

# Introduction to Resilience

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# Introduction

The purpose of this manual is to support the training of professionals working with children on the basis of a modern method for prevention, upbringing, treatment, therapeutic treatment of children who have been exposed to traumatic experience and events. The manual is in aid of trainers on Introduction to Resilience as well as to those receiving training on the topic.

The manual aims to present, through summarised theses, the basic concepts of a human phenomenon, revealing how some people manage to recover and carry on with their lives after being exposed to hard experiences, and even to come out stronger, and others who lapse into various pathologies.

The manual features also theses on the so called resilience approach which involves both knowledge of pathology prevention in the cases of exposure to traumatic events and also knowledge of interventions aimed to support the resilience in individuals who have already experienced traumatic events.

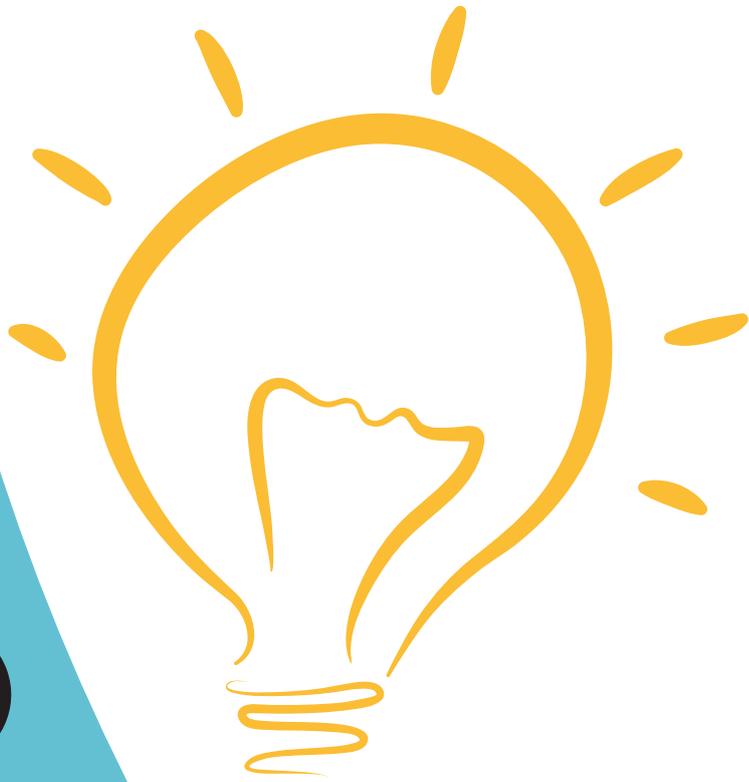
The manual tackles also the so called good treatment, which could be a concept of a comprehensive approach to prevention of violence and of the consequences of it and an intervention applied in parenting, education and relationships in the community.

Serving as an aid in the training, the manual features also certain theses about interactive training.

From the author



# Why use resilience approach?



It is probably a good idea to justify the introduction of the topic of resilience and the resilience based approach into the training of professionals, working with children and parents: teachers, psychologists, social workers, policemen, medical professionals, etc. Maybe it is important to answer the question – **Why exactly the resilience approach?**

## **Necessity to define practice in terms of concepts**

The practice of educational, pedagogical, socio-pedagogical work is still widely based on ideas generated through life experience rather than on theoretically based ones. The expression “Theory and practice are two completely different things” and its variations wrap in the “iron curtain” of ignorance a major part of the working practice and the provision of support to people. This “conceptualisation” through life experience, based on established “apparent knowledge” is more a sign of absence of conceptualisation and renders professional relations and work approaches commonplace.

The practice of **educational, pedagogical, socio-pedagogical, therapeutic work is still widely based** on belief in an ultimate true knowledge/theory. The family child-rearing practice still relies very much on a rather authoritative parenting style, convinced in the power of lecturing and punishment, including - physical one. Such “ideology”, even if not explicitly referred to, very often defines the relationships, behaviours, approaches and methods of work at schools, social services, communities. Thus children with difficulties have limited opportunities to receive support and the risk of deterioration and switching to destructive behaviour increases. It seems that this “common” practice turns into a dogma, becomes rigid and in that sense unresponsive to the individual child and their needs. There is a need to expand the knowledge, capacity for reflection/self-reflection of parents, teachers, medical doctors, psychologists, social workers, etc., which would enable them to understand child’s distress, anxiety, its manifestations and the ways to respond and provide support.

Signs of pseudo conceptualisation are observed, based on chaotic generalisation, expansion, amalgamation of knowledge and testing it into practice, which results in a rather contradictory experience. This is a case of using different types of knowledge, without correlation to a common concept or approach, which can be defined as chaotic eclecticism.

The conceptualisation of practice could be based on making sense of doing within a well-defined theoretical framework: evidence based approach, competence based approach, reform pedagogy, psychoanalytic approach, psychodynamic, transactional, systemic or other theoretic approach.

More and more often, the so called eclectic approaches appear, which, in terms of theory, acknowledge a person’s dynamics, uniqueness, etc., i.e. they recognize knowledge, derived on the basis of various theories, allow various theoretical supports, while consciously acknowledging eclectics, however eclectics which is aware of this otherness, aware of the ideas, concepts, limitations of this otherness. Resilience approach is one of these rationalised eclectic approaches, which constitutes a unity of conflicting knowledge, centred round a generally acknowledged phenomenon or a unity of conflicting knowledge centred round an acknowledged and seeking recognition amalgamation of characteristics, concepts, theses.

## Need of change in the approach to violence prevention and support of people exposed to violence

When discussing the hard issues of child upbringing, care, training, education, violence is among the most serious problems: violence against children and among children. An increasing number of professionals from various fields become aware that most of people's problems are related to violence they have been exposed to: conflicts, repeat maltreatment, crime, psychiatric disorders, addictions, etc. The topic of violence is also among the key ones in the field of education, healthcare and social services and care.

Professionals focus their attention on examining, making sense of, analysing, etc. the life story, early childhood, adolescence and hardships associated with these periods or the transitions between them. In order to understand, we examine more and more often the acts, the reasons; we focus efforts on the phenomenon of violence: cycle of violence, transgenerational repetitions, maltreatment – violence-needs – protection-measures – violence.

Researches on people's resilience, reveal that those who cope outnumber those who do not manage; that if out of ten abusers eight were victims of violence in their early childhood, out of ten children, who were victims of violence in their early childhood, not more than three or four become abusers. There is an increasing number of researches interested in those who cope in order to gain knowledge, which could help us to help the others.

The theory of resilience is a relatively new one, which in the past decades has a "leading role" in the helping work with children and young people all over the world.

# What is resilience?



## The notion of resilience

Resilience is an English term used in metallurgy and reflecting the ability of steel to return to its original form after being hit i.e. when referring to people, resilience is associated namely with their ability not only to recover but to also derive strength from disaster.

Resilience is a term originating from the Latin verb “to spring back”, which means also “to rescue” but can be used in the sense of protection<sup>1</sup> too. As can be seen, the dispute focuses not on the origin of the notion but rather on its content. The notion’s content expands and encompasses not only the response to the trauma but also the capability to protect oneself from its influence.

## The phenomenon of resilience

**The phenomenon of resilience is a natural process, it is part of many people’s lives.**

People coping with serious hardships and even experiencing a “steeling” effect thanks to difficulties, is a phenomenon which exists in life, we come across it, people have been telling us about it, we have read about it in books, we have seen it in movies. It is worth trying to find out why certain people manage to cope and live a fulfilling life, and others never manage to recover, the trauma defines their lives, we meet them in social and health services, police, prisons.

**Resilience is ability, capability to cope, recover after experiencing extremely hard traumatic events.**

Resilience is a notion which reflects the ability (a universal one) of an individual or a system to develop and thrive in very adverse conditions. Resilience is a notion which reflects the ability of people to recover after traumas and at that, in such a way which makes them even stronger. The most general understanding of resilience is such a “positive adaptation in the context of extremely difficult circumstances, after coping with which, we expect the individual’s functional or cognitive capabilities to grow”, “manifested competence in the context of significant challenges to adaptation”<sup>2</sup>

It is considered that in order to identify resilience, there needs to be a serious, prolonged trauma on the one hand, and absence of pathological functioning after it, on the other.<sup>3</sup>

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1. (Tisseron, S., 2007)

2. (Rutter 1985; Garmezy 1985; Masten and Coatsworth 1998).  
(Masten & Coatsworth, 1998, p. 206).

3. Jacques Lecomte, **La résilience après maltraitance, fruit d’une interaction entre l’individu et son environnement social**  
<http://odel.irevues.inist.fr/cahierspsychologiepolitique/index.php?id=1065>

## Resilience factors

Resilience is a psycho-social process and it is the result of the interaction of internal and external factors. Resilience is the result of the presence of protective and risk factors.<sup>4</sup>

Protective factors associated with resilience could be a good relationship with at least one adult; good capacity for active facing (face-to-face) of problems (coping); ability to establish good interpersonal relations; recognized competence in some specific area, by the child themselves and their environment.

Most often protective factors are associated with the presence of emotional and social security, shelter, food, living conditions.

Research reveals that children, who are described as resilient, are characterised by a better appearance, sociability and stable environment. These are children who have formed a secure attachment; they have not experienced loss; have not been neglected and have not been affected by their parents' deficits. In that sense, girls are more resilient than boys. It has been established that school progress is also a factor. All these factors are a powerful pre-condition for success at a later stage. They prove to be also very important as promotive<sup>5</sup> factors. The findings about the factors associated with resilience are very valuable; they tell us a lot about achieving true resilience: what are the steps that will enable disadvantaged children to achieve progress.

Resilience is a psychosocial dynamic process where one and the same factors can be both a resource, protection, strength and a risk factor.

It is a unique set of individual and social variables, functioning systematically at various levels.<sup>6</sup> Mechanisms of resilience do not constitute an individual trait or characteristic; they involve a number of processes, unifying quite a variety of mechanisms, which are to be identified since one factor can be considered a risk factor in a given situation and a protective one in another<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, to refer to them as risk factors could be misleading. The constellation of hardships has a complex structure, which could signify that things are not always what they seem to be. Protection is hidden in the way people cope with changes in life and their actions in the context of stressful and adverse circumstances. With reference to this, special attention needs to be paid to (tried and tested) processes which improve the chances for efficient coping with future stress and to those which provide an opportunity to people to overcome the consequences of past psycho-social hazards.

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4. (Scales and Leffert, 1999; Benson, Leffert, Scales, and Blyth, 1998).  
(Rutter, M. 1990) (Garmezy 1985)

5. Masten and Powell (2003), **Marc A. Zimmerman**

6. Rutter (2012) Masten & Narayan (2012)

7. Rutter, M., 1985; Hart, A., D. Blincow, 2007

**Extremely important are the affective supports, the belonging, the bonds both within the nuclear and the extended family, in the community, school.**

This belonging is the result of acceptance, investing, love, unconscious processes<sup>8</sup>, *bond with an adult*, *“tutor” bond*. Finding a life purpose is both a criterion and a factor of resilience<sup>9</sup> and those can be the result of both the emotional supports and the individual capabilities, coping strategies, talents, sense of humour, etc. Many researchers point out the importance of the ability to mentalise, to make sense of the idea of the self.

**Resilience is more than an internal capacity** – “there is substantial evidence available that resilience, judging from the child experience, depends more on structural conditions, relationships and access to social justice rather than on individual traits.”<sup>10</sup>

**Resilience is not a single act, which happens once and for all.** What is more, an individual can experience resilience in one field and to fail in another. The process of resilience is individual for the individual person i.e. it happens differently, at a different time and is determined by different factors. At the same time, in terms of content, it is more of a holistic process, it concerns changes in the overall functioning of the individual. Resilience is a “biological, psycho-affective, social and cultural process, which allows new development after traumatic experience”.<sup>11</sup>

**Resilience could be a change, the result of a turning point<sup>12</sup> in everyday life.**

Resilience comes from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources. The idea is that small things in life can have serious consequences, and also that once the idea of resilience mechanisms is understood, they do not seem unusual anymore. The “turning point” concept involves also important encounters in crucial moments of a person’s life, which make him/her take one direction or another, for example, getting married to an appropriate person, right friendship.

## **A resilience mentor or tutor**

The majority of researchers reveal the *significance of human bonding, of a special relationship between an adult and a child, which is of key importance for thriving in the context of difficulties* – such a person is defined as a resilience mentor, **“tutor”**.

8. **Critères de résilience**, Boris Cyrulnik, **Directeur d’enseignement, université de Toulon** (France)

9. Stephan Vanistendael, Sociologue, démographe, secrétaire général adjoint, chargé de recherche et de développement, BICE (Bureau International Catholique de l’Enfance), Genève.

10. Ungar, M. 2005

11. B. Cyrulnik, 1999 ;Б. Сирулник, 2011, Manciaux, M., (1995, 2003

12. Hart, A., D.Blinow, 2007

“Resilience tutor” can be a person who treats the child as a human being, talks with them, “he/she is able to express emotions and empathy; he/she is interested, as a matter of priority, in a person’s positive traits; gives the other person the freedom to talk and to construct themselves; does not get discouraged by failure; respects the choice of path the other person has made in order to cope; he/she is able to associate the relationship with the child with the law; avoids using polite words which cause pain: I can step in your shoes, why didn’t you say so, this has to be forgotten<sup>13</sup>. The resilience mentor is a person who thrusts the child and the child trusts them<sup>14</sup>. It is very important to have in mind that this person has influence over the development of the self and the perception of the self, the mentalisation or the ability to symbolize.

## Types of resilience – “popular resilience”, “real resilience” and “inoculated resilience”<sup>15</sup>.

**Popular resilience** is the resilience referred to in everyday speech to describe everyone who has overcome a difficult situation. In that sense, resilience is something which almost all of us have. Those of us who have had good enough childhood, have gone through many challenges and difficulties, even if they seemed absolutely insurmountable. We live, love, work, gain experience through sorrow and pain and then we overcome them.

**“Real resilience** is displayed by the people who are more vulnerable rather than capable to cope with the difficulties, than we could have expected, given the circumstances and compared to what we know happens to the children in such situations. When genuine resilience is observed, it is important to find out what is it that brought about such unexpectedly good results and how this could benefit others. Was it the “ordinary magic”, “some basic everyday activity or some organised change had taken place, which had an impact on the lowest level”. The genuine resilience concept focuses on the protective mechanisms, which help the child to go through difficulties and thrive.

**“Inoculated resilience”** – the principles identical to immunology apply: difficulties are treated as resources or protective mechanisms. Therefore, resilience, as a concept, provides an opportunity to transform the negative into positive or at least to withstand/prevent the negative consequences of hardships.

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13. Jacques Lecomte *La résilience après maltraitance, fruit d’une interaction entre l’individu et son environnement social*

14. Manciaux, M., 2001, 2003

15. Hart, A., D.Blinow, 2007

## Resilience criteria

Resilience criteria include positive changes/characteristics in a person's life, which enable them to function successfully i.e. various fields of competence are identified<sup>16</sup>, such as good progress at school/education/intellectual field, social competence and clinical symptomatology.

Those could include also successful functioning in various areas of life, such as trouble-free adolescence, employment, satisfactory sexual relations, parenting without repetition of the traumatic experience from their own family, wide social network, etc.

In order to be certain that coping did happen, i.e. the resilience was experienced, there must be time elapsed since the traumatic event/events. Many authors consider<sup>17</sup> that **sustainable change** or long enough period after the trauma is one of the leading criteria of resilience experienced.

Four groups of mental constructs can be specified as **ego-resilience criteria**: ability to be happy, capacity to engage in productive activity (work), good emotional security, ability to build satisfying relationships with the other people<sup>18</sup>.

**The way a person talks about the traumatic event/s, could also be considered a resilience criterion:** if the way he/she talks reveals that they are still holding fast to the trauma and accepting it as an identification support or downplay it, throw it out of their life and forget it. Most often, people who have experienced resilience i.e. they have made sense of the traumatic event and have integrated it in their life in a constructive way, manage to talk about it in a relaxed, open manner, reflecting on it, without being dramatic and trying to avoid the memory of it.

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16. Kaufman J., Cook A., Arny L., Jones B. & Pittinsky T. (1994) Problems defining resiliency: illustrations from the study of maltreated children, *Development and psychopathology*, 6, 215-229.

17. Manciaux, M., (1995)

18. (Block J. and J. Blok, 2002)

# The resilience approach



## The essence of the approach

The resilience approach focuses in the first place on studying the resources, capacities, factors, strengths, etc. of people and communities in order to enhance our knowledge of this phenomenon.

The resilience approach provides a conceptual framework for studying and applying what is helpful in our work, and not of the risk factors, the problems; it focuses on coping, strengths when working individually, case evaluation.

Next, based on the knowledge gained through studying the capabilities, capacities, factors, supports, etc. of the people, groups, communities, which have managed to cope despite hard, difficult, traumatic events, circumstances, hardships, etc., we could develop knowledge how to implement practices which could contribute to better resilience of the children and youth when exposed to such experiences, more mechanisms for coping and moving forward, how to assist in developing resilience in children to prevent psycho-social pathology. It is not only about reducing the risk factors, prevention of violence, traumatic experiences but rather about building supports, which could make them more resilient.

Resilience approach comprises also knowledge about support (care, education, social work, psychotherapy) to children and adults, who have already experienced traumatic events.

This knowledge encompasses both the relationships between the person intervening and the child/adult, and intervention methods and techniques. Resilience approach involves action, intervention; direction for seeking a solution; a different way of considering tough problems; it offers areas of possible intervention, where elements of resilience can be identified; the possible intervention is developed on the basis of the specific needs, situation.

Resilience is an **eclectic, multidisciplinary and multi-theory approach**, which opens up an opportunity for meeting and discussions on human knowledge about the people, groups, communities, even about the cities<sup>19</sup>. It is rather an approach, i.e. aspiration to use the knowledge gained, while relying on some **key concepts without ignoring the knowledge gained by various other sciences, as well as by various schools, theories, concepts.**

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19. Roberge, A. Élaboration d'une modèle d'action pour la transformation des territoires urbaines en milieux de vie durable, résiliente et viables.2013, Université de Sherbrooke.

## Knowledge about supports for resilience

The approach regards *the relationship between the child and the adult as a key one*, and at that, a relationship which can be defined as one involving unconditional acceptance of the child as a human being. In order to be resilient, each child needs at least one adult who accepts them as they are, respects their human nature, understood as an agent.

The ability to form attachment bond is extremely important, it can differ with respect to the two parents and it is a condition for the building of relationships, including intimate ones at a later stage. Usually, this ability is developed by the parents. The approach underlines the huge *importance of one's own family* and the way the child is treated by its members, for the child's ability to cope with crisis situations. The family provides the basis for the development of the child's personality, which is what an individual has in advance, without efforts, and if they have it, this is a real wealth. People's capacity, and the child's one in particular, develops through the relationships, supports, the social network, capabilities, abilities, talents. The families which experience difficulties, which do not provide "good enough parental care", need support, "sharing of the care of their children", and not replacement.

Another key concept concerns *the child's capacity to form multiple attachment relationships* i.e. the understanding that the child can form more than one attachment bond and those can be a source of resilience in case the parent was unable to play this role. The insufficient attachment can rely on the child's capacity of multiple attachment. The difficulties in the family, manifested as behavioural difficulties of the child, may find a solution when the child is enrolled in kindergarten, the class, friendship, through the relationship with the teacher, engaging with art, etc. Fitting within this context are *the agreements or the sharing of the care and the attitude*, which define the significance of the extended family, foster family, school, community, the neighbourhood for the resilience. The child and at a later stage the adolescent, find supports in all those or through them. The adolescent may reorganise their attachment, they may expand their constellation of affections to involve belonging and relationships, sexual choice and making sense, which could result in resilience.

**The resilience approach defines the significance of another adult "mentor" of resilience.** The mentor is namely a person who can accept the child as they are, to respect their personality of a human being and he/she can be a relative, priest, teachers, other professional, etc.

**The team of professionals has the important tasks to form an attachment bond and then they can be a "tutor" of resilience.** They accompany the child in their social and mental development, they coordinate and evaluate the effect of the interventions and adjusts them to meet the child's needs. Depending on the child's age and their specific needs, the care for the child's educational progress in school, choice of career, relationships with the others, difficulties in socialising, may be shared with the other members of the team: psychologists, social workers, pedagogs. In fact, the involvement of other professionals in the work with the child is important for a number of reasons. On the one hand, this ensures a professional response to the child's needs, which increases their opportunities for resilience at a later age. Equally important is to widen the range of the child's encounters with other people, which increases their chances to meet a resilience

mentor – the person who accepts the child as they are, treats them as a personality, not as a victim and thus provides them with another life prospect; but also a person who becomes someone special for the child without even being aware of this.

A key thesis of the resilience approach is the one about the *significance of the support that the social network provides* i.e. not merely the social environment but the relationships within it.

The social network is involved in the “putting of a value” to a person and in that sense, it can have a highly compensating effect with relation to the depreciating impact of other factors. The social network matters for the child’s, adolescent’s, the adult’s belonging to the community, neighbourhood, town, etc. Resilience helps us go back to the meaning of things, to ask ourselves how it happened that in some places the school and even the kindergarten have become insecure, unattractive places for the children to be and they are very often even perceived by them as threatening. How have we reached a stage when we move one child from a given kindergarten to another because they “threaten the security of the other children or disrupt them”? How has this approach become already an “acceptable, normal practice” in the primary school? And maybe it will help us consider how the school can be a secure place for each child, including the traumatised one. The answer is simple: by accepting them as a child, a personality, and not merely as a student. However, putting this into practice is difficult; it requires change in the adults’ attitude: both parents and teachers.

## Attitude to the child, who has experienced traumatic events

Another key concept is accepting the person, who has experienced a serious trauma as a personality, a human being, and not as a victim, a patient seeking help, a vulnerable person, etc. The necessity to support a person’s resilience, i.e. their general capacity to cope, makes us perceive them as a subject, who builds their relations with the others, and not only as a person having problems, a victim of violence.

The approach perceives the *person as a multilayered personality*, and understanding them requires psychological schools knowledge; systematic, dynamic, behavioural, etc., but also a psycho-social, cultural and ethno-cultural approaches. In that sense, the approach takes into account the complexity of the problems’ origin and of the difficulties experienced by people.

Key understanding of how to approach the desired and supported change in a person is to **focus on making sense of, understand and accept the event experienced; seeking for and developing an identity, a perception of oneself as a person who does not identify themselves with the trauma, who has a choice, who can be.**

*This approach involves a more direct work with the trauma*, i.e. it is named, the person is supported in getting to understand it, to “learn” about the accompanying emotions, about the consequences for themselves. It is particularly important in the course of rendering support, to identify the person’s resources for coping with the trauma, strengths, which they have already resorted to but are unaware of.

When applying this approach, the principle of working with the strengths involves the understanding that these strengths are individual – there is no opposition between strengths and weaknesses; the focus is on the ability to perceive *each* trait as a strength as well. In such a situation, tough problems gain a different aspect, they are considered from a different angle.

The resilience approach questions strongly the so called neutrality of the supporting person, which involves absence of closeness and relationships; the approach places a focus on the understanding that it is a sincere attitude of unconditional acceptance of the other person, of a constructive relationship, of absence of evaluation and judgment. This is how the relationships of various types of closeness, developed in the process of support, are legitimised, without going into extremes. In other words, the attitude of support is still based on the general, while acknowledging the possibility of a “special” human relationship being developed in certain cases, as part of the professional one, and then it stands the chance of being a special resilience factor for the person in distress.

## Resilience based interventions

Intervention models comprise prevention, perceived as “strengthening the person’s supports”, support for good parenting, changes in the child institutions, in the services and institutions providing support.

It is about the notions of “good treatment/attitude” and the notion of “shared or joint parenting”, which will be considered as a conceptualising socio-pedagogical intervention.

The resilience approach defines concepts such as attachment, relationships, learning, constellations, identity, identification, mentalisation, which are used to describe the individual, group and community processes for coping with life’s hardships by individuals, groups and the communities at risk. These are process, which describe the change in people, which professionals try to attain through various intervention models.

These intervention models, perceived as highly competent psycho-pedagogical interventions, are based on two more basic concepts, which are strongly influenced by the resilience approach and incorporate principles and values along with practices, approaches and methods of action. These are the concepts of “good treatment/attitude” and “shared or joint parenting”, which will be considered as conceptualising the socio-pedagogic intervention.

## The good treatment

Change of objectives: from prevention of abuse to “good treatment/attitude”.

This is a significant change, which encompasses (it is important to encompass) more so the practice of care, upbringing, education, social support/social work. This change should move from prevention of maltreatment, as protection, for example, which is the essence of providing help, to support for enhancing the wellbeing of the person, who is in need of help. This is a change of conceptual, ideological nature.

Maltreatment as well as “good treatment” are both terms from the 80-ies, with maltreatment signifying a set of actions, behaviours of one person to another, which inflict suffering on them (psychological, emotional, physical, etc.). The etymology of *traite* derives from the Latin *tractare*, which means “to take care of”, “to handle”, “to hold in one’s hands”<sup>20</sup>.

As a notion and concept *good treatment* (*bientraitence*) is a neologism, which is opposed to *maltreatment*, since it would be more efficient if professional efforts were focused on ensuring better treatment/attitude rather than on coping with the consequences of maltreatment. What is more, the question of whether the absence of maltreatment automatically means good treatment is raised.

It is extremely difficult to define<sup>21</sup> the „good treatment” and if the family functions, types of families, types of upbringing, etc., serve as a reference point, this concept could also be considered from the point of view of the various theories and schools tackling human development and functioning. „The mere fact that the word (*bientraitence*) is in circulation in the world of helping professionals, is an indication of change in the attitudes. It is known that maltreatment exists though we already cope better. We are aware that the major part of parents does better in this difficult area (children’s upbringing). We know that the desire to attain perfection in the process of upbringing children is a dangerous utopia. What is needed is to simply consider treating our children well in order to limit the damages”. This kind of thinking enables us to say, Cyrulnik goes on to say, that “good treatment is not non-maltreatment, as if it is sufficient not to harm a child in order to consider that they are well treated. There should be no maltreatment, however, this is far from good treatment. If it were the case, it would be sufficient to provide the child with a stocked fridge, good television programme, nice clothes and to tell them “bye” every morning in order to ensure that they develop well emotionally. Since, talking about the “golden deprivations”<sup>22</sup>, it is not the fridge but the person next to the child who is the factor for the child’s maturing.

## Good treatment – respecting the child’s needs

Recognising, understanding the child’s specific needs is of key importance for good parenting, for the choice of educational practices, of the interventions of the various professionals. In the parenting practice, the care, upbringing, education, helping, understanding of the child’s needs, distinguishing them from the children’s wishes, presupposes transition from the life-experience-based understanding about the desires and needs to making sense of them via knowledge.

Sometimes, the emotional needs of the child are not recognised, understood, but are underestimated by all these practices. It is more often the case that within the context of mainstream pedagogy what is respected are achievements, knowledge, obedience and material security. As far as ensuring the child’s material and physical security, for example, is linked to ensuring their health and life, it is natural that these needs will be considered of greater priority.

20. Buissières - Dubourg, F., 2011; Cyrulnik, B., 2005

21. Gabel, M., F. Jesu, M. Mahciaux, 2000

22. Lemay, M., 1993

However, focusing on those alone, the underestimation of the needs related to the child's psychological state, relationships, etc. lead to interventions perceived by children even as violence.

*Resilience* as an approach, which respects human knowledge in its diversity and controversy, endeavours to find out, on the one hand, how the relation need–traumatic experience (such as abandonment, violence, deprivations) functions, i.e. how the human being “endures” this dramatic negligence, deprivation, even displacement of namely the specific “human” element of our needs. As living creatures, we have the same or similar needs as those of all other living creatures. At the same time, we have needs, which seem to be specific, inherent only to people. It does not take much knowledge and research in order to be convinced that we, the people, need to be loved, to spend time with other people, to develop, to succeed, etc. Researchers studying the resilience draw on the scientific knowledge and practice about the consequences of unmet needs or about pathological mechanisms of satisfying them. Those can be love through violence, relationship through violence, etc. or everything that we often refer to as maltreatment.

Respect means, in the first place, understanding and recognition of these needs, i.e. understanding the specific needs (depending on the individual characteristics, age, stages of development, etc.) through which common needs are displayed. As already mentioned, this is one of the major difficulties for the helping professionals.

Respect involves also efforts to satisfy these needs. The good treatment contributes to constructing the child's identity, which is a complex and conflicting process, which brings to the fore affective, cognitive, social and ideological components; in other words, identity is a formation, which includes components such as affective belonging, intellectual achievements, social autonomy and individual ideology<sup>23</sup>.

**The child's affective needs are of basic significance and satisfying them or not determines the specifics of belonging to the family, peer groups, school, community, etc.** They express the child/person's needs of relationship with the other people, manifested differently in the case of different people, and at the various periods and stages of life. Research data and practice reveal that these needs, especially during the first months of life, have a fundamental significance for the human being<sup>24</sup>.

**The need of belonging is the first manifestation of affective needs and is met by the first relationship, attachment and belonging of the child to the family, which lays the foundations of their identity.** At the end of the day, parenting and early childhood are linked and this concept serves as a serious explanatory model, which can be used in the work of social workers and social educators, especially when they prepare the parents.

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23. Pourtois, J.-P., H. Desmet, 2009

24. Bowlby R. Shpitz, Lacanq J., Lakade, F., 1999

Attachment<sup>25</sup>, the ability to build relationships and understanding it, are of great significance for the understanding of the mechanisms through which early childhood events affect the life of the child, the adolescent, the adult. Securely attached children are able to build relationships with friends, other adults, intimate relationships, parenting bonds at a later stage. Most often, the children with insecure attachment can be seen in infant homes, where they display the so called “false autism” (the children appear uninterested in anyone, they spend their time in repetitive rocking movement, head banging, etc.). If we use again the example of institutionalisation, where forming an attachment constitutes a serious problem, we often see cases of children, who have long been placed in institutions, “clinging” to every adult, forming quick relationships followed by quick separations.

**Resilience approach<sup>26</sup> studies in greater depth the consequences of maternal deprivation and without underestimating it, introduces the notion of multiple attachment**, i.e. children’s ability to benefit from their environment and to form multiple relationships. Resilience approach points out that the “internal model”, established during the early childhood period, is not necessarily unchangeable. Indeed, the first relationship is very important and it is necessary to make efforts to support it, however, there are also other options for supporting the change of this model and this is the adolescence period, which is also sensitive with relation to relationships building, i.e. to changing the “internal model”. *There is an opportunity for restructuring of the attachment during the adolescence* if the adults develop constructive relationships with the young person. It is very important when evaluating the case, to identify the child’s needs in terms of their affective needs.

*The need of acceptance is among the affective needs, the meeting of which presupposes trusting the child, expressing love, making clear distinction between not accepting certain behavior and accepting the child.* The acceptance of the child is important for the way they perceive themselves, for their idea of themselves. Acceptance is symbolically expressed through naming the child, welcoming them in the family; good parents accept the child, their personality, their human nature “unconditionally”. It is good for the child if any other care also manifests unconditional acceptance.

*The need of investing in the child, of the parents (or those who cover for them in the daily care) pinning their hopes, desires, dreams on them in fact constitutes the need to feel important for someone and them making plans about us in the future.* This allows us to also plan ahead and dream about this future. This is a key function of parenting: to open up space for their child’s social goals and dreams. Of course, the child may accept and fulfil these projects as their own, they may reject them and develop completely different ones; reconstruct them based on their desires and needs and make them their own; understand them, accept them and draw up new plans of their own, etc. It is important, as many researchers state, that there are such projects. We come across children who have no projects of their own, who live for the day, who do not see their future, and most often these are children abandoned by their parents or children maltreated by them in some other way, children whose parents had “bad” projects about them or did not have any.

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25. Bowlby; Mary Ainsworth, 1996

26. Rutter, M, 1979; Sirulnyk, B., 2011

## What can we do as professionals to support meeting the child's affective needs?

*Training and support of the parents and other structures sharing the care of children aged 0-7 years, to be aware of the importance of affective needs, to be “good enough parents”, to be able to talk with their child, to support them in their freedom to create and grow, etc.; for upbringing and care focused on promoting the child's spontaneousness and creativity in the family, the foster family, kindergarten, etc., giving up the “traditional” upbringing aimed at reproduction, carrying out of tasks, stimulating obedience, i.e. switching to psychoanalytical pedagogy<sup>27</sup>. Training and support of parents or caregivers of adolescents who have experienced traumatic events.*

*Socio-pedagogic work with families at risk for supporting the relationship of a child with both parents, for the child having sense of belonging to the family, acknowledging the child, maintaining connection with the child even when they are not raised by the parents.*

*Direct work with children at risk with a view to meeting their needs of acceptance and belonging through the relationships with the adults, sharing the care of them or expanding the affective constellation, support of the affective shield<sup>28</sup>, which ensures a reasonable balance between freedom and frustration, as guided again by the psychoanalytic pedagogy. Including pedagogy in the project of encouraging the child's planning ahead in the future – it is of key importance to encourage the child to be responsible of themselves, which is again influenced by the relationships with the adults. The action is the result of engaging and it enables the child to see ahead, to start “projecting” themselves in the future.*

## Cognitive needs – the fulfilment, achievements

*The need of stimulation is met through stimuli from the outside world, the family, the community and society as a whole. The child's development is also contributed to by the learning, i.e. acquiring of new knowledge, skills, experience; by the training, experiencing, imitation, etc. – they also depend on the stimuli the child receives in the process of learning. Here as well, the relationship which enables the child's identification comes first but apart from it or along with it, important is also the specific praise, which helps the learned things to “stick”, as well as the motivation to learn.*

*Prevalence of the positive stimuli in the learning practice of children and also of the children at risk (at home, kindergartens, school). Very often, parents' behaviour is dominated by negative stimuli and bans. When a child raised in such a family does not receive the necessary stimulation outside the family either, they do not develop motivation to succeed. This failure to meet the needs of stimuli results in reduced or missing learning motivation, which has a negative impact on achievements, which decreases the motivation even further and the child breaks more and more toys, “does not want” to go to school, becomes aggressive, gets moved to another school, etc.*

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27. Pourtois, J.-P., H. Desmet, 2002

28. Cyrulink, B. 2011

*Need of experimenting, creating, creativity of the children should be considered with relation to meeting their emotional needs. A child, whose need of bond and security has not been met and who has not been stimulated to learn all the time, rarely reveals a need to experiment. Sometimes, however, it is namely creativity that reveals the other needs. Very often, in the case of emotionally deprived children, engaging in artistic activities enables a general progress in displaying their needs and provides an opportunity for a general response on their part.*

*Need of „boosting”, enhancement, means that the child needs more complicated “tasks” to enable them to improve their capacity. The child uses what they have achieved so far as a basis of a subsequent achievement but in order to make this possible, they need to be given new “tasks” from the so called “zone of proximal development”<sup>29</sup>: in order to “solve” them, the child deploys more effort than usual and achieving success is more rewarding. Thus a need of “solving ever more complicated tasks” appears. Generally, it arises as a leading need as early as the end of the early childhood as a result of good parenting and successful initial socialisation of the child. When the conditions offered are different, when there is a serious failure to meet the previous needs, overcoming the consequences requires great efforts.*

*The children at risk of dropping out from school, for example, often lag behind a lot in their studies; the “tasks” for them are in the “zone of very remote development” and they are unable to solve them at all. A child, who is unable to read and write, cannot learn a lesson in geography on their own no matter what efforts they make. They need help in order to “catch up”, to experience success in learning and only then it can be expected that they will try on their own. This is a long process, influenced by various factors, related again to meeting all the child’s needs.*

### *How can we assist in meeting the child’s cognitive needs?*

*First comes the so called Rogerian thinking about learning or the learning as seen by the humanistic psychology and pedagogy, which perceives the adult as a facilitator and mediator of the child’s learning and not as direct disseminator of knowledge. As C. Rogers says, each person has a capacity to learn and learning is successful when it matters to the learner, when it is part of relations, which result in change in the organisation of the self, i.e. when the learner is accepted, acknowledged, involved. The adult has an authentic attitude to the child and their learning. Any threat to this attitude is a threat to learning<sup>30</sup>.*

*Next, it is important to point out the active learning, learning through action. The social learning theory provides good arguments about how important it is for children to take an active role in learning; and about techniques such as experiencing, playing, role-playing, modelling, training. The active learning methods have an effect of engaging, individualisation and they support each child’s and person’s capacity.*

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29. Vygotsky L.S., 1984

30. Rogers C, 1972

Differentiated pedagogy and active pedagogy as a response to the needs focuses on development of cognitive differentiation, psychological differentiation and socio-cultural differentiation. Experimenting at any age is extremely important. Here, the role of the adult is more of a mediator and disseminator of information and of a “driver” of the child’s cognitive development<sup>31</sup>.

## Social needs – social autonomy

Good treatment involves acceptance, love, respect, appreciation, learning and clear, flexible, rationalised, agreed boundaries, rules, framework.

*The need of social communication transpires through the children’s needs of communication in their community, which are specific. Friendship, the various groups people wish to belong to, interest groups, etc., constitute the social network a person functions within. The variety of this network satisfies the needs of communication, through which the child finds their place in the community. The social status, social roles are important for the child’s identity. When conducting a social needs evaluation, it is important to examine the social communication in order to identify the social network, the “social genosociogram”<sup>32</sup>, as referred to by some representatives of the systemic approach and which is successfully integrated by the resilience approach. Very often people say “he/she is just that type of child”, he/she does not want to communicate, to have friends. It is good to be aware that they need social communication and to find out what this means in this particular case: rejection by the community and the group, difficulties in the social skills, communication skills. Since this is a need, children find a way to meet it through models, which are not very constructive: joining groups of elderly children, groups with anti-social behaviour, isolation in the world of “internet games”, etc.*

*The need of appreciation is directly linked to meeting the previous need. The child not only needs to communicate and belong to social groups, they need social appreciation, i.e. a positive status. In that sense, being powerful social agents, the kindergarten and the school are of huge importance for the self-worth. Unfortunately, very often, children at risk are not socially accepted and this has an impact on the formation of their identity.*

*The need of structuring, of boundaries is also important for the identity and for the child’s overall development. The child needs a structure and boundaries; the person needs them all their life. They make our life predictable and secure. The rules and norms, which define the various boundaries in social interaction, need to be created with this purpose in mind. Often, the boundaries created for children are imposed unconditionally, without any criteria, with no respect of the child’s personality and children do not understand that these boundaries are meant to ensure security; they consider them to be pressure exerted on them. The absence of rules is also a form of maltreatment, which does not respect the child and hampers their development.*

In order to identify themselves in an appropriate, positive, proactive way, the child needs love and boundaries.

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31. Pourtois, J.- P., H. Desmet, 2002

32. Schutzenberger , A.A, 2014

## **How can we assist in meeting the social needs?**

Communication with children is an area where parents and adults have things to learn and to develop.

The pedagogy of the communication, learning to communicate goes beyond learning and is again influenced by the relationships and contacts. In that sense, from a socio-pedagogic point of view, it is important to support change in the communication between children and adults and to make sense of the significance of communication for a person's entry into the social sphere.

**The social may be a supporting, accepting, open place, assigning roles and functions, which make the person fulfilled and successful.**

The social may be humiliating, damaging, crushing. It is professionals' responsibility to assist parents so that they/their replacements, relatives manage to engage children actively during the "transition periods" of their lives so that they can cope with frustration, integrate the rules in their own internal framework of freedom and autonomy, self-respect and respect for the others. These occurrences are individual, unique, and can be handled again through the attitude, accompanying, respect and consideration for the child's personality, treating them as a subject and not as a "blank slate".

## **Spiritual needs, needs of ideology are the needs of good, truth and beauty**

The perceptions of good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly define the child's inner ideology, inner ethics and values. This is influenced by the relationships in the family but not so much through lecturing, instructions, but rather through the relationships, links, learning, achievements.

Every person has such needs but meeting them is related to the previous ones in a fundamental way. Ideological dimensions encompass the area of values, which influence the responses to the child's affective, cognitive and social needs.

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“Finally, in terms of practical upbringing, good treatment is related to the forming of the child’s identity, which appears to be multi-layered; it seems important to favour multiple identity; therefore, it is good for parents and educators to try and develop opposing prospects: dependence (kinship, traditions, belonging), independence (autonomy, innovation); social adaptation and individual fulfilment; seeking an active response to the needs or passive acceptance of affectation or stimulation; attachment to parents, attachment to peers. At the same time, the upbringing should display simultaneously trust and tenderness, love and structuring, respect and friendship. And finally, it is important to know that identity’s platform are “attachment and investment”.<sup>33</sup>



33. Pourtois, J.-P., H. Desmet, 2002

# Bientraitance in School



## Why is it necessary to discuss *bienveillance* of children in school?

The term *bienveillance*, i.e. good or positive treatment, has made its way into the helping professions and in other areas of working with people through the values of professional ethics. As an alternative to maltreatment, *bienveillance* stands for an approach of humanisation of the field of humanitarian treatment, which explains its strong conceptual affinities with humanistic education and teaching, as well as with humanistic person-centred therapy and counselling.<sup>34</sup> Naturally, the term is associated with the treatment of people in different institutions whose functions include education, rehabilitation, care, social services, healthcare etc. Its advance has been paralleled by that of *care* and *welfare*, and it further renders itself to conceptualisation and articulation as *good-enough treatment*.<sup>35</sup>

One key assumption giving direction to various studies and professional debates is that the above-mentioned institutions can be maltreating.

As a result, different approaches are sought, such as resilience support programmes in schools.<sup>36</sup>

In the last decade, the term *bienveillance* has often been used to indicate quality standards as sets of rules. The introduction of standards and rules is not unambiguous as, on the one hand, enlarging the scope and introducing clear rules is a form of prevention against maltreatment, but, on the other, it can limit creativity and the individuality of relationships,<sup>37</sup> shifting the focus towards demonstration of compliance with rules rather than assurance of people's well-being.

As a field of interpersonal relationships, teaching and education also become topics of interest for any analysis of the relations between maltreatment and *bienveillance* or of the quality standards of school relationships.

*Education and children's rights* are the main driver for such discussions in many European countries following their ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The need to reconceptualise the teaching, education and training of children in school in the context of respect for their rights has introduced changes in the terminology used, to which the adoption of *bienveillance*, *best interest of the child*, and *educational services* can testify. The relationship between people's rights and services to meet their needs is easy to see.

At times, the approach to reconceptualise the education and teaching of children in the context of children's rights can be quite contradictory, wavering between incompetence and underestimation. There are instances when the mandatory issue following any mention of children's rights at all levels of the educational community is the importance of children's obligations and responsibilities. Approaching children's rights in such a simplified manner is far more widespread than could be assumed based on our claims to civilisation. More often than not, promotion of the rights-obligations relationship is due

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34. Rogers, C., 1972

35. Following D Winnicott's concept of the good-enough mother.

36. Hart, A. Resilience approaches to supporting young people's mental health, University of Briton, 2015

37. Rouzel, J., 2014

to unfamiliarity with the rights and the best-interest principle underpinning the Convention, as otherwise it would be clear that their use has different implications. Children's rights to life, family, access to health, education etc. cannot be interpreted in the context of obligations simply because their assurance rests on adults.

## **The need to discuss maltreatment – bientraitance in school**

At first glance, such a need arises most likely as a result of the *numerous school issues* that are often discussed from a public and political perspective rather than in professional methodological and organisational contexts. At the political level, questions concerning **the poor quality of education and the lack of connection between school knowledge and real-life skills are increasingly common.**

In the public domain, the image of students suffers one blow after another with statistics reporting increasing incidents of little children playing truant or having unacceptable behaviour in school. A growing number of questions are raised about the *alienation of children from school* and value systems, confrontation with teachers, violence among children, and the non-commitment of parents.

Given the above, it is somewhat surprising that so few cases of *self-reflection* on the situation on behalf of schools are known. Most problems are attributed to children, parents or society. Various forums on school dropout never trace the issue back to the school and the manner of treatment of children there. One is left with the impression that schools, education and teachers are a-priori good and doing their best, as opposed to today's children, who are different and do not show an interest in anything; their parents, who are also disinterested; the lack of public respect for the teaching job; and the meagre wage for teachers' labour awarded by the government.

Without wishing to underestimate any of the above reasons, I would like to discuss the school as an underlying reason. Does bientraitance really exist there, or is what we consider fundamentally good in fact an instance of maltreatment?

**Bientraitance is actually a response to the need for psycho-pedagogical normalisation.**

The pedagogy of obedience and discipline has been seen as the sole pedagogy acceptable for far too long. Regardless of any creative approaches and innovations discussed, they never break the matrix of the school as a venue where rightful adults exert an influence on as yet unrightful children, and whose mission is to turn the latter into rightful adults in the only way possible, i.e. through education.

**In fact, pedagogy and other education and teaching sciences have built up a knowledge bank of the child and of the child's relations with adults during the development process that far exceeds this simplified model.**

The issue of bientraitance in school can be considered in the context of a return to the meaning and purpose of the school and an understanding of the actual role of teachers and the school in any child's life. Raising this issue will possibly put forward the question of pedagogy and its development in Bulgaria.

*The bienveillance of children generally combines respect and restraint.* It is a treatment of consideration of children's needs, respect of their dignity, assurance of their rights, support of their independence and individuality within a clear, meaningful and flexible framework.

## **Maltreatment in school – the phenomenon of institutional maltreatment**

*Institutional maltreatment* is a curious phenomenon, whose existence cannot be denied. The lack of respect for people's needs as shown by various public institutions, including schools, the disregard of individual human rights, the abuse of real power, and the presence of numerous restrictions, requirements and prohibitions for users are some of the most obvious signs of maltreatment.

**One very common manifestation of the maltreatment phenomenon is attributing all difficulties, problems and failures to users.**

In the process of interaction, it is always the institution that is the rightful party, whereas the responsibility for any fault lies with the client or the user, meaning that, in such a context, changes should be sought in the latter. As an educational service provider, the school shows serious faults, such as illiteracy upon completion of the elementary level of education, an alarmingly large proportion of dropouts among school children etc. At the same time, no professional attempt is made to look for the underlying causes within the service, most probably because it is not considered as one. Instead, its existence as a totalitarian institution does not invite an understanding of its activities, but of power and its maintenance.

**The school, in its traditional form, bears many features of the totalitarian institution,** such as the judgement that is at times exercised at entry into elementary school; the collective model of pedagogical work, where group interests preside over those of the individual; the instrumentalisation of children as objects and means of fulfilment of syllabi and curricula designed without them or their parents; rules and guidebooks set up by the institution without the involvement of children and their families; practically secured manifestations of psychological violence and passive neglect towards children that are different; violence among children; antagonising parents against certain children who do not fit the established model etc.

*School staff could be a major contributor to maltreatment,* both due to traditionally authoritarian relationship models, which are difficult to change, and, paradoxically enough, to the very lack of competence concerning the education and training of teachers, directors and pedagogical specialists. The lack of sufficiently qualified staff able to design an active teaching methodology and the internal rules and organisation of the teaching process somehow promote an "advantageous" environment that transforms judgement, sarcastic verbal abuse, ridicule, threats, power abuse and the like into characteristics of the school environment. Such "pedagogues" also happen to consider as fully professional and natural an assessment based on behaviour, and so to award the obedient child and punish the one whose behaviour they regard as unacceptable.

Signs of psychological abuse by teachers are not recognised as such, but are often seen as a natural consequence of the difficulties associated with teaching today's children and interacting with today's parents, where *today's* is construed entirely negatively. Today's children's respect for their teachers is not a given, but depends on the teacher's personality and attitude towards them. Often, teachers label children as spoiled, which usually means that the children have certain desires, do not follow all rules unconditionally etc.

### Misunderstanding of children's needs is an obvious problem.

If today's children and their families are really different, does it not follow that the school should also be different, i.e. that it should align itself with difference, as any service would? There really exists the expectation that students should fully adjust themselves to fit the school system, which, given the global development of educational and teaching sciences, seems incompetent, to say the least. More often than not, such characterisations conceal ignorance of the manifestations of children's development and a lack of knowledge and skills to re-define difficult behaviour as a resurgence of difficulties and traumatic events causing anxiety, worry and fear which the child cannot otherwise express.

### Personal acceptance of behavioural difficulties in children and the use of power in relationships with children and parents is also a rather common practice.

In place of understanding of what children say through their behaviours, there arises a reaction of personal acceptance by the teacher. Warfare of teachers against children actually seems to exist, despite it being uneven and with a predictable outcome as to who the victim will be. Even when a child or a teenager eventually reacts aggressively towards a teacher, the victim is once again the child. The full power of framing relationships and setting rules lies with teachers and schools, and since it was they who originally adopted the might-is-right principle, there should be no complaints when a child has decided to act by it.

### What "identifies an institution as totalitarian or generous are the rules and regulations<sup>38</sup> governing its operation."

Totalitarian institutions are generally dominated by prohibiting, restricting and categorical rules and regulations. They prescribe in detail what users of their services may not do, what they have to do, and what the consequences will be in case of violation. At the same time, as far as the institution is concerned, powers prevail and duties are absent. The contents of rules clearly reflects the interests of the institution and its staff. Suffice it to look at a random schedule of the office hours in which parents can visit a teacher to see whose interests are served by the rules. Usually, such hours are in the middle of the day, when the teacher has a gap class, which is the only argument, and whose explanation is "If they really want to come, they'll find a way." It is also important to look at how the rules are set<sup>39</sup> - is it done by the institution alone or with the participation of the users of its

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38. Cirulnyk, B. 2001

39. For example, in accordance with the Pre-school and School Education Act, parents should participate in the newly established civic councils in schools in an advisory capacity. This has been decided by the school and without parents' participation, thus also eliminating their future involvement.

services, and do the rules apply to all or just to children? In the general case scenario, the totalitarian institution sets the rules single-handedly and uses them to exercise its power.

The presence or absence of complaints can also be a distinguishing marker of the totalitarian institution, as the latter usually never receives any complaints. It would be interesting to study data on complaints against schools, kindergartens and teachers.

**The very organisation of the teaching process can also be a driver of maltreatment, as can its failure to adapt to the individual learning pace of the children,**

classes with larger numbers of students, the facilities available at the school, the absence of teachers, the increasingly obvious gap between modern knowledge, which is developing very dynamically, and the forms and methods of teaching in the majority of schools and classes, which have remained unchanged for more than fifty years.

**The phenomenon of maltreatment and passive neglect of different children exists**

in educational institutions. It includes maltreatment of children who are different, such as children with disabilities, children at social risk, children who are behaviourally challenged etc. Such children are particularly vulnerable to maltreatment and very often become the object of *passive neglect*.<sup>40</sup> This is manifested in *a lack of anticipation of achievements* from such children, a lack of interest in and respect for the specific needs of the children, *a lack of dedicated effort for informing the children and ensuring that they fit into the group*, *a lack of communication* with the children etc. Passive neglect of such children can result in:

- Increase of or failure to offset cognitive and emotional difficulties;
- Ongoing inability to keep up with the learning pace, which affects the motivation to learn;
- Becoming an outsider in the peer group;
- Low self-esteem and lack of confidence;
- Behavioural problems;
- Dropping out of school.

As behavioural difficulties emerge, passive neglect is often replaced by active neglect. The consequences of this can be seen in most children at risk.

**One of the worst manifestations of maltreatment of different children is antagonising everyone else against them.**

The maltreatment of children and parents is an extreme manifestation of the maltreatment of different children. There are multiple instances of transferring hyperactive children to a new school, initiated with the full support of the parents of the remaining children, the children themselves and the school.

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40. Pouhet., A., 2014

**Recognition of institutional maltreatment in schools and accepting the fact of its existence is the first step towards its replacement** with bientraitance. Critical attitude to any professional discussion of this issue is part and manifestation of the very phenomenon of its existence, which further impedes its resolution. There is no way we can solve the situation as long as we claim that it does not exist. Non-acceptance of the existence of this problem is also a defence mechanism in the type of communication based on accusation and self-defence that is typical of low levels of professional competence.

**We should be aware that any real power carries a risk of maltreatment, and so the power holders should make an effort to manage this risk.**

As far as different children are concerned, this risk can be aggravated by some peculiarities of the Bulgarian school system. They are:

- Lack of familiarisation with the characteristics of children at risk and their behaviours, and lack of awareness of the manifestations of psychological suffering behind different behaviours. What usually happens instead is that unacceptable behaviours are treated and reacted to on a personal level.
- Teachers' work overload contrasting with the years of individual work that any such child requires, i.e. rather than favouring an individual approach, the approach should be individualised for a long time. This implies a serious and in-depth study of the psycho-pedagogical resources and deficiencies of the child.
- The need for more techniques and approaches for inclusion of children with difficulties, which requires more resources. Rather than providing a resource teacher, which is not enough, the teaching methodology for all children should be changed.
- No discussions are ever initiated, and it is taken for granted that the teacher is correct and good, and so the issue remains taboo.

It is important to understand that the school can be and often is a source of maltreatment. To do this, we need to break free from the accusation- and self-defence-based model of communication and to opt for professionalism instead.

**Maltreatment in interpersonal relationships usually implies some kind of connection and stands for bad treatment. The latter, in turn, implies some form of violence – physical, psychological, sexual or neglect of a human being and their needs.**

In this sense, maltreatment is usually a manifestation of power in a relationship. Where maltreatment concerns a professional relationship, it is initiated by the professional, the team or the institution, as they have the power to determine the nature of the relationship and the framework, rules and boundaries for its development. When teachers claim that they suffer maltreatment from children or their parents, in the majority of cases many questions arise concerning the framework of the relationships, which has been set by the school and its teachers, and since that framework allows for violence in relationships in the first place, who in fact is guilty of maltreatment? Responsibility for treatment, whether good or bad, lies with whoever has the power to determine the relationship.

Ultimately, it is precisely treatment, be it in the form of support, care or education, that forms the basis of professional attitudes, but on behalf of professionals.

**The existence of violence and conflict among children is also a symptom and manifestation of maltreatment in school** that, quite often, teachers and directors are unable to handle. Violence is explained through family upbringing, and, on most occasions, simple answers are sought to complex issues. Children replicate adult behaviours, and it would seem clear that violence bears violence and might is right. The “bad child” grows up as a “bad youngster”, who can opt to be on the side of power. School bullying thrives in such a regulatory environment.

One instance of violence among children can result from neglect on behalf of an adult, along with **a lack of clear and well-thought rules and boundaries, contradictory application of conflicting rules, and rules that do not evoke any sense of responsibility in children.** This is an instance of indifference or fictitious interest of adults in children’s needs, which essentially is neglect. Fictitious interest can take the form of friendship, familiarity, lack of distance, privilege, permissiveness etc. In such cases, adults are interested in being popular, and are trying to protect themselves from an actual adult-child relationship, which should exclude permissiveness. Such types of relationship can instigate maltreatment by children. The lack of clear rules and boundaries provokes experimentation in a rather destructive way.

**In instances of excessive discipline,** as testified by rigid, unchangeable and often meaningless rules, unless seen from the perspective of the power holder, attitudes to children include disregard, disrespect and conscious bullying to make it clear who is in charge. Violence among children is rather a result of applying the hierarchy principle to groups of children, where, in most cases, the older ones are used to assist in maintaining order among the younger.

# Principles of bientraitance in school



There is a need to at least discuss what good-enough treatment means, as well as to study best practices of bientraitance in school.

The launch of such a discussion may open the way for creativity, search, and, ultimately, a change of which the school is the object.

It is particularly important to discuss teaching and education as relationship processes between an adult and a child, and to try to consider these processes from the point of view of the child.

The bientraitance offered to a child by adults is very likely to one day result in the child becoming an adult who treats children, and first of all their own children, well. Relationships educate more than, or at least as much as, learning, and teachers should be well aware of that.

The rules and principles of bientraitance build on the values of human rights, democratisation, respect for people's needs, and understanding the significance of the school for the overall development of the child's personality. Serious discussion and new solutions are needed in support of the understanding of the individual rights of the child as equally significant as collective rights.

Bientraitance accepts the strengths and resources of the child and the environment as the focus of pedagogical practice in schools.

Studies of resilience factors reveal the great importance of the school, in particular the child-teacher relationship, which can even replace a missing symbolic and spiritual relationship in the child's closest environment.

The school, as a major actor in the child's social network, plays a part in the valuation of the individual, and as such can have a strong compensatory effect, compared with the devaluating effects of other factors. The resilience approach outlines the significance of the social network, which provides a stable foothold in the child's life.

The school is the major playfield and factor for meeting all children's needs. With the help of the school, learning and school life at the age 7-18, all needs a child can have can be met. At this time, the needs of acceptance and belonging are already manifested as a need for acceptance by one's peers and the class, and being part of these plays an increasingly important role in building awareness of one's own personality. It is exactly the sense of belonging to the class and the school that plays the major part in the development of a sense of belonging to the community, city, country etc.

**The child's need of fulfilment and involvement is entirely realised through studying and doing well at school.**

It is particularly important to see if the school invests in the child's future or, in other words, if it expects the child to be an achiever. Often, rather than as anticipation of achievement, schools' behaviours can be interpreted as anticipation of errors. It seems that the goal is not to teach but to judge. The anticipation of achievement boosts the motivation to learn, whereas the anticipation of errors instigates fear and reluctance. No other criterion is as important in determining the child's place among the others as doing well at school. Stimulation and satisfaction of cognitive needs push the child towards growth and maturity.

**The notions of good and bad, beautiful and ugly, right and wrong are, wanted or not, built under the major influence of the school.**

The adoption of moral values takes place through the relationships in the family and at school, as well as through encounters with art, but not through teaching and moralising.

**The school should be a friendly place for the child. The resilience approach helps us to revisit the meanings of school, studying, belonging to the peer group, i.e. to see school not just as an educational institution, but as a place of existence for the child. It would be good to ask ourselves how it came to be that the school, and now the kindergarten too, became insecure and unattractive places for children, and why they often see them as threatening. How is it possible that the initially overwhelmed first grader is already put off by going to school as soon as the second term starts? Why are there more and more instances of children refusing to go to school?**

**Bienveillance in school is the best prevention against violence and maltreatment, both towards and among children.**

Understanding this will help us to move away from talking and thinking about how to deal with aggression, unacceptable behaviour and bullying at school. To make this happen, we need to think and talk about how relationships at school can be improved, how children can feel secure and accepted, how the atmosphere can become friendly and calm, and how to resolve conflict in a constructive and safe manner; in other words, how to ensure positive attitude and bienveillance.

# What is bientraitance in school?



## Good management

**Bienveillance covers all fields of relationships in school**, so we will try to consider it as a concept in terms of good management, the teacher-student relationship, parent partnership, teaching methodology, and the involvement of children. Good management means that the school is ready to *welcome the child and to seek* continuous improvement of its readiness to meet the needs of the children who enter it. We believe this to be a substantial shift from the ongoing discussions about whether children are ready for school, i.e. the school should reconsider its readiness for today's children instead. In this context, the school should have a dedicated bienveillance policy, whose aim should be to make it a safe and friendly place for children.

**First, it is important that the school management and teachers should want to introduce bienveillance standards**, to monitor and evaluate achievement, and to seek opportunities for improvement. The involvement of other partners is also part of bienveillance.

**Bienveillance requires regular analysis and evaluation of the situation** and treatment at school, but is there a common understanding of this? Are all school activities really bienveillance-based? Who are the relevant people and resources inside and outside the school as far as this issue is concerned? Do we all, from our respective positions, contribute to building a climate of bienveillance and prevention of violence? How are children and parents involved?<sup>41</sup> It is important to carry out such periodic analysis and evaluation as a basis for school management.

**Schools make reasonable plans with activities to ensure bienveillance. Good management builds on clear objectives, based on a solid analysis of the needs of the people using the school service, i.e. children and their families.**

Good management also implies involvement of these users in the management, i.e. negotiating relationships and interactions between adults, taking into account the best interest of the child. It further means reasonable planning of activities, based on the evaluation, to ensure the necessary change in the organisation of teaching, the preparation of teachers, their career development and support.

**The school has rules, guidebooks and regulations focused on the best interest of the child and on ensuring the right to education for every child.**

The school guidebooks, procedures and regulations are based on the understanding that schooling is a *service* for children, which is implemented in partnership with their parents and other institutions. Children's rights, and especially the right of every child to access to good education are the focal point of the guidebooks, procedures, rules etc. They ensure open access for every child regardless of age, ethnicity, health and social status etc. It is commonly said that by law all children have a right to education, and this is considered enough. However, experience reveals a need to introduce flexible

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and relevant mechanisms and forms of enforcement. It is too simplistic to think that as long as children are willing, the law will provide.

**The school has clear procedures for informing children and their families of children's rights and ways to ensure them in school.**

The content of the school rules, guidebooks and regulations is dominated by rights rather than prohibitions and obligations, and there are clear commitments of the school and teachers.

**Bienveillance requires hiring competent professionals and providing ongoing training and support for teachers.**

Good management poses a need for clear procedures for selection and career development of school staff. It is advisable that the school should have a competence profile of teachers, including competences for bienveillance. Career development should be linked to increasing teachers' competences as a result of training and self-improvement for raising the bienveillance competence.

**Teachers should have a guaranteed right to participate in training in order to raise their bienveillance competences.** The training should include topics aimed at developing knowledge and skills for a multidisciplinary, multi-institutional and integrated approach to ensure the right to education of children.

It is very important that teachers **should also receive professional support to meet the professional challenges relating to bienveillance.** Teachers need pedagogical supervision and intervention. Such forms of professional support should clear the way for discussing challenges other than in a judgmental and controlling work environment. These forms should turn into a medium for professional reflection and self-reflection on the pedagogical relationships between teachers and students and children and adults, as well as the meaning of those relationships, and the approaches, methods and means through which teachers can build and maintain the relationship. Furthermore, the forms can become a medium for sharing experiences, emotions, worries, bitterness, disappointment etc., where the latter will be accepted without being judged or moralised. In the majority of cases, this results in a better understanding and acceptance of children's emotions, experiences and behaviours.

## **Good-enough treatment of children by teachers**

**The school should have a code of ethics on bienveillance, including values, regulations and rules on treating children, their families and loved ones.**

This code of ethics should be available to all, and should envisage clear forms of prevention of violations against the adopted rules.

**Bienveillance is primarily an attitude based on the concept of acceptance of the child as a person, i.e. an individual in the course of development.** Positive acceptance is the first prerequisite for bienveillance. The child has emotional, cognitive, spiritual and social needs on whose satisfaction the child's development rests. The bienveillance of the child requires acceptance of the child as a child in the first place, i.e. a small individual in the course of development, where needs are of the utmost importance, in accordance with the child's life so far and the specificity of the child's requirements based on common needs.

**Bienveillance is an individualised treatment,** meaning recognition of the specificity of all needs and aligning treatment and teaching with them. The most important factor here is that we are talking about a set of needs, which are sometimes dramatically related. Bienveillance could not exist if only a part of the whole set, e.g. cognitive needs, is respected. As an individual, the child has a set of needs, and they all need to be respected for bienveillance to take place.

**YES!**

### **Good practice: Individual recognition and assessment of every child**

*Recognition and individual assessment of the strengths, resources, difficulties and needs of every child. Teachers have been trained to perform such psychological and pedagogical assessment, and can rely on the support of a school psychologist or counsellor. The assessment is made each school year, and it helps teachers to facilitate the learning of the child in accordance with the child's own resources. Work is done under a multi-institutional approach and within a multi-institutional network, so that when the need arises, as for example with children at risk, partnership with other institutions or services is sought, such as health or social services, for the benefit of both the child and the family.*

*Bienveillance anticipates achievement from every child. School is for children, and it should hope to teach every child exactly what that child needs for the own life. School has a major part in the self-evaluation of the child, and it is important that it should expect every child to achieve progress in accordance with the personal needs and resources, and not just with standards. Once the school has accepted that every child has resources, it will make it a personal commitment to discover, develop and mobilise those resources in the best interest of the child.*

Bienveillance involves partnership and negotiation with the family or its substitute, i.e. the school has clear procedures for involving parents and children in the preparation and adoption of its rules, guidebooks and regulations.

**YES!**

### **Good practice: Contract between school and parents**

*The contract specifies the relationships and responsibilities framework for both parties, arrived at by joint efforts. It has a professional value to invite parents' participation in partnership, and contains a description of the relationships which will ensure cooperation in the best interest of the child.*

*The bientraitance exercised by teachers implies acceptance of the history of the child and the child's family or replacement family. Acceptance means respect, non-humiliation and regard for the dignity of the child and the child's family by both teachers and school. Acceptance is shown in both the manner of acting and the manner of speaking.*

*Bientraitance implies confidentiality in the relationship with the child and the family. Any information acquired professionally should only be used for professional purposes and in a regulated manner. Teachers' professional jargon should exclude ridicule, sarcasm, insults and judgement directed at either the child or the family.*

*Bientraitance implies making special effort for learning, anticipating achievement, including children at risk in the class and in the school, and recognising signs of traumatic events in children's behaviours. Behind acts of isolation, aggression, arrogance etc., the teacher should be able to recognise suffering which the child is unable to put into words, and so has opted to put in behaviour instead.*

*The school should have dedicated procedures, rules, forms and activities to prevent children from dropping out of school, which should be based on an integrated, multidisciplinary and multi-institutional approach.*

**YES!**

### **Good practice: Inter-institutional mechanism for prevention of school dropout at local level**

*The mechanism was developed as a result of the joint work of school directors, representatives of the local authorities and the protection system, and social service providers. It provides a clear division of roles and functions in establishing the risk of dropping out of school. Where the risk is due to pedagogical problems, pedagogical solutions are proposed, with the school taking the lead so as to ensure an integrated approach to the child and the family in partnership with the other actors. In the event of social risk, the protection system plays the leading role, but again in partnership with the school and the other actors. Clear signalling mechanisms, roles and responsibilities have been defined. The approach has been implemented for more than three years in some municipalities, and its effects have been consistently good.*

**YES!**

### **Good practice: The relay class**

*An integrated cross-sectoral service in France aimed at children in conflict with the law is the relay class, i.e. a relay class for children who either experience great difficulties at school or behave badly in class. In each region of France, one school has been appointed to set up such a class. Regardless of the physical setting of the class, the school is responsible for the paperwork and for providing a teacher for the class. Organisation usually takes place in a town where it is needed, and the class has no more than eight students. A committee team is set up for the class, consisting of a representative of the leading school, a mathematics and a French teacher, a social coach, and a psychologist from a centre for specialised social services for children in conflict with the law. Teaching lasts for six weeks, during which the teacher is in charge of preparing and putting in place an individual learning programme for each student. The social coach mostly works with the family, but also seeks to engage other services as needed by the child and is present in class twice a week. At the end, a report with recommendations for each child is produced, which may include return to school or referral to a specialised school, job or another form in accordance with the available options. Dropping out of the educational system is not permitted as an option.*

*Bienveillance implies that the teacher should not judge, insult or further isolate the child, but should opt for support in a multidisciplinary and, if necessary, multi-institutional team.*

*Bienveillance involves introducing active methods of teaching, adapted to the needs of the children. The teaching methodology includes active methods, such as working in small groups, teamwork, role-play, discussions, individual work etc. Other options are studios, clubs and other interest-based forms from which the children can choose. It is possible to invite external specialists, volunteers etc. to conduct the activities. The teaching methodology involves assessment, which motivates children to learn. Bienveillance requires education and teaching promoting independence. The bienveillance of the child is aimed at progressive autonomy and life fulfilment.*

## **Involvement of children**

*The school should develop activities to include children in the school life, and to facilitate their involvement in the class, school and community. Teachers should be prepared to try to make every child feel involved in the respective group, class, school and community. The school could have “Rules on good treatment and behaviour in class and in school”, developed jointly by children, teachers and parents, which should apply equally to all. Children’s involvement should be real, and the school should make efforts to understand and hear the children. Fake involvement would not benefit anyone. It is advisable to look for approaches that will facilitate understanding of the rules and invite children’s opinions.*

**YES!**

### **Good practice: Philosophy for children**

*Group discussions with primary school children aimed at stimulating thinking and creativity in children as a way of facilitating their involvement in the development of proposals to improve relationships at school.*

**YES!**

### **Good practice: Programme “We’d better talk”**

*This is a group programme aimed at preventing violence against children by developing their skills to express their emotions, recognise the emotions and experiences of others, and cultivate empathy and an ability to replace aggression with words expressing experiences. Through active methods such as play, discussion and work in small groups, children understand what violence is, how it affects others, and how to build safe relationships among themselves. Teachers and parents also take part in the groups, but on an equal footing as the children.*

**YES!**

### **Good practice: Children’s projects for bientraitance in schools<sup>45</sup>**

*This practice comes from a Belgian school working under the resilience approach and aiming to cultivate a civic mind-set and qualities in students through participation in the school management and introduction of democratic practices in support of this participation, such as forums, debates, councils etc. Children are taught to prepare projects, and, following training, they develop their own projects. Support was given to children from four schools throughout the country to develop projects contributing to the introduction of bientraitance in their school. In each school, following philosophy for children and forum theatre, teams of grades 3 and 4 and grades 5 and 6 were taught how to prepare a project. The teams were set up as requested by children, and efforts were made not to use any elitist approach. The training was conducted in accordance with a programme specifically designed for children and based on learning by doing. The projects prepared by the children were presented in front of the remaining children in each grade, who also contributed their ideas. The focus was general school life and bientraitance activities, and the budget was BGN 5,000. Some parents and teachers also contributed to the development, but the projects were mostly the result of children’s work. The projects were financed by SAPI<sup>46</sup>. Some of them were aimed at creating a space for children – a room, a staged space in the schoolyard, a gazebo, a library or a meeting place. In one of the schools, the children developed a school radio project, with equipment, radio programmes etc.*

42. Following training and support, such projects were developed by children from schools in Sofia, Pazardzhik and Shumen.

43. As a result of the support of OAK Foundation under the project “Bientraitance – Network of Resilience”.

The school should also involve children in public life and make an effort to raise them as active citizens in a democratic society.

**YES**

### **Good practice: Mini-forum “How to live together respectfully?”: a civic council in school**

*This practice comes from a Belgian school working under the resilience approach and aiming to cultivate a civic mind-set and qualities in students through participation in the school management and introduction of democratic practices in support of this participation, such as forums, debates, councils etc.*

Possibly the biggest change in institutions is the participation of users in the decision making about the services used. In this context, in recent years focus has been placed on the need for all institutions working with children to develop guidelines and dedicated programmes and activities to involve fathers in the process. In our society, fathers’ participation in the raising and upbringing of children is undeniable, but at the same time early childhood and early school age seem dominated by mothers, and their feminisation hides risks for the child. The concept of shared parenting helps to outline the roles of each parent in a specific way that also anticipates a specific treatment on the part of institutions.

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