

familynet

**A guide for social workers,
educators, family specialists
and counsellors
on working with families**

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Mládež Ulice / Asociación Navarra Nuevo Futuro
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#FAMILYNET is a project which promotes the exchange of experiences, knowledge and practices on socio-educational and therapeutic work with families. Professionals and volunteers who develop support programs for families in Slovakia and Spain visit and compare projects and practices and create informative media about what they have learned.

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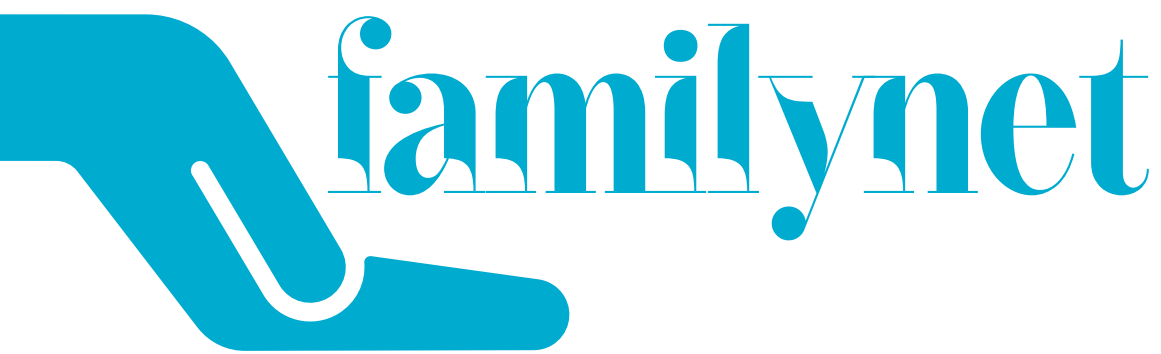
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01.

About the authors

01. About the authors

to improve education and quality of life for children and adolescents in Peru, Haiti, Senegal, El Salvador & Ecuador. We develop methodologies to promote rights-based approaches in socio-educational work and work on intensive pedagogy, social street education, education for development and youth activation. We promote direct action with young people; national and international professional exchanges; and research in socio-education.

www.nuevo-futuro.org | www.laboeduca.org

Mládež ulice

Since 2000, we have been working with youth, families and communities from socially excluded environments and housing estates. We provide our services within the framework of low-threshold programs (fieldwork and club), community work, family programmes, social counselling and we have experiences in working in school environments, implementing training and education in the field of youth work and social work, as well as several years of experience in international cooperation.

We are registered as an executor of measures pursuant to § 10 of Act no. 305/2005 on the social protection of children and social custody, which therefore enables us to devote ourselves to preventive, developmental and social work with children, youth and families.

We work with children and youth (from pre-school age to 25 years old) and also work with families (parents and family members of children and young people). These are clients from housing estates (the so-called general population), but also from socially disadvantaged environments (excluded communities) or families in crisis (educational problems, divorce, conflicts in the family, truancy, bullying, communication problems, domestic violence, etc.).

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The two organizations working on this project are based in Slovakia and Spain and are both involved to some degree in socio-educational and therapeutic work with children, adolescents and families. Both use different methodologies (one more based around community work, the other specializing in residential foster care) but aim to enrich and strengthen what they do by learning about how the other organization works and understanding more about the socio-cultural contexts in which they operate. The ultimate aim of all this work is the promotion of children's rights and the right to family life. Comparative analysis, exchanging experiences and international cooperation are also fundamental for us and help us to compare practices and models, to look for integral solutions in a global and joint way and to share our mission of care for children and adolescents. We have made study trips, talked to parents and children, visited institutions, and generally trying to rub off on one another through shared experiences, exploring differences of opinion and understanding diverse strategies.

Asociación Navarra Nuevo Futuro (ANNF)

ANNF has worked in child protection & the promotion of children's rights since 1971. ANNF is based in Navarra, Spain and runs foster homes, provides support for families, as well as designing & implements socio-educational and international cooperation projects. ANNF provides 107 living spaces for children in coordination with State Social Services and runs 15 foster homes for minors and 10 "emancipation" spaces where mature teenagers can prepare for transitioning to a more independent life. We work

02.

Why have we made this tool?

We have all had many types of exposure to various different definitions and configurations of “family” through formal and non formal educations, popular culture, religious teachings etc. We can find them in textbooks, sociological dictionaries or in the laws and constitutions of many countries. These sources mainly state that:

- “The family is the basic unit of society”.
- “The family is a social group that is the most important for our life and development”.
- “A family is made up of two or more people who are connected by relationships”.

We see the family as a place where we are with those closest to us, with whom we create relationships so that we can grow and develop. Family is expected to provide security or acceptance for its members. It is supposed to be a harbour until the time when its younger members can become independent. Family is supposed to protect us, raise us, take care of our well-being, help us and prepare us for adult life.

But the question remains, what happens if a family is unable to provide any of the above to its members? Are there strategies a family can employ to make their family environment a more healthy place for all its members? What if it can't heal by itself? What happens if one or more family members are going through especially tough times? What if someone in the family has a problem, an addiction, or if somebody is violent or abusive? What if the family is in poverty? Does it become difficult for that family to

02. Why have we made this tool?

form part of their local community? What happens if family members are not on good terms? What if they fight? What happens to the nuclear family during and after the parents go through a separation?

Is the traditional model of “mother, father, child” the only configuration of a “family” as indeed defined by many laws or constitutions? Or can a family be more broadly defined? Is the “standard definition” really in keeping with the way modern life is organised? Does it really reflect the way family life is lived out? For example, the European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly told countries that a family can be defined very broadly and can even exist in the absence of a biological link or parental relationship. For example, foster parents who have cared for a child on a temporary basis can form a family with that child on the basis of the close personal ties between them, the role played by the adults in the child's life, and the time spent together.

We should ask ourselves these and many other questions when we think about family if we want to perceive family in all its diversity and complexity. Family does indeed come in many forms. Perceiving it predominantly in a traditional or “idealistic” way makes it difficult or impossible for us to be open, pragmatic and non-judgemental when dealing with modern families.

It would be wonderful if all families really lived up to the aspiration of being a nurturing, loving, safe place full of complex, beautiful and positive relationships. However, this does not always reflect what can in fact be very messy family units - therefore it is important to think outside the box about how we can support all types of different families. We must perceive it not only as an isolated unit of a few people, but as part of the social environment that surrounds it - the extended family, the local community, the institutions in its vicinity, and also society or even the State itself.

The reason for creating this manual comes from the desire to share functional and proven tools that help us - youth workers, family counsellors, therapists, social workers - in working with and supporting families. In our work, we meet families which are generally in some crisis and often don't know what they can do about it. They don't necessarily know the best way to fix their relationships or how to commu-

02. Why have we made this tool?

nicate constructively with each other. We work with families whose children have been taken into care or are at risk of being taken into care if their situation doesn't improve. We try to support them so that they can (re)build healthy relationships so that the children can return home (or don't need to be removed from their parents' care). We meet families in which the child needs support during adolescence and the parents do not know how this should be done. There are many situations like these and it is good if family counsellors know strategies to stand by the family and pass these on to them. The goal is for the family to be able to function independently and use these tools for their own benefit.

Mládež ulice and **Asociación Navarra Nuevo Futuro** have come together to prepare this guide for professionals who work in this field and who care about building relationships, families and communities. We wanted to join forces and bring together experience from two different societies and cultures. Thanks to this, we can look at the functioning of families from a richer, more diverse perspective. We can talk about how community affects the functioning of a family. We can compare strategies used while the child is still in the care of the family and what happens when they grow up outside it - for example, in foster care. We wanted to share what works for us in building relationships with family members.

We believe that it will be a helpful tool for all of us - people who work with families - but also a tool for dialogue on how to constantly improve in this area.

02. Why have we made this tool?



03.

What is a family?

Humans are the creatures that take the longest to mature and become autonomous. We are actually born a little too early, before we are ready - but if gestation took as long as it really needed, our bulky heads would not have enough space to leave the mother's body (in some cases where the hips are too narrow to allow for a natural birth, a caesarean must be performed at full term). Whereas some creatures are ready to face the world almost on their own only a few hours or days once brought into the world, human offspring wouldn't last a minute against natural predators without help from a support group. And this remains the case for many years. This great fragility actually turned into a major evolutionary achievement: although the brain continues to develop until we are 25 years old, it has allowed us to develop language, complicated social relationships and achieve great technological developments. We have developed a world based around signals, symbols, communication, social institutions, the most important of which we call "family". It is something common to all human civilisations, although it has taken different forms according to different cultures, ages and political ideologies, and continues to evolve to this day. The forms of what we call family change and we are now at a time when these changes are accelerating. There are many types of families, but what interests us most here is their function, which does not vary much. Multiple forms and the same structure and utility.

Working with families in Theory

03. What is "family"?

The family should serve to:

Basic care (food, protection, health).

Provide affection, promote the attachment relationship.

Educating informally, in everyday life.

To give children roots, security and stability.

Providing them with identity and a sense of belonging.

Promote their socialization, relations with other people, groups, areas.

It teaches how to live in community, defining limits, rules of coexistence...

There are, as we say, many ways of living in family, and the European Convention on Human Rights recognises and protects many different configurations and specifically the "right to a family life" in Article 8 (it is important to note that this is not necessarily the same as "the right to have a family"). However, our work focuses more on the rights of children to enjoy a good family life and less focussed on their parents' rights or needs. It is also beyond the scope of this publication to talk in depth about how adults wish to organize themselves as a family unit and the respective merits of each configuration.

Having said this, it is worth briefly exploring some of the most common typologies of family units to help us broaden our minds as to what we believe constitutes a "family". To properly understand why so many families fail to meet the ideal of what is broadly considered a "happy" or "good" family or enter into difficulties, it is also worth exploring where these ideals and typologies come from and how we have come to believe how families should be organised. This is important because many have argued that a lot of families come into difficulties because the "standard family structure" as construed in modern society is in itself an impossible and flawed "ideal". It's also argued by some that families as we have come to understand them might not really be the best possible way to organise ourselves if our number one goal is to ensure children and young people have the best upbringing possible and enjoy a good quality of life.

Working with families in Theory

03. What is “family”?

One argument is that the classic family ideal of mother, father and children is a way of organising societies that is imposed on people in order to maintain a specific way of life, a way of life which may even be contrary to our best interests. These other interests include maintaining the gendered division of labour and care-giving (and other patriarchal patterns), maintaining societies that prioritize efficient production and consumption of consumer goods over what is really “best” for everyone in a given community and that community as a whole, and ensuring a steady and dependable supply of (mainly unskilled) workers and consumers. It is important to recognise this because part the reason why many families have difficulties is because they are placed into these models of living that are designed (to at least some degree) to serve interests apart from the best way of upbringing and caring for children.

There are interesting theories and explorations as to where the more “traditional” family models come from (such as Engles’ theory on the predominance of the monogamous nuclear family and the rise of capitalism – see his seminal work: *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*) but detailed analysis of this is beyond the scope of this guide. As a summary, it has been argued that before capitalism emerged as the dominant economic model traditional, tribal societies did not have a class system. Rather people lived in groups where there was little or no private property and the common good was the priority. Property was owned collectively, and family structures reflected this communal ownership – independent “micro” family units were not prevalent as they were highly inefficient and unsustainable: rather groups existed in larger collectives or communities where resources were pooled and parenting tasks shared amongst the many members of the tribe. With the emergence of industrialisation and capitalism in the 18th Century, society and the family changed to better fit into serving and sustaining that economic model. Capitalism is based on systems of private ownership and the accumulation of wealth. Once this wealth and power is accumulated, ways were found to control this wealth beyond the life of those controlling it, passing it on to the “next generation”, rather than sharing it amongst the larger community.

Working with families in Theory

03. What is “family”?

The theory is that this is predominantly where the monogamous nuclear family comes from: it’s the best way of guaranteeing that you pass on your property to your son/daughter, because in a monogamous relationship you have a clear idea of who your own children are, and this helps perpetuate a consumer society. Ultimately this arrangement produces inequality – the children of the rich and powerful inherit great wealth, while upward mobility is limited (the children of the poor remain so). The modern nuclear family functions to promote values that ensure the reproduction and maintenance of this system. The family has been often described as the ideological instrument of capitalism – it conditions people to think in a way that justifies inequality and encourages people to accept the system as fair, “natural” and unquestionable.

It is therefore not exactly fair to expect all families to “succeed” because they are being shoe-horned into ways of living that are not designed to optimise their functioning. Although this might help us understand why so many families struggle or have problems, it does not change the fact that many families need help. The rest of this publication will address how most families are structured and set out some of the many ways in which we can help families work through the difficulties they encounter.

04.

Family Typologies (Some examples)

The main typologies of family that exist in most “developed” societies are what we have to work with on a daily basis, so it is these that will form the basis of our analysis.

1. Nuclear Family

The most common, “traditional” type of family are bi-parental (usually living as a couple) and their children. Nuclear families can have one or more children who are biological or adopted, but the main idea is that two parents are raising their children together in a family home. Having a strong nuclear family has very well advertised advantages and has long been championed as the “ideal” family structure. However, if a family becomes too nuclear, too insular, this can also lead to weaknesses - it can lead to the exclusion of extended family and the broader community which can lead to isolation, stress and emotional dependency. This can lead to tension, relationship breakdowns, and conflict. Without a broader support network, if there is a problem in a tight-knit nuclear family this is more likely to lead to the breakdown of that family as other people aren’t readily available to take over some of the parenting duties while problems are being resolved.

Working with families in Theory

04. Family Typologies (some examples)

2. Single Parent Family

As the name suggests, single parent families consist of one parent with one or more children. Monoparental families have been on the rise particularly since the 1960s when divorce rates started climbing sharply (as did births out of wedlock). A mother, father, or parent raising children alone is not uncommon, but for obvious reasons can be challenging. These families can become very close, children are often more likely to learn to do household duties and so be more independent and resilient when they grow up. However, families reliant on only one source of income can struggle to get by, and many will require social assistance which can lead to stigmatisation. It can be difficult for parents to work full-time and still afford quality childcare, which can lead to a downward spiral in terms of quality of life for the child(ren).

3. Extended Family

Most people identify the nuclear family as being the most “traditional”, however in many cultures families which include a large number of extended family members are much more common and in fact preceded predominance of the nuclear family model (see above). Extended families are families with two or more adults who are related through blood or marriage, usually along with children. This often includes aunts, uncles, cousins, or other relatives living under the same roof. Typically, extended families live together for mutual social support and to achieve common goals, or may be living together in order to pool resources. For example, parents may live with their children and their children’s grandparents. This gives the family the ability to provide care for their elderly, and in turn, the grandparents may be able to help with childcare while the parents are at work.

4. Stepfamily/blended family

A “stepfamily” or “blended family” is where people from different families can merge into one. For example, parents divorce and remarry, mixing children from prior relationships. Like single-parent families,

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04. Family Typologies (some examples)

step-families are increasingly common. Children can get the benefit of having two parents and new siblings with which they can form bonds which can be just as strong as those you can form with a biological brother or sister. There is also the added benefit of having two incomes compared to single parent families. However, “suddenly” having a new sibling or son/daughter can be difficult for both children and parents. Going from a nuclear or single parent family to a stepfamily can be a difficult transition: you find yourself letting people into your life and this can drastically change the family dynamic which can cause unforeseen problems in cohabitation.

5. Grandparent Family

When a child’s parents aren’t available to take care of their children (this could be due to a conflict with the law, they may be too young to provide, they may be deceased etc.) grandparents can act as parents to their grandchildren. Grandparents and grandchildren can form close bonds and these arrangements can keep children “in the family” and prevent children having to go into foster care. Grandparents may not work or have full-time jobs however, so they may struggle with income. Depending on their health, it may be difficult for them to keep up with young children or discipline them as they mature.

6. Foster families

There are many different models, systems and procedures related to foster care throughout the world. Being a foster parent means caring for a child as part of your family. How long you care for the child depends on the type of foster care provided: it can range from a limited period of time to many years, or until the child is an adult (perhaps even beyond). Foster parents tend to care for children as part of a larger team which can include a local authority, school, health professional and the child’s birth family. Foster parents will usually share all the same duties as parents caring for their biological or adopted children such as keeping records, writing reports about the foster child, attending meetings, advocating for the child, helping the child manage their behaviour and feelings. In some countries being a “professional parent” or foster parent may require training and can be paid. Given that a lot

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04. Family Typologies (some examples)

of foster children come from difficult backgrounds, parenting in these circumstances can be particularly challenging, but as stated elsewhere, it is possible for relationships to be built in foster families which are considered to be as strong as those in biological families. As such, in many cases the law can afford the same or similar protections to these families as families whose members are related, such as the rights that are included in the “right to a family life”.

05.

Why we work with families

“The family is the focus of health and social policy strategy across a range of central and local government and health service provision, including criminal justice, mental health, community care, youth offending, fostering and adoption, education and primary health care. Families are often stated to be at the heart of government policies that aim to support parents and children to participate equally in society as valued citizens.”

(Walker, 2008)

There are many institutions which focus on family work, for instance, child protection services, state social workers, schools (psychologists, counsellors, social educators), psychologists or special educators from the counselling system and nongovernmental organizations. This chapter discusses first of all what are the reasons for working with families, which is our target group and why. Furthermore, we would like to focus on the question if it is worth it to work with middle class families which are already well integrated into society.

We work in the natural environment of a family. Families invite us to their intimate private space, to their households. Our interactions are based on confidential relationships, which is not usual in the working approach of other institutions or authorities. It means that we can get closer or are able to develop more intimate relationship.

In our work we understand that if we want to support youngsters in their healthy development and if we want to act in the field of prevention against risky behaviour, we need to work with the family as a whole system - working just with young individu-

Working with families in Theory

05. Why we work with families

als is not enough. For some youngsters, mainly from segregated groups, are certain types of services or institutions inaccessible, or they are afraid to use them. At the same time, there are very few organizations, that work with young people in their natural environment - in the family. State institutions for example does not work in natural environment only very rarely. Youth workers or family educators break down obstacles, which prevent the availability of the services and bring the social or psychological counselling straight to the home of clients. It means that our services are more accessible.

And why do we work with certain families?

There are a lot of challenges families can face or needs families can have, either families in financial difficulties or families from the middle or upper class. The assumption that families from lower classes face most problems is not necessarily true. These problems could be educational - how to react to a child breaking rules, how to set boundaries, how to support a child, how to teach the child how to express emotions properly, how to motivate the child to attend school, how to develop a child's self-confidence; then we could talk about managing relationships between family members - how to handle the conflicts between family members, how to develop a relationship and work through problems connected with employment - coordination between work and family, finding and holding down a job compatible with child rearing. These issues are common for most of the families we are working with. There are also specific issues like learning how to handle money, housekeeping, dealing with unemployment, addiction, educational problems, violence (sexual, physical and psychological), dealing with a family crisis (loss of a family member, illness etc.), poverty and segregation, criminal record in the family or family relative sentenced to imprisonment.

The system is set up in such a way that it only captures people who have already fallen into crisis instead of focusing more on prevention - sometimes people are only eligible for assistance when it's too late for them to make a change in their life. So we might reasonably think it might be more inclusive and more effective to start working with families at the first sign of there being a problem, and not when that problem has started manifesting clear

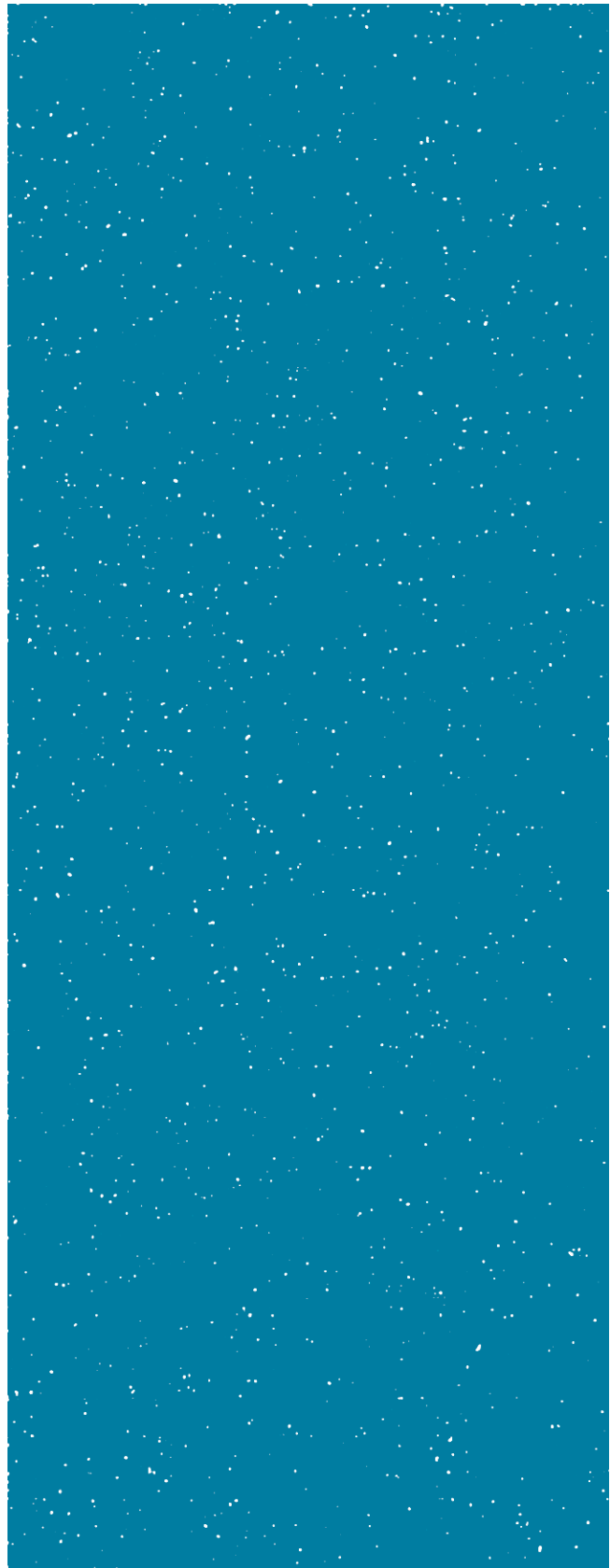
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05. Why we work with families

symptoms. But you might ask, what are these signs and how can we identify them quickly and unobtrusively? That is the most difficult question. Are institutions adequately trained and prepared to identify these families?

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05. Why we work with families



06.

Our views on family

Beyond the different typologies of families, our subjective perspectives will also mark our practice. We can approach working with families as isolated groups (individual approach) or adopt a more interrelated perspective, taking families as the result of their surroundings. The tendency in modern societies, particularly in “developed countries” is to favour an increasingly individualistic model: each person “achieves” as quickly as possible as a direct result of their own effort, based on their own competence and motivation rather than seeing development and growth as a community-wide effort that favours above all the common good, mutual support and shared care. The support we offer to a family can also respond to different objectives: to eliminate a symptom (often an adolescent experiencing serious difficulties can be a symptom of “dysfunctional” family), or to promote community health, or to reinforce the social link...

Therefore, it is very useful to look at families with complementary “glasses”: let’s look at all the cross-cutting issues: social, psychological, educational, sociological and anthropological. The “family” institution is a system full of interactions and moving parts, it’s greatly complex, and understanding it is a fundamental aspect for the deployment of child protection.

In the past, the state apparatus took direct care of children who had suffered violence. The idea was that a strong state with well-funded institutions could effectively replace parents. Although state-financed protection programmes are essential, the state itself cannot replace the attention a child can receive through a family unit or something analogous. Family provides us all with identity and a sense of belong-

Working with families in Theory

06. Our views on family

ing, but childhood traumas can haunt us for the rest of our lives. We might not recognise it at the time due to the plethora of natural coping mechanisms we develop to deal with trauma, but at some time or another, we all become aware that most of us have some sort of harm and it is necessary to repair that damage – and if possible, with the help of the family.

With adoptions it was similarly thought that by taking a child from a very young age, the biological parents could effectively be replaced. However, we since understand that filiation is something which must be respected, and in order to give a certain meaning to our lives we need information and some kind of relationship with our origins, no matter how quickly we were removed from the situation we were born into. The rebelliousness we often find in adolescents ought not be misinterpreted as ungratefulness, but rather as a need to find our place in the world, to belong, to be understood.

To carry out all this work full of subtleties, relationships and nuances, it is important to have knowledge that combines sociology, psychology, anthropology and pedagogy.

07. Different types of work with families

Talking about working with families is a very broad subject matter. Almost all the people who work in care giving professions are directly or indirectly involved with families, from education to the field of health and social services. All workers in these sectors should have at least some basic knowledge and training on how family's function, the rudiments of relating to families, how to spot problems, and who to derive a family or its members to if they are having difficulties. Sometimes professionals do not feel comfortable "interfering" with the family unit avoid contact with them or keep it to a minimum, however we must understand that a more "systemic" approach is potentially very effective for improving the situation of a person being cared for.

We ought to agree on some minimums (not judging, being interculturally aware, identifying values, etc...) so that our relationships with families become fertile ground for future work with them. We must see the family not as a circumstance (or as an annoyance) but rather as a key to unlock the well-being of its individual components.

In cases where the task requires direct work, it is necessary to equip oneself with powerful analytical tools. We are talking here about specific programmes, which seek to strengthen the role of families by clarifying the situation, transmitting knowledge, reorganising, reflecting on the system itself, etc.

There is a wide dispersion of practices and contexts, but generally based on problems and crises. The

Working with families in Theory

07. Different types of work with families

challenge could be to promote these family groups, in order to seek greater efficiency in the child and adolescent care sector. It is not a question of supporting "family-centric" ideology, but understanding this organisation as a provider of resources, identity, love and affection, which contributes many positive things, and which is therefore tremendously complicated and problematic. As we know, the line between love and hate can be slim to invisible... Family problems are closely linked to their importance. Families should not be mythologised, we must be aware that they are capable of bringing out the best and the worst in every person, and therefore their support must be handled with great precision and care.

We can work with families in a therapeutic framework (couple and family therapies or by including them from time to time in individual processes.

We also collaborate with families in the school environment, with training proposals (parents' schools), stable peer exchange groups, or specific actions almost always in relation to a crisis.

There are also programmes that provide advice, guidance and information in certain circumstances.

Socio-educational tasks are also carried out at home in order to avoid separation measures. Discussions and modelling are held with fathers and mothers to correct inappropriate parenting behaviour.

08.

Dilemmas and tensions

In recent years, many efforts have been made to develop criteria, procedures and protocols in the social, educational and health fields. Of course, this is a necessary to avoid arbitrarily taking important decisions that can have a lasting impact on families and to try to deal more consistently with families. However, perhaps there is sometimes a “scientific” expectation that does not correspond to the nature of our work. Because people (and their families) are subjective beings, enriched and bogged down by complicated values, beliefs, establishing direct causes and effects with them is an unenviable task.

Sometimes well-meaning measures with children who have suffered violence paradoxically reinforce the harm they have suffered. There is therefore tension between the need for homogeneous and legally stable criteria and the importance of working with each situation in a bespoke way. Here (in therapy, educational and social processes), there are no formulas or recipes, no one-size-fits-all solution. Each person, each family and each need must be treated in a specific way and with the seriousness required by required by each problem.

Another tension has to do with our position: when there are difficulties and violence of any kind, there must be legal and moral responsibility. But those of us who are with the families cannot be moralists. We don't have to justify, we don't have to have an affective relationship with them. But we do have to respect them and not pass judgement. Our ethical map is probably very different from theirs, but it is not our role to be judges. We should try to understand the causes and why they act the way they do. The values that underpin the often-terrible actions they trigger. Our position must be genuine, we do

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08. Dilemmas and tensions

not represent society, rather we are one of the many different tools societies have to support people and families. We are not prison guards, nor are we responsible for policing “family relationships”. We are supporters. To do this, we must try to understand and identify the symbolic axes and the values of families from our identity, to try to correct them, to turn them around, so that things can be done in a different, more satisfactory way, without violence. Our position must be neutral, although always centred on the interests of the children.

Another characteristic tension of this issue is the existence of varied interests and subjectivities. Reality is experienced in different ways whether it is the administration, the family, the child or the aid professional. The same event has many faces, as does its intentionality. This is a fundamental point as it requires a very precise inter-subjective relationship, which is effective but which tries to build alliances and bridges between the different ways of seeing reality.

Here, we will present some ways to develop social, educational and therapeutic programmes related to families. We have chosen to highlight the most important aspects of our work as applied to both organisations. There have been a series of very intense exchanges over a period of months, and leaving aside the specificities of each task, the contexts in which they are developed, personal styles and professional cultures, there is a common basis for orientation.

09.

Phases of working with a families

Phase 1: Introduction of the service and first contact with families

Families come to us in different ways. They can be referred to us by the schools their children go to, Social Services, or in the case of low threshold youth clubs we find that it necessary to work with the child's parents to achieve some progress in working with the child.

We know from our experience that work is much more difficult with families that are sent to us by the Child Protection Office because we first have to work with their motivation. They don't realize they have a problem or don't want to admit it. Therefore, they have no reason to cooperate with us. In this case, it is necessary to explain why we are there and what we can offer them. For example, we might need to explained to the mother and grandmother that we were involved in their family life because of their child's absences from school. We found out by talking to the whole family that there are many other things that we should be working on together other than absenteeism. A child in one case had impaired communication skills and a learning disability. They had no motivation to go to school. That's why it was necessary to start working with the grandmother and the mother, because they didn't know how to do homework with the child, they felt bad forcing her to go to school where she couldn't understand the information being presented to her and didn't know how to communicate with her in a way that she could

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understand. After a short time, the grandmother started to see that our intervention made sense and she started to be more motivated and helpful, but after a long time the mother has yet to grasp the full implications of her daughter's learning disability.

It is important to recognise that we cannot expect clients who do not have strong internal motivation to contact us on their own. It may get to the stage where they call, but they will be a very critical situation that will need to be dealt with immediately, regardless of whether it's night or weekend, and it has got to the point where Social Services needs to get directly involved. It is best to have contact with families before it reaches this point, set regular meetings and stick to them. Families can get gradually used to our presence in their family unit and be ready for us.

In another case, we had reached the family through their school. The school psychologist brought a child to our club who was problematic at school and needed a place to spend their free time. The psychologist approached us about this case and suggested that it would also be necessary to work with the boy's mother, because they have a very distant and dysfunctional relationship. We met the child in our Youth Club and offered them individual counselling. We also invited the mother to the meeting. It turned out that in this case the parent is motivated to meet up, but she waits for stimulus from our side. She isn't proactive, and doesn't call to say she needs help or wants to meet, but when we suggest a meeting, she comes. She realizes that her relationship with her child is broken, and she would like to do something about it. She is motivated and sees that is wrong. The advantage in this case is that we can work with the child in our club where they can be found almost every day. They don't always want to have individual counselling, but at least we get the chance to observe them in interactions with other children and have informal conversations. This helps us build up trust with the child.

In the third case, a situation may arise when we find that it is also necessary to work with the parents of a child who attends our club. We feel that the family has a strong influence on the child, and we cannot move forward without contact with the parents. In such a case, we try to contact the whole family for a meeting. It doesn't always work out the first time,

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and sometimes no one shows up. In that case we are helpless and can only work with the child in the club. However, if the parents do come to the meeting, it's important to explain to them why we have called them. One has to be very sensitive and carefully choose words because the first meeting with them is crucial and can define the future relationship. If it goes badly, they might not come again.

We offer them help and explain what they can get from us. We try to support and listen to them. It is important not to hide the fact that we have met with the parents from the child. We talk openly with them about it and explain why we met with them and what we talked about. The child might be concerned about privacy or be afraid about us telling the parents something private that he told only us, so in order to keep our relationship confidential, it is necessary to explain to him that what they tell us remains between us and that we only tell the parents about it with their consent.

Phase 2: Assessment identifying needs

During the initial anamnesis, the client's living situation and needs are assessed. It is *"the process of assessing an individual or family and their environment as part of deciding what their needs are"* (Thomas, Pierson et al., 2006, p. 35). The assessment will focus on the microsocial system (family, close people in his life), as well as the meso-social system (schools, peers, neighbourhood relationships) and the macrosocial system of the individual and his family. We try to emphasize the client's participation in assessing their own situation.

During the assessment of the client's needs, we recognise 4 stages:

- We describe living and housing conditions, behaviour, and family relationships.
- We propose possible causes of problems and probable consequences of unsatisfied needs.
- We identify problems that should be decided and the strengths and weaknesses of individuals or families in solving these problems.
- We evaluate how the client's needs could be satisfied as efficiently as possible.

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If the individual's psychological state is affected and violated by any lack of satisfaction of needs, we speak of psychological deprivation. That's why we try to prevent this situation, and when assessing the family's living situation, we determine the level of satisfaction of the needs of individual family members. If the needs are not satisfied to a sufficient extent, in an appropriate manner and for a sufficiently long time, deprivation arises. Prolonged deprivation can lead to disruption of psychological development, uneven development of some components of the personality, or to the emergence of specific deviations. Vágnerová (1999, p. 36) defines the following types of deprivation:

- Deprivation of biological needs, which directly threatens the physical and mental health of the individual.
- Sensory deprivation – lack of stimulation, lack of amount and variability of sensory stimuli.
- Cognitive deprivation – educational neglect in the field of learning. An individual can thus appear to the environment as mentally disabled.
- Emotional deprivation – when an individual lacks a stable and reliable relationship with a close person. Emotional deprivation in childhood can significantly affect the overall development of personality and behaviour towards people in adulthood.
- Social deprivation – it occurs when adequate interpersonal contacts are limited.

Different children exposed to the same deprivation situation will behave differently and suffer different consequences. Mentally deprived, a child may grow up in a hygienically exemplary environment, with perfect care and supervision, but his mental and especially emotional development may be seriously impaired.

Phase 3: Setting the goals and contracting

The most difficult part of family work is setting goals. This can depend on how the family perceive you, how they perceive the whole process, whether they have been told to go to counselling or whether they are there voluntarily. This can determine motivation,

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how high their defences are, how receptive and participative they are, boundaries, and other aspects of the process.

If they are there voluntarily, it is obvious that they are motivated to change their situation, they are seeking help or support. This is the phase when you can set and contrast expectations. It is necessary to be transparent and open and promise only what can be achieved. A lot of people come to the counselling process expecting their problems to be resolved with little or no effort on their part other than showing up. Many think that behavioural issues can simply be “unlearned”, or that we can help them with financial issues. That’s why this phase is very important because you need to set goals which are achievable. If you overwhelm clients with distant and vague goals, it could have a negative effect on the whole counselling process.

Defining the problem

Answering the question: “*what is the problem in this case?*” can be a never-ending quest. The answers we can vary wildly even when talking about the same case to child protection service, the parents, other family members, the social worker involved and/or the child themselves. The more people you talk to about a case, the more complicated it can become.

What is important in this introductory phase is also finding out who in the case perceived the problem as a problem. Which family member is the most affected or disappointed with the situation - it is easier to take steps to work on a problem with somebody who is motivated to do something about it rather than someone who has no interest in even admitting there is a problem, even if they are able to do something about it.

It is important to find out the strengths of the family and try to empower relatives. A lot of research shows that families in crisis, even families without a fixed abode have a lot of resources at their disposal and can show inordinate amounts of resilience. They are able to resolve problems, maybe in unconventional ways, but it is important that *they* solve them (Berg, Hopwood 1991, Dugan, Cole, 1989). It can be more effective to focus on resources the family or family members are familiar with

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and have at their disposal rather than more conventional methods. It’s vital to identify which relationships are constructive and supportive in the child’s development. Who are the referential figures for the child? What is their support network? What approaches can the child use to retain and strengthen these relationships? If the client has lost the support of an important person – is there a plan to get it back or find a substitute?

Developing the relationship

The client-social worker /therapist/ youth worker relationship should be perceived as a tool to achieve the goals identified in the previous stage. Building this relationship should not be the goal in and of itself. In social and psychological counselling you must emphasise this in low-threshold work with youth. It is important to try to express an equal relationship. Clients are the experts on their own situation. It is recommended not to use too much technical jargon and use positive and friendly words - “*It seems to me that your family is going through a rough patch - how can I help you?*”. At the same time try to pick up on the language the client uses or how he/she uses some words. Be accepting - accepting the personality doesn’t mean approving damaging behaviour. You can discuss the behaviour or show alternatives, but at the same time show that you care. Try to see solutions from the client’s perspective. It can be like a negotiation, have a deal ready to be approved but be prepared for some to-ing and fro-ing. Sometimes conflicts or negative feedback toward the client’s behaviour can help the relationship develop. For this, it is necessary to give feedback correctly - “*how do I perceive your behaviour, what emotions it causes, what consequences it might cause, and add how you can avoid these consequences.*”

Avoid misunderstandings. Be inquisitive but don’t treat sessions like an interrogation. Be supportive of both parent and child, guide them through the process of change, which is suitable for them.

Clients have the authority to decide what is right and what is wrong for them, for their mind and body, for their future, for their life. The client is fully responsible for ending the relationship.

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Goals and contract

The most common reason why clients and social workers cannot make progress is due to badly defined goals. A contract between user/client and social workers, family specialists, therapists etc. can be a very useful tool for laying out the groundwork for a good working relationship, defining ground rules, setting up goals etc. But it must be carefully crafted, and above all, be voluntary. If a particular institution refers a client to us, one of the first things we need to do is agree a voluntary contract. The goals should be small, simple and achievable. We need also to agree on a method/tool for reaching this goal - or steps on how to reach these goals. The goal is supposed to be meaningful for the client and perceived as something good and beneficial - better behaviour from their children, better results at school, fewer conflicts in the family, feeling better about yourself, improving self-esteem etc. It is better to describe the goal as the beginning of something new, something positive, the end of negative spirals. The social worker, youth worker or therapist is supposed to find out what clients want and be a well-tuned instrument of the client's change.

An important part of each contract is the conditions for cancellation of the contract. In other words, you need to set boundaries for your cooperation for instance - frequency of meetings, division of the tasks and responsibilities, condition of making steps to reach the goal...

Part of the contract is supposed to be an individual plan for the client - goals and sequences of events and timescales. In developing a professional relationship - what is not effective is to let the client talk over and over about how hard life is. Try to redirect the client to something positive or to the willingness to change. "So what are you going to do to have a better feeling about yourself?". Each conversation should have the main aim - find the goal suitable for the client's situation, and reachable with the client's resources. Ask questions in a client-developing way - ask open questions. Be cooperative and try to find out answers together. Sometimes you can pretend that client asks for help even if he/she doesn't because the client can be ashamed of asking for help.

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How to begin?

A family becomes a client of social work at the moment when it requires the assistance of an expert, it is in a difficult life situation, or has a certain social problem that cannot be eliminated or manageable on its own. A social worker can meet with a family under different circumstances. The family itself can look for a social worker because it realizes that its member or the whole family needs help. However, the family can reach the social worker and another organization, for example: court, school, etc. or based on the submission of another citizen's initiative or is summoned through social protection of children and social custody. Social work with the family is most often carried out at the Social Services and Family department (most often the Bureau for the social protection of children and social custody), where the competences of social workers are greatest. The Bureau for the social protection of children and social guardianship perform preventive tasks, especially in situations where a child's parents are suing after a divorce for alimony and custody of the child, or when they are unable to solve problems or conflicts in the family. In necessary situations, they also decide on the imposition of various educational measures. It is also necessary to mention the Centre for Children and Families, which works with families in need. However, the third sector is also dedicated to this work, which has its irreplaceable place in the form of accredited entities when working with the family. Since a comprehensive view of the family's problems is necessary, the social worker also cooperates with the police force, prosecutor's office, courts, school and school facilities, and health care providers in their work.

Assessment of the living situation of the family

The aim of assessing the life situation of the family is to try to understand the problem and its causes, but also what could be changed to minimize or eliminate the problem. It is necessary to become familiar with the case and we also have to determine the degree of risk to the child: the higher the risk, the more "intrusive" the intervention. In the Spanish context this initial evaluation is carried out by Social Services

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before the case is sent to Family Specialists. Social Services has very clear and fairly strict criteria which is designed to ensure children are sent to the right type of care. Once a child is sent to the Family Specialists and Psychologists, their assessment is more of an art than a science, except in cases where the child is at clear risk of imminent harm. This is usually the case if there is a drastic change in circumstances which, although not uncommon, is far from the case in the majority of cases.

We should assess the entire situation in which the family or the client finds themselves, but also the needs of each family member. The further process of working with the family depends on the assessment of their current situation. Within the analysis and assessment of the situation, we should describe various areas of the family's life, such as housing conditions, the behaviour of family members and their mutual relations. Based on the information obtained, it is necessary to identify problem areas, strengths and weaknesses of individual family members in solving problems that could arise. Subsequently, we should summarize ideas for satisfying the client's needs as efficiently as possible.

Methods of assessment

We use different methods to assess the family's living situation. One of the most important methods of assessing the family situation is the interview. During the interview, the client presents their problems, often touching on sensitive and intimate topics, so it is important that we try to understand him, support him and encourage him to make effective changes. Through the interview, we will not only get information about the family, but we will establish a relationship with individual family members. It can be an ordinary, diagnostic, counselling or therapeutic interview. Another method is observation, which is a deliberate, purposeful and planned perception of individual family members as well as the family as a whole. Through observation, we find out how the client behaves in the environment in which he lives and how he communicates with the people around him. We focus on external manifestations (mimicry, gestures, proxemics), but also on emotional manifestations and communication (Levická, 2003, p. 85). In addition to these methods, we also use the analysis of the materials available

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to us. These are, for example, materials provided to us by other institutions – schools, judges, police, employers,...). It may happen that the client also shows us some materials that may be private, for example official letters or examination results or a diary. All these materials help us navigate the problem. To assess the family situation, we can also use various other methods such as modelling, drawing, finishing the stories started or creating a family map.

Child protection services and assessment

Social protection of children names a child in need as a child at risk. It is a child in a particularly difficult situation or a child who has special needs. They consider a family at risk to be a family with a child in a particularly difficult life situation, which means that it is under the influence of unfavourable circumstances (Zákon č. 305/2005 o sociálnoprávnej ochrane detí a sociálnej kuratele). One of the functions of the family is to satisfy the basic needs of its members. A social worker from the socio-legal protection of children should be perfectly familiar with Maslow's hierarchy of needs in order to be able to assess the functionality of the family. If a child's basic biological, psychological, social and developmental needs are not filled, psychological deprivation occurs. As a result, the child is unable to adapt to situations that are common in society. As long as the social worker is aware of all the child's needs, he can carry out an effective assessment. The task of the social worker is to map the areas of children's needs, parenting skills and factors of the family environment. The resulting assessment serves as a basis for further work with the family (Kvašňáková, 2011).

Family as a unit

While working with a family, it is necessary to consider it as a whole. However, one needs to identify the family member that is at the root of the dysfunction. Often the cause of dysfunction is a breakdown in communication, deficiencies in fulfilling needs, lack of spending free time together, frequent departures of family members or different opinions about the functioning of the family. Such function-

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ing is often reflected in the behaviour of one of the most sensitive members, who may suffer from various behavioural disorders. It is therefore necessary to look at the causes of this behaviour.

Before the first meeting, we should study all the written materials we have about the family.

We should know the answers to the following questions:

What is the situation of the family?

What experts have the family already been in contact with?

What are the specifics of the family?

What interventions has the family already completed?

After that, it is necessary to search for answers to other questions during the process of work with family as well:

Why did the situation in which they are now arise?

What are the options for solving this situation?

How is the family prepared to handle the current situation?

How are the family members personally equipped for the given situation?

What options for working with the family are available?

What is the social environment of the family?

Although we probably won't know the answers to all the questions right away, we should prepare as thoroughly as possible (Levická, 2003). Some of them we try to answer during the process of work with a family.

familynet

A guide for social workers, educators, family specialists and counsellors on working with families.

10.

Some tricks for practitioners

- **S**etting: once we approach the meeting with the family, whether in a clinical or educational relationship, it is essential to take care of the space. People should feel included but individualised, the light, smell and temperature should be comfortable. If there are decorative or symbolic elements, they should be very basic, without being misinterpreted or clashing in their values. The space should be warm, inviting and neutral. The setting includes placing the professional on an equal footing, without establishing undesirable power dynamics. The search for a partnership involves using effective body language. It is important to be welcoming, to identify people and to make them aware that we are attentive to them. It is important to announce what the meeting consists of, what its objective is and the rules of the meeting.
- **Cooperation:** in no case should judgements be made about the situations we deal with. Our only way forward is to take an interest in what we are told and try to propose alternative readings and interpretations that help to explain what is happening. They will always be hypotheses, open proposals, never verdicts. They are circles that must be opened to open up alternatives, to introduce oxygen into the system. Our aim must be to establish an alliance between family members and professional support. We cannot be rivals or fight to be right. We must make room for each other to be recognised and taken into account, to be part of the "same team". Otherwise, family systems tend to close down to out-

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side intervention. Without giving up our values and deontological position, we can come into contact with another world of values, with other ways of seeing things. Our task is to accompany people towards other interpretations, towards other ways of doing things, without questioning their deep convictions or their affections.

- System: a family is a very complex institution that must be understood from different points of view. There are the individualities of its members and then their interrelationships that actually form another individual. For example, if a family has 4 members, we could say that its sum is 5 (the individuals + the system itself). This systemic vision helps us to understand and facilitates the elaboration of alternatives.
- It is important to carry out transgenerational analyses to understand the person and their symptoms.
- The honesty of the professional is also key to establishing the link, a fundamental tool with which we work.
- The harm of families is often transferred to professional teams who sometimes respond with their defences by repeating the relational pattern of the family, making it difficult for the person to establish different bonds and thus rebuild their history.
- We need to refine concepts and nuance them in order to broaden our view: domestic violence, gender-based violence, child to parent violence... the concepts we use are complex and we need to be meticulous with the words we use.
- We stand for the philosophy of giving, not stealing. Our job is to pour sand into the ocean. We don't need them to tell us when they don't want to or don't feel able to, because we know and we give them content that can help them heal the "unsaid" without them having to say it.
- We adapt the techniques and make them more flexible by applying our creativity to each situation or case.
- We become aware of the impact of our gaze on the people we serve.

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10. Some tricks for practitioners

- We go through ethical and moral dilemmas. It is part of the job. It is not possible to always have clarity of action. We are also caught up in intersubjectivity. We have to assume that it is a very complex field that requires rigour and technical knowledge, but also intuition.
- It is no longer important who did what, when, how, to whome... what matters most to us is what we can bring to the family and what they need from us.
- There are many models; theories are always necessary because they articulate our view and mark our method. In this area, it is necessary to choose an approach depending on the situation. If, for example, we are talking about an educational awareness-raising framework, it will be better to use pedagogical approaches; if we are talking about a clinical setting, the systemic model will be a more powerful tool. Although other theories can of course be used, the important thing is to understand our time and capacity constraints and to choose the most efficient way.



11.1 Human Rights and Family Life

The European Convention on Human Rights protects the human rights of everyone in Europe. All 47 countries that belong to the Council of Europe are obliged to protect, respect and fulfil the rights and have implemented the Convention into the laws of their country. It is one of the most important documents on human rights for people in the European Union. The European Court of Human Rights is the international tribunal responsible for safeguarding, developing, and clarifying exactly what states must do to uphold the rights contained in the Convention. The European Court does this through deciding cases alleging human rights violations that come from each European country. If someone thinks their rights have not been protected this court is their last port of call for seeking a solution.

When deciding cases, the European Court doesn't just resolve the specific issue in that case: it creates new rules that are crucial in determining issues of public policy in every European country, raising the standards of protection of human rights and extending human rights law throughout the community of the European Convention States. One of the most important sources of information courts can use to determine what exactly international standards are on important issues is examining how countries across the world have interpreted and applied certain human rights rules in their own countries. In international law this is called "state practice." The Court uses state practice to determine what the "state of the art" is on many issues which affect our daily lives and then applies these standards to the cases it decides. The rulings of the Court are therefore an *important source of*

11. Annexes

information on what current standards are on the rights contained in the Convention.

Article 8 of the Convention contains the Right to Respect for Family Life

1. Everyone has the right to respect for ... family life and their home...

2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of ... the prevention of disorder or crime ... or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

This is one of the most relevant human rights in the *Convention for people working with families and children* as it includes the rights of parents to have custody and contact with their children, and the rights of children to be with their parents. The European Court of Human Rights also helps to protect families from being unlawfully separated – including protecting the rights of parents to maintain or re-establish contact or a relationship with their children. There have been countless decisions of the Court that have directly influenced rules in every European country and have advanced the way we think about families generally, how we work with families, and how we can tackle complicated questions people might have about what the right to a family life actually means.

The meaning of "family" according to the Court

In order for someone to be able to claim that their right to family life has been unjustly interfered with, the Court must first establish that it is dealing with a "family life" situation. The notion of "family life" is essentially a question of fact depending upon the *real existence in practice of close personal ties*. The Court will look at *de facto* family ties, such as cohabitation, in the absence of any legal recognition of "family life". Other factors include the length of the relationship and, in the case of couples, whether they have demonstrated their commitment to each other by having children together. Therefore, the notion of "family" does not only con-

cern marriage-based relationships, but also other “family ties”, including between same-sex couples, where people living together outside marriage or where other factors demonstrated that the relationship had *sufficient constancy*. “Family life” can extend after the age of majority on account of “additional elements of dependence” allowing for the existence of “family life” between parents and adult children.

Many people think that a biological connection between a natural parent and a child is enough to consider them “family”, however, without any further elements indicating the existence of a close personal relationship, is not enough on its own for them to be considered a family with protection under Article 8. As a general rule, “family life” requires cohabitation, although other factors may demonstrate that a relationship has sufficient constancy to create “family ties”.

Is there a right to “have a family”?

The right to a family life does not guarantee the right to found a family or the right to adopt. The right to respect for “family life” does not protect the *desire* to found a family; it presupposes the existence of a family, or the potential relationship between, for example, a child born out of marriage and their natural father, or the relationship that arises from stable cohabitation, even if family life has not yet been fully established, or the relationship between a father and his legitimate child is, years later, proved to have had no biological basis. A person’s intention to develop a previously non-existent “family life” with their nephew for example by becoming his legal tutor does not automatically make them “family” as protected by Article 8. However, it is important to remember that the right of a couple to make use of medically assisted procreation is protected by Article 8, as an expression of family life, but the right protects their decision and access to procedures, not a guaranteed outcome.

Alternative Care for children and the right to family life

The main goal is to strike a balance between the interests of the parents and the child, and the obligation to interfere as little as necessary with the family unit. The main priorities are to protect the child and reunite the family. The State in this regard has positive obligations (things it must do) and negative obligations (things it should not do). The State must always look for and explore the least drastic methods possible of protecting the child’s interests and any interference must be as short-term as possible. The possibility of placing a child in a more beneficial environment on its own does not justify removal of a child from their families, nor is a lack of financial resources sufficient reason on its own. Authorities must conduct an in-depth examination of all relevant factors, involve the parent and children actively in the process, and make a clear distinction between emergency and ordinary care orders.

Children from the same family should not be placed in separate foster homes or at a significant distance from their parents. Everything possible must be done to preserve personal relations and if and when appropriate to rebuild the family in a sustained effort to facilitate family reunification (support regular contact; steps to reunite; examine & monitor situation). If the authorities have not taken all necessary steps to facilitate contact as can reasonably be demanded in each case they have failed to protect the right to a family life.

Same sex couples and the right to family life

The concept of “family life” *includes* a stable same-sex relationship. The European Court’s decisions have led to important developments in protection for same sex couples by recognising that they require legal recognition and protection of their relationships and family life. The State cannot ignore the situation of same-sex couples in the context of the protection of family life without providing means to ensure their relationship, including the registration of their legal marriages abroad. Non-registration constitutes a violation of their family life.

Adoption and family life

There is no “right to adopt” included in the European Convention. However, once a child has been adopted, the relationship between an adoptive parent and an adopted child are, as a general rule, of the same nature as other family relations protected by Article 8. If a State has made adoption available to unmarried couples it must also be available to both different-sex and same-sex couples with no discrimination.

Foster care and family life

The Court has recognised the existence of “family life” between foster parents and a child placed with them, if they have spent enough time together. Other factors taken into account are the quality of the relationship and the role played by the adults in relation to the child. For example, in one case a baby had spent 5 months being well cared for by a foster family but was put up for adoption by the State against the wishes of the foster parents and given to a different family. The court held this interfered with the foster parents’ right to a family life and the child was returned to them.

Other family relationship

Family life can also exist between siblings, aunts/uncles and nieces/nephews. The Court has recognised the relationship between adults and their parents and siblings as constituting family life protected under Article 8 even where the adult did not live with his parents or siblings and the adult had formed a separate household and family. Family life includes at least the ties between near relatives, for instance those between grandparents and grandchildren, since they might play an important part in family life. The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is usually less strong than the relationship between parent and child and generally calls for a lesser protection. Therefore, the right to respect for family life of grandparents in relation to their grandchildren primarily entails the right to maintain a normal grandparent-grandchild relationship through contact.

When a grandparent has taken care of their grandchild since birth and behaved in all respects like a

parent, it has been accepted that this relationship can be in principle of the same nature as the other family relationships protected by Article 8. In more recent cases it has been ruled that family ties between adults and their parents or siblings attract lesser protection unless there is evidence of further elements of dependency, involving more than the normal emotional ties.

Surrogate children and the family unit

There is no requirement on State to legalise surrogacy even if a couple is unable to conceive children naturally. Surrogacy arrangements are banned in many countries, including France. In one case, when a French couple decided to enter into an agreement in the United States, where the process is legal, the surrogate mother gave birth to twin girls. The twins were legally recorded as the twins’ parents on their US birth certificates but when they tried to have the details transferred into the French register of births, the French authorities refused to allow them to. The couple were forced to go through over a decade of legal battles in the French courts concerning the validity of their daughters’ birth records. The twins grew up in a state of uncertainty. Their parents had serious difficulties when registering for social security, enrolling the children in schools or free time centres etc. The twins were denied French nationality, complicating family travel and raising concerns over their right to remain in France when they became adults. The European court found France’s refusal to recognise the children’s birth certificates undermined their identity within French society violated their right to a family life, and France changed their laws.

11.2 Testimonials from Family specialists and Psychologists

*What motivates them to work with families?
What are the highlights of their work?*

Kristína Eliašová (Psychologist)

"I am motivated especially by the vision of improving family relationships. I don't want children to go home with fear, parents to worry because they don't understand and can't help their children, or parents to have no time for their children because they have to devote all their time and effort to providing for their material needs. Sometimes it's a more complicated process, but often it takes little to help a family - directing them to the institution they need, providing them information, or acting as a kind of mediator between them and the school. Sometimes they just need help getting their bearings, and that may just be the first step towards their own efforts to get back on their feet. I am motivated by the fact that through our work we can leave a mark in their lives."

Izaskun Vicente Ullate (Psychologist)

"In my day-to-day, I tend to children and adolescents face-to-face and one-to-one. Occasionally I meet with or observe sessions between the children and their family using the systemic approach (this focuses on the relationships in the whole family rather than just working on the individual). The objective is that all family members can understand the child's problems and help to grow from it, taking into account the social, family and relational context. It is a job that I like and it motivates me as it gives me the opportunity to interact with young people in an intimate and close way, creating a very special bond. It is also a job in which I learn a lot from them about myself, helping me grow as a person."

Ester Kövérová (Youth worker)

"My main motivation is develop healthy relationships and environment for children and youth within their families. To reduce harm and transmission of generation trauma, which we can not remove completely, but we can find the way how to do it to some extent. Empower young people to take at least minimal (as much as they can) control of their lives, motivates them to actively participate on their life story. On the other hand for me this work is partly detective work, because you need to find out all likely circumstances of the problematic situation, you talk with people, who give you different points of view - school, municipality, family, youngster and you try to get complex picture and develop strategies how to deal with the situation. You need to motivate all participants to focus on supporting the child or family in critical situation. It is a challenge which engage all my senses and cognitive abilities. That's why I love this job."

Iñaki Rodríguez (Family Specialist)

"I think that the most remarkable thing is how we position ourselves in our work, and that this framework is based on an accompaniment to the whole nuclear family. I believe that accompaniment is a different way of approaching people's life stories, their harm, their pain, their mourning and their situation. We accompany them in trying to fell with the families, taking care not to judge. We try to be there when needed, and not be there if that is what is convenient. From the point of view of the protection of children, we do not lose sight of the fact that these families, these adults, were also boys and girls. And that this helps us to look at them in a different way, from the vulnerability that they display, both if they are capable of reversing their situation and achieving real change, or if they cannot achieve it or even see what's wrong. We try to always not lose sight of the fact that their "undesirable" or "unhealthy" behaviour is all due to their own harm and experiences. What motivates me? Explore this challenge and accompany the human factor that surrounds it."

Rosana Gorgoa (Family Specialist)

"I would highlight the variety of interventions that we have to develop, since the families that come to us are very varied and multi-problem, from migratory mourning to social exclusion, consumption problems, mental illness, prostitution, gender violence, etc. Based on these. In such complicated situations, it is not difficult to understand that we have to address multiple traumas and emotional wounds in both parents and their children. The challenge is to ensure that spaces for repair can be provided where these wounds can be healed in some way, with the goal of ensuring that they can have the best possible relationship with their children, which in some cases will be the maintenance of the bond, in the best family unification. What motivates me?... Exactly what I have just said, giving these families the opportunity to relate in a healthier way, so that these minors can grow up as happily as possible. On a personal level, a lot of learning and improvement."

Javi Cambra (Family Specialist)

"What I like about this job is being able to be part of that help and accompaniment to families during this process in which one or more of the sons or daughters are separated from the family environment. I think the bond we create with families from minute one is very important, both with the parents and with the minors who enter the home. Establishing this link is essential for this process, so painful, to be successful. The fact that these families feel (on many occasions for the first time in their lives) heard, understood and not judged is key to establishing a relationship of trust and respect with them.

What motivates me about this job is seeing how some families evolve and restructure as you work with them. You see that the family is not something rigid but rather has a life of its own, where the emotional part has a leading role."

Ignacio Delgado (Family Specialist)

"I would highlight the high quality, humane treatment and open participation in the different life stories that families bring us. The typology of the cases is very varied and allows a multidisciplinary professional development. Each one has their own experiences and based on active listening, families share their experiences and life stories with you, which is very enriching for all parties. Accompanying you can understand the adaptive process carried out by the different members of the families and be a participant in the changes that occur in the future, helping the parties to find a new balance that places them in a less painful and traumatic position. It motivates me to see small signs of small advances, seeing the faces of satisfaction, signs of growing confidence and seeing that with the passage of time you have left a small trace in the families with whom you have shared a lifetime."

Stella Hermoso (Psychologist)

"On a day-to-day basis, I mainly attend to the children and young people individually and occasionally also to their families, although always, either with the minor and their family, from a "systemic" approach – I focus on relationships between a group of people, rather than solely on an individual's thoughts and feelings. The most remarkable thing in my opinion is to offer both the minor and the family a redefinition of their relationships that brings them to the psychotherapeutic space connected to the relational and social context in which they develop, understanding the individual as part of it, as well as the discomfort of it. This job motivates me because it offers me the opportunity to relate in an intimate and close way with children and their families, a desire to accompany them and to learn with them every day. It also helps me connect to myself and to my own family. I am motivated by the desire to contribute to society and do my bit to improve it."

Iris Barandalla (Psychologist)

“My work is focused on minors in particular, that is, the sons and daughters of these fathers and mothers, or the caregivers involved in their upbringing. And sometimes, I also carry out joint sessions with the entire family system, being able to provide another look and other tools that help to channel the existing dysfunctional dynamics in parent-child work. We always maintain a systemic perspective, which helps us to understand the problem in the particularity of each family and its context. What I would highlight most about my work would be the attitude and gaze free of judgement, the planting of trust, unconditional acceptance, the personal awareness of the professional and learning to read between the lines in the face of each behavior. Through these skills we facilitate the construction of a bond, through which complex trauma is addressed. In this way, through a structure, awareness and responsibility, an attempt is made to promote an image of worth, the functional construction of a life narrative and the acquisition of protection resources. But the rhythm is always set by the patient.

Regarding what motivates me, I would say the fact that they give you the opportunity to be able to accompany them in the face of so much damage, defense and distrust. I think that it is something difficult, and that they embark on the adventure of therapy, I consider it to be brave people and worthy of admiration. It is a delicate task to sustain so much suffering, but being aware of reality and knowing how to see beyond, you can generate small moments of connection and perceive light in the face of so much darkness, and that is priceless. Also, you never stop learning with them. Therefore, accompanying people who really need it, against this highly individualistic society, gives me gratification, personal and professional growth, and hope. Finally, I think that for all this to happen, you have to believe in what you do.”

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- https://www.educacion.navarra.es/en_GB/web/dpto/escuelas-de-familia

Social affairs and family - Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family - Slovakia

- https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/socialne-veci-a-rodina.html?lang=en&page_id=212

Families school:

- www.familiesandschools.org

familynet



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