008 was non-contactable after six failed attempts over a period of two weeks.

2.4.1 Confirmatory Findings from 2008

The confirmatory findings from 2008 were in two parts. Firstly, the general reactions, memories and impacts of the course on people's knowledge and confidence and, secondly, the wider impact of the course on others. Each will be outlined in turn.

General reactions, memories, knowledge and confidence

The general comments about the Speakeasy course confirmed the extremely positive remarks reported in earlier years. Indeed, there were no negative comments about the value of the course. Examples included:

"Really liked it."

"Really great stuff."

"Really good."

"Very good course, extremely good course, so important to be open and not typically English. I'd much rather talk to them about it than not."

"An absolutely brilliant course, I really do, that I've told lots of people about and it should be made more available to lots more people."

"It was really good cos I never had no one to tell me about things when I was a kid."

Most people commented on the style of the course, how it made them feel at ease, for example:

“Very positive, I learnt a lot, tutor was excellent and very hands on, very good at getting everyone to overcome their embarrassment. Excellent.”

“Light-hearted and easy going, quite fun, cos I was worried about being it like going back to school.”

Of real importance, comments were also made about how they felt the course would equip them to handle sex and relationships issues effectively:

“Definitely a positive experience and got a lot of stuff from it that I can use.”

“I found it very positive and I said to my friend that I’d love to do it again now my children are a bit older and asking more things.”

“It was very positive, more knowledge, more information and prepared to handle questions when they arise from my son.”

“Definitely a positive experience and got a lot of stuff from it that I can use.”

When prompted, people’s memories of the course (being up to four years ago) was impressive. The memorable elements of the course were quite varied, as illustrated as follows:

“Really liked the course, remember the blue willy, homework was a bit hard. The body parts was good as was the female condom, it was so big.”

“Lots of stuff mainly about the changes and stuff that my daughter will go through and the collage about sticking bits from a teen magazine and how what expectations teenagers have about boyfriends and being drunk and stuff.”

“Remember doing the body board and lady talking about diseases, and still got the folder which I’ve used and has been handy with a teenager about and stuff.”

“Yeah can remember it, about relationships and what makes us individual and sex education, highlighted the need to talk to the kids and explain things.”

“Just the thing that sticks in my mind is to keep talking to your children and not kind of being embarrassed and stuff and just keep talking.”

“The collage, parts of the body and changes girls and boys go through.”

“Washing line to say what age you should introduce or talk about things, lots of cards with topics on to hang on the line to say what was appropriate age wise, really good way to see what we thought, virtually everyone said 16 but then we talked about talking about things earlier, right at the younger age.”

The isolated example of having less memory was as follows:

“Can’t remember much, more about where it was.”

Linked to these memories was people’s reference to the course folder which the vast majority had kept and used to keep their knowledge up-to-date. For example:

“I remember bits and still have the folder and stuff.”

There were also some comments about the timing of the course in terms of the age of the parents’ children. Some clearly felt the timing was right, whereas others noted that because their children were too young they had a significant period of time between doing the course and putting their learning to use. For some, this generated a strong interest to take a refresher course. For example:

“I did the course at the right time and it helped me a lot with the daughter.”

“I remembered most of it, but I really would like a refresher course. Now my situation has changed I want to learn more and don’t want to stop learning.”

“Still remember stuff but my kids were younger so I’m not using it much at the moment but will do when their adolescents and, you know, I’ve kept the folder and when their 12 or 13 it will be useful.”

“Would like a reminder but not so long as over the weeks because for me the frightening thing is I have to keep reminding myself otherwise I forget things and it gets a bit stale and stagnant, once things start triggering your mind it’ll all come flooding back.”

“I’d like to do a refresher course, and would like to go over all the stuff again which would help reinforce it with me.”

Also, some people mentioned that as their children had grown up since taking the course, they used the Speakeasy course and folder to spur them on to resource new information to ensure they were right up-to-date with the latest information. For example:

“I remember a lot of it and use the folder although I’ve moved on from that a bit. I quite like facts and looking things up on the internet, but I would like a course that’s maybe moved on from things like, like what happening today about internet and internet sites and stuff, and also

now that my daughter's older and stuff and getting into boyfriends and things that she weren't into when I did the course."

"I've still got my file which is a good reference point for things to go back to. The literature allowed me to back myself up and references to find other books."

"Well I kept the leaflets and since then I've gone down the centre and doctors to get some more."

With such positive memories, perhaps the most important observation from the interviews was the learning that people had gained. The learning appeared to have been a combination of 'knowledge' and 'confidence' in discussing sex and relationships. For some, when asked about the most important element of the course that stood out, "looking four years ago", was the important knowledge gained. Although this varied, the information about sexually transmitted disease was particularly prominent:

"I think diseases was the most important thing I found out, and that they can kill you if you don't do things about it."

"Diseases cos I was unaware, although I'd heard of most, I didn't know the details so it was really useful."

"STIs, AIDS, HIV, parts of the body and stuff."

"Diseases that can be caught and the easy ways of stopping it, media and how people are influenced by it, contraception and how to raise issues during conversation with children. Having the knowledge and then knowing the opportunities to turn it into reality."

For others, the knowledge gained seemed to be in a wide variety of areas. For example:

"Being aware of what kids are taught in schools and the adolescence bit with all the changes and how it affects their bodies and behaviours, and also a section on infections and contraception."

"Really important for me was to learn about the different types of contraception so being a nurse I knew things, but I didn't know everything as I hadn't been a nurse for 10 years, so it was no good me talking to them about things if I hadn't got my facts and figure straight. This was the most important thing I got from the course. All things like the female condom and the development of the male pill, it was a really useful update."

For some people, the main outcome was the confidence and importance attached to talking about these issues and putting their factual knowledge into practice. Comparing the impacts on knowledge and confidence, there was a clear sense that, four years on, the impact on confidence was more evident.

Working in the group and discussing sex and relationships with other parents in this setting was instrumental in providing this confidence. For example:

"I would say I knew a bit of stuff but if pushed on a subject I wouldn't know so much, but the course definitely helped me talk on a more serious level but to do this on a more relaxed one-to one level it was difficult, but by the end I felt a bit more confident to do that."

"Being able to talk about it if the kids ask questions, you know made it more confident, you know working in the group like."

"Gave me loads of confidence, and confidence more in general cos I've never been a person to go up and talk to people so it helped me in group work and helped my confidence. Definitely, working in the group gave me confidence and I guess that's made me more confident with my daughter."

"I did a lot of course but remember this one cos of the confidence it gave me. I already had the factual stuff but the course gave me the boost in confidence to talk about things and that's helped me talk about difficult issues with her."

"Making good use of opportunities rather than let's go home tonight and have a serious conversation, something like do you know what that word means if it comes up in conversation and then just explaining a little bit."

"The thing is I was really uncomfortable talking about sex and stuff but don't know why really. I knew most of the facts before the course, although some people really didn't. What it taught me was not to feel afraid of talking about things and what it showed me was that other parents were experiencing the same things and I wasn't alone in this. Hearing what other people were saying made me feel more comfortable and getting us all together helped it be normal, not alienated. Speakeasy has made it more easy to talk to my daughter and I know that as she gets older I can move on from the facts into more deeper things."

For some interviewees, there was a less clear distinction between the impacts on knowledge and confidence. The following examples illustrate how the course, for some, resulted in a combined gain of knowledge and confidence:

"I thought I was knowledgeable but I learnt a lot more, but I didn't know that much about things so it was good we covered everything. It also helped my confidence, again I thought I was pretty confident beforehand but the course made me think about what I would say and how, and that made me realise I wasn't that confident and you don't realise until it comes to the crunch. So the course did help in confidence way too."

"I would say equal measures of knowledge and confidence. They have so much improved since the course."

"Probably the diseases but also gave me confidence too, you know, talking to other mums and stuff, cos I didn't do well at school so had no confidence."

Wider impacts of the course

As in previous interviews, there were several instances of where the course had led to benefits beyond those in attendance. For the majority this was in the transfer of information to other parents or children. For example:

"Even my friends, who are a bit loose, they don't know and ask me if something is going on downstairs and they don't know much about diseases."

"Now I've gone into childminding I'll be in a good position to talk to others about things so I'm quite excited about this."

"Definitely I'd do some more courses to younger mums cos some of them learnt about sex in the playground and some really didn't know about things until they got pregnant. Perhaps doing it through a 'mums and tots' or something so they can get educated on this as well as other things so they won't be so embarrassed. Also within the school so educate teenagers before they get pregnant, cos teenage pregnancy is a real problem. Really important to start at the younger end as prevention is better than cure. If you educate the parents then you educate the children and then the ever decreasing circle will come to a halt."

"I mean my sisters have got older kids so I've shown them the literature and stuff and one of their lads has behaviour problems so it's good to show how all the changes affect behaviour cos you don't always think of that and I think she found it reassuring and stuff and she's borrowed some of the material."

"Talked to my husband and actually my friends cos some of them didn't know about contraception and stuff so I got the folder out and we went through all the methods of contraception and talked about all that and what we thought and things."

"My wife benefited cos she's not so talkative as me cos she had a catholic upbringing so some things were talked about more things than others, so she feels more comfortable about it all."

The following quote is a particular impressive illustration of the inspiration the course had on a particular attender:

"Although no other kids or parents have contacted me directly, I did use the speakeasy approach in my kid's school to do a session on drugs, basically going through all the facts and encouraging parents

and kids to know a bit more about them and not be afraid and feel confident in talking to each other about the dangers. We saw what they look like, what the signs are and doing the speakeasy just made me think you could use this in many ways. That basic way of getting parents confident to know how young people are thinking and not feeling scared to talk to them about things.”

In relation to the above quotation regarding drugs, the wider impacts also spread into parent-child communication more generally to talk about other issues beyond sex and relationships:

“We talk about loads of things now like ‘stranger danger’ and going off with strangers.”

“We have talked a lot more about personal safety and so we were very open with him and not to be frightened and covered a lot more than sex.”

“I do manage a girls football team and feel they could confide in me, they’re all about 13 or 14 years old and if they do mention something I don’t go ‘oh’ which is what they may expect so I feel they could say things to me.”

Additionally, the confidence of attending the course had raised some people’s self-esteem in other areas too:

“I’ve never really been that confident, I was very withdrawn so it’s helped me widen my friends and the course has helped me all round and more than just with my children.”

2.4.2 Innovative Findings from 2008

The questionnaire used in 2008 was generally similar to the previous year. However, emphasis on these interviews was extracted from exploring whether “four years on, what impact has doing the course had on you and your family?”. This translated into some real-life examples of where the learning obtained in the course had been applied. Given that these interviews were conducted up to four years since undertaking the Speakeasy course, these applications are considered innovative in their own right. Compared to previous years, as parents’ children were gradually becoming older, there were clearly more examples of how the learning from the Speakeasy course was put into practice. The following sections provide examples of putting this learning into practice under the following themes:

- Reactive response to children’s questions
- Proactive provision of information
- Use of materials
- Linking in with school PSHE
- Talking about their children’s sexual behaviour
- Preparation for the future.

Real-life applications of learning put into practice – answering questions reactively

Virtually all people mentioned having answered questions that their children had asked them. The nature of the questions were predominantly around their sexual development, puberty, or noticing differences between their own and their parents bodies. It was clear that parents had dealt with these questions in a confident and precise manner. Typical examples included:

“My boy, now he’s older is asking more about feelings and things that are happening to him. Like he asked me why his willy is always hard in the morning and why it goes up when he sees a nice girl. He didn’t know why this was happening. I would have just said well it just happens but the course taught me about why this happens all the changes in hormones and stuff to do with puberty.”

“My girls are still asking factual questions like will I get boobies and hair and stuff mum.”

“A typical example was when a boy in my son’s class was constantly playing with his genitalia and my son asked why he did this so much. I explained this to my son that he probably enjoyed this but probably wouldn’t be acceptable to most. So I used this to explain that somethings are ok to do in private but other things aren’t and that at a certain age things should be private.”

“It’s always been on the agenda if we see something on TV or someone says something in the playground. There was one situation where a boy was playing with a tampon at school and someone painted it red and my boy came home and said he didn’t know what was happening. So he described it to me and then I got one out and showed him how it worked and what it was used for. He said he didn’t understand how this could work given that a baby could come out there so I got a cup of water and showed him how it swells up. That’s typical us, we talk about things and I never make up names for bits of the body, I’ve always been honest as I don’t want them to have to be re-educated when their older.”

“The course will have more of an effect as they get older, although I have spoke to them about body changes, and where they come from, the sort of questions younger kids ask.”

“Asked about periods and she asked me why I was bleeding and before that I was on the injection and she’s actually been with me when /I had that done and she’s asked me what that was all about and I said so I don’t have anymore babies, but without the course I would have said I don’t know sort of something or changed the subject. I said I don’t wanna have anymore babies so I going for the needle.”

“I feel that if he wants something he will ask, like the other day he had a spot on his penis and he did ask and drop his trousers to show us, so we are pretty open as a family. He feels pretty comfortable about it anyway.”

There were also a few occasions where children had asked more specific questions that were less related to sexual development or physical characteristics. The majority of these were around ‘where babies come from’. The following examples illustrate how parents were effectively responding to these questions:

“She’s asked me where babies come from, and actually I felt that confident and made it age related, so like we talked about eggs and dads have seeds which get planted in a special place in mummy’s tummy and keeping it honest but basic, and she then wandered off half way through so she was obviously happy with what I told her.”

“Well they haven’t really asked much except that I’ve just had a baby and they wanted to know where it came from and things. It was easy cos they are so young so I just told them and it that was ok.”

“The younger one asks about where babies from and watches the Discovery Health channel, the older one asks more in-depth and direct questions, like how do you use a condom and I just told him and relationships. He just came out with it out the blue, you know how to use a condom, and I just stayed calm and told him.”

“Also me nephew had a condom on his key ring and she asked what’s that for and I said a man puts it on his willy, cos that what they call it, and he does that so the woman doesn’t have a baby and although it’s early they might as well know rather than later.”

“We’ve always been open but he’s talking about things now and asking things very direct like what’s gay, what’s snogging and sexy, just things he’s heard in the playground. He asked me exactly what sex is. It was difficult and tried not to brush it under the carpet, and my husband was out, it was at the wrong time as he was just going to sleep or on the way to school. It was only last week and started off talking about eggs and things and sexy which is difficult to explain but tried to say something about feeling good about your body and things.”

This next example makes clear reference to how participating in the Speakeasy course has installed this person’s ability to answer such questions:

“We’ve had lots of foster children so we’ve got many examples. We’ve just had a recent instance with a boy aged 10 at the moment and he’s quite forward and he was asking us things like where do babies come from and some of the things that were said on the speakeasy course like talking is good and don’t be afraid. With the

same situation, if I hadn't done the course, it would have been left to the wife and I wouldn't say nothing."

Real-life applications of learning put into practice – providing information proactively

In some ways, it is not surprising that young children ask questions about how they differ physically from their parents or where babies come from. That is why most of the examples above were reactively dealt with by parents. For the examples of more proactive discussion, this was mainly around the area of emotions and relationships. This may be because children may start to develop 'feelings' but they may not be so obviously evident compared to physical changes and are less likely to ask questions. It may be for this reason that virtually all the discussions around emotions and relationships were initiated by the parents and may also reflect the growing age of the interviewees' children. The following examples also make direct reference to the role that Speakeasy has played:

"Speakeasy definitely helped me approach things more directly with my kids also, and also about the emotional things about a caring loving relationship. So reading a story they would say to me, well why didn't he have a baby and I'd then say that babies usually come from when people really care and love each other."

"Speakeasy has made it more easy to talk to my daughter and I know that as she gets older I can move on from the facts into more deeper things."

"She's now getting into boyfriends and things and I talk to her about relationships and the moral side of things. Before it was just why do you look different if you were half dressed but now we talk about relationships as lots of her friends have boyfriends."

"Boyfriends is a big area for her and her friends having them more than her, so we talk about what it means to like someone and when you have feelings. Cos it gave me confidence and extra bit of knowledge about how to talk to a teenagers so it's helped me and helped me to help her which has been good."

Some parents highlighted some of the strategies they used to bring up these discussions. Using triggers such as material on television or magazines, and dealing with people in a calm but direct way seemed to be the most commonly reported strategies. For example:

"Also when you're watching things on tele and using this to bring up things, if I hadn't done the course I wouldn't be as confident and not know all the facts, and if I hadn't done it then I probably would have sat down with them and said stuff and that would have been it but now I'd say things more often as things occur and you know someone says they've seen something at school or on tele when they see something they don't understand."

“I asked her about boyfriends if she’s in a relaxed mood, but they don’t go far unless she wants to ask me anything. But by doing this I feel she will ask things and once I know she’s seen someone for a month or so I think I will sit down with her to make things are all right really. I would feel confident that I could do this in a casual way and use some of the role play things that I picked up from Speakeasy, such as what I’d do if a boy asked her about what an erection is and stuff. I would just run a mile from that if I hadn’t done speakeasy.”

“The puberty stuff would come around earlier, about 10 or 11 would be a good time to talk about this, and this is what happens and why it happens and leading on from here to relationships and what to expect when your older, and finding a natural starting point and a logical way, you know the permanent and physical relationships and a natural progression about what things to watch out for and be aware of and keeping healthy.”

“She never wanted to know anything, but she started her periods at ten and so the course told me to find a good time so we did, just me and her, so I sat down and told her everything, just blurted it out and I said well you know now you can chose to listen or not, but I know things went into her head. She had no choice but to listen.”

“If they asked me things I’d be able to answer and like things come up on the telly and so we do talk about things like that.”

“Anything on tv or in the papers you can kind of judge to see on their face if they’re not sure or don’t understand, like sexually transmitted diseases, and things. You know adverts and things and I told her about diseases and the best way to prevent that is to use condoms and things.”

Real-life applications of learning put into practice – use of materials

With the various examples of providing information to children, either reactively or proactively, it was clear that supporting materials were commonly used. These materials were seen as a good means of allowing children to read them in their own time and then ask for further clarification if necessary. It was also clear that the leaflets contained in the Speakeasy folder had been widely used in providing this information. As examples:

“Now my daughter is 12, although she’s not physically mature and not interested in boys, I have shown her some of the course materials. They’re written in a good way and easy to understand and she has now read most of the file. I didn’t think about using it in this way but will do so again when my son is older. They don’t just give me a reminder but allow me to start conversation with them too.”

“I did use some of the leaflets which was really useful. One on periods I think so I gave it to her for her to read in her own time and then you know, ask me things that she found out to see how much

she took in and also ask me things that she didn't know. It was written in a good way for younger people and it was good to get us talking about things."

"Because she's uneasy about talking about stuff I've used the leaflets and passed them on to her. She sent me text messages cos she was uneasy talking to me so I left her leaflets and said if she wanted to talk about it then for her to come to me. She's happier to talk to me now so it's more face to face about how bodies change and how normal it is."

"The course and the leaflets and stuff have really helped me reinforce to her that what I was saying was true and not just my opinion and using it to stop her taking the pill, and that helped her."

"I did just hunt out the folder and found the leaflets on STIs which I'll use when they're a bit older, maybe 13, or when they start getting feelings and you know prevention of diseases and thing and you could get this or get that, you know."

In some cases, the supporting materials had been obtained by the parents since the course and reflected the earlier finding that doing the course had inspired parents to seek out more information. For example:

"Although we don't talk about it all the time, I think he know a lot of stuff. He says mum, where's that leaflet and if he doesn't find what he wants then we look it up more by getting a library book and leaving it for him. it helped him and me too learn important stuff."

"He wanted to watch a DVD and wanted to know if there was sex in it and I said no but there's kissing so he said I'll watch that one, so there was something going on there and I wouldn't stop him if he wanted to learn things that way."

Real-life applications of learning put into practice – link with school PSHE

A further innovative finding, reflecting the age of the children, was the parent's awareness and ability to tie in their home information with that provided at school. This also reflect people's confidence to be aware of the sex education curriculum within schools. As examples:

"I also went to the school to find out about their sex education so I could build on things when I know what my son was being taught and he said that he would ask me things if he didn't understand them."

"I know she has sex education at school and it's really good to get us talking. She talks about what happened in her classes and so it shows what she's learnt and then she'll asks things that she wants to know more about and stuff so I build on that. I would have felt so uncomfortable about that before Speakeasy but now I'm interested and even more confident about talking about things. I think she

knows also that she can talk to me which gets us talking more and more.”

“I mean when their older I’d probably link it in with what the school was teaching them so try and get in touch with the school to find out what they were telling them, when their 12 or 13 or something. I’d use some of the leaflets and leave them stuff to read and try and be a bit open really.”

“I know the school does something on it so we’d build on that too.”

“I’m quite happy to talk about things and I think I need to go hand in hand with schools to give her the knowledge, but I’d also ask her if there’s anything she wants to ask or talk about.”

Real-life applications of learning put into practice – talking about their children’s sexual behaviour

As noted in the earlier examples, the majority of discussions were around physical development and enquiries relating to the origin of babies. This clearly ties in with the age of the interviewees’ children - the majority of whom were reaching or going through puberty. Very few of the children had been active sexually, although there were a few exceptions. It was only in these cases where more explicit conversations about contraception and sexual behaviours were talked about. It is certainly the case that future interviews would be able to capture more of this information as the cohort increases in age. For example:

“His friends wont talk about it and they’re the ones that get pregnant. My son has got a girlfriend and although he says he doesn’t do it I do le him know where contraception is if he needs it. If he did do it, I reckon he’d be careful. His mates wouldn’t have a clue and they’d get people pregnant.”

“Now she’s older some of her friends are on the pill and she asked me if she could go on it but she said would it be ok even if she’s not having sex. We talked about changes to periods but not just that it doesn’t just do nice things to her body so it’s helped her realise that she shouldn’t just go on it for the sake of it.”

“My older boy I know is sexually active and I know he’s safe. The other’s [her children] aren’t but I know they will be because they know everything and they know that they need to take control to look after themselves. I’ve got no doubt whatsoever that they’d be safe cos I’ve told them things every step of the way.”

“We did talk about what it means to have sex and that its really special and that they must be physically and emotionally ready for this. I’ve said it’s a really special thing, and he said that, and he’s sexually active, and he said if I’m going to do it then I’ve got to make sure I’m protecting me as no one else can.”

“I have told other teenagers like my cousins girls who are fifteen and I took the folder round and that and one said she wanted a partner and said she wanted to go on the pill and found about the diseases so she’s being good now and safe. I’ve always said she could borrow the folder if she wants, cos if I don’t know a thing I’d look in the book.”

“I am open with him, and I’ve told him and even though he’s twelve I do remind him and every now and again. The conversation starts for no reason really and he knows where the leaflets are and he reads them and he knows he can ask questions and I’ve told him, you know, if he has sex he should always wear a condom even if she says she’s on the pill cos you can get AIDS and things. Don’t take no notice cos you always use a condom.”

“Even though he’s not having sex I think he would use them, cos I’ve got them and he knows where they are and he’s asked me how to use one and I’ve showed him on a banana, so he know now what to do.”

Although some of the above examples included preparing children who were not sexually active, the following is a good illustration how the Speakeasy course may have contributed to improved sexual health. In this example, the positive outcome was the avoidance of an unplanned pregnancy:

“We had a teenage girl who was having two or three one night stands a week and what we learnt off the speakeasy course about contraception and diseases and stuff helped her and she went down the family planning and got some help. We started the conversation when she was coming in late at night and we just talked about it, contraception and diseases as well. She has had now a coil fitted so she followed our advice, you know.”

Link between actual examples and future (if too young) and children’s sexual behaviour

Aside to providing this information, illustrated in the numerous examples above, the further area of innovative findings concerned people’s sense of preparation for the future. For some, this referred to providing information about sexual development as their children got older, for others this was providing information about contraception and sexual behaviour as their children became sexually active. For the latter the sense of preparation was prominent since many of the interviewee’s children were not currently sexually active. This raises the point about the clear value of further interviews in the future as a large proportion of the interviewees indicated this could happen in the ‘next few years’. The following examples show how the improved learning and confidence of the parents are likely to increase the dialogue between parents and children in the future. It was clear that parents had very strong intentions to address these issues at an appropriate age. For some, very specific plans and strategies had been prepared:

“I’d sit him down, me and his mum, and just broach the subject, like if you have a girlfriends there’s things that you can and cant do and

things are ok, others you can't for a while and to me led, not just what she says but what your mum and dad say too. As body mechanics take over we'd have to explain but we'd have to do this over several sessions and pump information day after day but not in a stressful way."

"As they get older I will definitely talk to them. At the moment its innocent boyfriends and girlfriends and I do tell him what it could be like when he's older about being safe and careful. I'd talk to him about relationships, trust, safe sex and tell him about myself and my experiences, pregnancy and abortion. Usually through stuff in soaps on the tv, I'd wait to see if he talks then I'd use it to point out something."

"Things are happening more now, you know, they are thirteen now so there's gonna be more chat about things from now on. Although I feel ready for this, it will be interesting!"

"I would hope I could talk to them about contraception and diseases and stuff. I'm sure other people could do it better but feel I couldn't have done it before the course."

"Difficult to say as they aren't old enough yet. But it's made me think and I'm prepared for when that time comes. I will definitely talk to them about diseases and other things as it's so easy to prevent them. I hope they will be safe when they're older and I'll do everything I can to help them."

"I think one day, definitely, I would talk to him about issues like contraception and I suppose I'd do this by bringing this into relationships and respect for people and stuff and bringing it from this angle, I don't know really. I'd try to bring it back to how normal it is and not to feel under pressure."

"As she gets even older I know there's things we have to talk about like contraception and things but feel ok about doing this."

In a final conclusion to these innovative findings from parents who completed the course up to four years previously, it is clear that the course is still having strong benefits. These benefits range from conversations about physical development right through to advice about safer sex and relationships that has led to some positive changes in young people's sexual behaviour. Some prime illustration of its sustained impact are used to conclude the findings for the 2008 interviews:

"The course itself, it's given me a tool box, something I can use in the future when opportunities arise, given me confidence having talked to strangers in the group I can now feel I can talk to my kids."

"Oh it [the course] really has helped cos the thought about having to sit down and talk to them about these things I was dreading."

Beforehand I could speak to my friends and stuff but to talk to my children horrified me. Doing the course and having a working of what I was gonna say really helped a great deal and that on the whole and I'm more approachable and they can ask anything I know now that I won't be taken by the blind side about something I don't know."

"It's [the course] just opened my mind, it's just the norm now, I mean she was six and now she's ten so when anything comes up on the telly we talk about it and we're both confident now and it's just something that I've gradually introduced her too."

2.5 Results – Confirmatory and innovative findings from 2009 interviews

In 2009, 13 of the parents and guardians from the original Speakeasy sample were successfully re-interviewed. These 13 accounted for just under 70% of the possible pool of 19 parents from 2008 and a third (32.5%) of the original sample of 40 parents who were interviewed in 2005. As this longitudinal study now marks a 5-year period, a retention rate of a third of all original participants is considerable.

As in previous years FPA approached each parent or guardian and obtained informed consent for interview. Initial consent was obtained at the close of the previous year's interview where all 19 agreed to be approached a year later. Young People in Focus (formally TSA) were provided with the details of 19 parents who had provided consent for interview. The six parents who were not interviewed in 2009, that formed part of the 2008 sample, were either unobtainable after 5 times of calling or the telephone numbers were no longer in service.

Some five years since taking their course, a brief profile of the 13 parents interviewed in 2009 is summarised below:

Gender:	Ethnicity:
Females = 11	White British = 11
Males = 2	Pakistani = 1
	Black Caribbean = 1
Age:	
30-34 = 2	Religion:
35-39 = 4	None = 3
40-44 = 3	Christian = 6
45-49 = 1	Catholic = 1
50-54 = 1	Islam = 1
55-59 = 2	Humanist = 1
	Methodist = 1
Disability:	
Yes = 1	Marital Status:
No = 11	Single (never married) = 1
No answer = 1	Married = 7
	Divorced = 2
Step family:	Living with partner = 3
Yes = 12	
No = 1	Work:
	Full-time = 3
Number of children (total = 32):	Part-time = 6
1 child = 2	House person = 4
2 children = 7	
3 children = 2	
4 children = 1	
5 children = 1	

Of particular significance to the findings from this study, only 5 out of the 13 parents had children over the age of 14 with the majority, or 10 parents, having children aged 12 and under. This highlights the age at which their children were when the parents first took the course (minus five years) and partly accounts for why the 'learning into practice' is more tied to conversations and discussions rather than specific influences on the children's sexual behaviour. In addition, the overall profile of the interviewees, although a small sample, is broadly replicated by the wider sample of Speakeasy parents (in terms of being predominantly female, their age, age of their children, etc.).

The interview schedule is attached as an appendix to this report and, consistent with the interviews in more recent years, there was a strong emphasis of whether and how the Speakeasy course had enabled parents' learning to be put into practice.

As in the previous years of reporting, the findings are separated into those that replicate or *confirm* those from previous years and those that are more *innovative* in nature.

2.5.1 Confirmatory Findings from 2009

The confirmatory findings illustrate the enduring memories of Speakeasy course as a highly positive and worthwhile experience. These are outlined under the following themes:

- General memories, knowledge and feelings about the course
- Overall learning
- *Most* important area of learning
- Using the Speakeasy course materials
- Interest in a refresher course

General memories, knowledge and feelings about the course

As it had been up to five years for parents since going on the Speakeasy course, a number of parents confessed to having limited detailed memories about what the course entailed. Interestingly though, an equal number indicated that they had remembered a substantial amount from the course. Regardless of lapsed memories though, the recall of the key topic areas were fairly universal. For all parents, the topics that were seen as particularly memorable were:

- Contraception, pregnancy and abortion (n⁴=9 people mentioning this topic)
- STIs (n=9)
- Names for body parts/ age appropriate discussions about sex (n=7)
- Sex and the media/ stereotyping gender roles (n=7)

⁴ Because of the specific nature of this question, the number of parents remembering topics is provided (n).

- Puberty (n=5)

Other less common topics highlighted by parents included:

- School policies regarding sex-education (n=2)
- Marriage and relationships (n=2)
- Peer pressure (n=1)

As in previous years, parents were all highly positive about the course and felt it had been a very useful experience for them. It was stated that the course allowed them to share new learning with others. Parents also indicated that they had since recommended it to others:

“Very positive experience for me.”

“I learnt a lot on the course, and it was good to share [new knowledge] with others.”

“It really helped me talk to all my boys in an open and factual way.”

Overall learning

There were a range of learning points recounted by parents in their memories of participating in the Speakeasy course. An increased knowledge about sex-related issues was an area of key learning for parents. Parents discussed feeling considerably better informed about: the commonality and range of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), the changes/developments involved in puberty and the various types of contraception methods – some of which parents expressed to not having been previously aware of. Indeed, one parent talked about her surprise on hearing about the female condom. Other parents commented:

“The STIs were all a bit gruesome. [We] discussed what they were and how to avoid them.”

“I learnt a lot about diseases, STIs and the like. There were loads more than I thought.”

Of interest here, this previous illustration point highlights parents’ overestimation of their knowledge before the course – a point raised in the analysis of the pre- and post-course questionnaires where parents’ knowledge prior to the course may be perceived to be greater than the reality.

One especially important example was around parents feeling more able to communicate with their children about sex, and doing so in a frank, open and honest way. Parents discussed feeling less embarrassed and better equipped to answer their children’s questions. For example:

“For me, not being so embarrassed in talking about bodies and sex.”

“The importance of being open and honest.”

“How to talk about these things, you know, not being embarrassed, using the right words.”

“Confidence! I don’t feel there’s anything I can’t say to them. I was embarrassed about these things before the course.”

“...not being afraid to deal with any subject that might come up.”

Another important learning point for parents was in the way Speakeasy addressed communicating with their child in an ‘appropriate’ way. Points were mainly addressed around age-appropriate sex-related discussions. As these parents say:

“...knowing what to say, like the language, and what’s right to say at different ages.”

“The right sort of words at different ages.”

“the sort of language to use with children about sex and things, even at a young age.”

“We rehearsed how to say things to young people of different ages. It was very, very useful.”

One parent also talked about how Speakeasy helped identify ‘appropriate’ ways of communicating with children about sex who might have additional needs. She explained that both her children had disabilities and therefore sex-related discussion had to be appropriate in terms of what they could actually understand.

Finally, parents also talked about how the Speakeasy sessions allowed them to learn from other parents in the group. One parent spoke about feeling better informed regarding different cultural approaches to sexuality and relationships, including the influence of religion. Other parents discussed the benefits of hearing how other parents dealt with ‘sensitive’ topics. For example:

“Hearing other parents’ ideas and experiences of talking about sex to children of different ages. I got lots of useful hints and ideas.”

“...learning from other parents about the experiences of [talking to] children at different ages – what they’d tried, what worked well for them...”

Most important area of learning

Nearly half of the parents felt the *most* important learning they took away from Speakeasy was in their increased knowledge about sex and related issues. Parents confessed that some of the information they received was new to

them, and thus the course had helped them become much better informed about the issues:

"I'm a catholic and we never learnt about this when I was younger."

A third of parents felt their most important learning was around being open and honest with their children, and being able to talk about sex and relationships with confidence.

And a minority of parents felt their key learning was in their perceived ability to talk about sex and relationships with their children from a young age. Parents explained that Speakeasy underlined the importance of not delaying such discussions. For example:

"not leaving it too late... you can and should talk to children about these things."

"You have to raise these topics when children are young, as they grow up, and not say when they're 15 I'll talk to them about pregnancy. It has to be ongoing."

Using the Speakeasy course materials

Ten out of the 13 parents commented that they tended not to use any 'aids' when raising discussions about sex and relationships with their children. The main reason for this is that parents tended to just approach topics through straightforward conversation i.e. responding to questions when they came up. Given the five years since the course, some parents who had previously used materials or 'aids' felt they were not so necessary given their increased experience.

However, for the remaining parents that did indicate using the materials provided on the Speakeasy course, the resources were seen as invaluable and were often incorporated into discussions about sex and related issues:

"I often refer to [the Speakeasy literature] with the children, so that they're comfortable about the topics and up to date."

"I have all the useful materials from the course and I still look at them a lot."

One parent explained her 8-year old son had been asking about pregnancy and babies. As she says:

"I got the book out and explained it to him, without embarrassment or fuss. He was fine, and I'll pick it up with him again as he gets older."

Parents also talked about using other materials such as newspapers, books and the television to promote discussion, check facts and answer questions.

Interest in a refresher course

As stated previously, parents had a fairly mixed recollection of their Speakeasy training, with some remembering a great deal and others indicating it was 'a bit of a blur'. Eight of the 13 parents indicated that they would have liked a day refresher course, and of the five that said no or were not sure, this was due to feeling there was nothing else they would want to know or feeling that the course was adequate enough as it was.

2.5.2 Innovative Findings from 2009

Innovative findings from the 2009 interviews were grouped into the following themes:

- Learning into practice: What has been the impact of Speakeasy in aiding discussions for parents?
- Learning into practice: What has been the impact of Speakeasy in aiding discussions with others?
- Knowledge of school's role in PSHE
- Learning into practice: Is Speakeasy still having an impact five years on?

Learning into practice: What has been the impact of Speakeasy in aiding discussions for parents?

As discussed previously, parents talked about the advantages of their Speakeasy training in relation to being more able to answer their children's questions. Over the previous five years of interviews, as the course participants' children had aged, conversations of this nature were more common. Therefore a key innovative finding from these interviews was the increasing frequency of the dialogue between parents and their children about sex and relationships. Examples given were around more frank discussions about: contraception (where to go, what to get); periods; sexuality; pregnancy; etc. One parent indicated that both her children had asked her 'where babies came from'. As she explains:

"I wasn't phased at all, I just explained it in their language. My eldest daughter asked me about periods too... we sat down and talked and I showed her some pads. It felt very straightforward. She also mentions things sometimes about why people's bodies are different sizes, look different etc – I know how to say things to them that they understand."

And as these parents also commented:

"My 3-year old asks about why her body parts are different to her brothers. I feel happy to just be straightforward and explain. The course showed me the language to use and just to be open and honest."

"The course has helped a lot. I heard from friend that my daughter had a boyfriend so I sat her down and talked to her about boys, pregnancy and diseases. She didn't say much but she listened. I could never have

done that, you know, just told her the facts without the course. And I wasn't embarrassed."

"My son will say things like 'look at my spots mum' and that helps to open up a conversation. On the course they said we shouldn't be embarrassed, you know like, just talk. So like I say 'that's normal, we can get you a cream' or something."

Another parent explained how she put her Speakeasy learning into practice when her son came home from school saying that he had heard other children at school saying AIDS and HIV were the same thing. This parent explained that she felt confident enough to discuss this with her son and they did a web search and looked it up together.

The importance of such 'collaborative research' was raised by another parent. In this example, it was commented that her child had raised the topic of periods but was too embarrassed to talk about it. The mother felt her Speakeasy training helped her take a 'calm and methodical approach', and she and her daughter went online and researched all the information together. These prior examples of using online materials and 'research' has certainly emerged over the previous five years of interviews.

A number of parents raised the important role of the media in promoting discussions about sex. The training they received in Speakeasy helped them find ways to broach these discussions. One parent commented that he spontaneously mentions things on television to promote discussion. He gave one example of when he and his boys were watching the X-Factor. He drew attention to the 'overtly sexual' aspects to the clothing being worn by the contestants to gauge his sons' reactions. The father commented that his children enjoyed the discussions, and he himself felt comfortable facilitating them. Another parent discussed how she proactively raises 'flash' topics from soaps, magazines, etc. and asks her children about what they think about it – 'What do you think about that person getting pregnant?', 'Should that girl wear those skimpy clothes?' etc. As she says:

"This helps them think about their own views and their own behaviour."

And in another good example, a parent revealed that her son's friends asked him to ask her questions about sex (wet dreams and erections, etc.) as they felt they could not ask their own parents. As she commented:

"I'm happy to answer their questions and my son learns these things are okay to discuss".

Through the examples, it was clear that the main way in which the Speakeasy course was felt to have had a positive impact on children and young people, by way of the parents, was through helping to promote open and honest discussions, and doing so without the children becoming embarrassed. For example:

“Yes they don’t giggle and laugh, they talk about the topics in a mature way. The course definitely helped in this way... we talk about all these topics in the same open and honest way.”

“We’re very open and honest about things and they feel happy to ask me anything”.

“Yes definitely [the course helped]. They feel comfortable asking questions, with me and others now. And they’re not embarrassed by the topics, they see them as normal parts of life.”

“They’re quite private despite my openness – but they don’t seem embarrassed to ask, that’s the main thing.”

One parent also talked about the positive impact of Speakeasy training in that it made it easier to talk to her daughter about sex, which then resulted in her going to her GP to get the pill (indicating a positive impact on safer sexual behaviour).

Overall, most parents felt they were taking a proactive approach to encouraging frank discussions about sex and relationships with their child, and would continue to do so in the future, as and when needed. Whereas the findings from the previous interviews could be considered to be predominantly reactive (in response to children’s questions), an innovative finding this year was parents prompting more discussions. This may be a product of their increased time and experience gained over the five years since the course. However, impacts on their children’s sexual behaviour were rarely reported (mainly a product of the children not being sexually active given their young age profile – see earlier).

However, there were also isolated instances of parents who confessed that despite all that they had learned on the Speakeasy course, difficulties in talking with their child about sex persisted:

“I have tried but it doesn’t work. They both put their fingers in their ears and won’t listen.”

Aside to perceived difficulties, a minority of parents also indicated that they had not had significant discussions about sex with their child as yet. One reason for this was in relation to the age of the child, with parents feeling that discussions about sex and related issues would become more common as their child grew up. As examples, three parents indicated a limited impact of the course due to the age of their children. They felt that the child was too young to engage in discussions of this nature at that point, and it was certainly not appropriate to discuss sexual relationships. As this parent says:

“My children are three and eight so we don’t talk that much, just about periods and things. But the kids will hopefully be more open about other things like sex when it comes up.”

A second reason for limited impact was in believing that questions should be raised by the child and not prompted by the parent (closely related to the child's age). In addition, a father commented that it was difficult to measure the impact of the course as he did not have sex related discussions with his children. He explained that, as a Muslim, it was considered the role of the mother and not the father to have such discussions with the child.

A particular difficulty in assessing the impact of the course was reported by parents who said that they and their children always had open and honest relationships. The course was not seen to have affected this. For example:

"The children are very open and upfront about these things but that's the way our family is anyway.... They're both confident children and talk about most things. I don't think the course affected that."

"We always talk about all topics, drugs and stuff too. We're very open."

"My children are always confident and articulate... that wasn't affected by me going on Speakeasy."

In addition, two parents explained that the course had not improved their sex and relationships communication with their child due to other issues affecting their child. In both cases, this was due to the child having a learning disability.

Parents felt it was particularly hard to say whether their Speakeasy training had had an impact on their child's sexual behaviour. Five parents commented that they did not know about their children's sexual relationships anyway as they were 'private' or they were reluctant to 'pry'. One mother felt that it did not really have an impact on the child at all as the course was more for the parents. As she comments:

"...they're fairly comfortable with these topics anyway, I think the course was more about my confidence and attitude than theirs."

Learning into practice: What has been the impact of Speakeasy in aiding discussions with others?

Nine out of the 13 parents interviewed indicated that their Speakeasy training had prompted discussions with others – particularly other parents. Parents reported being asked for 'hints and tips' from other parents to help them with their own children. One particular parent reported that a family member borrowed the Speakeasy file to help her raise issues with her teenage daughter. As she said:

"She found it very helpful and it gave her some useful ideas."

And another parent commented:

"I have given [the Speakeasy file] to lots of people, friends, other foster parents, they found it very interesting and I know it helped them answer their children's questions."

Three parents indicated that the training had promoted other parents to see them as 'experts', and as such had been asked to speak to friends' children about sex and related matters.

In many cases, parents also recounted that they were not sure what effect their advice and information had had on others though.

Knowledge of school's role in PSHE

Parents were mixed as to whether they were aware of the school's education policy. Most knew the school had one, but only a minority of parents had actually received or asked for a copy. Generally, parents appeared to trust their child's school to deliver an appropriate and informed sex education package. For example:

"It's a good school. There's no need for me to check."

"It's a good school and they'll be doing it well."

"I have signed the consent letter for all three of my children... they're a good school and I trust them."

One parent knew that the school had a policy, but felt it was not necessary because of the age of their child:

"I know I can see the school policy if I want to. When they're older I'll probably ask for a copy."

Parents who indicated they had seen the policy also commented that they talked with their child about topics raised by the school in their sex education lessons. For example:

"Yes I've looked in to it all and got the policy. My kids and I talk about the things that come up."

Only one parent said that their child's school did not have a sex education policy and described 'battling' with them about getting one.

Learning into practice: Is Speakeasy still having an impact five years on?

Parents, on the whole, were overwhelmingly positive about the huge impact of participating in the Speakeasy course. Parents described being more confident, more knowledgeable and more open than they were before - even for those that already felt they had an open and honest relationship with their child. As these many comments evidence:

"Yes definitely. We're more open and honest, we're not embarrassed about bodies and sex and stuff... it wouldn't be like this if I hadn't done the course."

“Yes definitely. We’re more open, talk more, there’s no embarrassment.”

“Absolutely. It was excellent. There’s nothing we can’t discuss now.”

“Yes definitely, it’s made me feel more comfortable about sex and things like that, and my children are okay, you know, to ask things.”

“Yes definitely. We’re open and honest and our girls know they can ask us anything and that they’ll get a proper, honest answer.”

“Yes definitely. I’m more confident and comfortable in answering questions and mentioning things to do with sex.”

“Absolutely! It’s still really useful, helps me to help my boys deal with these issues.”

“Yes definitely. We talk about things and discuss things, and probably wouldn’t have done without the course.”

“Yes it is. It means I’m still confident and not embarrassed about any of this stuff.”

“Yes definitely, it helped me and my husband to be open and honest and use appropriate language. I’m not phased or embarrassed by any issues anymore.... Everyone should do this course. It’s helped lay the groundwork for good communication when my children are older.”

Only one parent indicated that she did not feel an impact of the Speakeasy training. However, this was due to her children’s communication difficulties and not because she considered the course to be inadequate or unhelpful.

As a final note to these 2009 interviews parents who undertook the Speakeasy course some five years earlier were still recalling positive memories. They perceived that the course was still having an strong impact on increasing the quality of the conversations between themselves and their children, as well as with other adults. The *quality* of the conversations is the key point as although the course may well have increased the number of conversations that were raised by children, there is more certainty that the course had increased the quality, accuracy and appropriate nature of the parents’ response.

In addition, an innovative finding this year was the increased experience of the parents in engaging in such discussions. This was illustrated in two main ways. Firstly, with years of answering ‘reactively’ to questions raised by the children, usually out of curiosity, they were starting to raise more discussions proactively. Secondly, although the course materials had provided them with important information, parents were becoming sufficiently experienced to raise these discussions without having to constantly refer to the course book. There was a sense that they were becoming much more adept at seizing on opportune moments to open up important discussions. In relation to this, there

was a clear sense that internet sites were commonly used to resource information, usually with parents and their children seeking out information together.

Although some five years on, the age profile of the children was still largely pre-puberty. It is evident that only a very small minority would be sexually active and thus the impact on their sexual behaviour remains unknown. Moreover, although any positive impacts on children's sexual behaviour may occur in the future, attributing this to the Speakeasy course would become increasingly difficult due to other influences.

As a final note to the 2009 interviews, the findings clearly confirm those from the previous five years demonstrating the positive experience of the Speakeasy course and its impact. Parents wholeheartedly report enjoying the course and learning vast amounts of new information. They typically found that they knew much less than they thought they did before attending the course. The impacts of the course were mainly centred on being able to respond to their children's questions calmly, clearly, and with an appropriate level of detail. More recent years have shown further instance of parents utilising opportunities to proactively raise conversations and there were isolated examples of where their children's sexual behaviour had become safer, perhaps as a consequence. Although the findings are focussed around the parents who attended the course, the effects may be far more extensive given the commonly reported sharing of information with other parents and other parents' children, as well as influencing school level sex and relationships education. The following section includes the specific suggestions raised by parents to improve and enhance the course – from years 2005 to 2009.

2.6 Suggestions for Improvement from 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009

2005 Suggestions

In 2005 all 40 parents were asked whether, based on their experiences, they had any suggestions for how the course might be improved and whether they had any final comments on anything further they wished to mention about their Speakeasy experience. Responses were overwhelmingly positive to these questions with 48% (n= 19) of parents commenting that either the course should not be changed or that there was nothing to change:

“Absolutely not, I wouldn’t say anything should be changed, course has been wonderful, great as it was!”

“Don’t think it can be improved, how it was run was good, a very relaxed environment and very informal and that was important.”

“Everything was good, it covered a lot of material in a short space of time, and I was very happy with that – very glad I did the course. The course not only helps people in big ways, but also in more subtle ways too, in everyday life with things that are related like relationships, emotions and dealing with other issues like bullying and school.”

“Nothing really, covered everything that I wanted and it’s been a brilliant course to be honest’.

“It was fantastic; I praise it all the time.”

“No, it was perfect, it was brilliant...lots of parents should do the course, really enjoyed it as well as learning new stuff. Everyone was really friendly, and even though it was the course facilitators first time running the course, they were both really good.”

45% (n = 18) of parents did propose some change to the course but similar to Burns (2004), these recommendations were mainly concerned with publicity and marketing issues, and how to attract more parents (particularly fathers) to the course. For example, one parent suggested the timing of the course may exclude some fathers from attending and that this should be revised to encourage more men to attend.

“There needs to be more men, more daddies on the course. At the moment the timing of the course conflicts with many men’s work. Course times should be changed to encourage more fathers to go.”

One parent suggested that there is a need for greater understanding about Muslim communities and that the Speakeasy course should be extended or revised to specifically target Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups (BAME), perhaps through taster sessions in schools or local community centres:

“There is a need to understand Muslim communities more, people are very close knit, and once they know how good the course is, many would be at the door waiting to do the course...[Speakeasy] could perhaps try ‘taster’ sessions at parents evenings to get parents, especially ethnic minorities interested in the course – then they will know how good the course is and want to continue the rest of it.”

A range of other issues arose including:

- Greater group sizes to promote discussions and diversity
- Development of a ‘resource pack’ which parents can buy which would be based on Speakeasy principles and aimed specifically at teenage children
- Increased use of external speakers
- Extend course session time and duration (i.e. number of weeks)
- Ensuring the crèche (where provided) does not disturb the group sessions
- Need to advertise more in local schools
- One parent-child session where parents and children can work on activities collaboratively
- More information on becoming a Speakeasy peer trainer

2006 Suggestions

Most of these recommendations were echoed by the 2006 interviewees. With the time-delay between the course and the 2006 interviews, the recommendations mentioned could be indicative of the most important changes to the course. The following recommendations were mentioned:

- Improved access for dads
- Make the course less rushed
- Provide more opportunities to practise answers
- Make more mention of celibacy and consent issues
- Ensure rapport is built within the group at the start
- Consider different faiths
- More different language courses
- More hands-on activities rather than overloading with paperwork.

2007 Suggestions

Suggestions from the 2007 interviews included those from the previous years. The 2007 interviews also provided some novel findings.

As mentioned in previous years, some parents found that the paperwork, or getting time to do the paperwork, was difficult. In 2007 a few parents revealed that they had discovered that some of the parents on their courses had dropped out because of the amount of paperwork.

Due to the nature of the Speakeasy course, sensitive areas concerning child safety are often raised. One parent raised a potential ethical dilemma for the course concerning a lady who had a past involving sexual abuse. This lady made people feel uncomfortable and was also gossiped and laughed about

behind her back. This suggests that it is important to have support for vulnerable people on the course and to foster an atmosphere of understanding and respect within the group. Another parent echoed these concerns and suggested that counselling be made available for vulnerable people:

"I do think that one of the things that maybe they could think about is actually providing somebody who's a qualified counsellor...For this particular young woman, I mean she was 19, you know it would have been a real step forward for her you know if she could have actually discussed it and come out of herself a little bit more, perhaps she would have continued with the course".

A quite frequent suggestion, especially from parents with older children, was that it would be beneficial to run a course for children or a session where parents and children could work together.

"I've been there when they've been taught it [at schools] The talks that they have aren't anywhere long enough, there for something stupid like fifty minutes, how on earth can you pack so much of a wealth of information into fifty minutes"?

"I don't agree with the way that they actually teach it in schools to be honest, I think it would be an absolutely brilliant idea if they could modify the speakeasy course for the kids, get them to do the silly games and the word association... it would get rid of this embarrassment and you know this taboo situation... and I just think if you got kids involved with it on that level, make it fun make it so as it's an everyday thing and then it doesn't become an issue".

"I think it would be very good if they had maybe a course running for children, teenagers or even before teenagers, sort of my daughters age I mean it would be good if there was somewhere they could go maybe with a mixture of girls and boys or I'm not sure if it would be girls and boys or just girls and just boys but it's good for them to find out things like this".

An important concern made very strongly and competently by one parent and echoed by a few others was that of the need to tailor courses appropriately for the target audience. This parent attended a Speakeasy course aimed at parents of children with special needs. Whilst echoing the general positive statements made about the course it was felt that the course had not been adapted enough for the needs of this group of parents. As such the suggestion for improvement is that more advice be made available to those trainers who wish to provide courses for specific groups.

2008 Suggestions

There were interestingly less suggestions raised through the 2008 interviews when compared to previous years. This may be a result of the increased time-lag of the up to four years between the taking of the course and the 2008 interviews. However, it could also be argued that with this increase in time,

the recommendations raised through these interviews were perhaps the most strongly felt (otherwise they may not have been mentioned). Some recommendations were made about making the course more streamlined to fit the needs of those attending. The first way mentioned was to run male (as well as female) only sessions:

“I do remember it but I think the biggest thing for me was being the only man on the course, and I found it a bit embarrassing, eleven was women and I was the only man, I did find it a problem really and as the course went on it became a bit more explicit and quite difficult. If there was another man it would make it easier or an all mans course would be better, or at least half and half, a really good idea. That was the only think I thought was difficult was being the only man.”

“As I was the only bloke some women found it a bit difficult, but I didn’t and didn’t understand why other didn’t do it but there are more important things in life to get the knowledge so it wasn’t a problem for me, but may have been for them.”

A further recommendation was a testament of the course in terms of its potential to reach people from more diverse communities. This was explained by a Muslim attender as follows:

“I would recommend a higher course or something more widely which is really important to get it out to other families and the community. I have talked to other families about these things which is quite difficult given our culture where these things are like a culture shock. I would say something like that, like an extension to the course. The community is very different in a different way, too we are living a long time here but were are not ‘here’ also. I think we need more of this, but to be done in a good way to respect Asian, Muslim people. I have that knowledge, but those people don’t, I’m not an expert but it has helped me and other families that I speak to.”

Finally, a further response was to run the course among people who had the same aged children which may enable the course to be more focused to their specific needs:

“Good to do it and get together with kids of the same age and think about the future really.”

This concurs with the earlier finding that parents reported a range of opinions about the timing of the course. For some, their children were still toddlers, whereas others were sexually active. For the former, there is a real issue over whether parents took the course too early and whether refresher sessions should be provided. Of course, this raises the question of the optimum age of the parents’ children when participating in the Speakeasy course. This is a difficult question to answer as parents are likely to have children ranging in age, and also that talking about sex and relationships can occur at any age (in a reactive manner from questions raised). Nonetheless, providing some

guidelines over the age of children may be something the organisers of Speakeasy may wish to consider.

2009 Suggestions

The main suggestions put forward by parents from the 2009 interviews with 13 parents were as follows. As becomes evident, a number of these themes have been raised in previous years:

- Allow more time for the course to be delivered. Three parents felt that there was too much on the schedule and not enough time to cover everything.

“...it felt quite rushed. The course needs to be longer.”

- More widespread advertising – three parents said that there were either very small numbers in the group, or the gender split was quite imbalanced. It was felt more could be done to get a wider range of parents involved. For example:

“Definitely need to advertise it more to men – I was in a group with 13 women!”

“The group was very small, only me for the last two sessions. It needed better advertising to get more people.”

- Provide a follow up course to build on what has been learnt previously. Five parents felt that the learning gathered from the initial Speakeasy training could be enhanced with a follow-up session.
- Parents who have been trained could become trainers themselves – two parents indicated that parents who had gone on the course previously might make good tutors or indeed mentors to other parents in the future.
- More visual materials used in the training – one parent felt that a more varied use of materials would have enhanced her learning experience.
- The course should cover abstinence as a topic – not just about ‘safe sex’. One parent was concerned sex education was too focused on promoting safe sexual behaviour, and not suggesting that abstaining from sex is also an important option.
- And finally, make the course more widely available – as this parent explains:

“It should be offered in schools, like parallel to young people doing their sex education lessons”.

'Speakeasy'

Telephone Interview Schedule – September/October 2009

Reminder of main objectives of interview (for the benefit of the interviewer):

The main focus of the interviews is to see whether Speakeasy is meeting its core outcomes that are:

- To increase parents confidence and communication skills with their children
- For parents to show a more positive and open approach to discussions of sex, sexuality and sexual health
- To increase parents factual knowledge around sex and sexual health
- That health and educational professionals given higher priority to work with parents following the Speakeasy model
- A step towards further learning/professional development for excluded groups of parents.

Introduction:

Note that these parents have been interviewed before and also have agreed to be interviewed on this occasion. So you could start by saying:

“I’m a researcher calling from Young People in Focus about the speakeasy course you took some time ago now, and I believe you were contacted last year – are you ok to have a short chat about the course this year? Are you ok to do this now or can we make a time to do this interview later? - should take about 15-20 minutes”

Thank you for giving up your time to be interviewed. Before we start, there are a few general things I need to tell you about:

- I work for an organisation called TSA (young people’s charity – aims to help improve the lives of young people and families, does research, organises conferences, and produces publications).
- The reason we are doing this research is to evaluate the Speakeasy programme to find out if it has been/has not been effective in meeting its main aims (e.g. increasing parent’s confidence, communication skills, and knowledge etc.)
- All the things that you and other parents tell us will be strictly confidential, and it will only be used in the research. Nothing you say will be told to anyone else and no parent will be individually identified.

- You don't have to answer any questions which you chose not to
- There are no right or wrong answers – we are just interested in your views and experiences
- I will be making written notes of our conversation –no one outside of the research team will see/hear them – it's just so I can remember what we have talked about. Is this ok?

There'll be 3 sections to the interview and it lasts for about 20 minutes. Before we start, I need to update your details on who you are, where you live, etc.

SECTION ONE – SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHICS (Likely to have been recorded from previous interviews)

1. Sex:		Female <input type="checkbox"/> (1)	Male <input type="checkbox"/> (2)
2. Name: _____			
Address: _____			
Post Code: _____			
3. How old are you?			
25-29 yrs <input type="checkbox"/> (1)	30-34 yrs <input type="checkbox"/> (2)	35-39 yrs <input type="checkbox"/> (3)	40-44 yrs <input type="checkbox"/> (4)
45-49 yrs <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	50-54 yrs <input type="checkbox"/> (6)	55-59 yrs <input type="checkbox"/> (7)	60-64 yrs <input type="checkbox"/> (8)
65-69 yrs <input type="checkbox"/> (9)	70+ yrs <input type="checkbox"/> (10)		
4. How would you describe your ethnic group?			
<u>White</u>	<u>Asian or Asian British</u>	<u>Black or Black British</u>	
White British <input type="checkbox"/> (1)	Indian <input type="checkbox"/> (4)	Black Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/> (8)	
White Irish <input type="checkbox"/> (2)	Pakistani <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	Black African <input type="checkbox"/> (9)	
White (Other) <input type="checkbox"/> (3)	Bangladeshi <input type="checkbox"/> (6)	Black Other <input type="checkbox"/> (10)	
	Other <input type="checkbox"/> (7)		
<u>Mixed Race</u>	<u>Chinese or Other Ethnic Group</u>		
White & Black Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/> (11)	Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> (15)		
White & Black African <input type="checkbox"/> (12)	Other Ethnic Group <input type="checkbox"/> (16)		
White & Asian <input type="checkbox"/> (13)	Unknown <input type="checkbox"/> (17)		
Other <input type="checkbox"/> (14)	If Other please specify:		

5. Do you have a religion that you follow or practice?

Yes (1) No (2)

If yes, which religion:

6. Do you have a disability?

Yes (1)

No (2)

7. a) What is your marital status?

Married (1) Single (2) Living with partner (3)

Separated (4) Divorced (5) Widowed (6)

b) If you are married or living with your partner, is your family a step-family?

Yes (1) No (2)

8. a) How many children do you have?

1 (1) 2 (2) 3 (3) 4 (4) 5 (5) 6 (6)
7+ (7)

b) Of these children, are any your step-children?

Yes (1) No (2) If no go to question 9

c) If yes, how many of your children are step-children?

1 (1) 2 (2) 3 (3) 4 (4) 5 (5) 6 (6)
7+ (7)

9. How old are your children (birth and step-children) a) When you started Speakeasy? b) Now?

12 yrs or under (1) 13 yrs (2) 14 yrs (3)
15 yrs (4) 16 yrs (5) 17 yrs (6) 18 yrs + (7)

10. What type of work do you do?

Full-time work (1) Part-time work (2) House-person (3)

Unemployed (4) Student (5) Retired (6)

11. When did you attend the Speakeasy course (month/year)? _____
12. Where was the course based? _____
13. How many times have you been contacted before in relation to Speakeasy?

1 (1) 2 (2) 3 (3) 4 (4) 5 (5) 6 (6)
7+ (7)

When was the last time you were interviewed? _____

SECTION TWO – GENERAL WARM-UP QUESTIONS / MEMORIES AND REACTIONS

14. What can you remember about the Speakeasy course? For example, structure (different topic each week), content (i.e. puberty, what children need to know and when, stereotypes, contraception, STIs, SRE, safe from home), any themes, exercises and activities etc.

15. Was completing Speakeasy generally a positive/negative experience? Is it a course you would recommend to other parents?

SECTION THREE – MAIN INTERVIEW

LEARNING

16. Five years on from when you did the course, what parts of the course have you found most useful? Can you name your 'Top 3' learning points / things that you learnt?

17. Of these learning points, which one stands out the most? And why?

18. When parents were interviewed in 2008, some said they still remembered much from the course while others said they'd forgotten a lot. Would you say you remembered most or forgotten a lot? If the latter, would you think a short refresher training day would be a good idea?

**LEARNING INTO PRACTICE – THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS –
RECORD EXAMPLES IN DETAIL AND REACTIONS THAT FOLLOW.**

**ASSESS IMPACT OF SPEAKEASY COURSE IN AIDING THESE
DISCUSSIONS**

19. Do you have any examples of situations where you have put your learning into practice with your children (e.g. communication, openness etc.)? Have you had any communication with them recently about sex and sexual health issues?

Try and separate out examples of where parent has responded to questions raised by children and where parents have used situations to talk to their children proactively? For the latter, was this an opportunistic moment or a pre-planned decision (due to their age or other reason?). How did this feel for the parent and how do they think their child/children reacted?

Record several examples if possible – important for evaluation and details and examples that can be used with other parents.

20. Do you use any aids (as a result of Speakeasy) when raising discussions such as stories in the press, TV, or course materials, exercises, leaflets etc.? If so, how?

21. Has it affected your children's attitudes and views about sex and relationships at all? Can you give me some examples?

22. Do you think it has affected your children's confidence in raising topics with you? If so, how? Not just related to sex necessarily but other topics also (drugs, alcohol, etc.)? Can you give me some examples?

23. Has the fact you've done the Speakeasy course affected any other parents (e.g. friends) or members of your family? For example, do they ask you questions, do they want to do the course etc.? Do they communicate better about these issues?

24. (DEPENDING ON AGE OF CHILDREN) Do you think the fact you've done the Speakeasy course has affected your children's developing sexual relationships and sexual behaviours (e.g. how they communicate with their girlfriends/boyfriends, safer sex, etc.)? If so, how?

25. Are you aware of your school's role in PSHE and sex education i.e. whether they have any policy, what is taught and when, whether interviewee agrees with this, whether they know that they have the right to see the school's policy? Do they envisage that they might use this as an opportunity to raise issues about sex and relationships?

26. Five years on, do you think that fact that you did the Speakeasy course is still having an impact on you and your family? If so, how?

27. Thinking in the future, perhaps if they haven't raised issues proactively, would they do this, and if so when, why and how would they do this?
Could use prompts here in the form of scenarios – e.g. if your child asked you a question, such as.....how would you respond?

OCN AND ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

28. If you received OCN credits for doing the Speakeasy course, has this made you do any further learning or development? If not, do you think you will do so in the future?

FINAL GENERAL QUESTIONS

29. Do you have any recommendations about how the course could be improved in the future? Use specific prompts as follows if necessary:

How to attract more parents (particularly fathers) to the course?

How to attract more BME groups?

What about the group size?

Course pace? Too rushed?

Provide more opportunities to practise answers?

More hands-on activities rather than overloading with paperwork?

A course for children or a session where parents and children could work together?

To run the course among people who had the same aged children which may enable the course to be more focused to their specific needs?

30. Would you be interested in being interviewed again next year?

Yes or No

31. Finally, is there anything else you would like to add or mention about the Speakeasy course?

Prompt for impacts on children and other family/friends.

So that's the end of the interviews and thanks very much for sharing your views.

(Ask them whether a £20 Argos or WHSmith voucher would be ok – if not, and only on exceptional circumstances allow the preference of another voucher).