



LEARN HOW TO SUCCEED IN TOMORROW PARENTING CHALLENGES

Family Skills Notebook

EXERCISES, READINGS AND SUGGESTIONS
FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS



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The family skills exercise book



PROJECT INFORMATION

Family skills

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Presentation

*You never got to choose the parents you ended up with, but you have a chance to choose which kind of parent you will be..
(Marian Wright Edelman)*

Children are born, parents are made. And it is an adventure and a challenge. Being (sufficiently good) parents means having many relational, educational, caring, and emotional skills, which are not acquired just once and are not static. They mostly adapt to individual changes and changes in family relationships.

Daniel Siegel in his book "12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind" writes: "It is no overstatement to say that the kind of relationship you provide for your children will influence future generations. We can exert an influence on the world's future by taking care of our children properly...."

That's why we believe it is crucial to promote family skills among parents and parents-to-be: so many seeds that can change the world.

Have a good practice!

This family skills notebook is

by

started on

WARNING

There are no perfect parents. Because there are no perfect people. That's if we think of perfection as the total absence of mistakes.

Parenting means making mistakes: it is intrinsic to the very nature of parenting. You grow, you face challenges, you make mistakes, you fix them, you look for solutions, you build perspectives, you choose, you act, you fail again.

The goal of our path is not to become super parents. Because there is not a right recipe. There are ingredients, there are techniques to mix them, there are cooking times. And to become good chefs you have to train, try and retry day after day.

I declare that I understand that there are no perfect parents!

Date _____

Signature _____

Hello!

This is the family skills notebook.

It is a kind of diary that will walk with you on a path of deepening and growing in both your personal and parenting skills.

It is an exercise book, a training tool. You can download it and print it out to keep it with you.

You will find exercises, reflections, tips, activities to do alone, in pairs or even with your children.

The workbook is individual, but you can also share it with those around you in your parenting journey, with your parents, with your children because several activities are just designed for the family.

Personalize it, write in it, draw in it!

You can use it for any of your children's ages.

You can find more information and take a self-assessment journey by answering the family skills questionnaire by visiting www.familyskills.eu where you will also find some video contributions from experts addressing the issues that you will also find in this notebook.

If you are a parent or about to become a parent together with a life partner or companion, it might be very helpful to compare notes on individual aspects and perhaps compare your results and the way you think or act in certain situations. But always remember that there is no one way of parenting, but a unique way, your own, and that when you are a parenting couple, it is important that these ways integrate, complement each other, and not collide.

Rate yourself!

Let's start with a moment of reflection and evaluation.
How do you rate your 4 family skills?

Think about the area of emotions management: do you find it easy to understand the emotions that you feel? Do you manage and express them properly? Do you have a rich emotional vocabulary? What happens when you feel unpleasant emotions, such as anger or sadness? And can you put yourself in your child's shoes? Can you help him manage his emotions? Do your emotions negatively affect your behaviors, or are you able to manage them?

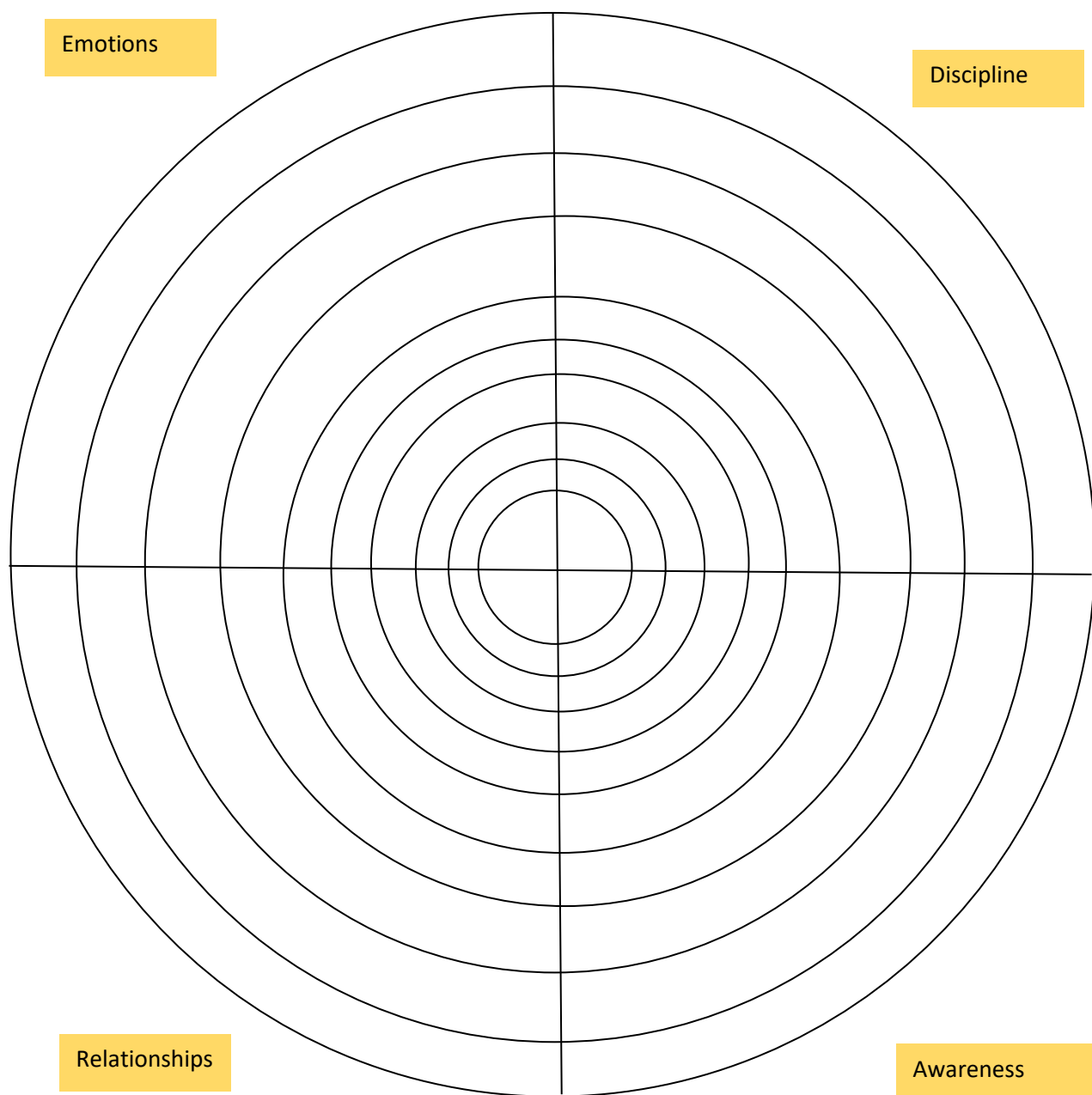
Think about the discipline management area: what is your relationship with the word discipline, politeness, do you find yourself losing patience in having to call your child to order? How do you rate your ability to manage rules? Can you get attention and listening from your child(ren)? Or from your family members? Is there positive cooperation in the family? Can you quickly think of three rules that are shared and respected by everyone? Try listing them in your head.

Think about the area of relationships: if you live in a couple relationship, do you feel fulfilled? Does the time you spend in your relationships outside your relationship with your children satisfy you? How do you evaluate your relationship with school? With the extended family? Is the communication in the family peaceful and positive? Or aggressive and passive? How do you see the future of your relationships? Do they help you in growing well? Is love clearly expressed? Are you satisfied with the time you can spend with the people you care about? Are you satisfied with the quality of the time you use to spend with your family members? Do you feel free to be yourself?

Think about the area of educational awareness: are you satisfied with the education you received? Does the parenting model you have in mind reflect who you are now? Am I taking a conscious educational approach that promotes my children's autonomy and healthy development? Am I always able to satisfy my children's educational needs? Am I always able to see and recognize the progress my children are making? Am I able to give them the right rewards? How often do I get questions from my children that I cannot answer? How do I handle it when this happens? Can I count on supportive sources or people for my children's education? Do I often make comparisons between my children and me at their age?

Now put your evaluation in every slice of this circle made up of 10 sections...

The uniqueness of the family skills assessment wheel is related to the way the results are presented. The circle divided into 4 segments, each of them expressing the level of self-perception of your skills in each of the 4 areas. This allows you to get a summary view of your current life and you can identify those areas in which you feel you need some training.



A tool to help you evaluate yourself.

Now if you'd like, take a little time to assess your skills by answering the questionnaire you can find at www.famailyskills.eu.

After registering, follow the platform's instructions. A 40-question questionnaire will be presented to you. After answering all the questions, you will also view the result.

Then come back here!

Write date and result here.



Date of completion of questionnaire

Emotions area:	
Relationship area:	
Discipline area:	
Educational awareness area:	

As you may have read in the report, this is just a tool, a feedback and has no clinical intent.

Are there any questions that particularly struck you among those you answered? You can describe them here:

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Now compare it with the results you entered in the evaluation circle on the previous pages. Are there any particular differences? What are your impressions?

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Let's talk a little about you....

Name

Last name

Demographic age

Age you feel

④ words to introduce yourself?

1)

2)

3)

4)

What do you like about yourself and your life?

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What would you change about yourself and your life?

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What do you like about your family?

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What would you change about your family?

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When did you first become a parent?

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Do you remember the emotions of those moments?

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Do you have a partner? What is his or her name?

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④ words to introduce him or her?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

How many sons do you have?

.....

.....

Name _____ Age _____

What do you like about her/him?

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Name _____ Age _____

What do you like about her/him?

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Name _____ Age _____

What do you like about her/him?

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Name _____ Age _____

What do you like about her/him?

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You can print this exercise book and bind it.
Keep it in a place where you can remember to flip through it occasionally.
Use it also as an agenda/notepad.
On each page you will find something to practice with,
to read or explore further.
There is no specific order or even a set number of times you can use the
exercise.

Day _____

The eyes of others

Ask, via email, text or WhatsApp, at least 4 personal contacts to answer this question:

"Hi! I'm participating in a family skills training (then if you want I'll tell you about it). I'm asking for a minute of your time to answer this question: what are the 3 greatest resources you recognize in me? Answer me truthfully!"

You can transcribe the answers here. In the "My Reflections" area, try to ask yourself if their answers surprised you, if you recognize the resources given, how you felt about it, and any comments they had.

Contact name

Recognized resources:

My reflections

Contact name

Recognized resources:

My reflections

Contact name

Recognized resources:

My reflections

Contact name

Recognized resources:

My reflections

If you want to do the same exercise together with your partner or children, each person should call

5 friends/contacts. And then compare the experience!

Day _____

Parenting resources.

What parent do you think I am?

Try asking your partner (you can also ask other family members) to list 4 aspects that characterize you (or will characterize you if you are about to become one) as a parent.

They can have positive or negative valence and are a starting point for reflecting on your parenthood.

Who _____

What does he or she recognizes in me:

Personal reflection (how did you feel listening to the other person's words? What did you learn from this exercise?)

*You never got to choose the parents you ended up with,
but you have a chance to choose which kind of parent you will be..
(Marian Wright Edelman)*

TRUE OR FALSE?

This activity is a simple and short game, but really useful for continuing to stimulate exchange and getting to know each other (to be done with young and old, in pairs or even in groups).

1. Sit on the floor in a circle.
2. Start the youngest player, who will have to say 3 things about him/her: only 2 of these can be true (for ease you can also write them on a sheet of paper).
3. The other players must raise their hands to say their considerations. The first one can try to guess which of the 3 statements is true and which is false. If he guesses, it is his turn to say 3 things about him, and so on, until each player has played at least once!

So who was the winner?

Who got the most wrong?

What are your thoughts after this game?

What did you learned?

What to do in exhausting moments?

Being a parent is not easy.
Especially balancing personal, family, or work needs.
Sometimes it can be very tiring!

It was also so during the recent pandemic that led to a change

- in the rhythms of life
- in the division of space
- in relationships with people outside the family
- in opportunities to do enjoyable things, to engage in activities we are passionate about
- in the tasks and demands within the family.

Note: Children, when tired, may become "temperamental" (or even more capricious than usual), seeking more attention, reassurance, an exclusive relationship with parents; needing company for a longer and longer time at the time of falling asleep; losing autonomy, regressing, using swear words, avoiding commitments, not agreeing to do the tasks assigned to them.

What is exhausting for you today?

What happens when you feel tired? How do you react to tiredness?

What do you do to make yourself feel a little better?

What happens in your family when there is tiredness? Stress? Agitation?

If you are really tired you will find some helpful advice in the following pages!

*At any age, parenting is a challenge.
(Harrison Ford)*

What kind of child will I have?

Write a brief description of your child and his ability to cope with society. Imagine him or her as an adult. Between 15-20 or 30 years old.

This exercise can also be done in pairs. In that case write down all the characteristics that come to mind for both of you. If you disagree on some, jot them down on a separate piece of paper and then compare (try to understand each other's point of view!).

How would you like your children to grow up? What kind of adults?

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Try listing the individual skills/attributes you would like them to have when they will grow up:

- | | |
|---------|----------|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

What have you done or are doing to help him or her become an adult or what would you like to do to help him or her in the future?

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Train your emotional vocabulary!

Emotions are a truly various world. There are many emotions; they differ in intensity and pleasantness. And they are often marked by a thousand nuances.

Paul Ekman, a U.S. psychologist, in the late 1950s began to study the face and the expressive characteristics of emotions to understand their communicative value, demonstrating that facial manifestations and emotions are not determined by a place's culture or traditions but are universal and therefore, biologically derived.

Facial expressions for Ekman are the product of a small number of basic emotions: joy, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, disgust. Also called primary emotions.

For further information you can read the book "Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life" by Paul Ekman.

Of course, there are many shades of the primary emotions, combinations of them (so-called secondary emotions).

How many shades of emotions do you know?

Try asking the people who live with you (young and older): how many shades of emotions do they know?

On the following pages you will find a few. Read them only after completing the following exercise.

This exercise can prove to be a lot of fun and may help you discover things about yourself and others that you never imagined!

Do you remember what the primary emotions are?

Joy, fear, surprise, anger, sadness, disgust.

For each one find synonyms, or other nuances and think about when you experienced them.

With younger children it will become a time for bonding and getting to know each other, and you will also help them learn more about the varied world of emotions.

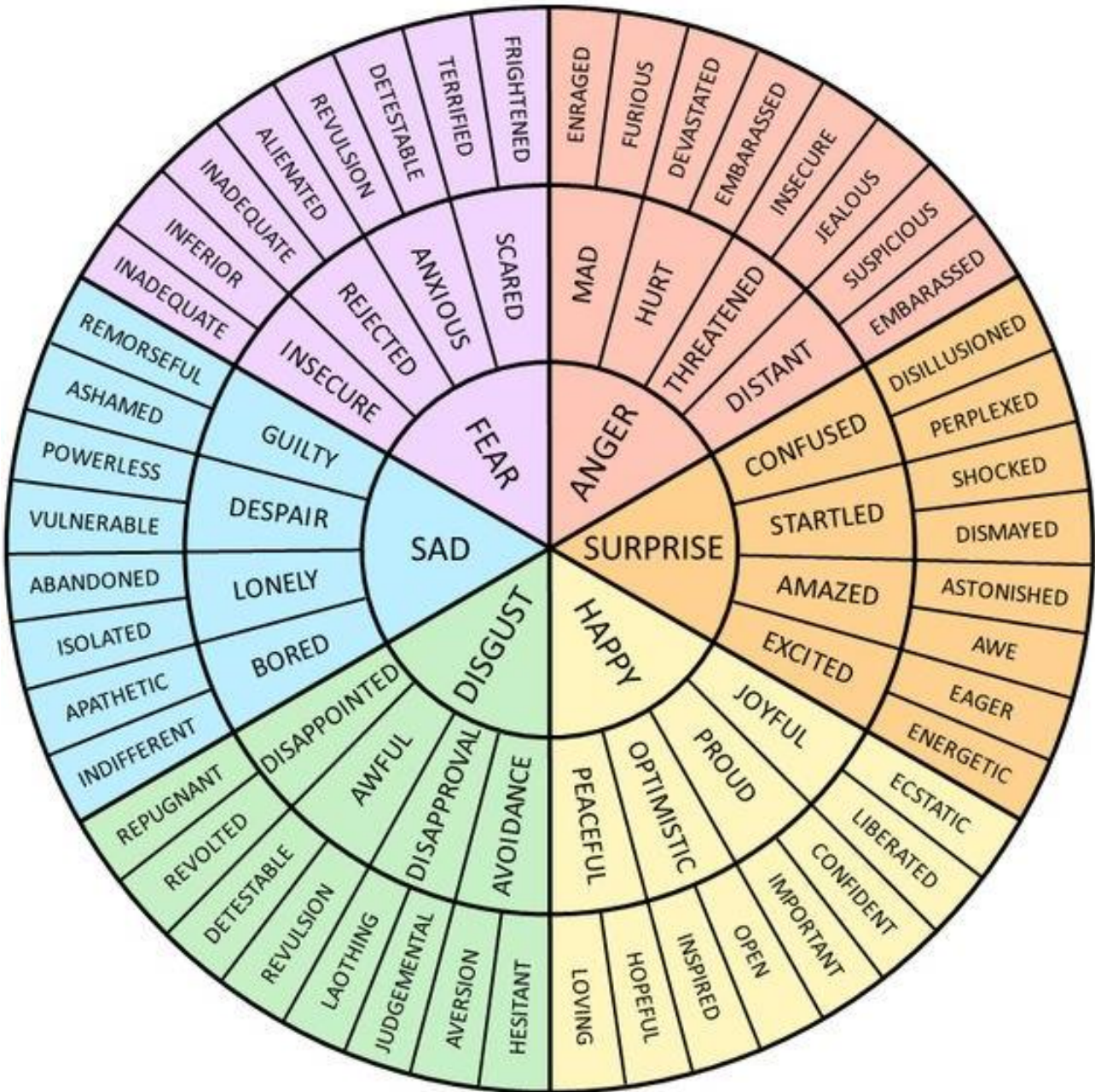
Write the 6 emotions on 6 different pieces of paper and then fold them.

Take turns randomly pulling out a piece of paper loudly read the emotion you have to write in the first column of the paper, and then kick off. The person who completes the exercise first wins.

You need a pen and paper and copy the diagram below.

<i>Primary emotion</i>	<i>Synonym / Nuance</i>	<i>How do I define it?</i>	<i>When was the last time I felt it?</i>

This is a wheel that can be useful for you to "read" and name your emotions better. When you experience one of the basic emotions, try to figure out what nuance it has:



Reading advice

"Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting"

by John Gottman e Joan Declaire

Every parent wonders about the best ways to educate their children to actualize their talents and enjoy life in its fullness: in this path of growth, a key role is played by emotional intelligence, that is, the ability to merge one's own attitudes with qualities such as empathy and attention in relationships with others. A psychologist world-renowned precisely for his studies on parent-child relationships, Gottman shows in this book how parents can become good "emotional coaches": through limpid explanations and a large number of practical examples, the author examines the crucial stages of child and youth development from managing feelings to control of impulses, from the importance of listening to overcoming conflict, and illustrates step by step how to pass on to their children the qualities they need to grow stronger and happier.

By reading this book you will learn how to use different strategies and you will become an emotional trainer.

John Gottman identifies four macro categories or types of parents, which are characterized by the different ways they manage and understand their children's emotions:

- Uncaring parents. These are parents who tend to belittle, ignore or read their children's **unpleasant** emotions as caprices.
- - Censoring parents. These are parents who tend to scold and punish expressions deemed excessive of **unpleasant** feelings.
- - Lax parents. These are parents who tend to accept even **unpleasant** emotions and manage to be empathetic. They fail, however, to manage their children's behavior and direct it.
- Emotional trainer parents. They are parents similar to lax parents but, unlike lax parents, they are able to recognize emotions and teach their children to name them and find an appropriate way to handle them.

In the book you will also find some tests and quizzes that will help you identify your parenting style.

A key concept in the book is emotional training, which is based on the ability of parents to empathize with their children's emotional status and empathize with them.

The training parent is that parent who can put himself in his/her child's shoes, who sees an opportunity for growth in emotions, even negative ones, and who, as a result, is able to handle moments of crisis. He or she is more patient, accepts and listens to all the child's emotions even the most difficult ones (such as anger, sadness and fear) without minimizing, underestimating or mocking them.

This does not mean that he is a permissive parent; in fact, he accepts feelings but not inappropriate behaviors that should be corrected.

Gottman says that children who have received good emotional training generally behave better than children of overly permissive or overly authoritarian parents, for three reasons:

1) Children that feel understood by their parents and genuinely interested in them do not need to get attention by tantrums;

To learn to walk, children must fall. To learn to eat on their own, they must get dirty. To learn to construct sentences, they must first say single words. To learn to control anger, they must first get angry. And the first few times they will inevitably make it wrong!

Taken from "Children must be happy. Not make us happy. By Elisabetta Rossini and Elena Urso

How many different things happen in a week?

So many, so many. We just often don't have time to reflect on them.

In many new families there is a widespread practice of keeping a diary of children's first days/years/months. This is especially true for the first child.

You will note down events, happenings, photos, descriptions, steps forward that concern your child. In this exercise (to be done alone or with your partner, or even with your children) you will have the task of noting down each day something special that has happened in your family.

A particular event, good or bad, (an unexpected visit, an argument, a surprise, a discovery...).

7 days, to observe and note down what happens in your family life.

On the following pages you will find a space for each day of the week.

You can repeat the exercise as many times as you like. Or you may also decide to keep a diary, an agenda, so you can write something about what happens each day, perhaps enriching the pages with photos, drawings, or sticking small objects. You can write about yourself or your children.

It will be nice in a few years to take those diaries back and share them with the family.

Overview week from _____ to _____ month _____

Monday

The one thing that happened that impressed me. Something that happened that concerns me, my children.

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What emotions do I feel thinking about this event and why?

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What did I learn?

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Notes:

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Tuesday

The one thing that happened that impressed me. Something that happened that concerns me, my children.

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What emotions do I feel thinking about this event and why?

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What did I learn?

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Notes:

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Wednesday

The one thing that happened that impressed me. Something that happened that concerns me, my children.

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What emotions do I feel thinking about this event and why?

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What did I learn?

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Notes:

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Thursday

The one thing that happened that impressed me. Something that happened that concerns me, my children.

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What emotions do I feel thinking about this event and why?

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What did I learn?

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Notes:

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Friday

The one thing that happened that impressed me. Something that happened that concerns me, my children.

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What emotions do I feel thinking about this event and why?

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What did I learn?

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Notes:

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Saturday

The one thing that happened that impressed me. Something that happened that concerns me, my children.

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What emotions do I feel thinking about this event and why?

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What did I learn?

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Notes:

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Sunday

The one thing that happened that impressed me. Something that happened that concerns me, my children.

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When our children come home from school (but also valid for the older ones)!

Have you ever thought that there are many alternatives to "how was your day?"
Here is a list of simple questions, a little more detailed.

- Which was the most interesting episode today?
- **What did you learn today?**
- What made you smile?
- **Did you do something funny, silly, or interesting?**
- What made you wonder today?
- **Did you get a chance to help someone?**
- Did you do something good for yourself?
- **Were you proud of yourself today? Under what circumstance and why?**
- Did you feel sad?
- **Did you had to learn something difficult?**
- Which game did you play with your friends?
- **Who was sitting next to you for lunch?**
- Who do you want to be friends with among your classmates?
- **Who among your classmates is completely different from you?**
- Which teacher do you like the most, and which do you like the least?
- **If you were a teacher for a day, what would you teach your classmates?**
- Is there anything that made you angry?
- **Did something unfair happen?**
- Did something happen that made you embarrassed?
- **- What did you disagree about today?**
- **- If you could experience today a second time, what would you do differently?**
- **What have you not been able to do this week, and what have you been able to achieve?**

Can you think of other questions? Write them here:

Try asking your children and then write his or her story here.

Your childhood memory

When I think about my childhood and my family....

Which are some of the happiest memories of your childhood?

What made those moments so beautiful that you can still remember them?

What did you liked more and what a little less?

What emotions did your parents feel and how did they express them?

What would you never do the same as what they did?

What if you need some help?

Asking for help is a gesture of great awareness. Especially for yourself and for the family. In difficult times, when you feel a weight too great on your shoulders, when educating is too difficult. Smiles begin to lack, it is time to ask for help. Would you know who to ask?

Around you are there people you could call on in any of these cases?

LIST

Surely in your city there are this kind of hubs:
Social Services
Family counseling center
Listening center
Family associations

Try looking them up on the Internet!

A movie to watch as a family: Inside Out

This film chronicles the journey inside the brain of Riley who, at age eleven, moves to another town, leaving her beloved old life behind. Anger, fear, joy, sadness and disgust will take turns taking over her in the great chaos that is preadolescence. Joy, which ensures happiness for the girl; Disgust, which makes sure Riley is not contaminated physically and socially; Fear, which keeps Riley out of danger; Anger, which prevents Riley from suffering injustice; and Sadness, whose purpose is initially unclear. The five emotions direct Riley's mind inside a headquarters, operating a console full of controls. But something doesn't go as planned!

ENJOY THE MOVIE!

Inside Out is an animated, comedy genre movie from 2015, directed by Pete Docter, starring Mindy Kaling and Amy Poehler. Released in theaters on September 16, 2015. 94 minutes in length. Distributed by Walt Disney Pictures.

Emotions are all important and have a value in our lives. It is important to recognize them and know how to express them. It is important to teach children not to hide them and not to be ashamed of feeling them. And to find the correct behavior to express them.

Remember: all emotions are right. What is occasionally not right are the behaviors by which we manifest them!

The movie teaches us that there are no positive or negative emotions (right or wrong) and that every emotion has a specific purpose. Emotions can be pleasant or unpleasant, this yes, more or less intense. But they are all useful!

Day Viewing: _____

After watching the movie try to answer some questions:

What role does sadness play in the story?

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What do Riley's mom and dad do when she comes home at the end of the story?

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If you have seen this with your partner or children, try asking them what they would have done in

Riley's shoes

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Could you name the two most important emotions that your child is currently manifesting?

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Can you remember the last time your child felt anger? How did you deal with this emotion?

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What movie lines or sequences did you particularly like?

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Advice

Punishment: better to consider it a direct consequence of a choice and not an imposition!

"If you don't eat, you can't go out."

It is the threat of punishment in which the parent uses his or her decision-making power to bring the child to do an action. The request and the eventual consequence are unrelated.

"If you put your shoes on, you can go out."

With this sentence is proposed a choice that has consequences; shoes are needed to go out, the child can choose to wear them (and go out) or not wear them (and stay in).

Day _____

Try it right now!

Turn these sentences into positive ones

If you don't clean your room, you can't watch television before dinner.

If you don't put your shoes in their place, we won't have a snack.

Don't run, you might fall!

Don't shout!

*Make sure that, at the end of the day,
the number of positive comments you gave to your children far exceeds the
number of orders, directives, or negative comments.
(Alvaro Bilbao)*

Advice

For discipline management, use Time In instead of Time Out.

"Time-out" amounts to the temporary removal of a child from an environment in which unacceptable behavior has occurred. The goal is to remove him or her from a pleasant context, thus encouraging him or her to remove the offending behavior.

If you remember the classic statements "Sit in that corner!" or "Get behind the blackboard!" or "Go to your room!" then know that those were and are forms of "time-out." In fact, a corner of the house or otherwise similar space is often chosen in which the child is to stand or sit quietly for a few minutes during "time-outs."

Instead of time-out, "time in" or a space set up specifically to encourage the child to regain control can be helpful. At the daycare/school it can take the form of a corner (soft or with a small table) with fluffy toys, books, cognitive games (puzzles, pegs, jigsaws, objects to classify, sort, etc.), play dough to manipulate, soap bubbles, paper to cut out (depending on the child's age), where the little one can go to regain composure together with the adult who acts as a guide and emotional regulator, after which it can become, over time, a learning for which the child will come to use independently, at the invitation of the parent or adult of reference or as his or her own initiative. Time in does NOT have any punitive overtones: it is a tool for the child to regain calm in his or her own time, accompanied by a caregiver in emotional control.

The 6 seconds: sometimes they are crucial

In any conflict and stressful situation, parents will take a short break of at least 6 seconds to let their feelings be released, then they will be able to act and respond, quietly and intentionally.

To make the 6 seconds last, they can think of their six favorite vacation spots, six favorite books or movies.

Breathe deeply for 6 times.

Have you ever noticed how your breathing changes according to the emotion you are feeling?

Have you tried this advice in a stressful moment?

Did it work?

How did you feel?

Advice

The quiet corner

Since there is no one-size-fits-all formula for calming down, it is important for our child to know and master different strategies to make his/her own and improve as he/she grows.

Creating a calming corner in the home or classroom means providing him or her with a dedicated space where he or she feels free to feel his or her emotions. In this space s/he can find the best way to manage anger independently, gaining more confidence in his/her skills and nurturing his/her sense of self-efficacy.

The quiet corner can be enhanced with:

- pillows (also useful for being punched in moments of intense anger);
- relaxing pictures;
- anti-stress balls;
- mandalas to be colored;
- relaxing music.

Describe your own quiet corner:

Photos of your quiet corner



The little nice things of the day

Before going to sleep, whether alone, with your partner or with your children, try to identify a nice thing that happened during the day.

It can become a daily ritual of getting together and in turn each telling the other about a nice thing. You don't necessarily have to comment on it or explain it.

Even better if you try to focus attention on a nice thing in the family.

Ask them to tell you about 1 nice thing happened.

Day _____

Nice thing reported

Day _____

Nice thing reported

Day _____

Nice thing reported

Day _____

Nice thing reported

Day _____

Nice thing reported

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Day _____

Nice thing reported

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Positive communication through words and actions: some examples

Positive messages through language:

- I am glad/happy that you exist.
- You are important.
- I love you.
- I've been thinking about you.
- It's good to see you.
- I'm glad you're here.
- It's good to be with you.
- Thank you for the gift.
- How well can you read!
- Thank you for your help in the kitchen.
- You set up your toys well.
- I like the way you did it.
- I'm glad you went with me grocery shopping and helped me.

Positive messages through actions:

- Smiling.
- Hugging.
- Shake hands.
- Listening.
- To look into the eyes.
- Calling out by name.
- Kissing.
- To caress.
- Listening.
- Being patient.
- Reading something to the child.
- Carrying out an activity together with him/her.
- Helping him/her without criticism or substituting for him/her.

Day _____

Can you think of any other phrases or actions?

Handwriting practice area consisting of multiple sets of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

For good communication

1. Choose to communicate when you are relaxed.
 2. Discuss one issue at a time.
 3. Speak calmly.
 4. Agree that you can take time out so that you can calm down for a moment after starting a discussion but also agree that you need to come back to finish it. Don't just walk away!
 5. Listen to each other without interrupting.
 6. Accept your partner's emotions without any judgment.
 7. Before responding, make sure you understand the message correctly by summarizing and repeating it.
 8. Don't past, blame or use sarcasm or scolding. If you disagree with something that happened in the past, focus on what you would like next time in a similar situation.
-

Words that put a smile on your face

This game is most useful for training the use of good and valuable words that help change or make positive attitudes of people who are close to you and your child. It is as if they were real magic words: the moment they are spoken, they help you feel better.

Think of some words that have the power to make people happy in your mind.

They can be sentences or actions, for example:

- I LOVE YOU
- YOU ARE KIND
- YOU ARE SPECIAL

Take a paper sheet and divide it in half, then fold it accordion-style so that when you open it again, you will have shaped many rectangular labels.

Cut them out following the fold of the paper and write on each one one of the words you have thought of.

Next:

1. place the labels facing down in front of you;
2. in turn, starting with the youngest player, turn over a label and read aloud the word it contains;
3. the player in turn must formulate a compliment for a person (either among those present or among people known to everyone) that contains that word and then must explain why. To help you, think of everyday situations, good things that happened in the family, at school, with friends.

Ex. My friend Peter is kind, because when I need help he is always there!

Ex. Grandpa is special, because when I am sad he can make me laugh.

How was it?

Did you know that....

There is an important chemical component that makes relationships enjoyable. It is called oxytocin. What is oxytocin?

They call it the "love hormone." A very fitting name, since oxytocin plays a key role in the processes involved in emotional relationships: in the creation of attachment bonds, sexual relations, childbirth, breastfeeding, and childcare.

Oxytocin increases in the blood and brain when we give ourselves a hug, when we indulge in a caress, when we make love. Oxytocin production is greatly affected by physical contact, so cuddling, massage, and sexual activity are powerful stimulators of oxytocin production and therefore give us a sense of positivity and relaxation.

Oxytocin in fact increases pro-social behaviors such as altruism, generosity and empathy and leads us to be more likely to trust others.

Every time you pick up your child, brush his hair, hug him or her, walk her or him to school holding her or his hand, your brains secrete oxytocin getting you closer and closer to each other!
(Alvaro Bilbao – Il cervello del bambino spiegato ai genitori)

When your child was born

Below we give you a list of emotions/sensations/feelings. Mark the ones you felt when your child was born.

If you are a future parent, you can do the same exercise by marking the emotions/sensations/feelings you think you will feel when your child will be born.

Amazed	Tired	Confused
Happy	Frustrated	Unprepared
Relieved	Exhausted	Observed
Honored	Doubtful	Judged
Overcharged	Anxious	Supported
Disturbed	Scared	Abandoned
Stunned	Responsible	Bonded
Joyful	Intimidated	In love
Attractive	Confident	
Capable	Lonely	

Also try to imagine the situations you experienced when you felt this way.

You could also ask the other parent to fill out the form and then compare the results by discussing the results.

How do we communicate!?

*Don't you worry if your children do not listen to you....
They are watching you all day long.
(Mother Teresa of Calcutta)*

In general, 3 components of communication can be identified:

- VERBAL: is the language, governed by rules and conventions. It is the content of messages, the WHAT;
- PARAVERBAL: are the expressive elements of voice, pauses and punctuation. They become a support for the content, expressing its intentions;
- NON VERBAL: it is everything related to corporeality. Posture, gestures, gaze, facial expressions, proxemics (distance). It is the most subjective component, it is specific to each person, it is what most characterizes us.

There are, basically, 3 styles of communication:

Passive style

Passive Style characterizes those people whose behaviors are often aimed at inhibiting their own emotions such as anger, joy, sadness, etc. People with passive style generally feel oppressed and intimidated by others, tend to over-apologize, and are often depressed with low self-esteem.

- has difficulties expressing his or her thoughts;
- has difficulty making decisions;
- always needs the approval of others;
- always tries to avoid conflict;
- depends on the judgment of the others;
- is often afraid of making mistakes;
- does not look others in the eye;
- keeps his or her gaze low;
- does not express his or her feelings;
- does not communicate his or her needs;
- avoids problems and conflicts;
- speaks in a low tone of voice;
- does not express opinions;
- keeps his or her shoulders hunched;

*"It's okay anyway. It doesn't matter.
I don't want to create problems. Let's
do it your way."*

Aggressive style

The aggressive style is made up of attitudes that often lead to a conflictual communication. It is preferred by very determined people who want to achieve goals even at the expense of the other person. They are more disposed to conflict and to resolve disputes with both verbal and physical violence. Often, as a result, aggressive people end up being avoided by others, or have poor social success and being often dissatisfied with themselves.

- prevaricates, dominates and manipulates;
- chooses for others by imposing himself or herself;
- does not give weight to the ideas and opinions of others;
- does not recognize the credit of others;
- constantly interrupts his or her interlocutor;
- does not accept that he/she can make mistakes;
- stares defiantly at others;
- points his or her finger;
- shouts and is rude;
- hurts the feelings of others;
- thinks only of his or her own needs;
- has an overbearing attitude;
- gets nervous quickly;

"I decide. If you don't do what I say, then you don't play! It's all your fault! I don't care."

Assertive Style

The Assertive Style characterizes those people who base the expression of their needs, feelings and thoughts on honesty and transparency. They are not embarrassed to communicate their discomforts and express their emotions because they do so in a socially appropriate way without either demeaning or prevaricating those of the others. This Communication Style helps a lot in interpersonal relationships as it makes people likeable and pleasant.

- recognizes and expresses his or her emotions;
- is honest with him/herself and others;
- lives relationships in a healthy, open and helpful way;
- respects the thoughts and ideas of others even if he or she does not share them;
- is a good listener;
- is reluctant to judge;
- does not accept being manipulated;
- looks others in the eye;
- keeps his shoulders straight;
- has a calm and confident tone of voice;
- says what he or she thinks while respecting the opinions of others;
- takes other people's feelings into consideration;
- says no without feeling guilty;

"I don't feel like playing this game, shall we play another one? It bothers me when you grab my things without permission, and I wish you wouldn't do it anymore."

How assertive you are

Read each of the following statements and indicate your answer by choosing from:
Often (O), Sometimes (S) and Rarely (R)

Is it easy for you:

To express your feelings to your partner	
Receiving a compliment from a friend	
Speaking up when, in a meeting, all eyes are on you	
Saying "no" when a friend asks you for a favor	
Controlling your mood during an argument	
Responding to unwarranted criticism from your boss	
Complaining openly when you are unhappy with a service	
Asking a friend for help	
Telling a friend that he or she has unnerved you	
Admitting to a colleague that you were wrong	
Complaining openly when a stranger smokes near to you	
Telling your relatives-in-law how you sincerely feel about them	
Refusing an invitation	
Reminding a friend that he or she owes you money	
Doing what you want instead of what is expected of you	

Now sum your points.

"Often" = 3

"Sometimes" = 2

"Rarely" = 1.

Your score: _____

The higher the score you get, the more assertive you are.

Of course, some situations may be more challenging than others.

REMEMBER: Many of us can be assertive in some situations but not in other ones.

To help our children develop assertive communication, it is important that we as parents for first try to use it, especially when we talk about emotions and share feelings and moods with them.

In these situations, we can:

- remember to look him or her in the eye;
- - maintain a position that is still but reassuring, with straight shoulders, a calm and confident tone of voice;
- - always take our child's emotions into consideration as well, making him or her feel heard and understood.

Instead of saying "You can't", try saying "I don't want you to" instead of saying "The candies are finished", try saying " I don't want you to eat the candies", instead of "Daddy can't play" try "I don't really want to right now".

Example of dialogue with and without listening ¹.

Without Listening

"Mom, I don't really want to go to guitar class today."

"No, don't you start, you took a duty and now you have to take your own responsibility."

"But mom..."

"No buts! You wanted to do this course. It is your responsibility. And it must be respected. That's it."

What will happen in your opinion?

Regardless of whether the child goes to guitar class, and how he goes, he will surely stop talking, or become oppositional with behaviors or words, or feel resentment toward the parent.

While the parent will never know what has happened to his or her child and how he or she has changed through that event; he or she will feel nervousness and non-acceptance because of the constant problems and obstacles the child poses, he or she will find it increasingly difficult to understand him or her.

Let us try to imagine together a dialogue based on listening.

With listening.

"Mom, I really don't feel like going to guitar class today."

"Something has happened, I don't see you in your usual mood. Tell me, I'm all ears...."

"Nothing, I don't feel like it."

"Days happen when things don't fit. It happens also to me, usually when I had some sorrow or problem at work. Did something happen to you as well?"

"It is that at school I had a fight with a group of classmates, they were all against me. I tried to make them understand that mine was the best solution but nothing, they all took off and the result was that I had to leave the team."

"You feel disheartened."

"Yes, and also angry, but is it possible that they don't understand anything?"

"It just seems impossible to you that your teammates don't think like you, it's hard to accept that people who are different from us have different thoughts and opinions than us, it's easier to think that they don't understand anything."

"Yeah, that's right. It seems to me that they just don't understand."

"The result, however, is that you were left 'out' and alone ... and now you are disheartened and angry."

"Are you telling me that maybe I went too far in pushing too hard, raising my voice and arguing?"

"Are you telling me that maybe you started it with an unfriendly attitude?"

¹ "EduCare alla genitorialità" ("EduCare" in parenting) by Marco Maggi, Alessandro Ricci.

"Now that I think about it maybe that's exactly what happened, they didn't back down -- but I started it, I didn't think about it."

"Well, maybe now you're clearer about what really happened. And what do you plan to do tomorrow?"

"I don't know if I can make it to apologize."

"It seems like the thing to do but you don't know if you'll be able to do it."

"Yeah, we'll see."

"Yes, now that you're clearer about what happened, you'll see tomorrow what you'll be able to do, what about the guitar lesson? Today the teacher wanted you to try that new song."

"But yes, I'll go, so I can distract myself a little..." or "I'm just not feeling it today..."

"Okay. Try calling the teacher and see if she can move your lesson. I don't know if she'll be able to do it so last minute, if it's okay with her, it's okay with me too, but that it doesn't become a habit, you know we made a pact at the beginning of the year about the guitar, you chose it and you were very insistent on continuing. Unless there are more than serious reasons, you can't move lessons at the last minute, organize and make your assessments. But try to take into account the needs and commitments of others as well."

Day _____

Now you try! Think back to a few episodes when you had a dialogue that was not based on listening. It could be about your child, your partner, your colleague.

What did you say?

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What could you have said?

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When you need to give feedback: some tips!

- 1) Focus more on the behavior than on the person.
- 2) Placing attention on observations rather than inferences.
- 3) Resort to specific descriptions rather than personal judgments.
- 4) Correlating behaviors to a specific situation.
- 5) Sharing ideas and information rather than making recommendations.

When you receive feedback: some tips!

- 1) Something you did is being discussed, not your personality.
- 2) It is a person's perception at a certain time, not an irreversible judgment for a lifetime.
- 3) It is not useful to disagree with feedback about you; it is useful to clarify it rationally.
- 4) Feedback is an opportunity to learn about your impact on others.

So you are free to react to it in different ways:

- A. Modify the behavior.
- B. Ask for additional clarification.
- C. Decide what elements of the feedback you can learn.
- D. Ignore the feedback.

“Watering” relationships

How important is it to find gestures that let us know we care about each other? Whoever it is. Try thinking, and then writing, about everyday gestures you can make to improve your relationships (couple, children, extended family (parents, grandparents, uncles, cousins), work, colleagues, school (teachers, children, parents of classmates), community, gym, church, associations).

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Focus on feasibility and concreteness (example spending more time together is very generic: going for a walk in the park is more specific; doing acts of kindness is generic, offering to give your partner a massage is more concrete). Think about:

- gesti che migliorano la relazione nella coppia di genitori
- gesti che migliorano la relazione con i figli
- gesti che migliorano la relazione con la famiglia allargata
- gesti che migliorano la relazione con il vicinato
- gesti che migliorano la relazione con la scuola

For whom?

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What?

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For whom?

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For whom?

What?

Occasionally take time for yourself:

Ideas of pleasant activities to feel good:

- ✓ Spend time with someone you're comfortable with
- ✓ Buy a gift
- ✓ Reading a newspaper or a novel
- ✓ Going to the hairdresser
- ✓ Phone a friend
- ✓ Going to the movies or a museum
- ✓ Going to the bar
- ✓ Have a delicious meal
- ✓ Meeting a friend for lunch
- ✓ Doing small crafts
- ✓ Taking care of the car and washing it
- ✓ Going to watch a soccer game
- ✓ Having a picnic
- ✓ Making a face mask
- ✓ Asking for a hug
- ✓ Taking a hot bath
- ✓ Drinking a beer
- ✓ Going fishing
- ✓ Having a massage
- ✓ Burning some perfumed oil
- ✓ Joining an association
- ✓ Listening to music
- ✓ Spending time with children
- ✓ Spending time with pets
- ✓ Planning a weekend
- ✓ Doing something for someone you love
- ✓ Going for a walk in the park or along the beach
- ✓ Playing sports (tennis, squash, swimming)
- ✓ Do something creative like an art activity (pottery, embroidery, cooking, flower arranging, decorating a room)
- ✓ Going shopping

Try in the next few days to do at least 2-3 activities from the list.

List them here:

what _____ when _____

what _____ when _____

what _____ when _____

what _____ when _____

what _____ when _____

Let's get to know each other better!

Take some time to play together and get to know each other, away from cell phone interruptions, commitments, around a table, sitting in a circle on the carpet! Write down some questions on slips of paper and then draw them out at random.

These questions can be helpful in discovering the child's inner world and creating com-licity and closeness. Remember that in addition to asking, it is critically important to be able to listen to his or her answers, to show attention and active listening.

Of course, these questions should not be asked all at once, otherwise you risk crowding the child's mind too much.

Each day, you can choose a few to talk about together until you trigger moments of reflection.

Here are some questions to share as a family to get to know each other, so you can ask all family members!

If you want draw a number at random, or ask them to think of a number from 1 to 83 and then read the related question. Everyone will have to give an answer (perhaps by writing it down on a piece of paper and then reading it in turn).

1. If it rained food, which one would you want it to be?
2. Which animal would you like to ride: an elephant or a giraffe?
3. If you could give the colors different names, what names would you give them?
4. If our cat could talk, what would it say?
5. If you could ask a wild animal a question, what would you ask?
6. What would you use to build an indestructible wall?
7. In your opinion, what animal would be able to drive a car?
8. What invention would the world need?
9. What would happen if you had a time machine?
10. How would the world work if money had not been invented?
11. If you had a magic wand, what three wishes would you make?
12. What five words would you use to describe yourself?
13. What do you like, and what do you dislike about yourself?
14. If you could change something about yourself, what would it be?
15. If you could be a different person for a day, who would you like to be?
16. If you were a superhero, what superpower would you have?
17. If you could go anywhere, where would you go?
18. What sounds do you like?
19. In your opinion, what are the things that adults don't understand?
20. What is the best compliment they gave you/you ever heard?
21. What activity makes you happy?
22. What is your favorite vacation?
23. In what ways do you take care of others?
24. What makes you happy?
25. What do you feel when I hug you?
26. What makes you cry?
27. What makes you angry?
28. What makes you afraid?
29. What do you wish you could do: swim like a fish or fly like a bird?
30. If you had a million, how would you spend it?
31. If you had so much money that you didn't need to work, would you still work?
32. If you opened a store, what would you sell?
33. If you wrote a book, what would it be about?
34. Do you like to give gifts?
35. What does your ideal day look like?

36. What can you do that you could teach others?
37. What else would you like to learn?
38. What was the happiest/saddest day of your life?
39. Of all the things you know and know, which will be the most useful in your adult life?
40. If you could time travel and see yourself three years ago, what advice would you give yourself?
41. What is the thing you are most proud of?
42. Which of your friends do you like the most and why?
43. What do you do if someone offends you?
44. If you became famous, what would you like to become famous for?
45. What could you do to help other people today?
46. If you could spend a day with one person, who would it be and what would you do?
47. What makes a person smart?
48. What do you think other people feel?
49. Why is it necessary to go to school?
50. What will our life be like in the future?
51. What would you change in the world, and why?
52. Is it easy or difficult to be a child? and an adult?
53. How do you notice that you have grown up?
54. Should a child respect all adults?
55. Should parents always be listened to?
56. Should children be punished? For what?
57. Can a person steal if he is starving?
58. Is it always possible to do whatever you want?
59. How is it possible for people to lie?
60. Can you always say what you want?
61. How comes that people get divorced?
62. How comes that people argue? How come they can't always argue calmly?
63. How come some adults smile a little?
64. How come people smoke, if it is harmful?
65. What is good mood, and what puts you in a good mood?
66. What would you do when you are old?
67. What is love?
68. How do you notice that someone loves you?
69. Is there such a thing as eternal love?
70. What is happiness?
71. Is it possible to be happy all the time, and never sad?
72. Is it possible to be happy without money?
73. How come rich people do not share their money with poor people?
74. Are all people equal?
75. Is the world still a beautiful place even if there are wars and famines?
76. Is there a way to avoid wars?
77. Is there anything good in problems and difficulties?
78. If someone was rude to you, should you also be rude or remain kind?
79. Is it okay to envy people?
80. What is art good for?
81. Who decides what is beautiful and what is not?
82. If you could make a law that everyone must obey, what would it be?
83. Can you change your destiny?

Notes

Me and my partner

In the list below mark with an x 7 adjectives that you think characterize your partner. You can read the list together and then compare your answers by commenting on them.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loving | <input type="checkbox"/> Elegant | <input type="checkbox"/> Witty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitive | <input type="checkbox"/> Lending | <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Courageous | <input type="checkbox"/> Playful | <input type="checkbox"/> Beautiful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intelligent | <input type="checkbox"/> Lovely | <input type="checkbox"/> Pleasant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtful | <input type="checkbox"/> A great friend | <input type="checkbox"/> Rich |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Generous | <input type="checkbox"/> Exciting | <input type="checkbox"/> Funny |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loyal | <input type="checkbox"/> Sober | <input type="checkbox"/> Expressive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confident | <input type="checkbox"/> Full of plans | <input type="checkbox"/> Calm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strong | <input type="checkbox"/> Shy | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflective |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energetic | <input type="checkbox"/> Vulnerable | <input type="checkbox"/> Fond |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexy | <input type="checkbox"/> Committed | <input type="checkbox"/> Active |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decisive | <input type="checkbox"/> Involved | <input type="checkbox"/> Attentive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Reserved | <input type="checkbox"/> Lively |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Imaginative | <input type="checkbox"/> Adventurous | <input type="checkbox"/> Outstanding partner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fun | <input type="checkbox"/> Receptive | <input type="checkbox"/> Outstanding parent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attractive | <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable | <input type="checkbox"/> Optimistic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible | <input type="checkbox"/> Protective |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organized | <input type="checkbox"/> Polite | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enterprising | <input type="checkbox"/> Warm | <input type="checkbox"/> Cute |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Athletic | <input type="checkbox"/> Virile | <input type="checkbox"/> Mighty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerful | <input type="checkbox"/> Kind | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> coordinated | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical | <input type="checkbox"/> Comprehensive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pretty | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensual | <input type="checkbox"/> Original |

How was it? What adjectives did he or she gave you?

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My child's positive qualities

This is an important exercise regarding educational awareness and relationships.

If you are in couples, you can do it together, or at the same time and then compare the result.

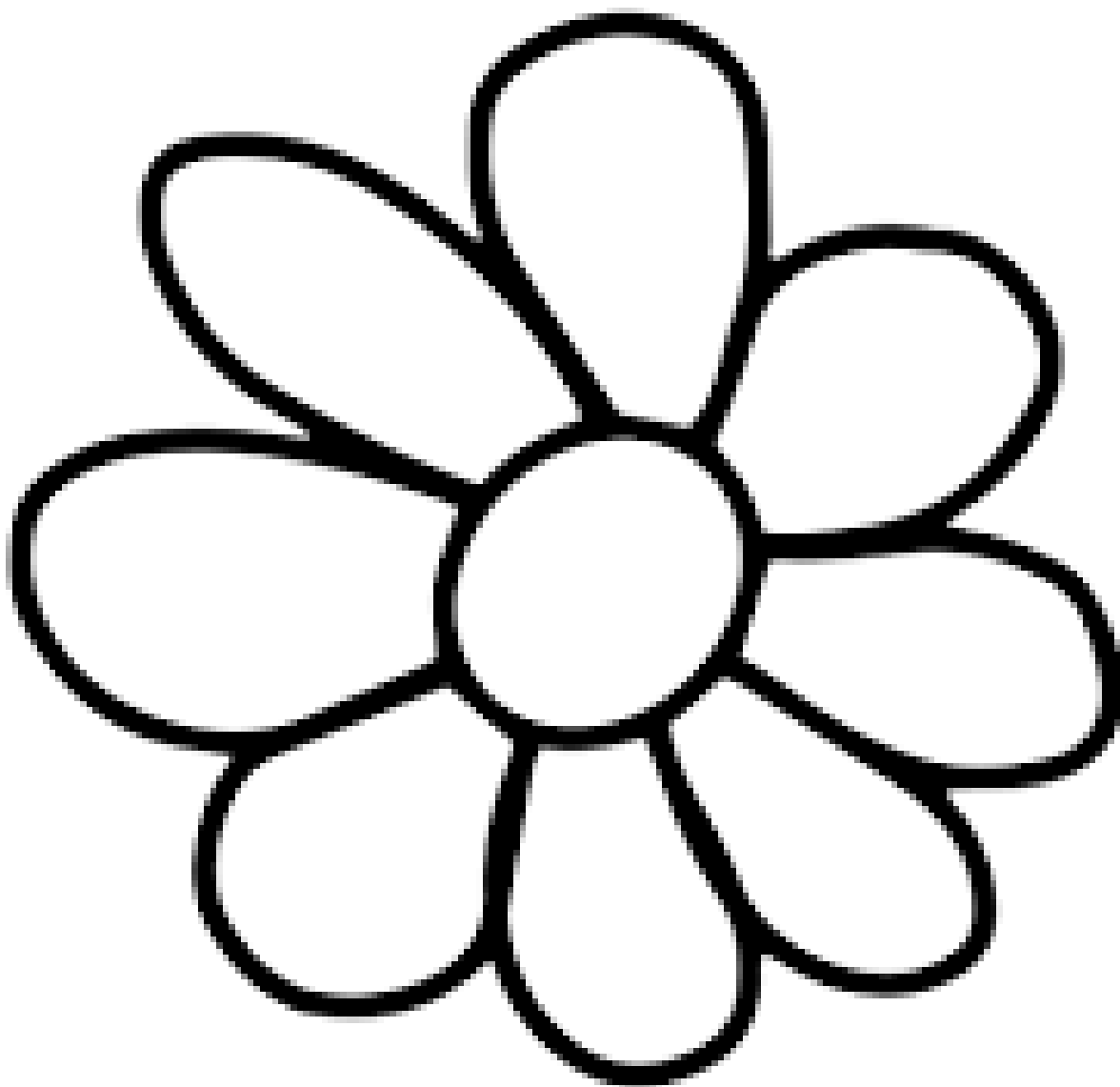
It could also be a gift to give later to your child.

And, why not, you can also do it with your partner or some other family member in mind.

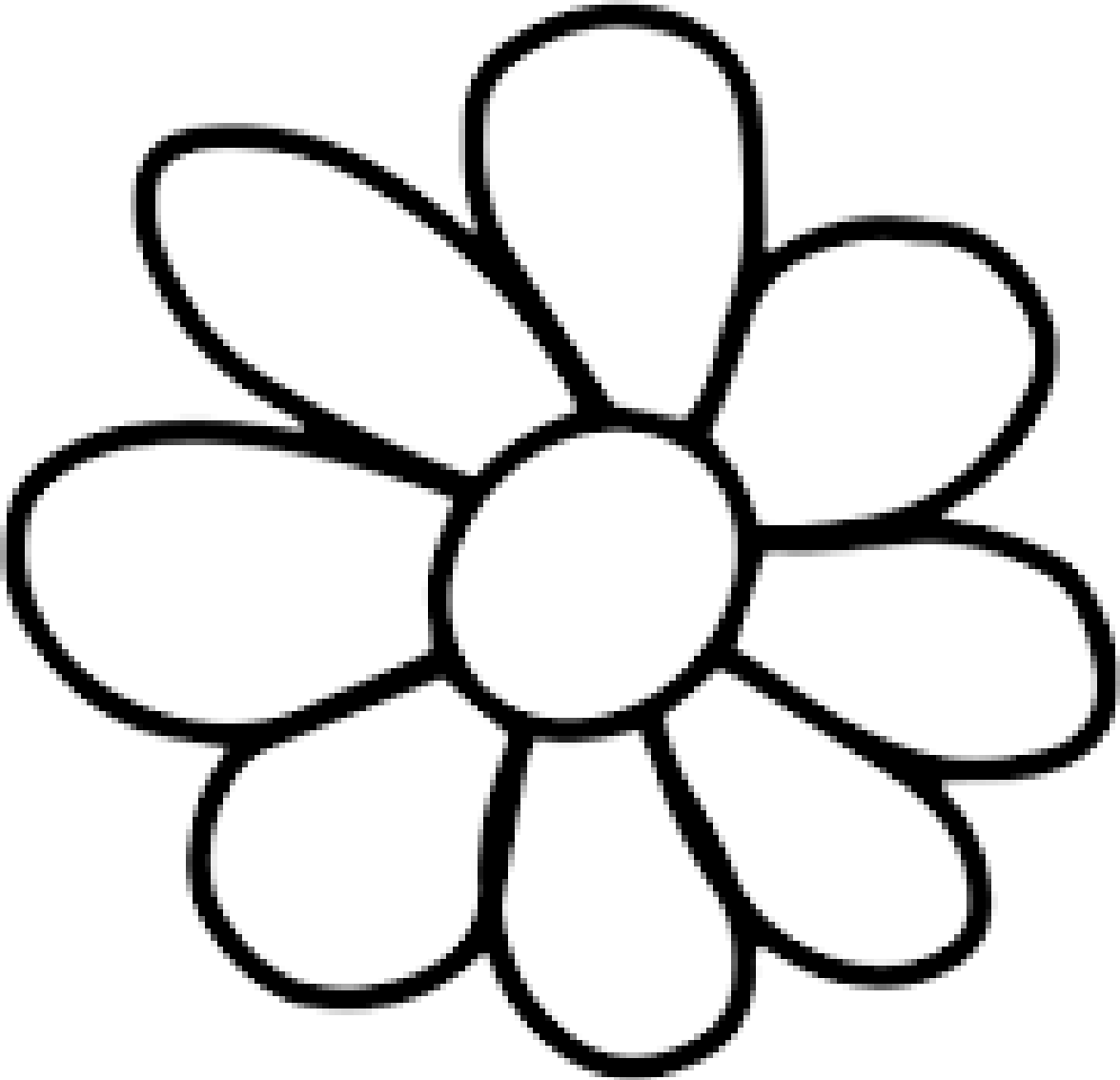
And if you like, repeat the exercise thinking about yourself.

Thinking about my son/daughter, I try to identify the positive qualities (character, personality, attitudes) he/she possesses and place them in the petals. It is possible to insert more qualities and abilities. In the center of the flower, insert his or her name.

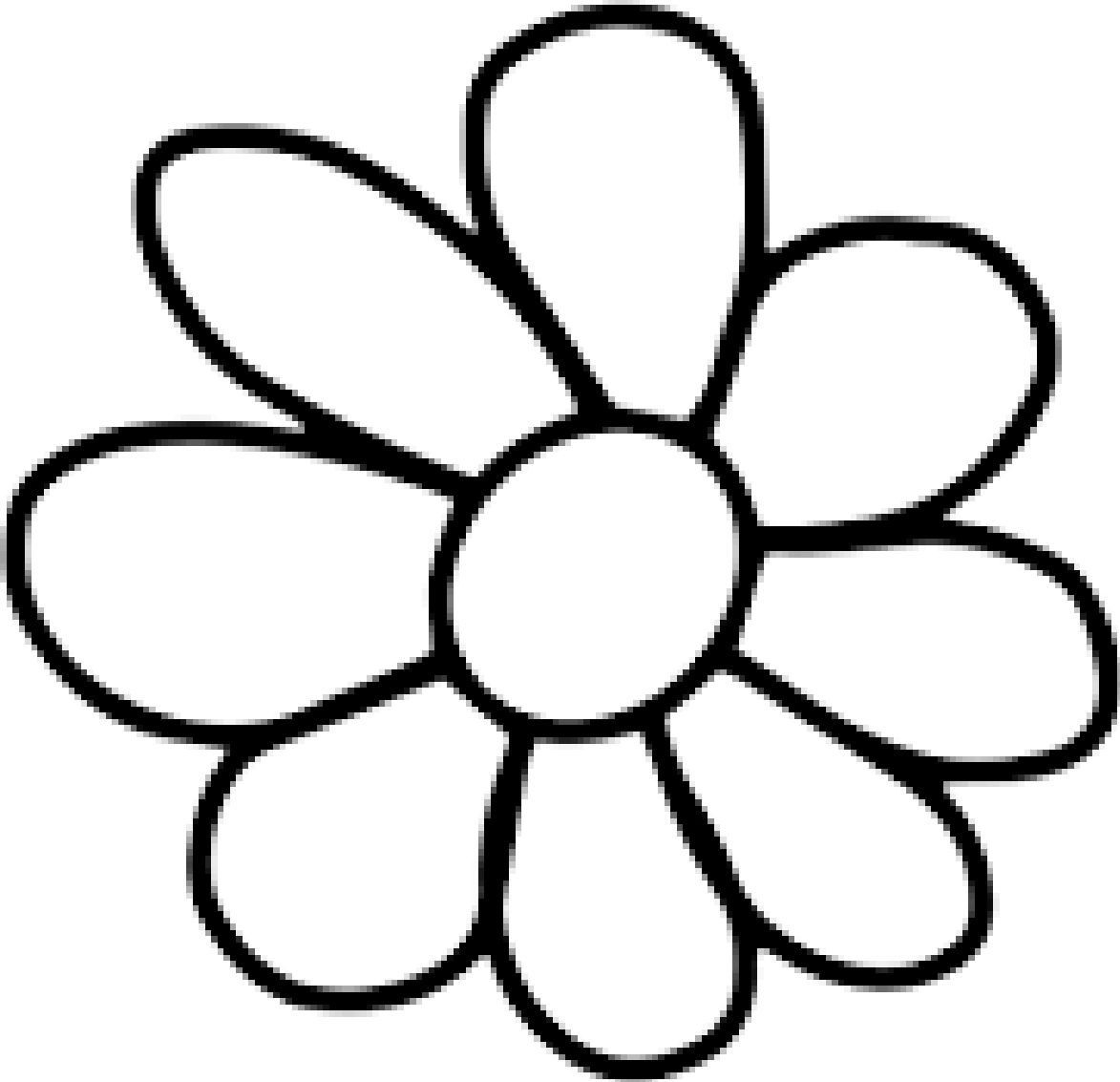
The flower of _____ date _____



The flower of _____ date _____



The flower of _____ date _____



Playing is a serious matter!

Much of the exercises you find here are games. Playing is an important activity in every family. Plato is quoted as saying that you can find out more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.

A game I used to play as a child...

For me to play is...

Who used to play with me as a child...

My son/daughter's favorite game is...

In my opinion the most beautiful game is....

With my son/daughter we usually play...

Usually in our family we play...

How much daily and weekly time do you dedicate to play together with with your son/daughter?

What does it look like (a little, enough...)?

The anger box

The goal of this activity is to increase the child's awareness in the moment of anger, teaching him or her to "downsize" it and offering an alternative way to canalize his or her energy into something more constructive.

Take a shoebox and have fun decorating it together.

You can use colored paper, newspaper clippings, watercolors, paint colors, markers, crepe paper...the only limit is your imagination!

Whenever an episode of anger occurs, ask your child to draw something related to that precise moment. It can be as little as a strongly made doodle or a shredded sheet of paper.

Invite him, then, to close inside the box what he has produced, so that it remains locked there and cannot come out again.

Day _____

How was it?

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Photos of your box



The rules

Rules are important. They let us live well. They are benchmarks. Sometimes, in families, they are handed down, taught. And sometimes unspoken. They are indispensable because they provide references, and thus give reassurance, security and containment. They limit chaos by helping to adapt to family and social life. The rule is a help, something necessary when we have to relate to others, when we are part of even a small community like the family. Moreover, we must not forget and always have in mind that rules do not only place obligations on us, but are also the source of our rights. They are the "guides" that allow us to orient ourselves, to be in the world! In every family there should be rules, even written ones!

Some tips for thinking about rules together!

Rules are often given in the negative, and from an early age the child learns many "NOTs"! Think about the rules in your family.

Write them down here:

If you wrote them down in the negative form, try turning all the "don't" into something positive. Example: "you don't talk with your mouth full when you are eating" it becomes "you can talk after you have swallowed the bite you have in your mouth." Example: "When grandma comes, don't disrespect her" becomes "Be nice to grandma."

When you were a child

Everyone has their own history and experience regarding family rules.

What were the rules in your childhood that you remember were strong spots in your family?

What is your relationship with these rules? What do you think about them?

What happened when the rules were not observed????

RULES IN POSITIVE WAY

It is very important for parents to focus on what should be done instead of focusing on what children should not do.

GIVE FEW RULES AND GIVE THEM AT THE RIGHT TIME

It is not important to set a lot of rules; a few are enough, as long as there is value behind each rule and it serves a personal, family or social good that children need to be made aware of.

BE CONCRETE AND CONCISE IN PROVIDING ONLY RELEVANT AND UNAMBIGUOUS INFORMATION IN RULES

It is important for the parent to describe actions to the children operationally, focusing on the expectation and being careful not to be vague. For example, Mom's statement, "Don't be messy!" becomes "Remember to clean up your room; you can start putting toys in the basket."

RULES NEED TO BE EXPLAINED AND JUSTIFIED

Children become more motivated to follow the rules if they understand their meaning. Therefore, one must always explain: if a no is accompanied by an explanation, it will acquire a different value.

AGREEING ON THE RULES WITH THE CHILDREN

It is effective to agree and syndicate rules openly with children. In this way they acquire a less constricting value if they are first negotiated together with the parents, and it is this that helps the child to be more likely to follow them since he or she will feel that he or she has set them himself or herself with the parents. This discussion is, therefore, also an opportunity to get the children's participation in introjecting and following the rules. They themselves may have ideas on how to improve them and make them more acceptable, and they may also be asked what kind of help they need to conform to them.

The 10 rules of our family

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____
- 8) _____
- 9) _____
- 10) _____

Date _____

Signatures:

REMEMBER: what really matters is the example

Children learn much more from what they see and not from what they hear from their parents. Example setting by parents, especially in following rules, is the most effective learning tool. It also happens to adults to "break" rules. Just as, for example, it happens that they are not very assertive, or manage their emotions to the best of their ability. In this case, a good relationship with our partner can mentor us. Finding the right way to "correct" (and not criticize!) the other person.

What might be the phrases with which you would like to be "being corrected by your partner"?

You could talk to your partner about finding ways to support you in this.

Also, because it is necessary to have consistency and agreement in setting rules among parents. The goal is to have a precise and shared plan to propose to the children, to avoid subjecting them to a state of confusion and uncertainty. To improve the game in the parenting team, we need to reduce the words we use with the children and increase the words we address to the other parent. Share your rules the first time and periodically.

On the following page you will find a way to do it!

Let's validate the rules
 (With the whole family or even as a couple)

Write your family rules on sheets of paper (1 rule per sheet) and then fold them up and place them in a box.

(The same exercise can be used to choose family rules. In this case each person is asked to write at least 5-6 of them on a sheet and then fold it and place it in the box.)

In turn, each participant chooses a piece of paper and reads the rule.

He or she must then try to support its validity, as if in front of a court of law, whose task is to choose whether to keep or abolish this rule.

The other members play the role of judges who listen and can note on a sheet of paper whether they were convinced or not, and why.

After the first round, (i.e., when everyone has validated at least 1 rule) we move on to the second round.

All the notes are to be put back in the container. This time, you will have to disprove the rule, highlighting its unhelpful aspects.

At the end of the work, each participant comments on his or her experience.

Notes and considerations

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This exercise can also be used to choose specific rules in the family, such as, rules of cell phone use, social networking, etc.

What is your relationship with the cell phone?

When you play with your child:

- Does it happen that you check your cell phone if he or she is busy with something?
- Do you eliminate all distractions so that you can give them your full attention?
- Does it happen that the TV is on in the background even if no one is watching?
- Do you often watch videos because he/she likes it so much?

What was your answer to that?

Attention: that's what our children demand from us. And it is also what we demand from them when we do some stuff together, when we try to explain something to them.

What answer would your child want? And which one would you want if you did something important with someone? And playing is a serious thing!

Try observing yourself for a few days, see how often you use your cell phone even when you don't have to, and especially try putting it down somewhere far away while you play with your children.

"Phubbing" identifies the behavior we take on whenever, although in company and in contact with another person, we prefer to look at the smartphone screen. Even if it is not notifying us of any urgency. "Phubbing" is the crisis of two English terms: "phone" and "snubbing."
In a 2020 Italian research, kids with parents too much stuck on their smartphones felt more than once excluded, ignored, sidelined in the family picture. What's more, the data also showed that a mom or dad too dedicated to phubbing stimulates a feeling of disconnection in their children: the more they feel their parents ignore them in favor of the phone, the less involved they feel in family life.

A parent-child agreement² on smartphone use

Here you can find an example of how some parents in a school decided to "hand over" the smartphone to their children.

“ Dear _____

You are now the owner of a smartphone. Wow, that's not a small thing!

You are years old, you are smart and responsible, and you know that this tool, even if small, is very powerful. You can do things that are very interesting, useful and fun, but if you are not careful also very harmful to yourself and others. We ourselves sometimes find ourselves in trouble and that is why it is important that we ally in order to make the best use of these technologies by agreeing on some rules. I hope you understand that our job is to raise you so that you can become a wise and balanced adult who knows how to make the best of these technologies without being dominated by them and who knows how to take his own responsibility.

Read the following contract well: we can discuss some aspects of these rules together, but once you sign it you must abide by it otherwise we will question your ability to use the phone.”

BASIC RULES.

1. The use of the smartphone, from the moment it connects online, is under the complete responsibility of Dad and Mom. Not only do we sign the phone contract, but by law we are responsible for everything you do online and your online safety. Basically, we are giving you a great deal of trust based on the few rules we will agree together. Are we good or not?
2. We will then always know what your password is. We may also ask you to see together what is on your cell phone. Not to mind your business, but so that we can protect you and prevent possible problems and bad experiences online.
3. The phone will be turned off in the evening at _____ and turned on again at _____ in the morning. You will not be able to keep it in your room at night, even as an alarm clock, because of health and safety reasons. We will also agree on how long and on what occasions you can use it during the day (using the "Notes" box at the bottom).
4. We will decide together which new Apps you can install on your phone. Keep in mind that many have age limits, so we will have to decide together whether you can use them under our supervision.

KNOW HOW TO TURN IT OFF WHEN NOT NEEDED

5. The telephone should not be used at school (except when explicitly requested by teachers). Take the opportunity to be with your classmates. Knowing how to dialogue in person, even to clear up misunderstandings and disagreements, is a fundamental life skill that can only be developed with training. The ability to focus without distraction is as well. Also practice turning it off when you study.
6. Learn not to use it when it is not necessary. It's not easy sometimes even for us; let's help ourselves in this. Let's turn it off, make it silent, put it away when we are together and in public. Especially at restaurants, movies and while talking to other people. Let's not let the cell phone make us forget the beauty of being together and looking into each other's eyes.

There is no need for billions of photos and videos. There is no need to document (and share online) everything. Live your experiences, they will stay in your memory forever! Leave your phone at home sometimes and feel confident in that decision. Learn how to do it without it, too.

²“THE AGREEMENT: parent-child pact for smartphone use” has been reworked by the M.E.C. Association on the basis of numerous discussion and debate meetings with parents, educators, psychologists and teachers of an Italian school. The text is inspired by a letter from American journalist J.Hoffmann.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

7. If your phone falls into the toilet bowl, is broken by falling on the floor, or disappear, you are responsible for the cost of replacement or repair. Cut the grass, babysit your brother, save the money you get on your birthday. If it happens you must be ready to buy it back.

SAFETY AND RESPONSIBILITY

8. Don't trust strangers in both real life and cyberspace; the world is full of all kinds of people and not everyone wants to make you happy or wants your good. In general, be wary of people who want to know too much, and never give out information about yourself or your family to people you don't know in real life. (Don't share your password, even with friends: it belongs exclusively to you!)

9. Do not send or forward any embarrassing photos, intimate or humiliating photos of yourself or other people. Don't laugh. One day you will be tempted to do this, despite your intelligence. It is risky and could ruin your life, your relationships, your education, and your future work. "Cyberspace" is wide and more powerful than we are. A sentence or image once posted is no longer under our control. They can potentially reach anyone and can stay forever. It is difficult to make things disappear from this space, including a bad reputation.

10. Do not use technology to lie, mock or deceive others.

Don't write in a text or email something you wouldn't say in person. Don't get involved in conversations that can hurt someone else. Be a good friend and always respect others even online. Don't even passively participate in such behavior by staying silent or not having the courage to express your thoughts and intervene if someone is being excluded or targeted.

Always ask yourself how the person on the other side is doing, and if you understand that they are suffering, do not remain indifferent.

IN CONCLUSION...

It's going to happen that you're going to mess up, we know, like us after all. Maybe we'll even pick up your phone. We'll still sit down and talk about it. We will help you if something has upset or hurt you. We'll start again, trying to understand. You and us keep learning new things, day by day.

We are on your side, on the same team as you. We are together, trying to raise you happy and wise. We hope you can agree on these points. Many of the "lessons" that are part of the list apply not only to the phone, but also to life.

We love you infinitely and look forward to learning new things together with you.

Mom and Dad

Date and Signatures:

Notes:

CLASS WHATSAPP GROUP ETIQUETTE

1. PARENTS PRESENT AND RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENS IN THE CLASS WHATSAPP GROUP

Since we are dealing with minors, it is desirable, if not necessary, that all parents in the class be aware of and monitor the content of communications and shared material (we emphasize and reiterate that WhatsApp membership is prohibited for minors under 16 years of age, and the educational and legal responsibility for early use lies with the parents). In addition, it is crucial that the group administrator is an adult and not a minor.

2. MAKE CLEAR THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE CLASS WHATSAPP GROUP.

It is necessary to distinguish whether the chat will be used only to send homework or other school information or is intended to be the expansion of communications and interactions within the class group. In the second case, the risk is to reintroduce and expand some dynamics already present in the classroom, but without the supervision of the teacher or a facilitator.

3. USE AN APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE.

In the past, speaking and writing correctly was a boast, a source of distinction and a means of affirmation in the family, with friends, at school and at work. In the world of social media, however, it seems that this attention to language and the way we communicate has been a bit lost. Words serve, first of all, to talk about ourselves, that is, to present ourselves in the eyes of others. We are what we communicate. Even on WhatsApp, it is important to use respectful and appropriate language to avoid hurting other people's sensibilities.

4. MEASURING THE QUANTITY AND LENGTH OF MESSAGES (written, audio and video).

It is easy to send a message, but it is difficult to do it the right way. In certain WhatsApp groups you risk going overboard and sending dozens if not hundreds of meaningless messages. In addition to quantity, you need to be careful about length, especially in voice messages.

5. THINK BEFORE POSTING COMMENTS AND MATERIAL (videos, photos, images and audio).

Often those who send videos, photos and messages of various kinds, in their rush to respond or impress others, do not think about the possible consequences. You must be very careful because, without knowing it, you risk committing crimes that can be prosecuted by the Judicial Authority.

6. REMEMBER THAT EVERYTHING THAT IS PUBLISHED AND SENT STAYS ON THE SERVER OR DATABASE (even if you delete it).

WhatsApp stores messages in a SQLite database. When an item is deleted by the user, it is simply made unavailable but is retained in memory; therefore, it is good to think before sending comments and other materials because it is not true that by deleting them you are safe. Everything is detectable.

7. AVOID UNNECESSARY DISCUSSIONS OR USEFUL ONLY FOR A FEW

It may happen that discussions about issues of class group life or about school life in general (questions, notes, etc.) are triggered in class. It is crucial not to bring back the same discussions within the WhatsApp group. Better to let frustration or anger dissipate. It definitely helps more to address it at school directly, so as to avoid misunderstandings. Or, if some discussions only concern someone, it is best to talk about it separately among themselves, without getting in the way of the other members.

8. MONITORING TIME OF USE.

As with the Internet, you may spend a lot of time in Whatsapp groups without even realizing it. Establishing a maximum daily conversation time in groups helps to balance their use and avoid abuse.

9. REMEMBER TO MEET CLASSMATES IN REAL LIFE.

It's great to chat with classmates, some children feel grown up this way, but we hope instead that kids meet in real life, at someone's home to play, do homework, go for a ride together... This type of socialization is much more meaningful and deeper than online socialization and makes possible the development of social, emotional and problem-solving skills.

10. IN THE EVENING, TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE AND DISCONNECT.

Educating ourselves to disconnect and turn off our smartphones at a certain time is essential, as well as healthy. One can and should live without the anxiety of looking every 5-10 minutes at Whatsapp to see if messages arrive or if we are answered. Above all, it is good at night not to leave cell phones in the room turned on and connected: the temptation to look to see if messages arrive is high. Unfortunately, many kids stay connected late at night and get little sleep, resulting in the morning having difficulties to wake up, not being able to follow classes at school, and suffering in school performance.

The power of reading

Reading together is a habit that brings with it countless benefits, from enhancing a child's vocabulary and cognitive skills to strengthening the parent-child relationship: it is also a valuable opportunity to talk about emotions: which stories make you happy? What emotions do the characters feel?

Why do they feel that particular emotion, what triggered it?

To pass on the passion and love for books to the little one, the best way is to include the book as an object among his or her toys, flipping through the pages together, reading the stories to him or her, observing and admiring the pictures that often enrich illustrated books.

Reading a book together, from an early age, often means carving out a parenthesis of quiet and exclusive attention for him, away from the hustle and bustle of the day.

If you can't "teach" your child to love books, you can certainly set a good example and create those little daily rituals devoted to reading that will remain forever impressed in his memory and encourage this child to continue independently.

Which books have you read together?

Which are the favorite ones?

Day _____

Write a letter to yourself as a child.

Handwriting practice area consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

An argument: how does the child feel!!!?

Scan the QRcode and, if you have 3D glasses, watch the video.

It is about an ordinary day within a family made up of two parents and a son. The scene begins with the father arriving home, while the son is in the living room waiting for lunchtime. This is followed by an argument between the parents that the child witnesses.

You can watch the scene from the child's point of view; he can move and turn his head, listen to the voices. The child is always present in the room....

This video aims to make you experience the feeling of isolation, alienation, estrangement that can sometimes happen, during a family conversation. This is a typical situation.

After you have finished watching the video, try to ask yourself:

- How does a child feel in a similar situation?
- What was his or her experience?
- What emotions emerged?
- What could be done to avoid making the child invisible?
- Thinking back to your experience in the VR situation, how did you feel?
- What emotions did you mainly feel? Can you describe/name them?
- Can you define your emotions toward mom and dad?
- Are there any differences between the emotions you feel from dad and those you feel from mom?
- What would you have liked to have heard in that situation? What could have made you feel better?
- How do you think the situation could have been resolved?

D. Siegel points out how: it is important for an infant to have reference figures constantly and regularly present for him/her ("The Power of Showing Up: How Parental Presence Shapes Who Our Kids Become and How Their Brains Get Wired" Daniel S. Siegel, Tina Payne Bryson, 2020).

In an age of digital distractions and pressing commitments, BEING THERE for a child might seem a very difficult task. But, reassures Daniel Siegel, being present does not necessarily require large amounts of time and energy. BEING THERE means offering a child a quality presence, simple enough to ensure what is needed for healthy child development: protection, understanding, comfort and security, the "poker of attachment."

The child in the virtual experience is present, but there are no parents for him or her at that moment. Parents are caught up in the discussion and forget his presence.

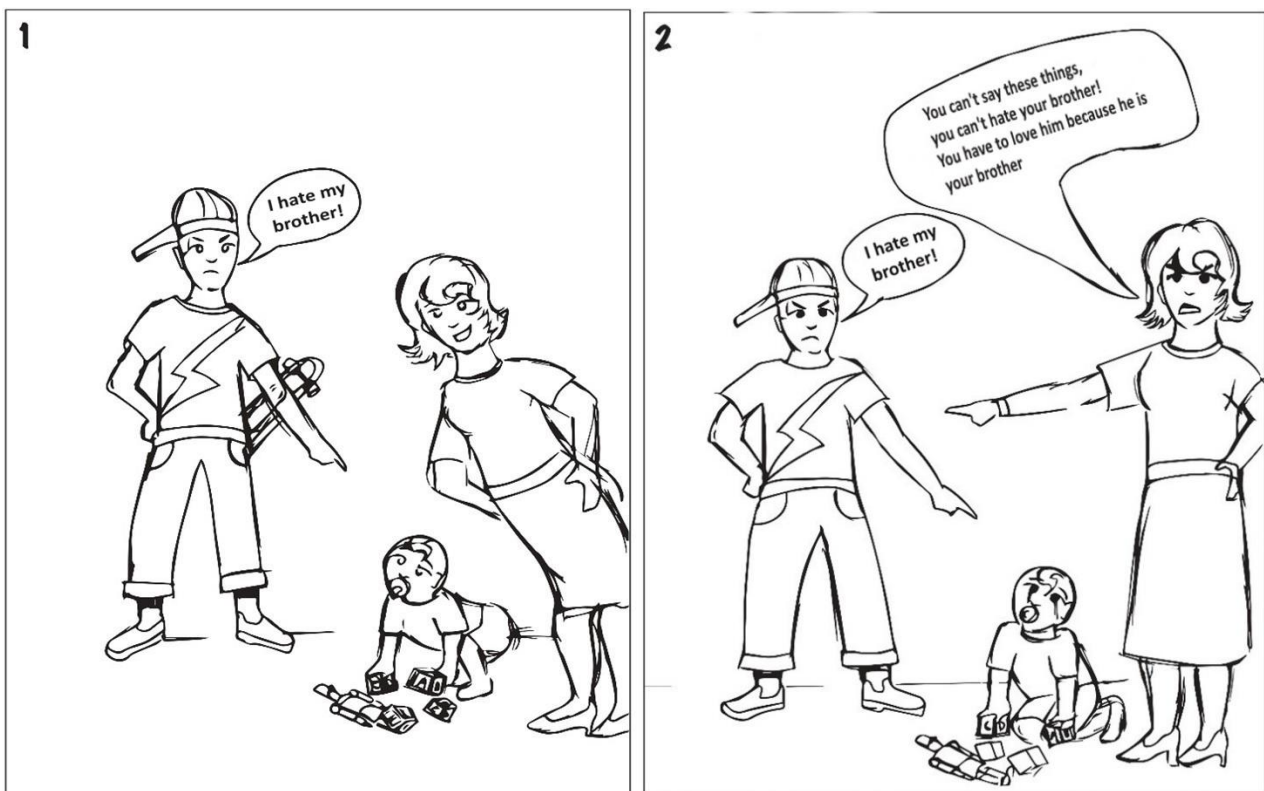
Scan the QRcode to open the video "invisible child"



Get tuned

When a child is overwhelmed with emotion (but it applies to the adult as well!) screams or cries apparently for no reason, it is not the right time to explain the facts to the child (make him or her understand). This is the time to get tuned with the child, to listen to his or her right hemisphere and respond with your own right hemisphere, to get in tune with him or her and his or her emotion, to be close to him or her, even physically or with the tone of your voice (nonverbal communication), to pick up his or her emotions and to di-show that you understand and respect them. This will enable them not to be overwhelmed by the emotions, to navigate them, beginning to name them.

Beginning to talk about events together helps to calm strong emotions. Asking the child to talk about a fact (whether it is a simple fall while running or a traumatic event or a loss, etc.) is helpful. Asking him or her to talk about it does not mean exposing him or her to additional and unnecessary suffering by bringing him or her back to think about those events; instead, talking about it helps him or her make sense of the event, understand it, and integrate it with emotions, getting him or her to relate better to the event even from an emotional point of view.



Mom intervenes to calm down her older son who, as the older one, since his little brother has arrived, must put his needs aside because everything is about his brother. And he gets upset when his little brother plays with the toys of his childhood.

So in a moment of anger, he "explodes" and says: "I hate my brother!"

The mother witnesses the scene and hearing those words "alerts" her: could her son have said those bad words! It is unacceptable! That is the reason why she scolds him, telling him that such things should not be said and that he should love his brother because he is his brother.

In this case son and mother are facing a wall. Mother, faced with her son's anger, for which she perhaps also feels responsible, reacts by scolding him and denying his emotion: you cannot say these things and you cannot feel these emotions.

How will the scene continue in your opinion? How will the child react? How would you have reacted if you were in the child's shoes?

What do you think mom could have done?

Identifying the son's emotion (anger) and trying to understand him, trying to give him the words, are a good way to get in tune with him. Getting in tune is essential to then activate the "rational" side or rather the reflective side and thus help him get through that moment. To help him grow. Here's an example. Can you think of any others?





Dad picks up his son on his way home from school. He is angry, sad, a mixture of emotions. And he is crying. Dad immediately asks him what happened. So the son tells him that his classmate Luigi made fun of him in front of the other classmates. Dad initially calms down, thinking that fortunately it is nothing serious, things that usually happen. That fights are part of child relationships and that this will help him grow.

So he calms him down by telling him not to take it personally. That these are normal things between friends but that tomorrow will be over, and they will go back to being the friends they have always been. Because Luigi loves him.

What happened in this episode in your opinion? What emotions does the child feel after listening to the father? What could the father say before reassuring him to get in tune with him?

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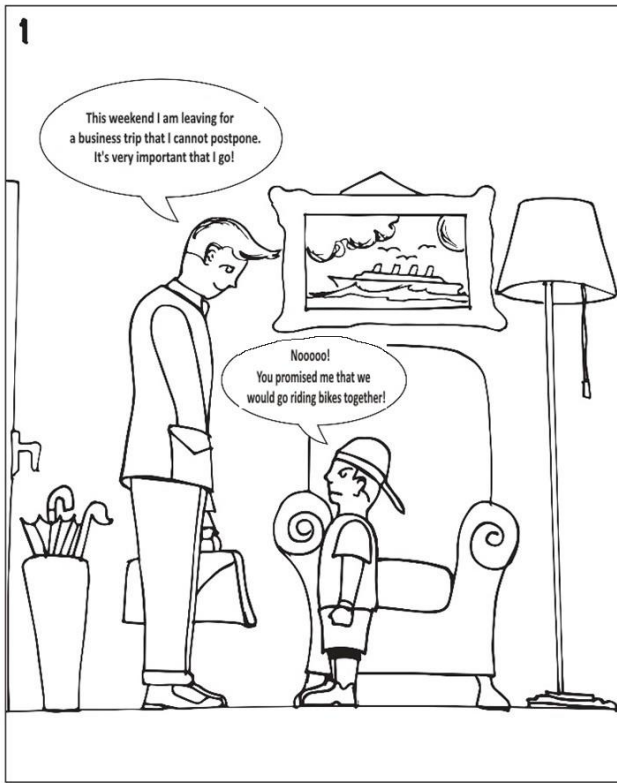
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Getting in tune with your child's emotion means having the same frequency. Understand it. Try to put yourself in his or her shoes. Then, lowering yourself to his level, laying a hand on his shoulder, let them know you understand. It doesn't solve the problem. But it helps the child to tell what happened. Has this ever happened to you?

How will the little boy feel after sharing the fact?



Imagine this situation: You must travel for business. As soon as your son finds out that you will be missing for several days, he gets upset. He wanted you to go cycling together this weekend and he clearly tells you so.

For every possible answer, try to imagine how your child might feel:

I can see that you are sorry, I am also very disappointed for not being able to be with you this weekend. Let's think together about something cool we can do as soon as I get back.

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You can't sulk, you know I have to go to work! We will have other opportunities to be together.

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Stop sulking, you're not a little kid anymore. You will have so many other things to do this week, you would be too tired on the weekend.

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I love to spend the weekend together, but work is important, and even if it is hard for you to understand, we have to accept the situation. First the duty!

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Before you choose what your answer would be, ask yourself how do you feel! Listen to your own emotion!



The exercise book covers some aspects of the training course and provides tools and advice to the parent during the training path on the four skills areas.

Within it we take up the macro-areas of the Family skills model and some key concepts of parenting.

The goal is to provide a space for parent to self-question and self-assess, finding insights, tips and exercises.

Through questions and activities, the parent will be able to consciously and calmly reconsider the educational experiences they have had in their childhood.

The exercise book is also enriched by some illustrations representing everyday life situations.