



ESEC

Extending Social Educators Competences

Project No 2018-1-PL-KA2014-051126

Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University in Warsaw

Dissemination of project outcomes and good practices

Target groups

The dissemination should be addressed to all principal target groups of the ESEC project:

- parents of children with disabilities,
- social educators/social workers/teachers,
- stakeholders: employees of social services, managers of social services, employees of social enterprises, managers of social enterprises, policy makers,
- students of pedagogical faculties.

Social work study programs delivered by Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University in Warsaw consist of training courses at level I and level II specialization for the profession of social workers whose teaching contents list, among others:

- social skills to be used when working with individuals, families and local communities;
- interpersonal communication skills when working with individuals and families with mental disorders.

In this context, the ESEC project results can meet students' expectations of competencies enabling changes and improvements of the effectiveness of their future work.

Teaching parents' emotional communication skills

Parents who up-bring, educate, protect and support their disabled children should particularly focus in everyday work on soft skills which open the way to effective involvement, cooperation and communication.

Significantly important soft skills understood in terms of necessary human qualities are:

- analytical thinking and innovation,
- creativity, originality and initiative,
- critical thinking and analysis,
- complex problem-solving,
- leadership and social influence,
- emotional intelligence,
- reasoning and idea-producing.

Conditions for parental successful communication with children

The communication partners receive mutual messages within two perspectives:

- the information-level expressing opinions, emotions, experiences, values,
- the relationship level immensely driven by emotional tensions between partners.

Holding back one's own emotions may contribute to a rational communication and collaboration. The language of communication has to be simplified in favor of an easier and better understanding.

Active listening to children or even putting oneself in their position, together with a high self-esteem, are a good prognostic for a successful communication.

Demand for social and emotional skills

Huge majorities of parents admit that they need a fair amount or a lot more support to learn social and emotional skills. At the same time, one has to keep in mind that

- “[...] parenting is a deeply personal experience, as is (but perhaps even more so than) teaching, that integrates the heart and head. Any supports for parents must include a sensitivity to the highly personal nature of change and the variable ways that families can create positive environments for their children to develop” (Miller, Wanless, Weissberg, 2018, p. 23).

Emotional intelligence of parents of children with special needs

Mother-child and father-child relationships due to the context of disorders or impairments are special, stressful, maybe rewarding, but still extremely challenging.

The emotional wellbeing of parents of children with special needs is negatively affected, as there is probably no event more devastating to a family than a child born with a birth defect.

Studies dedicated to families with children suffering from ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), autistic disorder, Down syndrome, mental retardation and learning disabilities demonstrate that:

Emotional intelligence of parents of children with special needs, cont.

“[...] higher care giving demands are associated with poorer psychological and physical health states for parents and other family members. [...] Parents are known to get impacted in many ways because of having a special child. These include feeling sad, depression at various stages of life and experiencing other emotional reactions. Their social life may be affected, recreational and leisure activities get reduced, interpersonal relationships with the family members also get affected, financial problems may arise, parents' own physical and mental health also tend to be at a greater risk” (Vindhya Ravindranadan, Raju, 2008, p. 34-35).

Emotional intelligence of parents of children with special needs, cont.

Parents of the disabled children should possess higher levels of emotional intelligence competencies in order to better cope with unprecedented mental tensions.

Parents who competently manage their emotional intelligence usually experience:

- a better quality of life,
- subjective wellbeing,
- a higher sense of life satisfaction.

The more professional management of parental emotional intelligence, the more satisfactory understanding of the child's emotions and the more promising communication with other family members.

Emotional intelligence of parents of children with special needs, cont.

Emotional intelligence scale used to measure individual scores takes into account major qualities of:

- self-awareness,
- mood management,
- self-motivation,
- impulse control,
- people skills.

Emotional intelligence of parents of children with special needs, cont.

The scale of the quality of life measures three main aspects of physical, psychological and social circumstances of the life of individuals.

The quality of life determinants include:

- gender, marital status, age, family and friends, household, income, employment status, community and environment.

A proper insight into parents' emotional intelligence constitutes an important implication of their psychological, social, physical and emotional wellbeing.

Parents as adult learners

Parents, as a singular category of adult learners, usually need to know why specific knowledge is necessary for them before they decide to learn something. They very rarely choose unnecessary courses.

Parents give a particular emphasis on their own decisions and on self-direction for which they feel responsible.

Parents' motivation to acquire a new knowledge leading to skills and competences is driven by a desirable goal of coping with real-life difficulties and problems. Their motivation can be also connected with a sense of self-esteem.

Parents as adult learners, cont.

On the one hand,

- the majority of parents recognize that social and emotional communication skills are a high priority for the success of their disabled children.

On the other hand,

- most cannot readily articulate how they are utilizing, promoting or directly implementing these skills in their own families.

Even professionals in the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) may strenuously fight in making the translation between their professional knowledge and their personal and individual parenting practices.

Emotional intelligence after Daniel Goleman, in conclusion

Five principal components of emotional intelligence:

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Internal motivation
- Empathy
- Social skills

Parents, definitely, need to get familiar with all of them for the purpose of successful communication with their disabled children.

Definition of emotional intelligence after Salovey and Mayer, in conclusion

The term of emotional intelligence, as a psychological category, was developed by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1997. They agreed that:

- “Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (*Goleman’s ET*, 2009, p. 1).

Social and emotional learning (SEL), in brief

According to CASEL (2017):

- “Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (*What is social emotional learning ...*, 2019, p. 1).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a trusted source of knowledge about high-quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL).

Good practices of communication and cooperation with other parents

Parents of children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDDs) need good communication with and efficient support from various environments: other family members, siblings, teachers, professionals.

However, there is evidence that a huge majority of parents consider very helpful to become members of a parent-to parent support group: meet together, talk about their children's problems, build up self-confidence when being able to help others.

Family Network on Disabilities (FND) in Florida, USA

Basic activities of the Network aim at:

- mutual support,
- information-sharing.

FND is family-centered and family-driven. Its principal objectives are, as follows:

- to group individuals without any age limit who might be at risk, who have disabilities, or who have special needs and their families, professionals and citizens who are concerned about their situation and their wellbeing;
- to enable complete integration and equal opportunities of the disabled in a society without barriers;
- to serve families of children with the full range of disabilities from the very birth through the age when they turn 26 years of life.

Components of Family Network on Disabilities (FND)

- Parent Education Network (PEN), Parents of the Panhandle Information Network (POPIN) and Parents Educating Parents in the Community (PEP)

They prepare programs in order to:

- guarantee that parents of children with the full spectrum of disabilities have access to training and information they need to get their children:
 - firstly, ready for school,
 - secondly, to enable them productive, independent life experienced to the fullest extent possible.

Components of Family Network on Disabilities (FND), cont.

- Family STAR (Support, Training, Assistance, Resources) is Florida's Family to Family Health Information Center

It is a highly professional entity that:

- provides information and support to families of children and youth with special health care demands.

Components of Family Network on Disabilities (FND), cont.

- The Jan La Belle Scholarship Program

It offers a financial resource to:

- the disabled individuals who desire to pursue their personal goals and professional career through attendance at a postsecondary educational institution (either academic or vocational).

Components of Family Network on Disabilities (FND), cont.

- The Youth Advocacy & Action Project (for people aged 14-22)

Activities are free of charge to families and their goal is to:

- leave in place a well trained and confident group of youngsters who later on will be able to advocate for themselves, to improve their own lives, as well as their communities, in the context of a more effective participation in meeting the vocational, independent living;
- give emphasis to specific rehabilitation needs of the disabled (*FND USA About Us, 2019*).

Family to Family Network in Houston, USA

Chief activities of the Network strive for success of children and young adults with disabilities by strengthening and empowering their families in the areas of complex education, health care and social service systems.

The Network operates through:

- guidance and training that help families to discover potential where others see just only barriers;
- actions that aim at changing stereotypical attitudes and mindsets about disabilities and, by doing that, making sure that every individual gets to live his/her best life.

Family to Family Network in Houston, USA, cont.

The Network offers families of children with disabilities the opportunity to communicate and cooperate with other families in similar situations, in order to learn from another and help each other.

The Network operates by providing:

- education and training events on the special education process,
- developmental disabilities diagnosis information,
- referrals to community resources.

Family to Family Network in Houston, USA, cont.

Commonly adopted tools consist of:

- annual conferences,
- a website dedicated to trustworthy information about the special education procedures,
- a monthly e-mail newsletter on family and community activities,
- a leadership and advocacy training program.

The testimony of the need to take part in Family to Family Network

One of the mothers caring of and bringing up her disabled child claims that:

- “It is very easy to become overwhelmed and frustrated when trying to find help raising a child with disabilities. The best part about Family to Family Network, for the family, is being able to speak with other parents who have walked in our shoes. Their own personal experiences and advice shared with us have been so valuable. We have learned the importance of planning ahead and visualizing what the future will look like for our son and then showing us steps it takes to get there” (*Family to Family Network, 2017*).

Family to Family Network, in conclusion

Parents very much appreciate to have experienced every kind of opportunity to know both their children and each other. They claim to be very fortunate to have learned the true meaning and importance of the community belonging. Mutual cooperation opens to individuals with disabilities better chances in the fields of education and employment, and it builds a stronger consciousness of independence.

Growing up Together Plus Program of Workshops with Parents, Croatia

The Program is addressed to parents of preschool (up to eight years of age) children with disabilities, including children with developmental delays and additional specific educational need and developmental risks.

The age range of children with disabilities is extended up to eight, because their enrolment to primary school is frequently postponed even up to several years.

The Program is intended for parents of children with similar and/or different disabilities.

Growing up Together Plus Program of Workshops with Parents, Croatia, cont.

Values of group work by categories:

- “sharing – people feel less alone when they see that others feel the same;
- identification – people are willing to identify with others in a similar situation;
- accepting help from <similar people> - people accept help more easily from those who are in a situation similar to theirs, who understand them;

Values of group work, cont.

- checking – people in a group can be checked, tested in a variety of important roles;
- mutual assistance – people are often able to provide assistance to others who are experiencing the same or similar situations, which raises their self-esteem;
- social exchange and acceptance – people need a sense of belonging and acceptance, which is possible to gain in a group of people with the same experience” (Grubić, 2014, p. 39)

The testimony of the need to take part in Workshops with Parents

One of the mothers discloses the opinion about the advantages of working together:

- “Little did I know that these workshops would affect me so much. I normally don’t talk that much with people about what is going on in our lives, because they don’t understand, so why waste words and time... I just say: Verica has cerebral palsy, and that’s it [...] At the workshop, when you meet <fellow soldiers> WHO KNOW HOW MUCH IT HURTS, this is something else entirely... “(Grubić, 2014, p. 38).

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**Thank you very much for you
attention**

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