

PATHS TO THE PERSON

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PATHS TO THE PERSON

COMMUNITY ASSIGNMENTS IN ACHIEVING
INDIVIDUAL PREVENTION GOALS

Editors

MIROŚLAW KALINOWSKI, IWONA NIEWIADOMSKA

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Reviewer
Prof. Ryszard Maciejewski

Cover design
Patrycja Czerniak

English translators
Piotr Czyżewski, Natalia Szarzyńska, Anna Zagórna-Bartnik
Maksymilian Kobyłecki, Marylka Hawrylecka

English revision and proofreading
Jan Kobyłecki

Coordinator of cooperation with the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers
Rev. Dariusz Giers, PhD

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Wydawnictwo KUL
ul. Zbożowa 61, 20-827 Lublin
tel. 81-740-93-40, fax 81-740-93-50
e-mail: wydawnictwo@kul.lublin.pl
<http://wydawnictwo.kul.lublin.pl>

The Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers
Via della Conciliazione, 3-00120 Vatican City
www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils

*To the Holy Father John Paul II
- Servant of the dignity of the human person -
the Founder of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers*

Chapter XV

Family

(IWONA NIEWIADOMSKA, JOANNA CHWASZCZ)

The expression *homo familiaris* indicates that man is a family being, as it is in the family community that individuals come into the world, satisfy their multidimensional needs, as well as develop and fulfil the meaning of their existence (Wilk 2002, pp. 6-7). The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly points to the significance of this community for individual and social existence (CCC 1994, number 2207):

The family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honour God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

It should be stressed that family community constitutes a dynamic system which determines the development of its individual members as well as of the entire family. This is a consequence of interactions between family members – interactions that have the character of feedbacks (positive and negative). Thanks to these constant processes and the simultaneous ability to maintain a relative balance between them, family is a community that generates very important resources protecting individuals – especially children and young people – from deviant behaviours (Braun-Gałkowska 1989, p. 107; Braun-Gałkowska 1991, pp. 59-60). Factors that should be regarded as particularly important in this respect include (Grze-siuk 2005, p. 190):

- setting clear but at the same time permeable borderlines between the family system and the external environment as well as between subsystems within the family;

- effective interpersonal communication, enabling development stimulation and constructive problem solution;
- satisfying physical and psychological needs – such as a sense of security, belonging, love, and respect;
- creating a natural system of support for the physical, psychological, spiritual, and social development of family members;
- moulding the world view, axio-normative standards, and social attitudes.

1. The Dynamics of the Family System

According to the concept of the family as a system, it is possible to isolate eight stages of family development (Ostoja-Zawadzka 1994, pp. 18-30):

- 1) “without children” – lasts for about 2 years after marriage;
- 2) “with a small child” – about 2.5 years;
- 3) “with a pre-school child” – about 3.5 years;
- 4) “with a school child” – about 7 years;
- 5) “with an adolescent” – about 7 years;
- 6) “launching a young adult” – about 8 years;
- 7) “empty nest” – about 15 years;
- 8) “ageing” – about 15 years.

The above phases of family life development only give a simplified picture of this multidimensional process. We should be aware that the stages may overlap – e.g. “with a pre-school child” and “with an adolescent” phases may coincide in a numerous family. There are also families incomplete as a result of divorce or due to the death of a parent or a child. The above division is only intended to facilitate the understanding of family life cycle and its main tasks at each stage of development. Yet, before characterising the stages of functioning of family community, we should attend to the premarital period, which ought to be the time for a man and a woman to get to know each other, exchange views, and show love (Braun-Gałkowska 1992; Majkowski 1997).

Re 1) Marriage “without children.” During the first stage of marriage, husband and wife learn their new roles. They move from the “I-“you” identities to the “we” identity, thus creating a community. The first marital crisis frequently has its source in disappointment with the relationship itself or with the partner; these seem not to fulfil the expectations of young people because of the additional duties involved. Personal habits

and customs may be another problem, causing numerous conflicts. Both sides begin to try to impose “their own style” (Sujak, 1971, p. 96). Working out “a community of life” demands good communication between spouses, characterised by (Niebrzydowski 1990, p. 81):

- openness;
- discovering various manifestations of love;
- the ability to compromise in conflict situations;
- constructive anger management.

Re 2) Marriage “with a small child.” Another person – a child – appears in the marital community, which results in a shift of borderlines within the family system. The husband-wife dyad is loosened for the sake of the mother-child dyad for a period of approximately 9 months and then restored to the previous configuration. The birth of a child brings considerable change, since the spouses enter new roles as father and mother and take up new duties. In this stage, conflicts most often arise due to:

- the transition from “we” phase to “we and the child” phase;
- the necessity to reconcile different roles and/or divide new duties (e.g. the difficulty of combining professional and family duties in the case of working mothers);
- changes in showing love;
- household budget division.

There is also the issue of alienation crisis in men in cases when the mother strengthens her bond with the infant while the man cannot get used to the role of a father and at the same time feels rejected by his wife. The way to prevent this situation is to involve the husband in all child care activities and to overcome stereotypes concerning male and female roles in family life and at work.

Re 3) Family “with a pre-school child.” This stage is also described as the period of relative stability in family life because it is the time when the relationship between spouses becomes strengthened and the child begins to form a separate subsystem. Moreover, the age of the child allows the parents to continue professional work and social activity. Problems at this stage may be due to difficulties connected with:

- fulfilling parental roles;
- taking up and/or involvement in professional work;
- too tight household budget;
- fulfilling the needs of each member of the system.

If they are constructively resolved in love, trust, and mutual respect, the difficult situations experienced contribute to the deepening of family ties.

Re 4) Family “with a school child.” Family community with a school child is usually also going through one of the earlier phases at the same

time – the second or the third. This makes it necessary for parents to be very flexible in their behaviour. Their conflicts in this stage most frequently concern:

- contradictory needs;
- division of duties;
- expenses;
- ways of spending free time;
- reconciliation of professional and family roles.

An important issue in the marital relationship is the mutual acceptance of physiological changes, mostly concerning appearance. Individuals fixated on youth and driven by lower values – such as erotic love, strength, or fitness – often refuse to accept physiological changes, and this refusal manifests itself, among other things, in looking for younger and/or more attractive partners. Marital infidelity causes an internal integration crisis of the the family system, and divorce causes the crisis referred to as “a change in the living space,” affecting the entire family. The child may experience problems connected with adaptation to school and peer group as well as difficulties with overcoming the exclusive authority of the parents.

At this stage of family development, it is important to cultivate universal values, accept developmental changes, and develop various forms of showing love. These protective factors enable household members to move on to subsequent stages of family system development.

Re 5) Family “with an adolescent.” It should be firmly emphasised that the entire system is “entangled” in the problems of adolescence. The important task in this stage is to establish qualitatively different parent-child relations, with clear elements of separation and controlled independence. Proper relations in this period allow, on the one hand, to maintain the authority of the parents, and on the other – to develop the teenager’s autonomy. A young person – aged between 13 and 19 – is undergoing an identity crisis. This means experiencing numerous internal conflicts, negating what has been received from others, and searching for one’s own solutions. The adolescent’s individual difficulties often translate into interpersonal conflicts involving the entire family, especially when the child’s adolescence coincides with parents’ mid-life crisis. Hence the importance of a proper marital relationship, thanks to which parents constitute an authority for the child and provide it with support. Regrettably, improper shifts in family subsystems frequently occur in this stage due to faulty interpersonal communication, ignorance of one another’s needs, and/or neglect of the marital relationship – as when one of the parents forms a coalition with the child against the other parent. A situation of this kind threatens both the stability of marriage and the teenager’s development.

What makes it possible to go successfully through this difficult stage in the dynamics of family community is the cultivation of proper hierarchy of values and the previously developed problem solving competences.

Re 6) Family “launching a young adult.” This is the stage when the child actually leaves home, not merely a period of his or her psychological separation. Young people enter adult life and experience the difficulties involved – e.g. difficulties in establishing intimate relationships or attaining social position (Płużek 1991). Sometimes a sense of guilt for wanting to live their own life is a very important problem. This is particularly often the case when the marital bond between the parents is weak and when their life concentrates on the child and on the desire to keep it at home. The sense of guilt may be strong enough to prevent the separation of offspring from parents (Barbaro 1994; Grzesiuk 1998).

Re 7) The “empty nest” stage. In this stage of family life the spouses remain on their own, which means that, at last, they have time to fulfil their own plans and dreams. If the marital bond has been cultivated since the beginning of their relationship, they begin to experience relative peace and happiness. Yet, it happens that, after children have left home, husband and wife become strangers to each other, which may lead to separation or divorce. Problems at this stage of family life concern mainly:

- the husband-wife relationship;
- getting used to new roles – mother/father-in-law and grandmother/grandfather;
- ending professional activity and going into retirement;
- organising free time;
- coming to terms with biological changes in the organism and with the experience of diseases;
- death of the spouses’ own parents, which is connected with mourning and with the awareness that the spouses now become the eldest people in the family.

Re 8) The “ageing” stage. In this stage, rapid biological changes occur that lead to deterioration in physical and/or psychological function. It is also at this stage that people take stock of their lives. Positive verification enables them to spend old age in peace; negative verification often leads to despair (Płużek 1991). Serious difficulties in this critical period may also be caused by:

- a serious disease;
- the spouse’s death;
- refusal to come to terms with ageing and one’s own approaching death.

It should be strongly emphasised that, thanks to positive assessment of one's life, this phase should be the time of reaping life's rewards – the joy brought by children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren – as well as sharing practical wisdom with the loved ones.

The above presentation of stages of family life shows that the family community constitutes a natural system of support for its members – especially when they experience various kinds of problems.

2. Difficult Situations as a Potential Development Factor for the Family and Its Members

Home environment abounds in circumstances which the literature of the subject describes as difficult situations. Experiences of this kind may result in functioning disorders at the individual and community levels, but they may also become a factor stimulating the development of the entire family system and its individual members. The most frequent difficult situations occurring in the family community include: 1) conflicts – intrapsychic and interpersonal, 2) crises – developmental and situational. These are briefly characterised below.

2.1. Conflicts

This term is popularly understood as referring to quarrels or feuds that end in winners and losers being determined (Gut, Haman 1993). The essence of conflict is the clash of contradictory pursuits. If there is a struggle of motives, tendencies, or needs inside an individual, we speak of an internal (intrapsychic) conflict. If, on the contrary, the opposing tendencies originate in two or several individuals, we are dealing with an interpersonal conflict.

It is worth realising that conflicts – internal as well as external – are inherent in human life and development (Płużek 1991).

Intrapsychic conflicts consist in the inner struggle of motives, but at the same time they manifest themselves outwardly in human behaviour – e.g. in absent-mindedness, decision-making difficulties, as well as in chaotic and/or hesitant behaviour. The intensity of conflict depends on the values that the person ascribes to the contradictory pursuits involved, and its resolution is determined by goal preferences and decision-making

abilities (Płużek 1991, p. 95). The three most often distinguished **types of intrapsychic conflicts** are the following:

– **approach-approach**; its essence lies in the necessity to choose between two goals that have a positive meaning for the individual – e.g. between spending the weekend with friends and going on a family trip, assuming that both activities are desirable to the subject who experiences the dilemma; internal dialogue is supposed to lead to a decision regarding the more attractive option;

– **avoidance-avoidance**; a conflict of this kind is connected with a choice between two goals that have a negative meaning for the person; assuming that the forms of spending the weekend that were mentioned above have a pejorative meaning for the subject, the subject follows the “lesser evil” principle in choosing the goal to pursue;

– **approach-avoidance**; the last type of conflict involves only one goal, characterised by both positive (desirable) and negative (rejected) features; a dilemma of this kind is more stress-inducing, since the increasing conviction of the goal’s attractiveness is accompanied by its negative features gaining prominence, which prevents the individual from making a decision.

Summing up the above characterization, it should be stressed that:

Constructive resolution of an internal conflict stimulates the individual’s development by giving a sense of self-satisfaction and reinforcing self-esteem.

Interpersonal conflicts usually arise from a lack of communication between individuals or from mistakes in interpersonal relations. In a situation involving contradictory aims, individuals are inclined to “struggle” to force their arguments through. The resolution of an external conflict demands mainly that the “struggle” proceeds in keeping with the rules of effective communication – the competences it requires include talking skills, active listening, and expressing opinions from the “I” perspective, which makes it possible to express one’s feelings, desires, and/or views in a manner that does not hurt others.

An interpersonal conflict is resolved when both sides are satisfied with the solution, which not necessarily means that they have managed to force their own arguments through. The most popular way to resolve a conflict constructively is to work towards an agreement between the conflicting sides so as to satisfy, at least partly, the needs of every individual involved in the conflict. There are also certain behaviours of the conflicting sides that do not lead to conflict resolution – e.g. total abandonment of one’s own needs or postponement of their satisfaction, separation, periods without talking to each other, or escape into hazardous behaviours (drinking alcohol, fast driving, casual sexual contacts, etc.).

In the context of the analysed issue, it is worth concluding that a total lack of conflicts in a family testifies to the lack of development in that family system due to superficial relationships in which true emotions, aims, and opinions are not revealed. We should bear in mind the developmental potential of this kind of difficult situation, following from the fact that:

Successful resolution of an interpersonal conflict strengthens the ties between the conflicting sides.

2.2. Crises

Just like conflict, also crisis has negative overtones in the popular understanding, as it usually refers to the borderline between the end of “something” and the beginning of “something different.” Psychology treats this phenomenon as a critical event that may have either positive or negative consequences, depending on how it is gone through and on whether its significance is properly acknowledged (Płużek, 1991). For our present purposes, developmental and situational crises may be distinguished.

Developmental crises are an inherent part of the transformation cycle human life undergoes – they require a change of behaviour style and involve taking on new roles; their cause often lies in the discrepancy between the individual’s current mode of functioning and the demands of society (Jacyniak, Płużek 1996).

Following E. Ericson (Uchnast 2002, pp. 11-14), it is possible to distinguish eight developmental crises, during which the individual exhibits both an increased potential for change and a heightened susceptibility to pathology in the somatic, psychological, and social spheres. Developmental crisis essentially consists in the occurrence of a conflict whose resolution is necessary to acquire a new quality of functioning.

– The first developmental conflict takes place in infancy (between birth and the first year of life) and concerns the antagonism between gaining trust and the lack of it. Its positive resolution gives the child hope and allows it to enter the next stage of development.

– The second conflict surfaces in early childhood (between 2 and 3 years of age) on the “sense of autonomy – shame” axis. By going through this crisis successfully the individual gains will power.

– At the age of 4 or 5, the antagonism between initiative and a sense of guilt emerges. The value gained by going through it positively is the strength to pursue goals.

– The fourth developmental crisis emerges in the school years and concerns the conflict between diligence and the sense of inferiority. Its con-

structive handling manifests itself in the desire to gain competences and in healthy competition.

– The next antagonism – the sense of identity versus the loss of role – is experienced in adolescence (between 13 and 19 years of age), leading to autonomous decision-making ability and independent task performance.

– Characteristic for early adulthood (between 20 and 24 years of age) is the experience of the antagonism between isolation and close relations. Working out this dilemma results in the ability to show love.

– The next developmental crisis is typical of adulthood (between 25 and 64 years of age) and comes down to the conflict between stagnation and generating various kinds of activity. The value acquired by going through this dilemma is the concern for others.

– The last developmental antagonism, experienced after the age of 65, concerns the conflict on the “integrity of personality – despair” axis. Resolving it positively allows to acquire practical wisdom.

Situational crises. In a difficult situation, the individual frequently experiences a state referred to as situational crisis, which may be brought about by:

- deprivation of needs;
- states of overburdening;
- important values being threatened;
- conflicts;
- frustrating situations, arising in reaction to obstacles preventing goal achievement.

Not every difficult situation causes a crisis. It is inherent in the nature of situational crisis that the new state of affairs comes as a surprise, the person concerned does not know how to behave, and the previously used ways of coping with problems now turn out to be inadequate. The person finds themselves helpless in the face of difficulties that demand a change of behaviour. In such a situation, behaviour is governed by trial and error, since the person cannot use ready solutions (Jacyniak, Płużek 1996, p. 108).

In a situation of crisis, the individual very often experiences stress. Initially, there is a general mobilisation of the individual’s psychological processes. The short-term effects of difficult situations include mainly unpleasant emotional tension, violent verbal or physical aggression, and the occurrence of defence mechanisms protecting the stability of self-image. The greater the distress caused by particular behaviours, the more probable strong defence reactions become (Siek 1983, pp. 378-380). Prolonged strain causes a deterioration in psychological processes, which may lead to destructive behaviour as the individual is not capable of assessing the

situation and performing actions correctly. Long-term effects of the stress connected with psychological reactions in difficult situations consist in reinforcing a particular kind of motivations and particular modes of behaviour that reduce or eliminate psychological tension. This may lead to maladjustment of the individual or the entire family because the person may develop negative as well as positive stress coping strategies.

Non-constructive ways of coping in difficult situations include (Oniszczenko 1993, pp. 72-74):

- withdrawal (avoidance of or retreat from the difficult situation);
- distraction (creating an atmosphere of fun);
- belittling the danger;
- disregarding the goal or ignoring the possibility of failure;
- identification with a destructive group providing a sense of security.

Apart from the above ways of coping with difficult situations, there are constructive coping strategies, such as (Oniszczenko 1993, pp. 72-74):

- using help from others, particularly family support;
- discharging tension through intense physical effort or strong concentration on the activity performed;
- gaining experience by increasing one's competence;
- seeking information about the event;
- seeking information about the situation.

Summing up the issues connected with going through difficult situations, we must stress that experiences of this kind may contribute to human development. Yet, for the problems experienced to become a factor stimulating positive transformation, a helping hand is needed. In no other circumstances does a person need help, patient audience, and empathy more than they do when experiencing difficulties (Jacyniak, Płużek 1996, p. 108). This finds confirmation in the results of research (carried out on a sample of 3000 randomly selected adult Poles) concerning the actual sources of help in situations of danger (Hołyst 1997). Based on the results obtained, it was found (Hołyst 1997, pp. 562-578) that individuals aged between 18 and 24 were the group that most often relied on the family as the source of help in difficult situations (64%); as regards other age groups, family was indicated by 58% of individuals aged between 55 and 64 and by 54% of those aged between 25 and 34; the oldest respondents (individuals over 65 years of age) turned to the family for help least often (51%).

3. Solving Difficult Situations as a Family

The family may together attempt to solve problems experienced by its individual members or shared by all of them in accordance with the six-step method proposed by T. Gordon (1995, p. 225):

- Step 1: Identifying and defining a difficult situation;
- Step 2: Generating possible solutions;
- Step 3: Evaluating the possible solutions;
- Step 4: Deciding on the best acceptable solution;
- Step 5: Implementing the solution;
- Step 6: Evaluating the solution.

Our analysis of ways of overcoming difficulties together will also use the principles contributing to the development of a healthy family, worked out by the American Association of Parents Against Addictions (Gaś 1993, p. 62).

3.1. Identifying and Defining a Difficult Situation

For the implementation of this step, a meeting is necessary of all the family members who agree to cooperate with a view to resolving the difficult situation (Braun-Gałkowska 1999, p. 71). Each person should focus their attention on the problem, voice their judgements, and express their feelings concerning the issue. Statements that humiliate or accuse individual family members should be avoided. Meeting this condition comes down to following the key principle of building a healthy family, namely the principle of unconditional love.

The key principle of building a healthy family: UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

It is crucial for spouses to be aware of the significance of complete and mutual love in the marital relationship, on which the sense of security experienced by children largely depends. Important conditions of accepting marriage as a value feature responsibility for the partner and for the family, shared experience and joint resolution of difficulties, and the learning of marital love, which consists in mutual concessions and sacrifice as well as mutual help in development (Dąbrowski 1974, pp. 105-108; Grzywak-Kaczyńska 1988, p. 61).

In the parent-child relationship love should be unconditional, making everyone feel important and valuable in the family (Dyczewski 1994, p. 115).

Unconditional love means loving the child regardless of its behaviour, appearance, virtues, burdens, and deficiencies.

The emotional life of children and young people resembles a mirror image: children reflect rather than initiate love (Campbell 1991, p. 21).

The child reciprocates the love it receives. Unconditional love is unconditionally reciprocated by the teenager whereas conditional love is conditionally returned.

Bearing in mind the criterion of unconditional love as the condition of successfully resolving difficult situations, we should note the disintegration of bonds in Polish families. This alarming fact finds confirmation in the constantly increasing divorce rate, divorce being pronounced only in cases of complete and irretrievable disintegration of matrimonial life, provided that granting the divorce is not detrimental to the welfare of common minor children of the spouses or contrary to the principles of social intercourse (article 56 of the Family and Guardianship Code).

Preceded by a period of misunderstandings and acute conflicts and amounting to a legally sanctioned form of isolation from the marriage and family problem, divorce testifies to helplessness in the face of problems and offers no prospect of their positive solution (Steuden 1996, p. 70).

That the dissolution of marriage by court stands in contradiction to complete and unconditional love is shown by the fact that spouses in a divorce situation frequently suffer from the separation anxiety disorder, which manifests itself in negative emotional states, a feeling of loneliness, as well as hostility towards oneself, the spouse, and the children. This disorder is the sum total of experiences constituting a reaction to the loss of belonging to the loved person; it is a kind of crisis in which the person can see no chance of solving the problem. For the children, parents' divorce means the destruction of the fundamental child-parent-world relationship. This results in a loss of the sense of security that rests on the stability of the relationship between the parents (Lachowska 1999, p. 285; Steuden 1996, pp. 75-77).

The causes of danger to marital relationship and family stability are traceable to a shift in the hierarchy of values, in which material goals and the pursuit of career and welfare frequently push family into the background. The disintegration of intrafamily relations manifests itself in the increasing rates of crime against the family, the increasing number of suicide attempts among children and young people, the growing number of punishable offences reported in the population of minors, and the growing scale of social orphanhood (Hołyst 1997, p. 278).

A principle of building a healthy family: SPENDING FREE TIME TOGETHER

The above principle is also necessary for the implementation of the first step in problem solution. Only in a situation of being together, without any external pressure, can parents and children build the irreplaceable bond, necessary to every human being, and especially to a child, in order to face the surrounding reality (Campbell 1991, pp. 27-32). In order to strengthen the relations between family members, it is necessary to pay special attention to organising free time together, as free time may perform functions connected with (Roykiewicz 1979, p. 238):

- instruction (activities connected with satisfying cognitive needs);
- education (activities connected with the need to inform others, create, experience approval and esteem as well as take care of others);
- integration (satisfying the need of belonging, esteem, and accomplishment);
- recreation (activities connected with the need to play, create, and perform feats);
- cultural development (creating and assimilating cultural values).

Parents should consider the following questions: **How do they organise their own spare time? How do their children use spare time? Do they control the behaviour of their children? What do they do together as a family in their spare time?** Research results suggest that parents devote very little time to educational interactions with their children. In the families examined, free time was the least organised and/or used in ways not very diversified in terms of form and content (it was mainly spent on unplanned television viewing); 22% of parents had never thought about interesting ways in which their children could spend their free time (Grochocińska 1998, pp. 415-416).

3.2. Generating Possible Solutions

In this step, members of the family community should consider possible solutions of the problem. All possible ideas should be accepted. It is also important that parents maintain a healthy parent-child relationship. No role reversal – i.e. treatment of children as a confidants and demanding emotional support from them – must be allowed to take place. Children may be asked for advice or opinions, but the basic duty of parents in difficult situations is to maintain authority and give emotional support (Campbell 1991, p. 17).

At this stage of solving the problem, family members should show special skill in applying another principle that contributes to building

a community between them – namely in showing acceptance and respect to one another.

A principle of building a healthy family: SHOWING MUTUAL ACCEPTANCE AND RESPECT

With the need for respect and acceptance satisfied, the individual experiences high self-esteem, looks forward to the future, feels important and needed, and shows good interpersonal skills. Respect should be inherent in mutual relations. It is, however, very often the case that parents address each other or the child by means of insults, without stopping to ponder on their meaning – and every unpleasant expression, taking advantage of family members, ridiculing their beliefs, manifesting irritation, and/or using physical punishment hurts their self-esteem (Kwiek 1994, pp. 27-30).

Generating possible solutions also demands following another principle, presented below:

A principle of building a healthy family: KIND LISTENING

Kind listening consists in listening intently to what the interlocutor is saying; it also allows the possibility of the listener changing their views, since openness to the other person's experiences may inspire a reinterpretation of one's own experiences. Agreement between verbal and non-verbal messages and the reliability of interlocutors are two important issues in the process of kind listening. Family members ought to be aware that posture, tone of voice, and facial expression should be in agreement with the verbal message. As regards reliability, it is the outcome of a long process in which others recognise the honesty, impartiality, and good intentions of a given individual. Reciprocal communication between people is possible as a result of consistent behaviour over a long period of time. A person in a relationship who has repeatedly come up against their partners' reluctance and failure to keep promises will not receive their message with trust (Stoner et al. 1997, p. 515).

Seeking possible solutions to their problem, family members must fulfil a number of conditions (T. Gordon 1995, p. 62):

- find time to talk;
- be able to recognize the psychological difference between themselves and another person;
- accept the feelings of others;
- trust that the other person will cope with their emotions and seek solutions to problems.

Using the kind listening method within the family may foster understanding of one another's views, acceptance of one another's behaviours, and restraint from hasty judgement of one another's conduct. Meanwhile,

research results suggest that the family often fails to be the actual support group for its members because parents spend very little time relating to their children directly (more than 70% of parents do not know what desires and problems their children have). Children in turn have difficulties in deciding which parent to listen to, since the outlook incompatibility index is very high in marital and parental relations. This situation results in a lack of trust for parents – only 27% of respondents confided problems in their parents (Grochocińska 1998, pp. 415-416).

3.3. Evaluating the Possible Solutions

At this stage it is time to think of which of the proposed solutions is the best. Critical analysis of possible solutions should be guided by another community-building norm: offering advice.

A principle of building a healthy family: OFFERING ADVICE

Advice should provide the other person with information, dispel their doubts, as well as provide support and a sense of security, but at the same time leave them the freedom to decide on their actions (Gaś, 1993, p. 68). This kind of behaviour allows the person in need to employ or develop the ability to make responsible decisions. In the process of offering advice, then, one should not impose one's will on the spouse or child or force them to accept one's point of view, since this deprives them of their own opinions.

3.4. Deciding on the Best Acceptable Solution

Decision-making should be accompanied by an exchange of arguments and feelings between family members as well as by the certainty that everyone has understood and accepted their assigned task and is ready to fulfil it. In difficult situations, the solution often involves behaviour that is unattractive but more valuable (Grzywak-Kaczyńska 1988, p. 48), which makes it so important to follow the next intrafamily principle – teaching to distinguish between good and evil.

A principle of building a healthy family: TEACHING TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

Its role in the implementation of values and norms – mainly through written and unwritten rules, customs, holidays, and control system as well as through punishment and reward – makes the family the most important

environment factor that determines the development of young people's attitudes.

The socialisation system provided by the family performs a very important task with regard to children and young people by (Dąbrowski 1974; Kobierzycki 1989, pp. 220-223):

- introducing them into the world of values;
- developing predispositions to the performance of tasks in various spheres of social life;
- fostering affirmation of the other person and the community;
- developing the ability to reflect on the fundamental issues of the meaning of life;
- helping to build such a hierarchy of values in which basic needs are subordinated to higher needs and goals.

The fact that both the young ones and the adults are involved in the socialisation makes the family the centre of cultural transformations and at the same time guarantees its stability and cultural continuity (Dyczewski 1994, p. 19). The family should also be the setting of the internalisation of norms, which consists in accepting the established principles of behaviour and following the rules despite temptations to break them, with no control from other people (Gołąb 1976, p. 248).

Child's development demands hope for the future and at the same time a deeper rooting in the spiritual heritage. One of the major desires of contemporary teenagers is to receive from their parents a system of moral values that would show them the way to live. Those parents who want to give that to their children must themselves find the foundation on which to build their lives and solve everyday problems. Mother and father ought to declare firmly and unambiguously their attitude to religion as the principle behind their line of development, the efforts undertaken, the demands they set themselves, and their respect for other people (Ostrowska 1990, p. 163). Moral confusion in teenagers often stems from the fact that parents fail to pass their beliefs down to children and do not obey their declared spiritual values in everyday life, or fail to obey them consistently (Campbell 1991, pp. 93-102).

Disintegration of the family along with its traditional values may lead to the emergence of the so-called "existential gap" in the attitudes of the young generation, described by R. Rolheiser (1979) as "rootless loneliness." A person experiencing such a state is characterised by the subjective conviction that one cannot feel safe in the surrounding world because, with constant changes and with few phenomena remaining certain and stable, people sail through life "without an anchor," live it "without roots" and without "firm ground" to stand on.

3.5. Implementing the Solution

In this stage a detailed plan of action should be prepared, setting the scope of duties for each family member and aimed at resolving the crisis situation. The implementation of this step should follow the next healthy family principle, namely constructive discipline.

A principle of building a healthy family: CONSTRUCTIVE DISCIPLINE

This principle consists in placing demands on both adults and children that are appropriate to their level of development. In a situation of excessive social demands, the individual may develop a negative self-image and a fear of failure that may evolve into a general fear of undertaking any tasks. The factors discussed result in defensive adaptation, since individuals with low self-esteem are afraid of events happening around them and strongly influenced by society – particularly when their beliefs are not firmly established and when they are connected with self-esteem being threatened. Negative self-image hinders information processing and translates into low subjective probability of success in various spheres of activity. A generalised expectation of failure rather than success translates into lower problem-solving efficacy (Tyszkowa 1986).

Most people are not confident about their abilities until these abilities have been confirmed by family and friends in the course of discussion – through a readiness to listen to and respectfully discuss all ideas, taking into account every participant's viewpoint. Members of families that do not exchange ideas in conversations may develop the subjective conviction that their opinion does not matter, which gives rise to anger, resentment, or even bitterness (Campbell 1991, p. 91).

Constructive discipline also demands that, in showing love, parents should be consistent with regard to their own behaviour and that of their children (Campbell 1991, p. 47; Kwiek 1994, p. 12). People taking care of the child must help it to develop responsible behaviour; therefore, appropriate sanctions for infringement of norms must follow from what actually happened, not from the parents' passing moods; they should also make the child aware of what it is being punished for. Additionally, the sanctions must end within the specified time. If the punishment has its specified end and if the forgiveness of the adults has been granted, it is easy for the child to acknowledge its guilt (Campbell 1991, p. 93; Kwiek 1994, p. 29).

Another aspect of the constructive discipline principle concerns proper control of the behaviour of juvenile family members. It often happens that parents do not know what their children are doing and where they are. There are situations in which peer group may deprave the young person.

Factors favouring deviant behaviour of adolescents – meaning also conflict with the criminal law – include, above all (Hołyst 1999, p. 651):

- weak emotional bond with the family;
- weakening or lack of control by parents and other educational institutions.

In this situation, the behaviours of informal peer group colleagues become the patterns to follow. The environment created by such groups is particularly attractive because (Kozaczk 1990, p. 105; Markocki 1998, p. 392):

- it allows to identify with the quick fortune-making ideology;
- it permits to indulge the fascination with consumerist and lavish lifestyle;
- it builds self-esteem;
- it satisfies the safety need, frustrated by the inappropriate atmosphere at home and at school.

In order to implement the fifth step, it is also necessary to follow the next principle enhancing the developmental potential of the family community: building a sense of independence.

A principle of building a healthy family: STIMULATING A SENSE OF INDEPENDENCE

When the child is little and unable to judge their behaviour properly, parents take all the responsibility for the child's behaviour. By contrast, entering the period of adolescence is connected with longing for independence. The adolescent tries to gain greater and greater control over decisions concerning their own behaviour. Parents should not suppress that desire for independence but they should control the pace of its acquisition, adjusting it to the level of maturity. The parents' task is to set the limits of independence (Campbell 1991, p. 66).

Adolescence is also connected with experiencing numerous internal conflicts between (Macacci et al. 1996, pp. 76-82):

- independence and dependence on the family;
- fear of taking initiative and securing oneself independent existence;
- the tendency to self-criticism or criticism of the external world on the one hand and the inclination to idealism and the search of higher values on the other.

Independence, then, is the major means of gaining personal experience in the surrounding world. In setting the limits of independence, parents should take into account the increasing socialising significance of the peer group in the child's development. Already in the upper forms of primary school small groups emerge in which individuals share their feelings, secrets, and desires. Peer support system often plays the role of defence

against the power of adults and allows young people to gain a greater confidence in their behaviour. What is more, a constructive peer group allows to prepare young people for adult life by enabling them to (Macacci et al. 1996, pp. 76-82):

- perform various social roles;
- establish new relationships based on competition and cooperation;
- profess values and beliefs.

There is another healthy family principle that should be followed when implementing the decision taken in order to resolve a difficult situation – satisfaction of the needs of all family members.

A principle of building a healthy family: SATISFYING THE NEEDS OF ALL FAMILY MEMBERS

The satisfaction of marriage-related needs and the fulfilment of children's needs – in all their diversity, from biological needs to a whole range of psychological needs – is the condition of proper development, openness to the external world, and confidence about the future (Prężyna, 1989, p. 136). Looking for the causes of disorders in interpersonal relations, A. Maslow (1990) highlights the significance of unsatisfied psychological needs. The author assumes that human behaviour is motivated by the satisfaction of needs, which are organised in a hierarchical order (Maslow 1986, pp. 184-186):

- physiological needs;
- safety need;
- love and belonging needs;
- prestige and esteem needs;
- self-actualisation needs.

The satisfaction of higher needs follows the satisfaction of those of a lower order, and a satisfied need loses its active, determining, and organising role. In the case of unsatisfied love and belonging needs, whose existence does not have to be consciously realised, a person feels severe loneliness among family and friends and seeks a sense of security in other groups (Maslow 1986, p. 187).

In the process of self-actualisation there appears a need to go beyond the community – but this drive develops only thanks to prior contacts with others, which have satisfied the common belonging need that is fulfilled by the family, fraternity, or friendship. We find a confirmation of the above in R. May's statement (1989, p. 188) to the effect that, to a smaller or greater degree, meeting between people simultaneously evokes anxiety and joy. This stems from the fact that a real meeting changes the attitudes of individuals to their own inner world and leads to an extension of consciousness, in consequence of which both individuals undergo a change.

Results of criminological research (Hołyst 1997, p. 288) suggest that the vast majority of registered juvenile offenders are brought up in families that fail to satisfy the natural needs of their members. A cumulation of negative factors – e.g. alcoholism of parents or siblings, lack of emotional family bond, aggressive behaviours, a parent leaving the family, lack of positive social role models, inappropriate upbringing methods, neglect of care, or lack of control – often leads young people into conflict with the criminal law.

Deficiencies concerning the satisfaction of physical and psychological needs which contribute to conflicts with the criminal law are reflected in the portrait of a juvenile offender worked out on the basis of research carried out by A. Woźniak-Krakowian and B. Pawlica (1998, pp. 460-462) and by A. Kozieńska (1982, p. 85). Results of the research suggest that punishable acts are most frequently committed by children aged 13 to 17; the offenders are usually upper-form primary school pupils or vocational school students, mainly boys, truants, often highly deprived, runaways from home or from educational institutions. The following factors were also found to be conducive to delinquent behaviour (Woźniak-Krakowian, Pawlica 1998, pp. 460-462; Kozieńska 1982, p. 85):

- participation in a criminal gang;
- abuse of or addiction to alcohol or other psychoactive substances.

A group gives a sense of anonymity and increases aggressiveness, while alcohol reduces the sense of control. It is also worth noting that approximately 50% of deprived children participating in the study came from pathological families and the remaining 50% came from families with good financial situation but showing a lack of adequate psychological and physical parental care.

3.6. Evaluating the Solution

The final step in resolving a difficult situation as a family consists in critical analysis of the results of actions taken. For the implementation of this step, a meeting of all the family members is necessary during which everyone gets a chance to say what they think about the attempts made to solve the problem. At this stage the family may also gather and decide on the verification of the solutions adopted.

This step requires the application of another principle that regulates the functioning of a healthy home environment: building a sense of reality.

A principle of building a healthy family: BUILDING A SENSE OF REALITY

To the individual, reality is the outcome of subjective perception and definition of situations, crystallising in the process of interaction with the external world. This process results in a stabilisation or modification of one's own behaviour in accordance with group norms, among which family norms are of fundamental importance (Siemaszko 1993).

With positive educational patterns provided, the child develops towards a real, individual, and independent personality. Parents must not isolate the child from problems, bringing it up in an over-protective atmosphere or in a closed environment, because the child must gradually get to know the world and life, learn to bear difficulties and hardships, and get used to the pain of existence in order to grow up to be a sensitive individual, aware of all aspects of life in society (Dąbrowski 1979, p. 240). Therefore, the sense of reality principle demands that the family must be open to its own problems and to the problems of the external world. In order to enter into interactions with the surrounding reality, family members must have an understanding of the rules of the surrounding world as well as confidence in their problem solving abilities.

Distorted sense of reality is exemplified by the way of thinking of an alcoholic, whose defence mechanism of rationalisation results in increasingly strange behaviour and serious distortions in the assessment of facts (Johnson 1992, pp. 40-44). The distortion of the sense of reality in a person addicted to alcohol leads to substantial changes in their system of values, to loss of control over their own behaviour, and to violation of existing moral norms. This finds confirmation in the record of violence, pathological interpersonal relations, and privation in families with the alcohol problem (Hankała 1997, p. 66).

Distortions in the sense of reality may also occur in co-addicted people. This problem manifests itself in difficulties with understanding oneself and the external world, in anxiety-driven attitudes to people and events, and the in ambivalence concerning interpersonal relations exhibited by alcoholics' wives. The above phenomena are largely responsible for the emergence of upbringing problems in families with the alcohol problem (Niewiadomska 1999, p. 314).

Also A. Kępiński (1992a, 1992b) analyses distortions in the sense of reality when examining the issue of information metabolism. The fundamental precondition of establishing information exchange with the environment is the adoption of a "reality-orientated" attitude. Initially, the child's world is limited to the mother, then it includes the whole family group; as the child develops, its social world extends to play groups, to the school group, and to own family. Participation in various communities produces

and reinforces in the individual a specific way of estimating the probability of what might happen to a person in each of these communities.

A. Kępiński (1992b) also draws our attention to the fact that, to a smaller or greater degree, everyone feels a social anxiety, which nonetheless cannot suppress the tendency to expansion to the surrounding world. The pathological nature of pre-disease social anxiety disorder in schizophrenia consists in the fact that the anxiety is too strong and, as a result, not limited to selected forms of behaviour. Schizophrenics' escape from reality starts already in childhood and usually intensifies in adolescence, when the teenager's social environment rapidly expands. To an individual who has abandoned expansion to the environment, the world seems dangerous – it repels rather than attracts. Their “conquest” of such environment proceeds in a heroic manner, since every action demands overcoming an anxiety whose strength is disproportionate to the threat objectively involved.

Summing up the proposed method of resolving difficult situations as a family, we should note that its advantages consist in a multifaceted approach to the problem, a better understanding of decisions by family members, and a greater acceptance of the solutions adopted.

The proposal also makes for a greater integration of the family community, which puts parents in a better position to exercise their constitutional right to rear children (article 48 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland: *Parents shall have the right to rear their children in accordance with their own convictions. Such upbringing shall respect the degree of maturity of a child as well as his freedom of conscience and belief and also his convictions.*

The presented problem solution strategy finds additional support in the results of Cz. Walesa's research (1988, p. 345) on making momentous life decisions. The author states that facing difficult situations as a community results in an enhanced capability of consciously sharing feelings and values, greater empathy with the experiences of others, taking realities into account, greater openness to information coming from the external world, maturation to independence in decision-making, and greater flexibility of the solutions adopted.

When adopting the presented strategy of seeking solutions in a difficult situation, family members should pay attention to whether the implementation of the strategy is not impeded by a paradoxical effect of acting as a group, which may take the form of (Stoner et al. 1997, p. 501):

– identity paradox – family unites individuals with different abilities and views, and each individual subjectively feels that the community imposes restrictions on their identity;

- revelation paradox, arising from a lack of trust in the family on the part of its individual members;
- individuality paradox – the community draws its power solely out of the individual strength of each of its members and fails to recognise the power of group action;
- power paradox, connected with the fact that, when deciding to join group action, family members give up their power to the group;
- regression paradox, arising from the fact that individuals participating in joint problem solution diminish their own significance and roles in order for group action to be possible;
- creation paradox, referring to the fact that, when seeking new solutions, the family community must change the previously established rules, and unwillingness to destroy the established norms diminishes the ability to solve problems.

The role of the family system in resolving difficult situations also demonstrates how important it is to create an atmosphere of respect for marriage and family. In order to accomplish that goal, the state's social policy should make a more extensive use of the means of social communication, which in turn should propagate patterns of marital and family life as well as reinforce ethical, religious, and social values. The activity of the state should be directed towards protecting and reinforcing the family community also because it comprises the fundamental elements of social life, namely (Dyczewski 1994, p. 191; Prężyna 1989, p. 135):

- the interrelation between individual and common good;
- axiological and normative elements, which regulate interpersonal relations as well as rights and duties following from the social role;
- the experience of the necessity of observing norms as a necessary means of achieving individual and common good.

Based on the relations presented, we may then advance the thesis that protecting the value of the family – built on firm axiological foundations – is the only way to create a personalistic state that serves the development of the individual and contributes to the realisation of the common good.

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