



Erasmus+ project “Extending Social Educators Competences”
ESEC Project Nr. 2018-1-PL01-KA204-051126

Evidence-based guidelines

Topics of Mancomunidad de la Ribera Alta

Emotional and Social Skills:

Emotional Interaction and Family Disruption

The peculiarity of the 2020 session has been introduced by the pandemic that has changed the plans of the sessions and the whole project – the activities and communication with the course participants had to take place totally on-line even within the country. The project organizers had to modify the prepared organizational settings and materials for this format, as well as conducting sessions and activities.

Abstract

The guidelines consist of several sub-chapters to provide more detailed reflection, considerations, and suggestions that are based on the 2020 session of parent educators in Alzira that has been conducted by the MANRA ESEC project group. This report contains the set of evidence-based guidelines, with the aim of the completion of a training course organized by the Mancomunidad de la Ribera Alta (Spain), within the framework of the European project Erasmus + ESEC “Extending Social Educators Competences”.

The chapter that reveals *content and its organization* introduces the main idea of selecting the content for the session *Emotional Interaction*, for the face-to-face training, and *Family Disruption* and organization of the content. The conception of the session reflects achieving parent educator qualities appropriate for developing *social skills based on emotional interaction and also skills based on the learning to manage situations of family disruption* on the background of communication as a fundamental basis of human individual development. The content of the activities in the session of “Emotional Interaction” represent three groups of activities or phases of the development of communication skills or competencies: (a) those that are related to the active listening; to complete these participants have to communicate developing this skill, discuss and understand (these belong to a successful communication, nevertheless are seldom attended and included to parent education programs), (b) activities that are directed to evaluate and improve communication skills regarding the emotional intelligence; (c) activities that develop skills in order to learn how to normalize a feeling when parents go through undesired emotions.



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Another chapter is devoted to organizational issues and strategies; these deal with the considerations evolved while conducting the 2020 session and include: information related to this training action in terms of its content and its organization, the learning units selected for face-to-face training by MANRA, such as the learning unit of the “Emotional Interaction”, or the unit selected and also prepared by Mancomunidad for the online training modality, on the theme of “Family Disruption”, according to the materials of the project’s MOODLE platform (prepared by RTA) provided, both for individual and collective learning. In the same way, the document describes the order in which this material has been used, with respect to the development of the ESEC project training course, the adaptations made to ensure attention to the needs of the participants, in relation to the situation experienced by the Covid-19 pandemic and the restructuring of training modalities, through virtual space, as well as the difficulties encountered and the possible solutions found, for the development of training action throughout the process. So the document details the organization aspects of the course and the strategies used, in relation to how the training action has been conducted, the communication during and after it between the students and the course teachers, difficulties found and solutions to these, especially taking into account the current situation and the need to adapt the training course.

On the other hand, the document explains the methodology used in carrying out the training course, in order to explain the mode of the session and the activities that are chosen to implement the main idea of the parent educator developmental program. This section includes reflections on the mode of the session, considerations, conclusions, suggestions, as well as some obstacles and difficulties are based on the experience collected at each cluster of the content and its methodological design: activities that initiate active listening, those that improve emotional intelligence skills, as well as activities that train skills by learning how to normalize a feeling.

Finally, the document collects information on the evaluation process, method, tools, such as the ESEC project questionnaires that the participants have answered to assess their skills once the training action has been completed and those results regarding the knowledge acquired by the participants, regarding the training course developed by MANRA for the ESEC project. Evaluation is an integrating component of the process that also closes the session and serves as a bases for further planning of parent and parent educator individual development, collecting the necessary skills acquired by participants for developing emotional interaction, active listening, emotional intelligence, learn how to normalize a feeling and how to manage these situations regarding to the family disruption.



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1. Content and content organization of the course (*with learning units have been selected to be taught face to face (platform) and with from individual learning and why. In which order did you use the ESEC COURSE MATERIAL what content adaptations you did in order to meet your participants training needs difficulties encountered and solutions*)

The session 2020 conducted by MANRA *Emotional Interaction - Family Disruption* cover the most topical issues of *Social and Emotional Skills* with a focus on communication. The items are chosen for discussions according to the parent most attended questions of parent integrated roles, communication among parents and children, parent educator communication and active listening with parents, peculiarities of communication in digital age; these are contextualized with the current social processes and needs. Course educators can add some specific activities to meet special needs of the course participants. Articles and clips are suggested to consider emotional interaction peculiarities, competence improvement, and discussion. The course consists of thematic activities that include short introductions and tests for the course participant self-evaluation of their emotional interaction skills and conflict prevention, as well as reflections on the content of the course. The transition situations when paradigm shifts in the societies make parents and their educators feel powerless to decision-making and acting or behaving to achieve the new more complex parental goals; parents feel losing control over their children that quite often is accompanied by a feeling of lost mutual understanding among the members of the family.

Regarding to *the leading conception*, it is important to mention that during the last decade the parent, social worker, parent educator, as well as stake-holder conception of what parenting is or what it should be has changed considerably and challenge a new look at the content of parent educator courses, as well as introduce a new paradigm of *Social and Emotional Skills*. This is not only because of the large variety of education possibilities. The perceptions and conceptions change due to the diversity of cultures living side-by-side in the countries; this also because of the expanded knowledge on parenting and a shift in mindset that cause the need to replace the concept of the different educational styles and educational patterns to be fulfilled by parents introducing new educational skills related to the emotional interaction, active listening or emotional intelligence.

The term *emotional interaction* has entered the area of family up-bringing to inform about the approach that has emerged from European policies in the family relation area, but parents do not know how to implement this; and their educators need some assistance to prepare them for implementing this paradigm shift. The *emotional interaction* framework facilitates the development of strategies, skills and measures to support families that aim to foster equal opportunities for them; and it includes the support of social educators, associations and other professionals that work with families.

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The chapter of the project completed by Mancomunidad de la Ribera Alta followed the philosophy that parent education and support programming should assume that parents are more likely to provide appropriate nurturing and guidance as they acquire a greater understanding of child development and children needs, as well as the parent roles in the changing and technology-rich social environment. All parents need support from community agencies: (a) to grasp the most topical changes in society and learn appropriate ways to implement these by learning emotional and social skills; (b) willing to improve family education and want to be successful.

Improvements in social skills and development of emotional interaction in parents can improve positive development by the positive nature of mutual relationships in families. Thus, parents are not conceived solely as recipients of assistance, but play a role as contributors by developing appropriate educational skills that enable them to learn to manage certain stress situations when such a situation occurs with children.

The MANRA contribution to the parenting program development is related to the conception that the bases of human individual development resides also in the familiar interaction and dynamic of the educational processes. It is extremely common for interaction within the family to become problematic if parents or relatives have poor emotional and social skills.

The content of the 2020 session held in Alzira is divided into three mutually integrated parts, with respect to the theme of Emotional Interaction, which consist of various sub-topics about emotional and social skills that are organized in the logic of integrating content rather than suggesting separate topics related to emotional interaction - this breaks with the traditional form of content organization. Therefore, the content is offered through various activities in each part. The three parts of the activities are:

- (a) those that are related to the active listening; to complete these participants have to communicate developing this skill, discuss and understand (these belong to a successful communication, nevertheless are seldom attended and included to parent education programs);
- (b) activities that are directed to evaluate and improve communication skills regarding the emotional intelligence – these make use of part (a) to have an evidence-based discussion on skill improvement;
- (c) activities that develop skills in order to learn how to normalize a feeling when parents go through undesired emotions – this belongs to a successful interaction and improves parent and parent educator competences.

The main aspect that this special content organization brings is the integrating activities by involving experiences of parent education to identify and practice the above-mentioned paradigm shift about *Social and Emotional Skills*.



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All activities with the selected pieces of content are under the umbrella of the evidence-based positive parenting framework with the content approach of emotional interaction.

2. Organizational issues and strategies (*how did you conduct the participants how did you communicate during and after training course difficulties encountered and solutions*)

Introduction on the workshop format that is built upon the Experiential Learning Model to accentuate the shift in parent and parent educator mindset towards: (a) a greater autonomy and respect to all family members, creating *emotional interaction*, (b) peculiarities of covering the activities in the total on-line format. The accents are implemented by the organizational setting of the session and the content of activities. The steps modified for this format are:

- starting with a theoretical introductory activity to integrate with a part of the content.
- discussing the group, couple, individual, plenary discussions in line format;
- explaining the concept of the session in simple language, inform the participants about the suggested activities of the content and the possible achievements to be achieved in each of them.
- the introduction of activities inviting participants to make their own contributions, reflect on their experiences and their scope for discussion;
- exchange of reactions and observations by encouraging critical thinking and reflection on what happened in their cases and during this session; comparative evaluation of experiences and exercises carried out;
- generalizing to discover what was learned and how it connects to real life;
- suggesting participants to give some examples of how the learned new knowledge, know-how, and considerations can be used in their practices.

The online session has shown that the suggestions listed above should be provided so that the parent educator can make more use of them and save the session time.

Preparing the materials for the session in advance is necessary to have the session successful. These are up-loaded to the project website and have to be in “power point”, ‘pdf’, ‘doc’; introduction to the session activities can be in ‘PP’ format; the size of each file should be about 1 MB and do not exceed 8 MB. Anyway, the materials must be accessible for those who will use them for the purpose of knowledge improvement and competence development on Emotional and Social Skills: Emotional Interaction and Family Disruption. The materials are discussed in the country project group when being prepared; therefore, all up-loaded original materials should not have the name of their authors, except for the otherwise published materials – either cited, completely downloaded, or modified - the author and source should be mentioned.



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Registration of the participants onto the project website takes place on volunteer bases and access to it should be made as simple as possible. The organizers should take into consideration that many offers are suggested on-line; therefore, the social workers, parent educators, parents, and anyone who wants to join the whole program or a particular session has to assume the profile of the project and course sessions from the first lines of information.

Details on access to the ESEC website and course materials are on page

<https://tdl.rta.lv/mod/page/view.php?id=28> .

Introduction into the session and assignments prior to the session should be accessible before or right after the registration. The session and activities of 2020 at MANRA had been introduced by (a) e-mailed program of the session and activities and (b) up-loaded to the website. The two ways are preferable for easy-to-find the assignments because of different levels of the parent digital competencies. Besides, the totally on-line format on the one hand increases the number of volunteers, while on the other, open addressing of the possible participants of the session can also reach those parents who had poor IT skills: the web invitation to the session should denote the desired IT skills or, if there is a possibility, offer some instruction prior to the session.

Instruction on how to work with the materials and assignments opens the chapter *Emotional and Social Skills: Emotional Interaction and Family Disruption* of the Handbook. This can be located either prior or right after the defined aim of the session so that the participants of the session can anticipate possible synergy, as well as guess about the way to their success (new knowledge, considerations, and know-how).

The management of the session, usage of the materials, and difficulties encountered depend much on the introduction and how well the participants are prepared for the particular activities or whether they have completed assignments. It is wise to remind the participants prior to the session that their achievements during the session depend on how well they got acquainted with the recommended sources, selected an experienced situation for discussion and described it or otherwise prepared, formulated questions or statements for the discussion, etc. The peculiarity of total on-line format damages eye-contact between the educator and the participants; this changes the way how participants are invited to speak or ‘jump’ into the discussion – face-to-face and on-line formats impose slightly different pace of the activities; on-line might take more time because this experience has just started.

It is convenient if the platform allows educator to make small groups or pairs for discussion – this does not give much opportunities for the participants to do it themselves provided groups are made prior to the session.



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3. Methodology (*teaching-learning modality, difficulties encountered and solutions*)

Teaching-learning modality

Exercises used at the sessions are suggested and described in the part of the program produced by MANRA in major follows the interactivities of the hands-on or workshop sessions:

- suggested short hands-on activities, their evaluation and identifying possible modalities to conclude on their usefulness when working with parents;
- individual experiences and situation analysis to come to conclusions of possible usage to meet the parent particular needs; identifying experienced or possible situations when the conclusion or the activity might be helpful;
- a set of questions related to the content of the sessions (these are included into the session program and plans);
- lists of testimonies on examples and different skills, etc. to compare, analyse and reach a conclusion on their suitability for current situations and the needs of parents or children; these are concentrated in the assessment questionnaires;
- illustrate some important aspects that emerge when examining the impact of particular parent education examples in real-life contexts;
- comment the chosen video-clips, images, etc. that are selected for their essential message, such as apps, which are popular with children and less popular with parents; video clips that report features on social skills, etc.
- session participants had been asked to make their own personal contributions to the proposed exercises (especially valuable for observing the diversity of opinions, experiences and knowledge emerging from the group), which makes the collective learning process more enriching.

The sessions with the parents' educators held in Alzira are organized in three parts that mutually integrate with their specific methodological accents: active listening, emotional intelligence and normalization of a feeling.

The suggested activities should be related to *emotional interaction*, provide information on important parenting decisions, local strategies in a broader context, social skills, etc. Anyway, on the basis of the theoretical content and the activities proposed, participants should initiate a debate on the subject and thus reach their conclusions. The activities should inform the participants of the session by talking about the target issues to which they are addressed and trigger discussions.



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Here are the illustrations (one for each part) of such activities that must be modified according to the specific needs of session participants in local areas and cultural settings.

Active listening

This is an important component of communication, unfortunately, it is seldom addressed in parent or parent educator education programs.

Parent educators can choose any of the suggested activities or do everything if there is enough time; it is also possible to suggest some activities for the autonomous termination of parents. Communication is successful if partners are good listeners. Very often a family communication fails if the partners do not know how to listen to each other or stop the process of interaction without listening to each other’s opinions, considerations, needs, etc.

Activity 1. The participants, visualizing the content on active listening, worked on the definition of the concept, how to learn how to show that you are listening (behaviour and body language), make sure that what they have told us has been understood (as for example, paraphrasing) and encouraging the speaker to share (nonjudgmental state of mind, open questions...). Participants commented on all these aspects, discussed with each other, and responded to the session’s concluding questions about active listening to observe acquired skills and knowledge.

Some of the key aspects addressed during this part are: learning to listen as much as you speak, learning that listening is a sign of respect, learning by listening and thinking about what you can learn from your child or parent’s educator; listening must be open, show interest in it and know the opinion of the speaker; learn to remain silent when your partner/ parent/ child speaks; demonstrate your perception of what is being said by all senses; exercise your creative force - listening creates us, we get our qualities by listening.

Emotional Intelligence

Activity 2. The participants, regarding the content on emotional intelligence, worked on the definition of the concept, the explanation of the emotional awareness term (emotional literacy, levels of awareness...) and the emotional validation.

Participants worked on all these concepts and content, discussed with each other, and responded to the session’s concluding questions about active listening to observe acquired skills and knowledge.

Normalizing a feeling

Activity 3. The groups of learners, regarding the content about learning how to normalize a feeling, worked on the definition of the concept, the explanation of perspective and perception (reframing the situation) and empathy (using a video explaining the concept of empathy).



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Participants worked also on all these concepts and content, discussed with each other, and responded to the session’s concluding questions about active listening to observe acquired skills and knowledge.

At the end of the reading of the contents and the realization of the proposed exercises, as well as those presented in the subject of Family Disruption and the deepening of testimonies, the participants evaluate their acquired social skills, make conclusions and then discuss in groups.

Notes:

It is always useful if the educators who conduct such classes have extra exercises to change for the more appropriate ones or for those that better fit the context or participants need etc.

Time allocated for each activity depends on the program planning and time allocated for each session.

Difficulties encountered and solutions

The main difficulties are related to:

- (a) Different experiences of parents or educators of parents who participated in the session;
- (b) Different level of digital technologies’ skills. The obstacle was mainly related on the syndrome of unexpectedness and possible unpreparedness to total on-line format. Thus, the main difficulty has been related to emotional aspect of the session, and this can be overcome by a couple of emotionally positive play/game.

Suggested accents for the future improvements

- *Sharing experiences and inventory practices*: the argument in support of analysis of the national contexts was also considered to be critical when implementing a successful practice in one location and adopting it in another.
- *Educators and organizers practice* sometimes are not considerably changed by parent courses or suggested technology, as suggested by participants of the sessions;
- All family support actions, as well as those related to parent and parent educator education and development of emotional and social skills *must be placed within a country’s national, regional and local planning framework*– this must become responsibility of the whole community.



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Evaluation

(method, process, tools and results of the knowledge evaluation and method, posses, tools and results of training course evaluation)

The leading idea of the evaluation is: the aim of the evaluation is to evaluate and identify the learning of new concepts and knowledge acquired by the participants. Evaluation, also, is a continuous matter that occurs during the course of the training course, at each session and even at each activity, it is among the best means to make the program a unique, well-structured, or integrated affair.

- *At the very beginning* of the session the participants self-evaluate their emotional and social skills via online discussion. This will introduce the whole set of skills and/or competencies that parents and parent educators should hold, which are already well-developed, which are under-developed, what each of the participant aims to improve during the session or do it after.
- During the session reflections should be practiced to self-manage the improvement of the competence of uniform improvement. Therefore, the educator must present in writing what qualities will be trained during each activity. The educators and participants of the training course carried out by MANRA concluded that this detailed identification of the objective skills should be integrated remembering the whole set of these presented to make this issue synergistic and synthesized.
- The educator should remind participants of the role of self-reflection in successfully implementing the development of *social and emotional skills*, emotional interaction and the management of family disruption situations.
- Self-assessment closes the session. A common questionnaire, developed within the framework of the ESEC project, is offered, which allows the participant to evaluate their initial skills and compare them with those acquired during the lessons. In the same way, the participants of the training course also conduct a second questionnaire on the content of Emotional Interaction and Family Disruption, developed by MANRA, to assess learning and the acquisition of new knowledge after the training.