

**WHY THE FORMATION**  
*of future parents?*  
**50 good reasons**



*François Asselin*  
*Francisca Cruz Sánchez*

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*François Asselin*  
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La Habana, Cuba, 2020

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## Dedication

*Finally. I make a promise many times promised from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s. At fifteen I traveled 80,000 kilometers from Halifax to Anchorage. I exchanged with hundreds of Canadians who spoke English or French and from many backgrounds. It's to them that I turn. They not only welcomed me, they protected me, they always respected and saved me, they fed. But, most importantly, we exchanged around a hundred and one topic. That was my school where I learned a lot. He really had no money, a few pennies every now and then. So I thought over and over that I would thank them one day and that is what I'm doing today through the unprecedented project of empowering future parents.*

FRANÇOIS ASSELIN



*As much as the archer wants his arrow, he has to release  
it so that it reaches its target...*

BUDDHA

*Good seeds come from good herbs, but the seeds are invisible,  
they sleep in the secret of the earth, until one day one of them  
has the fantastic idea of awakening...*

ANTOINE DE SAINT- EXUPERY

*Seeing after isn't worth it, what is worth is seeing before and being prepared.*

JOSÉ MARTÍ

*Give a child a fish and he will feed one day.  
Teach him how to fish and he will feed all his life.*

CHINESE PROVERB



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# PRESENTATION

*We must begin the training of future parents as soon as possible, from early childhood, with the aim of reducing injuries or sequelae in children and adolescents who will become future parents and will transmit their acquired or copied negative or positive experiences from their parents.*

FRANÇOIS ASSELIN

Children have the same rights as adults, and the rights that derive from their special condition as human beings are highlighted, which, because they have not reached full physical and mental development, require special protection (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

Child abuse is a global problem with serious consequences for the physical and mental health of which they are victims and can last a lifetime, thus slowing down the economic and social development of a country.

International studies reveal that a quarter of all adults report having suffered physical abuse of children and that one in five women and one in 13 men report having been sexually abused in childhood. In addition, many children are subject to psychological abuse (also called emotional abuse) and victims of neglect.

According to data from the World Health Organization, around 16 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are mothers and approximately 1 million girls under the age of 15 stop every year; most are concentrated in low- and middle-income countries. An estimated 100 million girls will marry before the age of 18 over the next ten years.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, according to Unicef, an average of 38% of women in the region become pregnant

before their 20th birthday and almost 20% of live births in the region are to teenage mothers.

Many of these children's parents are teenagers as well, although they are usually young and old.

In the next twenty years 2 million children will be born in Quebec. Between 12% and 15% of them will be innocent victims of mistreatment, they will harbor sometimes permanent discomfort and their injuries may affect them until the end of their days. But this doesn't happen only in Canada, it's something very frequent in all developed and developing countries.

Poor living is understood as a concept that refers to diffuse or intense psychological discomfort or discomfort suffered by a child, adolescent or adult, who can ignore its origin, since it's blocked in his unconscious memory.

The Directorate for the Protection of Youth in Quebec (*La Prensa*, May 31, 2017) reports that there are 20 confirmed complaints of ill-treatment daily.

"You don't have to believe everything they say." Suicides and the events that necessarily lead to them are not all accounted for. They are far from reality. Statistics on suicide attempts and suicidal ideation are few in Quebec and are beginning to be analyzed in some countries.

Are government programs and less subsidized community agencies important and effective enough to reduce the number of so many ills?

Many parents and specialists think, like Germain Duclos, that there are obstacles in the parental role. In *Self-Esteem, A Passport to Life* (2010), Duclos writes: "During human life, there is no task more important than being a parent, and yet there are few tasks for which we're so poorly prepared. There is no school or preparatory course to become parents".

In 2016, petition 6181 was introduced in the National Assembly of Quebec, signed by 1,006 organizations or people

interested in the education of future parents. The Ministry of Health and Social Services were asked to introduce in prenatal courses the essential elements to the knowledge of the essential psychological needs of children, an unprecedented measure. The petition will not remain a dead letter, Dr. Gaetan Barrette said.

A thousand organizations don't constitute an expert consensus, nor do they reveal conclusive data. In April 2017, a CROP survey of 1,000 Quebecers, 18 years of age or older, revealed that 85% of the population was favorable or very favorable to the proposed measure. It's worth saying that in Quebec and elsewhere.

Tens of thousands of children and adolescents are subject to physical discomfort, sexual assault, even between siblings - a taboo subject -, neglect, abandonment and psychological abuse. Consequently, the education of future parents should have as a priority to deal with self-esteem and self-confidence.

The project can cause a paradigm shift, where the father will be the first and main participant in the long-term prevention of discomfort, suicide and violence.

The project of training the future parents and the psychological needs of the children was the purpose of an international symposium during the International Congress on Adolescence, which took place at the University of Medical Sciences of Cienfuegos, Cuba, from October 23 to 27 2017, also during the National Pediatric Congress at the Havana Convention Center, in January 2018 and at the International Congress of Early Stimulation in Varadero, Cuba, in June 2018.

FRANÇOIS ASSELIN



# 50

## GOOD REASONS

*Before training future parents, it's necessary to train  
future coaches or trainers.*

FRANÇOIS ASSELIN

Many of these reasons are the fruit of the exchange in workshops carried out with adolescents, parents and professionals from various Cuban provinces where the authors of this book participated:

1. The training courses will favor a better knowledge of the parents themselves, their children and third parties.
2. To improve the quality of parents.
3. To improve the quality of life of children and adolescents.
4. To promote the quality of life of families.
5. Families are the pillars of societies.
6. Because in the formation of the future parents there is the continuity and the future of a healthy life in the communities.
7. The quality of future generations depends on the training of future parents.
8. The courses, when accessible and generalized, help to raise the level of consciousness, both of parents and of societies.
9. Training parents is essential to guarantee a sustainable society.

10. In all societies, both in the largest and the smallest, parents are always the first responsible for the transmission of values.
11. Children have needs and rights; parents have duties that they must know.
12. Prospective parents should know that there are many public and community resources to support them, when the time comes, and that they need to be identified as soon as possible. Unfortunately, there are parents who feel useless, guilty or underrated.
13. The future parents must receive information and reflections that allow them to better understand the life of families and societies everywhere and some become indispensable participants.
14. The future parents' training courses favor equality between men and women.
15. The information transmitted to the parents-to-be and the exchanges between them have a double effect: on the one hand they help them better understand the essential psychological needs of their children and on the other hand they understand each other better, which is very important.
16. Future parents should know that mental and physical illnesses are not myths, but that their children, just as they are, will love them almost always without condition.
17. So that they are able to face their roles, challenges and challenges.
18. To make them more aware of vulnerabilities.
19. To modify behaviors, educate and form values.
20. Better informed parents, more aware of their actions, behaviors and purposes, safer and happier, will not emerge on a starry night. They will appear as an effect of long-term prevention of discomfort, suicide and violence.

21. Parents need to understand why there is talk of long-term prevention and the precautionary principle.
22. Parents-to-be must develop trust, with examples of good parents, who are guides, because children imitate their parents for good and bad reasons.
23. Prospective parents should be informed of issues such as maltreatment, failure, and parental incompetence.
24. Parents-to-be need to understand their children's need to be loved.
25. In the training courses for future parents, it's necessary to talk about the relationships that gradually establish themselves and are lived between siblings.
26. There is no father who wants to visit his son in prison, especially if he has a certain responsibility. Prisoners are generally responsible for their actions, but they are not solely responsible for the trajectory of their lives.
27. A good understanding of the innate, the inherited, the learned and the instinct is imposed on both the future parents and the future children.
28. The future parents must know how to differentiate the feeling of love and that of admiration.
29. Parents to be must understand what a feeling is and what an emotion is.
30. Parents must learn the existence and function of their children's unconscious memory, which isn't static at all.
31. Parents deserve to know the realities around the word "innocence." Injuries inflicted on innocent children can have consequences for years, even into adulthood.
32. Prospective parents must ensure the emotional stability, physical and mental well-being of their children.
33. The future parents must be aware that the children of divorces and separations can suffer even during their adulthood or even throughout their lives. Divorce always affects children, parents, family and society.

34. Prospective parents must know to what extent the relationships between parents and children are united and how divorce can, in an instant, break them forever.
35. Parents must identify well the chain of words, behaviors, and gestures that leads them on the path of a devastating divorce. This chain is also qualified by contempt, contempt, silence, absences, lies, anger, insults, violence...
36. Parents should learn to freely exchange with their children about money and its use.
37. Parents need to become aware of the potential damage to their partner and their children, to cyber dependence and to any other form of addiction.
38. Prospective parents should also be informed, as soon as possible, about drug use and its consequences for themselves, their children, their families and their livelihood.
39. It's necessary to take all the necessary time to explain to the future parents the differences between personality, temperament and character, because there are three important notions that coexist.
40. The training of future parents improves communication with children.
41. Parents to be should talk about sex education and sentimental education.
42. Parents to be should prepare for sexuality issues so that they are not afraid or embarrassed when their children ask them something and can accept their sexual orientation without prejudice.
43. Children need support and advice to avoid making mistakes.
44. So that they are better prepared to assume motherhood and fatherhood.
45. To postpone the first sexual relationship in adolescence.
46. To avoid unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

47. Prospective parents should be aware that the child will not necessarily be of the sex expected by one or the other or both parents.
48. In order to talk about the process of resilience or slow despair.
49. Prospective parents should know that grandparents have rights and that they must be given a space.
50. Parents should speak clearly to members of their brotherhood of recommended, acceptable, or prohibited conduct.

# UNCONSCIOUS MEMORY AND CHILDHOOD AMNESIA IN THE NEUROSCIENCE ERA

DR. C. NIBALDO HERNÁNDEZ MESA

## **Memory. Essentials for specialists, parents and teachers**

Memory is defined as the information stored in the nervous system through the learning process. It can be conscious like the name of our relatives, the streets of our country or the episodes of our past life. On the other hand, it can be unconscious like the language we speak or the automatic walking when we walk with someone in conversation. This neurological memory is different from the immunological memory that is confirmed by vaccination.

Memory is the function of the brain that allows the body to encode, store and retrieve information from the past. That is why learning, memory and recall are inseparable. Memory arises as a result of repetitive synaptic connections between neurons, which creates neural networks.

The stored information is preserved in the form of physiological electrical and structural changes in the brain connections. This happens if the information acquired and stored is consolidated through experience, i.e. without forgetting, remaining in the system until stimuli appear that allow it to be recovered in the memory process. Under normal adaptive conditions everything happens that way.

## *Types of memory*

Depending on the duration of storage, the memory can be subdivided into: sensory, short-term, working and long-term. Long-term memory has two variants: explicit conscious memory and implicit unconscious memory.

### *Sensory memory*

It's the memory acquired through the senses. It has the ability to briefly retain a large amount of information that is received daily by the senses. It lasts a few seconds. Its basis is the activity of receptors and sensory pathways: visual (iconic), auditory (echoic), touch (haptic), taste and smell. This type of memory requires repetition to be preserved, as it has little capacity. For this reason, the empirical law  $7 \pm 2$  known as Miller's law is applied, which recommends teaching no more than nine *items* of information that are intended to be preserved in the sensory memory without being forgotten. Parents and teachers are suggested to use the lower limit when children are in groups.

### *Short term memory*

Also called short-term memory, primary memory and active memory. It's defined as the ability to actively keep a small amount of information in mind so that it's available for a short period of time. The duration of short-term memory is several seconds and its capacity, like that of sensory memory, is also  $7 \pm 2$  elements (Miller's law). Short term memory differs from working or operational memory in that it refers to the structures and processes involved in the storage and manipulation of information. The arguments that prove the existence of short term memory are:

- The phenomenon of anterograde amnesia such as that suffered by patients with hippocampal injury who can remember the past but can't store up new learning.
- Studies with experimental manipulations that affect memory performance. Observations in subjects with excessive

hippocampal neurogenesis have less short-term memory capacity.

### *Working memory*

It's the active process referring to structures and processes used for the storage of short term memory. It allows to keep active a limited amount of information needed in that instant of time. It requires a mental representation of the objective, the current state and in relation to the future situation. It's sometimes compared with the computer's RAM memory. Working memory requires the activation of a circuit of neurons in the prefrontal cortex, temporal lobe for meaning and occipital lobe for visual imaging. Children motivated by learning songs and games keep the information in their working memory the time required for memory consolidation. On the contrary, the lack of motivation in some school study tasks or motor learning doesn't allow retention of the contents taught by the teachers and then this information in the working memory disappears into oblivion, for example, in language classes that are taught once a week to students who are not very motivated, some words are learned in class that later pass into oblivion because no study is done or self-evaluation is done, this makes one reflect on the importance of study as close as possible to learning the content.

The consolidation of the working memory makes it possible to switch from short-term to long-term memory. Consolidation is tested by observing the effects of trauma, anesthesia and electroshocks where it's reflected that episodic events of several minutes before the stimulus are not remembered. The process of consolidation seems to be related to that of working memory.

There are two interferences that make it difficult to consolidate what has been learned and that are intended to be kept in the durable store, they are known as proactive and retroactive interference. In proactive interference the information that was previously learned interferes with the memory of recent materials, regardless of the number of trials; people who don't have this interference have a large long-term memory, e.g., the list of words that a child is intended to learn is hampered by the traces

of the previous list that we have already fixed. In retroactive interference the opposite occurs and the new learnings that are recorded compete with the old memories, for example, in people who speak several languages sometimes the last ones cause blocking effects on the old ones.

### *Long-term memory*

Also referred to as long-term memory, inactive memory or secondary memory. It's a store of memory information for a period longer than six months, with no capacity or duration limits. It differs from short-term memory and working memory in the duration of information storage. Memories that are stored in long-term memory are proposed as changes in genes and proteins. These are susceptible to fading into the process of forgetting. The maintenance of memories over a long period of time depends on the depth with which the information has been processed, as well as on repeated retrievals or retentions of the stored information. Finally, two types of long-term memory are recognized: conscious or explicit memory and unconscious or implicit memory.

In the motor learning of a sport or a type of dance at the beginning the act is done consciously with the participation of structures of the cognitive brain and the emotional brain that give the motivation along with the cognitive learning. In parallel, the circuits of lasting depression of the cerebellum suppress the circuits in excess until the learning of the motor act is consolidated, which is done automatically. In these conditions the arrival of consciousness to the learned motor act far from benefiting can harm the performer, a matter to be taken into account by teachers and parents.

### *Conscious, declarative, explicit or non-procedural memory*

It's the kind of memory that makes us human with an "I" that lives in the world with other "I's" in the family, friends, co-workers or fellow citizens.

This memory contains information referring to the knowledge about the world and about the experiences lived by each person, which is recognized as *episodic memory*. Semantic

memory is a store of knowledge about the meanings of words and the relationships between these meanings and constitutes a kind of mental dictionary, while “episodic memory” represents events or details of the lived situation and not only their meaning. The information represented in “semantic memory” follows a conceptual pattern, where the relationships between concepts are organized according to their meaning.

The organization of the contents in the episodic memory is subject to spatial-temporal parameters, which means that the events that are remembered represent the moments and places in which they occurred.

Semantic memory has the ability to infer and is capable of handling and generating new information that has never been explicitly learned, but that is implicit in its contents, for example, understanding the meaning of a new sentence or a new concept using already known words.

On the other hand, the events stored in the episodic memory are those coded in the explicit conscious memory. There is also a special type that exists only in some normal subjects and in many autistic people. In this variant of memory, subjects can describe events exactly even if a long time has passed since the event.

The conscious memory is stored and then retrieved or remembered also in a conscious way, so we can know its origin and details that are not hidden from the consciousness and therefore it's known as explicit or declarative, for example, when we see a friend who was on a trip and returns after 20 years of absence, we immediately recognize him, call him by name and even hug him and laugh together about some very remarkable events of the common past. This kind of memory in the child and adolescent allows him to realize the world he lives in and to recognize the episodes of his personal biography. It should be in the interest of all specialists, parents and teachers to develop as much as possible this type of memory related to various types of special intelligences. This variant of memory is the one that during neurodevelopment provides the knowledge of our own “self”. It has a very large capacity

and is lost only when there are very extensive brain injuries as it happens in the final stages of Alzheimer's disease.

### *Unconscious, non-declarative, implicit or procedural memory*

In addition to conscious memory there is another basic type of memory that we all possess and it's recognized by various names. In this type of memory, memory is performed without the participation of consciousness. The regions responsible are the caudate nucleus and the cerebellum. It's also stored in the cortex, although its recovery differs from declarative memory in that it's unconscious or automatic. It's characterized by not varying easily and being modulated by emotional variables. Unconscious memory is a system of practical execution involved in learning different types of fundamental skills such as crawling, walking, running, speaking, writing, dancing, driving a vehicle or doing sports such as swimming or gymnastics. This type of memory is activated in an automatic sequence in a procedure that arises from the demand of a task that is then performed unconsciously, for example, human walking is initiated voluntarily but then we walk without being aware of the sensations that are produced during each stride unless we pay attention to the steps.

Learning these skills is acquired gradually, mainly through execution and feedback, although instructions from the declarative system or imitation or mimicry where mirror neurons may be involved also play a role. The degree of acquisition of these skills depends on the amount of time spent practicing them, as well as the type of training that is carried out. As the "law of practice" predicts, in the first trials the speed of execution undergoes a rapid exponential increase, which slows down as the number of practice trials increases. In order to better achieve the skills related to that memory, it's convenient that parents and teachers appropriate three principles of sports training:

- Periodicity: repetition of practice, which directs neuroplasticity to affirm learning so that it's not forgotten.
- Specificity: each child, like each athlete, has personal potentialities and deficiencies that must be considered in teaching.
- Progressive increase of the loads: in each athlete or child

the loads or intensities should be progressively increased under the penalty of achieving an inferior result or producing over-training exhaustion, for example, when training the walk in every child it's necessary to take into account if it presents discrepancy of length of members, supine or prone position of the inferior members or I'm worth, for with help of specialists to try to correct them, so that the walk is the normal one when it finishes settling down to the seven years. Walking is the most important human motor activity. This is initiated by the will, but then it continues in an unconscious way unless the meditation is done in movement as the Buddhists do when they do the variant of walking meditation that fixes their attention on the steps that are being taken without judging other thoughts that come to mind in those moments of meditation. This type of meditation known as Mindfulness is applied in adults for its stress-reducing effects, anxiety and blood pressure. Recently it's being used in children in some schools around the world to improve school performance.

Specialists such as pediatricians, as well as teachers and parents of children and young people who are advancing in their biological and social neurodevelopment towards adulthood, wish to improve working and long-term memory in its two variants: conscious or explicit and implicit or unconscious. They ask themselves if it's possible to do so in order to obtain all the potentialities in the future when they are adults; they debate if it's possible to learn several languages, to be qualified professionals or excellent sportsmen, dancers, among others; the answer is affirmative, but it depends on some knowledge about the learning variants that have been recognized by psychology and more recently by neuroscience.

## **Childhood Amnesia**

Childhood amnesia refers to the inability to remember episodic events in the first two or three years of life. It also contains information referring to general knowledge, especially

regarding concepts extrapolated from lived situations, which is known as *semantic memory*.

Adults usually don't remember their life before the age of three. This lack of memory about what happened during the first few years of life is known as *childhood amnesia*. Childhood amnesia or childhood amnesia is the inability of adults to recall episodic memories that are recollections of specific events (times, places, associated emotions and other contexts, who, what, when and where) before the age of two or three, as well as the period before age 10, of which adults retain fewer memories than might otherwise be expected over time. This fact has puzzled many researchers, as five-year-olds have developed 85% of their intellect, personality and skills, yet they remember very little of that unusual stage of development in which they acquire their "self", learn to talk, walk..., in their close relationship with other "selves".

The proposed explanations for childhood amnesia are Freud's trauma theory, neurological development, cognitive self-development, emotion and language.

To study this phenomenon, researchers ask adults of different ages about experiences they had when they were young, such as the birth of a sibling, a change of address, the death of a family member or a hospital stay. It was found that the amount of information participants were able to give about different events in their childhood increased as the age at which they experienced them increased.

Why do older children and adults remember virtually nothing about our early childhood, when we know that babies can remember past events? According to theories from the field of developmental psychology, this may have to do with different factors.

Because babies do not handle language, those memories are stored non-verbally, making them unrecoverable once we start to encode the information verbally. On the other hand, it can also have to do with the concept of "I" or personal identity. Until the notion of "self" is developed, one doesn't have the capacity to organize life experiences in the way that children over the age of four do. Perhaps that is why the first memories

date from two to three years old in most adults, with these memories of events being highly impractical.

A very sound biological hypothesis of childhood amnesia focuses on postnatal development with the addition of new neurons by neurogenesis in the hippocampus at early ages. The hypothesis is based on data from humans, primates and rodents with disabilities to form long-lasting memory. The observed decrease in postnatal neurogenesis levels corresponds with the origin of the ability to form stable long-term memory.

As for the role of stress, some of the young adult subjects interviewed to explore the nature of early childhood memories refer to these as life-threatening situations such as gunfire, while others refer to happy birthday events, first encounters with the beach or the birth of a sibling.

## Final consideration

As children learn and increase their conscious and unconscious memory they will be healthier, smarter and happier developing their personality in all its potential.

Canadian neurophysiologist Grey Walter asked himself some decades ago what does the brain do that no other organ does? He answered himself by saying: learning (Walter, 1967: 278-301). Walter was not wrong, because although other systems such as the immune system have learning, these are not consciously programmed or performed like the learning and memory that the brain performs, providing the child with all the conscious learning that is stored in the explicit long-term memory that gives us the awareness that we exist, as well as the habits and automatic activities such as walking, language, writing and many others that are stored in the unconscious memory.

However, for children to appropriate both types of long-term memory, they need to practice, but with the guidance of parents and teachers applying the Miller  $7 \pm 2$  law. It has been argued that we have 21<sup>ST</sup> century children with teachers and parents who come from the 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY who use 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY methods in comprehensive education. If we want our children

and students to be good men and women who reach their full potential, the method used until now can't be followed. Here we can subscribe to what without evidence has been attributed indistinctly to Einstein, Twain or Franklin, but which is recorded in the book *Sudden Death* by Rita Mae Brown of 1983: "The greatest stupidity and madness in the world is to do the same thing over and over again pretending to obtain better results".

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# SEXUALITY IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE. TOOL OF INTEREST FOR FUTURE PARENTS

DR. ANA ANDREA GUISANDES ZAYAS  
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## Sexuality

Many parents believe that talking to their children about sexuality encourages early sexual initiation, because they think sexuality is linked to sexual only relationships.

Sexuality is an inseparable part of our lives, even when there is no erotic behavior. We're born sexual and this condition accompanies us all our lives. Based on sex, it includes gender, sex and gender identities, sexual orientation, eroticism, emotional bonding, love and reproduction. It's the result of the integration of biological, psychological, socioeconomic, cultural, ethical, religious and spiritual factors. It's part of our personality and is manifested in the way we relate, express affection and even the way we feel affection, think and act as a person. Sexuality manifests itself in all aspects of human life, in the family, the couple and in society.

We must not confuse sexuality with sex.

## Childhood sexual development

During the growth and development of human beings, sexuality is present in the physical, psychological and social aspects. Every human being goes through a process of changes in each of the stages of their life course: birth, childhood, adolescence, youth and adulthood until reaching old age.

Children discover themselves as people, they know their genitals, they explore and know their bodies and they discover themselves as sexual beings during childhood. From 10 to 19 years old is the period of adolescence, changes are expressed not only physically, but also in the way of thinking and manifesting their sexuality.

From early adolescence onwards, physical and psychological changes take place gradually. In males, growth of the genitals is observed, change of voice, the first emission of semen appears. In the girls the breasts grow, the hip widens and the first menstruation appears. When they have reached sexual maturity, both girls and boys are able to reproduce. It's at this stage that adolescents seek their identity and have a greater interest in independence, when infatuations and the need for sexual pleasure arise. Autonomy is progressive during adolescence. Between the ages of 16 and 19, physical development takes place, doubts are clarified, internal conflicts with parents improve and the capacity for deductive thinking is obtained.

## Sex

It's manifested by the characteristics of the body that establish the differences of the sexual organs between male and female, according to anatomical and physiological differences.

Educating children according to their sex is related to what each family and each society considers. It responds to social and cultural models that guarantee during the different stages of life that women and men behave according to the guidelines for their sex in each society. These guidelines are gender stereotypes and the process by which we appropriate these social norms is the process of socialization. During socialization, children learn how they should behave, how to express their feelings, what toys they should play with, what clothes are appropriate, how they should talk, walk, in short, what they should do according to their sex in order to be accepted.

## **Eroticism**

It's the ability to enjoy pleasant sensations that cause reactions such as the erection of the penis in the male and moisture of the girl's genitals, sensations that invite boys and girls to touch and caress their genitals to prolong that pleasant feeling or exchange these caresses with a partner.

A sexual response can occur during relationship or through autoeroticism, which is the stimulation of one's body through caressing and manual stimulation (masturbation). It's a natural and healthy option for adolescents until they are ready to share their eroticism with another person.

## **Gender**

It's the definition of masculine and feminine in different cultures. It's something socially constructed and transmitted from generation to generation. Families produce messages like: "men don't cry", "boys are from the street, girls are from the house". These are the gender stereotypes established by families.

The delimitation of what is masculine and what is feminine, the patterns of behaviour that we learn during our upbringing, shape our feelings, desires, beliefs and ideas of what it's to be a man or a woman in the society in which we live. The construction of gender begins in the family, then school, friends and later with the couple, and so throughout life we're building our way of being a man or a woman according to social norms.

Gender is based on sexual difference and involves the traits that characterize identity, the attributes and functions assigned and assumed, the value hierarchies in positions and the power quotas of men and women.

## **Gender Equality**

It refers to "the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, and girls and boys". Therefore, the sex we're born with will never determine the rights, opportunities and responsibilities we may have throughout our lives.

Sex education for children, adolescents and adults is essential to guarantee healthy and responsible sexuality.

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# EMOTIONAL OR SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF TRAINING FOR FUTURE PARENTS: A BRIEF REVIEW

DR. FRANCISCA CRUZ SANCHEZ

It's not possible to understand why the formation of future parents without knowing what happens during childhood and adolescence with the emotional and sentimental changes and how they can last throughout life. There are many children and adolescents who express sadness, violent reactions, inappropriate behaviour, even putting their own lives and those of others at risk in different ways. That is why I have made this brief but necessary review about some concepts related to the subject.

## Emotion

It comes from the Latin *emotio* -movement towards-, expressing the idea that in every emotion there is implicit a tendency to act with some purpose, a tendency to move in some direction. Emotion is defined as an intense and fleeting alteration of mood, pleasant or painful, which is accompanied by a certain somatic shock (Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language).

The four basic emotions are: joy, sadness, anger and fear. Some argue that love is the fifth emotion. From the combination of the basic emotions arise the complex ones, such as: pride, envy, illusion or frustration. Emotions are inevitable and should not be ignored, whether they are pleasant or not,

the important thing is to know them and learn to handle those that bother us.

## Moods

It's the stable and enduring dispositions over time, which do not determine so intensely the ways of perceiving and acting as the emotions, which are the most fleeting and captivating activation.

## Temperament

It comes from the Latin *temperamentum* –measuring–, it's the individual peculiarity and intensity of psychic affections and the dominant structure of humor and motivation. It's a relatively stable predisposition, linked to biological factors, which determines the usual parameters of emotional response of each individual. It's, so to speak, the particular constitution of the organic systems linked to the emotions with which each one comes from birth. Temperament is inherited in 50 %. The biological substrate of temperament is the limbic system, striated body and its variations.

## Character

Set of reactions and behavioural habits that have been acquired during life and that give specificity to the individual way of being.

It's little inherited and is influenced by socio-cultural learning. It's goal-oriented, value-preserving and introspective. The biological substrate of character is the neocortex and the hippocampus.

## Feelings

They constitute the part of the emotional reactions that are subjected to conscious reflection and to which they are assigned a conventional label, a name. They are the thoughts that are held about the emotions, the part that is consciously processed.

## Innocence

Innocence in childhood isn't synonymous with ignorance, naivety or lack of maturity, it's rather the expression of surprise, illusion, imagination, as well as different fantasies of the world in which childhood develops, but we must know that that innocent childhood with concrete or simple thoughts is loaded with sincerity and feelings expressed through verbal and non-verbal messages.

## Resilience

The term *resilience* refers to people's ability to overcome periods of emotional pain and trauma. Resilience is the ability of an individual or a group to recover from adversity and continue to project into the future. Neuroscientists believe that people who are more resilient are more emotionally balanced when faced with situations of stress.

## Functions of the emotions

Emotions have three fundamental functions:

- Adaptive: they facilitate the adjustment of the organism to new environmental conditions. Each emotion, both those considered positive and negative, has a specific usefulness.
- Motivational: they promote and direct behaviours in the attraction-repulsion dimension.
- Communication: on two levels:
  - Intrapersonal: as a source of information.
  - Interpersonal: in a social dimension, communicating feelings and intentions (mainly in a non-verbal way), influencing the behaviour of others and enhancing relationships.

## Emotional regulation

It can be defined as any strategy aimed at maintaining, increasing or suppressing an ongoing affective state. The first two years of life are a key point for learning and moving from

more rudimentary strategies of emotional control to more autonomous ones due to the development of cognitive, attentional and linguistic mechanisms necessary for the capacity of emotional regulation.

There are various forms of regulatory strategies:

- Re-evaluation: assigning a “non-emotional” meaning to an event.
- Suppression: controlling the somatic response of an emotion.

From the interpersonal point of view, people who suppress their affections, by notoriously diminishing their emotional expressiveness, generate negative affections in others and are less “encouraging” in situations of adversity.

The key to fostering emotional development in children lies in the inter-subjective relationships that are established between them and the people with whom they interact.

The development of the emotional brain depends on the quality of these intersubjective or attachment relationships.

Possible psychopathological disorders arise due to two related phenomena:

- A “heightened emotional reactivity”.
- A “Poor regulation process.”

## Mood swings

Mood swings in adolescence have two causes, one is physical and the other is psychological.

Teenagers’ changing moods are one of their parents’ most frequent complaints. When they enter puberty they go from joy to sadness or from boredom to fun in a few minutes. Suddenly they are the happiest beings on earth and moments later there is no one in the universe more miserable than they are.

At the onset of puberty (from age ten), hormonal changes begin to occur. Large amounts of sex hormones begin to be produced: estrogen and progesterone in girls and testosterone in boys. It’s these hormonal discharges that cause the profound sexual changes and, at the same time, cause, in part, the emotional disturbances.

In addition to hormones, everything in the teenage universe is in flux: their body, their world, their mind, their relationships. During adolescence they stop being children, but they are not yet adults, and that leads to emotional instability that also causes those frequent mood swings.

## **Emotional or sentimental education**

It's an educational innovation that responds to social needs that are not met in ordinary academic subjects, whose objective is the development of emotional competencies: emotional awareness, emotional regulation, self-management, interpersonal intelligence, life skills and well-being. It includes the sphere of emotions, attitudes, motives, self-concept and self-esteem, as well as sexuality and relationships with others.

Emotional or sentimental education doesn't refer to schooling; it's about education for the family, society, the media, among others. It's a continuous process during our existential journey, changing and progressive, where skills are acquired and knowledge is transmitted in such a way that we're able to overcome mistakes and modify behaviors. Childhood is the most effective time for this type of education.

Children and adolescents with an adequate sentimental education will be more responsible and safe and therefore have fewer risks and will be healthier since this type of education offers tools for the resolution of daily problems, and therefore provides well-being.

Sentimental education can be summarized in four points:

- Knowledge and control of one's emotions.
- Recognition and understanding of other people's emotions
- Ability to motivate himself.
- Control of interpersonal relationships.

## **How to help prospective parents**

- Teach them how to be parents.
- They must know about growth and development in children and adolescents

- They must be able to identify feelings and manage emotions.
- Developing attachment and enriching relationships
- Develop social and emotional skills.
- Know what physical and emotional needs are.
- Learn to know and comply with rules and limits.
- Develop links and values.
- To be supportive.
- To inform them about the impact on integral health (physical, sexual and reproductive, mental and social) of adverse experiences during childhood and adolescence.

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# IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY IN THE FORMATION OF THE PERSONALITY

DR. DIANA MARIA STUART DUARTE

## Personality

It's known that the activity of each individual is regulated by the personality, which is determined by the social relations existing in the environment during the period in which it's formed and developed.

When you're born, a part of your brain continues to develop, yet it has an extraordinary capacity to learn and acquire everything that living conditions and education convey to it. The child is born an individual and a personality emerges through the historical course of his social interaction, that is, contact with and interaction with his social environment, and the child acquires distinctive features and qualities that will determine him in the future.

A child's initial experiences, the bonds they form with their parents and their first educational experiences, profoundly affect their future physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. We're who we're precisely because of the sum and interaction of the effects of our genes and the environment, in which those genes are expressed and regulate cell function and maturation processes.

For these reasons, prenatal and postnatal exposure to different environmental influences, both physical and psychological, constitute risk factors to be taken into account in order to

explain the appearance of alterations in development and, in general, individual differences in the expression of cognitive and emotional capacities.

Therefore, *personality* is the structured and consistent set of biopsychosocial characteristics that are established as a consequence of the dialectic interaction subject-medium and that when manifesting themselves during this process, differentiate some human beings from others in a given socio-cultural environment.

*Temperament* is the equivalent of the functional modality of the nervous system and is identified by some as *the way of being*, while *character* or *way of doing* is developed from experiences and their interaction with the environment, where parents play a fundamental role from the early stages of life. Character is a component of personality that, together with temperamental modeling by the environment, incorporates values, convictions, interests, habits, personal security, attitudes and interpersonal relationships.

It's necessary to emphasize that the *intellectual capacities* are developed from the aptitudes and these capacities together with the character, integrate the personality, that is to say, the way of being, of doing, of reacting, of solving, that differentiates an individual from another one in a certain sociocultural environment.

The personality is unique and individual, it's unrepeatable and this is because the internal conditions of each subject will always be as diverse as the external ones.

## Importance of the family

The family is the most important institution in the development and formation of the personality, since in it the first experiences, experiences and learning take place during childhood. It's a decisive element for the social construction, it's the oldest social institution of humanity, where we feel more protected as children, it's an example and an ideal space for learning.

All the typically human qualities are acquired and transmitted through social inheritance; during childhood the expe-

periences of the adults around them are gradually assimilated; all the superior feelings of man are learned from the earliest childhood, which is why the early years are decisive in the formation of the personality, with parents becoming the first educators and the ones most responsible for the formation of the personality.

Optimizing the early years of a child's life is the best investment you can make to ensure their future success.

## Human behaviour

Etymologically, the word *behavior* comes from Latin and means "led or guided", that is, all the manifestations that are understood within the individual are supposed to be led by something internal or external, which indicates that the behavior can be guided both by psychic phenomena of biological cause and by the influence of the social environment on the subject, it's the result of educational and environmental influences and the heredobiological disposition.

The behavior also comes from the Latin *comportare*, which means "to involve". It has acquired a meaning that demonstrates a greater involvement of the subject, while the etymological root of behavior indicates something external, guided.

Children's behaviour is a consequence of the educational moulding of their educators, mainly their parents. It's also influenced by the child's own genetic load, a variable that conditions the temperament and with it their adaptive and emotional behavior and management.

In most cases, the wrong education can lead to behavioural disorders. This shows how important the parents' educational styles can be in the development of later behavioural disorders.

*Human activity* is the process of conscious interaction of man with reality, originated and directed by need and its satisfaction, it's during this process that the self-regulation of one's actions occurs. When there is no consciousness of the end that one wishes to achieve, the self-regulation of one's own behavior doesn't occur. This is called *impulsive behavior*, that is, *behavior regulated by emotions* such as, for example, anger.

## Behavioral disorders

These are the unstructured, psychopathological situations in which the child or adolescent himself has ample capacity for response and is still fully autonomous in their resolution. Based on this, behavioural disorders are alterations, in general, much more benign and close to normal than all those we call behavioural *disorders*.

The origin is usually multifactorial, as is the treatment. These data show the magnitude of the difficulties at the level of adaptation and regulation manifested by adolescents, transgressive behaviours begin to be established from childhood and are aggravated and reinforced in adolescence.

Peer assault, gang violence and frequent altercations within homes and educational institutions, among other assault events, alert health systems and direct actions towards prevention and timely intervention in the field of mental health.

It's necessary to emphasize that the presence of criminal behavior and mental health problems or drug use doesn't necessarily imply a causal relationship, but rather represents the interaction between psychological, biological and social factors that trigger psychopathologies in adolescent lawbreakers.

An essential element of adolescence and youth is precisely their behavior, their way of acting, since they are always in search of novelty, needing permanent stimulation, to demonstrate autonomy and that they can solve their problems, seeking in most cases solutions without deep analysis, without taking into consideration that these can bring negative results, which causes them to constitute risk factors, together with others as in the case of dysfunctional families or adverse conditions of the social environment around them, facilitating the deformations of these subjects or deviant behaviors, which can reach their mature form: delinquency.

Three factors are known to operate in the constitution of this type of disorder:

- Socio-historical and cultural factors
- Intrafamily factors.
- Biological factors.

It's an obvious and contracted fact that the education of children and adolescents in the current social and historical context is complex. Various studies and reviews show a clear increase in the significance of certain problems related to child and adolescent behaviour and health in the world population.

Behavior disorders and mental health problems in the child and adolescent population deserve special attention, with special relevance to minor aggressors of their parents or adults, substance use and addictions, obesity or increased conflict and violence in the school context.

Although parents and the family context can't be fully held responsible for the presence and evolution of all these problems, it's no less true that the family's educational style, upbringing models and the development of healthy habits is an essential function of the family.

Many studies have shown that a significant percentage of adolescents have behavioral disorders. The development of the brain is closely related to environmental factors that allow it to reach the necessary and positive maturity as the individual grows, but in these times, every day the transgenerational significance of habits and the risk of disease, make behavioral alterations of adolescents greater, taking into account that the family is the basic nutrient of the first emotional and educational experiences, is the basic cell of society, is the basis of individual learning. Tobacco dependence, a tolerant attitude towards the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, frequenting friends or peers who use these substances, are also consequences that are currently seen more frequently in this age group.

The international literature points out that there are a number of protective factors in the lives of adolescents that can help them succeed and develop into responsible adults, and these factors prevent young people from engaging in behaviours that affect their health, for example, the use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

Factors that protect the adolescent from engaging in these types of behaviors include positive relationships with family, academic performance, or academic achievement, the latter

two being considered important protective factors for avoiding substance use in youth.

Some factors affecting adolescent participation in healthy behaviors have also been identified, including poor school performance, school failure and poor participation in extra-curricular activities.

In current educational practice two aspects are out of control: the absence of adequate “educational time” with the children and the lack of knowledge about the “role of parents”.

The absence of time generates in some parents a lesser knowledge of their children due to a lesser time of coexistence and observation, this generates many doubts and fears of making mistakes, so educational mistakes are not well assumed and guilt and, with this, overprotection appears more easily.

Ignorance of the role of parents is most of the time involuntary, they are parents without educational criteria who do not set themselves objectives, so that their education is ambivalent and overly tolerant, giving rise to tyrannical children. When talking about the “role of parents” it’s also important to talk about those who voluntarily resign and delegate, since they will be children who will hardly know “no”.

Educating without the capacity for frustration in childhood is, in most cases, a cause of behavioural disorders.

## **Helping parents manage behavioral disorders**

Children and adolescents need to learn to pay attention to the behavior that causes problems and that is why it’s useful:

- That the parents clearly and precisely define to him what the conduct in question is.
- Identify what actions always precede that behavior.
- Recognize the external stimuli (coming from the environment) and internal stimuli (thoughts, sensations, among others) that are presented before and after.
- It’s advisable to observe several behaviors without falling into an excess.
- It’s not necessary to always observe negative behaviors, it’s important that positive behaviors are also observed and recorded.

- The duration of self-observation on the same behaviour can't last for an excessively long time because it would induce fatigue.

Parents must observe certain rules:

- Give few orders and they should be precise, short and not contradictory.
- To be very clear on the basic regulations.
- Avoid excessive speeches and concentrate more on actions.
- To be more persistent than the children.
- The adult's argument must be coherent and sensible.
- The message must be one (agreed upon by both parents).
- It must be accompanied by affection.
- Not to appeal to physical punishment.
- It's necessary for the child to know in advance the consequence of non-compliance.
- Try not to get "hooked" on escalating violent arguments.
- Stay calm.
- Avoid repeating persistently "this is the last time".
- Offer alternative behaviors.
- Strengthening behaviors that are appropriate for a child of that age.
- Begin the changes by the most recent behaviors.
- The "punishment" must not be retroactive.
- Avoid multiplying the "no"s.
- Limits are renegotiated according to the child's growth.
- Offer a routine that allows them to organize and master their behavior.
- Offer models from which to generate behaviour by imitation.
- To instruct the rest of the people involved (educators) so that they are aware of the intervention
- Obedience is a duty where the parent has the obligation to teach the rules and the child or adolescent has the right to know them.
- The rule must be discussed and put in writing.
- The rule should not be long in time.

- The rule must be appropriate to the time and place in which it's developed, as well as to the way in which it's established.

What *not* to do:

- Not get into a power struggle looking to win or say the last word by making the child feel that you're the one with the power.
- Not to promote argument or discussion in a specific situation in order to convince you that you're right.
- Not to criticize or use aggressive communication.
- Not to confront or pressure behavior in times of crisis.
- Not forcing the child to remedy his behavior at times when he is upset or in crisis.
- Don't set penalties in times of conflict.
- Don't ask "why?" (you should already know the answer).

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# CRISIS AND ABUSE AS FAMILY RISK FACTORS

DR. C. CRISTOBAL MARTÍNEZ GÓMEZ

All modern families suffer from the tensions and pressures of society. However, some succeed in having children who are confident and able to successfully manage a difficult environment. Sociologists believe that living in a neighbourhood where criminals abound is an important factor in the development of delinquency in children. However, there are families living in such neighborhoods who do not have delinquent children and others who do. Psychoanalysis explains these differences by saying that it's a deficiency in psychic functioning, which manifests itself in the development of their "self" or in the controls of the super "self". It seems more accurate to us, as Virginia Satir puts it, that it's the family interaction that influences in a positive or negative way the behaviour of children and that the family is the critical variable that intervenes between society and the individual.

The family system is the main learning context for individual behaviour, thoughts and feelings. How parents teach a child is as important as what they teach. Family theory postulates that outside forces are important because they affect parents. If parents are disillusioned with each other, feel annoyed, confused, empty and hopeless, any outside tension will have a much greater impact. If spouses have not integrated what they have learned into their own families, it will be difficult

for them to achieve marital interaction that allows them to give clear and consistent messages to their children.

## Family crises

Perhaps one of the greatest discoveries of the 1960s was the importance of the indication of family treatments at the time of crisis. The use of drugs and hospitalization to calm the family atmosphere is considered an obstacle to effective treatment. As Jay Haley states, to change an impoverished situation and allow the individual development of family members, the therapist should not juggle the crisis. When hospitals are involved in the stabilization process, this is much more difficult. Often, institutions adopt family therapy not because they consider it an effective treatment, but because they see that the medical model is being overtaken by therapists in this field. They try to catch up, because their foundations force them to emphasize community work, in which the family approach is more relevant than traditional individual therapy.

The concept of crisis has been taken by many people as something negative. In the life cycle of the family it evolves due to crisis, but in a positive sense, giving this concept a connotation of a decisive moment or a situation of danger and opportunity. However, we can't deny that there are also crises that constitute a threat to the family and that represent a risk of suffering, disorganization, malfunctioning, destruction and demoralization. I will now describe the most important of these crises.

## Dismemberment crisis

Dismemberment can occur through various events: *divorce, abandonment, death and migration.*

### *Divorce*

Divorce is a reason to seek help in everyday practice, because families are concerned about the consequences this crisis may have on their children. It's clear that depending on how

the parents handle this event, the damage to the children will be. The separation of the parents means for the children a loss of their base of security, since they in the concrete logical scope, as it's their thought, deduce that in the measure in which their family is united it's stronger, more protective, more competent and therefore the "rupture" entails weakness, incompetence and absence of protection. If, in addition, the fact that what is happening is hidden from the children through deception, then the damage is aggravated. Guidance for these cases is based on the fact that it must be explained that just as the parents fell in love and therefore married, now they are no longer in love and "fall out", which doesn't mean that they are "fighting". As Virginia Satir puts it, the child can find itself caught between conflicting demands, as each parent sees it as:

- A possible ally against the other spouse.
- A possible messenger through which they communicate.
- A possible appeaser of the other.

If the child takes the side of one parent, he or she risks losing the other, and since he or she needs both, it's inevitable that he or she will suffer from having to choose.

Parents who are getting divorced often worry about the effect the divorce will have on their children. Other parents are mainly concerned about their own problems, but they are also aware that they are the most important people in their children's lives. They may feel disconsolate or happy about their divorce, but invariably the children are frightened and confused by the threat to their personal safety. Some parents feel so hurt and overwhelmed by the divorce that they seek help and comfort from their children. Children may not understand the divorce, so parents should explain to them what is happening and what their fate will be. Children often believe they are the cause of conflict between their parents; many take responsibility for reconciling their parents and sacrifice themselves.

However, a strong family can help children deal constructively with their parents' conflict resolution. Parents should watch for signs of stress such as loss of interest in school and friends, sleep disorders, and rebelliousness, among others. It's

important for children to know that their mom and dad will still be their parents even if they no longer live together.

### *I leave*

Something that creates very serious difficulties are the crises that occur when one of the members of the nuclear family abandons it for various reasons such as, for example, transfer to another city for work reasons, emotional detachment due to divorce (generally it's those parents who, when they divorce the mother, stop caring for their children). This type of abandonment generates a feeling of handicap that is very difficult to resolve.

### *Death*

The death of a close relative, whether mother, father, grandparents, aunts and uncles or other, is a risk factor and is often mishandled by the family. Unfortunately, the family fears the negative effects that the news will have on the children, without appreciating that it's inevitable that they will learn about it later. It's true that the death of a loved one hurts us all, but hiding it or postponing the news only adds to the pain and distrust that deception generates. It's necessary to prepare the family to be aware that young children will not understand the concept of death very well and will sometimes make judgments about whether the dead person will "live" again or "return".

It should be explained in language appropriate to the child's age what death is. Added to the shock and confusion is the lack of proper attention from other family members who are mourning the loss. It's normal for them to feel deep sadness for a time or to believe that the loved one is still alive, however, long-term refusal to admit that the death occurred or to avoid manifestations of sadness is unhealthy and can result in severe problems in the future. As an anecdote, I remember that on one occasion, when it was the family's decision, as I have had to do many times, I was given the painful task of informing a seven-year-old girl of her mother's death, when I said to her: what happens when the mother dies? she replied, while two

thick tears ran down her cheeks silently “the body is buried, but the feelings and affection remain here in my heart” and she placed her little hand on her chest. All those present wept with emotion. He was able to understand why his family was sad and why they had not had the courage to tell him.

### *Migration*

Migration from the countryside to the city, so common nowadays, produces effects on the family and on children in particular, which must be taken into account when assessing any symptomatic manifestation. Changes in housing, customs, school, friends, way of life and living conditions, and resources, among others, substantially destabilize family functioning. If these changes are from one province to another they are even more evident.

Let us imagine then what it means if we add to all this, when migration is to another country, a change of language, culture, traditions, values, ethical and moral criteria. There is no doubt, as Sluzki (1995) has stated in his research on the Latin American community in Los Angeles, that this in a general sense creates an imbalance in the functioning of the family. Moving to a new community can be one of the most stressful experiences for a family. Moving interferes with friendships. A child new to school may feel that others have a favorite friend and feel left out. Sometimes a parent disagrees and the children sense the conflict. Sometimes children show signs of tension or depression.

Children are the most sensitive to removals, as they usually do not have the motivation or need that parents have to make them, so it's necessary to establish some preventive measures:

- Clearly explain to the children why it's necessary to move.
- Familiarize him with the new environment.
- To highlight the advantages of the new place (amusement park, recreation areas, beautiful landscapes...).
- If it's an older child or teenager, the move should be postponed until the end of the school year or left to someone from the extended family until that time.

## *Surge crisis*

This crisis occurs when the family expands, not because of situations related to the life cycle (birth of children, marriage of children or birth of children) but because someone who had already become independent from the family returns at a time in the family cycle that doesn't correspond to the normal development and growth of the family. Some examples of this are children who divorce and return with their corresponding offspring, widowers who come home with or without children, stable marriages with their children who return from unsatisfactory migration, return of the one who abandoned the family, among others.

## *Crisis due to disorganization*

The family needs, for its good functioning, like any system, to have an internal organization and this can be affected by multiple causes. A chronic somatic or psychiatric illness in one of the members can sometimes disrupt the family's life. Alcoholism or drug addiction almost always disrupts good functioning. The retirement or disability of a significant member causes negative changes in the family dynamics. A terminal patient creates extra needs that cause a disruption in everyone's daily life and, in addition, a significant emotional imbalance. The suicide or attempted suicide of a member sometimes generates feelings of guilt that hinder good relationships. A low cultural level creates an environment of little stimulus and disrespectful relationships that, in most cases, generates inadequate norms of coexistence. Inadequate housing conditions provide the ideal framework for disorganization. A rigid or chaotic family structure, without the necessary cohesion or one that is so cohesive that it becomes "amalgamated" is susceptible to disorganization. Other aspects to be taken into account are the "socio-familial permeability" and the "family strength".

The influence of disasters, earthquakes, floods, fires, cyclones, wars, among others, on the functioning of families is obvious.

## ***Demoralization crisis***

The family, like any institution, needs patterns of behavior governed by ethical, moral, ideological, and legal values, among others. When these values are violated by members of the family or by people outside the family, demoralization crises are generated. These crises can be caused by the anti-social behaviour of one or more of their members or by one of them being in prison. Sexual abuse perpetrated against a family member generates feelings of aggressiveness, guilt, helplessness and frustration in the rest, and if the perpetrator is a member of the family itself, as is often the case, then the conflict is even greater. Psychological or physical abuse directed at the most defenseless people (children, women and the elderly) absolutely demoralizes the family and generates a crisis, which if not intervened therapeutically, will result in irreparable consequences. Negligence, as its very name indicates, is a risk factor that carries with it the potential damage to family functioning and the generation of crises.

## ***Mixed crisis***

The mixed crisis is one in which several of the events that characterize the other crises can be detected, so they will be evaluated and treated according to the situation of these cases and, of course, using very specific techniques.

Now I must make a special mention of an issue that has been gaining importance and to which we family therapists give a remarkable weight in the genesis of difficulties in the development of the personality of all family members. I'm referring to family violence and specifically child abuse.

## **Domestic violence**

*Domestic violence is defined* as any act or omission committed by a family member that violates the right to the full development and well-being of another. Domestic violence is primarily directed at women, children and the elderly. Paradoxically, the place where violence occurs is usually the home.

The consequences of family violence are loss of dignity, security, self-confidence and trust in others. In addition, loss of the ability to control the environment and to “rebel”. It also diminishes the sense of competence and self-esteem. Victims experience helplessness and despair when they see that efforts to control or escape from violence are futile.

Family violence is occurring more often than we imagine. In many cases the victim is silent about the fact, in others they seek help, but it’s clear that this is an issue that needs attention since it’s within this framework that the new generations are being born.

The effort that implies to survive daily, in all the countries, causes an accumulation of tensions, from the economic thing, the familiar thing, the labor thing, that affects the quality of the affective relations. The cultural guidelines are marking, likewise, forms of coexistence that usually damage the members of a couple, of a family group. Conflicts that are not resolved on a personal level are forming a skein of situations that generate violence.

One expert noted: “There is no time to relieve all the tensions that accumulate because the woman works all day, the children sometimes have double schooling (the normal one plus music or dance, among others) and the father works 24 hours a day. There is no time to talk. We have lost the family structure, the dialogue, the power to comment on what is going on”. Another points out: “Nor is it good what happens in those families where leisure abounds, where the wife doesn’t work, nor the husband, nor the children study”.

Whatever the social group in question, the importance of knowing what is happening, what needs to be changed, must be stressed. Some family members must be able to say “this can’t happen to me again, I need help” or “I don’t deserve this”; but unfortunately not all mothers know how to ask for help, let alone children, there is usually silence.

Usually we work with the demand, which is the battered woman or the children, but it’s strategically important to work with the batterer, to get close to him. Obviously this one, whether it’s the father or the mother, needs therapeutic help,

although he is almost always unaware of it. We talk about the battered woman, but we don't deal so much with the batterer. Lately, many scholars on the subject have been asking themselves, what about the woman? Does she not assault, or does she not exercise violence or some form of violence? These are open questions.

## *Child abuse*

*Child abuse* is defined as any assault on a child by parents, siblings, relatives or others with the intent to punish or harm the child. There is also abuse when the child's needs are not met: food, health, protection, affection and care. Among the most common causes are certain characteristics of the parents: Many of the parents who mistreat their children were abused children or learned in their family that physical punishment was a method of teaching. There are also characteristics of the children that are present as an apparent cause: restless, problematic children, with generally inappropriate behaviors as occurs in attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder known as ADHD and delayed intellectual development, among others.

Environmental situations can serve as a catalyst for parents and children to abuse. These include economic problems, marital difficulties, unemployment, lack of education, overcrowding, and inadequate housing. The tendency to look for the cause in the victim, when blame is "scientifically" (sophisticated psychological mechanisms) or "popularly" (they themselves have sought it out), isn't acceptable.

It's evident that these facts have consequences in the different ages:

- Pre-school: abnormal patterns of social interaction. They tend to avoid people, respond aggressively to their approaches, or are abusive to other children.
- School: low self-esteem, withdrawn or aggressive behavior. Behavioral or emotional mismatches at school. Lower intellectual performance.
- Adolescent: they internalize aggressive reaction styles. Suicide risk.
- Adult: antisocial behaviour.

## *Physical abuse*

In extreme cases, injuries can occur that cause death: asphyxiation, bleeding, skull fractures, rupture of vital organs (heart, lung, liver, among others). The most frequent behaviours of children who are subjected to maltreatment are: fear of their parents, distrust of adults, restless when other children cry, difficulties in school performance, aggressive or distracted and absent. The most frequent injuries are cigarette, water or iron burns, multiple fractures, wounds, bruises, scratches and scrapes on the face.

## *Negligent or Careless Abuse*

This type of abuse occurs when parents do not look after the child's needs. These children have accidents such as falls, burns, poisoning, straying into the street, being hit by cars, and develop preventable illnesses. The most frequent behaviours exhibited by these children are: they say that nobody cares about them, they are tired, they have attention deficit, they fall asleep, they steal or beg, they use drugs or alcohol and they drop out of school to be on the street.

## *Sexual abuse*

When an adult or adolescent uses his or her power over a child to establish sexual activity. He or she may use deception, threats or physical force to convince or force the child to participate. The forms are: fondling, kissing, manipulation, exhibitionism, even rape, sexual exploitation, prostitution and pornography. It's necessary to be attentive to the evidence, because this abuse is almost always hidden, usually difficulties in walking and sitting, pain and itching in the genitals, urinary infections, dirty or deteriorated underwear.

The most frequent behaviors observed are: underachievement at school, distractibility, isolation, low self-esteem, lying, stealing, running away, inappropriate sexual behavior (may refer to sexual assault).

## *Munchausen's syndrome (proxy abuse)*

It's characterised by the fact that the abuser, usually the mother, assaults her child through another person (the doctor), simulating and describing false or provoked symptoms and signs, forcing hospitalisation, examinations and unnecessary treatment that sometimes endanger the child's life.

### Psychological child abuse

All these theoretical disquisitions are very useful and shed light on the problem and its solution, but what no one doubts is that children educated in this environment of violence, whether they are beaten or not, are going to develop abnormally, which constitutes abuse, subtle, unnoticed perhaps, but as criminal as physical abuse, this type of abuse is psychological.

If the abuse of subjectivity is an injury to the development of the child's personality, then we can argue that the adults responsible for the child's growth (parents, relatives, professional staff: doctors, obstetricians, health workers in general, among others) have generated a factor of abuse when, from the very gestation, they have stopped providing the minimum conditions for their physiological, psychological and social development. However, it's necessary to make a minimum mention of the aetiology of subjective abuse, to then go on to outline the concept of *deficient socialization*, framed in a set of family factors that determine it, such as:

- A dysfunctional or poorly integrated nuclear family.
- A couple's problem.
- An extended family with flaws in its functioning, in its structure and the consequent difficulty of interrelation

The second aspect to take into account is the need to specify the subjective abuse that a child has suffered, studying these factors in depth:

- Their school situation, in terms of their performance, promotion, educational advancement and behaviour.
- Family diagnosis issued by trained professionals.

- Social work studies that comprehensively assess the child's living conditions, with special emphasis on developmental conditions.
- Child-specific clinical examinations, performed by qualified professionals with specific training in family therapy or child psychiatry
- Direct observation of the child, carried out in appropriate places and by qualified professionals.

In reality, the magnitude of this serious problem is unknown, but if there is anything obvious, regardless of the number of cases, the fact that a child is psychologically abused, whether through ignorance, omission, laziness or pure evil, is already something that should be of concern. We must take the appropriate, timely and necessary measures to avoid the damage that this implies and to promote healthy treatment that will produce happy and satisfied future generations. As far as the growth of this problem is concerned, we can't say whether it has increased, but we can say that more is currently being detected. It's possible that we, the members of the health team, are more alert. It's good to clarify that this situation occurs at a global level and isn't typical of Cuba.

*Psychological abuse* is defined as any action taken against the normal development of children's cognitive, affective, behavioural, integrative and relational potentialities.

It becomes evident that these actions affecting the child psychism can be of an objective or subjective nature. *Actions of an objective nature* constitute a whole range of factors, among which the following stand out: genetic, toxic, infectious, traumatic, neurological, anoxic, hemorrhagic, nutritional, among others, which exert their negative influence from conception, gestation, birth and the neonatal stage. There is no denying the extraordinary importance of these factors, which cause mental retardation, cerebral palsy, speech and language disorders, among others. All these factors affect the normal development of the psychism of these children and therefore constitute abuse.

However, we want to focus our attention on the *actions of a subjective nature* that constitute abuse of the child's psyche

by hindering its development. The culture of a people is full of traditions on how to “educate” their children. Within these traditions, those that refer to how to maintain discipline, how to sanction faults, how to express affection, how to play, how far independence is allowed, acceptance of individuality, among others, have special strength. Culture will influence children through the family. It can make an important contribution to their well-being, happiness and health. In fact, this is the case in most families, but it’s not our aim to highlight the positive, beneficial aspects of some customs. We must highlight those aspects of tradition that by omission or action are going to be harmful to the normal psychological development of children and therefore must be exposed in order to control and eradicate them.

It’s not an easy task to convince parents that these traditions in which they, their parents and their grandparents were “brought up” can be harmful to their children. Phrases like “this is how I was brought up and look at me here good and healthy”, “the letter with blood comes in”, among others, are passed on from generation to generation and become law. They cover up and justify the negative effect that these modes of relationship produce.

I’m not going to refer to all the customs, myths, habits and family rules that constitute maltreatment, only going to establish a generalization about what it means for the family not to satisfy the psychological needs of children. This omission is the most subtle abuse, the most difficult to detect, and therefore the most difficult to avoid and to resolve. Only sometimes in the most intimate knowledge of the family dynamics and the interactions that occur in family therapy does this become evident.

The family must provide a protected training ground in which the child learns to live as a member of society. The family is the universal primary social unit, and therefore is central to the understanding of health in general and mental health in particular. The first social environment of human beings is the family. It’s on the one hand a link between generations that allows for stability of culture and on the other hand it’s a crucial element in cultural changes.

The family is a miniature society in which one acquires habits of social behavior that can persist throughout one's life. At first the child is completely dependent on the parents, but later on he or she demands and must be given more and more independence and autonomy in his or her activities. It's important not to ask too much of the child in terms of self-control and responsibility for his or her actions, while doing too much for the child may delay his or her creativity and the process of becoming independent.

The child has *psychological needs* that the family must satisfy, otherwise intellectual and emotional development is compromised. The behavior will be exactly opposite to the expectations and hopes of the child and his family.

*Affection* is one of the greatest needs. Not satisfying the need for affection during the first few years causes serious personality changes. The characteristic feature is a poverty of emotional response. Not having been loved they never know what love is. Interpersonal relationships are difficult. They are unapproachable, incapable of working harmoniously in a group, difficult to be positively influenced. This syndrome called *primary affection hunger* is an example of how the omission of an action is itself a harmful action that constitutes a real abuse, but not so evident.

The *game* allows the child to "practice" the modes of social behavior he or she needs for daily functioning. There is a misguided tendency to consider play as fun and entertainment rather than a necessity. It's true that the child has fun playing like we all have fun at dinner, but no one thinks that that is why eating is fun. Play stimulates creativity and learning, it constitutes an escape valve for emotions (anger, fear, jealousy, love, sadness, anxiety, among others). In that clear and simple way it has to be explained to the parents. An important reason to provide the child with opportunities to interact with other children of similar age with whom to share and compete is based on the fact that interacting with them will result in a better social adjustment. Not doing so may have many justifications, many pretexts may be used (lack of time, space, possibilities...), but it's clearly unfair.

*Discipline* is necessary for the child to learn to accept authority and acquire the ability to attenuate or limit his or her impulses, to dispense with immediate pleasures, in accordance with a future goal. Such behaviour is necessary in every situation to be faced. Whether the task is to learn a profession or to keep a promise, the individual must be willing to make the necessary sacrifices to achieve that goal. Problems arise when parents expect implicit obedience, when restrictions are too numerous, when demands are inconsistent. Also when parents are too tolerant, inconsistent or lack a sense of authority, the results will be inadequate. It creates disciplinary deficiencies if the family's rules differ essentially from those of the social group as a whole. Indiscipline is sometimes a sign that children are rejected, overprotected or feel unsure of their parents' affection.

The *security* that the family must provide is fundamental to keep away fears and anxieties, which allows them to focus their attention on the acquisition of skills and abilities. An insecure child will have difficulties in learning, in interpersonal relationships and ultimately in personality.

The psychological and social maturity to start school depends to a great extent on the *independence* that the child has acquired. This in turn is the result of the education for independence that has been given to the child at preschool age. From that age onwards, the child must be given a certain autonomy of action outside the home and family. Decide on matters that concern her identity, for example: what she wants to wear, what she would like to eat, what she prefers to play with, choose her playmates..., act with a sense of responsibility, emulate others in performance. In the families that comply with these premises, with the right dosage, children reach the necessary maturity more quickly than in those that exaggerate their real possibilities.

The child, like every human being, needs *acceptance*. Membership of a group is essential. First of all, the first group to which one needs to belong is one's own family, which is why acceptance by the family is so important. Of course, if the child isn't accepted by the family, he will also find it difficult to be accepted by the peer group. The loss of self-esteem will make

it difficult for him to relate at school and at play. Rejection can appear from pregnancy and ranges from a slight indifference to intense aversion. The child sometimes seems to be content and accept the situation, however, he or she is unsure. Unloved, he may be indifferent to his parents. Growing up he doesn't appreciate his home and becomes openly resentful. The effects of this lack of acceptance are even more destructive if the child is placed in an institution.

The child achieves the elements of his *individual identity*, i.e. he gains awareness of his body scheme, his name and his sex, at about the age of two and a half. From then on, this individual identity will develop until, in adolescence, the child becomes aware of the individual as such and, moreover, aware of his or her conscience, which is the maximum expression of identity. From then on, the identity will continue to grow according to the quantitative and qualitative acquisitions it makes. But it can be denied that the most important part of the acquisition of identity occurs in early childhood and adolescence; these are two qualitative leaps that define personality, since if they do not occur or do so poorly, the consequences are dire. The role of the family is to provide the appropriate framework for this identity to appear and develop. This occurs naturally and spontaneously in all normal families and the subtle details depend very much on all the other factors that influence this process.

*Learning and creativity* are two attributes that should be stimulated by the family since the full development of the personality depends on them. If the child is repressed from preschool age for asking why or how, driven by curiosity, he or she may lose or diminish that innate need to learn and know everything, so useful in learning. The right mother or father will always respond to their child's concerns by answering their curiosity or channeling their needs to know along the right path, if they are unable to respond. Allowing the child to experiment and interact with his toys or non-hazardous objects stimulates his creativity. Not letting children use their toys because they break them and then proudly displaying them, as a sign of how careful they are, seems to us to be a crime against childhood.

## Inappropriate parental attitudes

The attitudes of parents often cause permanent damage to the child's psychism, and of these we will expose the most defined.

### *Overprotection*

It's over-affection, an exaggeration of the normal affectionate attitude. This term is generally used to characterize the conduct of mothers whose devotion to their children is extraordinarily intense. They do not allow competing interests to get in the way of their maternal duties and thus reduce activities in other aspects of life (marital, social, intellectual...) to a minimum. They are divided into two large groups: the pure and the compensatory culprits. The pure ones are women who show excessive care for their children out of true devotion. The compensating culprits are women who protect their children extraordinarily in order to hide or compensate for hostile or rejecting attitudes that they generally do not notice. Child misconduct, a direct consequence of the mother's excessive solicitation, can lead to secondary rejection. Overprotection by grandmothers is common, but there may also be overprotection by the father, grandfather, siblings or other persons living in the home. The factors causing maternal overprotection can be divided into three groups: excessive maternal impulse, external factors (loss of a child, late motherhood, among others) and emotional deprivation suffered by the mother during her early childhood.

### *Permission*

The child receives everything he wants, as long as it's financially possible, and is allowed to do whatever he wants. Daughters of overly affectionate or overprotective mothers are often permissive. Fathers whose childhood has been unsatisfactory because of financial constraints or hardship are often overly permissive. Permissiveness impedes a child's emotional development by keeping the child in a state of child dependen-

cy. The spoiled child is a demanding child, used to having what he wants, who insists on a prompt response. Their demands are often unreasonable, because all reasonable requests have already been met. He expects to be flattered and gets along badly with other children who do not give in to him. His behaviour can't be trusted when he is visiting. Parents may eventually become irritated.

### *Excess anxiety*

Excessive anxiety is often seen in parents when there has been a serious illness or death of a child. It's also common in families with only one child. It's generally associated with exaggerated affection, overprotection and permissiveness. The child's activities are limited by fear of illness or accident. They are not allowed to play with other children or to practice a sport. He isn't allowed to go out without the company of an adult. The child usually responds with fear, shyness, cowardice, and shame. It makes him dependent on his parents and he may become apprehensive and anxious about his health.

### *Rejection*

It's possible for rejection to occur in any set of circumstances where the child is unwanted. However, unwanted children can become loved and desired children are sometimes rejected. Most mothers who reject their children are immature, unstable, neurotic, and sometimes truly psychotic. Many of the mothers who reject their children have been rejected as children. The characteristics most often found in fathers are discord, lack of affection, aversion to pregnancy, forced marriage or marriage that met with opposition from relatives or interfered with a college career. Rejection is common when the child has a serious defect such as cerebral palsy, mental retardation, disability, sensory defects, or autism. Parents sometimes reject the child because he or she isn't of the desired sex. Rejection may be open, that is, obvious and acknowledged by the parent, or it may be obscured by conscious or unconscious efforts to hide

it. Parents behaviour towards their children is characterised by severe punishment, contempt, scolding, indifference, irritation, threats, inconsistent treatment, suspicion, resistance to expenditure and unfavourable comparisons with other siblings and children. The personality defect that most stands out in the rejected child is the lack of a sense of belonging. Anxiety can be prominent. When parental rejection is open, the child usually reacts with aggression and desire to retaliate mixed with hypersensitivity and unhappiness. The child is likely to be selfish, resentful, vengeful, disobedient, quarrelsome, and hyperactive. Theft, tantrums, lies and escapes are not uncommon.

### *Excess of authority*

Some parents are unable to accept their child as he or she is, but demand that he or she act in accordance with their ideas. A great deal of effort and excessive authority is exercised in trying to “teach” them. Parents with a feeling of inferiority assume a dominant attitude in order to maintain their dignity. In certain families there is a belief that this is the best way to prepare the child for the future. A characteristic response of the young child to excessive authority is submission accompanied by resentment and avoidance. Sometimes he resorts to slowness in eating, dressing, bathing and so on. Open rebellion against excessive authority manifests itself in restless behaviour, lying, stealing and skipping school.

### *Identification*

The identification of the parents refers to the attitude of the parents who return to live their life in their child and wish for him certain advantages that he could not obtain for himself. This is a natural attitude in parents, but it can be greatly exaggerated. Parents with this attitude may impose their interests in sport, music or social prestige on the child. Parents with this attitude are usually sincerely eager to help their child and can often be made to understand the real situation.

## *Perfectionism*

This attitude is characterized by the need to achieve perfection in everything that is undertaken. When a child is born its upbringing is considered as something that needs to be done well. All efforts are focused on the infant and on achieving remarkable successes while the child remains responsive. As development progresses and the need for independent behavior increases, the mother, far from accepting the child's more mature stage, concentrates all her energies on modeling the child according to her plan. She continually follows through with suggestions, advice and instructions. The need for a perfect result applies not only to the child, but to her appearance, to her home, to her household chores. As the child grows up, he is denied approval and little credit's given to his performance. Characteristic is the pressure exerted on the child to achieve first place in many areas. A young child can't understand such an exaggerated need for order and perfection. Often the child reacts with poor sleep, anorexia, nervous habits and restless behavior.

## *Excessive criticism*

Some parents treat the child as an inferior being and often ridicule and humiliate him or her. The child's pride is hurt and he or she loses self-esteem. He feels inferior to his peers, unhappy, shy and unsatisfied. He may react with emotional tension, hyperactivity, nervous habits, withdrawal, become unduly docile and shy, or react with aggressive and defiant behavior.

## *Inconsistency*

Discipline to be successful, that is, to be accepted, requires a clear awareness on the part of the parents of the child's needs to grow up and the respect that this implies. The child must learn to be considerate of others and to respect the property of others. Disciplinary problems can begin during the period when self-reliance, or autonomy, arises. Discipline must be

consistent. The child must know why, he must also know what he can and can't do. He must know that if he transgresses he will inevitably receive disapproval. The confusion caused by the inconsistency of allowing something at one time and rejecting the same thing at another time, according to the parents' state of mind, is reasonable to have an adverse effect on the children. Inconsistent stimuli cause neurosis in animals, so we can deduce that in children, more sensitive beings, they also have negative repercussions. The child may react by doing what he wants or worse by not knowing what to do, showing indecision as a habitual behaviour. As a result of all this they sometimes come to despise the authority not only of the home but of the outside world as well.

In summary, our view of what psychological abuse is has been set out, as tradition and the resulting family rules cover it up and justify it. How it can be mistreated by harmful action or by omission of the satisfaction of a psychological need.

We're optimistic that this powerful institution, the family, will be able to assimilate these concepts to prevent, attenuate or eliminate everything that threatens the happiness of our children and our own family. We're committed and obliged to convey to them this message of love and solidarity. It's clear that for the family to achieve this objective it must know and be able to control all the pernicious influences that modernization, urbanization and the mass media can exert on these personalities in formation. This is why family violence can't only arise within the family but can also be induced from outside by these "wonderful" means. It's then up to the family to "filter" this powerful influence, which, if well managed, can be extremely useful

## *Preventive treatment*

Since we're currently focusing on abuse as a risk factor, it's appropriate to set out some measures that we should apply when we detect this fact in order to prevent it. Parents, teachers and the health team must know that all therapeutic action is a collective intervention. The first action should be to

establish contact with the *family* in order to differentiate the child's difficulties from their difficulties and to identify healthy behaviours (protective factors). Adequate conscious discipline, without losing calm (control and wisdom). If a family member has disorders, they should be treated.

When the family system is totally unstructured or the interactive dynamics are very pathological, family therapy becomes necessary.

The child must be listened to carefully. Many think that the punishment is for their own good. They have difficulty talking about it out of fear or loyalty. Believe in him, give him confidence and guarantee that he will be helped. Help him to value his body, as opposed to the suffering he has suffered, through theatrical representations, corporal expression, sports, among others, allow him to express aggressiveness through play, painting and pottery. To recognize their capacities and abilities. Reinforce and encourage their achievements.

Abuse is an act that shows us the dark side of human life. It's a manifestation of our capacity to be intolerant and to attack by destroying. It's an impulsive, irrational and almost always unpredictable act. It's the experience of hatred, in which anger is discharged against someone who is defenceless and who, moreover, depends on us. It's the abuse of power, the obscuring of love and the disappearance of the ability to protect. It's not recognizing that the child is as much a person as the adult. A unique and different being. Every abused child suffers, needs help; he is very scared and distrustful of adults, he believes he deserves to be abused ("they do it to me for my own good"). All physical abuse is emotional abuse.

In children's mental health, assistance is also prevention.

As a result of the abuse there are children who refer to their "I" with hate. A child who has been repeatedly abused was found to be treated kindly by a teacher. That fact was identified as an "isolated achievement" and questions were asked to encourage the child to give it meaning, such as the following:

- What made your teacher realize that (the adult who perpetrated the abuse) was blind?
- What part of you said this to your teacher?

- What made your teacher know what you know about yourself? If that adult hadn't been as blind as he would have been to you? Do you think your life would have been different if he had known what there was to know about you?

These questions that circulate alternative versions and those that make people aware of the production of the productions, undermine their self-hatred and oppose the mutilation of their lives and their future.

To attend is to listen and to contain the affections. One of the functions of therapy is to help understand what one feels and thinks, promoting the verbal expression of what afflicts. It's to listen with warmth and attention to what the person feels and says has happened. Only by listening is it possible to contain their affections, that is, to believe them and help them understand what confuses, overwhelms, makes them feel guilty, afraid or full of anger. Intervening demands that we're willing to engage with the conflict, but discriminating between our feelings and memories of those that belong to the patient.

If we want to replace the parents or get angry, we can't help. If the situation overwhelms us emotionally and we're aware of it, we have to give up. Discussing cases in a group is very useful and healthy.

Something very much in vogue in recent times are actions to promote protective factors aimed at making families capable of knowing, recognizing, promoting and reinforcing attitudes and behaviours that are incompatible with mistreatment and that ensure the protection and care of children.

## **Actions to promote protective factors**

During pregnancy:

- Emotional support and selfcare.
- Comprehensive preparation for childbirth.
- Preparation for breeding.
- Integration into social support networks.
- Presence of the father in the delivery and perinatal period.
- Caress him through the belly.

- During the infant and preschool period:
- Development of early bonds.
  - Promotion and support of breastfeeding.
  - Knowledge of the stages of development.
  - Psychomotor, emotional and social stimulation.
  - Nonviolence for conflict resolution.

Establish a balance between freedom and security.

- During school age and adolescence:
- Strengthening of the previous contents.
- Adaptation and performance in school.
- Sexual education.
- Promoting socialization and selfesteem.
- Identity reinforcement.
- Favor the presence of a significant adult.
- Develop the capacity for emotional communication.

## **The mistreatment of the mass media**

Health is the most precious good of human beings. “Children are born to be happy” said José Martí. Anything that threatens a child’s happiness goes against his or her mental health and is a crime that we must expose. Health depends on two large groups of factors: the first are the constitutional or genetic factors that mark the human being, sometimes from birth; the other group of factors on which the state of health of an individual depends are the environmental factors, which also influence the genetic and constitutional factors, more and more evidently every day, as far as mental health is concerned these environmental factors are going to have an even more relevant importance.

If we focus our attention on children, then the influences of external factors become even more apparent, since at this age they are particularly susceptible, receptive and mouldable individuals. They benefit and harm much more from such interaction with their environment. If we take into account that the traces of these negative or positive influences are sometimes definitive and affect the process of formation of the individual’s

personality, we can then assess exactly the need to study and go deeper into these factors in order to try to modify them in a positive sense or at least control them so that the damage is as little as possible.

We're going to choose just one of them, although we recognize that it's by no means the only one involved in children's mental health. This factor refers to the mass media.

It's becoming increasingly evident that the mass media have an extraordinary influence on the daily life of the family in general and of children in particular. This influence on everyday life, which is sometimes underestimated, will have a negative impact on the health of individuals and therefore constitutes a very subtle form of child abuse that is very difficult to condemn. It's necessary to disseminate it and point it out so that parents become clearly aware of the damage they are exposing their children to when this information reaches them in an indiscriminate and overwhelming way. Within the mass media we will place special emphasis on periodicals (newspapers, magazines...) television (cable, regular, video games...) and the cinema.

If we examine the content of the *daily press* in other countries, we will instantly see how criminal acts against property and people are exaggerated and highlighted, bringing immorality and aggressiveness to a level of spectacle that does nothing to help the formation of a stable and appropriate personality in children. Usually these messages are not accompanied by an analysis or criticism of the fact itself, which would obviously mitigate the negative effects that this has.

Publications of the *magazine* type sometimes suffer from the same defect, adding in this case a particular fact given by pornographic magazines that alienate, pervert and distort, something that can be as healthy, as tender and as sweet as human sexuality. But, in addition, the most criminal thing is that, sometimes, the protagonists of these disgusting publications are children.

If we stop to examine the content of *television* programming we find that in most developed countries there is a frightening picture. An exaltation of violence, with special effects that make

it even more shocking. We have seen how this affects a child, when he is shy, as it will further limit his social relationships. Just as it affects a child with unsocialized aggressiveness, since it stimulates his aggressive impulses and somehow justifies them. Very popular characters show bad habits in language, moral and ethical behavior and are presented as if it were the usual or normal, which logically can be taken as a negative model by children. A very frequent example is using an alcoholic as a comic character, to generate laughter, but at the same time making the “beodo” pleasant or nice.

The excessive use of scenes in which drinks and glasses appear as a background for moments of happiness, pleasure or tenderness, can condition the idea in children that both situations are part of a single whole, with the logical repercussions that arise. Drug addiction is shown without a critical analysis of its consequences, which confuses children and adolescents as to whether the pleasant effects they produce are not as “bad” as their parents, teachers and the television itself say in other programmes. Crime and criminals are often shown in a heroic way, with so many material advantages, with so much power and with so much impunity that it’s very difficult to reduce by logic the error of appreciation into which children tend to fall.

In the underdeveloped countries, thanks to the magic of satellite telecommunication, all this is imported with the aggravating factor of contributing to the annihilation of the indigenous culture and its positive values. This can and must be an instrument of communication between peoples, which serves as a factor of spiritual enrichment for children, and becomes a vehicle for the transmission of all that is harmful and unjust that can be generated in the sick minds of some people.

Surveys in highly developed countries indicate that 62% of children watch TV every day, 58% even before going to school, 87% also watch TV on their return, and only 2% do not watch TV on school days. There are countries where children watch an average of three to four hours of television. The high content of aggressive, pornographic, addictive messages and impunity can’t be justified by a ‘positive’ ending, as young children can’t abstract it. Remember that a high percentage of children learn

through “imitation”. Television can be a powerful influence on the development of a value system and on the formation of behaviour. Studies on the effects of violence on television have shown that children can become “immune” to the horror of violence, accept violence as a way of solving problems, imitate it or identify with certain characters, whether they are victims or perpetrators.

There are widely held views that televisions, like cigarettes, should come with a warning label. In a survey of television viewing habits in North America, more than 1,000 people were asked about what would encourage them to stop watching TV. The results are surprising. Forty-six percent said they wouldn’t stop watching TV for less than \$1 million and 25 percent said they wouldn’t even stop for that amount. Television in itself isn’t bad, what prevents the growth of the child’s emotional capacities is the passive time in front of the device and the difficulties to set limits to our children in this sense.

Some colleagues have argued to me that this programming is designed for adults and that it’s the responsibility of parents not to allow their children to watch these programmes. We know that not all parents have enough knowledge to realise how harmful this is. The most dramatic thing is that programming aimed at children and adolescents isn’t exempt from the same negative effects already pointed out, those which, magnified by children’s fantasy and analysed by pre-logical or logical-concrete thinking, can cause unpredictable consequences. In order for parents to protect children from this excessive violence they must pay attention to the programs children watch, set limits on time, point out that although in reality the damage they see isn’t real, violence in real life does cause damage, explain the badness of some program by not giving approval to what they see, communicate with other parents to reach an agreement to establish similar rules to avoid peer pressure. They should also take steps to prevent the harmful effects on racial and sexual issues mishandled by television.

*Cable television*, which fortunately has not reached Cuba, transmits programmes and films that are not allowed on the usual channels (because of their content), can also be within

the reach of children if they remain in their homes alone or accompanied by unscrupulous domestic staff or simply ignorant of the consequences this can have. To that marvelous domestic apparatus such as a television, another technological ingenuity has been added: *computer games*, which in addition to being many of them aggressive, take children away from the traditional games that we know have a very important role in the formation of personality. How is that child going to socialize who only watches television and plays (when he has that possibility) with that same equipment? How does he learn to relate to his peers if he only maintains contact with them at school, where the social relationship is conditioned by the needs of the teaching-learning process, with its logical limitations. Playing with peers fulfills irreplaceable functions in learning appropriate social behavior, norms of harmonious relations, self-esteem, impulse control, respect for rules, and defense of rights, among others. These technologies make children play less and become more alienated. If all this were not enough, there is clear evidence that susceptible children can trigger convulsive crises due to the bombardment of photo-stimuli to which they are subjected by excessive time in front of the video game monitor screen.

The *cinema* suffers from the same shortcomings as television and although the films may be classified as “not suitable for minors”, so they are not allowed to enter the cinemas, we then watch in amazement how those same films are shown on television.

It’s an inescapable duty for all of us to make the competent bodies aware that this harmful action towards children must be prevented, that it’s a very subtle but very real abuse. Ideally, the writers of all these publications, programmes, soap operas and films should become aware of the harmfulness of their attitude and the content of their writings should have a positive, educational and formative meaning.

In order to alleviate this situation, we propose specific *educational, advisory and control measures*.

*Educational* measures must be aimed at showing families the damage they cause to their children if they do not measure

up to the quantity and quality of information they receive from the mass media. One very concrete and effective form that we have used systematically is the “school for parents”. It’s very important not to confuse the terms and devote ourselves to giving conferences or lectures to a certain number of parents. What is educational is to establish a group dynamic, led by an expert, in which latent and obvious expectations are discussed. Therapeutically and with the appropriate technique, subjects that we want to make known preventively are introduced. Another educational measure will be aimed at introducing into primary and secondary school programmes subjects with contents aimed at promoting the mental health of students and providing children with the necessary knowledge so that these massive attacks on their psyche do not cause so much damage.

*Advisory* measures should be directed towards programme directors, film directors, soap opera directors and others to eliminate or mitigate this harmful content. Advice should also be given to state officials who must exercise control over the harmful content of these materials so that they can scientifically combat it.

*The control* measures must be implemented by a state body that monitors and restricts the appearance of these contents that are unnecessary for the achievement of the artistic work or the information function, which also do not contribute to the exaltation of the culture of the recipient, but quite the opposite. It’s almost obligatory for the authors of articles, soap operas, children’s programmes, films and so on to protest against this control and to uphold the sacrosanct right of freedom of expression and the need to express reality artistically. There must be no freedom to attack the pure minds of children, which more than freedom is the contemplation of a crime, and to contemplate a crime without condemning it’s to commit it. It’s true that art must reflect reality, but art also has the duty and purpose of embellishing that reality, of reflecting it positively for the enjoyment of the one who contemplates the work of art. Art, as a supreme manifestation of culture, as the highest expression of human creativity, is obliged to enrich that culture of which it’s an inseparable part and to which it’s due.

Information must be in function of preventing the population from everything that could harm it, in the broadest sense of the word, but if it carries within itself potential harm, then it ceases to be free to become a slave to the pettiest interests and to the service of the most negative and perverse.

Art can be as creative as its author is capable of making, but if at the same time it's beautiful, sweet, tender, educational and provokes in those who observe it a feeling of healthy and positive enjoyment, then it's doubly artistic, because it creates the work and contributes to the creation of human beings who are more supportive, more sensitive and happier.

# EDUCATION IS A COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT

DR. ROBERTO CURI HALLAL

A great number of problems in childhood and adolescence are generated by the participation of the formative environment. Among them we can point out some as they are:

- Not planning the right time to start a family.
- Insufficient preparation and responsibility of parents and family members to care for, educate and support their children.
- Ignoring basic emotional and social needs.
- Exercising violence such as physical or psychological abuse or both, negligence, carelessness and abandonment, so that aggressive and self-aggressive, criminal behaviour arises in children and adolescents.

## Intrinsic values

Defining intrinsic values requires that we know how to question them, work to make them appropriate. Not to artificialize reality.

The construction of values with criticality undoubtedly directs the issue until their roles as builders of their children's ethics are confirmed and reaffirmed together with the families. The so-called family group obeys orders that go beyond the individuals who participate by maintaining conscious traditions. As a dynamic group it has its social function, it transmits cul-

ture, ideology and character when it's allowed to incorporate the very important role it has.

Children and adolescents need different care than previous generations. The complexity of today's world, the bombardment of induced consumption and alienation by empty offers, determine the superficial as fundamental, displacing the important as something that has been overcome.

The rites of consumption transformed into virtuosities of cultural life need a revision by the individual and collective critical conscience.

Educators can be parents, academics and ordinary citizens, who must be aware of the values they are transmitting.

The father is a manager of education, the intellectual creates public opinion, in this way it's possible to build the values of a society. The published opinion makes the opinion, in the family environment the influenced and influencing family climates are created.

The figure of the father as a social phenomenon is fundamental, we must insist on that. The father's absence is an epidemic disaster.

Any transformation depends on the growth of people's consciences, transforming their silences into voices that exhaustively express their rights as collective aspirations, as the will of the majority, until it becomes an inclusive, humanized society, respected in its origins and in its nature.

The formation programme for future parents, in my opinion, must be an organization of actions, of a reference culture, in order to raise awareness, to extend and to feed the debate on the importance of the paternal and maternal role, of siblings and of grandparents in the global formation of the children's identity, functions that can be carried out by substitutes.

The best way to implement it's through its dissemination and individual actions, but mainly in groups where some make the participatory inclusion of others.





***During human life, there is no task more important than being a parent, and yet there are few tasks for which we're so poorly prepared. There is no school or preparatory course to become parents.***

**GERMAIN DUCLOS**