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The Importance of Communication Between a Child and an Adult in the Times of Crises of the 21st Century

Znaczenie komunikacji dziecka z dorosłym w dobie kryzysów XXI w.

Abstract: The aim of the study is to draw attention to the importance of sensitive, coherent and insightful communication between a child and an adult. Effective communication seems to be particularly important in the times of crises of the 21st century, especially in the face of a pandemic during which concepts from the field of social sciences, such as psychological well-being or interpersonal relations, gained a new dimension. The author analyzes the literature on the subject on key concepts, presents and discusses the situations observed in the everyday life of children, concerning the communication situations between children and their adult carers during the pandemic. The author comes to the conclusion that interpersonal communication in the family is the foundation of the bonds established in it, determines the sense of psychological and social well-being, and determines the harmonious development of a child. In connection with the above, in the author's opinion, it should be borne in mind that a responsible and sensitive observer – an adult guardian – must constantly watch over the child's sense of the broadly understood well-being, creating conditions for the child to feel autonomy, agency, fulfillment and high self-esteem.

Keywords: child; communication; psychological well-being; interpersonal relation

Abstrakt: Celem opracowania jest zwrócenie uwagi na znaczenie wrażliwej, spójnej i uważnej komunikacji dziecka z osobą dorosłą. Efektywna komunikacja wydaje się szczególnie ważna w dobie kryzysów XXI w., zwłaszcza w obliczu pandemii COVID-19, podczas trwania której pojęcia z dziedziny nauk społecznych, m.in. takie jak „dobrostan psychiczny” czy „relacje międzyludzkie”, zyskały nowy wymiar. Autorka dokonuje analizy literatury przedmiotu dotyczącej kluczowych dla opracowania pojęć oraz przedstawia i omawia sytuacje zaobserwowane w codziennym życiu dzieci, dotyczące zaistniałych w czasie trwania pandemii sytuacji komunikacyjnych pomiędzy dziećmi i ich dorosłymi opiekunami. Rozważania prowadzą do wniosku, że komunikacja interpersonalna w rodzinie stanowi fundament nawiązywanych w niej więzi oraz decyduje o poczuciu dobrostanu zarówno psychicznego, jak i społecznego, a także stanowi o harmonijnym rozwoju dziecka. W związku z powyższym zdaniem autorki należy mieć na uwadze to, że

nad poczuciem szeroko pojętego dobrostanu dziecka musi ustawicznie czuwać odpowiedzialny i wrażliwy obserwator – dorosły opiekun, tworząc dziecku warunki do poczucia autonomii, sprawstwa, spełnienia, wysokiej samooceny.

Słowa kluczowe: dziecko; komunikacja; dobrostan psychiczny; relacje międzyludzkie

INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the world faced a pandemic of SARS-CoV-2, also known as COVID-19. The situation of a rapidly spreading “invisible enemy” changed the everyday life of many families, changed the functioning of children and necessitated isolation (Płoszaj, Kochman, 2021, p. 61). Children were literally locked in one space with their siblings and carers, the restrictions meant that they could only go outside under the supervision of adults. It would seem that the time has come to “catch up” in building correct relationships with loved ones, because “the family began to live in its own circle, adhering to the necessary isolation from friends, acquaintances and other family members. The children also stayed at home, contacting the class and teachers online” (Płoszaj, Kochman, 2021, p. 61).

The pandemic has crept into every aspect of temporal life. The concept of interpersonal relations has gained a new weight, in addition, as Płoszaj and Kochman claim, many researchers have shown that the pandemic contributed to the deterioration of these relations overtime (2021, p. 72). Perhaps, being together and constantly staying in a closed living space with the same people, without being able to react to the “enslavement” characteristic of isolation in the form of even a lonely walk, caused various crises in the relationships of spouses, siblings, children and their parents.

In the face of a global tragedy, not only medical knowledge, but also psychology, pedagogy and sociology gained importance. The concept of human mental well-being, which is difficult to define unequivocally, has gained a new dimension, and the very mental well-being has become a deficit state of “mind and spirit”.

MENTAL WELL-BEING OF A CHILD

Referring to the literature on the subject on the concept of mental well-being, we notice that its concept derives from two research perspectives: from a clinical perspective, in which health was placed in the center, and from a psychological perspective, which drew attention to mood and emotions. According to clinical tradition, well-being means “absence of negative symptoms/conditions such as distress, depression, anxiety, etc.” (Ilska, Kołodziej-Zaleska, 2018, p. 156). However, since with the passage of time and progress in research on human mental

well-being, some doubts have emerged indicating that the absence of negative emotions or the lack of depression is not synonymous with a sense of broadly understood happiness, at the end of the 1990s, the concept of mental well-being was dealt with, among others, by Martin E.P. Seligman within the framework of positive psychology (Seligman, 1993; 2002; 2011). We learn about positive psychology in Poland for the first time from the publication of Ewa Trzebińska (2008).

In search of a sense of psychological well-being and optimism in life, it is important, according to the assumptions of positive psychology, to find resources in an individual and his/her life space, as well as to maintain and improve skills “that accompany a person’s actions aimed at updating their own potential, as well as living in a coherent and true sense of self” (Cieślińska, 2013, p. 100). Mental well-being is a condition for a high quality of human life, and since the concepts such as mental well-being, happiness, quality of life, satisfaction or life satisfaction are often considered synonymous, the feeling of mental well-being by a person is particularly important for the sense of humanity, dignity, for the harmonious functioning of human in all spheres of his life (Kossakowska, Zadworna, 2019, p. 223).

Although many attempts have been made to define the concept of psychological well-being, it is not an easy task to define it clearly. Every man is an individual, born with personal resources, and as he develops, he experiences various life situations and social interactions, as well as adopts various “points of reference”, hence each of us will define not only “happiness” or “satisfaction” in a slightly different way, but differently define the features of the so-called “optimal quality of life” (King et al., 2007).

In the hedonistic approach, “well-being” can be defined as a positive mental state, which is manifested by a high level of satisfaction with life and its various areas, is also characterized by a predominance of positive feelings over negative ones and a “generalized sense of happiness” (Kossakowska, Zadworna, 2019, p. 223). When analyzing the concept of psychological well-being in the eudaimonist trend, which is part of the concept of positive psychology, the sense of psychological well-being is not considered to be dependent on the current feeling, but on the sense of agency and human autonomy. In this trend, psychological well-being will be synonymous with the concepts of development, self-fulfillment, or commitment (p. 223). In order to feel well-being, one must therefore be an autonomous individual, convinced of the possibility of action.

Meanwhile, during the pandemic, all previously obvious “freedoms” were significantly reduced. A child, locked in the walls of an apartment, unable to go out to the playground on their own, sitting passively with a football in the room, constantly staying with loving, though not always understanding the youthful dilemmas, parents had every right to feel the lack of freedom, a deficit in self-determination. When the physical and social space is drastically depleted, in the process

of maintaining or building high-quality interpersonal relationships, interpersonal dialogue, as well as clear, sensitive and coherent communication, are of particular importance.

A CHILD IN THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

Rostańska notes that the child, as a participant in communication, is influenced by the adult's style and manner of communication, which is expressed through the use of various language forms both in creating relationships and in showing intentions, and, finally, in demonstrating himself and his world. In this world, a child, by communicating with an adult, shapes his language and learns how to use it. In natural communicative situations, he experiences and tries various linguistic events, such as: interactivity, colloquiality, relationality, affectivity, authenticity or directing, explaining and functioning of meanings. Thanks to contact with adults, a child builds its linguistic and communicative capital (Rostańska, 2010).

The specificity of a child's contact with an adult includes both the asymmetry of the relationship between its participants and the asymmetry of skills, as well as language habits, intentions and different perception of the world and oneself in it, as well as the uniqueness and elusiveness of the phenomenon of conversation. The question of what kind of communication a child experiences when communicating with an adult in a conversation concerns both the structure, course, interactivity, relations, but also those elements of the conversation that are specific to education: explaining, transmitting and receiving meanings or creating an affective sphere. What a child experiences in a conversation with an adult is essential for the proper relationship between these two actors.

Taking into account the universality of human communication, it would seem that human communication competences appear in the process of an individual's development spontaneously and without much effort. However, if we are aware of the fact that communication is a complex process related to the development of cognitive competences, including linguistic, emotional and social competences, and it is conditioned by the approach of people functioning in the educational social space of a human being, it turns out that early experiences of a child's communication skills are particularly important for his/her subsequent mental health, learning and social competences. This thesis is also confirmed by Kuszak, who reminds that "today, a child's speech is treated as a process in which the child becomes skilled in communicating with the environment using language, and during this process he/she not only learns its grammatical rules, but above all learns appropriate communication behaviour depending on the situation in which communicating with others is carried out" (Kuszak, 2014, pp.

45–46). The researcher argues that the process of mastering speech is extremely orderly, even in a way that resembles “overcoming subsequent stages of motor development” (p. 46).

Effective communication between people is a prerequisite for high-quality social relations and, thus, for broadly understood life. Especially in the era of crises of the 21st century, communication becomes very important because “in a situation of imposed restrictions on contacts with other people, especially in personal contact, a number of emotions may appear through anger, fear and disappointment. Contact with other people or the ability to communicate is an important element for fulfilling social roles, development and well-being” (Kosowski, Mróz, 2020, p. 215).

A CHILD IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION

Already at the infancy stage, between an adult and a child there should be a consistent and focused on the needs of a young person proto-communication, which is important for him because “early experiences model the structure of the brain that matures in the first years of life at a fast pace. The quality of care for an infant, broadly defined as maternal or caring sensitivity, translates into the child’s safety level, and, thus, the formation of an attachment to the parent, adequate to the quality of care, and strengthening the bond” (Wichot, 2016, p. 9). This sensitivity means the guardian’s ability to carefully perceive the signals sent by the child, to give a quick “response” and emotions adequate to his needs. It is, therefore, communication with the child from the very beginning – the child, first screaming and crying, signals unmet needs and needs answers in order to survive, but also to feel safe. From the experience in the field of nursing activities, the child will learn the fundamental competences of conversation – the essence of the alternating exchange of messages, switching on, listening and eye contact.

Messages directed to the child by an adult, singing and reading books to the child will support both the development of the relationship of attachment of the toddler to the caregiver, and, thus, constitute the first models for the development of future emotional and social competences, but also the development of language and communication skills. As is common knowledge, “in order for a person to understand social situations, their context, mentalize the state of another person and thus communicate effectively, he/she needs to experience it himself as a child in a respectful and loving care” (Wichot, 2016, p. 10). Hence, for example, the extraordinary diligence in the field of communication with infants, shown in the concept of Emmi Pikler, Magda Gerber, and Francos Dolto emphasizing the importance of communicating with children who still express their needs in a non-verbal way (Sadowska, 2020).

As Harwas-Napierała points out, “The processes of interpersonal communication are important conditions for the functioning of the family. The analysis of healthy (normal) family models shows that the factor that distinguishes healthy families from those that display a significant degree of disruptions in functioning is the proper course of information processes based on clear, open communication between family members (especially adults)” (Harwas-Napierała, 2006, p. 221). Interpersonal communication in general, but in a special way in the family, “takes place on a broader background of relations between family members, being both an indicator and a co-creator of these relations” (p. 221). According to the author, relations “are recognized in literature as the sum of interactions (actions, verbal and non-verbal communication) or »as what happens between individuals in time« (...). They are relatively permanent in nature and imply – at the behavioral level – a series of interactions of people that are called interaction partners” (p. 221). Therefore, communication in the family takes place in the context of “particularly intensely occurring (...) personal interactions, due to the high frequency, durability and specificity of contacts between family members” (p. 221). This is due to the common living and daily coexistence of family members, and is conditioned by “the existence of an emotional bond between family members, which fosters the ability to read non-verbal, spontaneous messages, conveyed by gestures, facial expressions, pantomimics” (p. 221).

In connection with the above, family communication has – according to Harwas-Napierała – “an interactive nature, which means that each behavior of a family member is in fact a broadly understood message (both non-verbal and verbal) for others, and he is at the same time a sender and the recipient of messages from other people making up the family system” (p. 221).

Taking into account the systemic approach to the family, i.e. the one that involves, *inter alia*, assuming that what happens in one of the subsystems (e.g. what happens between spouses) has a significant impact on the functioning of other subsystems, special attention should be paid to the quality of interactions in specific subsystems, so that these reactions are appropriate for other subsystems. And so, for example, the quality of the communication taking place in the parents–children subsystem results to a large extent from the model of communication between spouses (parents), thus, “the dominant style of communication between spouses, which is also visible in the communication behavior of parents towards non-partner treatment of the spouse, is conducive to a similar approach to the child and manifests itself in a conversation with him” (p. 221). Harwas-Napierała also points out that “the model of communication presented by the spouses is a pattern inherited socially by children, with a tendency to duplicate it in their families of procreation. For example, an unclear method of communication, characterized by, *inter alia*, spouses dissatisfied with their relationship are imitated by their children” (p. 223).

Any communication changes taking place over the years of family functioning occur due to:

- changes in the individual development of parents and children, especially the emergence of new needs of children, e.g. the needs of independence and autonomy characteristic of adolescence, which largely determine changes in mutual communication,

- “the influence of the cohort factor – the generation to which parents and children belong, in which the socio-cultural expectations as well as the content of the common knowledge of the broadly understood environment are reflected” (Harwas-Napierala, 2006, p. 223).

Communication in the parents–children system changes in the context of changes in the relationship between parents and children. In the early stage of a child’s life, this relationship is asymmetrical (dependent). The method of communication is determined by the sensitivity and responsibility of parents for the child’s development as well as the child’s “dependence” on the parents. As the child grows up, the relationship becomes more and more symmetrical.

Communication, especially of the mother, with the prenatal child “includes those activities of the mother that are a manifestation of the recognition of the child’s distinctiveness and presence and help in the process of establishing a bond with him” (Matuszczak-Świgoń, Kowalska-Żelewska, 2020, p. 87). Literature on the subject distinguishes six forms of communication with the child in the prenatal period (Bielawska-Batorowicz, 1995; Kornas-Biela, 2004), which serve the so-called prenatal stimulation, thanks to which the mother survives and develops her attachment to the baby. This communication, therefore, has a significant impact on the development of parental feelings.

Among the forms of communication between the mother and her child in the prenatal period, we can distinguish: imaginary thinking about the child, talking to the child, singing to the child, listening to music “together”, touching, peculiar synchronization of the mother and the prenatal child.

Kuszek also confirms that the development of speech is possible thanks to the child’s contacts with guardians using speech. As a result, the prenatal child, as well as the infant, hears the speech directed towards him, has the opportunity to “immerse himself in the language”, learn the sounds of speech in various contexts (Kuszek, 2014). The condition for understanding individual words is tuning to the speech sounds of entire nervous circuits, and tuning this – as the mentioned author says – depends on experience, on listening to many words and phonemes already in the first year of life (Kuszek, 2014).

Already at the babbling stage, the baby gains an important communication skill, which is manifested by trying to cry on purpose. Then he waits for the guardian to come into his sight, and if he does not, he cries again. This type of child’s

deliberate behavior is a quantum leap towards mastering the cognitive processes necessary to understand the law of cause-and-effect: the child begins to realize that if he or she does something, there will be some predictable consequences. Kuszak emphasizes that once this early communication skill is achieved, it opens up a whole range of possibilities for an infant to influence the environment. So, the child deliberately starts sneezing, coughing, choking, squeaking, only to gain the attention of caregivers (Kuszak, 2014).

Human speech at the threshold of his life develops thanks to interaction with a partner in a dialogue situation and thanks to the child's ability to co-create this form of communication. These early experiences (also related to participation in the proto-dialogue) favor the accumulation of linguistic material by the child, essential for independent text construction, which is achieved thanks to the feedback received from the tutor.

SENSITIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CHILDREN AND ADULTS AS A CONDITION FOR HARMONIOUS CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

Communication based on sensitive understanding is a prerequisite for the harmonious development of a child. In a situation in which a child participates in communication, in which an adult takes into account the recipient's perspective, can listen carefully, can initiate a conversation, direct, support and close it adequately to the child's needs, the child will have a chance for effective communication in the future. In the process of communication with an adult, a child often tries to find confirmation or denial of his own experiences, which he is not able to fully assess positively or negatively. An adult, along with his messages expressed through verbal speech and non-verbal facial expressions and gestures, becomes a kind of "social mirror" for the child's feelings, the adult's reactions model the child's reactions. Hence, for example, when a child falls to the ground and crying does not immediately take place, but a (questioning) gaze towards an adult appears, then, in order to avoid children's fear, anxiety, or panic, one should not shout ("I told you so!", "You see, you fell, you were not supposed to run!"). An adult should, for example, smile, hug the child and ask: "Where is this hare? After all, you caught the hare, that's where he ran away!". You can also say: "Bang bang, ah how beautifully you have fallen, see, no one has fallen as beautiful as you have before! Bravo", and only then "in secret" to see the child in order to estimate its bodily losses.

The modern world brings a number of communication problems in the family, which often result from the fatigue, frustration, overwork of adults, their constant

pursuit of material happiness, and also from the fact that adults forget or simply reject the possibility that a child is a conversation partner. The pandemic changed the face of the already difficult everyday life, a series of new unrests crept into human life, the experiences of illness, hospitalization and death of loved ones did not contribute to increasing life satisfaction. The pandemic in the process of sensitive and coherent communication did not help, and yet the relationship between an adult and a child is often not as correct as it should be. The parent – the more immersed in material, serious adulthood, the more he loses sight of the child's ephemeral, sensitive perspective. Meanwhile, "some concepts of well-being put a special emphasis on the importance of the social aspect. Ryff (...) mentions positive contacts with others as one of the components of well-being, in addition to self-acceptance, autonomy, control over the environment, having a life goal and the desire for personal development. Positive relationships with others are understood here as an experience of contacts characterized by full trust, moreover, the ability to build intimate relationships, deep friendship, and a high level of empathy towards others" (Kosakowski, Mróz, 2020, p. 217).

It is also worth noting that Shapiro and Keyes (2004) introduce the concept of social well-being as a separate dimension of well-being, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal interactions in achieving a high quality of life. The assessment of social well-being proposed by the researchers is based on five dimensions: social acceptance, social actualization, social contribution, social coherence and social integration.

COMMUNICATION SITUATIONS BETWEEN AN ADULT AND A CHILD – "PICTURES FROM LIFE"

An example of communication that is unfavorable to the child's sense of mental well-being is the "alleged" dialogue between the father and a four-year-old girl. I observed this dialogue after the end of intense isolation, but still between successive waves of the pandemic. The participants of the interview were most likely returning from the kindergarten (the mother and the infant were also present). A preschool girl was walking with her head lowered, she was crying, while her father was very angry. The axis of the conversation was the question that the father constantly asked his daughter: "Why?". The course of the conversation was as follows:

- F (Father): Why were you being rude?
G (Girl): I wanted to take plasticine,
F: But why did you steal plasticine?
G: I wanted to make something.

F: Why were you so rude?

G: I was not, I wanted to improve with plasticine [the child explained, sobbing].

F: But why? You said you were not allowed to take plasticine.

G: I wanted to make something for myself...

This dialogue – as I concluded – began after leaving the kindergarten, lasted “along the way” and most probably had an ineffective continuation.

In the example of this unequal exchange of views, we deal with a frequent *a priori* error of negative marking not so much of the child’s behavior as of the child himself. The parent did not ask, for example: “Don’t you think that taking someone else’s item is a symptom of inappropriate/rude behavior?”

The parent, instead of creating conditions for the child to think and make independent conclusions, labels the child with the words: “you were naughty”. The parent seems to focus solely on his feelings, not trying to adopt the child’s perspective. The child, on the other hand, takes into account the parent’s perspective, because the father answers his own questions, doing it in a substantive way: “I wanted to take plasticine, I wanted to make something”.

Formulating subsequent answers, the girl is convinced that she is responding to her father’s needs. As a result of the analysis of the communication situation, as well as the gestures accompanying the interlocutors, it can be noticed that the child is involved in the conversation by the father, basically without much sense, because the father, focused on the fact that the child is simply “bad”, causes trouble, and repeatedly asks the question: “why?”, does not expect an answer at all, but “unloads” his negative emotions on the child. The father conducts a monologue – he talks to his own judgments and – you might even risk a claim – with the frustrations running through his mind. The child – having answered once – should receive an appropriate comment, while the child repeats the same answer to a question returning like a boomerang, for which no one really expects an answer, no one accepts the answer. The father feels hurt by his “naughty” daughter, so he discourages himself by verbally “tormenting” the child. In this situation, the daughter learned that when someone asks a question, she does not listen to the answer anyway, she also learned what a “monster” she was.

Moreover, a characteristic feature of the described communication situation is the significant silence of the mother. The mother is not an interlocutor, despite the fact that she is a participant in the family “walk”. The observation of the silent mother confirms, in a way, the concept of family communication included in subsystems along with the mutual influence of various subsystems on others. It may seem that the mother – repeatedly experienced by her husband’s “monologues” – gives up participation in the conversation, in which she will not be heard anyway. The child is an even less experienced interlocutor, so she undertakes the trouble of dialogue. She will probably give it up with difficulty in the next few years.

Another problem of this situation is the reaction of the teacher, whose plasticine was taken from the desk. The teacher should have conducted a conversation with the preschooler on her own. The “crime” committed by the girl was not so great as to inform the parent about it as the event of the day. After all, the teacher – due to her pedagogical mission and observation of the child’s family situation – should assume that the mentee’s father does not belong to the group of empathetic and understanding parents.

Another blatant example of “anti-communication” is the conversation between a frightened child (about three years old) waiting with his mother in the waiting room for an appointment at the dentist’s. The child was crying, and the mother, instead of trying to calm the child, consistently instructed him about his incompetence. The choice of words showed that the mother was irritated by the child’s behavior, showed absolutely no interest in her son’s emotions, she even amplified negative feelings, including fear, she claimed – colloquially speaking – that “white is black and black is white”. The conversation was as follows:

M (Mother): What are you roaring? It doesn’t hurt!

B (Boy): It hurts!

M: What hurts, nothing hurts!

B: It hurts, it hurts!

M: You are stupid, nothing hurts.

B: It hurts, I won’t go, it hurts!

M: You will go, it does not hurt, you are stupid.

B: I will not go!

And then the mother involved the adult (me) sitting next to her, addressing her with the following words: “He’s stupid, isn’t he? Afraid of the dentist?” To which I replied with conviction: “He has the right to be afraid of visiting the dentist, he is very smart, even adults are afraid of it”.

The child, after the words spoken by the third person, looked at this person with interest. Along with this interest, the boy redirected his attention to a previously unknown view, and as a result he stopped crying for a moment, felt that the fear had become justified, understood, and thus – it can be assumed – smaller. The mother, however, was clearly dissatisfied as the adult interlocutor showed understanding not for her “maternal torment” but for the child’s feelings. Instead of changing the course of the conversation, taking at least a momentary reflection on the situation in which her son found himself, the boy’s mother returned to the starting point, expressing her conviction: “He is afraid, he is stupid!”.

The child, as is well known, is a mirror of the parent’s emotions. When the parent is irritated, the child becomes irritated, when the parent expresses anger, the child also shows anger. A child, inexperienced in such a rich way as an adult, is constantly looking for a point of reference for issues that they do not under-

stand, especially in difficult situations. When a child experiences anxiety, he tries to “tame it” by looking for confirmation and explanation for his emotional state, by analyzing the messages transmitted through his “social mirror” – a parent, carer, significant person.

The reaction we have in this situation is similar to the previously described communication situation, except that this time the critical event is yet to come. However, the child is already so assured that pain is not pain, and that he himself is not prudent, that – within a few years – his self-esteem and faith in his own intuition will be at the lowest possible level. The child will grow up convinced that he is wrong, that he has no right to express his dilemmas, to talk about life dilemmas, that he creates problems, that he is wrong. The mother – who is a model for the child, and thus an “oracle” in situations that the child does not comprehend emotionally, downplays the child’s fear, humiliates her son in public, and additionally tells him something that is absolutely untrue. She does it for the so-called peace, achieving the exact opposite effect, because the child not only continues to feel anxious, but also learns that he feels that way because he is incompetent, and this information further aggravates the child’s state of anxiety.

The last situation which I would like to present in this study illustrates the complete lack of the ability of an adult to adapt to the needs of a child. The event takes place in the kindergarten’s locker room, where the grandmother – having picked up her granddaughter from the kindergarten after lunch – tries to dress the child in a jacket in order to take her home. The girl was about 4 years old, during the described situation she felt like crying:

G (Girl): Mom was coming, I want mom!

GM (Grandmother): There is no mom, I am, you must come with me! [replied the grandmother with some irritation in her voice].

G: But mom was supposed to be, not you! [the girl sobbed].

GM: But here I am and you will come with me [the grandmother, strongly offended by the child’s sincerity, turned to her granddaughter].

G: I will not go with you, I do not want to, my mother promised that she would come [the girl sobbed].

GM: She won’t come, you have to come with me, here’s me and that’s it [grandma, seemed to be talking louder and louder and more nervous].

The conversation between the interlocutors continues in the same way – the grandmother is unable to convince her granddaughter that she should dress, and she does not ask her granddaughter to do so, because she focuses on proving to the girl that she is in a situation with no way out (using the words “and that’s it”). Thus, the situation “stands still”, the granddaughter cries and refuses to dress, despite the fact that the grandmother is trying to dress the child. The grandmother does not change the subject, does not explain to the child the reason for the mother’s

absence, one can get the impression that the granddaughter is ungrateful, that the grandmother feels rejected by the child which makes her nervous.

While dressing my child in the same cloakroom, I learnt from my child what the girl's name was and that she was very sad because her mother did not come for her. In the meantime, I heard again: GM: "No mom's date". I shyly glanced at the grandmother and the little girl and dared to mention: "Ola, grandma is also a mom, she is even a double mom, because she is your mom's mom, and therefore a real mom. Your mommy asked your grandma to come and pick you up, because grandma is her mom". On the child's face I saw the curiosity and a momentary reflection. I also noticed she stopped sobbing. Unfortunately, the grandmother did not take advantage of the momentary chance and told me: "You see how bad she is, she wants her mother, but I am here. What do I have with this child... how ungrateful she is".

After these words, the conversation between the grandmother and the girl returned to the starting point, and I had no choice but to comfort the girl who was looking at me: "Mom will definitely be at home, maybe she will come back a little later, but she will definitely come back, go with your grandma, because when you go with her, you will meet your mother at home". However, this time the child did not listen any more, still resisted, but the grandmother did not change her communication strategy.

CONCLUSIONS

Sensitive and consistent communication allows you to build high-quality interpersonal relationships, which in the times of the crises of the 21st century are particularly important for the harmonious development of a child. The mere contact of the child with the parent/guardian is not enough, because for the contact to become a real relationship, people must be aware of their mutual existence and take into account the other person (Bakiera, Obrębska, 2021 p. 9). Relationships created by a child with other people, especially with the closest family members, including leading caregivers, play an important role in their life, influence their self-esteem, mental well-being, and even condition their survival. As noted, e.g. by David Myers, creating and maintaining social relationships not only satisfies the natural need to belong, but contributes significantly to an increase in the level of mental well-being, and also negatively correlates with feelings such as fear, jealousy, loneliness and guilt (Myers, 2000).

Child-adult communication is a specific human-human encounter. Communication is conducive to building interpersonal relationships and a sense of satisfaction with life when it is a sensitive, understanding, coherent communication,

when the dissimilarity of its participants does not become a barrier, but enriches their relationship.

A child in the process of communication with an adult, especially absorbed in worldly crises, is often socially and emotionally lonely, misunderstood, downplayed, and, thus, unhappy. A child, either directly or through an incoherent exchange of messages, learns very often from adults that it should be quiet, after all, the synonym of a polite child becomes a quiet, non-questioning, undemanding child. Meanwhile, it is worth remembering that interpersonal communication is an irreversible process, because what we say always leaves a mark on the memory and emotions of another person.

When communicating with a child, it should be borne in mind that, as Niśkiewicz notes, “mental well-being can be defined as the effect of cognitive and emotional evaluation of one’s own life, which consists of a high level of life fulfillment and satisfaction” (2016, p. 140). When a child is convinced that his life space is dominated by positive experiences and pleasant emotions as well as “low level of negative experiences and moods” (p. 140), he has a chance to feel psychological well-being. However, attention should be paid to the fact that “mental well-being is not something given and constant”. The child’s sense of mental well-being must be constantly supervised by a sensitive observer – an adult carer – creating conditions for the child to feel autonomy, agency, fulfillment and high self-esteem.

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