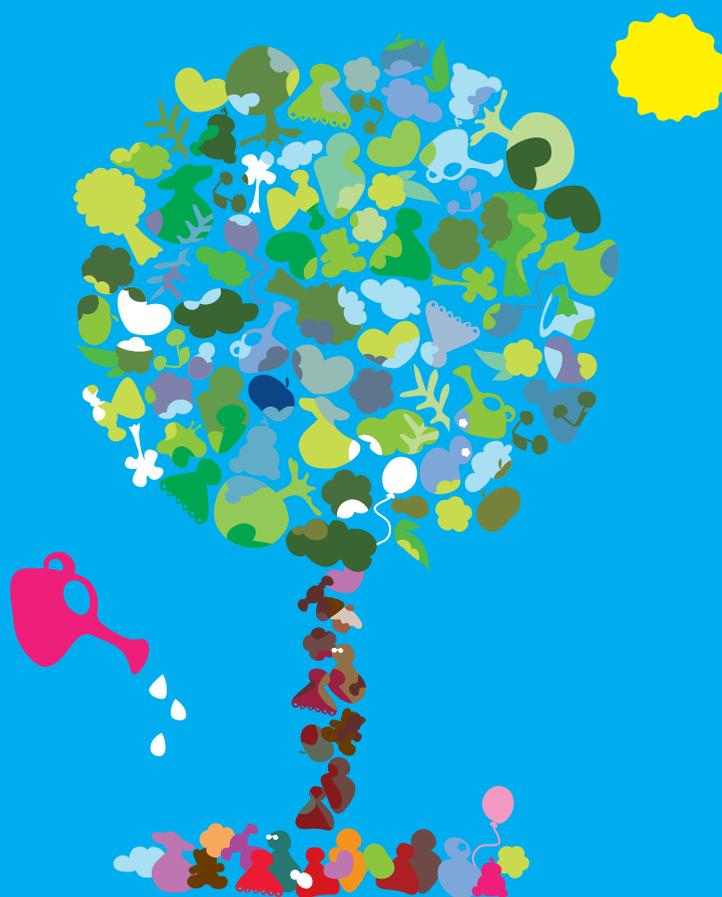


Parenting in the Best interests of the
Child and Support to Parents of the
Youngest Children



Growing up Together

unicef 

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Starc

**Parenting in the Best Interests of the Child
and Support to Parents of the
Youngest Children**

Zagreb, 2010



Preface

Even parents have a right to help when it comes to raising their children

This was one of the messages in UNICEF's campaign titled **First 3 Years Are the Most Important!**, presented to the public at the end of 2006. That campaign was conceived after numerous interviews with parents and experts, and after a research of opinions of the wider public on education and the needs of families during the first years of the lives of children. After the campaign in the mass media, activities started in small and largesettlements throughout Croatia, aiming to broaden the existing knowledge of experts on the importance of the first years, but also to offer new ways of support to parents in local communities. One of such activities is the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents. Although those activities were not highly publicised, they brought many changes to the lives of all those parents they touched. That great campaign for children was also recognised by many donors – citizens and companies of the Republic of Croatia, who contributed to the implementation of the activities and the creation of this Handbook.

Today, perhaps more than ever, the contemporary family is facing numerous challenges and often very high expectations. Therefore it is no wonder that, in the course of our research, both the parents and the wider public confirmed the need for additional professional support in raising children. Apart from the responsibilities of parents toward their children, the responsibilities of the society to aid the parents in raising their children is even enshrined in Article 18 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

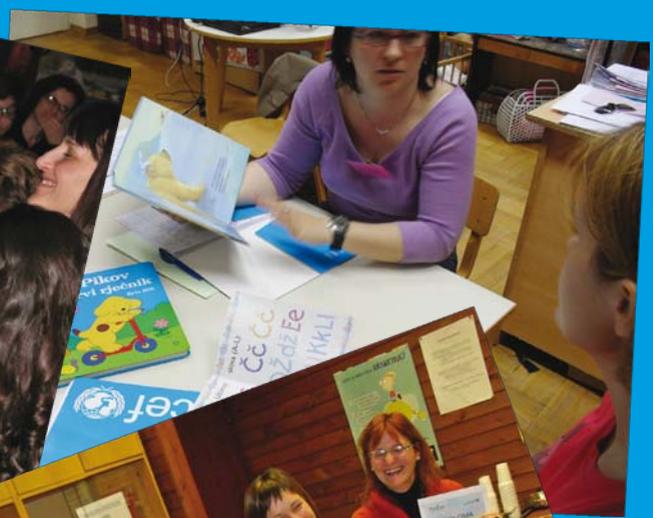
As a part of its answer to the needs of the parents, and in accordance with its obligations pursuant to the Convention, UNICEF has, in cooperation with its partners, placed emphasis on empowering parents and strengthening their parental competences in the first years of the life of the child through the existing services in the community. We have recognised that as the most efficient investment in a relatively wide area of early child development.

Throughout the entire **First 3 Years Are the Most Important!** campaign we strove to enable parents to acquire the knowledge and skills helpful in developing the potential of their child with love, in enabling their children to be successful and happy, and in enabling the society to be healthy and advanced. Encouraging early child development is certainly the most rewarding investment in societal development; it represents an investment in the future potential of the country and its ability to advance.

Therefore, we hope and believe that the "Growing up Together" workshops will also be a part of that aim, and that they will become available to the greatest number of parents of the youngest children possible, who will, after the workshops, continue to build their relationships with their children in their daily lives in accordance with what they learned in the workshops.

Finally, let us not forget that it is the child who is the traveller, while we have to provide our guidance on that journey. Therefore, this compass is a heartfelt gift from us!

*Lora Vidović,
head of the UNICEF Office for Croatia*



Introductory remarks

This book describes the scientific and professional basis of the model of parenting that supports the rights of the child in the family. It is an overview of contemporary theories and research dedicated to the improvement of the child's well-being and to the realisation of the development potential of both the child and the parents. With a new understanding of parenting in the 21st century, the book also describes new approaches to societal support to parents, imbued with the values of the true partnership and equal dignity of parents and experts.

The definition of parenting and the principles of professional support to parents described in this book are the result of the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents, developed as a part of UNICEF's activities for the support of early development and stimulating parenting. The "Growing up Together" programme is the result of three-year cooperation between experts and parents of children of the earliest age. It sought to shape an effective method of supporting the existing and facilitating the development of new parental competences and abilities to cope with the challenges of contemporary parenting.

The book is based on the handbook for the implementation of the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents, intended for licensed programme leaders. The motivation for publishing a book intended for a wider community of experts dealing with families, parents and children of the earliest age came from the need for a greater availability of new scientific findings and professional experience in the area of promoting positive child development and parental support.

We hope that this book will empower the future growth and development of societal support to parents in the community so that each child can exercise his or her rights. As the organisers of the workshop programme, the book addresses kindergartens because the programme was developed in them. However, all suggestions and guidelines also relate to other organisations implementing the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents, such as family centres and other institutions or organisations.

That Programme, including this book, would not have been possible without the sincere support of UNICEF's Office for Croatia, to whom we extend our most heartfelt thanks for the opportunity to incorporate our vision and experience into the common good, and to grow by doing what we love. Special thanks to Ms Gordana Horvat and Ms Đurđica Ivković, who developed the programme together with us. We also wish to thank the Pre-School Education Department of the Education and Teacher Training Agency, including Ms Tijana Vidović for having taken the responsibility to make the Programme available to parents throughout Croatia. The Programme would surely have not reached this level of quality without the contribution of the workshop leaders. We drafted the structure, but the leaders breathed life into the workshops! We thank them for the effort and sensibility invested in the implementation and critical thinking, particularly the first-generation teams, who braved the *terra incognita* of the first pilot implementation. The experience of having jointly created something of value has enriched both our personal and professional lives. Along with the leaders, parents, mothers and fathers participants in the workshops also shaped the workshops into what they are today with their feedback. We also thank them for their fundamental contribution to the Programme. We also wish to thank our reviewers, who helped us conceive and draft the final text of the book. Finally, we give heartfelt thanks to one another – for the trust and enthusiasm – which enable growth.

The authors





Reviewer Jasenka Pregrad on the contents of the Handbook for the Leaders of the "Growing up Together" Workshops with Parents

The introductory part of the Handbook is informative, concise, and presents a good overview of contemporary theories and research in the area of parenting, giving not only a clear orientation on the foundations on which the workshop programme was built, but also valuable concise information to all those who wish to briefly acquaint themselves with the contemporary theories and research prior to a more systematic study of the available literature. One special feature of this chapter is that it builds on the recent sources written in the past ten years, thus truly creating the foundation for the parenting of the 21st century (which is also the title of the first of 11 workshops with parents). The chapter also shows very clearly and explicitly how the intentions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child were based on these theories and research, and how it is essential to take them into account to realise the human rights of children. In the past 20 years since the adoption of the Convention, many activities have been aimed at teaching children and adults (dealing with their upbringing) on the human rights of children. However, the means of realising those rights and providing a child with an education in the child's best interests has not been determined, and so it remains hanging between the traditional and contemporary views and findings on child development. This almost caused a pedagogical imbalance and confusion because supporting the rights of the child without first changing the paradigm of support to their development results in confused parenting, which is certainly not in the best interests of the child.

Such a clear theoretical and scientific framework, which is the basis of the workshops with parents, transcends the boundaries of another programme, titled "School for Parents". It is a new answer to the need for children's human rights to be respected from birth, and for the parents and other educators to provide a steady guiding hand in their growth and development. This program educates and empowers parents to raise their children in accordance with the contemporary knowledge on the growth and development of children, in accordance with the Convention and in the best interests of the child. This is what makes it so remarkable and such a valuable contribution to the realisation of the parents' right to parenting support, which is another provision of the Convention and the obligation of all its signatories.

The middle part of the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents describes in its introductory subchapters the inception of the programme and its pilot implementation, as well as all the information on who its end users are and the prerequisites for its implementation, which certainly also includes the training and preparation of the programme leaders. In such an introduction (as well as the pilot implementation) the authors already clearly express the grave and demanding nature of the tasks of educating and supporting parents, as well as the need for the very means, process and dynamics of the workshops to be in accordance with the basic paradigm of the contemporary means of supporting a person's growth and development. Experience has shown that the overall and sometimes uncritical implementation of the workshops has resulted in damage in addition to benefits, and therefore this detailed and responsible approach to workshop preparations is all the more valuable.

What follows is an overview of 11 workshops – meetings with parents. Each focuses on one of the key aspects of parenting through varying activities enabling the parents to gain key insights and raise awareness of either the child's perspective on life or their relationship with the child. There are short presentations with many examples from the daily life with a child, discussions, exercises and adoption of new approaches and skills. This combination of education, discussions on family values and attitudes, and exercises is built carefully through a series of workshops, each of which brings a new aspect and level important for parenting. By paying special attention to the sequence of topics, the authors build the contents of the programme thoughtfully and continuously, building new material on the previous one and linking knowledge. In their sequence of topics and types of activities, the authors take into account the development of group cohesion, and respect the phases in group development, being careful that the parents do not feel exposed and/or evaluated, which significantly contributes to the quality and intelligibility of the entire programme. The workshops are equipped with all the necessary materials, short PPS presentations, and literature excerpts serving as notes for the parents.

The final part of the Handbook provides an overview of the evaluation of the Programme, implemented in the course of the pilot phase, and aimed at a qualitative assessment of the implementation and contents of the workshops by the parents and leaders, as well as at a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the impacts of the Programme on the self-assessment of the attitudes and behaviours of the parents compared to the control group of parents, which is appropriate and not wholly representative. Having in mind all the difficulties of evaluating this kind of programme, it must be underlined that the effort to evaluate the programme within reasonable limits is useful and, from the professional point of view, ethical, and that it represents the usual good practice of UNICEF's programmes. With their discussion on the "Development and Dissemination of the Programme", the authors conclude the Handbook by suggesting good and necessary points for ensuring not only the sustainability of not only the Programme, but also its quality. That discussion also builds on the experience gained in the pilot implementation, which adds to its authenticity.

Growing up Together

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1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PROGRAMME

1.1

Contemporary parenting

The context of contemporary parenting is characterised by numerous societal changes, which set new challenges before parents in fulfilling their parental responsibilities. The parental role has thus been made more demanding than before owing to pressure from different sides – employers, media, public services, other family members, and their own expectations and beliefs.

Compared to the world in which their own parents raised them, today there are changes on the labour market (e.g. increasingly longer working hours, greater job insecurity), changes in the structure of the family (e.g. an increasing number of single parents and families with children from different marriages and relationships), changes in the relationships between the women and men in the family, changes in the understanding of the nature of children, childhood and parental authority.

Children have been gaining a new position in the society in recent times. They have been recognised as bearers of human rights, whose realisation is guaranteed by the state, drawing parenting out of the private sphere and into the public sphere, thus becoming subject to public policies – which also represents a new challenge for parents.

This situation was best summarised by Juul (2005): *Today's parents are facing a historically unique task. They must literally reinvent the partnership between men and women, as well as the guidance in relation to children and youth, all in accordance with the new values and goals, such as equal dignity and authenticity, in order to avoid jeopardising the integrity of children and youth.*

1.2

The child as an agent of socialisation

The contemporary understanding of the nature of the child and parental role, and the approaches of parenting are different from historical ones. Schaffer (1996) describes four main models of child socialisation in the family (Table 1), detailed elsewhere (Pečnik, 2008 b).

Table 1 Socialisation models (Schaffer, 1996)

Model	The concept of the child	Parental behaviour	Research focus
laissez-faire	previously shaped	spontaneous development	developmental standards
clay modelling	passive	shaping behaviours and training	effects of rewards and punishments
conflict	anti-social	discipline	conflicts between the parents and the child
bilaterality	participant	sensitive recognition of and response to the child's messages	reciprocity in a mutual interaction

While the *laissez-faire* model of child development advocates minimal restrictions by the parents in order to allow the child's potential to develop spontaneously, the so called clay modelling model sees the child as a chunk of clay that can be shaped according to the parents' desires and which surrenders itself passively to the modelling process, rewards, punishments and habit forming.

According to the conflict model, children are not passive; they are regarded as subject to selfish, aggressive and destructive instincts, while socialisation is achieved mainly through parental prohibitions, commands and threats. The conflict between the child and the parents is equalised by the child's insubordination towards the legitimate adult authority, and is considered to be dysfunctional. Disciplinary strategies that ensure the child's subordination to the wishes of the parents are then sought.

The research in the past several decades have empirically disproven the basic presumptions of the models described above by showing that children are not passive, and that they actively participate in their own development from the earliest age, thus representing an active participant in the process who affects the parents' behaviour rather than an object of socialisation (e.g.: *If I laugh, Dad laughs with me; if I cry, Mum takes care of me.*). Furthermore, it has been shown that mutual compromises, rather than conflicts,

are the main characteristic of the interaction between the child and the parents from the moment of birth onwards. The reciprocity model was developed from those findings.

The understanding of the child as an active participant, an agent of its own development, has brought into question the very traditional definition of socialisation as a process of the transference of social values, beliefs and behavioural norms *from one generation to another*, which presupposes that the child *accepts and adopts those influences passively*.

Instead of the traditional one, there emerges a **relational understanding of socialisation** (Sommer, 1998; Kerr et al., 2003; Kuczynski and Parkin, 2006), which takes into account the behaviours and understandings of both sides, of both the parents and the child, while seeing socialisation as a process of mutual compromises. Both the child and the parents are able to initiate purposeful behaviour and strategically choose the means of influencing the behaviour of the other side. They are able to reflect on their own behaviour and interpret the messages sent during the interaction. They are also able to take a stand, resist requests that infringe on their autonomy, prevent them from achieving their goals, or that are contrary to their understanding of the social situation (Kuczynski and Parkin, 2006).

Along with the recognition of the active contribution of the child to his or her own socialisation, the bilateral model also acknowledged a continuous resocialisation of the parents themselves, who also develop and adjust their values and development goals through their interaction with the child in their daily lives.

The social relational theory (Kuczynski and Parkin, 2006) offers a theoretical framework for a relational understanding of socialisation, which acknowledges both the parent's and the child's activity and influence. It relies on the assumption that the quality of the close personal relationship between the parent and the child is what affects the child's conforming to the parent's requests and/or the parent's openness to the child's influence. The child's self-regulation and cooperation are not the consequence of parental disciplinary acts, but rather, the children *develop their readiness for cooperation primarily through early experience of reciprocal cooperation with their parents*, and they are motivated to conform to the parent's request due to their "investment" in their relationship with the parent (Kuczynski and Hildebrandt, 1997; according to Kuczynski and Parkin, 2006). Attention is not only paid to the child's obedience, but also to how the parent maintains their own side of the reciprocal relationship and cooperation with the child, and to which strategies they use to repair a relationship temporarily damaged by excessive parental coercion and control (Harach and Kuczynski, 2005; according to Kuczynski and Parkin, 2006).

Furthermore, while earlier socialisation models explained the conflict between the child and the parents in terms of discipline and control, the social relational theory accepts conflict as an inevitable aspect of life in a close relationship.

Instead of the terms *obedience* and *insubordination*, the suggested terms are *compromise* (taking into account the opposite view) and *negotiation*.

These terms better reflect the fact that many situations of conflict and socialisation are co-regulated by both sides – by both the child and the parent. In their relationship, the parents and children have developed a common understanding of what "obedience" means in different situations. It often happens that what the parents accept as obedience, and what the children understand by obedience, is closer to the idea of compromise, rather than following parental requests accurately and promptly. A child ready to cooperate with the parent's request, but under different terms than those set by the parent, they can show that they have heard the parent, that they will attempt to reconcile their own plans with the parent's wishes, or that they are ready to negotiate a mutually acceptable course of action. Parents send different messages related to their acceptance of their children's different behaviours that vary between what is ideal, acceptable, tolerable or "out of the question" (Goodnow, 1994; according to Kuczynski and Parkin, 2006).

Establishing a balance between the goals of the parents and two-year-old children is better viewed as a two-way conflict resolution process, rather than as a unilateral process of disciplining or "socialising" the child by the parents (Crockenberg, 1991; according to Lyons-Ruth and Zaenah, 1998). It is also an opportunity to acquire social skills.

It has been established that the mother's behaviour in a constructive conflict with the child of two and a half years (her compromises, explanations, guesswork and conflict resolution) is a predictor of the higher levels of a three-year-old child's socio-emotional development (Liable and Thompson, 2002). Parental *control strategies* offer social behaviour models for their children to follow. Learning to express one's own wishes and to negotiate their inclusion in common plans at the age of two may serve as a basis for an effective social behaviour at a later age.

In accordance with the above, Crockenberg and Litman (1990; according to Lyons-Ruth and Zaenah, 1998) stress that a two-year-old's "no" differs from angry defiance conceptually and empirically, and that it has to be viewed as an expression of the emergence of the child's autonomous view of the world. Research involving parents and children aged 1.5-3 indicates that educational acts of force and dominance will provoke the child's defiance sooner, while explanation and negotiation, in combination with

a clear and direct statement of the parent's needs will be more likely to result in the child's acceptance of the parent's requests and in the internalisation of the parent's standards of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Obedience negotiated in an atmosphere of mutual respect of each other's needs has a completely different psychological sense and developmental effect from obedience achieved under the threat of strict parental punishment. Furthermore, parents who refrain from coercion, and corporal and other humiliating punishment generally display a more compassionate and sensitive behaviour towards their children. Thus the parent's compassion toward a two-year-old child complies with the parent's request for the two-year-old child to have compassion toward others.

The idea of the child's proactive influence on its own development may be illustrated by a drawing of a ten-year-old girl, inspired by the message "the child travels, the parent guides" from UNICEF's "First 3 Years Are the Most Important!" campaign.

This is a map given to the child by the parent. First you're in a womb, then you're born. When you're a baby, you live in a village with your mum and dad. As a child, you go to a pasture and tend cows, just like Heidi and Peter. Teenagers are mountains, because it's just as difficult to climb to the top of a mountain as it is to be a teenager. (I'm here now, going towards the mountains. I'm sorry to have left the cows behind me already!) When you grow up, you no longer need this map. Then you're an adult and decide for yourself which city you travel to. You need it as a keepsake...





1.3 Parenting that respects and promotes the rights of the child in the family

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) has a unique role in promoting the understanding of the child as an agent of socialisation. The Convention contains two main messages on parental responsibilities (Doeck, 2004). The first is that parents are given the primary responsibility for raising their child, under the condition that they are guided by the best interests of the child (Art. 18), and that the child's well-being and development are their priority. The second is that parents are granted the right to receive the support of the state in the fulfilment of their parental responsibilities (Art. 27).

The Convention also provides for the steps parents have to take in the best interests of the child: ensure living conditions that enable a full and harmonious development of the child, including mental and social development (Art. 27), and provide appropriate direction and guidance *in the child's* exercise of the rights of the child (Art. 5). Appropriate parental guidance must respect the evolving capacities of the child (Art. 5) and the child's views (Art. 12), and be free from violence and humiliating punishment (Art. 19).

In short, the child has the right to care, security and upbringing that respect their individuality. The parents have the right to the support of the state in the fulfilment of their parental responsibilities. The overall purpose of parental action must be the realisation and promotion of the rights of the child (Doeck, 2004).

When those rights of the child are "translated" into the family context, parental behaviours and values, it follows that the parents should provide to their child the care, structure and guidance, respect them as an individual, and empower them (Pećnik, 2007). These categories of parental behaviour and values represent the basic principles of parenting that respects and promotes the rights of the child in the family, or parenting in the best interests of the child.

Nurturing behaviour responds to the child's need for love, emotional warmth, security, belonging, bonding and acceptance. The child needs their parents' nurturing behaviour as a safe base from which they can explore the world, and to which they can return when they feel fatigue, fear, sadness or some other uncomfortable state or emotion.

This requires the parents to be sensitive to their child's messages, and to respond to them appropriately, to show warmth and love, to provide comfort and protection, to accept the child and to provide support. The parent can show affection and happiness to the child, comfort them when the child is sad or shaken, talk to the child about the child's worries and interests, maintain a positive emotional environment and provide security.

Consistent emotional warmth and response to the child's needs represent the basis for the development of a safe, stable and emotionally warm bond with the parent. Such a bond enables the child's emotional needs to be satisfied, and the child feels valuable and accepted as a result.

Providing a structure and guidance gives the child the feeling of security and predictability, and enables the development of its competences. Structure means the space, time and guidance of the child's behaviour. A structured space is a safe space in which the child is protected from potential dangers, both inside their own home and outside it. Structured time and activities mean a consistent (but not rigid) daily schedule with regular times and patterns of family activities. Flexibility in the structuring of time also enables more agreements with the child as it grows older and more mature. The structure also consists of the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, as well as other forms of directing and guiding the child – such as expressing one's expectations or explaining a request. It enables the child to learn to manage their own behaviour.

The parent serves as the role model for the appropriate behaviour, expressing emotions, and interactions with other persons to the child. The child learns from them and develops their own moral values, dispute resolution methods and pro-social behaviour. In order to achieve that, the parent helps the child understand what is and what is not acceptable, and sets reasonable and appropriate limits and expectations. In that process, it is necessary to consider the child's opinion and to direct them in a positive way, while setting clear limits, offering reasonable explanations, and refraining from corporal and psychological pressure or punishment.

Acknowledging the child as a person or recognising the child's individuality satisfies the need and right of the child to be seen, heard and respected as a person – with their own understandings, ideas, plans, preferences and human dignity. For the development of the child's self-awareness, the parent need only notice, acknowledge and confirm the child's personal experience of themselves and/or of the world.

This requires the parent to spend some time with the child, and to express interest for the child's daily activities and experiences. The parent needs to listen to the child, try to understand their point of view, and help them express their thoughts and feelings. When the parent shows that it is important for them to hear and understand how the child truly feels and what they think, the child feels they are valuable as they are. Acknowledging the child as a person requires the parent to pay attention to the child's opinion when making decisions that affect the child and the family.

Enabling the empowerment of the child concerns the creation of the conditions for strengthening the child's feeling of competence, personal control and the ability to affect other people and the world around them, in accordance with their increasing age and maturity. In other words, the empowerment concerns the parental support of the child's autonomy, experience of one's own initiative, and the child's attempts to resolve their own problems.

This requires parental sensitivity, openness for the child's influence, and mutual cooperation. The parents support the child's strengths, they encourage the child and express confidence in the child's abilities, they follow and support the child's initiatives. The parent empowers the child when they follow the child's idea with interest, when they join the child's activities if the child allows it, and when they refrain from directing and helping when the child can achieve their aims alone. Furthermore, the parents may create opportunities in which the child can learn and gain new experiences. This involves broadening the child's experience and acquainting the child with the world, replying to the child's questions, supporting play and enabling the child to experience success. In that process it should be kept in mind that increasing the independence of a growing child is not a linear process, but rather that the child may sometimes express the need for autonomy, and later again for a greater protection and parental presence.

When they see how their actions affect their environment, the child experiences the feeling of efficacy, which encourages them to be active and to act in accordance with their needs and in new situations. On the other hand, if the child is never successful in affecting their environment, they may become passive and withdrawn.

In order to empirically confirm the assumptions that the child's well-being and the development of their emotional, social and cognitive competences are promoted by caring parental behaviour, providing a structure, acknowledging and empowering the child, the previously mentioned parenting principles arising out of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child have been brought into relation with the definitions of parenting in psychology sources.

The concept of authoritative parenting is the most prevalent conceptualisation of the optimal parental behaviour in psychology (Čudina-Obradović and Obradović, 2006). Authoritative parenting is defined by a high presence of parental warmth/responsiveness and demand/control, and arises out of the theoretical model of parenting styles (Baumrind, 1968; Maccoby and Martin, 1983).

When authoritative parenting is compared with the principles of parenting in the child's best interests, there is a match between caring parental behaviour and providing

a structure and guidance. However, parenting that respects and promotes the rights of the child in a family involves two more categories of parental behaviour and values: acknowledging the child as a person and enabling their empowerment and influence.

Although recent sources dealing with parental styles introduce the third dimension of parental behaviour – a support to autonomy (Gray and Steinberg, 1999), the principles of parenting style models remain subject to criticism (Kerr et al., 2003). The main criticism concern the one-way view of socialisation forming the basis of this model, aimed at the influence of the parents on the child. Kerr et al. (2003) point to the empirical flaws of the assumption that a certain parental style "produces" a child of certain characteristics, formed after correlational research. They also bring into question the static nature of the assumption that a parent is characterised by a certain parenting style, meaning that a parent does not change and develop in their relationship with the child, as well as that the parent treats every child equally.

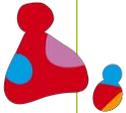
In our opinion, the assumptions of a parental context offered by the self-determination theory (Grolnick, Deci and Ryan, 1997; Grolnick, Beiswenger and Price, 2008) and the assumptions on the desirable characteristics of a relationship between the parent and the child of J. Juul (2002, 2005 and 2008) and K. Hundeide (1996 and 2006) are close to the definition of parenting that respects and promotes the rights of the child in the family, and a relational understanding of socialisation.

1.4 Basic psychological needs and the optimal parental context

The self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) sees people, from their birth onwards, as pro-active beings that act in their environment in order to overcome the challenges they encounter, seek what they love, and persist in a behaviour directed toward some goal.

According to the self-determination theory, all people – both adults and children – have the need to be free and to make decisions important for their lives themselves, to be close and connected with the important people in their lives, and to feel capable and efficient in what they do. Those are the three basic psychological needs: *autonomy*, *connection* and *competence*.





The need for connection is the need for close and secure relationships with other people. It is the need for love, emotional warmth, acceptance, belonging and a "safe base". Security arises out of predictability and stability, and from connection and acceptance.

The need for competence concerns the ability to affect the environment and to master knowledge and skills. This need reflects the need of a person to feel capable, efficient, effective and successful in their interaction with people and things around them. This does not mean merely intellectual, but also emotional and social competence.

The need for autonomy represents the need of a person to choose activities and make decisions important for their life of their own free will and independently, to feel that they are the ones directing their own behaviour, with initiative and freedom of choice, without behaviour under duress and (extrinsic or intrinsic) pressure. Autonomy does not mean independence, self-sufficiency or self-centeredness, but rather an experience of self-initiative and ability to choose one's own behaviour.

The fulfilment of the basic psychological needs is the prerequisite for an increased self-motivation/initiative and mental health, while preventing the fulfilment of those needs results in a decreased motivation and well-being of an individual (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

The attitudes and behaviours of the parents may support the fulfilment of the child's psychological needs to a greater or lesser extent. **The central dimensions of the parental context that supports the child's fulfilment of the basic psychological needs are the following:** personal involvement of the parents, providing a structure and supporting the child's autonomy (Grolnick, Deci and Ryan, 1997; Grolnick, Beiswenger and Price, 2008).

The parent's **personal involvement** enables the child's need for connection to be met. The involvement concerns the parent's interest for the child and the knowledge of them, and how much the parent participates in the life of the child. Showing personal involvement involves surrendering oneself to the child in the emotional and material sense (e.g. spending time in activities together, paying attention, showing warmth, being present in the child's daily life).

The parent's **providing structure and guidance** means ensuring stability and predictability in the child's life and surroundings (e.g. daily routine, rituals, safe space), and expressing their clear expectations, rules and feedback to the child. This



dimension of parenting is the basis for the child's acquisition of the experience of competence.

The structure is represented by the information needed by the child for their self-determination, i.e. so that they can choose for themselves their own behaviour. Those are behavioural guidelines and restrictions that provide an orientation framework to the child, serving as a map or lighthouse.

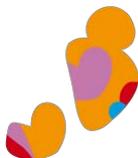
Providing a structure involves a clear expression of expectations and limits, explanations of why they are important, including what the natural consequences of their violation are. The expectations and limits must be in accordance with the child's intellectual, emotional and motoric abilities. Providing a structure also requires the parent to lead and not to leave to the child the decision falling within the responsibility of the parent.

Parental **support to the child's autonomy** facilitates the fulfilment of the child's need for autonomy. It involves active support and encouragement to the child's initiative and independent commencement of activities, offering developmentally adequate choices, using external behavioural controls only to the extent necessary, and encouraging the child to resolve their own problems.

The parent supports the autonomy of the child who explores, follows and tests their own ideas by following them, encouraging them and helping them as much as necessary to overcome obstacles and be ready to continue independently. The parent is present and at the service of the child who needs them, but does not issue orders, does not perform tasks instead of them, and does not take any initiative. As an illustration, whenever the parents want to play with their child, they must leave their hat with the inscription "I know best" in the hall (Grolnick, 2003).

Already at the age of 12 months it is evident that, by supporting the child's autonomy, the parents reinforce the child's motivation to overcome obstacles. This increases the child's feeling of competence and control, as well as the ability to control their own behaviour. On the other hand, when parents control their child's behaviour, the child begins to feel as if their successes and failures are in somebody else's hand, which decreases their motivation and feeling of competence (Grolnick, 2003).

Support to autonomy is a key dimension of the parental context. The child sees parental involvement behaviour and providing a structure as positive or negative, depending on the measure in which the parent supports the child's autonomy. A big parental involvement may be seen as imposing, meddling and overwhelming if the parent does not acknowledge the child as an individual. If the parent supports the child's autonomy, that involvement



reinforces the bond with the parent, which is the basis of the child's readiness to obey the parent's instructions and requests. Furthermore, the structuring and directing of the child's behaviour by the parent may be seen by the child as something negative if the parent does not respect the child's autonomy and participation in decision making.

It should be underlined that we are not speaking of absolute, but rather relative autonomy of the child – in situations where the child's age and maturity permit it. In children of the youngest age, the parents are the ones with the responsibility for the child's well-being. They make decisions regarding health and security. In other words, parental support to the child's autonomy is almost always necessary, but not always.

These very principles of the central importance of the parental support to the child's autonomy are close to the relational understanding of socialisation and assumptions regarding acknowledging the child as a person and their empowerment as the basic principles of parenting that respects and promotes the rights of the child in the family. The self-determination theory also offers other useful findings, particularly regarding the understanding of the parental "regulation" of the child's behaviour. They differ between two types of motivation: the *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* one (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Grolnick, Deci and Ryan, 1997).

Intrinsic motivation is an innate human affinity towards activity, seeking and conquering appropriate challenges, and curiosity. It drives spontaneous activities, such as exploration and persistence in challenges. An intrinsically motivated person works spontaneously, on their own initiative, and their only purpose is the intrinsic pleasure that accompanies such behaviour. There are many examples of intrinsically motivated behaviour in the first several years of the life of a child (e.g. exploring objects, doing something to see the reaction of others, making up games), and they are all important elements of the child's development.

This readiness for personal growth is more pronounced when the environment supports the fulfilment of the needs for autonomy, competence and bonding, i.e. in the context of relationships that support the well-being and growth of the person. However, when the fulfilment of these needs is prevented, when the environment imposes a control that is too strict, and expectations that are too low (e.g. when the child is overprotected and rescued from frustrations), or expectations that are too high without closeness, the intrinsic motivation is lost, and any initiative is absent. According to Grolnick (2003), for the natural intrinsic motivation to "stay alive", the environment should "nourish" it in the appropriate way.

However, many activities are not motivated intrinsically; they are undertaken for some other

reason. **Extrinsic motivation** involves situations in which the child behaves in a desirable manner due to rules, requests, threats, promised rewards, but also involves situations in which the child behaves in a desirable manner in order to maintain its feeling of self-respect or well-being. In the life of a young child, there are many examples of extrinsically motivated behaviour (such as picking up their toys to win the parent's approval, brushing teeth to earn a bedtime story).

According to the self-determination theory, for a person to feel autonomous, self-determined, and to undertake extrinsically motivated activities, the internalisation process is the key, whereby initially extrinsic demands are brought in line with the person's own goals. Internalisation is a process whereby a person adopts beliefs, attitudes or behavioural rules from external sources, and continues to shape those external regulators into personal values or regulators that have a personal meaning and which can be applied independently.

Since extrinsically motivated behaviours are rarely interesting, fun or pleasant, the child begins to behave in such a manner because someone with whom the child feels (or wants to feel) close asks, shows or appreciates them. It follows that the need for closeness is extremely important for internalisation. The child will sooner internalise a parent's request for some form of behaviour when they feel a secure closeness and their parent's care.

Furthermore, in order to integrate a certain rule or request, the child must understand its meaning and connect it somehow with their other goals and values. That process flows more smoothly with the feeling of choice and freedom, rather than if the child is pressured to behave in a certain way. Along with offering choices, it is important to involve the child in the creation of rules and structures. Such support to autonomy enables the child to actively shape the required values into their own.

Support to autonomy also means taking into account the child's point of view, respecting the child's feelings about a certain request, although the request is still maintained. When the child's feelings are *seen* and *acknowledged*, the intrinsic motivation grows (e.g.: *Now you have to pick up your toys*, as opposed to: *Now it's time to pick up your toys. I know that you'd rather go outside now, but please pick up your toys first* or: *I see you don't like picking up your toys. Storing them means they will be safe until the next time when you want to play with them.*).



1.5

Establishing a relationship of equal dignity and quality parental guidance

The understanding of children and parenting arising out of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, i.e. a relational understanding of socialisation and principles of the self-determination theory, can also be recognised in the experiences of experts working with families. Particularly valuable and encouraging are the experiences and ideas of Mr Jesper Juul (2005, 2006 a, 2006 b, 2008), a family therapist. Above all, they too are witnesses to the fact that childhood is the healthiest when the children are a part of the relationship in which both sides acknowledge each others as persons, agents. Although the needs of the parent (as a person who has identities other than being a parent) are also a significant aspect of the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents, we will not describe them in greater detail here, opting instead to continue resolving the issue of the child as an agent of socialisation, which can be found in the presented theoretical framework of the programme.

The *agent – agent* relationship involves, recognises and confirms the child's experience of the world and self. Such a relationship assumes certain skills and the parent's ethical attitude or *relational competence*, which Juul (2002) defines as (1) the ability to see and acknowledge the child as a person and to adapt one's behaviour to this fact, without giving up leadership, and (2) the ability and readiness to accept complete responsibility for building a quality relationship with the child, instead of blaming the child for behaving in *such* a manner.

Along with relational competence, a key term for the understanding of characteristics of the relationship between the parent and the child that offers the optimal conditions for the child's well-being and development (or, in terms of the rights of the child, the relationship that promotes the right to a full development of the potential and to a respect of the child's opinions) is equal dignity (Juul, 2008, 2006 a).

Equal dignity in a relationship means that personal needs, desires, opinions and feelings are respected and acknowledged equally by both sides, regardless of the age or sex of the person. In the context of the *parent – child* relationship, that certainly does not mean equal responsibility, since the parent is the one who makes decisions related to the child's well-being, and who is responsible for the child's safety, health and fulfilment of needs, particularly at an early age. Furthermore, the parent is also responsible for the quality of their relationship with the child, as well as for their own well-being and the well-being of other family members and the family as a whole. Equal dignity is the foundation for a relationship with the child when the parents are authentic, and when they assume personal responsibility for their choices.



In order to ensure that children have the optimal childhood, according to Juul (2008), parental guidance should, in its ideal form, have the following qualities: authenticity, personal authority, interest, dialogue/negotiation, recognition, inclusion and power (to be accepted and used responsibly).

The parent is authentic when they express their actual thoughts or feelings. This means refraining from "acting out" what they feel is appropriate for the role of a mother or father. Authenticity and sincerity give the parent the necessary personal authority which they can use to influence and impress the child throughout childhood.

Personal authority is possessed by a parent who is authentic, personal, and who assumes personal responsibility for their welfare. Personal authority is based on the parent's authentic experience and true feelings, as well as integrity and responsibility for their own needs, boundaries and values.

The personal authority of the parent loses its power if the parent does not protect the child's integrity at the same time. For example, when the parents say the following to a three-year-old child: "You're spoiled/obstinate!" or: "You like to make your mother angry", they impose on the child their understanding of the child's intentions, or transfer responsibility to the child (e.g.: *It's your fault we're not going out.*). On the contrary, when the parent speaks about themselves, their needs and boundaries (e.g.: *I want to have lunch first and rest for 15 minutes, then I'll play with you.*), and when they assume responsibility (e.g.: *I see you're sad we're not going out, but I can't come with you right now, and I won't let you go alone. We'll go as soon as I finish this.*), the parent's personal authority increases.

A dialogue based on equal dignity assumes that each side expresses themselves, their feelings, values and goals, without talking about the other side. Dialogue and negotiation have replaced lecturing and punishing. They are an expression of the values of equal dignity because they enable the participants to feel heard and taken seriously. A dialogue expresses the need of the community to hear the contribution of each member. Based on the dialogue and their own life experience, the parents make decisions they feel are the most appropriate.

Instead of the control as it existed previously, parental guidance can nowadays be characterised by an interest in the child as a person. The interest for the child's thoughts and feelings is accompanied by their acknowledgement (in terms of acknowledgement and naming, not evaluating using critique or praise). This can be connected with acknowledging the child as a person, with the recognition of the child's experience of the world and themselves. When the parent sees and hears the child's experiences, they can incorporate



them into their own decision-making process, and when they are making a decision that is contrary to the child's wish, they can, for example, say: "I see you want this toy, but I regret I can't buy it for you right now. I'm really sorry."

And, finally, the manner in which the parents choose to use their psychological and physical power strongly affects the child's welfare and development, as well as whether the child will be able to fully use their personal and social potential.

According to Juul (2008), leadership is a process of mutual and continuous learning together with those who need to be guided. A part of this process is becoming aware of one's own values and goals, and guiding in accordance with them. **The parents' task – and challenge – is to find a method of guidance that takes into account the needs of both the child and the parents, while preserving the psychological or physical integrity of the child.**

1.6

Emphatic interactions between the parents and the child: The three dialogues

The understanding of the child as a person with their own feelings, intentions and needs, which the parent can recognise in their own experience, is the basis of the parent's emphatic identification with the child. Such parental understanding and compassion with the child is the prerequisite of the readiness for a sensitive care for the child, promoted by the International Child Development Programme (www.icdp.info/Brochure.pdf).

According to Hundeide (1996), the key to a quality care and impact on the child's development is a parental empathy for the child's condition, and adapting to the child's needs and initiative.

Empathy or compassion is the ability to understand and feel what the other person thinks or feels, and the ability to show that understanding. Empathy is important because it facilitates communication with other people. It is even more important in the communication between adults and children. For the parent to be able to communicate with the child successfully, they must understand and feel the child's thoughts and feelings. The ability of the parent to adapt and react to the child's needs and initiative (which does not mean indulging the child's every whim) is the foundation of a quality care for the child's welfare.

If the parent recognises the needs of the child from the earliest days, and adapts to them constantly, the child will develop the feeling that other people can and want to empathise with them. That feeling develops when the child is approximately eight months old, and takes further shape in close, intimate relationships throughout the whole life.

If the parents do not adapt to the child, this can be extremely unsettling and harmful for the child in the long run. When the parent fails to show empathy for the feelings that the child expresses (e.g. joy, crying, need to cuddle), the child stops expressing, and even feeling those emotions. That way an entire range of emotions can be removed from the spectrum of close, intimate relationships, especially if during childhood the expression of such emotions is persistently discouraged (www.icdp.info/Introduction%20to%20the%20ICDP%20Program1.pdf).

Parental adaptation to the child is established through emphatic interaction from the beginning of their relationship. As the child grows and as the bond deepens, the emotional dialogue between the parent and the child becomes richer, more stimulating for the child and its development, and has a greater potential for guidance. The child begins to seek the involvement of the parent on their own in their actions towards the surrounding objects, to seek and understand the meaning of the events around them; they start needing help and guidance in the planning and execution of different ideas and undertakings. Gradually, as the child's horizons are expanding, the parents begin directing the child's behaviour using instructions, rules and limits until the child becomes independent and adopts efficient and socially acceptable modes of behaviour.

Hundeide (www.icdp.info/Brochure.pdf) describes this developmental approach to the interaction between the parent and the child with three different types of dialogues that differ according to the contents of the parent-child communication, i.e. messages sent primarily by the parent to the child. The first type is *expressing emotions*, the second *giving meaning*, and the third *direction or regulation of behaviour*. That which all three types of dialogue must have in common is emphatic understanding of the child and their condition, and adaptation to the child,

Emotional dialogue concerns early affective dialogue using expressive gestures between the parent and the child, in which the parent adapts to the child emotionally, follows and reacts to expressions of initiative and physical messages of the child, recognises signals and verbalises what the child does. This develops the true dialogue of emotionally expressed intimacy, as well as the feelings of trust, joy and partnership between the child and the parent. Such a relationship is the bases for a safe affection and fundamental trust in oneself and in others.

The typical situations in which *emotional communication* is developed are close contact situations, situations in which the child needs comfort, encouragement or support. The parent can establish emotional dialogue in two basic ways: by showing unconditional love and emotional communication, and by following the child's initiative and giving support.



Showing unconditional love and emotional communication enable the child to feel loved unconditionally for its very existence, which is important for the development of self-respect. The child can understand emotional expressions from the earliest age, as well as tell the difference between acceptance and rejection, joy and sadness. When the parent shows love to the child, and that they are happy to see the child, this is "psychological food" for the child, of which there can never be enough. Emotional dialogue can be established even with a very small child, by means of an eye contact, smiles and exchange of gestures, expressions with which the parent shows happiness and enthusiasm for that which the child does or which is of the interest to the child, while the child "replies" with happy vocalisation. Such early emotional conversation is important for the child's future establishing of relationships with others, as well as for the development of speech.

Following the child's initiative and giving support means the parent's recognition of the condition, wishes, intentions and body language of the child, and the adaptation to and following of the child in that which the child is occupied with currently. The child will thus feel that the parent sees, follows and approves of them.

For the development of self-confidence and motivation, it is particularly important that the child follows their own initiative within safe limits, without *always* being "pushed" by someone, or being controlled (although external control can sometimes be necessary, for example for the child's safety or for the parent's personal needs. Self-confidence and intrinsic motivation also grow whenever the child is successful in what they do, and when they receive clear feedback on something in which they were successful.

In accordance with the principles of Bowlby's theory of affection and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Starc et al., 2004), Hundeide believes that early emotionally expressive dialogue strongly influences the creation of an affective relationship between the child and the parents, as well as the child's trust and openness to other people (www.icdp.info/Brochure.pdf).

Comprehension dialogue occurs when the parent participates in, describes, and explains what the child does and experiences with exhilaration. The child has the need to understand the world around them, and the best interpreters of the world are the loved ones, who can assign words and significance to the child's immediate experience. Already during its first year of life, the child consciously seeks the involvement of adults in their actions, and enjoys doing something with adults and receiving explanations in an atmosphere of support.

The parent establishes comprehension dialogue by helping the child focus on the things and events in the environment, since a joint and mutual focus of attention is the prerequisite of a good contact and communication. Comprehension dialogue also unfolds

by introducing meaning and exhilaration in what the child is experiencing, and by expanding and enriching the child's experience using explanations, comparisons and imagination.

By describing what they are experiencing together, and by showing at the same time their feelings and exhilaration, the parent helps the child understand their experience of the outer world. The parent's naming, descriptions and expressions of emotional reactions indirectly shows the meaning of the surroundings to the child. The parent should not only explain, but also expand what they experience together with the child, e.g. by putting the new experience in relation with past and future events. In this way, the child learns to focus, observe, notice, differ, compare, imagine, etc. The parent should recognise what the child is interested in or could be interested in, and follow the child's focus. Thus not only feelings, but also the child's exploration initiative, are in the centre of the parent's empathy. This makes mutual communication and mediation even better. Joint participation in and expansion of experience strongly affects the child's intellectual development at an early age (www.icdp.info/Brochure.pdf).

Regulation dialogue occurs when the parent is involved in the child's activities by planning and giving instructions for what the child intends to achieve, and when the parent regulates the child's behaviour by setting rules or limits.

The purpose of parental regulation of the child's behaviour is to achieve the child's self-regulation. By controlling their own behaviour and establishing self-control, the child becomes capable of adapting to the necessities and requirements of the real world. With the aid of the parent's external regulation, the child gradually becomes capable of understanding the requirements for certain modes of behaviour, gains knowledge on how to meet those requirements, and practices the most effective modes of behaviour. Behaviour based on that knowledge and skills is called self-regulated behaviour, and its most important characteristic is the development of self-control.

The typical situations in which the parent teaches self-regulation to the child are situations that require focus on the goal and cooperation, and situations which require the regulation of behaviour because something is not allowed.

The parent establishes regulation dialogue by supporting the child's activities and initiative, and by guiding the child *step by step* towards the goal. Furthermore, regulation dialogue is used when the parent expresses their expectations in a positive manner, with clear limits for what is allowed to the child and what is not, while taking into consideration the child's reactions. Instead of shouting and restrictions, the parent provides explanations and reasons for why something is not allowed. With the statement of expectations understandable to the child, rules and the consequences for non-compliance are stated and explained to younger children. With older children, it is necessary to adopt the rules and consequences for non-compliance by mutual agreement.



1.7

Advantages and risks of the scientific/professional definition of "positive parenting"

The “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents was developed with the purpose of discovering and empowering parental beliefs, values and behaviours that enable the rights of the child in the family to be realised. The term "parenting in the best interests of the child" was offered, involving four broad categories of parental behaviours and values: care, providing structure and guidance, acknowledging the child as a person, and child empowerment.

It is an understanding or vision of parenting based on the values enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also on the knowledge arising mostly out of previously summarised scientific and expert findings. Namely, the findings on the characteristics of the parental context that supports the fulfilment of the basic psychological needs of the child for connection, competence and autonomy, and which consists of *parental personal involvement, providing a structure and supporting the child's autonomy*. Furthermore, the findings on the quality of parental guidance resting upon equal dignity of the parent and child, as well as on the characteristics of an emphatic interaction between the parent and the child.

Increasing the knowledge on the parent-child relationship that contributes to the child's welfare seems to be at least equally important as increasing the knowledge on what kinds of parental relationships harm the child. However, the scientific findings on what child abuse and neglect are and how they begin are still more numerous than those that define and explain parenting for the good of the child. Therefore, the advantage of trying to define "good parenting" is that it brings the re-examination of the contents (parental goals, values, acts) and the very name of parenting promoting the welfare and development of the child (and parent) into the focus of attention of scientists, experts and parents. A better understanding of the answers to those questions is a prerequisite for the development of programmes aimed at the promotion and empowerment of parenting that fulfils the rights and needs of the child, instead of programmes aimed at the prevention of parenting that jeopardises and violates these rights and needs.



However, the attempt of scientists and experts to define "good, correct parenting" is not without significant risks.

Juul (2008) warns of the phenomenon where, instead of from *emancipation* from an *object* of socialisation into an *agent*, the children are transformed into a *project* in the parental quest for the best methods of upbringing. Furthermore, terms such as *parenting in the best interests of the child* imply certain perfectionism, unlike, for example, the term *a good enough parent*.

It is not easy to estimate the advantages of finding useful guidelines and structures for easing the parental role and the risk of rigid adherence to them without recognising the uniqueness of the personalities of the child and the parent, as well as the primacy of their experience over "theories". A question of to what extent the construction of reality in the phrase *parenting in the best interests of the child* truly improves the quality of childhood remains open. Does such a definition of parenting contribute to the parents' ability to create an environment that enables a complete fulfilment of the child's potentials? Does it reduce the society's limit of tolerance to harmful parental behaviour, meaning that interventions are provoked sooner than when relying on the definition of a good-enough parent? And, finally, to what extent can *prescribing* the characteristics of parenting in the best interests of the child actually burden those children whose parents strive to be *perfect parents*?

Guided by the belief that the advantages of seeking and discovering parental behaviour and relationships with the aim of the child's welfare and competence greatly outweigh the risks described above, we have launched the "Growing up Together" project. The ideas of parenting presented in this chapter in the Workshop Programme serve as *working materials*, which parents use as a starting point in seeking their own parenting answers to the calls and challenges of their child.

In order to minimise the risk of parents adopting the ideas presented as *the correct method of parenting*, the message continuously conveyed to them from the first to the last workshop is that there exists no single correct way of parenting, and that we offer the definition of parenting in the best interests of the child (i.e. the four pillars of parenting), as well as other beliefs or beliefs from the Workshop Programme, only as a value framework and information to inspire them and to be verified by them.

The following perspectives provide a valuable contribution to the discussion on the risks of *the professional definition of good parenting*.

"Experts can and have to provide parents with a set of skills, but they must not lose the important message that children are people, real persons that live by our side. Persons with their own needs and characteristics in a unique (perfectly imperfect) set, who above all else

need a good relationship on a personal level for their growth and development." (Pribela-Hodap, 2008)

"Parents too are persons with a set of unique (perfectly imperfect) needs and characteristics, including their values, attitudes, family tradition... It is not easy to reconcile the needs and characteristics of the child, their own needs, personality traits, beliefs and values with the values of the society, which includes not only experts, but also the creators of the consumer society that stimulate the wishes of the child and overemphasize certain needs of the child for profit, as well as many other interest groups." (Pregrad, 2009)

However, the need for a complete picture of what we nowadays know about parenting that is good for children is clear. This is also advocated by Pregrad (2009):

"When we realised that it is not only important what children do, but also what they feel for the development of children, we spoke, wrote and taught much about it because it was new. In doing that, we forgot that it was also important to set limits and be demanding, and that taking into account their feelings does not always necessarily involve a smile. (...) That which is definitely lacking is a discussion on parental rights and obligations, and on how parents should set limits and raise their children, so that they don't always give in to their children's wishes and thus become *a service for granting their children's wishes*, while, on the other hand, meeting their children's needs and not violating children's rights."

1. 8

The right of parents to support

1.8.1 Sources of the programme of support to parenting and early child development

Along with the right of every child to a family environment that supports the child's welfare and enables a full and harmonious development of their potential, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child also defines the right of every child to appropriate and adequate help from the society for their parents in the fulfilment of their parental responsibilities.

The right of the parents to support enshrined in the Convention is also promoted by the Council of Europe with its *Recommendation (2006) 19 on policy to support positive parenting*, with the accompanying documents intended for parents (*Key Messages for Parents*) and experts (*Guidelines for Experts*). These documents represent an impetus and contribution to the creation of a new understanding of parenting and new standards of support to parenting in Europe.

The aforementioned international documents, in force in Croatia as well, are an indicator that the wider



social community realised the importance of "parental work", but also how demanding it is. Along with the great expectations from parents, the society has begun taking its share of responsibility in order to enable each parent to cope with the challenges of contemporary parenting and to exercise their right to reliable information, counselling, financial and other help with raising children.

In the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents, parents receive the opportunity to realise some of their rights to support, which they have simply because *they are parents*. That means they participate in the workshops not only because they are not good enough as parents, but rather because they are the parents of a child that has the rights of the child, which extend to every child until the age of 18.

It is well-known that parental behaviour is shaped by a series of influences. The characteristics of parenting involve factors relating to the personal characteristics of the parents (e.g. beliefs, personal welfare), the characteristics of the child (e.g. temperament, disabilities, contextual sources of stress and support (e.g. quality of the relationship with the partner, material conditions) and wider social environment (e.g. availability and quality of services for children and parents, family policy measures, social position of the child and family) (Belsky and Stratton, 2002). In other words, the manner in which the parents cope with their responsibilities in the family does not reflect only their parental skills and personal characteristics, but also what resources and support they can get (Quinton, 2004).

To provide their child with closeness, support, guidance and limits, the parent must have the capabilities and strength for that.

The inner strengths of the parent mean parental knowledge and skills related to child care, communication skills, problem solving skills and stress management skills, and above all their physical and psychological welfare. It is, therefore, important for the parent to take care of themselves, to meet their own needs for closeness, socialisation, recreation and/or alone time. It is also important for the parenting support programme to empower the parent as a whole person, not only in their parental role. *Resources or strengths within the family* mean the available models of good parenting and the quality of interpersonal relationships between family members (e.g. the partners' mutual support). Another significant contribution is provided by *resources or strengths from the wider surroundings*, such as support from the extended family, friends and child care services in the community.



The parental need for support is seen in the recent research on parents of children of the earliest age (Radočaj, 2008, Pećnik et al., in print). The interest of the parents for access to reliable information on child care, expert advice and exchange of experience with other parents has been established in it. Furthermore, the prevalence of parental behaviour violating the rights of the child, as well as beliefs supported by such behaviour, has also been found. These findings point to the need for support in the development of another type of relationship with the children of the earliest age.

The foundations of the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents are manifold – from documents enshrining the rights of the child, including *the right of the parent to support*, to *the needs of parents*, documented by the research conducted by UNICEF's Office for Croatia, which preceded the Programme. Among the reasons for the creation of this programme, the scientific findings of the *great importance of early childhood for the child's life* and of the *great importance of the parent's relationship with the child in that period* are central.

Neuroscientific findings have shown that the child's brain undergoes the greatest surge of development in the first few years of life (e.g. Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Everything that the child experiences has a strong impact on the development of the brain, and thus long-term consequences for future opportunities in life. If the child grows up in an environment without enough love, security and parental care, many connections in the brain will not be preserved, and such a brain will be significantly different from the brain of a child growing up in an environment rich with emotions. Already at the age of three, there are visible differences in the social and intellectual development of the child, which depend neither on the income nor education of the parents, but rather on how parents treat their children at home, how they stimulate their curiosity and learning (Richter, 2004). As far as the right of the child to education is concerned, it is important to note that obstacles to school success (a poor vocabulary) appear very early, already at 18 months of age (Hart and Risley, 1995).

The first years are also important because the experience of oneself and of others stays until later years of life (Aldgate and Jones, 2006). In the earliest years, the child's emotional security, or basic trust in oneself and others, is established, which is important for later psychological and physical health. Therefore, emotional attachment, early communication and stimulation represent development conditions as important as food, hygiene, health and safety from injuries.

According to the attachment theory and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Starč et al., 2004), the foundations of social relations are laid in the first year of life, and the parents or primary care givers play an instrumental role in it. They are primarily the ones who

provide an emotionally warm and supporting environment for the child, stimulate learning and growth, meet the child's basic needs, and allow the child to receive small quantities of stress and frustration that the child can handle with appropriate support.

Recent research shows that the child's *non-cognitive* skills are even more important than *cognitive* skills for success in school and further productive inclusion in the society. Those are the so called *soft skills*, or *socio-emotional* skills (e.g. persistence, perseverance, self-control, conflict resolution). Socio-emotional skills mostly concern self-regulation skills. On the emotional level, self-regulation involves the regulation of one's own emotions, anxiety, stress; and on the cognitive level, maintaining attention, inhibiting impulses, coping with frustration and delaying gratification (Shanker, 2009). Those abilities are acquired in the earliest childhood based on how the parent helps the child express emotions or cope with stress, i.e. based on the parent's direction and guidance.

These scientific findings are the foundation of the efforts to focus the support to early childhood development, along with cognitive development stimulation, to the strengthening of socio-emotional skills, meaning empowering parents, who are the "vital ingredient" in the development of those skills (Shanker, 2009).

Finally, investing in the early development and parenting support is not only the right of the child, but also a prudent economic investment. Economists have shown that investing in the parents of children under the age of three is the most profitable investment (Heckman, 2009).

1.8.2 Developmental support to parenting

The main task of social support to families is to strengthen the family for fulfilling its basic task of child rearing, and to enable the parents to provide appropriate parental care (Sandbeak, 2007). Gilligan (2000) distinguishes between the *developmental*, *compensatory* and *protective* support to families, which correspond to the levels of general, targeted and indicated prevention. While the remaining two types are intended to beneficiaries who are at risk, *developmental support to families* is not aimed at resolving problems or reducing risk factors, but is intended for all families as support to their welfare and development, to strengthen their capacities for tackling the requirements of the environment.

The "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents is one form of



developmental support to families. The ultimate purpose of this Programme is to *improve the well-being and facilitate the full development of the child's potential*, which can be achieved by improving the quality of the family environment in which the child lives. Since the parents' behaviour, thoughts and feelings are the main determinants of the quality of the family environment, the direct purpose of the Programme is to *promote the well-being and developmental potential of the parents*, or support the existing ones, and the development of new parental strengths and abilities (parental competences). Supporting and expanding positive parental experiences thus represents the focus of such programmes.

It should be noted here that the Workshop Programme is focused only on two aspects of parental empowerment – their internal resources, and mobilisation of resources in their immediate environment. Furthermore, general parenting support programmes in the community assume the possibility of using a series of other measures and services aimed at structural factors that affect the lives of the children and their parents (e.g. balancing a job and child care, tackling financial difficulties, quality services for children and parents in the community).

The advantage of general parenting support programmes is a proactive approach, which seems the most efficient in the promotion of well-being and development, and in the prevention of factors that may lead to child abuse or neglect (McAuley et al., 2006). This is in line with the popular saying that "prevention is better than cure". In addition, parents prefer to use such programmes because they are offered to all parents, without discrimination on the grounds of their needs or risk factors, and thus they are not stigmatised by participating in them.

1.8.3 Partnership between experts and parents

Evaluation research with parents users of parental support programmes show that it is not only *what* is done, but also *how* is done that attracts them to and keeps them in the programmes (Sandbaek, 2007; Moran et al., 2004). In other words, the extent to which the parenting support programme will actually strengthen competences, self-confidence and



contentment of the parents largely depends on the manner in which it is implemented. As always, the quality of the relationship between the support provider and the beneficiary of the support is the deciding factor. Research has thus shown that, along with the flexibility of the services adapted to the various needs of parents, it is extremely necessary for the approach of the expert to be non-judging and non-stigmatising toward the parents.

Recommendation (2006) 19 of the Council of Europe on policy to support positive parenting lists two **basic principles for implementing parenting support programmes**.

1. They should be characterised by equal focus to strengths, resources, protection factors and risk factors, which means focus on the recognition and evaluation of the strong points of the parents, stakes in interpersonal relationships and the community, and creation of new possibilities of achieving the parents' potential.
2. Experts in parenting support programmes treat the parents who participate in them as active participants, persons who make decisions in connection with their lives for which they are responsible, who cope with the circumstances in their lives, who are "experts by experience", and holders of social rights (including the right to support because they are parents).

A consistent application of the described principles requires a change from approach to parents which has been traditionally based on the deficit model (where the parents are viewed through the prism of their shortcomings) to the approach based on the empowerment model (Flett, 2007).

In the **empowerment model**, experts no longer see their role in determining (as experts) the needs of the parents and what they should do to be "better parents". Instead, they view the parents as partners with whom they cooperate so that the parents could find a way to fulfil their parental responsibilities for their child's well-being and for their own pleasure. Experts draw on their professional and personal experience to offer to the parent new ideas for verification, inspiration and orientation, and provide feedback and support. They also learn and develop their own competence from the experience and reactions of the parents.

The approach based on empowerment requires the existence of a partnership, cooperative relationship between the expert and the parents. Creation of a partnership between the expert and the parents requires recognition of the experiences of the parents and their knowledge of themselves and their own children. The expert is not in the position of an authority who knows how to best raise children (and who teaches that to the parents). Relinquishing the role of an "education expert" does not mean the expert must relinquish the knowledge and experience they have gained, but rather that they accept their lack of knowledge, and

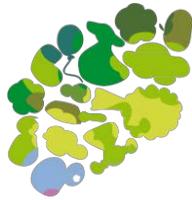


recognise that the parent too possesses the relevant knowledge that the expert lacks.

Partnership means that the experts and parents are *on the same level* – the former are experts on theories on child development and parenting, and the latter are experts for their children and themselves. If the experts are ready to "relinquish" their role of experts for education/children, and accept that they are not the supreme authorities in it, then they will be able to engage in an authentic, sincere dialogue with the parents, and learn from them. This calls for a non-authoritative approach (Breton, 1994), which enables the expert's personal authority to be established.

For the experts implementing it, establishing a parental support programme based on the principles of parenting and empowerment usually means "struggling against the tide", or creating an approach to parents contrary to the one already established. Creating a new understanding of one's own role compared to the parents requires a radical shift from the traditional attitude of experts from social institutions toward parents, characterised by *preaching* and *correcting* parents in how to raise their children.

Therefore, the application of the described principles requires the experts who provide support to parents to have sufficient and appropriate professional support. Just as parental support programmes enable the parents to develop their own competences, so continuous education, supervision and mutual support facilitate the development of the experts' competences in fulfilling their professional responsibilities in the parental support programme.



2.1

Development, purpose and approach of the Programme

The “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents is intended for the parents of children aged up to four years. It consists of eleven conceptually and thematically connected workshops led by educated teams of experts for early development support.

The “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents was conceived as a part of the Programme for Early Child Development and Positive Parenting Titled "First Three Are the Most Important", launched by UNICEF in 2006 within the Parenting Support in the Community Project. This Programme for the parents of the youngest children was developed in cooperation with the Education and Teacher Training Agency of the Republic of Croatia, Preschool Education Department.

The Programme was developed in 2008 and 2009 in cooperation with the leaders and parents who participated in the pilot project. It involved the implementation of two cycles of workshops in a total of 25 kindergartens in the Republic of Croatia. The reports of the leader teams, feedback from the parents and results of the Programme processes and outcomes evaluation were the basis for the verification, adaptation and improvement of the workshops. The experience of and feedback from the leaders were valuable to us; we quoted some of them in the handbook for leaders.

The purpose of the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents is to enable a flow of information, knowledge, skills and support enabling the parents to fulfil their parental responsibilities, and to promote the growth and development of both the parents and their children.

The main aim of the Workshop Programme is to create a stimulating and empowering environment in which the parents, together with the workshop leaders and other parents, exchange ideas on the ways in which they live parenthood, and on the ways they treat their children; in which they get to know themselves better as parents, and learn other possible ways to raise their children. They also become acquainted with the scientific findings on the positive interaction between the parent and the child, as well as on parenting in the child's (and parent's) best interests.

The method in which the Programme was developed, i.e. the involvement of the participants and leaders of the Programme as partners in its creation, is the main strength of the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents. Apart from the workshops being shaped in accordance with the theoretical principles and results of the Programme, and in accordance with the experience of the direct Programme leaders and beneficiaries, the Programme has been subjected to a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of its outcomes. The results of the evaluation indicate a success of both cycles of the pilot project in achieving the planned aims, and qualify this Programme as an intervention based on evidence.

Thus, it reinforces the parent-child relationship that supports the development of the child, and weakens the factors that may lead to child abuse or neglect.

The workshop participants re-evaluate the values on which parenting rests, learn what the needs of the children and parents are, and how to meet them, practice communication skills, and discuss any other questions the parents may have.

The Programme is based on the **approach of empowerment and partnership between the leaders and the parents**. At the workshops, the leaders and parents are *on the same level*. The leaders are well acquainted with the theories on education and parenting, they are experts for leading the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents, and have experience in educating children in cooperation with parents of all kinds. They are experts for child education in an institutional environment, but not in a family environment. The parents are experts for their children and for themselves, and have the experience of living with their children in their own family. Parents seek a validation of their competence, and, although they are sometimes insecure, they are experts for their children because they know them best. Therefore, the workshops were modelled after groups for personal growth and development, as well as after education groups.

The values and principles in the approach to the parents in this Programme comply with those set out in the *Recommendation (2006) 19 of the Council of Europe on policy to support positive parenting*. Such system of values of the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents is best suited for group work with parents, in which partnership and cooperation are explored. The advantage of group work is an exchange of experiences, the knowledge that they are not the only parents who worry, and socialisation, bonding, forming friendships, as well as finding the means most appropriate for them and their children, using group creativity and resources.

2.2

Who is the Programme intended for?

The “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents is intended for **the parents of children of up to four years of age**. In the previous workshops within the pilot project, there were the parents of children up to five years of age, as well as parents with older children. Everybody was very pleased and stated that the workshops were useful for their relationship with their older children. However, the programme is primarily intended for the parents of children of the earliest age.

Ten to twelve parents can participate in the workshops. In larger groups it is difficult to implement all the activities well, particularly the exercises and activities in which a more direct participation is expected from each parent. In large groups, it is more difficult to achieve a mutual trust of the participants, it is harder to be heard, and activities last longer. All that can jeopardise the overall implementation of all the activities envisaged for a particular session. If the group is smaller (6-7 participants), the group dynamics are weaker, and there are fewer fruitful discussions and constructive exchanges of experience.

Experience has shown that sometimes many parents apply for the workshops (14, 16). Sometimes 17 parents apply, 13 arrive at the first session, 11 at the second, and the group finally stabilises on 8-10 participants per session. Therefore, it is advisable to ask the following question: "If anyone of you is undecided whether to proceed, what does it take for you to decide to attend all 11 workshops?"

Since the Programme is intended for the general population, i.e. all parents, one of the special challenges in leading the workshops refers to **the differences among the parents** participating in the workshops and their different expectations from the "Growing up Together" Programme. While some parents seek more efficient ways of setting limits, and need encouragement for a greater sensibility for their child's needs and for the cooperation with their child, other are too eager to indulge their child's whims, and need encouragement to take greater personal responsibility for their own needs and limits. How can the Programme simultaneously benefit some parents to become more involved in the world of their child personally, to have more compassion or to protect their child, benefit others to provide a greater support to their child's autonomy with participation, refrain from being overprotective and controlling, and benefit still others for something entirely different, etc.? Those questions require a consistent application of the partnership principles in professional work, and therefore the leaders should be experts for the general knowledge on parenting and children, while the parents are and can become even better experts on their children and themselves.



The Programme does not address **mothers and fathers** specifically, but rather *parents*, although we are aware of the differences between motherhood and parenthood. This is not a topic of the Programme, but experience indicates that fathers are increasingly interested for participation in the Programme, that they consider their parenting skills more readily. The previous workshops showed that fathers are more likely to stay in the Programme when there are at least two of them attending. Fathers provide a specific contribution to the exchange of experience with other parents, and to the insight in forming a relationship with the child (e.g. they describe their own interaction with the child during play, in the expansion of their child's experience, and realise that they introduce more emotional communication in such activities after the workshops). In groups in which the only participants were mothers, there was a need for the participation of fathers.

The differences between the group participants according to **the level and type of education** contribute to the dynamics of discussions between parents, and do not present an obstacle, since it has been shown that many parental issues are universal, and that they enjoy and worry about similar things about their children, regardless of the differences in education (e.g. a child will not sleep, requests need to be repeated many times, disobedience...). At the workshops, the leaders may encounter parents belonging to different cultural traditions. In such cases, the leaders must pay special attention to the application of their personal norms, values and beliefs. Instead of prejudices and criticisms, the situation calls for a dialogue about differences. It is important to distinguish between traditional beliefs and customs that are harmful (e.g. rubbing brandy on the skin of a sick child, exposing boys to great stress to toughen them up) from those that are harmless (e.g. tying red thread around a baby's arm).

Apart from the aforementioned differences between parents, other **specific traits between workshop participants** must be mentioned. The previous workshops were attended by: one stepfather, one grandmother as a foster parent, one foster mother. Although they came as parents, their position in the group can still be special. The leaders must bear in mind that it may be necessary to "protect" them in certain discussions because they did not give birth to, breastfeed or name the child, etc. Naturally, everything depends on the composition of the group and the leader's sensibility.

2.3 Inviting parents to become involved in the Programme

The parents of children of the earliest age want and need support, help, advice and cooperation in raising their child. Although their ideas and expectations are very different,

kindergarten teachers know that every parent hopes to hear something good about their child, which will validate them as a good parent.

In crèches and kindergartens, parents can receive support and help in various, usual ways: through messages they receive from the teachers orally at the entrance, messages they can read on the bulletin board in the *family corner*, educational leaflets and magazines they have at their disposal, at parent-teacher meetings, at which they can discuss the kindergarten group programme. Social events for the parents and teachers at workshops and receptions celebrating holidays are no longer new. Parents attend parent-teacher meetings and workshops on expert topics if they want to know more about that topic or if it touches upon an issue present in their own family.

However, few kindergartens or other institutions and associations in Croatia implement more comprehensive programmes, such as *schools for parents*, therefore the offer of a more comprehensive programme consisting of 11 workshops with parents – such as "Growing up Together" – is something completely new for the majority of the participants.

The parents may have different expectations from the Programme, and ask themselves different questions:

- × *How can I be a consistent parent? What would be an appropriate punishment for a three-year-old child? Will I spoil my child? How can I make up for spending so little time with my child? How to put my child to bed without him/her leaving the room seven times? How to make my child eat their lunch? Why does my child refuse to listen to me? How to deal with the grandparents?*
- × *What do people do there, will somebody lecture me, or will I be able to pose questions and get answers without somebody evaluating what kind of a parent I am – too strict, too lenient, old-fashioned?*
- × *One time I asked the kindergarten psychologist something, and she gave me a good answer. Does she have any more good answers for me?*
- × *What is group work like, will I be comfortable, uncomfortable, will I like those people, will they like me?*
- × *Do I really want to tell strangers everything about myself, my child and family? They don't need to know everything...*
- × *Will they think I'm dumb and ignorant? Everybody reads books about parenting, but not me...*
- × *Eleven times is too much, that's almost three months, every Tuesday? That time is better spent with my child – we spend too little time together as it is.*

- × *I'd like to have a look, but I'm embarrassed, afraid. What will my partner, parents and neighbours say? Will they think I'm a bad parent because I've been seeking help?*
- × *Is this really for me? How will this group benefit me?*

All this is a challenge for providing information, "advertising" and attracting parents to become interested and apply for participation in the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents. It is important to alleviate the fears and reduce the resistance felt by undecided parents.

The important message for the parents is the following: we know the importance of early development, we understand the importance and difficulties of parenting, and we offer participation in the Workshop Programme as a possibility to exercise **the right of every parent to receive support and help**.

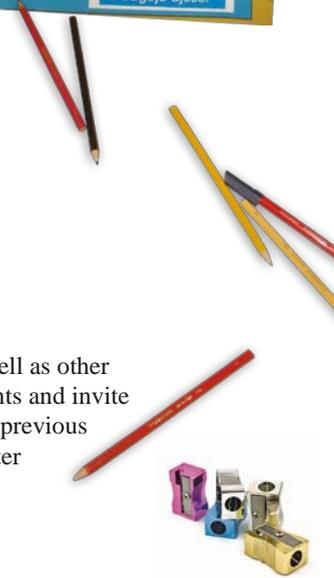
Experience has shown that the usual forms of communication with parents, as well as other ways to address parents outside of kindergarten, may be used to inform the parents and invite them to the workshops held at kindergarten. The parents who participated in the previous workshops themselves consider that more workshops should be planned and better "advertised".

Here are some usual and tested ways of informing and inviting parents in kindergartens.

- × Notices in the form of attractive posters on bulletin boards in crèches and kindergartens (in the changing rooms, hallways, at the entrance, on the outer door, etc.) There should be questions on the posters to attract parents and possibly reduce their doubts.

Some examples from the previous groups:

- *We invite you to, along with the leaders and other parents, discuss your relationship with your child – e.g. how you show your love, how you support*



your child's innate curiosity, how you teach your child what is allowed and what is not, etc...

- *Do you sometimes ask yourselves some of the following questions?*
 - *Are my actions right, am I too strict or too lenient, consistent or inconsistent?*
 - *What does my child really need? Am I doing enough?*
 - *How to do what is best for the child, without neglecting myself?*
- *Parents know their child and themselves the best, but the experience of experts and other parents are often welcome. Nobody knows the answers to all questions!*
- *What do they do at the "Growing up Together" workshops?*
 - *The lectures and exercises provide the knowledge and skills useful to parents in their relationship with their child.*
 - *The discussions are useful for exchanging experiences on resolving issues.*
 - *Meeting together makes the parents surer, more confident and happier.*

- × Larger posters with pictures and testimonials of the parents from the previous groups, which can attract parents with different worries and interests. The pictures and testimonials of the fathers can also be included (with their consent), if any. It should be shown that they are as welcome and invited as mothers.
- × Leaflets with more information about the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents, available to all parents in a sufficient number, distributed outside of the kindergarten as well – in libraries, clinics, etc.
- × At parent-teacher meetings (group meetings, with a large number of participants), the parents can be informed about the Programme and the experience of the previous participants. This should be presented by the workshop leaders, who will present the reasons, aims, materials and working methods of the workshops, since they can speak from their own experience. The support for the Workshop Programme can also be obtained from the parents who participated in the previous groups.
- × In their daily contact with parents, teachers can additionally and individually provide information and try to kindle interest in parents who have already expressed their need for parental support or for the solution to the problems they encounter in raising their children. Experience has shown that the turnout largely depends on the teachers and their efforts to inform parents and motivate them for participating in the workshops. Investing additional effort is necessary to individually motivate and involve parents who are, for example, poorly educated, unaccustomed to reading written notices or asking about their child's stay at kindergarten, always in a hurry, etc.



- × A good way to do this is to conduct a survey on the interest for participation in the Workshop Programme, on the topics and issues of interest to the parents, what they need to get involved, etc. In that way we inform the parents, and at the same time obtain guidelines for a better popularisation, organisation and management of the group.
 - *For example, in the surveys conducted in the previous groups, a number of parents stated they had other duties at the time of the workshop sessions. The dates and times of the workshop sessions may be adapted to the majority of the interested parents. There were proposals for the workshop sessions to be held every other week, which suited those parents who worked in shifts.*
 - *A large number of parents stated they could not leave their child to participate in the workshop. This is a problem, since the workshops are intended only for adults, and parents should ensure somebody looks after their child while they are attending. Additional hours in the kindergarten are not a recommended option because the child would then stay at kindergarten for 12 or more hours!*
 - *A smaller number of parents stated they had no time for the workshops. To some parents it seems that the programme is too long (two and a half months), but the experience and parental evaluations at the end of the programme undoubtedly show that participants consider that the workshops should be longer and involve more parents, preferably fathers as well.*
- × Many kindergartens have their own web sites, which could be used to a great effect to issue invitations, provide information, describe the Programme in greater detail, and win over parents to participate in the workshops. In that way, the information about the Programme also becomes available to parents whose children are not enrolled in the kindergarten, while the kindergarten provides its contribution to the support to parenting in the communities by issuing invitations to the workshops.

It would be desirable, especially if it is judged that the number of interested parents whose children are at that crèche and kindergarten is not sufficient, **to spread the information outside the kindergarten**. There have been examples of informing and issuing invitations by means of the local press and radio. The notices and invitations to the workshops may be displayed at the surrounding institutions visited by parents of small children (clinic, pharmacy, library, school, grocery store, post office, bank, etc.). Informing the media of the workshops, interviews with the leaders and participants of previous workshops also contribute to the popularisation of the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents.

The programme of workshops with parents organised by the **family centre** is intended for all parents in the community, including those whose children do not attend a crèche or kindergarten.

Information can be disseminated by means of all public media (e.g. the press, television, radio, Internet, leaflets...). Parents who are beneficiaries of various services of the social care centre may also become involved in the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents.

2.4 Who is implementing the Programme?

The workshops are led by a team of two or three educated leaders. The Programme is highly structured, which enables the workshops to be implemented by different types of experts (psychologists, pedagogues, defectologists, social pedagogues, social workers, teachers), with different experience in this type of work with parents.

When the Programme is implemented in a kindergarten, at least one of the leaders is an expert associate, preferably a psychologist. Other two team members may be an expert associate and a teacher, or, if there are no two expert associates in the kindergarten, two teachers, preferably both mentor teachers. In the family centre, the Programme is implemented by two leaders, one of whom is preferably a psychologist.

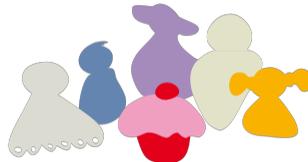
The leaders are experts in the field of early childhood development, are well acquainted with the characteristics of the development, needs and behaviour of children, and have excellent communication skills. It is also important that they have the knowledge and experience in managing workshops, i.e. group work with adults (leadership skills, acceptance without judging, ability to understand the parents' point of view, etc.). In addition, they should lean toward the values of parenting in the best interests of the child, and support the principles of partnership with the parents. Naturally, a key prerequisite is that they are specially **trained for leading the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents**, which means they have mastered the theoretical basis of the Programme, and that they have the support of their colleagues within the *“Growing up Together” leader network*. More details about that can be found in Chapter 4.

The leaders have a key role and responsibility in the implementation of the workshops. Their knowledge and personalities strongly affect the group and its members, therefore they constantly need to re-evaluate their own work, study continuously and work on themselves. The leaders are the ones who direct the activities of the group in accordance with the aims of the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents.

In the “Growing up Together” workshops, the leaders are equal, so that the roles in the leader team change depending on the needs of different activities. What are the

advantages of team leadership? With their mutual communication and cooperation, trust and support, respect for differences, showing and resolving misunderstandings without jeopardising self-esteem, the leaders are role models for other group members. More leaders will become involved in the work of subgroups more easily. Leading a group together is less stressful because no leader is active all the time at full capacity. The roles are divided according to knowledge and affinities. Each leader knows her colleague will "jump" to her aid if necessary, which creates an additional sense of security (like having a "spare part"). Furthermore, if one of the leaders is absent, others may still hold the session and ensure continuity. The leaders provide mutual support and source of feedback, creating enjoyment in the work. The shared leadership enables the entire process to be better designed. Less experienced leaders overcome their fears of their own incompetence and lack of skills in the team. Giving and listening to feedback in a constructive atmosphere, i.e. without judging the personalities of the leaders, contributes to a better management of the workshops. It is also an opportunity for the leaders to learn more about themselves, their behaviour in the group, which contributes to the leaders' professional and personal growth. The partnership in the leader team must be based on mutual confidence and respect, which is in line with the message sent by the "Growing up Together" programme to the parents, regarding the respect of the needs of everyone involved in a person's childhood.

When **assembling a team of leaders**, all those things have to be taken into account. The experts entering the team should express their expectations, worries, needs, abilities and readiness for cooperation and team work. That is extremely important because there are leaders with different skills in a team, often even different experience in group work with adults. The leaders should also be ready to accept that in a given group of parents there will always be individuals who will prefer one leader, while others will prefer another; or they might praise only one, or address the one more frequently, which is to be expected in group dynamics. All those and similar questions should be clarified by the leaders in advance, and they should be ready to discuss everything after each workshop, so that leading the workshops does not become a source of frustration for individuals or the whole team, which, naturally, jeopardises the efficiency of the workshops and the whole Programme.



2.5 Some characteristics of group work with parents

Since the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents rests on the principles of group work, particularly groups for personal development and educational groups, it is important that the leaders become acquainted with the basic characteristics of group work, such as group work development phases, preferable approach to the participants, communication methods, etc.

Ajduković (1997) wrote the following on the group work development phases: "Each group goes through certain predictable phases of development that are mutually dependent. Those are the **planning phase, initial, middle and final phase**. The planning phase is characterised by the initial efforts of the leader to form a group. (...) The group starts meeting in the initial phase. Group feelings start to develop. This phase is characterised by divided feelings of the participants. They show readiness to become involved, but also the need to keep a distance and their own individuality. The middle phase is a phase of tension, but also of establishing group efficiency. (...) At the same time, the interpersonal relationships of the participants deepen, and group cohesion is formed. (...) In the final phase, an evaluation of the outcomes of group work is conducted. The participants face a series of emotional reactions related to the conclusion of group work – from the feelings of loss and sadness, feelings of contentment with what has been achieved, to feelings of relief. Knowing and recognising the development phases is important for practical group action and understanding of group processes." (p. 92).

The same happens with groups of parents who participate in the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents. We had that in mind when we designed the Programme, in order to enable to the leaders and parents a safe, secure and gradual getting to know each other and engaging an increasingly deeper conversations. Our experience to date has shown that group feelings emerge gradually, along with an increasing readiness for cooperation, expressing different opinions and problem solving. As the Programme approaches its conclusion, emotional reactions related to the conclusion of the workshops, as well as the need to organise some form of a continuation, are increasingly more present. The parents should then be told that a continuation in another form has been envisaged, i.e. in the “*Growing up Together*” Parents' Club. For more information, see Chapter 4.

What the leaders said...

...about team work:

- × Team work is an extremely good working method, especially the division of roles, mutual complementation if one leader has not been clear enough. Preparations are extremely important because each leader is more confident in a specific situation – expected or unexpected...Working in a team is really nice!
- × We're more confident now than in the first cycle, we complement each other more.
- × We spoke in turns and complemented each other really well. We're very pleased!!!
- × We're a true team, we divide the tasks among each other, and we're responsible.



Leading the workshops as a specific form of educational and supportive work with parents requires from the leaders sufficient experience, knowledge, skills and **readiness for a dialogue of equals**. In our Programme, we do not impose our opinion, we do not lecture, we do not

What the leaders said...

...about the development of the group:

- × **After the first workshop:** We felt like under the magnifying glass, but we soon applied open communication by sending I-messages and expressing our own feelings, and also explaining our own motivation and sources of competence for the group leadership challenge.
- × **After the third workshop:** These parents are less open and spontaneous in a large group compared to our first group of parents. We feel as if they are afraid of us judging their answers, examples and experiences. This is something we never feel in pairs or small groups. We are trying to create a relaxing atmosphere, we use different "openers", and hope for more spontaneity.
- × **After the fourth workshop:** It appears that the parents feel very relaxed; they express their opinions readily, are willing to advise each other, and also respect each other.
- × **After the fourth workshop:** It seems that, during this session, both the group members and leaders jumped to the next group development phase (i.e. from the initial to the middle phase). Everybody talks about their opinions and experiences with more readiness and confidence...
- × **After the fifth workshop:** Besides, the parents already know each other well, we have a feeling they will want to go to an "excursion" with us at the end of their "schooling".
- × **After the tenth workshop:** Everybody (both the leaders and the parents) feel the "classical symptoms" usually present when group work is reaching its conclusion; the parents talk mostly about "our Wednesdays" they will miss, they praise all the support, understanding, being together, and express regret for the impending conclusion...



try to lead them "on the right path"; neither is the workshops an arena where people are vying for dominance. (Pleša, 1997) Our role is to encourage and facilitate an exchange between the parents, and to introduce new information from our professional and personal experience to the discussion. There are no ideal parents, only actual persons (Gabelica-Šupljika, 1997). We need to take the parents and what they say seriously. Every parent wants to "be seen" – just like every child.





If we want to help parents nurture a quality dialogue with their children, our interaction with them must provide a good example. Thus, our method of working with the parents in the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents comes from the overall approach to the understanding of the relationship between the parent and the child on the basis of equal dignity; the same approach is used in the improvement of the partnership between the leaders and the parents. A good leader of those workshops is the one who can establish a relationship of equal dignity with the parents and other leaders.

In a similar vein, it must be noted that the parents, apart from having different needs and expectations, also have their own **preferred ways of acquiring new knowledge**. Therefore it is necessary to respect the way in which individuals accept and apply new information offered and discussed at the workshops. Some parents need more help from the leaders, more concrete examples and guidelines in becoming aware of new insights, and more support to verify the new knowledge and try new skills in their relationship with their child. We strive to enable each parent to feel active, valuable and competent at the workshops.

Due to the aims of the Programme and the specific character of working with the parents of small children, we wish to particularly underline those **methods of communication** with parents that encourage compassion for another person, particularly for the child's situation and needs (thoughts and feelings). Just as we send a message to the parents that it is necessary to understand the child and follow the child's initiative, so the method of communication with the parents must send the message of compassion.

One of such ways is that the leader talks about her experience with her own child, about the child's good and bad feelings, about her own good or bad feelings, and about her relationship with her child. By talking about herself, the leader gains more credibility, and is seen as a person with her own issues, insights and dilemmas, just like other parents in the group. If the leader lacks her own experience in relation to the topic discussed, she can state some good examples from the literature or other people's experience. And then, an answer can be imbued with personality, and we can, for example, say: "My friend has dealt with a similar problem in this way...", or: "One father from the previous group told us..." Such personalisation makes both the problem and the potential solution livelier, more convincing and more acceptable.

Another way to stimulate compassion for the child is for the leader to describe vividly and lively how a child experiences a certain situation, how the child feels when they are alone in the crèche for the first time (where there are no parents, where there are a lot of children, where the people, toys and food are unfamiliar...). Such a situation can also be compared to a situation felt by us adults. For example, remember how you felt when you came to work

on your first day, when you did not know what to do, when you did not know anyone, and the space felt enormous, with many unfamiliar faces... What do you think; does the child feel something similar?

We can assume that, the more identification with and compassion for the child we inspire in the parents, the more chances the child will have for the parent to see and accept them as a person with their own experience of themselves and their surroundings.

2.6 Workshop leading skills

From everything stated above, it is clear that leadership skills are very important. The acquired group leading skills will meet the described requirements for a good interaction between all group members. Along with the following general skills of group work with parents, we describe some specific characteristics important for the "Growing up Together" workshops.

Structuring – the workshops are structured, and the instructions on the work method should be followed. However, sometimes the instructions can be derogated from (e.g. individual work, in pairs, in smaller groups, half the group, the entire group) due to the time available, or a large/small number of parents present. Sometimes discussions must be interrupted so that they do not take up too much time unnecessarily (e.g.: *Thank you for your observation. We will talk about it in greater detail later when that topic comes up.*) By structuring work, the leader ensures that the contributions and insights are in line with the topic, aims of the meeting and the general aim of the Programme to the greatest extent possible.

Generalisation – it is good for the parents to see they are not the only ones with needs/difficulties (e.g.: *Is anyone else in a similar situation? or: It appears that many of you have had a similar experience.*). When they learn that a certain problem is more frequent in parent-child relationships, what follows is a feeling of "normalcy", bringing them relief (i.e. normalisation).

Connection – by connecting what has been said, the leader shows to the parents that she is listening to them, and that she remembers what they have said. It is recommended to quote their opinions as much as possible, and connect new things with older knowledge that has been discussed earlier. By connecting what has been said, the leader expands their experience and makes them aware of it.

Redirection – a comment or question posed to the leader can be redirected to another participant, which stimulates group opinions, reinforces the competence of the parents, and obtains multiple answers to the question (e.g.: *What do others think? Would someone like to answer this question?*). If the leader can add another insight, information or



her own experience to the discussion, she can provide it at the end. Naturally, if someone asks for expert knowledge, the leaders must answer directly, without redirection.

Summarisation – when we wish to conclude, when enough has been said, when we wish to go to the next topic, we conclude the topic by summarising what has been said in one to two sentences, in the form of a conclusion (e.g.: *So, that means...*, or *Let's summarise what we've said so far...*). By summarising discussions that no longer bring anything new, we conclude them.

Giving tasks and responsibilities – for *revision* and group cohesion, it is recommended to give *homework* that the participants must do until next time or some time in the future, and report on it. In this way we stimulate a transfer of experience gained at the workshops into the family context, which is, after all, the aim of this Programme.

Encouraging feedback – the leader asks from the parents to react to what has been said, to express their opinions or experiences. This also helps shy participants to open up and say what they think. Providing and listening to feedback requires trust among the group participants. The leaders serve as the role models for providing and listening to feedback because in this way they encourage the group members to make an effort and contribute to the discussion by describing their attitudes, etc.

Encouraging direct interaction – using their example, the leaders encourage everybody to talk in their name and to address the group members directly. This increases the feeling of respect, avoids judging and "lecturing", and reinforces group dynamics because the communication is not routed exclusively through the leaders.

Encouraging – the leader's active listening and prompting will encourage the parents, particularly those who are afraid of saying something wrong, to ask questions and talk without fear of being judged (e.g.: *I see you're undecided. Please ask whatever you want, the group is large and somebody will surely know the answer to your question.*) Encouragement means noticing the growth, strength and trust in the personal growth and change.

Sometimes the behaviour of certain members requires **additional effort and adaptability from the leaders**. Some members may talk too much or too little, some know everything and interrupt others, change the topic, etc. (Parent Group Sessions). The leader herself may use such situations to verify how much she has mastered leadership skills, because she cannot expect that somebody else from the group will intervene. Naturally, her colleague can always help – that is why she is there. Often, one good way is to remind the "infringing" member of the rules of the group they have "violated".

Example: "Tell us what YOU think about that, and other parents will say what they think. We have agreed that everybody will speak for themselves."

A group member who talks too much – if a group member often wants to say something, talks for a long time, and takes away the opportunity and time from other members, the leader may interrupt them and redirect the question to the entire group, for example: "Does anybody else have something to add?", or: "Has somebody experienced anything similar?", or the leader can address a quiet member before the loud member has the opportunity to say something. Where necessary, the leader may invoke the rule of time.

A group member who is mostly silent – if a group member is shy or uncomfortable, they can be asked directly at a certain point whether they can contribute to the discussion, e.g.: "I see you're very quiet. Would you like to say what you think?" Quiet members sometimes find it easier to open up in smaller groups or in pairs. Still, some people are uncomfortable with talking in a group, and this must be respected.

A member who attacks others verbally – the leader must interrupt verbal attacks to protect other participants. She can, for example, say: "I can see you are disturbed by this...", or: "I'm worried that what you are saying may make somebody feel attacked or blamed...", or: "You can say what you think about it, or how you feel, and other will say the same for themselves if they wish. I remind you of our rule – we accept that we are different and that we respect each other."

A member who knows everything – some members may want to show they know a lot, so they often criticise, beg to differ, know better than other participants or the leaders. The leader can, for example, respond: "I see XX feels differently about it. What do others think about this issue?" As a rule, a discussion must be maintained without giving rise to a conflict. That can be a challenging situation for the leader because she has to remain calm and remind herself that many questions related to parenting lack the correct/true answer valid for all.

A member who interrupts others – this is usually a member who cannot wait for their turn. The simplest solution is to say, for example: "Please wait, I see XY has not said everything she wanted. You are next." Afterwards, the leader must ensure that that member can really speak next. The member may be reminded of the listening rule.

A member who changes the topic – if a member starts a topic that will be discussed in a later session, they can be interrupted using these words, for example: "We haven't said everything about this topic yet. What you're discussing will be our topic for the next time." Or, the leader may recommend saving that question for the 9th workshop

– the "Questions from the Hat" activity, and if they still want a more concrete answer, there can perhaps be individual consultations.

A member who reveals serious personal issues – if a member reveals their serious personal issue which is outside the scope of the Programme and/or the leader's competences (e.g. marital problems, family violence, financial difficulties), the leader can, for example, say: "This is a problem we are unable resolve in this group. Please stay after the workshop, and we will see how we can help you." The leader must certainly talk to that member after the session, and recommend an expert if she cannot help.

What the leaders said...

...about leading the workshops:

- × After the second workshop: We tried structuring, connection, redirection. We must practice summarising and interrupting when a topic of another workshop is broached.
- × The leaders reported that sometimes they were not firm enough in structuring and directing the discussion...: We rehearse the lines, but we must get better at their delivery:
 - *We will talk about that at one of our next workshops.*
 - *We will stay on this topic this time, not talk about the generational model of education transfer, although that too is a very interesting topic. We will come back to it at our 10th workshop.*
- × We've tried structuring, generalisation, connection, summarising, and we're good at them. Maybe we should work on promoting feedback and encouragement.
- × We have to work more on redirecting the discussion to our topic, because the discussion was a little off-topic this time. The parents are very talkative, and we feel they can't wait to share everything with us, and we like listening to them.
- × We somehow manage to lead and redirect activities. The parents often veer from the topic. We should judge when and how much we can let them talk about their own experience, and when and how to return the discussion back to our topic of the day.
- × We don't feel particularly successful because one mother has said on several occasions, quite angrily, that she expected answers to her issues, solutions to the situations she cannot resolve in relation to her children. We tried reverting to the pillars of parenting, but she still demands concrete answers, and several parents have agreed with her expectations. We felt disgruntlement, which discouraged us a bit.
- × Since the parents continuously express their satisfaction with the workshops, we have stopped being too critical; we take everything in the stride and resolve issues spontaneously. In fact, it appears to us that the parents have understood the essence of the workshops. They no longer seek concrete advice, they accept parenting as an individual experience, and they have come to see the workshops as an opportunity to connect this experience with the research and knowledge on the possibilities, sources of strength and basic rules.

2.7
What do the workshops look like?

The "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents is divided into 11 broad topics, 11 workshops. Their titles are the following:

1. 21st Century Parents
2. The Four Pillars of Parenting
3. Parental Aims and the Child's Psychological Needs
4. All Our Children and How We Love Them
5. Listening – an Important Parenting Skill
6. How a Child Learns about the World around Them
7. Boundaries: why and how?
8. We Create and Choose Solutions
9. Parental Responsibilities and Other Issues
10. Being a Parent: Influences and Choices
11. The End and a New Beginning

Each topic is a separate unit, but also an integral part of the whole Programme, which would be incomplete without every one of the eleven workshops. No workshop can be held separately because they build on each other conceptually – like the links in a chain.

Structure of the workshops

Each workshop begins with a "warm-up" exercise or activity, which introduces the topic and supports experiential learning, creating a comfortable atmosphere in the process. Although they are often light and fun, those exercises are not games for fun.



What the parents said...

...in the Programme evaluation:

- × All of the topics were important and useful for meeting parental needs – about the parent and parenting, about the child, about communication skills helpful in developing good relationships.
- × We'll try to apply in our lives everything we learned here, especially that which contributes to a better understanding and relationship with the child.

The middle part usually contains:

- × short lectures given by experts (usually with a PPT presentation or written handouts for the parents)
- × a film screening (UNICEF's DVD "First Three Are the Most Important")
- × activities and exercises (with a worksheet or handout) – reflection, discussion
- × an exchange of experiences as a discussion with the whole group or smaller groups (in pairs, *in threes, in fours...*)
- × sometimes there is a relaxing activity in-between more demanding ones.

At the end of the session, the parents are often assigned homework, which serves to check the newly acquired insights and knowledge in their own families, and for them to try out or practice the new skills. As a relaxation before the conclusion of the session, there are light games conceptually tied to the topic of the session, which stimulate bonding between the participants, and which can serve as an inspiration for play with children at home.

What the parents said...

...about the workshops:

- × I like the concept of the workshop very much, that is, alternating between games, and "reliving" my own experiences.
- × In the lecture, I found a validation of my good relationship with my child.
- × It's great that you cite your sources in your handouts.
- × The workshops are interesting and instructive. It's great that we were all actively involved, that we cooperated and complemented each other.
- × I like how everybody has the right to say what they think and want, particularly how we express our feelings, needs and habits.
- × A good feeling of learning with fun and talking.
- × The games were great, I had fun. Working in pairs is nice.
- × The games were excellent, useful for playing with children.
- × **A leader:** We're particularly pleased with the positive reactions of the parents, by the group's openness to discussion. I think we can all benefit from such group work.



In such a programme where the aim is to support and empower, and not to lecture, active participation of the parents is achieved gradually. In accordance with the expected development of the group, at the initial workshops the participants talk more about the material, exchange ideas and opinions in the spirit of partnership. Then, activities requiring more self-revealing are gradually introduced— naturally, to the extent to which the parents are ready and willing to do so. The aim is to highlight the existing strengths of the parents in a pleasant environment with ample room for revealing one's personality and personal opinions, without imposing ready-made solutions from the outside. Such an approach requires open communication between the leaders and the parents.

As a rule, the entire eleven-workshop programme should be implemented in eleven weeks, **in two hours once a week**. The total duration of the Programme is 22 hours. It is important to inform the parents of the Programme's duration and the need for regular attendance at all of the workshops when issuing invitations to them, so that the workshops can achieve their full purpose and impact. The parents are expected to attend regularly.

Naturally, the leaders will agree upon the workshops schedule with each group. Sometimes holidays will interrupt a series of eleven weeks, or there may be a need to hold the sessions every other week (e.g. if the parents work in shifts). However, two hours once a week are recommended because it ensures a continuity and strong focus of the group.

2.8 Preparations for the implementation of the Programme

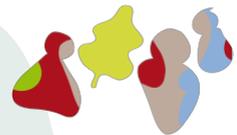
Preparing the teaching aids and space

After receiving the applications from the parents, the preparations for the workshops can begin. Apart from the professional preparation of the leaders, it is necessary to

What the leaders and parents said...

...about the duration of the Programme:

- × At first both us and the parents thought eleven workshops were too many, but now the parents are asking whether there will be more and whether they can join the spring group.
- × I'm sad that there are no more sessions. All those sessions were like a good psychotherapy for me. I feel insecure and lonely because the Programme is ending. We all bonded and confided in each other. It's a really good thing. I'd like to see more such meetings. Thank you!
- × After the two-hour session, we prolonged our meeting in a relaxed atmosphere for 30 more minutes. The mothers said the time flew by too quickly.





begin with practical preparations before the beginning of the whole Programme, and directly before each workshop.

What is required?

- × a computer, projector, speakers, projection screen (or a white wall), extension cord
- × posters or a flip chart
- × felt-tip pens, pens, coloured pencils, crayons
- × paper, post-its
- × badges and small pieces of paper for them
- × UNICEF's "Growing up Together" multimedia disc
- × folders for the parents
- × handouts for the parents
- × a ball of wool (for the third workshop)
- × a hat (for the 9th workshop).

Useful, but not required:

- × a CD-player, a CD with instrumental music
- × a serving cart with glasses, juice, coffee, snacks, etc.

All of the required materials and aids should be gathered, and kept in a safe place for the duration of the entire Programme. Handouts for the parents should be prepared before each workshop. Charging one leader with that task has proven useful.

For each workshop, the **room** should be prepared ahead of time. It can be a room belonging to a kindergarten group, a meeting hall, teachers' room... The room must be neat, rich with a kindergarten atmosphere, convey an image of good educational organisation (Pleša, 1997). The arrangement of the room conveys the message to the parents that they are welcome. The chairs should be arranged in a circle, so that everybody can see everybody else and communicate face to face. The leaders sit in the circle with the parents as equals. The chairs should be large, at least for older children if they are designed for children. In the middle there should be tables (e.g. four connected children's tables) with sheets of paper, pencils, crayons and everything else necessary for the workshop. Each time the leaders should bring the handouts from the previous workshops for those parents who were absent. The posters or the flip chart, as well as the projection screen, should be visible to all participants,

and the computer and projector checked if they work. A coat rack should also be provided. When the parents are still gathering and during some exercises, instrumental music can play in the background to create a pleasant atmosphere. With regard to the duration of the workshops (two hours), it is recommended to offer juice, coffee and snacks to the parents (e.g. as a buffet on a serving cart) if appropriate. Experience has shown that even the parents bring their own sweet or salty contributions.



Preparations of the leader team prior to the workshops

The leaders must prepare for the workshops carefully, even if it is not their first time. The entire "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents, as well as each individual workshop, are clearly structured to present individual topics and the entire Programme in the most efficient way possible. Therefore, the leaders must read everything each time (the workshop, PPT presentations, handouts for the parents). The scripts for some workshops are quite long, but that doesn't mean that everything in them must be said. They serve as sources of information for the leaders, so that they can master the topic and answer possible questions. The same applies to the handouts for the parents. Not all handouts must be explained; they are intended for the parents to read them at home, to warn and motivate them. In some scripts there are notes underlining the points which are important, or which can be shortened if necessary.

Within the leader team, assignments are given with regard to the existing knowledge and affinities of individual leaders. A good practice is for all leaders to speak for equal amounts of time in each session. Alternating between the leaders makes the workshops more lively, and the leaders more secure and spontaneous.

2.9 Implementing the workshops

To establish a pleasant workshop process and security in the group, and to "protect" the participants, it is important to agree upon the **rules of group work** at the first meeting with the parents. Each group, with the help of the leaders, makes the rules that are valid for the duration of the workshops. The rules are agreed upon so that everybody can accept them, and everybody can invoke a certain rule if they feel that somebody violates it and thus disrupts the group work.

What the leaders said...

...after the first workshop:

- × **Leaders of a team, who had never led a workshop before, wrote the following in their report following the first workshop:** The workshops material is excellent, with detailed instructions that make the preparation and the workshops easier for us. The initial "anxiety" disappeared after the training! We only needed to prepare well using the materials: to study, rehearse...
- × **Leaders who had already completed a workshop cycle wrote the following after the first workshop:**
We now feel very comfortable in our roles...

The experience so far has shown that the following rules may be of use:

- × *The voluntary nature of active participation*, i.e. a participant speaks about themselves and reveals as much as they are ready, without pressure to reveal more than they wish. It should be stressed that this is an educational group and a support group, not a psychotherapy group.
- × *Accepting the differences*, mutual respect and consideration towards others, without judging.
- × *Listening to others* without interruptions.
- × *Minding the total time* and allotting it to others, i.e. being aware that others too need the time to say what they want.
- × *Everybody speaks for themselves*.
- × *Being discreet*, i.e. not revealing what others have said outside the group.

How the participants address each other is also subject to agreement. We recommend that the first names be used, instead of *teacher* or *mother*. Everybody should agree to turn off their mobile phones. Some groups want a break. Sessions must begin and end on time (especially because of the babysitting some participants may have arranged). Except for the first session, the beginning must not be delayed while waiting for members who are late, because that only encourages them to always be late. Also, no pictures of the groups may be taken without the parents' consent, with an explanation of where and what for the photographs will be used. If they decline, they may not be photographed; if they give their consent, they must be asked at the end of the Programme whether they consent to their photographs being used. Naturally, the leaders should respect all rules and arrangements as role models.

By presenting their method of work, the leaders should also stress that this is primarily an educational group, and that the parents' needs for additional support may be met in individual consultations with the leaders or an appropriate expert pointed out to the parents by the leaders.

At the beginning of each workshop, the topic of the day is announced to the parents. The parents do not need to hear the aims of the workshops; they are intended for the leaders to structure the workshop more easily and to focus on that which the parents must learn and understand, the skills they must improve.

Each workshop is implemented according to the schedule of activities, which is a carefully designed set of exercises, presentations and exchanges of experiences in accordance with the topic and aims of the workshop. The time provided for individual activities is approximate, for general planning. Still, experience has shown that it is recommended for the leaders to adhere to it, otherwise they may not be enough time for some planned activities to be implemented.

A leader...

- × Balance is important – as is keeping the schedule: to give enough time to the parents for a discussion (which is sometimes insufficiently constructive).

The leaders must transition from one part of the workshop to another so that there is a logical flow between the activities. Each activity should be introduced by connecting it to the previous activity; at the end, the activity should be summarised, and the next activity announced. For example: "In this exercise you saw what it's like when you don't know the rules in a given situation, and you compared it with the situations when the child doesn't know the rules. Now we'll discuss making family rules and what purpose they serve." The workshops themselves suggest ideas for connecting or summarising activities. The speech register must be adapted to the parents present, so that the leaders are sure everybody can understand them regardless of their education level. In a mixed group, it is recommended to use Croatian or broader descriptive terms along with expert or foreign terms. For example, empathy or compassion, cognitive or mental growth, adaptation or adjustment, feedback or input, regulation or control, etc.

Instead of hurrying, everything should be explained well. For example, the expectations from the parents in individual exercises must be clearly stated and repeated so that everybody can understand the instructions; otherwise the activities and exercises lose their purpose.

In an exchange of experiences, the leader encourages a discussion that enables the parents to better see and understand their own experience. The leader is the one who connects the experience of the group. If necessary, she can talk about her own experience, but relies primarily on the parents' experiences. Only then does she offer her insight and experience hitherto perhaps unknown to the parents. By pointing to the different experiences of the parents, the leader expands their horizons regarding the topic of the day. For example, she asks them what they saw other parents do, and what they think about different approaches.

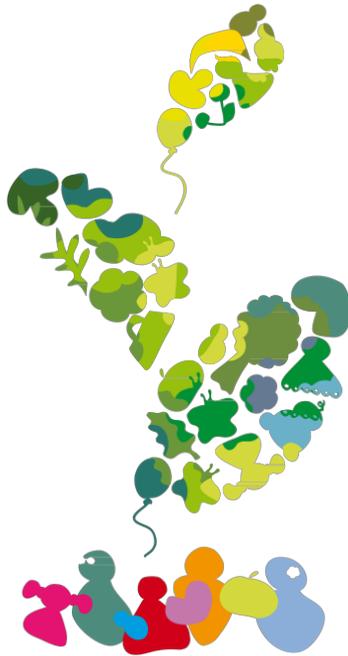
When choosing volunteers, which some exercises required, care must be taken that the person is capable for the task assigned to them, and to protect the participants from discomfort. If there is a problem with choosing volunteers for exercises, the leaders can be the volunteers. Although the exercises are designed not to cause discomfort, somebody may still decline to participate, which must, of course, be respected, like in massage exercises, for example, which are always back massages so that they do not make anyone uncomfortable.

2.10 After the workshop

Mutual feedback of the leader team should follow immediately after the session. If this is not possible, then the next day, with at least a short exchange of impressions after the workshop, a sort of emotional release, for which the leaders should plan to stay for at least 15 minutes after the workshop. The impressions from the workshop and mutual feedback must not be skipped, because only in this manner can the aims of each individual workshop be discussed, the aims of the entire Programme monitored, and further modifications made by the group leaders in the next workshop agreed upon. In such a way, the feeling of unity in a team is nurtured. It is also an opportunity to validate good leadership skills, and to overcome difficulties and improve the work of the entire team. It is important for the team members to communicate openly.

The experience of one team:

Pleased and tired. We're happy to conclude the known weekly cycle: workshop on Monday, report on Tuesday, first meeting on Thursday, second meeting on Friday...



3.1

Evaluation of outcomes and processes of the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents

In order to respect the principle of the development of the programme to support parents in a partnership with the participants and leaders of the workshops, and in order to obtain evidence of the effectiveness of the Programme in reaching its aims, two cycles of an experimental programme implementation were carried out. Both cycles were systematically and continuously evaluated during their implementation. The first experimental implementation of a programme consisting of 10 workshops was carried out in 13 kindergartens from October to December 2008. Afterwards, based on the evaluation results, the necessary changes were made in the programme, which was then evaluated again in the second experimental implementation in 25 kindergartens, from March to June 2009. The main **results of the internal evaluation of the outcomes and processes of the second experimental implementation of a programme** consisting of eleven workshops will be presented here.

The results are based on qualitative and quantitative data collected from the parents and leaders during and after the programme. Each workshop was subject to a project evaluation, in which *the reports of the leader teams* on their own impressions of each activity and the perceived impressions of the parents were analysed. Furthermore, *feedback written by the parents*, provided by them after each workshop, was also used. For the purpose of the evaluation, the parents who participated in the programme, but also parents not involved in the programme, completed a survey before and after the workshop cycle. Finally, the workshop participants completed another evaluation survey after the workshop cycle.

As was mentioned above, the general aim of the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents is to develop beliefs, values and behaviours in line with positive and non-violent parenting that promotes the rights of the child, and to improve parental competences. Each workshop had its specific aims regarding individual parental attitudes or behaviours, which together enable the general aim of the Programme to be achieved.

The purpose of the Programme outcome evaluations was to test whether and to what extent the planned aims are being realised, or to learn how participating in workshops affects certain parental thoughts, feelings, behaviours and assumptions of how they would behave in given situations.

The key questions of the evaluation were the following:

- (1) Does participating in the Workshop Programme affect the parents' beliefs about the attitude towards a small child, including their opinions on corporal punishment?
- (2) Does participating in the Workshop Programme affect the subjective experience of parenting? Does it increase the feeling of parental competence and contentment in the parental role? Does it reduce parental stress?
- (3) Does participating in the Workshop Programme increase the frequency of desirable parental behaviours (reading a picture book to the child) and the likelihood of positive parental reactions to the child's unpleasant emotions? Does it reduce the frequency of undesirable parental behaviours (shouting and hitting the child) and the likelihood of negative parental reactions to the child's unpleasant emotions?

The draft of the evaluation research was a double draft with an untreated control group (Milas, 2000). Those were initially non-uniformed groups of parents who participated in the Workshop Programme (N = 231) and those who did not respond to an invitation to participate (N = 348).

The data for both groups were collected by means of a "Survey for the Parents" before and after the Workshop Programme. The Survey consists of (parts of) other surveys and questions designed for the purpose of this evaluation research.

"Survey on the Beliefs Regarding the Attitude towards Children of the Earliest Age" (Pećnik, Radočaj and Tokić, in print), abridged form, consists of ten statements reflecting a series of attitudes in connection with parental treatment of a small child, with which the parents could agree or disagree in various degrees. Those were the following: *the attitudes on the detrimental effects of too much warmth* (e.g. too much praise and tenderness can spoil the child), *obedience and subordination of a small child to adults* (e.g. it is important to break the child's defiance and stubbornness in a good time because it's easy to bend a tree when it's young), *unnecessariness of induction* (e.g. it is not necessary to explain to a child aged 1-3 why something is not allowed), *justification of not responding to a child's crying* (e.g. small children often cry without a reason, which is best ignored), and *justification of corporal punishment* (e.g. it is sometimes necessary to strike the child to raise them well).

Parental stress was measured using an adapted "parental stress scale" (Gottlieb, 1997), which includes seven adjectives. The participants answered how often they as parents felt stressed, worried, nervous, angry, unhappy, emotionally exhausted and unconfident in themselves.

The subjective feeling of parental confidence was measured using the "parental competence self-assessment questionnaire" (Gibaud-Wallston and Wandersman, 1978). Two constructs were measured: *the parental (dis)satisfaction with the fulfilment of their parental role* and *the perceived efficacy in the parental role*. The parental assessment of their satisfaction with the perceived effectiveness in the parental role is related to the feeling of parental competence, closeness with the parental role, and problem-solving abilities (Sanders, 2005). The efficacy self-assessment was related to *parenting skills*.

Parental reactions to their children's unpleasant emotions, i.e. the parental assumptions regarding their own behaviour in a given situation were measured using two questions borrowed from the scale of parental reactions to their children's negative emotions (Fabes et al., 1990). The answers offered are typical parental reactions to situations in which the child expresses unpleasant emotions (fear and sadness), like anxiety, punishment, encouraging, focusing on emotions, focusing on problem solving and reducing the gravity of the situation, or the child's experience in connection with the problem.

Finally, the parents reported on their behaviour in the past seven days, namely on *the frequency of reading* a picture book with the child, *shouting* at the misbehaving child, and *hitting* the child's hand and bottom.

The survey was anonymous, with a code that enabled the surveys completed before and after the Workshop Programme to be matched. There were approximately 200 matched valid surveys.

The results of the comparison of the answers of the survey participants (N = 200) to the survey for the parents before and after the programme will be shown separately for parental beliefs, the subjective experience of parenting, and parental actual and hypothetical behaviours.



Parental beliefs regarding their attitude towards the child

Statistically significant differences were identified in the degree of parental agreement with each of the examined beliefs regarding their attitude towards a small child. Thus **parents AFTER the Workshop Programme BELIEVE SIGNIFICANTLY LESS THAN BEFORE THE WORKSHOPS THAT:**

- × it is not necessary to explain to a child aged 1-3 why something is not allowed;
- × if some unpleasant experience (going away, an injection) awaits a child, it is best not to say anything to them in advance, and the unpleasant feelings will pass sooner;
- × small children often cry for no reason, and therefore it is best to ignore them;
- × limits should not be set for small children because it restricts their personal freedom;
- × too much praise and cuddling will spoil the child;
- × it is important to break the child's defiance and stubbornness in a good time because *it is easy to bend a tree when it is young*;
- × sometimes it is justified to hit the child if they jeopardise their life, e.g. when they climb onto the window sill or wander into the road;
- × it is justified to hit the child during their temper tantrum;
- × it is justified to hit the child if they have hit somebody else, to show them how much it hurts;
- × it is sometimes necessary to hit the child to raise them well.

Those results of the comparison of parental beliefs before and after the Workshop Programme indicate that they shift toward a stronger acceptance of the child and parental actions that respect the child's dignity and recognise the child as a person. Since no differences in parental beliefs were identified in the control group in the two measuring instances, it was concluded that the Programme has an impact on the beliefs regarding the desirable attitude of the parents towards children of the earliest age, and that it weakens the attitudes of the unnecessariness of induction, detrimental effects of too much warmth, need for the child to be subordinate to adults, justification of ignoring the child's crying, and justification of corporal punishment.

The subjective experience of parenting

The reduction of parental stress reported by the parents at the end of the Workshop Programme is near the limit of statistical significance. Significant differences were identified at two points – after the Programme, the participants felt stressed and worried less frequently as parents.

The feeling of parental confidence was increased after the end of the Programme. A significant difference was identified between the parental efficacy self-assessment before and after the Workshop Programme. **AFTER the Programme, the parents feel more effective in their parental role.**

However, no significant reduction in dissatisfaction with the fulfilment of one's parental role was identified after the Programme; it only approached the limit of statistical significance.

Since no significant difference in the intensity of parental stress, perceived parental efficacy and dissatisfaction with the fulfilment of one's parental role were identified in the parents who did not participate in the workshops, the differences found in the parents who participated in the workshops were likely a result of the participation in the Programme. The limited scope of the Programme in the reduction of parental stress and dissatisfaction should be noted.

Hypothetical parental behaviours

In the parents who participated in the Programme, several differences were found regarding their hypothetical reactions to their children's unpleasant emotions. After the workshops, the parents are more inclined to, reacting on their child's fear of injections, encourage the child to talk about their fear, and less inclined to belittle their child's fear and telling them not to embarrass them by crying.

In their likely reactions to their child's sadness due to having forgotten their favourite toy upon coming to the kindergarten, the parents are, AFTER the Programme, more inclined to support their child's expression of sadness by crying, and to encourage their child to solve problems. At the same time, they are less likely to preach (*this wouldn't have happened if you'd kept it in mind*) and belittle their child's feelings by saying that they overreact.

With regard to the parents who were not involved in the Programme, no differences in the answers to the two surveys were identified in the first situation. In the second hypothetical situation, it was found that, after the Workshop Programme, the parents were readier than before to become nervous due to their child's crying and forgetfulness, but also to tell their child that it is all right to cry if they are sad.

With regard to the statements above, the changes in the hypothetical reactions to the child's fear and sadness, found in the Programme participants (i.e. the readiness for a greater understanding, recognition and support to the child with a problem) could largely be ascribed to the effects of the Programme. That development of the parents' sensitivity to their children's right to be heard and accepted with all their feelings, as well as their ability to cope with problems and emotions, was one of the specific aims of the Programme.

Along with the questions on the reactions of the parents to their child's expression of problems and unpleasant feelings, additional analyses of the answers to an open-ended question regarding a hypothetical situations were carried out during the first experimental implementation of the workshops (Velemir and Kašuba,2009). The parents were asked to state how they would react and what they would say if their child said to them when leaving the kindergarten that another child had hit them that day. A qualitative analysis of the answers given by 198 parents was carried out in order to examine how the parents react to such situations, and whether there are any changes in their reactions after their participation in the Workshop Programme. The parents' answers were classified into the following categories:

- × Encouragement for expressing unpleasant emotions (e.g.: *It's alright to be sad; It's alright to cry when you're sad*; encouraging the child to say what made them angry or sad);
- × Comforting the child (e.g.: *I comfort my child and do something funny; I comfort my child and start a game to fend off bad thoughts*);
- × Solving problems together (e.g.: *I help my child to find the ways to react in a similar situation*);
- × Reducing the severity of the problem (e.g.: *It's not so bad; It wasn't intentional*);
- × Giving advice (e.g.: *Tell it to the teacher!; Tell him you won't be friends with him any longer*);
- × Lecturing, preaching (e.g.: *Children should get along, not fight; Good children don't do that*);
- × Interpreting (e.g.: *He did that to attract attention*);
- × Questioning, doubt, interrogation (e.g.: *Why?; What did you do to him?!*);
- × The parent solves the problem with the teacher.

It was established that, after the Workshop Programme, the parents are much more likely to encourage their child to express unpleasant emotions and comfort their child, and much less likely to preach or lecture their child.

Parental behaviours

The survey for the parents gathered data on the frequency of reading picture books, yelling and hitting the child in the past seven days. While no differences were discovered in the relatively high frequency of reading a picture book with the child before and after the Programme, there were differences in the frequency of undesirable forms of parental interaction with the child. The differences show that **AFTER the workshops the parents report a significantly lower frequency of yelling at their child who disobeys, and lower frequency of hitting their child on the hand and bottom.**



It is interesting to note that a change in the frequency of the behaviours concerned after the Programme was found even in the group of parents who did not participate in it, compared to the frequency prior to the Programme. Thus parents in the second survey read a picture book with their child less frequently, but there are also lower incidences of yelling at their child or hitting their hand or bottom. The reduction in the frequency of corporal punishment can be mostly ascribed to the messages on the inappropriate nature of punishment sent to the parents from different sources in that period – from the teachers at parent-teacher meetings, through educational leaflets in kindergartens, to the media campaign against corporal punishment.

The results of the comparison of undesirable parental behaviour towards the child before and after the Programme in the workshop participants are in accordance with the set aims of the Programme. However, because the positive changes were also identified in the group of parents who did not participate in the Programme, it is difficult to ascribe those changes to the effects of the Programme. Still, less yelling and hitting by parents who participated in the workshops can justly be explained by their participation. This is corroborated with the answers to the open-ended questions on the changes in their own behaviour and personal gains from the Programme that the participants gave in the evaluation survey at the end of the Programme.

In total, the changes in the parental attitudes toward the child, increase of the feeling of competence, altered actual and hypothetical behaviour in the workshop participants, and comparison of these changes with the changes in parents who did not participate in the Programme offer **the initial validation of the effectiveness of the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents.**

It must be noted that a generalisation of this conclusion on the effectiveness of the Programme as regards the changing of certain parental attitudes and behaviours is restricted by certain factors. The data which yielded the results were collected on a double selected sample – the parents who participated in the workshops and who attended regularly until the conclusion. And parents who were not involved in the Programme, but who agreed to complete the survey twice; they are probably more educated and readier to evaluate their parenting than other parents in the population. Furthermore, the restrictions are also a result of the flaws in data collection, particularly the survey for the parents. For practical reasons, i.e. the need to keep the instrument brief, the reliability and validity of the measures used were reduced, and so they offer only a *rough picture* and enable drawing conclusions on trends.

The evaluation of the outcomes of participation in the Programme was also completed with *qualitative data*. An **evaluation survey for the "Growing up Together" Programme**, which included seven open-ended questions, was used to collect them. During the final, eleventh session, a total of 194 participants from 24 kindergartens completed the survey.

Two leaders conducted an analysis of the answers. We present the most frequent categories of answers for individual questions, with several examples for each category.

Question 1: WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE GREATEST BENEFIT FOR YOU?

× More confidence and self-esteem

- *I am more confident than before that I am doing some things right; criticism from others worries me less.*
- *I am confident in myself and my actions. I am more tolerant in some situations.*
- *I am much calmer in educating my child, I no longer feel helpless and out of control.*
- *I am more confident and calmer, and so the atmosphere in our house is much more pleasant.*
- *I see I am on the right path.*
- *I know now that I am not a bad parent.*
- *My confidence in raising my children has been boosted, and I worry less about the possibility to do something "wrong" in the relationship with my child.*

× Increased insight in personal growth as a parent

- *Noticing my own mistakes and finding ways to correct them.*
- *The knowledge that I don't have to be a perfect parent.*
- *The knowledge that we learn and develop, or grow, every day.*
- *The knowledge that I can change for the better, with my own and professional help.*

× Changed behaviour toward the child

- *I have expanded my horizons regarding raising children, I have changed some "methods" that made neither me nor my children happy.*
- *I have improved my communication with my child, as well as with my own family.*
- *Patience, active listening.*



- *New ways to solve problems.*
- *I am more persistent.*
- *I am more relaxed and more concentrated.*
- *I listen to my children more.*
- *We play more.*

× ***Acquiring new knowledge and attitudes***

- *The realisation that there are different ways to raise children from those that I have been applying up to this point.*
- *Changing parental attitudes.*
- *Certain new useful knowledge.*
- *Four pillars of parenting.*
- *Setting limits.*
- *I learned how to communicate.*
- *I learned how to solve problems.*
- *I learned how to control myself not to punish my child.*
- *Neither my child nor me have to be perfect!*

× ***Better understanding of the child's needs and point of view***

- *I believe I have realised how my child functions, (so I pay more attention to them).*
- *I have become more tolerant; I understand my child and their needs better.*
- *Having persisted in attending the workshops and learning something new each time, especially a perspective on things. I believe I see many things now from the perspective of my child.*
- *I recognise my child's needs better.*
- *I understand why they behave in a certain way.*

× ***Experiences of other parents, similar dilemmas and problems, feeling of not being alone***

- *I realised I was not the only one who had problems with children.*
- *The realisation that all parents have problems and dilemmas.*

× **Encouragement to enjoy quality time and activities together**

- *I enjoy the growth and development of my children more frequently and with more emotions.*
- *We spend more time as a family.*
- *The importance of more quality time with the child.*
- *I learned how to make myself and my child happy in many simple ways.*

× **Support to satisfying one's own needs**

- *I am now aware that it is important to satisfy my own needs too.*
- *I learned how to reduce stress and anxiety.*

The analysis of the parents' answers shows that they see their personal gains from the participation in the Programme with a **greater feeling of parental competence, sensitivity regarding the point of view and needs of their child, knowledge about different ways of treating the child, and communication skills**. These gains are in line with the aims of the workshops.

Since the ultimate purpose of the support to parents is to improve the well-being of the child and fulfil their development potential, we were also interested in identifying potential **changes for the child** due to their parent's participation in the workshops. Therefore, the parents also gave their answers to the following question on the benefits in connection with their child.

Question 2: WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST USEFUL BENEFIT FOR YOUR CHILD?

× **Changes in the parent's attitude towards the child**

- *She got a calmer, more responsive and gentler mother, who decided to follow her pace.*
- *My girls got a mother who understands them better, who doesn't yell, who talks more, who plays a lot – who is happier with herself and her life, which reflects on them.*
- *Deepening our relationship and bonding with the father.*
- *He got better parents, and his childhood is now filled with games, laughter and security due to clear limits.*
- *With the help of the workshops I realised that my child doesn't always mean to defy me, and so I approached some problems differently; my children are now happier.*

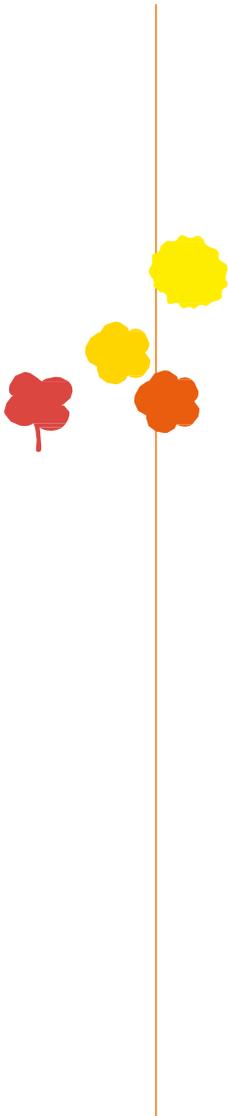
- *I react more calmly (not always) to some forms of my child's behaviour because now I understand them.*
- *They got a mother who respects them better, who sees the world more with their eyes who will try to put herself in their shoes.*
- *We spend more quality time together, so they feel happier and more loved; we have improved our communication, and there is less tension between us.*
- *A calmer relationship with me.*
- *A better relationship: more talking, less shouting.*
- *In my Personal Growth as a Parent Companion I entered that I felt better connected with my daughter, that I trust her, and that she trusts me.*

From those typical answers to that question, it is evident that the parents believe **that their child has got a calmer, more patient, happier parent who listens more, talks more, pays more attention to the child, and invests more effort, sees things from the child's perspective, and recognises their needs, all due to the workshops.** These results too are in line with the aims of the Programme.

The workshops cover a relatively wide scope of topics – on parenthood and parenting, children, communication skills for developing good relationships – we were interested to learn which ones were the most interesting and most useful to them. Therefore, we also asked them the following two questions.

Question 3: WHICH TOPICS LEFT THE BIGGEST IMPRESSION ON YOU?

- × *Topics connected with concrete communication techniques and strategies*
 - *I-messages (they're really powerful).*
 - *Listening to the child and clear communication.*
 - *I-messages – they made me think about how my verbal messages affect my child.*
 - *The topic I'm still afraid to start earnestly is setting limits, but I hope I'll do that soon.*
- × *Topics connected with parenting in the best interests of the child (the four pillars of parenting), parental aims and responsibilities*



- *Focusing on long-term aims and setting everyday rules accordingly.*
- *Responsibility towards the child.*
- *The traps of parenting of all topics because they made me aware of my most frequent mistakes as a parent.*
- × **Topics connected with the development and needs of the child, the way in which the child learns about the world, and with communication and emotional dialogue**
 - *The child's need for autonomy.*
 - *The games and how to see them from the eyes of the child who grows up with them.*
 - *The topics about the child's feelings and those in which we shared our pleasant experiences with our children.*
- × **All of the topics are equally important and interesting**
 - *Personally, I found my favourite part in each one of them.*
 - *It's difficult to name one. Something from every topic.*
- × **Topics connected with parents as persons**
 - *The topics about the personal growth of the parent – because we cannot improve our relationship with the child without working on ourselves.*
 - *Emphasis on how the child and I feel.*

Question 4: WHAT OF THE THINGS YOU LEARNED WILL YOU APPLY IN YOUR LIFE?

- × **Everything**
 - *I'll try to apply everything.*
 - *I already apply a lot of things, I'm trying.*
 - *I'd be happy to apply everything! (...) especially "the child only behaves in the way it knows".*
 - *I'll try to apply everything; I can recognise most situations now and recall the advice from the workshops, which is of great help to me...*
- × **Communication skills**
 - *listening, I-messages, feedback, limits...*
 - *definitely I-messages, active listening, I'll try to learn it.*



- *Appropriate communication with the child.*

× ***Greter focus on the child and their needs***

- *I'll be more focused on my child.*
- *I'll watch out for my child's needs.*
- *We'll spend more quality time together (understanding, listening, playing, reading).*
- *I'll talk to my child, think of additional activities.*
- *More play and inventiveness in everyday life.*
- *From the limits that need to be set, to the love and attention that need to be given.*

× ***Kindness***

- *I will be calmer.*
- *Being a patient, kind, warm and tolerant parent.*
- *Continue to unconditionally love and care for my child, and be happy for being a parent.*

× ***Direction without violence***

- *I will not hit her.*
- *I learned how to approach my child in some situations in which I didn't know how to react before.*

× ***Acknowledging the child as a person, empowerment***

- *I will respect my child; listen to what he has to say.*
- *Understand the child as a complete person, respect his interests.*
- *I learned how to apply agreements, i.e. involving the child in decision making.*

× ***More realistic expectations from the child and oneself***

- *I won't expect her to be perfect; I myself am sometimes in a bad mood, so she can betoo.*

× ***I'll find the time for myself***

- *I'll try to be available to my child, in accordance withmy needs, calmer and happier.*

× Other

- *I'll apply what is necessary to satisfy my own and my child's needs.*
- *Now my "weaknesses" are clearer to me, so I'll pay more attention to them and make more effort.*
- *A glance at the Personal Growth Companion is a good enough reminder what I still have to work on.*

The parents usually reply that all of the topics of the Workshop Programme were important and useful to them, and that they found their place when it came to meeting their needs. In addition, they state that they try to apply everything they have learned to their relationship with their child, especially the things that contribute to a better understanding. Among some specific points that were singled out as the most salient and applicable ones were communication skills and a greater sensitivity for the child's needs, as well as their own. As was the case with the previously described results, it is evident that those are parental attitudes and behaviours that the Workshop Programme intended to develop or strengthen.

The "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents offers a variety of written materials that the parents usually read at home. As a part of the evaluation, we were also interested in the opinion of the parents on the usefulness of the written materials, and therefore we asked them the following question:

Question 5: WHICH WRITTEN MATERIALS WERE USEFUL TO YOU?

- *Mostly all of them, because I understand more as I read them.*
- *All of them, but one has to read them; everything is a good reminder.*
- *They helped me accept myself as an imperfect parent.*
- *They will be useful because I will keep coming back to them.*
- *Absolutely all of them, I took them so they're always close at hand.*
- *I used some of them at work... borrowed them to others as well.*
- *I enjoyed reading them every day.*
- *I've read them all; everything was simple, useful and clear.*
- *Depending on the situation, all materials are useful – there should be more of them.*
- *All of them, plus the games we learned.*

- *I've read each of them a dozen times.*
- *I'll revise the materials together with my family.*
- *All of them. My husband has also read them and commented them with me, and we can ultimately apply some behaviour that the materials made us aware of, and which is in the interest of our children.*
- *For example, my husband no longer says to our son, who often expresses his wishes loudly: "Don'yell!", but rather: "I like it when you're speaking softly".*

From the typical answers it is evident that the parents usually stated that the materials given to them were useful and interesting, and most of the parents mentioned individual materials that were the most useful to them. All of the materials included in the Parent's Folder were spontaneously mentioned.

Finally, we asked the parents about their fulfilled and unfulfilled expectations, and about their suggestions for the improvement of the Workshop Programme. The following is the list of some of the most frequent answers.

Question 6: WHICH OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS WERE FULFILLED, AND WHICH ONES WERE NOT?

× Fulfilled expectations

- *The workshops helped me very much, and the written materials were useful to my husband.*
- *There weren't any expectations that weren't met; the goal was to better understand the needs of the child and the parents.*
- *The workshops more than fulfilled my expectations. Everything that I can apply I consider to be a benefit.*
- *I got some answers to the questions that troubled me, in connection with parenting.*
- *I was hoping for ready-made solutions, but now I know it's not realistic, and that those don't exist – I feel better now.*
- *I faced both my good and bad sides. I can apply some advice as recipes. Some remain too idealistic, but are at least useful to see in what ways a certain problem can be approached.*
- *I received help in raising my child, now I'm growing along with my child.*
- *I have expanded my horizons regarding raising children; I have changed some "methods" that made neither me nor my children happy.*



- *Even more than I expected, because we discussed some things people don't even think about, they take them for granted.*
 - *All of my expectations were met.*
 - *I didn't expect anything, but I'm pleased, happy and thankful.*
 - *My expectations were exceeded, every parent should come.*
 - *We got confidence in our parenting skills; I confirmed that I was a good parent. I criticise less.*
 - *I learned something new – How to better understand my child; a lot of examples and theory.*
 - *I became more patient, tolerant; I'm now closer to my child, I understand him better, I listen, we play.*
 - *I reformulated the way I talk; there are no recipes in child rearing, the choices are mine.*
 - *I'm not alone with my problem; I don't have to be perfect.*
 - *I realised I'm allowed to take care of myself too.*
 - *Fun, laughter, new friends, an exchange of experiences.*
 - *I expected being "lectured" on how to raise my child. Already after the first workshop I was exhilarated.*
- × Unfulfilled expectations**
- *I learned much, but I haven't communicated it well enough to my family.*
 - *They weren't met: persistence and courage; I still yell; I don't set limits; I lack consistency, limits and rules, listening skills...; I still yell.*
 - *We haven't resolved all of my problem situations; I need more concrete solutions.*
 - *New horizons of parenting opened up to me, but I must still learn and work on my patience.*
 - *I am more tolerant, calmer, but still have to work on my self – on the idea that not everything is my fault.*
 - *Many of my expectations were met, most of all respecting the wishes of my child, and kindness shown to my child. We don't spend enough time together; we don't play, hear and see each other enough.*
 - *Despite the behaviour considered to be justified, my child does not react in the way he should, but rather as he wishes.*

Question 7: WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE? THE WORKSHOPS WOULD BE BETTER IF...

× **Nothing**

- *I'm very pleased, I wouldn't change anything.*
- *They couldn't be better.*

× **More time for discussing real situations and the parents exchanging experience**

- *I would only add more questions and answers from our everyday life.*
- *More time, less topics and tasks in one session.*
- *I wish they'd last longer, for there to be more of them.*

× **More skill practice**

- *More practical examples, more practising with tasks.*
- *More concrete exercises or rehearsals.*

× **Number of parents at the workshop and their profiles**

- *More parents in the group (there were five of them).*
- *Less parents at the workshop (up to eight).*
- *For both parents to participate, for there to be more fathers.*

× **Other**

- *A bigger psychological aspect of the topics at every workshop (working with a psychologist).*
- *Let the parents choose a topic.*
- *More advertising, more workshops.*
- *The leaders should be involved in all group work as parents.*
- *We could attend the final workshop with our children.*



The answers listed above show that the parents were very pleased with the workshops, and that their expectations were largely met. They lacked the time for resolving some practical issues in their relationship with their children. The fact that the majority of the parents stress that the Workshop Programme should last longer, with more parents involved, or with both parents, also speaks in favour of the success of the Programme.

Finally, we bring a message sent by a participant to the leaders after the workshop cycle:

Here is a sentence that summarises my reflections on the past eleven Tuesdays well:
The workshop empowered me to persist in the things that I realised were good, "forced" me to become aware of what I did wrong, and directed me on the path to fix it. I hope I'll succeed. Thank you!

The feedback of several parents whose wives participated in the workshops can also serve as an additional indicator of the effects of the Programme. When asked whether they knew what was being done at the workshops, they replied that they had talked about that with their wives, and discussed how appropriate it was for their families. They stated that they noticed their wives were more patient and calmer with children. Here are some of the greatest changes they noticed since their wives started participating in the workshops:

- *The most obvious change is that my wife has become even more successful in her communication with our child, compared to me.*
- *She now thinks even more about what she does, why she does it, what the consequences and the results will be. The workshops surely contributed to that.*

In the end, they added they were interested in participating in the workshops.

Apart from the parents, the data on the effects of the Programme were also collected from the leaders. In their reports following each workshop, they recorded their own reactions, as well as the reactions of the parents to each activity carried out. Based on the insight into the difficulties, vagueness and bad experience, individual activities were changed and/or improved. However, in the course of the Programme implementation, especially in the reports of the leaders from the final session, the following messages were the most frequent:

- The workshops were extremely well accepted by the parents.
- The workshops reached their aim, and we all grew together.

Based on the data collected during the evaluation, it can be concluded that the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents fulfilled its purpose because it enabled the participants to question their parental beliefs, values and behaviours, to exchange their experience with other parents and professional leaders, and to grow personally as parents.

The answers of the parents point to the fact that a substantial number of the parents accepted the four pillars of parenting as their own parental value, or that they integrated the knowledge, values and beliefs in connection with parenting that respects and promotes the rights of the child in the family into their own parental identity.

If we recall changes in the behaviour and in relation to the child that they showed, it can be concluded that the Programme is able to achieve its planned aims, and that it can be considered to be an evidence-based intervention for a general/developmental support to parents.

3.2

Who accepts the invitation to participate in the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents, and who does not?

Apart from documenting the ability of the Programme to produce the planned effects, we were interested in learning to what extent the intention of the Programme to act as a general prevention programme, or to provide support to all parents, is being achieved. Therefore we, along with the evaluation questions, also explored the following questions:

- × *Who accepts the invitation to participate in the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents, and who does not?*
- × *Who are the beneficiaries of the Programme?*

In order to identify the characteristics of the parents involved in the Programme, as well as those who choose not to participate, we have compared the data collected at the beginning of the Programme, from the group of parents who participated (N = 231) and the group of parents who did not (N = 348). Unfortunately, those samples of parents who agreed to participate in the research are still selected.

The results of the comparison of socio-demographic characteristics of parents who did or did not participate in the Programme show that there are significant differences in their level of education, number and age of children, and ratio of sexes in both groups of parents.

The parents who participated in the Workshop Programme are, on average, **more educated** than those who did not. 39 % of those parents completed secondary education, 14.7 % graduated from a college, and 37.3 % have university-level education. On the other hand, among the parents who did not participate in the workshops, the majority of them has completed secondary education (53.2 %), 12.9 % graduated from a college, and 23.9 % have university-level education.

Another difference is in the number of children. The parents who participated in the workshops have, on average, **fewer children** than those who did not, and their children are **younger**. Thus the oldest child of the parents involved in the Programme is 3.9 years old, and the oldest child of the parents notinvolved is 4.8 years old.

There are **fewer fathers** in the group of participating parents (6.6 %), than among the parents who did not participate in the Programme (12.4 %).

There are no age differences among the parents who participated in the workshops and those who did not. Their average age is 32-33. There are also no differences in the number of adults in the household between those two groups of parents. The proportion of single-parent families is 9 %.

A comparison of the subjective experience of parenting, parental beliefs and behaviours among the parents who were or were not involved in the Programme resulted in the following.

The parents involved in the Workshop Programme are characterised by **a greater level of parental stress** and **a greater dissatisfaction with their parental role** than those who were not involved.

The parents who participated in the workshops, compared to those who did not, **agree less strongly with some outdated beliefs in connection with their attitude towards their child**. Thus the parents who did not participate in the workshops believe more that it is better to ignore their child's crying, that it is not desirable to set limits to their child, that too much praise will spoil their child, that it is sometimes necessary to hit their child, and that it is justified to hit their child during the child's temper tantrum.



It is interesting to note that there were no differences in the examined behaviours towards the child in the past seven days in neither group of parents. Both read a picture book to their child, shouted at their child or hit their child equally often.

Overall, we established that the Workshop Programme attracted more educated parents with fewer children, who were under more parental stress and who were less satisfied with themselves as parents. Their beliefs regarding their relationship with their children show a somewhat greater acknowledgement of the child as a person, and more sensitivity for the child's needs, while their behaviours differ little from the behaviour of the parents who were not involved in the Programme.

These findings confirm the previous impression of the leader teams, that the workshops are attended by parents who are more inclined to pursue the best interests of the child, and who are more motivated for questioning and improving their own parenting skills. This raises questions regarding the realisation of the universal right of each child for their parents to receive appropriate support in fulfilling their parental responsibilities.

The results of the comparison of the parents who were involved in the Programme and those who were not indicate a need to invest additional efforts in overcoming obstacles to creating a support programme used by a great number of parents. It is likely that the open invitation, the same for all parents, is not enough to ensure *equal accessibility* to all parents. Perhaps it is necessary to invest more effort in inviting, motivating and informing parents with a lower level of education and/or more traditional beliefs, as well as in listening to their reactions and needs. It is even more likely that some objective obstacles regarding the participation of less-educated parents in the Programme (e.g. working in shifts, jobs on the side, babysitting) need to be overcome by choosing different times of the day for the sessions or by making other adjustments.



After two experimental implementations attended by more than 70 enthusiastic trained female leaders and one male leader, together we created the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents. In this Chapter we will examine the following questions:

- × *What has been achieved so far in the design of the Programme?*
- × *What are the challenges of preserving the quality of the Programme and its dissemination?*
- × *How to ensure that the Programme is well-implemented, and how to make it available to the largest number of parents possible?*

Today there is an established training plan for the leaders and for the implementation of the eleven workshops in the Programme.

The leader training plan involves an initial seminar, one supervision meeting, and an evaluation seminar after the Workshop Programme with the first group of parents.

For the implementation of the Workshop Programme, expert associates in kindergartens can be trained, particularly psychologists, pedagogues and teachers. During the two-day initial seminar, each leader receives a "Leader's Handbook". The training is carried out by the project managers and appointed leaders of the regional group of peer support (in the implementation of the Programme). One training cycle can involve 10-12 kindergartens.

As a part of the education for each new group of leaders, in the middle of the first implementation of the Workshop Programme, a supervision meeting is organised with the project managers and/or regional group leaders. At the end of the first cycle of workshops, all members of the leader teams attend the evaluation seminar. This support to the leaders during and after the first implementation of the Programme proved important for alleviating the initial insecurities, obtaining additional explanations, instructions and feedback, and exchanging experience regarding the implementation of the Programme.

The leaders implement the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents in 11 sessions in their kindergartens or family centres. They receive a sufficient number of *Parent's Folders* for each new group of parents. Experience has shown that two workshop cycles can be organised in a single year – the spring and autumn cycle, which depends on the number of interested parents.



As far as future challenges are concerned, it is necessary to ensure the durability of the effects of the Programme both in relation to the parents and the leaders, as well as the latter's further training. After two experimental implementations we clearly recognise the need for a continuous support to the parents and leaders. We see the "Growing up Together" Parents' Club and obligatory membership in the "Growing up Together" Leader Network as good forms of Programme continuation.

Furthermore, to ensure quality, it is necessary to evaluate the outcomes and process of the Programme implementation systematically and continuously, like we did during its experimental implementation.

4.1 **Ensuring the quality of the Programme and continuous support to its leaders: the "Growing up Together" Leader Network**

In the course of the experimental implementation, the leaders were happy to be a part of a network, reporting to each other by e-mail on the implementation of the workshops,

What the leaders said...

...after two cycles of the Programme implementation, and what they recognised as sources of strength for leading the workshops:

- × the training and professional support: learning, new knowledge, skills for working with the parents, good materials, UNICEF, project managers;
- × the cooperation within and between the teams: a good team working towards a common goal, cooperation with other kindergartens, enthusiastic project participants;
- × the motivation: my happiness, contentment, my own interest and thirst for knowledge, enthusiasm, will and faith that I can do something, give and share something good, help others, invest in the future of children, a noble goal, helping parents, meeting new parents, the parents' happiness, their wish to continue cooperating, my personal motivation to bring something new in my cooperation with the parents;
- × the personal gain: the discovery that I've changed for the better (a better parent/teacher), gaining new experience, striving to be a better parent, validating my own competences, improving my own knowledge and experience, I've grown as a person;
- × the support of my own family;
- × the support and recognition of other kindergarten employees, particularly the principal.

What the leaders said...

...they needed to continue with their quality work:

- × supervision, more training, theory;
- × the principal's support, recognition (praise, reward, monetary incentive), time, being relieved of other duties, understanding and support of other teachers in the kindergarten;
- × the support of the local community and the media.

which provided them with the opportunity to receive feedback, security and support—professional and human. At the evaluation seminar

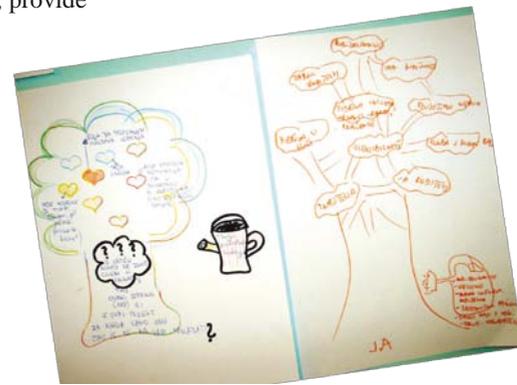
at the end of the second experimental implementation of the Programme they expressed it themselves creatively during the activity "My Tree of Strength for Leading the Workshops".

The aforementioned experience of the leaders in connection with what they gained from the Programme, and their need for support, supervision and training are also corroborated by the experience from different projects of this type, which indicates that leader networking is a good way to maintain and raise the quality of the project implementation.

We see the establishment of the "Growing up Together" Leader Network, consisting of all experts involved in the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents (project managers, regional group leaders and workshop leaders), as an excellent form of peer support and further training. We consider it to be a key guarantee of the quality of the Programme. In that network, we see the regional group leaders as a vital link between the project managers and workshop leaders in kindergartens and family centres.

The regional group leaders are appointed by the *Council for the Development and Quality Assurance of the "Growing up Together" Project*, whose members are the project leaders, UNICEF representatives and representatives of the regional group leaders and leaders. The regional group leaders can be expert associates of the kindergartens, who were already experienced in workshops with parents prior to the training, who completed the training and successfully carried out at least three cycles of workshops with parents, and who showed their expertise, engagement and interest for leading peer support groups at supervision meetings and evaluation seminars.

The task of the regional group leaders is to train new leaders and provide peer support. Peer support can be group/regional and individual for each leader team. It is recommended that the meeting of the regional leader and the leader team be held once during the second workshop cycle, so that the leaders can receive feedback, support and help from the regional group leaders. The regional peer support group consists of leaders from several "neighbouring" kindergartens, who meet to exchange experience, provide mutual support and solve problems.



The project leaders and regional group leaders meet once or twice a year in connection with the training cycles, to prepare the training sessions for new leader groups, to exchange experience, resolve professional and organisational issues identified in the previous cycles and listed at regional peer support group meetings.

A meeting of all the leaders is organised annually for the purpose of evaluating the implementation of the Programme and training the leaders further.

Our project development vision is based on our opinions, as well as on the opinions of the workshop leaders, expressed by them in the course of the experimental Programme implementation. In their opinions we see satisfaction with their team participation in the Programme to date, and their need for further support.

We consider that the "Growing up Together" Leader Network can be a good answer to the need of the leaders to be validated as competent experts, to receive training and expand their horizons in connection with their personal and team growth. In that way, that they can grow together, both professionally and as persons.

What the leaders said...

...about their participation in the Programme:

- × Useful – both personally and professionally.
- × I am honoured to have been a part of the team. I was proud, I felt comfortable.
- × Regardless of having felt uncertainty and fear, it was nice and I wish to continue.
- × It requires time and a serious attitude.
- × It is difficult to juggle all the meetings.
- × After each workshop I had more experience thanks to the help of my colleagues.
- × I'm very happy to be involved in the project because it taught me much and helped me in my work. I now see group situations differently, and approach children with more understanding. The Programme empowered and encouraged me, so I often advise my colleagues how to approach children differently.
- × All in all, I think I received more than I gave because I got so much more compared to the time I invested. I don't mean only knowledge and skills, but also the reactions of the parents, their happiness and changes.





What the expert associate leaders said...

...about their participation in the Programme:

- × Although we have all the materials, there's still much work to be done.
- × The participation of the three leaders was great because I felt support at all times, the stress of being short-handed was avoided; I knew at all times I could rely on my colleagues.
- × I think we did a great job and complemented each other well. The leaders should be trained in more topics that we presented to the parents, e.g. Juul – it's one thing to read, another to listen, still another to read closely and re-examine his ideas – perhaps this could be a part of the teacher training.

4.2

Ensuring continuous support to the parents: the "Growing up Together" Parents' Club

As a continuation of the continuous support to parents, which could contribute to their and the leaders' further growth, the kindergarten can organise a "Growing up Together" Parents' Club for participants. In this way, we send a message to the parents that they are not on their own after the Programme, now that they have begun applying new behaviours and changing the relationship with their children and family...

From what the parents said in the course of the Programme implementation, particularly in their evaluation surveys, it is clear that they are very satisfied with the workshops, that their expectations were met, but that they still need more time to resolve their own problems connected with children, and that they consider that the workshops should last longer or should at least have some form of continuation after the conclusion of the Programme. They also placed emphasis on that which they could share with other parents. They want more.

What some parents and leaders said...

...in support of the Programme continuation:

- × Too short!!! It should last for a year!
- × Now that the workshops are over, we should meet at least twice in a school year (like a parent-teacher meeting). As a reminder, for news, issues...
- × The workshops would be better if they lasted longer, divided into basic and advanced workshops.
- × One mother commented how the group was a big support to her in raising children because she has no female friends with whom she can discuss such things, and how she often feels the need for it, after which another mother gave her a piece of paper with her phone number on it, and said: "Call me!" Others too exchanged phone numbers and arranged weekly meetings after the workshops. We're invited too.
- × The parents are pleased with their progress, they're sorry that the end is in sight, and they suggested monthly meetings, something like a "support group".

The parents grew, and that growth needs to be maintained, "nourished". The following text is a message from one of the teams at the end of the Programme:

We're extremely pleased with our parents – their cooperation, receptivity and readiness to work on their personal growth. We're particularly happy about their wishes for further workshops and to continue meeting – in some form of a parents' club.

The meetings of the Parents' Club may continue to be held in the kindergarten or family centre, led by the same trained leaders. The leaders choose the discussion topics with input from the parents. This should be done in advance, so that the leaders can adequately prepare for the next meeting. It could involve activities such as "Questions from a Hat" or repeating some other activities from the Programme (with adjustments, where necessary, according to the parents' wishes), further discussions on what the parents think was not discussed sufficiently at the workshops, etc. The meetings can be held bimonthly, quarterly, semi-annually – according to the parents' interest.

Meetings have already continued in the Club in several kindergartens. The first experiences are positive, and new ideas are born. The parents' spontaneous meetings outside of the kindergarten show their need for continuation and support.

4.3

Expanding the availability of the Programme to parents in the community

Since the ultimate purpose of this Programme is to improve the well-being of the child and facilitate the full development of the child's potential, one of its aims is to increase the availability of the Programme to the largest number of parents possible **to bring the parents closer to the workshops and to bring the workshops closer to the parents.**

The "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents started in kindergartens with the parents of crèche-aged and younger kindergarten groups. In this manner we can continue to involve parents wherever there is organised pre-school education. Even the parents of children not attending kindergarten can participate in the workshops. The kindergarten, with its expert associates, can and should represent the hub for support to parents in the community.

In areas without a kindergarten, as well as in areas where the kindergartens are unable to satisfy the needs and interest of the parents, the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents can also be implemented by other organisers, such as family centres, under the aforementioned condition that it be implemented by experts trained for this Programme, and who are members of the "Growing up Together" Leader Network.

Realising the right of each child to optimal conditions for the development of the child's potential requires a broad availability of general/universal parenting support programmes, which promote the values, knowledge and skills of everybody parent and care giver. Therefore, for the expansion of the Programme to a larger number of local communities, it is important to win the interest of the public (parents, kindergartens, family centres and other potential organisers), which can be achieved through the media in the broadest sense, as well as the so called word of mouth.

A wider need for the Programme is also justified by the statements of the leaders and parents who were involved in the Programme, gave it excellent marks, and said:

- *Organise some form of continuation.*
- *Make the workshops mandatory for every parent who enrolls their child in the kindergarten.*
- *Organise workshops for the parents of children aged 3+.*
- *Many mothers recommended the workshops to their friends.*

In the development and expansion of the Programme, the following needs of its potential beneficiaries have to be taken into consideration. In the previous implementation some differences were noticed among the parents who were involved in the Programme and those who were not. The Programme must be available and interesting enough to attract parents regardless of their education, number of children in their family, both mothers and fathers. Additional effort should be invested in order to encourage a wider population of parents to participate in the workshops.

The “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents has proven to be applicable, efficient and well-accepted by the leaders and parents, and therefore has to be developed and expanded further, i.e. made available to the largest number of parents possible, which would contribute to the well-being of a largest number of the youngest children possible.



The conclusion of one leader after the conclusion of the Programme with the first group of parents is in line with the above:

I'm happy to have had the opportunity to participate in this project. I benefited both privately and professionally. I experienced each workshop by re-examining myself as a parent, my own parental actions, rises and falls in growing up along with my children. I saw the workshops as a reflection of my own parenthood. I'd like to remain active in the projects and activities related to the cooperation with the parents, in the sense of encouraging quality parenting.

Working in a team brought me joy. I felt good and accepted. I'm grateful for having worked with my colleague B.V., her high dose of professionalism, respect, acceptance and professional support.

Working with teacher K.Š. was great. I respected her feelings of insecurity regarding her professional competences in certain parts of the workshops, as well as her choice of smaller topics and activities.

Every child has their own way and speed of development, and it is the same with us "adults" – it has to be respected and supported. Only then can us adults grow up together and learn from one another...

I think it's one of the recipes for a happier and more successful next year.

(Vesna Kašuba, December 2009)

Finally, here is some information on media relations.

Guidelines for media relations

With the aid of the media, it is possible to communicate with the entire local community and present the Workshop Programme to the wider public. It is necessary to ask the representatives of the local newspapers, television network and radio stations to continuously cover the kindergarten activities intended for both children and parents. Perhaps there are some journalists among the parents of the kindergarten children – they can enable more parents, even those whose children do not attend kindergarten, to learn about the "Growing up Together" workshops. This might encourage the entire community to promote positive parenting.

Sample media announcement for the local media

(Kindergarten letterhead)

MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT

Short title conveying the general idea

(in five or six words, preferably containing a verb)

Place, day/month/year.

Most important information (who and what are obligatory, followed by the most important parts: when, where, why and how) to be stated in the first paragraph, no more than a few sentences long. This paragraph should attract the attention of journalists in the most efficient way, and provide them with relevant information.

The second paragraph can begin with why parenting is so important in the first years of life.

Afterwards there may be several chapters describing in more detail the kindergarten activities related to the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents. Such an announcement should not be longer than a single page.



Examples of titles:

New: Workshops with Parents at the "Mak" Kindergarten or

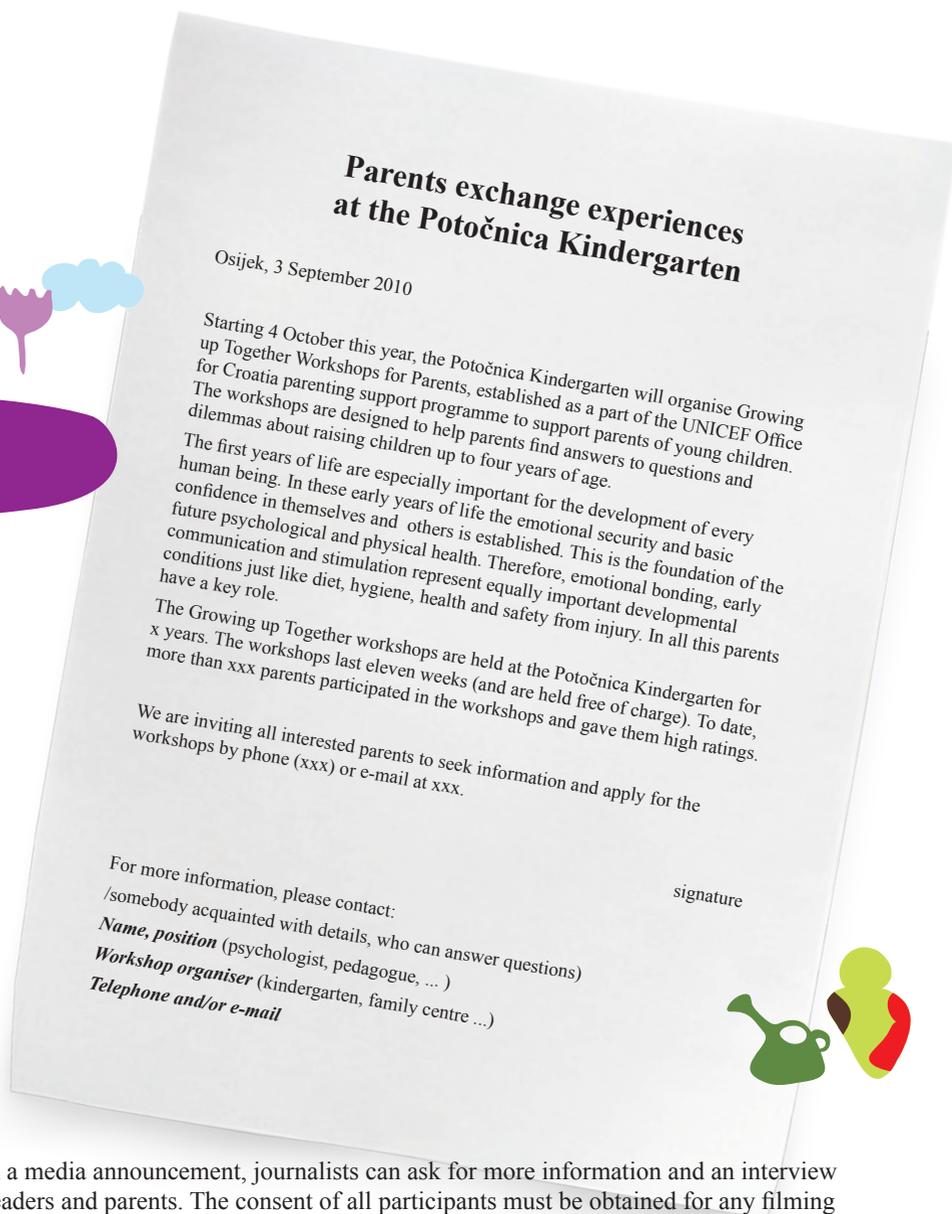
Parents Exchange Experience at the "Potočnica" Kindergarten or

**New Programme for Parents of the Youngest Children at the xxx County Family Centre
or**

**The "Ciciban" Kindergarten Would Like to Invite Parents of the Youngest Children to
the "Growing up Together" Workshops**



Text example:



After such a media announcement, journalists can ask for more information and an interview with the leaders and parents. The consent of all participants must be obtained for any filming of the workshops.

At the end of the year, it is recommended to notify the media of the number of parents attending the workshops that year, quoting their statements on how the workshops helped them with their children, etc.



5.1

Guidelines for experts

(Annex to the Recommendation Rec(2006)19 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on policy to support positive parenting)



COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EXPERTS

6.2.1 Introduction

This document is intended for experts working with children and families, or foster parents of minors. Its purpose is to provide experts with guidelines on providing support to positive parenting. Positive parenting is defined as parental behaviour and values founded on the best interests of the child, which includes setting limits using non-violent methods in order to enable the child to achieve their full developmental potential.

For the purpose of strengthening parental skills, experts are advised to focus on understanding the child's developmental needs; the responsibilities and capacities of the child's parents to respond to those needs; the relationships and interactions between family members; and the needs of the family as the basic unit of the society. The child should be at the centre – the rights and needs of the child laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the main legal instruments of the Council of Europe (like the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Social Charter, and revised European Social Charter).

The information on the developmental needs of the child and on the responsibilities of the parents is listed in Section 2, while Section 3 contains guidelines for experts working with families. An interdisciplinary approach is important in the work of social services, and the "segmenting" thereof should be avoided or ended.

In order to provide support to experts in fulfilling those duties, it is important that all service providers act according to the principle that their personnel are partners to parents, empowering them in their parental responsibilities. This means that the policies of all who provide services related to positive parenting should involve the following three key components:

- × Promoting parental learning on how to be a parent in a positive way, and how to contribute to the realisation of the developmental potential of every child
- × Providing support to parents in order to enable them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in the best possible way, and
- × Where necessary, enabling and encouraging changes in parental behaviour so that their behaviour can contribute to the developmental achievements of their children.

The managers/administrators who consider that the above three key components of positive parenting are a part of the professional roles and responsibilities of their employees will play a key role in enabling their staff to provide parenting support to mothers and fathers.

6.2.2 Key messages for parents: the needs of children and parental responsibilities

I. Focus on the child: the child as an agent of rights

The rights defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child involve the right to protection and participation. Another aspect is the emphasis placed on the development of the child, or the support to the child's evolving abilities. Good parenting in accordance with the basic principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the findings obtained from research includes:

Providing a **safe environment and meeting the child's basic needs**, including the need for a home, food, water, health care and dental service.

Kind, nurturing behaviour responding to the needs of the child for emotional care, security, belonging and safe attachment. The parents should satisfy the needs of their child for parental warmth, acceptance, sensitivity, openness, involvement and support.

A structure relating to setting and maintaining a standard of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, as well as the role models offered by the parents. The limits and guidelines are necessary for every child for his or her physical and psychological security, development of his or her values, and feelings of personal and social responsibility.

Respect in connection with the child's need to be acknowledged as a person, for the parents to respond to his or her personal experience and validate it. Acknowledging and

respecting the child's experiences and point of view contributes to the realisation of the full potential of the child's personal development.

Empowering means combining the feelings of personal control and self-discipline with the ability to affect the attitudes and behaviour of others. It means improving the existing strengths of the child, and reflects the belief that strength can be created and renewed. Thus the parents should respect the evolving abilities of their child by adapting to his or her behaviour and ideas through involvement and dialogue.

II. Parental responsibilities

The Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses that the parents should be supported in their parental responsibilities. The parents should be able to:

- × offer to their children basic care, such as meeting their physical needs, adequate health care and dental service, including the need for food, warmth, a home and clothes;
- × ensure their children's safety by protecting them from accidents in their home or elsewhere;
- × ensure that their child's needs are met, and that their child has a positive feeling of being valued, as well as a positive experience of his or her own ethnic and cultural identity;
- × stimulate the child by supporting learning and intellectual development through encouragement, cognitive stimulation and promotion of social chances;
- × provide guidelines and limits, enabling the child to direct his or her own emotions and behaviour, by using non-violent methods, and
- × give the child a stable family environment which enables the child to maintain a safe attachment to his or her primary care giver(s).



The resources necessary for parenting can be divided into three groups of resources, or sources:

- × the parents' internal resources – such as using knowledge and skills (e.g. on child development), good physical/mental health and problem solving skills;
- × the inner resources of the family – good parenting models, interpersonal relationships in the household;
- × resources outside the household – the support of the extended family and friends, neighbourhood, community, economic resources, employment, social care, child care services, education.

III. Parental abilities

The parents' internal resources can be improved by strengthening parental abilities and capacities through education. The following issues need to be addressed:

- × the child's uniqueness and changing of his or her developmental needs from early childhood to adolescence;
- × the importance of the attachment to the primary care giver in the child's development;
- × the parents' self-confidence and skills in applying positive parental management strategies;
- × ability to strengthen the child's social skills;
- × limit setting techniques using non-violent means;
- × understanding the importance of the child's spiritual and moral development;
- × parents meeting their own needs as a prerequisite for successful tackling with life circumstances, interpersonal relationships and understanding of the life of all persons within the family;
- × the factors aggravating parental abilities, such as violence in the family, addictions and other issues related to mental health, chaotic lifestyles, emotional issues, being critical and insensitive towards the needs of the child.



IV. Interpersonal relationships

The quality of interpersonal relationship in the family is the basic resource of healthy parenting. The following aspects are of particular importance:

- × the significance of parental respect towards the child, being sensitive to and meeting his or her needs;
- × dignity, dialogue with the child, his or her involvement, and guidance by an adult;
- × the quality of the relationship between adults with parental responsibilities, regardless of the family structure;
- × the quality of the relationship between siblings and other children in the household;
- × the importance of non-violent conflict resolution and disciplining methods in the family.

V. Extended family and informal support systems

The extended family and informal social network could be valuable resources for parents and children. Work with children and families should, whenever possible, strive to identify:

- × the quality of the relationship between members of the extended family or in the neighbourhood or community;
- × to what extent the family, friends and local community support the parents and the child;
- × the importance and quality of the relationship between the child and his or her peers.

6.2.3 Guidelines for experts

I. Principles on which the work of an expert with children and families is based

The role of an expert should be based on clear values, ethics, knowledge and skills. The following is important for working on empowerment and providing support to positive parenting:

- × trust building based on empathy and respect for the human dignity of all family members and other significant persons;

- × all interventions and their outcomes are focused on the child and take into consideration the rights, developmental needs and uniqueness of each child;
- × the language and approach used are accessible and supporting;
- × all interventions are based on the principles of equality and accessibility;
- × experts and parents cooperate to empower the parents for raising their children;
- × a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach is used in the work with children and families;
- × when intervening in a family life, the strengths of the parents are recognised and empowered, both real and potential ones, in order to use their abilities in the best possible way;
- × parental abilities are not to be judged based on one harmful incident, but the safety of the child is primary in any case, and must not be jeopardised;
- × expert advice is given both to mothers and fathers or foster parents. The importance of the parental role of the father is recognised;
- × the services offered should meet various needs of parents from ethnic minorities.

II. Enabling access to services

In enabling access to services, experts have an active role in recognising the necessary types of support and services and ensuring that the parents can access them to improve their capability of raising children. To that end, they first offer the least invasive type of service:

- × informal support, (i.e. strengthening the existing social connections of the parents and establishing new connections with the family, friends, neighbours and other members of the community),
- × semi-formal support (empowering non-governmental organisations dealing with parents and children (including through advocacy) and activation of a series of self-help groups and other groups in the community with the services they offer), and, finally
- × formal support (professional services)



Furthermore, experts should also do the following:

- × ensure that parents receive state benefits they have the right to, for example money or other rights, or to realise their social rights;
- × where necessary, appoint a lawyer for parents;
- × prefer services which are evaluated using appropriate methods, and which have proven to be efficient in attaining the goals of positive parenting.

III. Programmes for parents

Programmes for parents can have different aims and characteristics. It is necessary to offer a wide enough and adaptable range of programmes so that it can be applied to the entire cultural spectrum of every community. The categories of programmes for parents include the following:

- × programmes designed to meet the needs and interests of parents for acquiring general knowledge on parenting and child raising methods that enable them to realise their development potential;
- × programmes dealing with certain issues parents can face in relation to their children, such as asocial behaviour, drug abuse prevention, and improving self-confidence;
- × programmes aimed at targeted groups of parents or children with special needs. They can include single mothers, separated parents, parents belonging to vulnerable or socially excluded groups, parents or children with disabilities, or programmes aimed at a certain age group.

IV. Recommendations for the implementation of programmes for parents

When offering programmes for parents with the purpose of supporting positive parenting, experts should take the following into consideration:

- × focus primarily on the principle of the "best interests of the child" and achieving the best developmental outcomes for every child;
- × be appropriate for the needs of children, parents and families;
- × do not judge or stigmatize;
- × avoid creating a dependency of parents to the experts;

- × encompass all of the complexity of family life, and take into consideration the needs of every child and family;
- × be sensitive to the context of the local community;
- × use a bottom-up programme development approach in order to ensure that the problems that parents face and the context in which they raise their children are involved;
- × confirm the importance of exchanging experience between families, and the role of self- help groups;
- × include ethnic and other minority groups;
- × include appropriate evaluation procedures in each programme.

V. Providing information about the term "positive parenting"

The expert knowledge and skills should be applied and developed dynamically, particularly in the following areas:

- × help mothers and fathers understand the development of their child and their parental role;
- × provide fathers and mothers information about children's rights;
- × enable the understanding of the consequences that can be the result of violating the rights of the child.

VI. Expert knowledge

Every expert has to:

- × know which organisation/agency is responsible for providing certain types of services, and which has specific legal obligations;
- × follow new findings related to child development and means of support to positive parenting, and apply those findings in their professional work;
- × be skilled in working with both mothers and fathers, as well as with children and families;
- × know the parenting policy set out in the documents adopted by the Council of Europe and in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and understand their impact on practical work;
- × create a "space" enabling them to reflect on their own work and its impact on children and parents, as well as developmental outcome in children who benefit from such services;
- × evaluate their own work, using evaluations by their colleagues and feedback from children and parents.

5



5.2 Professional articles accompanying the Programme implementation

- × Workshop Programme – what, why, how?
- × Advertisement
- × The four pillars of parenting
- × Basic psychological needs
- × Erikson's theory of psychosocial development
- × Development of attachment
- × Development is a dynamic process
- × How the child thinks and feels
- × Characteristics and psychological conditions of development of a pre-school child
- × The three dialogues – introduction
- × The three dialogues – I. emotional dialogue
- × The three dialogues – II. comprehension dialogue
- × The three dialogues – III. regulation dialogue
- × The three types of parental responsibilities
- × How and why without beatings
- × Listening as a lifestyle
- × How to listen and hear
- × Active listening
- × The language of acceptance
- × Does the child know what I want
- × Rules
- × Feedback
- × I-messages
- × The principles of natural and logical consequences
- × How to read out loud to the child
- × Read to them from the earliest age
- × The child and play
- × The development of play
- × The child and television
- × Parent traps
- × Notes on parental behaviours
- × Notes on parental anger
- × "How to Be a Good Parent" leaflet

Growing up Together

Workshop Programme for the parents of the youngest children

WHAT?

AIMS OF THE PROGRAMME:

As a part of a wider UNICEF's programme to support parenting titled "First Three Are the Most Important!", a cooperation between group leaders and parents resulted in the Programme of Workshops for Parents Titled "Growing up Together", implemented with parents of the youngest children throughout Croatia.

The purpose of the "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops for Parents is to enable a flow of information, knowledge, skills and support that are useful to parents in fulfilling their parental responsibilities, and which promote the growth and development of both the parents and children.

The main aim of the Workshop Programme is to create an encouraging and empowering environment in which parents, together with the workshop leaders and other parents, exchange experiences on how they live their parenthood, get to know themselves better as parents, the ways in which they treat their child, and learn about other possible ways of treating their child. They are also acquainted with the scientific findings on the positive interaction between the parents and the child, as well as parenting for the child's (and parents') well-being.

The workshops will re-evaluate the values the parents are guided by, teach about the needs of both the children and parents and the ways to satisfy them, practice communication skills, and answer other questions the parents might ask.

WHY?

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE PROGRAMME:

The "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops for Parents rests on several key assumptions:

- **The first years of life are especially important for the development of every human being. The child's brain undergoes the most intensive development in that period. That which the child experiences has an enormous impact on the development of their brain, and therefore their abilities and chances later in life.** If the child grows in an environment without sufficient love, security and parental care, many synapses in their brain will deteriorate, and their brain will be significantly different from the brain of a child who grows up in an emotionally rich environment. Already at the age of three there are visible differences in the social and intellectual development of the child which depend neither on the income nor education of the parents, but rather how much time the parents spend with their children at home, and how they support their curiosity and learning.
- **The first years are also important because the experience of themselves and other people from those years is transferred to later years of life. At the earliest age, the child's emotional security, or basic trust in themselves and others, is established,** which is the foundation of future psychological and physical health. Therefore the emotional attachment, early

communication and stimulation represent equally important development conditions as diet, hygiene, health and safety from injuries.

- **The parents or primary care givers have the most important role in ensuring an emotionally warm and supporting environment for the child, and in directing the child's learning and development.** They satisfy the child's basic needs, ensure the child's safety, provide love, encouragement, direction and limits. The parents often have questions or dilemmas that encourage them to acquire new knowledge and skills, or to change some attitudes and beliefs.
- The society has recognised **the importance and demanding nature of "parenting work"**, especially at the time of growing pressure on the family from different sides – employees, the media, public services and even family members. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, one **right of the child** is that **their parents should receive adequate and appropriate support and help in raising their children.**
- **Parents nowadays raise their children in a different world from that of their parents.** The society has changed, in addition to the changes on the labour market (e.g. increasingly longer working hours, higher job insecurity), changes in the family composition (e.g. more single-parent families and families with children from different marriages), changes in the understanding of the nature of children and parental authority. The societal expectations from parents are high, and **it is the responsibility of the society to help each parent cope with the challenges of contemporary parenting** and receive reliable information, financial and other help in raising their children. **The "Growing up Together" Programme of Workshops with Parents enables parents to receive the support they have the right to because they are parents.**

HOW?

WORKING METHODS:

Different issues can arise in a life with a child, full of parental responsibilities. In the course of eleven group sessions, **the parents will seek answers to the questions that interest them, together with other parents, leaders and expert literature.** Each parent knows their child and themselves best, but the experience of experts and other parents are often welcome. **Nobody can answer all questions alone!**

Different working methods are utilised at the workshops, depending on the aim and contents of each individual activity. There will be short lectures, exercises and different tasks, and above all, discussions on a certain topic, and exchange of experience in smaller or larger groups. Each workshop is "enlivened" with a game or two, and/or a short film.



ADVERTISEMENT

A GOOD PARENT WANTED

Year one:

Laid-back and relaxed person to lovingly care for a baby. They should enjoy carrying the baby in their arms, cuddling it and change its diaper every three hours, then patiently holding and feeding it for twenty minutes. They should rise early and sleep lightly. Work in all shifts. No possibility of promotion.

Years two and three:

Athletic type, with good stamina and excellent reflexes. Lots of energy and endless patience required. First-aid skills compulsory. A 15-hour working day – no lunch or coffee breaks(except when the child is sleeping). Great concentration needed to work with many distractions. Driver's licence desirable.

Years four, five and six:

Expert in teaching small children, to provide a stimulating and creative learning atmosphere, full of love, skilled in pre-school teaching methods. Experience in teaching art, music, sports etc. desirable. One foreign language mandatory. Knowledge on child psychology, linguistics and the Montessori method desirable.

Years seven through twelve:

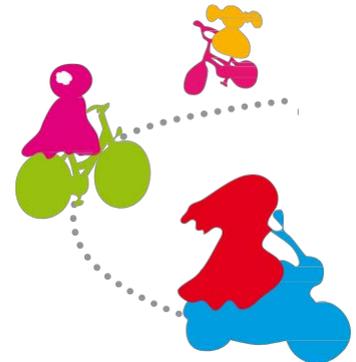
Opportunity for experts for sports and recreation. The tasks will be carried out in the living room, dining room and neighbourhood. Communication skills for the purpose of handling teachers, the principal and other parents are required. Readiness for conversations about sex and new mathematics self-evident. No objections to dirt, bug collections and children from the neighbourhood allowed.

Years thirteen through fifteen:

Specialist for adolescent psychology with experience in cooking large quantities of food. Can be hard of hearing. Tolerance critical. Tact, i.e.the ability to identify the moment when disappearing is the best course of action, is also necessary.

Year eighteen:

Provider to supply money, clothes, CDs and possibly a car too. Advice not necessary. Indeterminate appointment. The candidate will have enough time for an additional job for a good income.



The four pillars of parenting

IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD

1

Nurturing behaviour

- Responds to the child's need for love, emotional warmth, security, belonging, connection, acceptance. The child needs their parents' nurturing behaviour as a safe base from which they can explore the world, and to which they can return when they feel fatigue, fear, sadness or some other uncomfortable state or emotion.
- This requires the parents to be sensitive to their child's messages, and to respond to them appropriately, to show warmth and love, to provide comfort and protection, to accept the child and to provide support. The parent can show affection and happiness to the child, comfort them when the child is sad or shaken, talk to the child about the child's worries and interests, maintain a positive emotional environment at home and provide security.
- Consistent emotional warmth and response to the child's needs represent the basis for the development of a safe, stable and emotionally warm bond with the parent. Such a bond enables the child's emotional needs to be satisfied, and the child feels valuable and accepted as a result.

THE
FIRST
PILLAR



2.

THE SECOND PILLAR

Structure and guidance

- Respond to the child's need for security, predictability and competence.
- Structure means directing the child's space, time and guidance.
- A structured space is a safe space in which the child is protected from potential dangers, both inside their own home and outside it. Besides, for a small child it is important that the layout in a known space remains unchanged.
- Structured time and activities mean a consistent (but not rigid) daily schedule with regular times and patterns of family activities. Routine and predictability offer a sense of security to a small child. At the same time, a flexibility enabling the routine to adapt to the current needs of the child is also important (e.g. we do not wake the child up for a snack). Flexibility in the structuring of time also enables more agreements with the child as it grows older and more mature.
- The structure also consists of the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, as well as other forms of directing and guiding the child – such as expressing one's expectations or explaining a request. It enables the child to learn to manage their own behaviour. The parents serve as the role model of appropriate behaviour, expressing emotions, and interactions with other persons to the child. The child learns from them and develops their own moral values, dispute resolution methods and pro-social behaviour. In order to achieve that, the parent helps the child understand what is and what is not acceptable, and sets reasonable and appropriate limits and expectations. In that process, it is necessary to consider the child's opinion and to direct them in a positive way, while setting clear limits, offering reasonable explanations, and refraining from corporal and psychological pressure or punishment.



3.

THE THIRD PILLAR



Acknowledging or recognising the child as a person

- Satisfies the need and right of the child to be seen, heard and respected as a person – with their own understandings, ideas, plans, preferences and human dignity.
- For the development of the child's self-awareness, the parent need only notice, acknowledge and confirm the child's personal experience of themselves and/or of the world (e.g. I see you like sticking the stick into the mud; You're sad because you've lost your toy; You're worried about when dad is coming home, etc.).
- This requires the parent to spend some time with the child, and to express interest for the child's daily activities and experiences (e.g. what the child likes and dislikes, sources of worry, fear, joy or exhilaration). All this requires from the parents to listen to the child, try to understand their point of view, and help them express their thoughts and feelings. When the parent shows that it is important for them to hear and understand how the child truly feels and what they think, the child feels they are valuable as they are.
- Acknowledging the child as a person requires respecting the child's limits and making decisions in the areas appropriate for their age and maturity (e.g. whether the child is [still] hungry). It is also important for the parent to take into consideration the child's opinions and needs when making decisions that concern the child and the family. "Acknowledging the child as a person" does not mean acknowledging all of their wishes, but rather recognising, accepting and "seriously considering" how the child sees themselves or a certain situation (e.g. *I see you'd prefer to wear your green shorts, but unfortunately they're wet. Here are blue and red shorts. Come and pick which ones you want to wear until the green ones dry. But I want the green ones! Yes, I know you like them best. I'm sorry you can't wear them right now...*).

Empowering the child or enabling child's empowerment

4.

THE FOURTH PILLAR

*It is not the noise that makes the baby laugh;
it is the fact that she rattles the rattle. (Seligman, 2005)*

- Responds to the child's need to feel personal control, competence and the ability to affect other people and the world around them. In other words, empowerment means the parent's support to their child's autonomy.
- This requires parental sensitivity, openness for the child's influence, and mutual cooperation (e.g. You're pointing your finger there – you'd like to turn on the light – *I'll lift you up so that you can reach the switch.*). The parents support the child's strong characteristics, they encourage the child and express confidence in the child's abilities, they follow and support the child's initiatives.
- The parent empowers the child when they follow the child's idea with interest, when they join the child's activities if the child allows it, and when they refrain from directing and helping when the child can achieve their aims alone. When the child moves to realise their intention (e.g. get a glass of water, bring a plate to Mum, see an interesting device), instead of saying: *You'll break it, you'll ruin it, you'll fall down; see, you can't do it,* the parents can empower the child by saying: *Oh, that looks interesting, have you discovered how to open it, you're carrying it very carefully, you'd like to learn how it works already, etc.*
- Furthermore, the parents may create opportunities in which the child can learn and gain new experiences. This involves broadening the child's experience and acquainting the child with the world, replying to the child's questions, supporting play and enabling the child to experience success.
- When they see how their actions affect their environment, the child experiences the feeling of efficacy, which encourages them to be active and to act in accordance with their needs and in new situations. On the other hand, if the child is never successful in affecting their environment, they may become passive and withdrawn.
- In supporting the growing independence of their child, the parents should not forget that development is not linear. The child may sometimes express the need for autonomy, and later again for greater protection and presence of the parents (e.g. when they try to put on their shoes on their own in the morning, and when the parent comes to pick them up in the afternoon, they want the parent to put the shoes on for them, etc.).



The basic psychological needs

Every child and adult has basic psychological needs – they are universal (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Meeting those needs is important for their personal well-being.

- **The need for connection with significant persons in their surrounding, love, acceptance, belonging, a close relationship, "safe base", and security, predictability and unchanging nature of this connection.**
- **The need for autonomy, independence, recognition, freedom of choice.** Refers to our experience of our own initiative, freedom of choice, need to feel that we are the ones controlling and making decisions about our behaviour, rather than submitting to external pressure.
- **Need for competitiveness, ability to influence people and the surroundings, to master certain knowledge and skills.** Refers to the need to feel efficient, successful in our interactions (efforts) with people and things.

The attitudes and behaviours of the parents may support the fulfilment of the child's psychological needs to a greater or lesser extent (Grolnick et al., 1997).

How can a parent facilitate the fulfilment of their child's need for connection?

By getting involved in the life and world of their child!

The parent's personal involvement refers to the parent's interest for the child and the knowledge of them, and how much the parent participates in the life of the child. Showing personal involvement involves surrendering oneself to the child in the emotional and material sense (e.g. spending time in activities together, paying attention, showing warmth, being present in the child's daily life).

How can the parent support the fulfilment of their child's need for autonomy?

By supporting the child's autonomy!

Parental support to the child's autonomy refers to supporting the child's initiatives and efforts, the freedom of choice (in accordance with the child's age and maturity), and supporting the child in problem solving. The opposite of supporting the child's autonomy is using force and pressure in order to motivate the child, and solving the problems instead of the child.

How can the parent support the fulfilment of their child's need for competence?

By providing structure and directing the child!

Providing structure and direction means ensuring stability and predictability in the child's life and surroundings (e.g. daily routine, rituals, safe space), and expressing their clear expectations, rules and feedback to the child regarding desirable and undesirable behaviour. These parental behaviours help the child gain the experience of competence and get a feeling of having solved a problem successfully.

The child sees parental involvement behaviour and providing a structure as positive or negative, depending on the measure in which the parent supports the child's autonomy. A big parental involvement may be seen as imposing, meddling and overwhelming if the parent does not acknowledge the child as an individual and does not support their autonomy. Furthermore, the structuring and directing of the child's behaviour by the parent may be seen by the child as something negative if the parent does not respect the child's autonomy and participation in decision making.

Ryan, R. and Deci, E. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), p. 68 – 78.

Grolnick, W. S., Deci, E. L., and Ryan, R. M. (1997). Internalization within the family: The self-determination theory perspective. In Grusec, J. E. and Kuczynski, L. (ed.), *Parenting and children's internalization of values: A handbook of contemporary theory*. New York: Wiley, p. 135 – 161.



Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1970)

According to Erikson, the development of personality depends on typical social relationships that a person must establish in different periods of their life. In each period of life there is a certain developmental task to be completed. That task can only be completed with the help of the people around them. If the task is solved successfully, the person is ready to go to the next stage, where a new task awaits. If the person fails at some task, they go to the next stage of development with an unfavourable result. In short, the result of one developmental task has an impact on the success of solving subsequent tasks in psychosocial development.

Erikson describes eight such stages in the life of every person, out of which there are three in the pre-school age.

Table: The first three stages of psychosocial development

Stage	Psychosocial development task	Significant persons	Favourable-unfavourable development result
I. one year of age	establishing: basic trust vs. basic mistrust	mother (and father)	trust – mistrust security–insecurity optimism – apathy
II. two and three years of age	establishing: autonomy vs. self-doubt	mother and father	feeling of self-influence – doubt and shame
III. four, five and six years of age	establishing: initiative vs. guilt	family	focus – withdrawal initiative–guilt, passivity

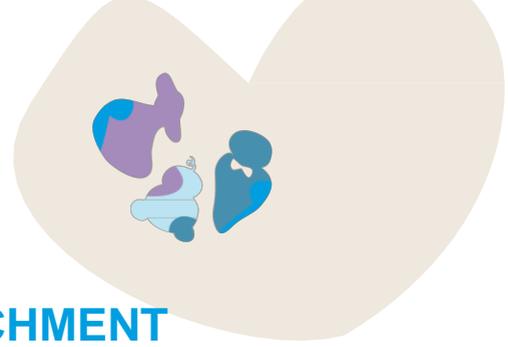
The most important findings of this theory are those on the important impact of an appropriate attitude of the environment toward the child. Erikson stresses the importance of sensitive motherhood during the first year of age, which involves responding to the child's needs for a gentle and warm treatment with a lot of physical contact, and a lot of cooing. In the second stage, Erikson describes the attitude of the environment that will enable the development of the child's SELF, the development of a growing feeling of autonomy and self-respect. In the third stage, the impact of the environment is important for the development of self-esteem, feeling of success, and connecting one's own success with the effort invested. Newer research has shown that the father too has an important role in the first year of the child's age along with the mother, as a partner in play and a figure who encourages the child to respond to challenges. The father gives a unique contribution to the development of the child, particularly visible in how the child deals with situations and interpersonal relationships outside the family. With his sensitivity and support to autonomy in early childhood, the child contributes to the social competence and adjustment of the child to school.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development points to the necessity of meeting needs as something of existential importance, not as indulging the child's every whim and the risk of spoiling them. If needs are met timely and appropriately, the child will be "well supplied" for later. If we do not meet them in the way the child needs, there may be an obstruction in psychosocial development. A child who has not received enough attention and recognition at an early age will seek them in the future. For example, the child whose fear of separation was ridiculed at the age of two will fear being left alone at the age of ten, which will require more energy and effort from the parents than it was necessary when the child was very young. A child whose calls we did not respond to when they were young will seek our attention even when their peers have long stopped doing so.

Children only behave the way they know; if they knew better, they would do so!

It is up to the parents to teach them – preferably with their own example.

(Starc et al. [2004]. Osobine i psihološki uvjeti razvoja djeteta predškolske dobi: Priručnik za odgojitelje, roditelje i sve koji odgajaju djecu predškolske dobi (Characteristics and Psychological Conditions of Development of a Pre-School Child: Handbook for Teachers, Parents and all Those Raising Pre-School Children). Zagreb, Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga)



THE DEVELOPMENT OF ATTACHMENT

The most important form in the emotional and social growth of the child is the development of attachment. Attachment is a strong emotional bond between a child and an adult (care giver, usually mother), which the child expresses with joy and tenderness towards that person, fear during separation, and by seeking comfort and security in the embrace of the care giver in all unknown and dangerous situations.

Today we know that the development of attachment comes from the child's biological need for physical and oral contact with an adult from their environment, and that need is physiologically based and connected with the maturation of the nervous structure in the brain. The fulfilment of the child's need to be touched, hugged, stroked, and for breastfeeding will lead to a normal development of the brain structures, particularly those parts that are "the seat" of emotions. If the child grows up in a neglecting or abusing environment, those parts of the brain will suffer damage, which may cause disorders such as social withdrawal and indifference, an increased desire for social contact with simultaneous aggression and unusual behaviour, development of socially inappropriate behaviour, inability to express or recognise nuances of emotional or motivational expression, as well as an inability to feel love, and pronounced negative emotionality, i.e. increased readiness to react with fear, sadness and anger (Joseph, 1999). At the same time, such inappropriate development of the seat of emotions, and negative emotionality of the child can be reflected in a disadvantageous development of the parts of the brain responsible for directing attention and memory, planning, problem solving and motivation, which might jeopardise the child's cognitive development and school success (Blair, 2002).

The development of attachment is the responsibility of the environment, which will satisfy the child's need for a warm physical contact, and which will provide the feeling of the stability and security of such contact. The mother is usually the object of attachment, but that can also be any other adult (foster parent) who provides the child with the feeling of protection, comfort and love by means of gentle physical touching, whispering, cooing, rocking and all other forms of pleasurable stimulation.

Attachment is a mutual feeling of a bond between the child and the care giver. Separation leads to the feeling of fear and anxiety both in a child and an adult. The child is usually dependent on the proximity and presence of the person they are attached to because they are unable to understand the temporary nature of separation, nor estimate its duration, making the separation feel catastrophic and definite. The development of attachment displays the characteristic course of an increase in the expression of the child's attachment at 6-15 months of age, and a gradual decrease of the expression and need for physical proximity by the end of the third year of age.

The main indicators of achieved attachment is the reduction in the frequency of a "social smile" and limiting of the smile and positive reactions to the care giver, as well as an emergence of fear from separation, and fear of unfamiliar persons. That fear is the consequence of the child's feeling of loss of the safe base that the person it is attached to represents.

Depending on the reactivity and sensitivity of the care giver for the child's needs, the child can develop either a healthy (safe) attachment or unhealthy attachment (in the form of avoidance or resistance towards the care giver, or chaotic, disoriented attachment).

In case of a safe attachment, the child will feel safe and comforted in the presence of the care giver, and their cognitive and socio-emotional growth will proceed to develop in the direction of an increasingly greater independence and established trust in the care giver and environment.

Safely attached children are curious, cognitively better developed and socially more competent: they adapt better, cooperate with other children, and display behaviour problems less frequently than children who developed an unhealthy attachment to their care giver.

Table: Course of attachment development
(According to: Vasta et al., Dječja psihologija, 1998).

<p>Weeks 0-6 Pre-attachment phase</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The child recognises the smell and voice of the mother (care giver), but reacts equally to all persons in their environment. • The child sends different "attraction signals" to the environment (hugging, gaze-following, smile). • The child is comforted when held in the arms, stroked and spoken to in a silent voice, but it still makes little difference which person does that.
<p>Week 6 – 6 (8) months Attachment development phase</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child begins to show different reactions toward "the most significant person" (care giver) than toward others. • More cooing and smiling is directed toward the care giver than toward others. • The child is comforted sooner when held by the care giver. • The child still shows no fear or resistance when being separated from the care giver.
<p>6 (8) – 18 (24) months Clearly expressed attachment phase</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signs of clearly expressed attachment emerge due to separation and fear of unknown persons. That development of attachment signs is connected with the child's other developmental achievements: established concept of object permanence (remembering the care giver's appearance), development of fear, and perfected crawling, which enables the child to follow the care giver. • The child upset by the separation can be best and the most quickly comforted by the presence and touch alone of the care giver. • The child shows security and bravery of exploration in the presence of the care giver.
<p>18 months – 2 (3) years Reciprocal relationship phase</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the cognitive development there begins an application of concepts and speech (internal representations), and the child gradually begins to understand the temporary nature of separation, especially if the care giver explains briefly and clearly the reasons for the separation, as well as who the child will spend their time with for the duration of the care giver's absence. The resistance to separation gradually subsides, and most children aged three can cope with being temporarily separated from the care giver.

(Starc et al. [2004]. Osobine i psihološki uvjeti razvoja djeteta predškolske dobi: Priručnik za odgojitelje, roditelje i sve koji odgajaju djecu predškolske dobi (Characteristics and Psychological Conditions of Development of a Pre-School Child: Handbook for Teachers, Parents and all Those Raising Pre-School Children). Zagreb, Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga)



Development is a dynamic process

Development is a sequence of changes in the characteristics, abilities and behaviour of the child that constitute their growth, making the child bigger, abler, more social, dexterous and adaptable.

For an easier monitoring of development, psychology studies the following separately:

- The development of motor skills – an increasingly greater ability to purposefully and gracefully use one's own body for movement and handling objects.
- The development of cognition – the mental processes whereby the child strives to understand the surroundings and adapt them for their needs.
- The development of speech – the ability to express one's knowledge, feelings, needs and opinions to other people using a system of signs and symbols.
- Socio-emotional development – creating relationships with oneself and others.
- Development of specific abilities – art, music, etc.

Development is a very dynamic and interactive process.

These individual aspects of development are **interrelated** and stimulate one another; for example, only when the child learns to walk can they be independent and go see something that draws their attention, thus gaining a new experience affecting the development of their cognition, etc.

A regular order in all areas of development has been identified, with **stages, phases and periods**. Still, there are differences between children regarding these regularities, which we call **individual differences**.

They give a personal touch to each child. Although it was possible for psychologists to create developmental standards due to the regularity of the sequence of developmental stages (what is expected at what age – learning to walk, talk...), it must be stressed that those standards are statistical: There is not a child in the world who will be what the standards described, just as there are no two identical children.

Development is not always steady. It is sometimes **turbulent**. There are periods of balance and imbalance, tumultuous and quieter periods.

We know that different factors affect child development: **hereditary** (biological, genetic) and **environmental** (learning, education), including the **child** themselves and their activity and personality.

We also know that child development depends on the development of **neurological structures** (the brain, nerves), and that it takes place in **social context** – among people.

Today we see development as a process that implies an interaction between the child, their characteristics and abilities, and their social environment, which includes the child's relationship with their parents, siblings, grandparents, friends and other significant persons, and also involves the relationship between their parents.





HOW THE CHILD THINKS AND FEELS

YEARS 1-2

This is a period of surprising changes!

In this period, the child will **learn to walk** and will experience "**an explosion of speech**"! Walking brings about a fundamental change. The child can now go whenever they want. They can reach objects they could not before.

They are exhilarated with their new-found independence: they love to explore every corner, touch and taste everything... Exploration is the child's "journey" to discovery. In that way the child learns about the fascinating world around them. All children feel the need to explore, touch and taste. This is absolutely critical for the development of their brain.

When the child explores, they are a "scientist".

For example, a toy will be thrown time and again. The child does not do that to annoy you, but rather to understand what "falling" is. They will put their hands into the bowl to touch the food and feel its texture. They will put a toy into their mouth to discover its taste. They will spit out the food to find out what that feels like.

None of these behaviours is "naughty". The developmental task of your child in this period is –to explore the world. **The child is an "explorer"**.

The task of the parents is to make the world safe for exploration. If the child is able to explore safely, they will learn many things quickly. They will also learn that their world is a safe place.

In the course of all that exploration, the child will quickly learn a surprising number of new words. They will want to know the name of everything they see. It is a wonderful opportunity to offer a rich vocabulary and love for words to your child. It is important to:

- talk to them
- read to them
- listen to them
- answer to their questions.

In this period, it is your task to stimulate the child's growing independence. (Erikson)

The child must know that you value their need for independence, and that you support their pronounced need to learn.

Their need for independence will be the cause of some conflict between you.

In this period children start to say "NO!". When a small child says "NO!", they are neither obstinate nor disobedient: they are simply trying to say what they feel.

Small children can name many objects, but they are unable to name feelings. They find it difficult to explain how they are feeling.

When a child says "NO!", they perhaps mean to say:

- I don't like that.
- I don't want to go.
- I want this.
- I want to pick the clothes myself.
- I'm not happy.

Children also cannot understand how other people feel. If they are unable to name their own feelings, they are certainly unable to name others'.

When you are tired and need a bit of peace and quiet, your child is unable to understand how you feel and what you need. If they are loud, this is not because they are "naughty". It is because they do not understand how you feel.

When you are in a hurry, and your child is slow to put on their clothes, it is not because they want you to be late. It is because they do not understand why you have to go right now – just when they are drawing their "masterpiece".

When it is raining and you want your child to put on a raincoat, and they say "NO!", it is not because they want to defy you. It is only because they do not understand that the rain will soak them, or because they want to choose for themselves what to wear that day.

Small children experience much frustration in their daily lives. They want to be independent, but we cannot always allow them to do what they want.

Not only do children always say "NO!", but they also often hear "NO!".

Small children are often frustrated many times in a day because adults often say "NO!" to them. We are trying to protect them and teach them important rules. But they do not understand our intentions. Listening to our "NO!" makes them frustrated.

As a result, small children often have temper tantrums. Frustration is bottling up, and they do not know how to release it. Their speech is insufficiently developed for them to express their feelings.

Thus the child is sometimes overcome by sadness, hopelessness and frustration. They express their feelings with tears, screaming and throwing themselves on the floor.

Many parents can be compared to children. When we do not understand the intentions of our child who says "NO!", we too sometimes become frustrated, and we also have temper tantrums.

This early learning how to resolve conflicts is another step in the development of your child. It reinforces your mutual relationship and teaches skills that we will use throughout our whole lives.

YEARS 2-3

In this period, you will perhaps notice some changes in the behaviour of your child that might worry you, but they are actually the signs of a growing understanding of the world surrounding the child. Those changes usually appear in the form of **fear**.

Your child can suddenly become fearful of the dark, animals, new sounds or shadows. Or they will perhaps cry inconsolably every time you leave.

Parents often worry because of those changes. They think that, instead of improvement, they are seeing a regression in their child's development. Those are actually signs of maturation.

As your child learns more about dangers, so they learn to fear injury. As their imagination grows and as they are able to imagine things they do not see, they can begin fearing monsters and ghosts.

This can be a very frightening period for your child. They still lack the experience to tell the difference between the real world and their imagination, and believe that everything they see exists for real.

They can suddenly become fearful of masks, drawings, cartoon characters or scary-looking toys.

Everything is alive in your child's imagination. If you put on a scary mask, they will think you have become a monster. If they imagine a monster under the bed, they believe it is true.

They can become frightened when you leave them because they understand danger, but not that you always return. They can become very frightened when left alone or with unfamiliar people.

In this age the child needs much **comforting and support**. They must know that you understand and respect their feelings, and that you worry about their safety.

Another sign of development is a sudden onset of **shyness**. Even usually very open children can start behaving differently in this period.

The child can suddenly be shy around strangers. This indicates a greater awareness of relationships.

Such new behaviour is not bad form or rejection. It is an intelligent response to the situation. Your child

understands the dangers, and can tell a difference between strangers and familiar people.

Your child's caution toward strangers shows they understand more about the world.

Another developmental phenomenon that worries parents is the child's sudden refusal to be held by your friends and relatives.

When this happens, the child is not being impolite; they simply wish control over their whole body. They wish to decide for themselves who is allowed to touch them.

This is an important moment in development. In order to teach children to protect the safety and privacy of the body, we must first respect their right to control their own body.

Remember: the child is still unable to understand how others feel.

When they are crying when you leave, the child does not understand that you have to leave. When they refuse to talk to a stranger, they do not understand that the stranger is trying to establish a friendly contact.

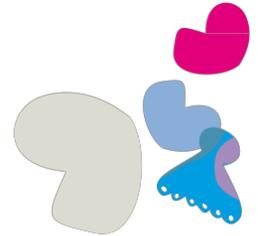
Your child is just beginning to understand their own feelings. Some time will pass before they are able to understand others.

The most important task for the parents in this period is to respect their child's feelings.

By respecting their own, we teach our children to respect other people's feelings. When children trust their parents to respect their feelings they show more trust because they feel safe.

Respecting the child's feelings means:

- helping them express their feelings using words
- telling them that we too feel like that sometimes
- that we refrain from shaming and embarrassing them
- that we refrain from punishment because they are afraid of something.



YEARS 3-5

This is such an exciting period! The child wants to know everything!

By now, the child's brain has developed significantly. Now the child understands they are able to learn so many things! When they see something new, they want to know its name, use, functions, why it moves like that... In this period children ask many questions!

Sometimes the parents are tired from answering them, and sometimes they do not know all the answers. **By answering their children's questions with respect**, the parents can create a good foundation for learning. If we respect the child's curiosity, they will learn with pleasure. They will keep this feeling for school later.

Parents who answer their children's questions – or help them find answers – are teaching their children many things:

- it is alright not to know everything
- their ideas are important
- there are many ways to get information
- seeking answers and solving problems are fun.

Children who adopt such attitudes will have more self-confidence when facing challenges. They will learn patience, and how good it is to want to learn.

However, children sometimes want to learn about things that are dangerous: they might wish to learn how to light a candle, or what will happen if they jump from a tall tree. Or what will happen if they drop your favourite bowl...

Since we do not allow children to do dangerous things, in this period they learn that there are rules. The better the child understands the reasons for a rule, the more likely it is that they will respect it.

Do you remember the fact that the child wants to know "why"? Why do birds fly, why do fish swim? Why can't I light a candle? When the child asks "why", they do not challenge you, they truly want to know the answer.

Children have the right to information. (Art. 13. of the Convention on the Rights of the Child)

In this period, children love fantasy games. They pretend to be whatever they want, especially adults. Sometimes they get carried away because equate play with reality.

Play is your child's "job". By playing, the child practises other people's feelings. They are immersed in other people's situation and see the world through their eyes. Play is extremely important for the development of empathy.

Play is also important for brain development. By playing, children solve problems, think of new things, experiment and discover how things function.

Children have the right to play (Art. 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Children need their play time. It is an important element for development.

If they have enough time to develop their imagination, they will become more creative in problem solving. If they are allowed to disassemble and reassemble things, they will learn to discover solutions.

If they are allowed to draw and sing, they will become more confident in their artistic expression.

If they have the opportunity to think about arguments, they will become better at problem solving.

A new phenomenon in this period is a need to **help**. They want to clean, make cookies, do the laundry, paint walls and build. When they are helping, children are "apprentices". By watching and helping, they are learning and practising important skills for life.

When the children help, they often make mistakes. They do not do things perfectly: they have little experience in them, therefore they are unable to do them the way we want.

However, that is the way they learn. Just as we are bad at what we are doing for the first time, so children need opportunities to make mistakes and learn.

When we are encouraging children to help, we are giving them an opportunity to learn. When we allow them to practise, we show respect for their skills and abilities.

That message has a strong impact on children. If they see themselves as capable, they will be more confident in learning new things. Therefore an important task for the parents in this period is to **encourage the child's confidence in their own abilities:**

- by answering their questions or helping them find answers
- by providing them with play time
- by enabling them to help.

A small child's confidence in their own ability to learn is the foundation for future learning.

In the following years the child will face many challenges; if they embark on that road with confidence in their abilities, they will be much more likely to respond to those challenges.

(Durrant, J. E. [2007]. POSITIVE DISCIPLINE, What it is and how to do it)





Characteristics and psychological development conditions of a pre-school child

A child aged 1-2

The basic characteristic of this period is an increase in the child's motor skills. Due to the new-found flexibility and finer handling of objects, the child explores new possibilities with curiosity, and gains new experience quickly. One of their favourite pastimes is tossing objects. There is so much to do and see. By the end of their second year of life, their motor skills will improve visibly, and a one-year-old baby who scarcely began to walk will turn into a running and jumping child.

The child becomes very active, and their total activity loses its previous harmony around 18 months of age. The first negativity emerges; the child's main word being "NO". They have to be under constant control because forbidding something verbally is insufficient in this period. Their mood is variable, tumultuous and short-lived. Diverting their attention is the best way of directing their behaviour. Speech, as a means of communication with the environment, will improve substantially (along with understanding and expression). Their interest for their peers also grows. The first forms of pro-social behaviour emerge, so they might, for example, comfort another child who is crying.

They mimic the actions of adults during play (wiping, combing), using substitutes for concrete objects. These are indicators that the sensorimotor stage ends at the end of the second year of life, and the development of the symbolic function begins. In the second half of the second year of life, the child becomes conscious of their physiological needs, and begins learning how to control them.

The fear of being separated from parents, which first appeared in the first year, is now intensified.

Psychological conditions of the optimal child development at the age of 1-2

1. Easing separation from the parents

- Offer an explanation to the child as to why the separation is necessary, and what the child will do in the meantime.
- Enable the child to express the already adopted habits and behaviours (the rhythm and means of meeting the primary needs – food, sleep, toilet...).
- Enable the child to use "transition objects".
- Enable a gradual extension of the child's stay in the crèche; presence of the parents at the crèche, particularly during the adaptation period.

2. Stimulating motor and cognitive development

- Enable the child to explore a large space with harmless and interesting toys and objects used daily (plastic vessels, bottles, colourful paper, rags, boxes, etc.). Do not cram the environment full of things, change the materials and toys from time to time.
- Plan the optimal quantity of new things – not too much at the same time!
- The child should be active and independent in that activity. Simple and harmless materials should enable them to discover and learn without the adults' immediate help.

3. Stimulating the development of the sense of self

- Use large and small mirrors so that the child can get to know their own appearance.
- Verbalise the child's sense of ownership (*This dress is all yours.*).
- Encourage the use of the child's name and "I" pronoun.

4. Ensuring the development of autonomy and independence

- Enable the child to develop a feeling of their own abilities, master an increasingly wider sphere of activities, and gradually expand their limits.
- It is important not to shame the child in this phase, but rather enable them to test the limits they can reach independently in their daily activities (play, hygiene, learning about the surroundings).
- Clear and realistic limits should be set – what the child is allowed or not allowed to do – without making the error of forbidding everything. Instead of warnings and forbidding something, the child should be taught how to safely perform the desired activity (demonstration of simple actions).
- Behaviours harmful for the child, others and the surroundings must be interrupted with clear, unambiguous and consistent actions, and the child's curiosity diverted to some harmless activity.

5. Encouraging pro-social behaviour

- Praise and positive examples should be used to encourage and react to all forms of pro-social behaviour, such as helping, comforting, generosity and cooperation.
- Encourage the development of the sense of self and sharing with others (ensure that there are enough toys, encourage an exchange of toys).

6. Verbal communication with the child

- Accompany actions performed jointly by the child and adult with speech.
- Adults should articulate their words clearly and accurately.
- Accept the child's communication initiative, verbalise the child's gestures and communication intentions (when the child comes with a question, need to be comforted, a comment, etc.).
- Adapt your speech to the child: use direct, simple and short sentences, words understandable to the child, expand their vocabulary. For example, if the child brings a ball, say: "The ball is red, the ball is bouncing up and down, throw the ball..."
- Talk to the child using appropriate intonation and vocal intensity.
- Particularly cherish the communication of the child with close persons, where an emotional and rich emotional interaction is realised.
- Organise "speech" activities:
 - listen and mimic sounds from the environment
 - read picture books and talk to the child while showing pictures
 - tell nursery rhymes and sing songs to the child while encouraging them to do the same
 - play recognition games, name objects from the immediate surroundings
 - enrich the child's surroundings with many toys similar to real objects.

7. Encouraging symbolic play

- Encourage symbolic games in which the child mimics the actions and characteristics of people, animals and objects (e.g. wiping the table, combing hair, feeding a doll, crawling, barking, putting a cloth on the head as a hat, etc.).

A child aged 2-3

A two-year-old child is generally stable, motorically able, able to communicate verbally, have patience occasionally, endure minor frustration, respect other people's wishes, give up a toy. People mean much more than before to them, they feel cuddly. After this short balanced stage there follows substantially unstable behaviour that usually reaches its peak when the child is two and a half years old. In that period the child is fairly inflexible, dominant and demanding, their emotions are volatile, they are very indecisive: everything must be the way they want and no different, they simultaneously want two different things... They are in conflict with themselves – even with their environment. This is the **three-year-old behaviour crisis**, a period of defiance and resistance. The child begins to resist adults: they do not want others to do everything instead of them, and express a desire to do something on their own. This is a period of becoming autonomous.

At the age of three there is a short-lived period of calm. The child will say "YES" more often, use the "WE" pronoun, and enjoy being with others increasingly more. The child becomes increasingly more secure, they no longer need the protection of rituals or everything to always be the same. The motor ability has helped them in their autonomy, and the development of speech has provided them with a particular self-confidence – both as a means of communication and thinking. In that period the beginning of exploratory behaviour and active testing is seen in all areas of development.

Psychological conditions of the optimal child development at the age of 2-3

1. Stimulating motor and cognitive development

- Provide the conditions for movement on a diverse terrain, stairs; climbing low playground equipment, etc.
- Create the conditions for independent activity, and for experimenting and exploration. Provide access to simple and harmless objects and toys that stimulate testing, disassembling, assembling, filling and emptying, that produce interesting effects when manipulated by the child.

2. Strengthening the feeling of independence and autonomy

- Enable activities in which the child can see the results of their actions, and in which they experience their own ability and competence.
- Ensure the presence of an adult to prevent harmful consequences of exploration, injuries, failure.
- The adult needs not be in a constant interaction with the child, but should be present, so that the child can receive a comment, support, attention, if solicited.
- Avoid any form of shaming.

3. Verbal communication with the child

- The adult should try to understand what the child wants to say, concentrate on what is important to the child (respecting the child's initiative).
- Use simple sentences when talking to the child, say them slowly and clearly, so that the child can understand them well.
- Talk to the child continuously and patiently, give them the opportunity to say something and answer questions, listen to them carefully; support and encourage them in connection with verbalisation.
- Although the speech of the adult must be intelligible and clear to the child, adults must use a complex verbal pattern that contain an "explanation" of the request, a reference to the past and future, and an expansion of the concrete example to the general.
- Tolerate the child's speaking mistakes, do not warn or correct the child, but offer them a correct verbal model.
- Browse, read and look at picture books with child, comment on the text after reading. Encourage the child to complete the story using their own words and give their own interpretations by looking at the pictures.

4. Facilitating the development of emotional control

- Create an atmosphere of safety and contentment.
- The adult must be a role model of an acceptable expression of all emotions:
 - cuddle the child in different situations, not only when they need comforting;
 - in situations that provoke anger, offer solutions that involve a short-term postponement of the gratification of their wishes and needs, or a replacement for a desired object, toy, etc.

Developed speech and ability to communicate with the child is not a guarantee that the child will understand and be able to fulfil the requests of adults.

5. Encouraging symbolic play

- Enable a variety of experiences to the child that the child will express with the initial game of pretend (symbolic game).
- Encourage the game of pretend in a cooperative relationship with an adult who plays with and in front of the child, and who shows activities done by adults which the child has already experienced (cooking, changing diapers, feeding, dressing...).

6. Encouraging empathy and pro-social behaviour

- Ask from the child to put themselves into the emotional role of another person (remember how you felt when...)
- Verbally explain your own and other people's emotions, provide help through speech.

A child aged 3-4

The child begins its fourth year of life balanced and fairly confident in themselves and their environment. The well-developed speech and interest for language and communication help them significantly. The child likes speaking a lot more than listening.

At three and a half years of age, insecurity, imbalance and lack of coordination may appear, impacting one or all areas of behaviour. In connection with motor skills, there might be stumbling, falling, fear of heights, lack of coordination in drawing and building. Individual differences are significant. More uncoordinated children start to acquire motor skills only now. The stammer that appears in this period may remain a permanent difficulty. Many children develop stress-reducing behaviour, such as blinking, thumb sucking, nail biting, nose picking. The child may also have difficulties in their relationship with other people. They can express their emotional insecurity by crying, whining, requesting things, being jealous; at one moment they can be shy, at the next they can be meddlesome. In that period, the child also begins to truly experience success and failure, indicating the beginnings of self-evaluation.

That is the period when the child's limits in the understanding of external phenomena are the most visible. We say their thinking is preoperational. A child surrounded by adults who explain the world to them, and who play with other children more will overcome the limits of preoperational thinking sooner. They are also interested in the functioning of their own body.

In that period, the child needs much patience, attention and understanding. Besides, at four years of age they enter a period when they become too sure of themselves, testing their abilities even above the limits set, which may cause danger and conflicts with the environment.

Psychological conditions of the optimal child development at the age of 3-4

1. Ensuring the development of autonomy and independence

- Enable the child to feel success in an activity.
- Enable the success to be felt from the results of the activity, not from a comparison with other children.
- The child needs to be shown that they have achieved success. Care must be taken that the child does not begin to value praise more than results, because this can lead to a motivational dependence on extrinsic, rather than intrinsic reinforcement. Intrinsic motivation must always have primacy. Therefore the child should always conclude for themselves whether the activity was successful, and asked: "What do you think, is this good?"
- In this period all children should be enabled to move and "practise" the acquired motor skills with enjoyment (kinesthetic games, mimes, small obstacle courses). Many children are still awkward, others are going through an insecurity phase, therefore comparison is undesirable, and mocking can be dangerous and impermissible due to its negative effect on the child's self-esteem.

2. Enabling intellectual growth

- Enable the child to gain experience through all sensory means.
- Enable the sense of quantity to be learned by handling real quantities: candy, chestnuts, pouring water and sand...
- Stimulating the use of speech becomes increasingly more significant: by giving and asking for explanations.
- Stimulate and satisfy the child's curiosity reflected in their asking questions – that is the period of "why?".
- Enable the acquisition of as much experience about the surrounding world as possible, **with the support of an adult or peer**, in order to overcome the limits of thinking, and encourage them to talk, retell their experiences (in actual and imagined situations, with and without pictures...).
- Show a proper speech model by example.

3. Ensuring the control of emotional expression

- Create an atmosphere of safety, acceptance and happiness in children.



- The adult must be a role model for the expression of all emotions:
 - cuddle the child in various situations, not only for comfort;
 - in situations that cause anger, offer to the child solutions that involve a short-term postponement of the gratification of wishes and needs, or a replacement for the desired object, toy, etc.

4. Encouraging symbolic play

- Encourage the development of play by gaining new experiences, joint experiences of the child and adult, and enable emotional experiences to be felt during play.
- It is necessary that the teacher's play in front of the children is preceded by a joint experience of the children regarding the work and activities of adults.

A child aged 4-5

A four-year-old child is going through a rather tumultuous development phase. They frequently cross limits in many areas of behaviour. For example, they will hit and kick others, throw stones, break things, run, laugh without reason, show rage. They will often be obstinate and impertinent toward adults. The language of four-year-olds often shocks due to the presence of swearwords and "toilet" vocabulary. In that period, children quite enjoy making up nursery rhymes and songs containing swearwords; they use them deliberately for their own amusement. The child often crosses limits even in their imagination. Imaginary friends appear, unbelievable stories are made up; the child often truly believes in the figments of their imagination.

The need for autonomy and independence that manifested itself as defiance and negativism slowly fades and appears in a new form, as a need to take initiative. At around four and a half years of age, it is as if the child slowly "slips" into their limits. That is still a period of uncertainty, insecurity, tentativeness. The child is trying to understand what is real, and what is imagined, even though it is still difficult.

Intrinsic motivation grows. The child finishes what they have started with the small help of an adult. If they begin to build a house, it will be a house in the end, whereas at the age of four it might have become a fortress, truck or gas station. In that period the child is a great examiner and debater. On the verbal level they show much experience and knowledge, as well as their way of thinking. They are also interested in the other side of the picture, what is on the inside, outside, etc. The need for realism strengthens. They can talk about death without becoming anxious because they do not see death the way adults do. A better control and improvement of many skills are visible. Play is calmer, the child copes with frustration better, draws better, begins showing interest for letters and numbers.

Around the age of five years the sexual identity is established: girls know they are female, and boys know they are male.

For some children it is the period of catching up with other children, especially for those boys who were slow to develop their motor skills and speech. It is often the period of rapid intellectual development. Such structuring and reinforcement of one's own abilities will be crowned with a more pronounced balance, security and friendly attitude towards the surroundings at the age of five.

Psychological conditions of the optimal child development at the age of 4-5

1. Ensuring the development of initiative

- Provide freedom for exploration and experimenting, enable activities that the child takes up on their own initiative (with precautionary measures).
- Taking the child's initiative into account is also reflected in the adult's answering the child's question, wondering together, partnership in play.

2. Enabling the development of own efficacy – competence

- The child needs to be enabled to **feel success** in what they do:
 - from the knowledge that they have achieved something with their own effort, without the help of others;
 - from the praise of an adult person.
- The adult needs to try to pronounce the "inner feeling of success" and ask the child: "What do you think, is this good?"
- The importance of praise needs to be reduced, especially in girls, otherwise they will become too dependent on the opinion of others, and will experience success only following external praise, without the true inner feeling.
- Provide the space and time for movement, running, climbing (playgrounds, obstacle courses)

and a wide range of games in which the basic forms of movement are perfected). Children are not yet ready to compete with others. Successes should be "measured" individually – how much is something better than the last time.

3. Enabling intellectual growth

- Enable the child to **create perceptive images** through all sensory means. It is important to enable to the child to play with "concrete" materials and objects useful for acquiring concepts (quantity, relations). Games with different materials: grains, fruits, stones – for making little heaps, separating, gathering into "columns", placing, arranging (the concept of number, quantity, weight,...); sticks, circles, plates of different sizes – to be arranged according to sequence, colour (relations: bigger, smaller); water and sand for measurements, pouring, filling, weighing (relations of quantity, weight, volume).
- Enable an **active use of speech**. Listen carefully in order to support and enable the child to express their feelings, needs, opinions and questions verbally. Always give an appropriate answer understandable to the child.
- Provide an accurate model for speaking.
- Use speaking games for the purpose of an auditory discrimination between sounds, enriching vocabulary and sentences.
- Listen, repeat and learn songs and nursery rhymes, accompanied by movement as much as possible. Ask simple questions and riddles, which children particularly like in that period.

4. Development of self-regulation (impulse control)

- Form a habit in the child to think before reacting:
 - to stop, withhold the answer/action that first springs to mind
 - to assess first whether it is accurate/appropriate.

5. Stimulating imaginativeness and creativity

- Stimulate imaginativeness and creativity in play by giving ideas for variations, asking to imagine in what other way, what if, etc. It is important to help the child in determining the line between what is real and imagined (a temporal or spatial determinant helps here, for example an actual country – an imagined country, when I ring a bell – we are making it up, etc.).

6. Ensuring the development of emotional control

- Enable the child to express and recognise their own emotions.
- Enable them to verbally express what and how they are feeling.
- Enable them to find alternative solutions for expressing emotions.
- Use social games – clearly set limits of what behaviour is acceptable and what is unacceptable, in a way understandable to the child.

7. Encouraging symbolic play

- Encouraging pretend games by enabling the child to notice the variation in the actions of adults in their daily lives and situations (visits, meetings, observation...).
- Enable various and new non-stereotypical roles in games, with a wealth of play materials.

8. Stimulating the development of "pre-reading" activities

- Develop and practise vocal sensitivity.
- Develop the understanding of how spoken words are translated into the written form.
- Develop the knowledge of the characteristics of written text.

THE THREE DIALOGUES

Empathic interaction between the parent and the child

INTRODUCTION

The key to quality care and impact on the child's growth and development is **empathy** with the child's condition, and **adaptation** to their needs and initiative.

Empathy or compassion is the ability to understand and feel what the other person understands and feels, and showing that. According to the old Indian adage, empathy is "walking in someone else's moccasins". Empathy is important because it facilitates communication with other people, and it is particularly important in the communication between a child and an adult.

In order for a parent to communicate with their child successfully, they must be able to understand what the child thinks and feels. **The parent's ability to adapt and react to the child's needs and initiative is the foundation of quality care for the child's well-being.**

The parent who recognises and adapts to the child's needs enables the child to develop a feeling that others can and wish to empathise with them. That feeling develops around the eighth month of age, and continues to form in close relationship with other people throughout the whole life. However, if the parents do not adapt to the child, this can be extremely unsettling and even harmful in the long run for the child. If the parent continuously fails to show empathy for the emotions that the child expresses – joy, crying, need for cuddling – the child stops expressing, even feeling those emotions. In this way, an entire range of emotions can be removed from the spectrum of close, intimate relationships, especially if the expression of such emotions is persistently discouraged during childhood.

The parental adaptation to the child is established through the empathic interaction from the very beginning of their relationship. As the child grows and the relationship deepens, the **emotional** dialogue between the parents and the child becomes richer, more stimulating for the child's development, and more directing. Children themselves begin to ask for parental involvement in their actions with the objects surrounding them, seek and understand the meaning of the surrounding phenomena; help and direction become necessary in planning and carrying out different ideas and actions. Gradually, as the child's horizons expand, the parents begin directing the child's direction using instructions, rules and limits until the child becomes independent and adopts working and socially acceptable behaviour.

Such a developmental approach to the interaction between the parent and the child can be described using **three different types of dialogue** that differ in the contents of the parent-child communication, i.e. the messages that the parent primarily conveys to the child. The first involves expressing emotions, the second conveying meaning, and the third directing or regulating behaviour. That which **all those types of dialogue have in common is empathic understanding of the child** and their condition, and adapting to it.

All those dialogues begin early, in this sequence, and continue, mutually interwoven and reinforced, and they are the following:

- I. **Emotional dialogue** – creating a strong bond and acceptance – development of attachment
- II. **Comprehension dialogue** – helping the child discover and understand the world – the mediation of meaning
- III. **Regulative dialogue** – directing the child's behaviour – from regulation to self-regulation.

THE THREE DIALOGUES

Emphatic interaction between the parent and the child



I. EMOTIONAL DIALOGUE

I. Emotional dialogue between the mother and the child dominates in the first month of the child's life, when it is important to express emotions and communicate face to face, with gentle touches, returning smiles, stroking.

The expression "emotional communication" means an early affective dialogue of expressive gestures between the parent and the child, in which the parent empathises with the child. The parent shows that by watching, following and reacting to the physical messages conveyed by the child, recognising the observed signals, and verbalising what the child does. For example, "You've drunk everything; you must've been really thirsty. You want the doll, don't you? Would you like me to take it off the shelf for you? Yes, a plane flies! You're tired. Your little bed is already waiting for you." In this manner, the true dialogue of emotionally expressed closeness, trust, joy and partnership between the child and parent are developed. Such a relationship is the basis for the development of a safe attachment and fundamental trust in oneself and others, which is in line with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.

TYPICAL SITUATIONS in which emotional communication is developed:

x close contact situations (breastfeeding, feeding, bathing, dressing, going to bed, morning greeting, goodbyes...)

x situations which call for comfort (when the child is anxious, sad, hurt, in pain...)

xsituations which call for encouragement, our adaptation and approval, support (when the child experiences difficulties in independent tasks – play, daily activities like meals, putting on clothes, picking up toys, etc.).

How does the parent establish emotional dialogue?

(According to: Hundeide, 1996)

a. By showing unconditional love and using emotional communication

For a healthy development, especially of self-esteem, it is important that the child feel unconditionally loved – merely because they exist. Even a small child understands emotional expressions, and can tell the difference between acceptance and rejection, joy and sadness. The child needs to be shown that they are loved, enjoyed, a cause for happiness... It is their psychological food of which they can never have enough.

In the same way, even a very small child can be communicated with using facial expressions, gaze, smiles, gestures, touch. The parent expresses their joy and interest for what the child does or is interested in, and the child responds with happy vocalisation. These early expressive "conversations" full of emotion are important both for the child's future relationships with others and the development of their speech.

b. Following the child's initiative and giving support

When the child shows initiative, and when they express their wishes and needs, support is important – we must see and hear them, identify what they need, adapt to them and meet their needs, follow and support their initiative. Therefore, it is important to recognise the condition, wishes, intentions and body language of the child, and to try to adapt to and follow the child in that which they are preoccupied with at the time. The child will feel your attention and approval. For example, if the child reaches for the picture book, read with them – do not put Legos in their hand.

For the development of self-confidence and motivation it is of particular importance that the child follow their own initiative within safe limits (not being always pushed into activities by someone else), that they be successful in what they do, and that we clearly say in which activities they are successful. For example, if the child drops their pants by themselves when going to the toilet, tell them they are successful, because in this way you confirm to the child that they are competent and important.

Early emotional-expressive dialogue is the prerequisite for an emotional relationship between the child and the parents, as well as the child's trust and being open to people outside the family.

THE THREE DIALOGUES

Emphatic interaction between the parent and the child

II. COMPREHENSION DIALOGUE

II. Comprehension dialogue is there when an adult participates in, describes and explains with exhilaration that which the child does and experiences

The child has the need to understand the world around them. Close persons are the best interpreters of the world; they give purpose to the child's direct experience. Already during the first year of age the child tries to consciously involve adults in their actions. "Learning" together in a supportive environment is the most effective. The child enjoys doing something together with an adult, and listening to explanations.

TYPICAL SITUATIONS in which the world is explained to the child are situations in which the child requires **information or explanation** regarding what is happening (conversations about everything that exists and happens around the child and in connection with them; at home, during walks, conversations about the environment, the people we meet, every new situation, the behaviour of other people, contents of a picture book, etc.).

How does the parent establish comprehension dialogue?

a. By helping the child focus on the things and events in their environment

The parent may help the child focus by diverting their attention to a joint experience of their surroundings (Look...) while pointing at what they want the child to see (Look at the plane fly...; Listen how merry the music is, like someone marching...; Smell this food in the pot, of what does it remind you?...). There cannot be joint experience if the child does one thing, and the adult another – for example, the child is eating, and the mother is watching television while feeding the child. For the child's understanding of the event it is important for the adults to be focused on feeding and talking to the child about it (This pea soup is delicious, yum!). Joint and mutual focus is the prerequisite of a good contact and communication.

b. By introducing meaning and exhilaration into what the child is experiencing

When the parent names and describes the outside world and joint experience, and when they show feelings and exhilaration, they give the meaning to the things surrounding the child. The child cannot experience meaning directly; it has to be conveyed to them by an intermediary through a conversation and through an expression of feelings. The child needs to be guided for the world to have meaning. Just like when we are in a foreign country and in need of an interpreter. The child does not only learn the names of things, activities and people, but also learns what is good and what is not from the parent's feelings; what is beautiful, acceptable, sad, etc... Nothing is self-explanatory. How can the child know whether the berries are edible if the parent does not say it? That which the child learns from close persons will be remembered more clearly.

c. By expanding and enriching the child's experience using explanations, comparison and imagination

The parent not only has to explain, but also expand what they are experiencing together with the child, for example by putting the new experience in relation with past and future events (Remember when we were at Grandma's place and made cookies; When you're taller, you'll go to school like Vedran). With older children, we rely on stories, emphasize similarities and differences –we expand the connections and relationships outside the realm of direct experience (e.g. while telling the story "Who Made Videk's Shirt", you can say the following: And everybody was very proud for having helped Videk. Now he's not cold. You like to help too, you help me when I'm dusting the furniture, and I'm proud of you.).

With the help of an adult the child learns to focus, observe, notice, differentiate, compare. The adult names the objects that the child sees, identifies the characteristics of the toys the child has chosen (e.g. it rolls – it's round, it's as blue as the sky, it's heavy), expands the child's verbal expression (Yes, it's a ball – the ball is big, the ball is red, the ball is bouncing up and down.). The adult names and explains what they see in a picture book, and then expands it in accordance with the child's abilities and experience (e.g. why, where from, what does it remind them of, what will happen). The adult turns the picture into a story or a logical sequence, comparison, imagination.

Joint participation and expansion of experience is perhaps the most important factor affecting the child's intellectual development in an early age.

There are different ways of expanding the experiences that prepare the child for different areas of human activity and culture, for example **poetic and moral** on the one hand (stories, music, art, plays, pretend games) and technical and computerised on the other hand (with more explanations, comparisons, classifications and logical explanations). It is good for the child to encounter different ways of expanding experiences, to get to know different people and areas of human activity and creativity – this activates their full potential.

From the point of view of communication **being mediators between the outside world and the child is a natural and timely response of the parents** to the child's interest and curiosity in joint activities. That is not teaching outside of the context (e.g. diverting the child's attention and explaining everything when we take them to the produce market is a natural response to the child's curiosity – unlike "lecturing" about what can be found in the produce market). The adults need to identify what the child is interested in or could be interested in, and follow their focus and interest. Then not only the child's emotions are in the centre of our empathy, but their explorer's initiative as well, which makes the mutual communication and mediation even better.

(Karsten Hundeide, International Child Development Programmes, www.icdp.info)

Sources for expanding the child's experience

- × Daily situations – at home and outside, toys, picture books...
- × Encountering adults and children...
- × The neighbourhood, grocery store, post office, clinic, hospital
- × Library, book store, books, picture books
- × Children's theatre, cinema, concerts, exhibitions, community events
- × Park, ZOO, botanical garden
- × Train station, airport
- × Tourist resorts, trips...

let's read to them from the earliest age

- × Let's join the library together with our children.



THE THREE DIALOGUES

Emphatic interaction between the parent and the child

III. REGULATIVE DIALOGUE

III. Regulative dialogue is present when the parent is involved in the child's activities by planning and giving instructions for what the child intends to achieve; when the parent directs (regulates) the child's behaviour by setting standards or limits.

The support provided by the parent to the child in regulative dialogue, described in the sixth workshop, changes when the situation calls for a clearer direction of the child's attention and behaviour. Expanding the child's experience ceases to be the most important in the interaction between the parent and the child if the child needs help, guidance, **direction** because child does not know something or lacks the experience or does not understand the situation, is in danger, is crossing a limit that we set. Naturally, in this regulation dialogue too it is important to recognise and follow the child's initiative and intentions, aims, direct them in an appropriate manner (using suggestions, support...) and withdraw once the child has mastered the necessary skills and behaviours. The adult should refrain from taking away too much initiative from the child, because it diminishes their competence and autonomy.

An important regulatory role of the parent is also to help the child control themselves when they want to do something that is not allowed by setting **positive limits**, pointing to acceptable behaviour, and planning together with the child. Children need limits in gaining self-control and planning abilities. A framework should be established, conditions created (expectations and limits), and planning should be done one step at a time. Older children need to hear explanations for why something is not allowed. Instead of constantly forbidding something, it is important to point to acceptable behaviour (expectations). Children need help in their exercise of self-control and planning abilities.

Several important terms:

Self-regulation means managing one's own behaviour, and its most perfect form is **establishing self-control – control over one's own actions**. By establishing self-control, the child becomes able to adapt to the necessities and requirements of the outside world. At a very young age, the child is often told, shown and demanded to adapt in a certain way by the parents (parents = external "regulators" of behaviour). Once the child grows up, they become capable of understanding external requests for particular behaviour, gains knowledge on how to satisfy them, and rehearses the most efficient behaviour. Behaviour based on that knowledge and skills is called self-regulated behaviour, and its most significant characteristic is the development of self-control (controlling one's own actions).

The development of inner speech significantly contributes to the development of self-control. The adult's verbal instruction significantly helps the child gain self-control because the child first mimics and follows the outer control of the parents using loud talk, then uses quiet talk and whispering, and at the end of the development of self-control the talk disappears completely, i.e. the child no longer has to repeat the parent's words (instructions or bans) out loud – they become the child's own thoughts. The real self-control development process follows, **after the third birthday**. Self-control/self-regulation enables the child to be patient, to learn reciprocity (now me – now you), leave the initiative to others, overcome fear, and continue working even when the work is hard and boring.

Regulation is an external form of behaviour control, and involves our **actions** (support, help, guidance, direction, expectations, limits, rules). Regulation precedes the child's self-regulation, and is the prerequisite for the latter's development.

Self-regulation is the child's controlling their own actions, i.e. **the aim of our direction, regulation** (so that the child can do it without us).

The opposites of regulation and direction are the following:

- ✘ ignoring the child or leaving them to their own devices, without support and limits (neglecting the child, absence of a structure consisting of expectations and rules about what is acceptable and what is not),
- ✘ commanding the child in a strict way, without regard for their wishes and needs, emphasizing only what the child may not do. That means overcontrolling the child's behaviour, with force and disrespect of the child as a person.

TYPICAL SITUATIONS in which we help the child control their own behaviour are the following:

- ✘ situations which require a focus on the goal and cooperation – when the child needs support and/or guidance in something, when they need to concentrate, focus on "problem solving" (e.g. building a block tower, assembling a jigsaw puzzle, making a paper plane, washing hands, setting the table);
- ✘ situations which require regulated behaviour because something is not allowed or desirable – respecting the house rules learning values, situations in which something is shared, situations that require rules for socially acceptable behaviour, altruistic behaviour and empathy toward others, including animals, plants... (e.g. when the child is touching the stove, walking around the house with dirty shoes, refusing to greet someone in the street, sharing a chocolate bar, comforting someone, taking away someone's toy, picking flowers, kicking a cat).

How does the parent establish regulative dialogue?

a. By supporting the child's activity and initiatives; by guiding the child step by step towards the goal

In the communication with the child, the support in joint focusing of the attention is present quite early. In goal-oriented activities it is natural that communication becomes more regulatory and adapted, both to the child's abilities and the difficulty of the task.

For example, the child wants to build a tower from many blocks that will not topple (= goal). However, that does not mean the adult must do that instead of the child. In a spontaneous game, we direct the child by suggesting ideas, asking questions, suggesting that the child try again, to perhaps take another block, etc. We help the child **plan one step at a time**: "What are you going to do now, which block are you going to use?" It is not necessary to hurry or directly lead the child in the task, there is enough time... It is important for the child to be autonomous (their goal, their effort, their success) and to improve their abilities and competence (the tower grows taller and taller). Or we observe the child learning from other children without interference.

When the parent judges that the child can do something, but is insecure, they will encourage the child to invest additional effort in order to complete the task. We regard such activities as "pulling" the progress forwards. It is important to recognise the focus of the child's attention, motivation and ability. If we ask for and expect a little bit more than the child can really do, they might give up that time, but will still remember something from our instructions and request, and generalise and apply it in a similar situation.

In all of the goal-oriented activities, the role of the adult is to support effort, step-by-step planning, persistence, and to provide feedback when the child is satisfied with their success ("You've succeeded in building a tall tower.") As the child progresses, so our support is needed less. It is important to **harmonise our expectations with the child's abilities** realistically and set good challenges and support ("I think you can do it, try one more time"...). If the child fails that time, they should be told that they have the time for more attempts in order not to feel guilty and discouraged ("Okay, now we know we have to wait for you to grow up a bit more, and then you can try again.").

When the child fails in their intentions (find the right hole, the tower topples, etc.), and the child is angry and frustrated, we do not need to "rescue" them from the frustration nor build the tower instead of them, but name what happened, have compassion and leave to the child to decide what to do. Patience should be encouraged because it builds tolerance to frustration ("Oh, your tower has toppled, and it was so tall. What are you going to do now?").

b. By expressing expectations in a positive manner, with clear limits of what is allowed to the child, and what is not

The limits should be set in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Instead of shouting and forbidding something, we explain why some things are not allowed, and why some rules are necessary. Along with expressing our reasonable expectations, we set rules and consequences that follow if the rules are not respected. We forbid something clearly, firmly and with an explanation, and we divert the child's attention to what is allowed. In that way the child becomes increasingly more capable to direct their own behaviour, and to predict the consequences of their behaviour, which leads to inner control in general.

When we set limits in advance, as expectations, we act proactively. If the child behaved well in a given situation, in accordance with our stated expectations, it is important to give positive feedback detailing what was good and why, in order to reinforce the behaviour. If the child has crossed a limit or broken a rule, the feedback should tell them exactly what was wrong and why, so that the child can know what to do next time. A natural and/or logical consequence can follow (e.g. "if you spilled it, then wipe it"). Now our actions are **reactive** (a reaction to the child's behaviour). When setting limits and reacting to the child's behaviour, we have to take care not to go overboard with the **emotional** expression of our approval or disapproval.

Such honest attitude towards the child in which we clearly say what we expect, without lying (e.g. that there is no more candy in the store, or that there will be no pain at the doctor's, etc.) develops, among other things, true trust. It is mentioned often that the child "tests their limits", i.e. the child's behaviour is seen by some parents as a struggle for power and questioning the parental authority. That is, in fact, an effort of the small child to get what they want, and it is difficult for them to hear parental bans and limits. We can compare it with driving on the highway at more than 130 km/h because the driver likes it, not because he tests the limits set by someone.

Therefore, whenever we do something with a child and are unsure of whether the child knows how to behave, or when we know that the child may behave inappropriately (e.g. store, guests at home, visiting the doctor), we have to announce to the child where and why we are going, who will be there, what will happen, what will we do, and **what we are expecting from them**. At the end we give them feedback, stating what went well and what should change in the child's behaviour.

NOTHING IS SELF-EXPLANATORY, EVERYTHING NEEDS TO BE SAID!

For example: "We're going to the store to get something for lunch, we're going to greet the saleswoman. I'll get some meat, and you'll look for milk. I'll buy some coffee for myself, and you can get a candy bar."

CHILDREN WISH TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THEM.

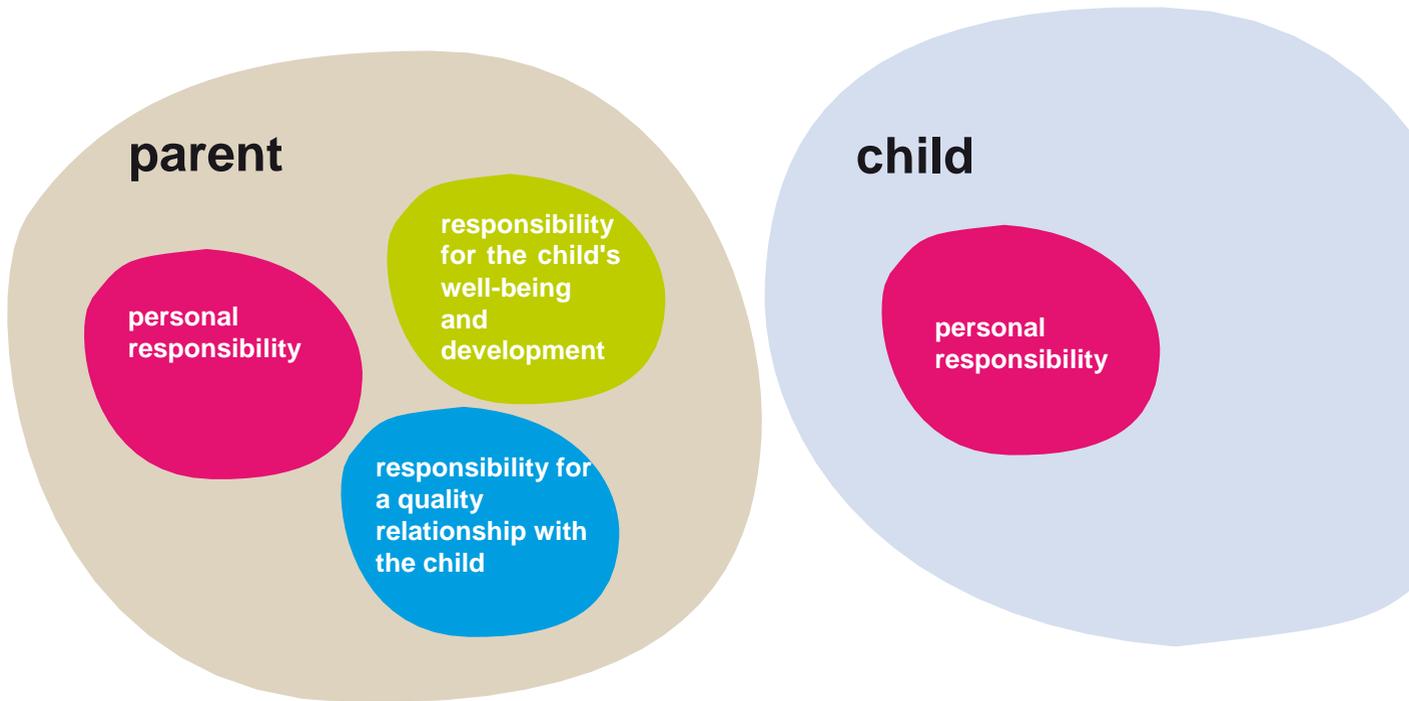
For example: When the mother said to her four-year-old Saša that he should stop peeing in the bed at night, he answered politely: Tell me how, and I will do it. The mother was taken aback by his question and did not know how to reply. "How can I do it when you can't explain it to me", said Saša.

(Karsten Hundeide, International Child Development Programmes, www.icdp.info)



The three types of parental responsibilities

What are the parent's responsibilities, and what are the child's?



Communication:



How and why without beatings?

Reasons to raise children in a non-violent way

Corporal punishment violates the human rights of the child because it represents an attack on the child's dignity and physical integrity. According to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, corporal punishment is not allowed in Europe. In Croatia, the Family Act forbids corporal and other humiliating punishment of children.

However, some parents believe that corporal punishment (hitting the child with a hand or an object, such as a stick or belt) is an effective way of compelling children to do as they are told. Even though the child will do what you want at that moment, the negative effects of such punishment can stay for the remainder of their life.

It is well-known that children who have suffered corporal punishment can develop:

- poorer mental health (e.g. less self-confidence, more frequent bouts of depression);
- a worse relationship with their parents (violence does not teach them to respect their parents, but to fear them, and encourages them to resist and retaliate, and/or distance themselves from them);
- poor self-regulation and lower moral standards (violence does not teach them the reasons and ways of correct behaviour);
- increased aggressiveness and socially unacceptable behaviour (corporal punishment gives the children an impression that violence is normal, acceptable and efficient).

Furthermore, it is known that adults who suffered corporal punishment as children have more problems with their mental health, and show more criminal and socially unacceptable behaviour, including family violence, than those who did not suffer corporal punishment in their childhood.

However, corporal punishment is not the only type of behaviour that leaves a lasting mark on health. It is also important to avoid other forms of behaviour that humiliate and degrade children, including derision, instilling the feeling of worthlessness, being unloved, incapability or fear in the child.

Practical guidelines for raising children in a non-violent way

Non-violent child education does not at all imply encouraging permissive parenting. Parents who are convinced that corporal punishment of children is inefficient and humiliating for the child find other means to resolve conflicts and ensure compliance with their standards of behaviour.

Non-violent means of reacting to the child's wrong, harmful, dangerous or socially unacceptable behaviour differ to an extent in relation to the child's age.

- For younger children – diverting the child's attention before the problem escalates; comforting the child by thinking of another joint activity; winning over the child to listen to you, pointing to what was wrong and how things can be done differently; stepping away from the situation with a discussion later, once passions subside; calling for a time-out; using natural and logical consequences.
- For older children – discussing undesirable behaviour, using natural and logical consequences; directing the child to "make up" for the damage caused or to make amends, preferably with the parent, or restricting privileges (e.g. watching television or meeting friends).

In those situations it is important to avoid insulting the child and jeopardising their self-consciousness and dignity; the undesirable behaviour, not the child, should be condemned. The parents should also think about the child's ability to understand and follow the rules, and about the circumstances and severity of the child's behaviour. When setting limits, the parent should take into consideration what is good for the child – in accordance with the child's age and level of education – and think about the reasons for the limits.

Many parents have realised that they can avoid coercion if they have already established a relationship full of feelings, respect and contentment with their children from their birth. The key to successfully educate children to regulate their own behaviour lies in establishing mutual respect and expectations of a cooperation with them from the earliest age. Children react well to respect and positive expectations. That means the parents should expect good behaviour and focus on it instead of on bad behaviour, make sure that the child understands what is expected of them, and that the child is able to fulfil it.

In order to help their children learn positive forms of behaviour, the parents can:

- routinely pay positive attention to the child regardless of their age (as the child grows, this begins to involve interest for the child's peers and school success);
- listen to their children attentively and help them express their feelings;
- help them understand the potential consequences of their choices;
- encourage desirable behaviour by paying attention to them and praising them, and ignore minor manifestations of undesirable behaviour;
- behave in the way they want their child to behave, communicate with the child respectfully, and show with their own example how conflicts can be resolved (constructively).

Parents respected by their own children are the most likely to succeed in supporting desirable forms of behaviour and reducing undesirable forms. This requires the parents to acknowledge and accept the fact that they make mistakes too, and to accept responsibility for their own parental behaviour and the quality of their relationship with the child (not blaming the child for everything).

Recent research has shown that the child's self-regulation and cooperation are not a consequence of parental disciplinary measures, but rather that they arise out of a positive parent-child relationship. Therefore, **the child is not polite because we have trained them that way, but because we treat them and others politely.** The very parental behaviour that contributes to the creation and maintenance of a positive relationship with the child is an early foundation of the child's compliance with the parents' requests. Children develop their readiness for cooperation based on early experiences of reciprocal cooperation with their parents throughout the history of their relationship.



Listening as a lifestyle

By listening, we acknowledge the right of the child to be heard, for their opinions and experiences in relation to everything concerning them to be acknowledged. Only by listening can we understand the child's priorities, interests and needs, and understand how the child feels about themselves. Listening is crucial for establishing mutual respect. Both the child and adults gain something from listening.

Listening is an active, two-way process of receiving, understanding and reacting to messages, and involves all sensory pathways and emotions, without being limited to verbal speech. It opens the door to the child's initiative and involvement, and our adaptation to the child in meeting their needs. Careful listening enables us to get to know the child in a new way, discover serious issues that worry them, but that the child is not able to express (e.g. abuse).

Listening is a part of an atmosphere in which the child feels safe and powerful, and in which they can express themselves with trust in the way with which they feel the most comfortable. It is especially important to show the child that we are listening to them if they have communication difficulties, because that teaches the child to be both listened to and heard. Listening is the way of acquiring other social skills as well (communication with new adults, children, following important instructions – in play, tasks, daily routine...). Listening to the child gives the adult the right not to know everything, and offers them an opportunity to explore together with the child, to hear their opinions regarding everything that happens to them – about the environment, routine, behaviour – and to correct and adapt their actions more easily to themselves and to the child.

For the true listening, we have to show respect, honesty and patience, be sensitive for a good moment, have imagination, be open and willing to cooperate. Every child, regardless of the age, sex, parents' education and culture, has the capacity for communication and expressing themselves along with their wishes and needs. The adult must say truthfully why they listen, whether they have got the time, and whether they can do what the child requires of them. Listening requires time and patience. If we have neither, we have to tell that to the child honestly, with a promise to pay them more attention as soon as we are able (determining exactly when that will be) because children often want something at an inappropriate moment, and we really do not have the time to listen to them. Besides, children often need much time to say what they want. If we ask the child without replying, we are sending the message that we are not listening to them and taking them seriously enough.

There are many ways and techniques of listening. Whichever we choose, **observing the child and empathy must be the starting point.** By observing their behaviour (mimicking, gestures, non-verbal messages, behaviour...), we can conclude something about the child's emotions, thoughts, condition. The child can express themselves using art, music, acting and dance (Malaguzzi: Hundred Languages of Children), which also tell us a lot about their needs, interests, emotions... Often the child thus expresses what they are unable to say verbally. Therefore **adults have to listen with their ears, eyes, nose and touch** – especially to the little ones.

Listening to a small child has an impact on their self-image, as well as their behaviour at a later age. Not listening to a stressed small child can lead to later anxiety and aggressive behaviour. Listening to an agitated child calmly, without nervousness and panic, is the best way for adults to help the child develop good feelings about themselves and others. Listening to a small child is crucial for the development of their listening skills and social skills.

By listening to the child, we provide a good role model for the child to learn to listen themselves.

Parents love listening to their baby – even when it sleeps, they enjoy its vocalisations, cooing, laughter. It is important to listen to the baby, to hear what makes it happy or nervous, and to act accordingly, to check whether they have heard what the baby needs, as well as to comfort it if the baby cannot get that. Parents can identify the reasons for their baby's crying. In an **emotional** dialogue with a small child, the child has to hear that we recognise that something hurts, that they are afraid, hungry, full, happy, tired, clean, comfortable, or that they are interested in a certain object (and hand them another one).

An adult listening to a small child talks to them (using speech adapted to the child's stage of vocal development), gives them options; talks using cooing, babbling (me, then you), reacts to what the baby is interested in, acknowledges the child's emotions gently and soothingly, sings different songs, tells stories, teaches the child rhyming games, comments daily activities, plays and laughs with the child. Domestic routine, loud family members, loud TV and music can prevent us from hearing a small child. **With a small child there cannot be hurry, and the noise of our own home should be reduced so that we can listen to the child and hear them as an equal member of the household.**

When we are listened to, we learn important skills such as listening, talking, negotiation, planning. We learn to reflect what we have heard or seen, take into consideration other people's opinions, be objective. By listening, we develop a deeper understanding of other people's needs, and a feeling of responsibility. Finally, we learn whether other people find it worthy to listen to our voice. The first to be heard by the child and to listen to the child are the parents and close adults. Their voices affect their attitudes and later achievements in the strongest way. In order for the child to develop well (**emotionally**, mentally and physically), it is important that the parents listen to them and acknowledge what they hear.

In order to adapt to the child, the parent must be patient, interested, available, realistic, honest and sensitive for what they see. It is also important for the parent to focus on what the child does, not to disregard the child's emotions as silly or irrelevant, to have positive expectations, not to yell, to reflect what they have understood – **in short, to make an effort.**

(Clark, A. and Rich, D. [2004]. NCB – National Children's Bureau, Great Britain)

We can also listen to children who are unable to express what they need verbally

We all know that crying is an expression of dissatisfaction, and all mothers try to decode this non-verbal message in a non-verbal or behavioural way, usually using trial and error. Thus they will cover the child, change their diaper, feed them, cuddle with them until they discover what the child needs, and until the child finally thinks: "Finally you have understood – that's what I wanted; I was hungry." Every mother gradually learns to decode her child's crying: the responsibility to understand the child's messages rests on the adult.

As in active listening, we have to check whether we have understood what the child needs or wants, not assume that we know what the child needs.. The communication sequence needs to be finished (Jana's example). In order for the communication with the child and the fulfilment of their needs to be successful, during the first year, the parents have to spend lots of time with their child. A small child needs the parents, they need them "desperately" because they are helpless and dependent, and the parent's presence shapes their trust in the world (Erikson). In the daily life, the most important thing is to listen to the child, e.g. to meet their needs. As the child grows, communication changes in the way that the child can meet their own needs and resolve their own problems alone. A good parent who listens will aid the child in that task (Petar's example). They will leave the responsibility for problem solving to the child, avoiding direct involvement or advice. Sometimes the parents are impatient, so they try to help their child by tackling the child's problems themselves. They are upset by the child's frustration due to unmet needs (they do not actually accept the child), so they "have to" tackle the child's problem themselves and offer a quick solution. If they do that often, they create obstacles in the child's process of becoming independent in the use of their own skills, enabling the child to learn being helpless.

Jana stands upright in her bed and begins sobbing, then crying loudly. **The mother** sits her back and gives her a rattle.

Jana stops crying for a short time, then hurls the toy over the side of the cot and onto the floor, and resumes crying, this time even harder.

The mother picks up the rattle and places it in Jana's hand firmly, saying in a strict voice: "If you throw it again, you won't get it again!"

Jana continues crying and hurls the rattle out of the cot again.

The mother slaps her on the hand.

Jana is crying really hard now.

Petar (crying): "Lorry, lorry – there's no lorry." **Parent:** "You want your lorry, but you can't find it." (active listening)

Petar (looks under the couch, but there's no lorry there)

Parent: "The lorry is not here." (reacts to the child's non-verbal message)

Petar (runs to his room, searches, can't find the lorry)

Parent: "The lorry is not there either." (reacts to the child's non-verbal message)

Petar (thinks, goes to the door to the back yard) **Parent:**

"Maybe the lorry is back in the yard." (reacts to the child's non-verbal message)

Petar: (runs out, finds the lorry in the sand pit, looks proud): "Lorry!"

Parent: "You've found your lorry." (active listening)

(Gordon, T. [1996]. Škola roditeljske djelotvornosti (Parent Effectiveness Training))

How to listen and hear

(prepared by Branka Starc)

If you want to make people talk to you effectively, you have to be ready to listen and show that unambiguously.

The famous psychologist Carl Rogers says that it is not enough to learn listening skills, because it is the art of listening that points primarily to your fundamental attitude towards life and others.

By listening and understanding what the other person tells you, without criticising and moralising, you show acceptance, and create an atmosphere of security.

Listening actively to another person is the greatest gift you can give to them. The power to listen and hear other people is perhaps the greatest gift of the human species.

How to listen? How to show acceptance?

How to listen to the child and hear what they want and need?

Wherever people gather, they want to be heard; however they are rarely heard because the person they want to hear them is waiting very impatiently to be heard themselves.

Jackins, 1982

How to listen so that it makes the child want to talk to us

LANGUAGE OF ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance is not just a feeling and state of mind. You must be able to show it.

When the child is not burdened by problems, when they are focused on an activity, we can show acceptance by **not interfering**, not talking or doing anything, letting the child be independent, explore, separate from us in a "healthy" way. In this way we show how much we trust that the child is capable and that they know and can, for example, assemble a jigsaw puzzle alone, dress up a doll, browse a picture book, build a toy house, draw a car, etc. Until the child invites us to join in, we should let them enjoy without our interference. If the child looks at us, it is enough for us to nod and smile, which means "I can see you". If the child needs us, they will say it.

When the child shows they have a problem verbally or non-verbally, that they are upset, wondering, angry, sad, we show acceptance by **listening**.

Passive listening

- × **Silence** is a strong unspoken message that helps express feelings. A person being passively listened to tries to solve their own problems because nobody interrupts them, feels respected because they are neither criticised nor advised.
- × Our **non-verbal behaviour**, gestures, facial expression and body language enhance the message of listening. So stop doing other things, turn to the child, lean towards them, crouch, "open up" your body, show that you share their concerns and wonder using your facial expressions.
- × **The beginning of listening** should be supported by simple words conveying interest for what the child wants to say to you;

The simplest ones are the following:

- a-ha	- mm, hm	- you don't say!
- oh!!	- really?	- I see
- yes?	- so that's how it is!	- and?

or an invitation to say more:

- Tell me more about it.	- I'm interested in what you think about it.
- Tell me, I'm listening.	- I see that's important to you.

Active listening

By listening actively, we encourage and maintain a conversation, we help the other person to tell us what bothers them in confidence.

× Check whether you have **understood what your child wants to say**.

- If I've understood correctly, you're saying that...
- Correct me if I'm wrong...
- You think that...

× Tell them you **understand their feelings**.

- Be a mirror reflecting their feelings.
- I see you're crying. Are you sad because Mum is not here yet?
- You're raising your voice, does this annoy you?

× Be compassionate, **put yourself in the child's situation**, "walk in their shoes".

- I believe you're uncomfortable...
- That really made you angry...

× Encourage the child to **find the solution themselves**.

- What will you do?
- Who do you need to do that?
- Can you see my role in it?

*To listen is an effort, and just to hear is no merit.
A duck hears also.*

I. Stravinski

By listening actively we are checking whether we have understood the meaning of what has been said and recognised the feelings of the person we are listening to. That sends the following messages:

- × I hear and understand your problem.
- × I see and understand how you feel.
- × I will help you think about it.
- × I believe in you to find a good solution yourself.

Once we have opened the "door to communication", we have to keep them open. Do not slam them, because the child will fall silent if, instead of talking about and listening to their problem you are:

- × commanding – Stop yelling!
- × threatening – If you don't pick up your toys, I'll be very sad.
- × preaching – Good children don't do that.
- × advising – Turn the cube like that.
- × criticising and blaming – You've made another mistake!
- × dissuading – It's nothing.
- × analysing – You're doing that to be in the centre of attention.
- × asking questions – Why are you crying?
- × refusing – We can't talk about that right now.
- × mocking – Wise guy. Whiner.

Instead, try to use all forms of good listening – that way you show to the child that you accept them and acknowledge them as a person.

Additional sources on communication:

1. Thomas Gordon: Škola roditeljske djelotvornosti (Parent Effectiveness Training), Poduzetništvo Jakić, Zagreb, 1996
2. Group of authors: Lijepo je biti roditelj, priručnik za roditelje i djecu (It Is Good to Be a Parent, handbook for parents and children), Creativa d.o.o., Zagreb, 2000



Active listening

- ✗intentional, conscious listening
- ✗we make an effort to understand **the person** talking and **what they are talking about** and provide feedback
- ✗requires as much as or more energy than talking.

ACTIVE LISTENING	
PARAPHRASING	REFLECTING
<p>Retelling in our own words what we have heard, how it sounded to us. That way we check whether we have understood well what the speaker said.</p> <p>We give the speaker an opportunity to confirm or correct what we have heard and understood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If I understood correctly... • In other words... • So, you're saying... • I wonder if... • Maybe you mean... • Does it mean... • Do you want to say... • Correct me if I'm wrong... 	<p>We tell the speaker we can see and hear them, i.e. that we acknowledge their feelings, are aware of what feelings and behaviour they are showing.</p> <p>We try to be a mirror in which their feelings are reflected.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You're crying, you're sad... • You're smiling, you're happy... • You're silent, you're worried... • You're yelling, you're angry... • I see that you're... • I hear... • You feel... • You think she doesn't like you because... • You're silent, what's going on? • You look upset... • That must've been terrible...
SUB-QUESTIONS	SUMMARISING
<p>Asking sub-questions, asking for an explanation of unclear and incomplete statements, asking for additional information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you mean...? • Can you tell me more...? • Please explain to me... • What happened then...? • What did she say to you...? • How did you feel when...? • What happened? 	<p>A short retelling of what the speaker said, what we understood and how we perceive the speaker's problem – so that they can see and understand it better themselves.</p> <p>We usually use it near the end of the conversation. It normally involves paraphrasing and reflecting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understood that... and that it's making you sad... • So far I've understood that... • Let me get this straight: you're happy when... and then you... and that's why you'dlike...

Language of acceptance – pure communication

Communication = relationship

The relationship is created by the **adults**, who are also responsible for it. Acceptance needs to be shown in a way that the child can recognise.

WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE WISH TO SHOW ACCEPTANCE?		
	WHEN THE CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR IS NOT A PROBLEM TO ANYONE:	WHEN THE CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR SHOWS THAT THE CHILD HAS A PROBLEM:
LISTENING NON-VERBALLY	<p>When the child does not need us</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> we refrain from reacting – we leave the child in peace, e.g. when they are engrossed in an activity <p>we do not interfere!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to a non-verbal query (gaze) we react non-verbally (by nodding or smiling) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we "listen" with our bodies: we face the child, close to the child, we lower ourselves to the child's level (crouching); gestures (a gentle touch, nod); eye contact, mirroring (compassionate, interested facial expression) paraverbal signs: a soothing tone of voice and pitch, sentence intonation (showing interest) passive listening: silence that is accepting
LISTENING VERBALLY	<p>When the child needs us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> we reply to the child's question and offer the solicited help we explain, give instructions, teach we encourage independent problem solving we praise, give feedback we talk, joke 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> simple "door openers" – an invitation to say more: mm, hmm, a-ha, and?, and then?, yes?... Active listening: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> paraphrasing – comprehension (if I've understood correctly...), reflecting – identifying emotions (you're crying, you're sad...) asking questions – additional explanation (what did you do then?) summarising – insight in the child's problem (I understood that... and that it's making you sad...)



Does the child know what I want?

(a leaflet from UNICEF's project titled **Let's Help Them Grow up**, 1996; prepared by Ana Pleša)

Imagine a situation involving you and your child
(a visit to the relatives, a walk, guests in the house, common task, play, etc.)

Think about it and answer what your actions toward the child are like in that situation.

I FORBID	I ALLOW	I EXPECT
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Do you forbid more than you allow?

Do you express your expectations more frequently than you forbid or allow something?

When you want your child to behave differently by forbidding something, such as:

- don't slam it like that
- don't be naughty
- don't whine, etc.,

does the child know what exactly you expect of them at that moment? Perhaps you will say:

Of course the child knows!, but is that really true?

By forbidding something, we tell the child what they may not do and what we dislike, which leaves the child confused as to what they should actually do.

Therefore, instead of what is unclear: "Don't slam it like that", the child should be told how to slam in order to satisfy both themselves and you ("play more quietly" or "slam in your own room" or "slam it like this", etc.).

Instead of: "Don't be naughty", tell the child how they should behave, what they should do to improve the situation:

For example: Be patient, Wait until I've finished, Share the candy, Listen to what I am saying, Sit quietly, etc.

In that way we turn forbiddance into permission.

Instead of: "Stop whining and you will get...", tell the child how to behave to get what they want from you.

For example: You won't get it from me if:

(or) I don't understand what you want when you are:

- whining
- arguing with me
- throwing yourself on the floor
- striking the spoon against the plate
- yelling
- talking back...

You will get what you want from me if you:

- ask clearly
- say "please"
- tell me what you want...

That way we teach the child to say what they want within the agreed limits of behaviour. If the child is doing something hazardous (playing with sharp objects, running across a busy road, etc.), along with the rule what to do to remain safe, the following should be added: "What you did is dangerous", or, for very small children: "No, that's dangerous."

When the child is asking for permission to do something, and you would like to say: "No, no, it's out of the question", and list some consequences for the child – stop and think! Perhaps there can be a condition attached to it, perhaps there is an "if". For example, it is raining outside, and your child asks you if they can go outside. Instead of: "No, it's raining, you'll get wet", it is better to say: "Yes, if you put on your boots", or: "Yes, as soon as it stops raining."

Your three-year-old child wants to cook with you and cut food with a knife. Instead of: "No, you'll cut yourself", it is better to say: "Yes, if you hold the knife like this, and the tomato like that" (show how). If you still have to say: "No", explain the reason for it and never change your mind.

When expressing your expectations, another rule is that the child must know what we expect from them, if we tell them exactly what needs to be done in a given situation.

If we say: "Be polite when Marko comes", the child does not know what is expected of them. They will try out different behaviours, and conclude from your reactions (forbidding or allowing something) whether they are polite or not.

Be clear from the start and say to your child before Marko comes:

I expect from you:

- to offer Marko some candy
- to let him play with your toys
- to take him to your room to play, etc.

Be concrete!



Rules

Rules involve behaviours for which the members of a given group believe to be necessary in order to ensure a proper functioning of certain group members and the entire group.

A large number of clear rules is important in large organisations (military, hospital, ship) so that everyone knows their roles and responsibilities. On the other hand, a large number of rules suffocates a relationship and could turn the family into an "army unit". Nobody wants that, so when we mention family or house rules, that means unwritten rules, conventions, routines, habits and rituals. For example, a family routine can become an unwritten rule, e.g. reading a bedtime story. Or, we take off our shoes before entering the house, we eat only in the kitchen, etc. However, sometimes a rule needs to be said loudly and clearly because not everybody will always respect it. For example, "we eat only in the kitchen" becomes a rule if family members start bringing food in other rooms, soiling furniture, leaving crumbs, etc. "We play football only in the park" will often be said if children persist in kicking the ball around the house.

Daily routines, habits, rules and repetitions help structure a day, make the world predictable, and provide a sense of safety.

RULES FOR AGREEING ON RULES:

1. Focus on the positive – not forbidding things (we play football only in the park).
2. Reached by an agreement – between everyone concerned!! This is the best guarantee that somebody will respect them (a small child should be told in an appropriate way why it is important to respect the rule).
3. Rules can be changed – only by agreement!
4. Simple and understandable – check whether the child has understood the rule.
5. Do not make heaps of rules – you do not want to impose military discipline.
6. Rules involve "sanctions" – a natural or logical consequence for breaking them –that should be known too because it is a part of the rule.

TEN GOLDEN RULES FOR LIVING

1. If you open it, close it!
2. If you turn it on, turn it off!
3. If you unlock it, lock it!
4. If you break it, fix it!
5. If you cannot fix it, call somebody who can!
6. If you borrow it, return it!
7. If you take it, take care of it!
8. If you make a mess, clean it up!
9. If you move it, put it back!
10. If you do not need it, leave the stupid thing where it is!



Feedback

A verbal or non-verbal response to someone's behaviour immediately after the behaviour, in the form in which the intended recipient can understand and use it.

The purpose of feedback is to contribute to the change in the behaviour, not the person!

Feedback is regulating because it is a means by which the parent validates the child's behaviour or directs the change in the behaviour.

Giving feedback is a **dialogue** crucial for the child's ability to learn from their own experience, in order to improve their "performance" and see what the people around them consider to be good and acceptable.

FEEDBACK should be:

- × based on what is observed, not what is assumed
- × focused on the behaviour, not the personality
- × specific, not a general commentary of the behaviour
- × clear, concrete, given immediately after the behaviour
- × tactful, understandable and verifiable
- × personal and supporting.

Examples:

I see you've put all of your toy cars in the box, so you will be able to find them tomorrow.

You've eaten everything, now you're full and happy.

Look how many windows you've drawn! You were really patient! You've completed the jigsaw puzzle, you've been really persistent.

Now that you've wiped what you spilled, nobody will slip on it.

You're decorating the Christmas tree patiently and carefully, I especially like your choice of colours... I like when you tell me what you want in a calm voice...

You've opened the tap too much, and the water spurted everywhere. Here is a rag, wipe it dry. Look, open the tap like this.

You've used your crayons on the wall! Now it's dirty and messy. You'll help me paint it. Here, this is a big paper that we'll put on the wall so you can draw on it as much as you want.



I-messages

- × a part of personal speech
- × talking about oneself means taking responsibility for oneself
- × by using I-messages, we provide a role model and teach the child to talk about themselves.

What is a YOU-message?

We send such messages when we are annoyed by the child's behaviour, when we are patient and do not wish to wait for the child to change their behaviour on their own, so we react using a you-message that evaluates the child in a negative way.

A you-message is aimed at someone's personality and says: You are bad (Gordon, 1996). Here are some examples that begin with you or contain it:

We offer solutions		We humiliate (killing messages)	
we command	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Find yourself something to play with! × Stop crumpling that paper! × Leave those pots alone! 	we judge, criticise, berate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × You're impolite. × You're stupid, you know nothing.
we warn, pressure, threaten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × I'll scream if you don't stop! × If you don't come out right now, you'll be sorry! 	we call names, shame, mock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × You're a baby, Miss "No" × Shame on you!
we persuade, preach, moralise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Play somewhere else. × Never interrupt when somebody is talking. 	we interpret, diagnose, analyse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × You're only seeking attention. × You want to make me mad. × You're testing my limits.
we advise, suggest solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Why don't you play outside? × Why don't you put everything back once you're done? 	we teach, direct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Good children don't do that. × Be good for a change.

After a YOU-message:

- × the child feels guilty, rejected, unloved, wronged
- × the child justifies themselves, "retaliates" or withdraws.
- × YOU-messages decrease self-esteem!

What is an I-message?

When I am telling my child how I feel when they do something that I consider to be unacceptable, I am sending them an **I-message**. An I-message does not provoke resistance or defiance, but rather informs the child honestly how their behaviour affects me: It is informative and suggests an appropriate course of action.

The structure of an I-message:

- × when you're doing that (the child's concrete behaviour that I find unacceptable)
- × I feel bad (I don't like it, it makes me angry, worried, afraid, sad...)
- × and I wish, expect, suggest... (for you to think about it, do something different...)

YOU-MESSAGE	I-MESSAGE
Put on your shoes!	When you're barefoot, I'm concerned for your health. I'd like you to put on your slippers or play on the carpet.
Shame on you, you've left me with so much work to do again!	I'm angry when you leave a mess in the kitchen so I have to tidy it up all by myself! It would help me if you left your plates in the sink.

The child only behaves the way they know, and they will continue until we show them in what ways they can satisfy their need without interfering with the needs of others.



Principles of natural and logical consequences



- × Rewards and punishments do not allow children to make their own decisions.
- × Rewards and punishments do not allow children to be responsible for their own behaviour.
- × Natural and logical consequences enable children to learn from the natural order in the world (e.g. if they do not eat, they will be hungry)
- × Logical consequences enable children to learn from the social reality. (e.g. if they do not get up on time, they will be late for school)
- × In order for the consequences to be effective, they must be logical to the CHILDREN.
- × Experiencing logical consequences encourages children to make responsible decisions, and reduces their dependence. They are only efficient if they are not a means for adults to realise their ulterior motives. (e.g. victory and control)
- × When you do what your children can do alone instead of them, you deprive them of self-esteem and the feeling of responsibility.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PUNISHMENT AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

- × Punishments demonstrate the power of authority.
Logical consequences are impersonal and demonstrate the reality of the social order.
- × Punishments rarely concern unacceptable behaviour.
Logical consequences are in a logical relation with unacceptable behaviour.
- × Punishments tell the child that they are bad.
Logical consequences do not involve a moral judgement.
- × Punishments are focused on the past.
Logical consequences relate to the present and future behaviour.
- × Punishments are open or hidden, connected with threats.
Logical consequences are based on goodwill, not revenge.
- × Punishments demand obedience.
Logical consequences allow for a choice.

DEGREES OF APPLYING LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

- × Give the child a choice and accept their decision. (e.g. either they will push a shopping cart together with their mother [the rule] or they will run around the supermarket, in which case we leave the supermarket immediately [consequence])
- × Speak in a friendly tone.
- × Speak less, act more.
- × When you apply the logical consequences of unacceptable behaviour, reassure the child that they can try again next time (Today I will go to the supermarket alone because you were running around again last time, but tomorrow you can come with me.).
- × If inappropriate behaviour persists, extend the time before the next attempt.
- × Be patient, it will take a longer time for the efficiency of the application of natural and logical consequences to show.

How to read to a child, and find mutual joy and use in it?

(prepared by Sonja Pribela-Hodap)

Reading to children is one of those activities passed down from one generation to another, with every child enjoying it.

If you would like your children to love reading, you must take some steps as soon as the child makes its first steps.

- × First, read the book yourself. If you know the whole story, you will read with more emotion, which will make easier to get your child involved in it.
- × Allow the child to choose the story. Do not be surprised if the child wants to hear the same story many times; that means they want to memorise it.
- × While you are reading, your child should be sitting in your lap or very close to you for bonding.
- × Be in a comfortable position and turn off sources of interference (radio, TV).
- × Small children particularly enjoy reading if they can look at pictures. Hold the book at an appropriate distance so that the child can see the pictures.
- × Read slowly, more slowly than you usually speak, so that the child can follow the thought and remember what has been read.
- × When the child wishes it, allow them to "read" the book themselves by making up a story, and you listen to it.
- × The younger the child, the shorter the story should be due to a shorter attention span. Respect the child's wishes and stop reading as soon as the child is no longer interested in listening.
- × You should not read for too long so as not to tire the child, and to make it want to listen to you again.

Reading picture books, short stories, etc. together is an excellent beginning for the development of pre-reading skills. Parents often think that reading is reserved only for the period just before school, but they forget that reading is a natural process that begins with the first exposure to a written text.

- × A parent who reads to their child stimulates the feelings of closeness and bonding.
- × By reading to a child, we stimulate comprehension and understanding of their own and other people's feelings.
- × By reading, we encourage accepting and acknowledging social principles and relationships.
- × By reading, we stimulate the development of speech.
- × By reading, we stimulate the development of the child's observation skills and memory.
- × By reading to the child, we stimulate making conclusions and acquiring terminology.
- × By reading, we stimulate the child's creativity and critical thinking.
- × By reading to the child, we prepare them for independent reading.



There are ten ways in which reading "rituals" can stimulate the child's more successful learning in the future.

1. CREATING A SPECIAL READING PLACE

Prepare a permanent reading place where your child will feel safe and comfortable. Curl up on your favourite couch, surrounded by favourite toys and covered by a favourite blanket. **This stimulates a multi-sensory brain development.** When your child is feeling safe and comfortable, all their senses (smell, taste hearing, sight and touch) are stimulated. Your child will associate reading with pleasure, and reading will become something they will remember fondly, something they will wish to do again.

2.GET CLOSER

Provide your child with a sense of safety by sitting them in your lap or as close to you as possible. **This reduces the secretion of cortisol in the brain.** Cortisol is a hormone that acts as a defence mechanism when people are afraid or feel unsafe. That hormone can interfere with learning. When the child is sitting very close to you (your bodies are touching), less cortisol is being secreted.

3. STRENGTHEN THE CHILD'S LEARNING POTENTIAL

Begin with shorter stories. Soon you will see the child's attention span extend more and more. **This increases the zone of proximal development.** That "zone" is the difference between what the child can learn by themselves, and what they can learn with the help of an adult. As you gradually extend your reading time, the child becomes increasingly more prepared for independent learning.

4. DRAMATISE

Use different voices, sounds, etc. When you are reading out loud, act out different characters. **This stimulates the child's hearing.** When the child has an opportunity to listen to different sounds, not only does the story become more entertaining, but the child's critical listening skills are also stimulated.

5. READ AND FOLLOW THE TEXT WITH YOUR FINGER

While you are reading out loud, trace the words with your finger, "underline" the title, author and key words in the story with your finger. This helps the child **adopt the left-to-right reading direction.** Furthermore, it **stimulates phonemic awareness.** Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify and use sounds in speech. Hearing sounds in a word is the first step in learning to read.

6.READ AGAIN AND AGAIN

Perhaps you have had enough of the story that your child likes to hear all the time, but there is a reason why children want to hear a particular story multiple times – again and again. That is how children **organise higher-order thinking.** When the child hears or reads a story again and again, they learn to predict the outcome based on a previous experience and recognition of familiar sentences. **Developing memory** – reading the same story again and again helps children develop their memory.

7. HIGHLIGHT

Highlight pictures, shapes, colours and page numbers by emphasizing them while reading. This encourages the **development of visual perception.** By highlighting different elements of a written text or picture, you help the child notice details in a printed material.

8. POWER OF WORDS

Speak in a "normal" tone as much as possible, but emphasize words accurately and clearly. Your child is listening to you very carefully! This stimulates the **development of speech.** When your child is listening to you, they are listening to the language being spoken. That is a process in which your help your child translate their thoughts into words, and to simultaneously learn the basic rules of language use.

9.COMPARE AND NOTICE DIFFERENCES

Compare while reading, for example by asking the following question to the child: "Which tree is taller than the other?" or introduce elements from the real life: "You have brown hair, what colour is Snow White's hair?" This stimulates **analytical thinking.** By comparing and noticing differences, you help your child recognise the relations between things, and notice differences and similarities.

10. RETELLING A STORY FROM MEMORY

After you have read the story together, ask the child what happened at the beginning and end of the story, who the main characters are, what happened to them, etc. This stimulates **higher-order thinking.** While the child is trying to explain the events in their own words, they stimulate their own higher-order thinking. At first, it might be a difficult task, but you will soon notice your child has learned to process information in higher categories. That activity simultaneously encourages listening and comprehension activities



Let's read to them from the earliest age

Share the enjoyment of reading with your child, even a newly born one!

A growing body of research has shown that children to whom their parents read and tell stories from the earliest age develop faster, are more interested in their environment, learn faster, have better communication skills, develop pre-reading skills...

Therefore reading to your child should become a part of your quality time together.

READING TO THE CHILD FROM THE EARLIEST AGE:

- ✗ helps in the creation of a special emotional bond between the child and the adult;
- ✗ is pleasurable for the child;
- ✗ introduces the child to the world of art and literature;
- ✗ improves the child's listening ability;
- ✗ facilitates the development of observation, attention, memory, thinking and logical conclusion;
- ✗ introduces the child to a diverse world of events and experiences, develops various interests of the child, enables the acquisition of knowledge;
- ✗ enriches the child's vocabulary and speaking ability, helps them develop pre-reading skills crucial for independent reading;
- ✗ enriches the child's imagination and creative thinking;
- ✗ develops the child's feelings and ability to empathise with others;
- ✗ helps in the acquisition of moral values and humane messages;
- ✗ contributes to the motivation for independent reading and enjoyment in reading;
- ✗ helps the child love books.

WHEN TO READ:

- ✗ you should start reading to the child from their birth (listening to an adult's voice develops the sensitivity to sounds and speech, an extremely important pre-reading skill);
- ✗ read to the child whenever you are able, but create special reading rituals (before bedtime, during the afternoon relaxation...);

- ✗ bring your child's picture book and read whenever you have to wait for something (at the doctor's office, in queues, etc.);
- ✗ read when both you and your child are relaxed, so that you may enjoy yourselves;
- ✗ judge when to stop (because your child is tired and not concentrated).

HOW TO READ:

- ✗ find a cosy and quiet place for reading;
- ✗ turn off everything that might interrupt you;
- ✗ hold the book in front of the child, so that they can see it well and touch it;
- ✗ involve the child in the reading by talking about the pictures, repeating the words they like, asking questions, allowing them to turn the pages...
- ✗ point to the words you are reading; this helps the child learn the connection between the written and spoken language, and the rules of the Croatian language;
- ✗ skip the words your child does not understand;
- ✗ read the whole story for immersion, then discuss it;
- ✗ encourage the child to retell the story and listen;
- ✗ read with emotion, do not let your voice slip into monotony;
- ✗ vary rhythm and voice volume, pause every now and then, give the child enough time to "process" what has been read;
- ✗ choose the book you will read with your child; reread the same book if the child wishes it;
- ✗ read different household materials (recipes, instructions, mail) together with your child so that they can see the purpose and application of reading and writing.

WHAT IS A PICTURE BOOK?

A picture book is your child's first book, in which the story is complemented or expanded and enriched with illustrations. However, the story can be told without words, only with pictures, or else the pictures may be in a sequence as terms that the child can browse, recognise, name and discuss.

Good and valuable picture books always have the names of the author and illustrator on their front page, while anonymous picture books are often a sign that the book is less valuable and poorly written.

A GOOD PICTURE BOOK

Its quality is judged by its illustrations and text or overall composition.

The text of a picture book must be:

- × adapted to the child's ability to understand the message conveyed; interesting, sensible, written using a clear language comprehensible to the child.

Picture book illustrations should be:

- × simple and comprehensible to the child;
- × aesthetically valuable, with pleasant colours and appropriate messages conveyed in order to increase the child's sense of aesthetics;
- × realistic in explaining some terms to the child;
- × fanciful when accompanying a plot that introduces the child to the world of creativity and fantasy, enriching their experience;
- × with fewer details for smaller children, richer and more detailed for older children.

A picture book should be printed using non-toxic ink, blunt and without sharp corners, appropriate for handling.

DO NOT FORGET!

- × **encourage your child in all activities related to reading;**
- × **read yourself because a small child learns from a role model;**
- × **surround** yourself by books and reading materials;
- × discover what your child likes the most when reading, get to know their reading preferences;
- × **go with** your child to a children's library as soon as possible, ask the librarian's advice on what books are appropriate for certain ages;
- × **give** picture books to your child as often as you can.

PICTURE BOOKS CHANGE AS THE CHILD GROWS UP:

- × **picture books for the smallest children** (at the age of one and two) are more like toys than books – they fold like fans, can be assembled into pretty shapes, are cut and shaped to resemble one of the characters, are thick and made of cardboard or are soft and flexible, made of cloth, sponge or plastic;
- × **at an early age**, children like picture books with rhythmic verses, nursery rhymes and songs that they listen to repeatedly and with joy;
- × **the child's first picture books** are usually so called vocabulary picture books (with images of objects, people, the environment...), which are at the same time the first textbooks from which the child can learn to interpret pictures, recognise objects, talk, describe, compare,...
- × **the illustrations in the picture books** for the youngest children must not be burdened with extraneous details that might distract the child (while picture books with more pictures and less text are more appropriate for smaller children, older children need a more complex plot to go with the illustrations);
- × **as the child grows** and becomes independent in looking at, browsing, even reading picture books, the illustrations lose their informative function, and assume an aesthetic function to an increasing extent (pictures no longer help the child understand the text, but rather enrich the reading experience);
- × **four-year-olds and five-year-olds** like simple plots, stories about people and events they can recognise; six-year-olds are interested in more complex stories about people and the nature of close and faraway lands, fables and fairy tales;
- × **pre-school children** benefit from picture books with fanciful, illustrations that imply something, as children imagine characters and the plot themselves while listening and reading.

Author: mr. sc. Ivanka Stričević

Source: Project implemented by the Commission for Library Services for Children and Youth of the Croatian Library Association titled "Čitajmo im od najranije dobi" (Let's Read to Them from the Earliest Age), Zagreb 2006.

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Child and play

(a leaflet from UNICEF's project titled: "Let's Help Them Grow up", 1996, prepared by: Ljiljana Šarić)

What is play?

- × Play is a free, spontaneous activity that arises out of the child's inner need.
- × Play is a processed reality in accordance with the child's experience.
- × Play is a creative activity, different every time, unique, that corresponds to the child's nature and rules of their development the best, and enables them to grow intellectually, socially and **emotionally**.
- × Play is an activity in which the child expresses and validates themselves – the driving power behind their activities that facilitate the development of their potential.

What does play mean to the child?

BY PLAYING, THE CHILD...	
...learns about:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the material world, i.e. the surroundings (the child gets to know things, explores, handles objects, checks directly) • other people and their relationships (analyses in their mind, empathises, imagines "as if..." and "what if...").
...solves:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the simplest and easiest conflicts • their fears and issues (when playing, the child can be a wolf, doctor, darkness... they scare others around them, chase the wolf and darkness away, operates on a doll – faces, processes and gradually overcomes fear and discomfort).
...expresses:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • everything that they are not allowed to express in real life (anger at other children and adults, yelling, taking out aggression on objects...) • when playing, the child releases stress, becomes calm and relaxed – because virtually everything is allowed during play.
...gains self-confidence:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does what they want • controls the situation • plays the role adults have in real life (the child is a police officer, soldier, singer, actor, pilot, doctor, father, mother...).

How can the parent help the child play?

- × ENSURE a feeling of friendliness, warmth, relaxation, safety; express love (using words or gestures).
- × Look at child's play as the most important job of adults.
- × Support, praise.
- × PROVIDE a permanent room for play (the size is irrelevant), a period of time without interruptions in which the child will decide themselves when to play, what to play, how long to play. Leave to the child to organise their own play space– allowing "mess" (from an adult's perspective) in that space – for a child this is neatness.
- × ENABLE the child to explore and play with the toys independently (giving advice[turn it on here, do it like that] bothers the child and tells them "you can't do it", "I'm not pleased with you", which makes the child unhappy).
- × ENABLE the child to solve problems on their own while playing, without the interference of adults.
- × HELP, if the child asks for it, but so that the child remains "in control of the situation".
- × DETERMINE, AGREE UPON a period of time for a certain activity with the child (several minutes are enough) – read a story, talk, make a joke, watch TV together, take a walk...).

Child – play – play – child

By playing, the child learns about themselves, the world and others.

By playing, the child processes all their experiences – good and bad ones (in an acceptable way). By playing, the child expresses themselves.

They prepare themselves for future events.

Play is a "mirror" reflecting all that the child thinks, experiences, feels, wants – all that which the child is unable to express with words comes out during play.

Every child needs play, and various toys are necessary (for both boys and girls). Children will pick for themselves what they need.

Parents – adults

Remember how angry you are when someone interrupts your work. The child is equally angry when you interrupt their play because **PLAY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK FOR THE CHILD.**



Development of play

The child grows and develops by playing. That is the fundamental activity in childhood. Play is an arena in which different aspects of the child's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development are tested.

Child's play can be observed from different aspects.

- ✗ Why do some children like to play alone?
- ✗ What can we learn about the child by watching them play?
- ✗ What can make play more complex and richer?

In order to answer those and similar questions, we approach play as a social phenomenon, as well as an aspect of cognitive development (Vasta et al., 1998).

A pre-school child's play can be observed with regard to two levels – cognitive and social.

COGNITIVE LEVEL	SOCIAL LEVEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • functional play – a type of play in which the child uses, tests and develops their abilities (functions) • cognitive play – play in which the child uses objects and handles them in order to create something • pretend play – a type of play in which children use an object or person as a symbol of something else (symbolic play; role-play, "as if...") • play with rules – a type of play according to rules and restrictions known in advance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observation – watching others play without involvement • independent play – autonomous and independent play without approaching other children • parallel play – a type of play in which children play alongside one another with similar materials, but without actual socialisation or cooperation • parallel-conscious play – play in which children acknowledge the presence of another child by making eye contact • simple social or connecting play – play in which there is an increased contact between children, they play close to one another, begin talking, smile, exchange toys • complementary and mutual play – a type of social active play in which the child "gives and takes" (playing tag, hide-and-seek...) • cooperative play – group play for the purpose of a certain activity or reaching some goal, with the children's actions being harmonised.

A special type of cooperative play is pretend play, in which children imagine their own and other people's emotions in different imaginary relationships and scenarios, which is especially beneficial for the development of the child's sociability.

Although it is possible to analyse it in this way, child's play is a complex phenomenon involving both levels.

By following the social level, the child's progress from independent to cooperative play can be seen as a theoretical model, but the transition from one play phase to another (e.g. from independent to parallel or cooperative) is not the same for every child, just as there can be different ways of playing in a given period of the child's life.

The cognitive complexity of play certainly changes as the child grows up. All of the key periods in the child's cognitive life reflect on the complexity of the cognitive level of play. That means that the same types of play may exist in different phases, despite their complexity being different with regard to the cognitive level. Thus, for example, functional play exists both in a one-year-old and three-year-old child, but differs insofar as they differ in their overall development.

Pre-school children show individual differences in their play style. According to Steinberg and Meyer (1995), some like construction and building, while others prefer symbolic play and dramatisation. Some children utilise both styles, but begin to develop their preference in time. No style is superior for the child's development – they are simply different. A challenge for future researchers is the question how play styles are important for example for future personal styles in life.

Although play is a basic childhood activity, some children are simply more playful than others. It has been established that those children have a more positive attitude towards the world around them, are more pro-social than their peers, more inclined to engage in social and symbolic play, and have more developed verbal abilities.

(Starc et al. [2004]. *Osobine i psihološki uvjeti razvoja djeteta predškolske dobi* (Characteristics and Psychological Development Conditions of a Pre-school Child), Zagreb, Golden marketing)



Child and television

(prepared by Sonja Pribela Hodap)

The average child in the USA spends 1,680 minutes daily watching television, and only 38.5 minutes conversing with their parents, which is a cause for concern. Another concern is that children under 6 years of age spend, on average, 3 hours a day watching

television, 2 hours playing outside, and only a third of that time or less reading or being read to. (www.tvturnoff.org/factsheets)

One of the important parental questions of the 21st century is how to strike a balance between watching television and the child's wish, developmental needs, and discussions on the benefits and harmful effects of that "magic box". This article will try to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about children and TV.

Children are a special audience with an incomplete understanding of the world (Dorr, 1986). Therefore it is necessary to guide the child through the world of television. Children are especially attracted to television due to several reasons:

x attractive images

- x availability
- x diverse TV programmes
- x lack of siblings or peers to play with
- x parents work increasingly longer hours.

How to "tame" television?

1. Take responsibility

Television is too powerful and attractive to the child for them to be able to control it themselves, so it is up to the adults to determine when, what and for how long the child will watch. The parents are the ones with the responsibility to introduce TV rules in the household. Experts recommend that children do not start watching TV before they are three years old, because in the earliest period television images may cause confusion and contradictory impressions.

2. Do not install a television set in the child's bedroom

Researchers from the Columbia University (New York) have proven that children who have a television set in their room watch television almost five hours more weekly than those who do not have one. Do not allow your child to watch television alone. When the child tells you next time that they would like to watch TV, ask them what they would like to watch. Ask for a precise answer.

3. Watch television with your child

The parents may reduce the effects of violent images on children significantly by explaining to the child what they have seen during and after watching television.

4. Turn off the television set when nobody is watching it

When there is nothing worth watching on TV, turn off the set. The parents should instil in their child a critical attitude towards watching television and the media in general; talk to your child and provide a role model in selecting a TV programme. Think about whether television should be turned on during meals or while you are doing something. Research indicates that children play with a certain toy only for half as much time when TV is on than when it is off, and that they are significantly less concentrated on playing. This could impede development and reduce the child's ability to concentrate.

5. Introduce rules

Children should not watch television for more than two hours daily (for younger school children); set a limit, agree on what the child can watch and at what time. This time restriction applies to quality TV programme, cartoons, etc. Other TV programmes should not be available to the child. Agree also on how much time the child should spend outside, in a free play in the fresh air, and how much time you will spend playing together, talking, etc. Bear in mind that, the younger the child, the shorter the time spent in front of TV should be. Children aged two or less should not watch television at all. The American Paediatric Association believes that watching television at that early age results in changes to the brain, which later lead to poorer reading results, less creativity, shallowness and not enough critical thinking. Staring at a screen leads to a poor structuring of the child's brain, which is a sure way for attention disorders to develop. Perhaps a research that shows that restricted TV viewing in childhood increases the chances of graduating from a university will encourage you to restrict your child's TV viewing habits.

6. Avoid using television as a babysitter

In order to distract the child, the parents often play a cartoon and let their child sit in front of the television in fascination. If you resort to that, think about television as an overly expensive babysitter that you can use very rarely and only in extreme circumstances. Parents often say that children learn a lot by watching TV programmes appropriate for their age. Psychologists have found that children up to two years of age cannot learn anything from television itself

(enrich their vocabulary, recognise characters better, etc.). For a later age, educational programmes have an impact on only the least creative and educated children, while in all other children they suppressed creative play and contributed nothing significant to their education. We can say that television can offer a lot of information to children, but cannot make them smarter or better at school.

7. Do not place your television set in a central place in your home

Rearrange your furniture so that the child is unable to reach the television set easily.

8. Try watching television less yourself

Children learn best by mimicking others; if you are a TV addict, it is very likely that your child will become one as well.

9. Think of television as a privilege

Some authors claim that watching television is a mental equivalent of a diet saturated with sugars and fats, as well as candy: it need not be banned (because forbidden fruit is the sweetest), but it should be rationed, taking into consideration that healthier activities are more prevalent.

October Create a home video library

Purchase or record high-quality educational or entertainment material that has been verified and doesn't contain violence and inappropriate messages.

(Dorr, A. [1986]. *Television and Children: A Special Medium for a Special Audience*. Beverley Hills: Sage)



Parent traps

The most frequent parent **traps** that contribute to parental stress and make raising children more difficult, and which rest on inaccurate beliefs and expectations, are the following:

- × **THE VILLAIN PARENT** – is frequently in a power struggle with the child; often criticises, yells, warns and threatens. They are in danger of falling into the trap of noticing only negative behaviours of their child, and of giving them only negative attention.
- × **LEAVE THEM ALONE (while they are behaving well)** – the parent ignores their children if they are behaving well and playing. The trap: ignoring reduces the probability of good behaviour to be repeated.
- × **THE PERFECT PARENT** – this trap is a result of the desire to be perfect, and not only a good parent who is up to the challenge. All parents are human beings – and they make mistakes. The only important thing is not to repeat the same mistakes. Since the perfect parent is non-existent, trying to be one only leads to stress, disappointment, frustration and guilt. The sheer desire to satisfy all the requirements and heed all advice removes enjoyment from parenting at the moment, as parents expect future success or failure.
- × **THE PERFECT CHILD** – it is not realistic from parents to expect their child to be perfect. All children are sometimes "whiny", upset, messy, angry. The way the parents react decides whether those problems will remain the same, worsen, or be reduced in time.
- × **IT'S ALL MY FAULT** – sometimes parents blame themselves for all their child's issues. It is possible to guide/direct the child to learn values and social skills, but it is impossible to control everything that affects the child's behaviour. Parents are sometimes depressed because they believe they are to blame for their child's behaviour, which makes it more difficult for them to be calm and patient with their child.
- × **IT'S ALL MY CHILD'S FAULT** – this belief blames the child completely for behavioural problems (e.g. She's so stubborn, she never does what she's told.). Such beliefs may prevent the parents to realise how their own behaviours contribute to the child's misbehaving – many issues are the result of how the children and their parents communicate and treat one another.
- × **THE MARTYR** – when parents are so preoccupied by parenting, sometimes they neglect their own needs for intimacy, socialisation, recreation, privacy / alone time and fun. When they "afford" some of that, they do not feel content, and their relationship with their partner worsens. Quality parenting is only possible when adults live balanced lives. Martyrdom does not result in quality parenting.
- × **STAYING TOGETHER FOR THE SAKE OF CHILDREN** – children growing up in families with serious relationship issues and conflicts are more likely to develop emotional issues and behavioural problems.
- × **THEY WILL GROW OUT OF IT** – parents often see a problem in their child's behaviour as something short-lived, something that the child will grow out of in time. Undesirable behaviour must be addressed early to prevent it from escalating into serious difficulties. The belief that problematic behaviour will go away on its own may prevent the parents from looking into the cause of that behaviour, resolving it, changing something or seeking help.

Read about all these traps and choose the one(s) in which you recognise yourself, or which your family members have connected with you.

If you recognise yourself in some of those traps to some extent, reflect on our eight meetings and think about whether you have learned, discovered or gained something that you think may help you "extricate" yourself from the trap in which you have fallen.

Notes on parental mood

Your mood strongly affects the behaviour of your child, but also how you react to your child's behaviour.

If you are tired, stressed out, worried about something or angry, it is more likely that you will get mad at your child. Sometimes parents take out their frustrations on their children. When their parent's mood is unpredictable, the child feels unsafe and worried. When the parent ignores their child's behaviour one day, and the same behaviour makes them angry the next, the child is confused.

When the parent is mad at the child because they are stressed out due to an unconnected reason, the child becomes bitter because the parent is not being just. If the parent is often angry or in a bad mood, the child feels scared and threatened. The parent's mood affects the child's behaviour. The parent must be aware of their behaviour. They should avoid taking out their mood on their child.

The parent must sleep well and eat healthy food in order to have enough energy to deal with all the stressful situation in their life.

If it seems to you that you are often angry, sad, worried or stressed out, you should talk to an expert, friend or family member.

It is important to solve your problems in a constructive way that does not harm your child.

(Durrant, J. [2007]. Positive discipline: What it is and how to do it. Bangkok: Save the Children Sweden)



Notes on parental anger

In your life with a child, you will often feel annoyed, frustrated or afraid. Sometimes those feelings will lead to anger.

We are angry when we think our children are being deliberately "naughty". If we believe that children can control their own behaviour and that they are trying to make us angry on purpose, we will probably become angry in reality.

But small children do not understand how we are feeling. They do not know what can and what cannot make us angry. They are only trying to understand that, while fearing our anger. Anger is not a reaction of ours that they wish and hope for.

When the child is young, patience is extremely important. Children will learn from us how to behave when they are angry. That lesson is very important because anger is one of the basic human emotions that we all feel, we only differ in the way we behave when we are angry.

Anger may or may not lead to aggressive behaviour. Instead of expressing their anger with verbal or physical violence, an angry parent can do the following:

- xrelease stress, "vent" by doing a physical activity or talking to another person about what made them angry; sometimes the parent might find it helpful to take a deep breath, take a walk or leave the room and come back when they are calmer;
- xexpress their anger in a way not hurtful to others; if you are angry about something that your child has done, you can say that you are angry and admit how it came to that (it is important that you are clear and concrete – that is less intimidating for the child you are angry at, giving them a chance to rectify their mistake);
- xthink about whether the anger might be a result of their unrealistic expectations from themselves and/or the child, and how the anger can be alleviated.

Children learn gradually. They need time to fully understand what we are trying to teach them. However, their understanding is critical for achieving our long-term goals.

Some other advice to parents for controlling their own anger:

1. Count to ten before saying or doing anything. If you are still angry after that, withdraw and give yourself a chance to calm down.
2. Relax your shoulders, take a deep breath and repeat soothing words like: "Easy." or "Be calm."
3. Put your hands behind your back and say to yourself: "Wait a moment." Do not say anything until you calm down.
4. Go for a walk and think about the situation. Think about why the child behaved the way it behaved. Look at things from the child's perspective. Plan your reaction to the child's behaviour – respect the child's point of view, but explain why you are angry.
5. Go to a calm place and repeat the words you heard at the workshops. Return to your child after you think of a reaction that is in accordance with your long-term goals, that gives your child warmth and structure, and that takes into consideration what your child thinks and feels.
6. Do not forget that such situation is an opportunity for the child to learn how to resolve conflicts through a conversation, with problem solving. **Anger is a signal that there is a misunderstanding between you and your child.** It tells you that you need to re-establish your communication with your child.

Do not let anger make you say something mean, yell, insult or hit your child. Do not try to retaliate "in kind", nor persist in grievances and criticism. Remember: Our most important learning happens in the most difficult situations. **Take advantage of every opportunity to be the person you wish your child to become.**

Being a good parent

(Prepared by Branka Starc)

Many busy parents are asking themselves whether they are good parents if they cannot spend enough time with their child.

Naturally, it is important to spend time with the child as much as possible, but if you have decided to work while your child is still young, you surely have a good reason for that. Your security and confidence in your decision to work will make you calm and reduce your anxiety arising out of the fact that you do not spend enough time with your child.

If you are calm, it will be easier for your child to accept your absence.

After returning from your workplace, school, kindergarten, your home should be a place in which each family member feels accepted. In an accepting family environment, it is important that you as the parent are psychologically available to the child – to be **there for them** when they need and want you.

The child is a part of the family living together, and they want to be involved in that life in their own way. It is up to you to enable them that.

It is not necessary to give up all household chores to focus on your child. At the same time, you must keep in mind that a house in which a small child lives cannot be spotless, and that you will have to leave many chores for later, or even skip them. It is better, for example, to knead dough together, which will, naturally, take up more time, than to rush doing it yourself so that you can play a didactic game with your child later.

Doing household chores together is more precious for the child than all didactic games.

Keep little pots in your kitchen which your child can use for "cooking", let them wash plastic dishes, wipe the dust with a small rag, hand you clothespins, carry an apple from the grocery store, hold the meter when you are fixing something, etc.

Some activities require the child to have an adult **partner** so that you can do the following together: read picture books, browse pictures and magazines, talk, draw, sing, dance, play ball, walk, run, gather leaves in the park...

Toys and different didactic materials are intended for **independent play**– it is important that **you do not impose yourself** in those games.

Observe your child when they are immersed in a game, smile, nod – let the child know you can see them and that you approve of their independent play. Focusing on your child does not mean that you should assemble blocks, puzzles, etc. with them or instead of them. Those toys are already made so that the child can and wants to assemble them themselves.

For the child's development, it is much more important that the child do that independently; that is a requirement for the development of attention and motivation.

For example, you can start playing with blocks, provide your child with an idea and encouragement, and then let them explore all the possibilities themselves. Sometimes it is enough to leave a toy close to them to see it, and it will draw their attention.

Such independent play also benefits from everyday objects re-purposed for play (e.g. clothespins, plastic shampoo bottles, rags, coloured paper...). The child will explore, look at, roll, manipulate, open, close, insert, empty, push, pull...

While the child is playing independently, you can read, iron clothes, make the bed, cook, wash the dishes, etc. alongside them.

Naturally, it is important for the child to be under supervision, particularly if they are lively, or if they endanger themselves or others. Hide everything that might be dangerous, that is better than forbidding something constantly. It is important for the child to play and explore in a safe environment. Then both of you will be enjoying yourselves.

Meals, bed time, waking up, changing clothes and hygiene are moments in which your attention, physical and psychological proximity, and a pleasant atmosphere are irreplaceable. Your complete attention should be given to the child in those moments.

In order for the child to eat their meal happily, fall asleep calmly, enjoy cleanliness and changing clothes, it is important to maintain the pleasant rituals from the child's infancy.

Rituals provide the feeling of safety and trust to your child. They require enough time for everything to be calm and joyous. Those are moments when household chores are best postponed or left to someone else.

A good parent listens to the needs of their child, creates the conditions for those needs to be adequately met. They enjoy their child's advances, benevolently handles their child's immaturity, comforts them in difficult situations; **do not impose themselves**, but rather, they are available for interaction whenever the child needs it. They are the child's compass.

[A good parent believes in themselves and their child, changes and grows together with the child.](#)



6

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Proofreader's comment:

This Croatian version of this Handbook contains some terms which should be different in the standard Croatian language. However, since they belong to the professional psychological terminology, where they are often parts of expert phrases, the authors of the Handbook have asked that they remain unchanged for consistency.

Leaders of the “Growing up Together” Programme of Workshops with Parents who participated in the pilot implementation of the Programme in 2008-2009, and who gave a valuable contribution to the creation of the workshops

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