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"COMMUNICATING with OTHER PARENTS"

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ABSTRACT

The situation of COVID 19 in 2020 changed the plans of the sessions and workgroups of the whole project. The Projected activities and communication with the course participants were limited to totally on-line ways of communication and distance learning. The project organizers had to changed and adjusted the prepared organizational settings and materials to unexpected conditions of pandemia, as well as conducting sessions and activities. Therefore one of the results of training activities of ESEC is the offer of training handbook.

The Handbook Report consists of description of chapters developed by each international partner to provide more detailed information about materials, considerations and suggestions based on its own and national experience in that field. Some parts of it also are based on the 2020 sessions of parent educators developed in each country, within the framework of the European project Erasmus + ESEC "Extending Social Educators Competences".

This report contains a next part of the content with learning units prepared by By Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University in Warsaw (JKPU), which is a leader of the project ESEC, including the training course held mostly by then internet communicators in JKPU, where participants who wishe to take part into come from all over Poland.

In this chapter there is presented material on "Communicating with other parents" with the aim of the completion of a training course organized by JKPU (Poland). In the context of COVID-pandemia even more there can be observed cases when the families with children of behavioral disabilities or children with special needs coping with all sorts of stressful situations of misunderstandings from the majority of society; they also deal with some sorts of breaks and disharmony in communication with other parents of classroom. Therefore enhancing cooperation and firstly communication among such group of parents is becoming very important. It should be stress that parents of the disabled children can benefit from the

perspective of mutual cooperation under the condition that they preserve their freedom to exercise their own judgments. They need opportunities for experimentation, chances to experience failure and to learn from mistakes. One of the advantages of cooperation is thinking together, valuing and respecting each other's personal opinions and contributions for the purpose of new and creative solutions to problems.

Parents of young children with developmental delays demonstrate similar levels of parenting daily difficulties and hassles to parents of typically developing children. However, there can be noticed greater parenting stress, as regards the impact of the child on the family.

In our proposed training topic of course “Communicating with other parents” we offered for participants the following structure of main needed content of which we focus on:

PARENTS' COOPERATION in the light of MOSTLY DEMANDED SKILLS

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) and EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE in service of PARENTING SKILLS

GOOD PRACTICES in COMMUNICATING and COOPERATING with OTHER PARENTS

Parents as adult learners usually need to know why specific knowledge is necessary for them before they decide to learn something. In the first place, they look for the practical use and implementation of the teaching content. They very rarely choose unnecessary courses. Parents give a particular emphasis on their own decisions and on self-direction for which they feel responsible. As adult learners, they do not expect to be offered advice or any kind of hints that are provided by teachers to school learners. Parents' motivation to acquire a new knowledge leading to skills and competences is driven by a desirable goal of coping with real-life difficulties or problems. Their motivation can be also connected with a sense of self-esteem.

1. Introduction.

The general objective of the course is to increase and improve the ability of participants, who face challenges when parenting children with disabilities, to cope with problems through communication and cooperation. But from the point of view educators and counselors the main purpose is a transfer knowledge in order to understand the strength of communicating and cooperating for parenting with competence.

Proposed structure is reflecting the presented fields of training. In this regard, the first part is dedicated to the participants who wish to learn or improve their range and level of skills and competencies mostly which have to do with emotional communication skills. From among the above-listed skills, parents who up-bring, educate, protect and support their disabled children should particularly make use in their everyday work of those skills which are useful for emotional communication. It is desirable to focus more on soft skills than on the hard ones, because they open the way to effective involvement, cooperation and communication.

In the second part there are issues of social emotional learning and emotional intelligence for parenting with competence. There is no doubt that social and emotional skills obviously matter in raising children. Huge majorities of parents admit that they need a fair amount or a lot more support to learn social and emotional skills. In these days there is a higher awareness that parents of children with intellectual disabilities undoubtedly feel categories of emotions that are substantially different to those of parents of typically developing peers. 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.

The last major part of the training consists of practical approaches for communicating and cooperating with other parents of children with disabilities. Children and adults have their basic psychological needs. Meeting them is important for personal wellbeing. Parents when working together, communicating and cooperating in a satisfactory way develop attitudes and behaviors that bring opportunities for the fulfillment of the child's psychological needs to a lesser or greater extent rather than to complete satisfaction. Fundamental psychological needs of individuals can be divided into at least three categories:

- The need for connection with important person/s in the environment, for love, acceptance, close relationships, a <safe base> and for security, predictability and stability of this connection.
- The need for autonomy, independence, appreciation, freedom of choice. It relates to experiencing self-initiative, freedom of choice, feeling that I am the one directing my own behavior and making decisions important for my life (rather than behaving under duress and extrinsic pressure).
- The need for competence, the ability to have an effect on the people and things that surround the child and to master knowledge and skills.

In general, 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.

2. PARENTS' COOPERATION in the light of MOSTLY DEMANDED SKILLS

It often happens these days that three words are used in order to describe effective teamwork: collaboration, coordination, cooperation.

However, semantically those words are not the same or nearly the same. Thus, they should not be considered synonyms. When used interchangeably, their meaning dilutes and diminishes the potential of creating powerful, collaborative workplaces. Recently, collaboration has been a highly important word in the media thanks to Marissa Mayer's explanation of her decision to bring Yahoo employees back to the office:

"To become the absolute best place to work, communication and collaboration will be important, so we need to be working side-by-side" (Stoner, 2013, p. 2).

Mayer strongly believes that when people work together, they work better because they create real relationships the building of which is a lot easier when having face-to-face contact. Coordinative and cooperative efforts are crucial for effective and efficient work commitments and accomplishments. At least some face-to-face time spent together makes a huge difference. Examples of productive, valuable teamwork can be found in all types of environments. High performance teams, in particular, share common characteristics. Depending on their intentional objectives that are supposed to be achieved, they might rely more on cooperation or coordination than on collaboration. Cooperative work and undertaken efforts of parents of the disabled children serve as one of excellent examples.

Parents of the disabled children can benefit from the perspective of mutual cooperation under the condition that they preserve their freedom to exercise their own judgments. They need opportunities for experimentation, chances to experience failure and to learn from mistakes. One of the advantages of cooperation is thinking together, valuing and respecting each other's personal opinions and contributions for the purpose of new and creative solutions to problems.

Teaching parents' emotional communication skills

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, idea-producing.

Parents who aim at a successful cooperation with other mothers and fathers of the disabled children need to acquire knowledge in the field of developing psychology, be aware of scientific explanations of disorders, get familiar with family role models and relationships. From among skills, they mostly require communication skills, accompanied with self-consciousness and the ability to properly diagnose and analyze the situation. From among desirable attitudes they need to express: patience, tolerance, acceptance, stress-resistance, responsibility, respect of differences.

Parents who take advantage of their soft skills are prepared to play a variety of roles in front of their children, no matter if they are disabled or within generally recognized norms of psychophysical development. A list of parents' roles can be immensely extensive and the selection of priorities should rather be left to the parents' themselves for the sake of the well-being of the child. Suggested parent roles cover a broad spectrum of activities as: advisers, coaches, assistants, guides, mediators, protectors, managers, care-takers, enablers, leaders, instructors, supporters, initiators, companions, evaluators, listeners, models, teachers, assessors, coordinators, facilitators, story-tellers, partners, or trainers.

Conditions for parental successful communication with children

Understanding the importance of collaboration and interpersonal communication is a driving force of activities that are being undertaken. At the same time, the awareness that the communication process depends on many factors is necessary to be admitted. Verbal and non-verbal behaviour strongly interferes with communication and collaboration. On the one hand, if verbal signs are supposed to give directions for an effective communication, they need to be used in a very clear way, so that the message is explicit and unambiguous. On the other hand, non-verbal signs, like body language with facial expressions and gestures, sometimes play a more significant role in communication than the language itself. At the same time, one needs to recognize that if verbal and non-verbal signs do not coincide, the partners' communication process will be confused and the collaboration is damaged. Parents are expected to know that their perception of the real world is different than that of their children, because it is influenced by their socialization factors, in particular. Parents observe reality through a specific filter of individual experiences, thoughts and values. This does not mean that children who are involved in communication and collaboration do not apply their own filter, as well. Without keeping one's distance in respect of another person, the open-minded approach cannot be experienced.

A group of necessary conditions for a successful communication can be named as contextual situations that are shaped by time, place or environment. The communication partners receive mutual messages within two perspectives: the information-level expressing opinions, emotions, experiences, values, and the relationship-level immensely driven by emotional tensions between partners. Holding back one's own emotions may contribute to a rational communication and collaboration. Sometimes, the language of communication has to be simplified in favour 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 successful communication.

3. SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) and EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE in service of PARENTING SKILLS

Definition of social and emotional learning and its five core competencies

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 ...*, 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).

With the support of teachers and parents, pupils/students are supposed to gain skills in five competences that are agreed to be essential to success in school and life: social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

- Social awareness is understood as the ability to take the perspective of and feel empathy towards the others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. It also means the ability to comprehend social and ethical norms for behaviour and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports. Social awareness includes four aspects: perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, and respect for others.
- Self-awareness is associated with the ability to accurately identify one's own emotions, thoughts and values, and to properly recognize how they influence behaviour. It also helps to assess one's own strengths and limitations, to get a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and mind-set. Self-awareness consists of five factors: identifying emotions, accurate self-perception, recognizing strengths, self-confidence, and self-efficacy.
- Self-management means the ability to successfully control one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in a variety of situations, to effectively cope with stress, manage impulses, and motivate oneself. It also helps to set and work toward personal and educational goals.
- Relationship skills demonstrate the ability to build and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. They are beneficial to a clear communication and cooperation with others, as well as to a good listening. They are required when resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflicts constructively, seeking and offering help. Relationship skills are based on four elements: communication, social engagement, relationship-building and teamwork.
- Responsible decision-making expresses the ability to make constructive choices about one's personal behaviour and social interactions with respect of ethical standards, safety concerns and social norms. The concept itself asks for a realistic evaluation of consequences of several different actions, and an accurate consideration of the well-being of oneself and others. Responsible decision-making is related to six aspects: identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting, ethical responsibility (*What is social emotional ...*, 2019).

Parenting with competence

Studies show that parents who have at their disposal a broad spectrum of parenting strategies feel more comfortable and competent in their roles and have more positive mental health. Patience and understanding are usually ranked as the most required skills for successful parenting practices. However, social and communication skills are considered the most critical skills to learn. Six key factors are commonly examined in order to understand parenting practices, including "[...] warmth and emotional support, monitoring, communication, psychological control, behavioural control, and parent efficacy, all of which can involve the use of social and emotional skills" (Miller, Wanless, Weissberg, 2018, p. 11-12). It often happens that parenting practices are in a trap of repeated patterns from parents' own childhood experiences while not coordinating with their currently accepted values, beliefs or authentic feelings towards their children.

The conceptual model of the connections between parenting and social and emotional learning (SEL) can be put into action when taking into account the following factors that are characteristic of: parent background, family and child. These factors remain strongly interrelated:

"Parent background - parent influences: parent upbringing, parenting practices, family climate, parent access to resources and education about SEL and parenting, friends, teachers, trusted others, culture.

Parent SEL skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making;

Parent outcomes: wellbeing, stress and burnout, depression, physical health and longevity.
Family parenting practices: love, modeling, intentional teaching, discipline.

Family climate: collective sense of belonging, trusting relationships, psychological safety, norms for emotion management.

Child SEL skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making.

Child outcomes: positive social interactions, age appropriate risk taking, emotional resilience and mental wellbeing, academic success, healthy relationships" (Miller, Wanless, Weissberg, 2018, p. 13).

Emotional intelligence of parents of children with special needs.

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).

Further steps towards descriptive approaches in the field of this psychological theory were successfully undertaken in the late nineties by Daniel Goleman, a prominent science journalist and researcher, who brought emotional intelligence on the internationally recognized bestseller lists. Goleman has authored a number of books on the subject, including *Emotional Intelligence*, *Working with emotional intelligence*, *Social intelligence: the new science of human relationships*, to mention just a few.

After Goleman, attention should be focused on five principal components of emotional intelligence:

- Self-awareness - perceived as the ability to recognize and understand personal moods, emotions and their driving forces, as well as their impact on others. Self-awareness is interrelated with self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, and a self-disapproving sense of humor. It enables to monitor one's own emotion state and to properly identify and name one's emotions.
- Self-regulation - meaning the ability to keep disruptive impulses and moods under control, as well as to change their direction and, thus, to suspend premature judgments and to reflect before acting.
- Internal motivation - relating to a passion to work for internal reasons that aren't associated with money or status (as external rewards). Actions and efforts are grounded on an inner vision of what really matters in life, brings joy in doing something, pushes to learning for curiosity. A strong driving force is to achieve a goal, to express optimistic attitudes, also when facing a failure.
- Empathy - explained as the ability to comprehend the emotional makeup of other people and as a necessary skill in demonstrating attitudes towards people in accordance with their emotional reactions. Empathy, by its nature, asks for cross-cultural sensitivity. Meanwhile, in an educational perspective, empathy is often understood as a step leading to sympathy with its implications of concern, care or a desire for diminishing the intensity of negative emotions and individual experiences in others. It's worth stressing that empathy does not necessarily mean a feeling of pity for the suffering or misfortune of others, in other words it does not engage compassion.
- Social skills - meaning a great facility in managing relationships, cooperation and building efficient networks. They involve effectiveness of actions and joint initiatives, as well as they have the power to persuade.

Parents' emotions

Studies dedicated to families with children suffering from ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), autistic disorder, Down syndrome, mental retardation and learning disabilities demonstrate that "[...] 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 get 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" (Vidhya Ravindranadan, Raju, 2008, p. 34-35).

It is justified that parents of the disabled children should possess higher levels of emotional intelligence competences 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 and a higher sense of life satisfaction. There can be observed a reciprocal influence - the more professional management of parental emotional intelligence, the more satisfactory understanding of the child's emotions, and in addition to that, the more promising communication with other family members.

Working on and improving the emotional intelligence of parents with the disabled children brings as a result an increased quality of their lives. Emotional intelligence scale used to measure individual scores takes into account major qualities of self-awareness, mood management, self-motivation, impulse control and people skills. 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, employments status, community and environment. A proper insight into parents' emotional intelligence constitutes an important implication of their psychological, social, physical and emotional wellbeing.

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.

4. GOOD PRACTICES in COMMUNICATING and COOPERATING with OTHER PARENTS

There is evidence that "[...] many parents find it helpful to become members of a parent-to-parent support group. Parents meet regularly in one another's houses, not only talk about their children or the problem they present, but as a means of mutual support and building up self-confidence through being able to help others. Sometimes, such groups provide individual support to a new parent" (Mittler, Mittler, McConachie, 1986, p. 23).

Some of such groups of parent support may give wonderful example of good practices such as:

Family Network on Disabilities (FND) in Florida, USA

Family Network on Disabilities (FND) was established in 1985 by a group of parents of the disabled children who came together for two basic reasons: for mutual support and information-sharing. This body is a grass roots organization for individuals with disabilities and their families. FND is, in the first place family-centered and family-driven. It operates as a national network of persons 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. On the one hand, the principal mission of FND is focused on the complete integration and equal opportunities of the disabled in a society without barriers. On the other hand, the organization makes great efforts 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.

Family Network on Disabilities (FND) strives for a broad range of goals to be achieved. Let us have a closer look into three types of activities through the operation of the following programs:

- Parent Education Network (PEN), Parents of the Panhandle Information Network (POPIN) and Parents Educating Parents in the Community (PEP) constitute programs designed to guarantee that parents of children with the full spectrum of disabilities have access to training and information they need in order to get their children, firstly, ready for school and, secondly, to enable them productive, independent lives that they can experience to the fullest extent possible. The program is addressed to the whole territory of Florida, including isolated, rural areas.
- Family STAR (Support, Training, Assistance, Resources) is Florida's Family to Family Health Information Center. It is a highly professional Center that provides information and support to families of children and youth with special health care demands.
- The Jan La Belle Scholarship Program (in operation since 2009) 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. The school they are going to choose may be either academic or vocational, depending on personal abilities and interests. This Scholarship Program awards from 16 to 24 individuals who are following higher education.
- The Youth Advocacy & Action Project (for people aged 14-22). Activities are free of charge to families. The final goal of the Project is to leave in place a well trained and

confident group of youngsters who later on will be in the position to advocate for themselves. They will be able to improve their own lives, as well as their communities. The Project activities focus on actions that lead to more effective participation of individuals with disabilities and their families in meeting the vocational, independent living. They also give emphasis to specific rehabilitation needs of the disabled (*FND USA About Us*, 2019).

Family to Family Network in Houston, USA

The crucial message for Family to Family Network activities is striving for success of children and young adults with disabilities by strengthening and empowering their families as they navigate the complex education, health care and social service systems. The organization, through guidance and training helps families to discover potential where others see just only barriers. The driving force of all actions aims 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 offers families of children with disabilities the opportunity to communicate and cooperate with other families in similar situations, in order to learn from one another and help each other. The body in question operates by providing: education and training events on the special education process, developmental disabilities diagnosis information, referrals to community resources. 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.

One of the mothers caring of and bringing up her disabled child gives the best testimony of the need to take part in Family to Family Network:

"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 they 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).

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. It is justified that the age range of children with disabilities is extended up to eight because, usually, the demands and developmental characteristics of older children are not consistent with the chronological age. Moreover that their enrolment to primary school is frequently postponed even up to several years. The advantage of grouping parents of children of different ages comes out from the fact that they have acquired more varied levels of personal experience, awareness of their difficult situations, as well as an uncommon intensity of stress. The Program is intended for parents of children with similar and/or different disabilities. Evidence shows that this approach of a joint participation enables to receive information and acquire knowledge from different parental perspectives, which does not at all mean a barrier to mutual understanding.

5. Practical issues for parents. Training.

Group work with parents

Parents of children with disabilities express specific needs and expectations - when accurately recognized, the accomplishment of particular goals might be possible. Those goals are directly related with emotional and social support, and then with encouraging parents' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Parents expect to be empowered in order to take over the control of challenging situations, understand and anticipate problems with parenting a disabled child. What really matters is training them in successful communication with and support to the child, as it leads to increased and improved parental roles.

A mother of a child who suffers from cerebral palsy discloses her 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... Thank you, thank you, I am charging my batteries, which is the most important thing" (Grubić, 2014, p. 38).

The benefits and values of group work can be connected with the fact that this kind of experience is an entirely natural human experience. Thus, by its nature, it gives to individuals who are involved in it a strong sense of reality. Right after, the participants are able to feel a sense of predictability and emotional stability. The next crucially important step is hope and a sense of optimism. A commonly shared benefit of working together is the opportunity to achieve emotional relief by expressing one's feelings.

Values of group work can be divided into the following 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;
- 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 Growing up Together Plus Program of Workshops with Parents follows a routine of eleven broadly formulated topics that are consecutively addressed during workshops. They consist of such issues, as:

- The idea that every child is special, as well as every parent asks for a special attention;
- Parents' and children's expectations versus adaptation to particular situations;
- Most significant pillars of parenting to be agreed while working together;
- Psychological needs of disabled children versus parental objectives;
- All children are our children and they deserve to be loved;
- Listening as a basic parental skill;
- How a disabled child learns about the surrounding world;
- Why and how the boundaries exist?
- Parental responsibilities - what really counts?
- What does it really mean to be a parent? Influences and choices
- The end and new beginning - what parents should avoid and what kind of approaches to adopt?

In the light of the above-listed topics, parents stated that after having participated in the workshop events they have learned to talk about their feelings, they have appreciated a value of exchanging experiences and acquiring knowledge that other parents are facing similar problems and challenges. They became conscious of the fact that contact with other parents who have children with different, but too much extent parallel circumstances, opens chances for new ways and standards of communication and direction towards the child's mostly expected needs and abilities.

Playing together

Group work activities do not neglect the aspect of playing together. Parents feel like to inform other mothers and fathers, how their children react to different games. At the same time, they expect to play themselves having in mind the purpose of bringing about relaxation and relief. A question "what are we playing today?" is often asked. One of the examples is the activity whose name is "Three wise thoughts" during which parents receive three sentences cut into pieces that need to be connected. When searching the right solution, they communicate, cooperate and start to know each other better and better. Those sentences are, as follows:

- What do / good gardeners do? / They help / a rose become / a rose. / Mothers and / fathers are / like good / gardeners.
- Those / who / conquer / fear / can / scare / even / a tiger.
- There are no / hopeless / situations; / there are / only people / who / feel / helpless / in certain / situations.

Reading activities

Activity 1:

Read the article: Vidhya Ravindranadan, Raju, S., *Emotional intelligence and quality of life of parents of children with special needs*, Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology, 2008, vol. 34, p. 34-39.

medind.nic.in/jak/t08/s1/jakt08s1p34.pdf

Aim of the activity:

- Understand the importance of emotional intelligence for the quality of life and the wellbeing of parents of children with disabilities.

Task to carry on:

- Discuss what parents of a disabled child can do in order to improve the level of their emotional intelligence.

Activity 2:

Read the article: Roya Koochak Entezar, Nooraini Othman, Azlina Binti Mohd Kosnin, Afsaneh Ghanbaripanah, *The influence of emotional intelligence on mental health among Iranian mothers of mild intellectually disabled children*, International Journal of Fundamental Psychology & Social Sciences, 2013, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 12-15.

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org>

Aim of the activity:

- Understand the impact of emotional intelligence on mental health among mothers of mild intellectually disabled children.

Task to carry on:

- Discuss if mental health or mental wellbeing can be of a better quality thanks to increasing emotional intelligence of individuals.

Advices to practice:

The message for parents, as regards playing with their children, reflects the idea that mothers and fathers are children's best and most valuable toys. That is why they should play together. A set of tips for parents that encourage them to get involved in games give important advices to be followed, such as:

- Take time to play with your child every day and focus solely on him/her.
- Let the child choose the game to play.
- Draw your attention to positive feelings and good communication, in the mood of having fun together.
- Get involved as many family members as possible.
- Let playing become a routine family activity.
- Stress the child's skills and virtues, encourage initiative and the sense of competence.
- Teach your child to accept victory and defeat, as both need to be taken for granted.
- Respect the rule that time comes for the game to stop.

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