

# Living in a Democratic Family.

A MANUAL FOR PARENTS  
OF ADOLESCENTS AGE 15 TO 19.



**QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL**

*Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022*

Illustrated Version

**September 2021**

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Republic of Serbia

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE  
AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT**

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“ This world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the love of ease.”

Robert Kennedy.

“ How dare you. You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words.”

Greta Thunberg

# Preface

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the Council of Europe, through intensive cooperation in the implementation of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, promote a democratic culture in schools not only in regard to school Ethos, but also in partnership with local communities and parents. This manual aims to improve the competences of parents in their encounters with different behavioural and developmental stages of children and young people.

One of the most important reference documents in the world, **The 2030 Agenda** for sustainable development, references the main factors that have a demonstrated influence on children's development: from the strong impact of media, to high pressure on families, mobility and flexibility in many areas of life, and the requirement to fulfil tasks in the family, at school, and at work. All these demands combined with a lack of learning about adequate parenting styles and a higher frequency of dysfunctional family patterns, mean that support is required for parents in the process of acquiring competences for democratic culture.

The goal of this manual is to enhance a culture of democracy through the empowerment and development of parents' competences with regards to parenting skills, attitudes, values, and critical thinking, in ways which parents can then pass on to their children.

The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture gives many opportunities to apply missing elements of a democratic culture into the educational system, as well as into everyday family life, which is the aim of this manual. Competences and descriptors correspond to interactions within a family environment. Stories and situations are universal and set up in contexts that do not relate to only certain countries or ethnic groups. At a time when we adults look at children and young people as individuals with their own ideas, thoughts and desires, and social and normative changes are reflected not only in altered family dynamics, but also in a significant change of educational goals, it is important to have manuals like this one available to families, especially for those taking the role of parent.

**Ministry of Education, Science and Technological  
Development of the Republic of Serbia**

How to raise children is personal and approaches differ as do types of families. Yet some principles transcend families, communities and even national boundaries. The Council of Europe's Education programme has developed a framework for this concept called a democratic culture.

What is democratic culture? A culture of democracy equips young people to take action to defend and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law and to live with others in culturally diverse society. It enables them to participate constructively within their families and communities, both in person and online.

To make a democratic culture a reality, four broad areas were identified: **values, attitudes, skills and knowledge** within the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*. Twenty competences were identified to strive towards this ideal, with 135 descriptors for each competence. We can all identify with these competences. They include empathy, sustainability and critical thinking, to name a few.

During the height of the pandemic in the spring of 2020 as teachers and students (with the help of parents) were all quickly shifting to online learning, the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the Council of Europe decided that parents needed specific support. This idea grew into the present publication written by Professor Rolf Gollob and Ms Svetlana Lazić within the framework of the joint CoE/EU project "Quality Education for All".

*Living in a Democratic Family* is geared towards parents of children from the age of 15 to 19. A separate companion volume entitled *Growing up in a democratic family* is aimed towards two age groups, 6-10 and 11-14. The volumes are both theoretical and practical and include topics and activities parents can broach together with their children.

We hope that parents and educators will find this publication useful to equip their children with the competences they need for the future and, at the same time, to create a more harmonious home environment where everyone contributes. While written for the Serbian context, the volumes can also provide inspiration to parents around the world.

**Sarah Keating**

Head, Division of Co-operation and Capacity Building, Education Department  
Directorate General II – Democracy, Council of Europe



# Introduction

Every parent of teenagers over the age of 15 knows how difficult each day can be. It is more than true that this difficulty is felt by all members of the family and that feelings of sadness, anger, weakness and joy are shared by everyone. Emotions define many moments of shared life and create the specific environment of living with a young person during the years when they are no longer children, but not yet adults.

Please pause for a moment and try to remember yourself at the age your child is now. Be honest with yourself – did your parents give you more of something than you give to your child? Freedom, time with friends, maybe a car, or summer holidays, for example... How do you feel now? Were you unhappy in those years? Do you know why?

Upon recognising the differences between your youth and your child's youth; perhaps that you had more of some things than they have, or that you have higher expectations for your child than your parents had; remember that times have not changed- only you have changed. As a youth, you were at one end of the stick, and today you're at the opposite one.

Today's life of multitudes in all areas of life, of more than several possibilities that individuals face in almost every situation, the presence of 'my own, subjective truth' and much more, can be confusing and confronting for adults. It creates awareness that the world in which they were raised no longer exists, and the world in which they are raising their own children is completely unfamiliar to them.

## Parents still expect to be the main benchmark for everything in life of their child (especially adolescent). No way!

Human rights give us the freedom to choose, move, travel, experience new things, read more, talk more, listen more, etc. We were born into a different time and context, and experienced these new possibilities in our late youth, yet our children have lived with these freedoms from the day they were born (*21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies*, 2020). They live what we need to learn. This clash of perspectives has led to big differences in the way the parents of 15-19-year-olds and the teenagers see the world.



Often what is black for parents is white for children.

# Democrat



**Ines** (38), single-mom and yoga instructor. She helps her mom to stay in shape.



**Nada** (58), a politician, always gives advices to her friends and family about society and democracy.



**Relja** (17) plays football for the school team. He just has that "something", girls absolutely love his sense of humour!



**Ivan** (37) works as geography teacher in high school. Ballet was his biggest love when he was young, so he goes to practice whenever he can.



**Ana** (34) works in a marketing agency, often takes in cats from the street, but Ivan's dog doesn't like that fact.



**Mark** (9) loves to play outside.



**Vera** (64) used to work as an accountant in a big company, but she quit to spend more time with her daughters Sara and Ana.



**Victor** (3) cares for his grandfather the most, cause he makes funny faces when he shouts.



**Branko** (84) loves to tell war stories to his grandchildren; can't stand it when someone doesn't know about important historical events.



**Sofia** (12) just loves going to after school biology classes, adores spiders and other insects.

# ic family



**Vlada (33)** owns the gym down the street. Kids from the neighbourhood love him because he always helps them to avoid parents' scolding.



**Una (16)** plays the guitar all day; can be a bit mean when someone isn't nice to her twin sister.



**Sara (40)** enjoying a second youth in her new marriage; photography is her passion and the walls in her house can attest.



**Todor (10)** doesn't hang out much, prefers the magic of a chemistry lab, test tubes and microscopes.



**Petra (4)** dreams of becoming a magician.



**Karlos (41)**, Mexico native, prefers living in this neighbourhood. His hairdressing salon has become very famous.



**Dragan (66)** retired postman, but he still can't get used to it. He makes the best cherry pie ever!



**Mia (16)** delights in spending time with her family and reading.

The authors of this manual write about changes in the relationship between young people and their parents and family, and they are aware that human relations are closely related to maturity and state of mind. In this book, they give parents and opportunity to alleviate their day-to-day stress, and offer appropriate solutions for common parenting issues.

The term 'adolescent' is more appropriate than 'teenager', since it is characterised by the psychological changes which follow physical growth in puberty and end with identity forming. Adolescence starts at puberty, but the two are not the same. Puberty is related to biological changes in the body, while adolescence maintains a broader scope (*Trebamo li brinuti? (Should we Worried?, 2010)*).

Adolescence can be divided in three major phases:

- **Preadolescence:** Usually characterised by arrogant, noisy behaviour and defiant opposition. It is often called the phase of opposition.
- **Adolescence:** Directed at finding independence in all areas of life.

- **Postadolescence:** The time when adolescents enter the adult world, starts to accept adult roles, and forms his/her own gender and professional identity.

Considering this, the focus of this manual are parents of young persons in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> phases.

**Dear parents, keep in mind that although it is sometimes very difficult to reach agreements and understanding with adolescents, it is possible.**

And the results can be seen for a long time. Staying consistent, reflecting on your own youth, and reminding yourself of the impact these changes have on your child's mental health are all keys to success.





**Democratic decision-making** in the family is the key to building a relationship of trust, respect and acceptance between all family members. Parents in Serbia like to agree with their adolescent about pocket money, planned expenses, etc. If teenagers want to participate in extra-curricular activities, parents and children work together to find affordable options. In situations where a child can't decide which secondary school to enroll in, parents usually encourage them to attend a school with a broader education, to be introduced to issues in science, literature, arts, physical education etc.

**Conflicts** are common in family life, but sometimes the cause of the conflict may come from an outside source. Adolescents around the age of 15 frequently have conflicts with their peers with regards to style, taste in music, differences of opinion, etc. Sometimes, the results of these conflicts can be severe, even resulting in exclusion from the group. This can be reflected in the adolescent's behaviour, leading to increased frustration, impatience and anger at home. It has consequences on family relations, but it is only when parents recognise the underlying cause of such behaviour that the unprocessed emotions within their child become apparent, and the issue can begin to be addressed. Problems regarding addiction and substance abuse among friends from school and the local area can act as particular triggers for conflicts

and can disrupt family unity. Such problems may overcome parent's competences and knowledge, and, in such instances, some parents are right to reach out and ask for professional help. Professionals can encourage adolescents to understand that big changes should not be met with fear and withdrawal and teach them to react without hurting themselves or those closest to them.

**Joint family activities and/or rituals** are very important for maintaining and preserving family unity. A lot of adolescents live with only one parent, usually as a consequence of divorce, death or work commitments. and sometimes rituals can be very hard to sustain. Parents usually say that lunch or dinner is very important to the family, in order to spend time with their child, and to find out about their thoughts, feelings, and activities. Sometimes, these situations can become a source of arguments or, misunderstandings, but this is a normal part of life. According to parents of adolescent girls, visits to shopping malls can provide occasion to connect to their daughters and offer the opportunity for small, but significant talks.

Recently, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, board games have been added to the list of joint family activities which can be enjoyed at least one to three times per week.



## PART I

# Democracy in daily family life

## 1. Living in a Democracy – some basic thoughts.

Democracy means sharing power. Not one should rule, not several, but all. This applies to the community as well as to the family. In the patriarchal family, only one person rules. All the others are to be subordinate and should obey. An unrestricted autocracy that deprives the citizens of their political freedom was considered reprehensible by the ancient philosophers, as tyrannis. For the family, however, the same philosophers demanded it. Political freedom includes the right to determine oneself. It is only when this is guaranteed for every citizen, that power comes from the people, from 'demos'. Unlike all other forms of political rule, democracy is the only one in which the exercise of power is linked to the consent and participation of the subjects. In ancient democracy, this was enacted by large assemblies in which every male citizen had the right to speak and vote. In the family, on the other hand, only one man had the right to make decisions for all members. No assembly was held. In the direct democracy of antiquity, the independence of each individual citizen was to be asserted. The domestic conditions of this autonomy consisted of patriarchal autocracy. The right to speak publicly in the assembly and the power to call the shots in private at home were directly linked.

### Participation in public space also means a say in the private home

In representative democracy, too, the people should rule over themselves. The government is elected by the people and should express their majority will. But even those whose opinions do not agree with the majority should not experience the elected government's rule as foreign. All opinions should be represented in parliament, so that everyone can recognise their democratic representation. As a possible future government, the opposition always has a share in the current government. The deputies appointed to constituencies should represent the entire population, men and women from every class and profession. After winning the right to vote, women began to be represented accordingly, not only through democratic participation, but also through the democratisation of the family. Participation in public space also means a say in the private home. Equality increased and employability, free choice and mutual interest over the child became representative issues of families, as is still the case today.

In other words:

**we are faced with the fact that children must also be represented. Because they belong to 'demos' just like men and women.**

### The democratic family includes all members

For centuries, obedience to the family was considered the highest educational goal. To meet not only the parents but the entire family with devotion was highly valued. This was especially true once children had grown up and had children of their own. In this way it was to be ensured that the children fulfilled the demands of their parents, both in terms of their legacy and in terms of their care. Interests were directed towards the community, not to the individual person. Love and affection were not publicly displayed.

The main focus of families was to raise children in such a way that they could successfully work and maintain family values and wealth. The family always comprised of several generations and consisted of a large number of relatives. This is still the case today in many cultures. Belonging to one's own family, which is often the only protection and support necessary for the individual, is usually stronger than the bond with the community and its institutions. Important positions are given preferentially to relatives. Nepotism is everyday life.

And this is by no means only true for the higher levels, but wherever relations with one's own family are more powerful than the rules of the community. Even in democracies that have existed for some time, there are still very influential families in which political and financial power is combined. This trend can be dated back to ancient times, when one of the main tasks of democratic rule was to reduce the political influence of large families. Democracy had to assert itself not only against the tyrannis, but above all against the rule of the nobility. To ensure that offices could not be passed on from one relative to another, they were allocated by drawing lots. The community was not to be dominated by large families and their political allies, as was the case in the European hereditary monarchy until well into modern times. Without the

independence of children, large families form a political power that is incompatible with democracy. Breaking the chain from one generation to the next is one of the existential conditions of democracy.

### Children question the world

Every child creates a new, personal view of the world that did not exist before. With every new experience and at every stage of learning, children begin making their own judgments. This starts much earlier than we realise - from birth. Moreover, children want to have their opinions heard long before they grow up and get involved in the political world. Once children learn to speak, they immediately start to ask questions about the world around them. First, they want to know the names of plants, animals and things. When walking in the forest, parents might notice how few of the bushes and trees they themselves can name correctly. Second, come the questions of why. Often, a child may ask why people need to sleep and why they have to go to bed already.

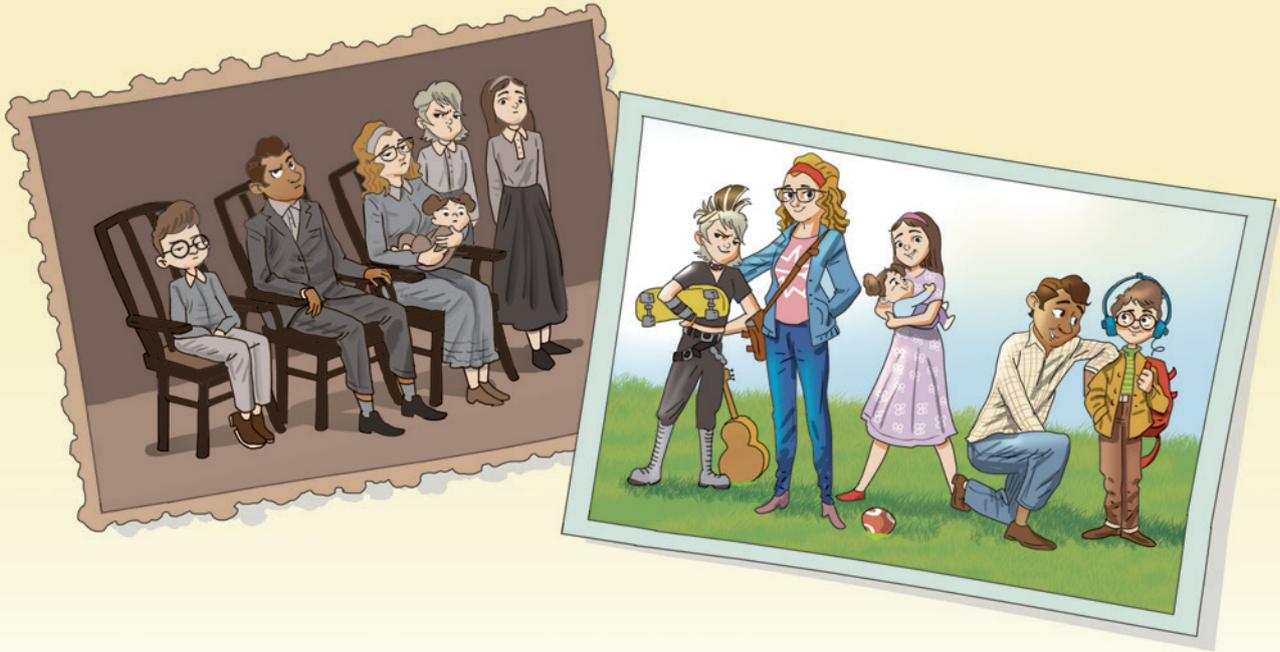
### About self-control, listening and having a say

It is a fact that, just like adults, children need clear rules. But education does not take place in only one direction. The family is a learning community. Parents change alongside children, as they grow up and develop. Children have their own tastes, their own preferences and often hold clear views on how things should work. Parents have to know how to deal with this, even if it can be exhausting.

It can be painful for parents when a child refuses to do something they did previously without issue: they no longer want to sit on their chair, no longer want to put their shoes on, or announce with great seriousness that from that point on, they will no longer help with cleaning up. What was fine yesterday is a problem today. It can often take a while before we understand what the reasons for these sudden changes could be. Yet we are also often impressed with how convincing their reasons for doing so seem.

**The goal of parents should be to teach their children to control themselves.**





But self-control is not the same as discipline, something which is beginning to be demanded by society and education again today. Self-control means knowing what is good for you and what is not. Parents in a democracy want their children to be able to make their own decisions. To achieve this, parents must also give them the right to have a say. In dealing with children, one can experience the effectiveness of democracy first-hand. Parents cannot demand anything of their children which they do not do themselves. Listening is a political virtue, which is why speech and counter-speech are crucial mutual foundations in the democratic family, just as they are in democratic politics.

### Modern families dare to try new things

In recent decades the concept of family has changed a lot. The dominance of the ancestor and the patriarchy has come to an end, with most couples now viewing their partnership as equal. When they marry, they no longer do so to claim ownership, but instead, to solidify a promise. Even if not always successful, the intention to stay together for life is often linked to the desire to start a family of their own, and marriage provides a legal framework for this.

The oldest division of labour between a man and woman is no longer a matter of course: more and more fathers are now contributing to previously 'female' tasks in the household, thus exposing them to an existential life experience which they previously had no access to. Political democratisation, which was first seen in Europe with the execution of the absolutist during the French Revolution, has not only led to the political self-determination of men, and later, of women, but it has also freed families from the structure containing authoritarian figures of domination.

**This break away from the paternal family structure suddenly changed the family focus away from their origins and towards their future.**

While in the ancient familia the key focus was on the preservation of paternal power, the modern family is geared towards enabling and supporting new life. The fall of the despotic father benefits not only women and children, but also men. Only in a democratic family structure can all family members actively participate and take responsibility.

## 2. Three styles of upbringing

Kurt Lewin (1890 – 1947), an Austrian psychologist who emigrated to the USA, defined three styles of leadership, relevant to all fields of the community, including the family. These are referred to as the democratic, the authoritarian and the laissez-faire style of leadership. These terms serve as a guide to leadership styles, but do not, of course, mean that all parents conform to only one type: usually parents demonstrate mixed elements from two or more of the styles. However, such concepts can be useful in raising awareness of one's own behaviour as an educator and may encourage one to reflect on the various behavioural styles which exist.

### 2.1 The democratic style of upbringing

Parents who opt for the democratic style of upbringing do not want to set rigid rules or patronise their children, and instead focus on promoting their independence by offering guidance and support. The democratic style of upbringing should be as transparent and comprehensible as possible for the child, including clearly communicated rules and regulations.

The democratic style of upbringing:

**One of the most important characteristics of the democratic style is the clear announcement of future plans and activities to children.**

This prepares children for the rights and responsibilities that come with life in an open democratic society. The consequences of such communication are clear:

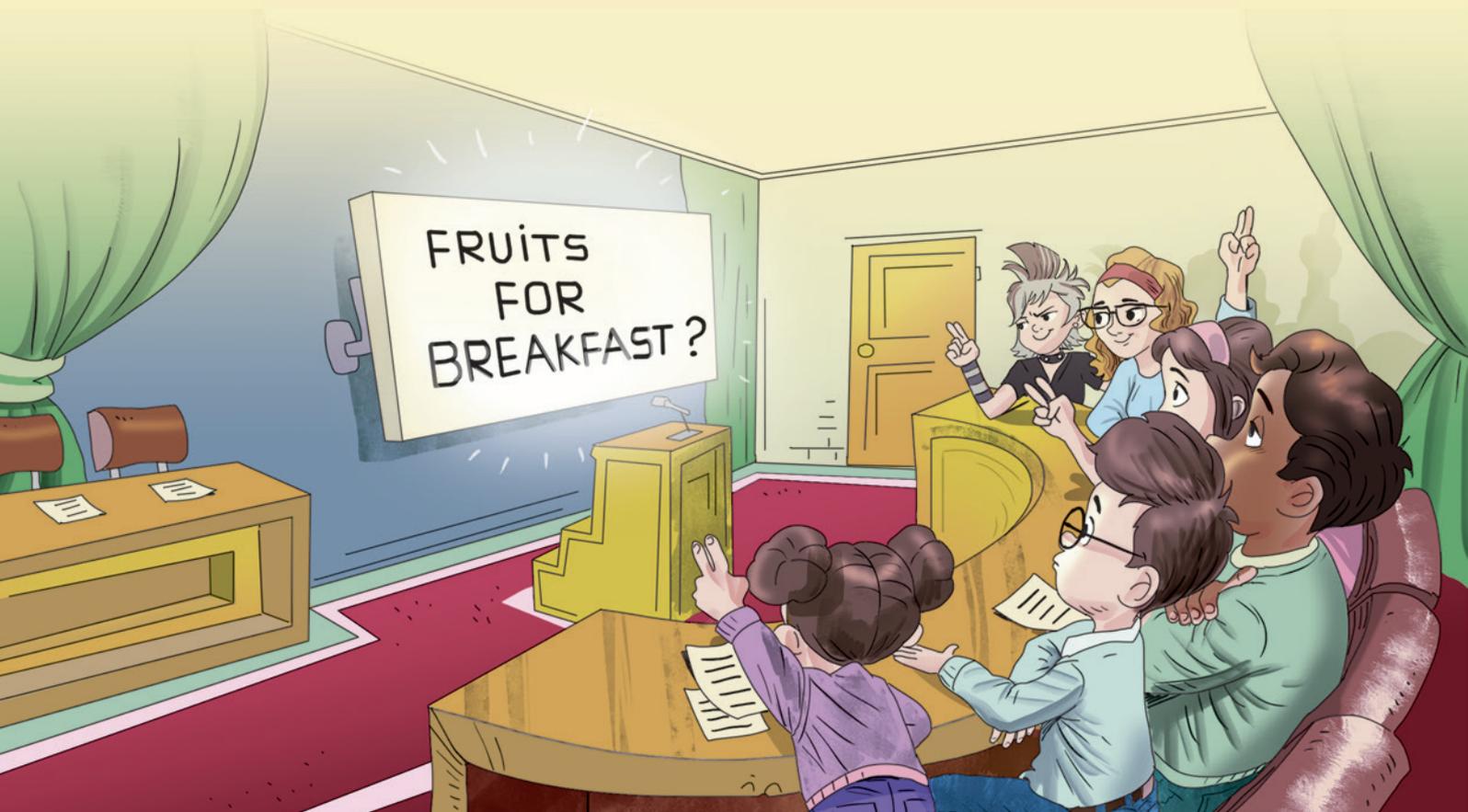
- parents are more likely to give suggestions than to set rigid boundaries
- the child may question rules and receive explanations
- parents are willing to discuss alternative solutions
- the opinions of both parties - parents and children - are generally considered to be of equal value
- the child may make independent decisions within a given framework
- important decisions that affect the whole family are made jointly by both parents and children
- parents continuously offer their children support and stability

- the parent-child relationship is characterised by openness, acceptance, affection and warmth
- when parents express criticism of the child's behaviour, it is done in a constructive and appreciative manner
- if the child has violated rules and the parents choose to apply consequences, the child always understands the reasons why, as well as the length and the manner of punishment.

The democratic style of upbringing has the following advantages and disadvantages:

### Advantages

- strong communication between parents and children promotes good language skills and a large vocabulary
- strengthening of the child's self-confidence in their thoughts and abilities
- children learn to handle criticism
- children develop a greater acceptance of other opinions and a willingness to work together to find solutions
- encourages children to make their own decisions and to take responsibility for the consequences





## Disadvantages

- requires patience and time on the part of the parents
- children often want to discuss everything
- children often demonstrate a lack of willingness to accept mandatory rules and limits
- outside the family, e.g. at school, the children's eagerness to discuss can be interpreted as disrespect

**For many parents nowadays, the positive aspects of the democratic style of upbringing outweigh the negative, and democratic practices are put into practice intuitively, at least in part.**

Blind obedience and discipline are rarely expected of children by parents anymore, and parents usually work to ensure their children are treated lovingly and are met with clear and comprehensive communication. Creativity, initiative and self-confidence should be encouraged and strengthened from a young age.

## 2.2 The authoritarian style of upbringing

Until the 1960s, the authoritarian upbringing was the predominant model for raising children. It was only through the course of the student movements of the decade that established hierarchies gradually softened and more liberal forms of upbringing became popular.

The authoritarian style of upbringing is mainly characterised by a strict hierarchy between educator and child. Parents maintain control over their child, who are deemed to be too small or immature to take responsibility of their own decisions. In this approach, parents are the subject and children are the object. The authoritarian style of education does not tolerate any forms of resistance. The child must follow established rules and meet parents' demands as best as they can. If the child does not follow parents' instructions or does not carry them out to their level of satisfaction, they are reprimanded and punished. Certain statements are characteristic of an authoritarian upbringing. Here are a few examples:

- "If you don't eat up, you go to bed hungry."
- "When adults talk, children shut up."
- "I decide when you go to bed."
- "As long as you put your feet under my table, you do as I say."

An authoritarian style of parenting goes far beyond a strict upbringing; it also strongly influences the emotional relationship between a parent and child. In general, the child receives little intimacy or attention, and only receives recognition if, in the opinion of the parents, they have satisfactorily fulfilled the demands placed on them. Even then, praise is rather impersonal and objective, and loving gestures are rarely offered.

Further characteristics of an authoritarian upbringing:

- The decisions and wishes of the child are considered irrelevant and unimportant
- A child's upbringing is based on the reward and punishment system
- Daily life is organised through the use of strict rules and control
- Criticism is frequent and a normal form of communication

### Possible consequences of an authoritarian upbringing

An authoritarian style of upbringing can have negative effects on a child's development. Children are denied the opportunity to develop their own thoughts, opinions, independence and personality. This can have a detrimental effect

on self-esteem, creativity and social relationships, right into adulthood. Desire to be 'a good child' and please parents can affect children throughout their entire lives and can make life more difficult than it is for others. Consequently, in adolescence these children might experience painful existential crises, without having developed the coping mechanisms necessary to navigate their way out of them. This can lead some to drug use, criminality, or other unhealthy behaviours.

### Children who have been brought up in an authoritarian way often display issues in their social environment.

They tend to appear aggressive, struggle to respect authority, and often strive to be the centre of attention. They frequently also replicate the behaviour displayed at home towards their peers. This is particularly the case towards children they perceive to be weaker, with whom they often communicate in a bossy, aggressive, and egocentric way. This can also be seen in their use of language, with frequent use of words such as "I", "my", "me" and "mine".

It also happens that children who have been brought up in an authoritarian household behave in exactly the opposite way: They let their peers push them into a victim role, withdraw and experience feelings of isolation and helplessness. This behaviour is frequently continued into adulthood.



## 2.3 The laissez-faire style of upbringing

In the laissez-faire style of upbringing, parents tend to behave passively towards the child. It could also be referred to as a form of 'anti-authoritarian' parenting, in which the parents behave in direct contrast to the authoritarian leadership style. Only minimal guidelines are given to children, who are therefore essentially left to their own devices. The laissez-faire style provides no clear framework that offers children orientation and security.

Parents following the laissez-faire style demand very little from their child, and in case of conflicts they rarely take the children's opinions into account.

**In the laissez-faire style, parents tend to behave with indifference and a lack of interest, only doing what is necessary and keeping effort levels as low as possible.**

In extreme cases, parents with a laissez-faire parenting style can neglect their children. The laissez-faire style ultimately satisfies neither the parents nor the child. Parents can be disappointed by the spoiled, ungrateful behaviour of their children, and the children do not learn proper behavioural boundaries.

## 3. Life is colourful: Patchwork families

Many people are familiar with the colourful patchwork blankets and carpets sewn together from many different pieces of fabric. Even if the patches often look completely different, when put together they form a harmonious picture. A patchwork family follows the same principle: partners come from different families and are "patched together" as strangers to form a new family and a first-degree kinship. Following this, mothers, fathers and children are "patched together" in life. The possible combinations are almost endless. And unlike with colourful patchwork rugs, it is often not easy to create a harmonious overall picture within patchwork families, especially when issues arise regarding different values, habits, parenting models and shared finances. Despite this, however, in modern, open democratic societies, in which women have the same possibilities as men to develop and take decisions, new types of families no longer have to be hidden.

If families decide that it is in their best interests to combine, it should be seen as a positive development; not easy, but positive. Living together harmoniously as a patchwork family cannot be forced, especially when there are two different communication models – intergenerational and intragenerational – at play. Intergenerational communication refers to the communication between family members from different kinship positions; generally between parents and children and





grandparents and grandchildren, but also including extended family members such as aunt, uncles, cousins and in-laws. Intragenerational communication refers to the communication among family members from the same generational group, i.e. the communication between children, parents, or grandparents. It is important for families to understand that growing together takes time. If the members of a patchwork family do not try to rush, and treat each other with care, there is a good chance that this colourful jumble can develop into a unique work of democratic art.

### **All beginnings are difficult: Starting as a patchwork family**

Children, particularly at kindergarten and preschool age, often believe that they are to blame for their parents' separation, as one or other of them does not love them. For children to better adjust to their new life in a patchwork family, it is key for them to understand that their parents love them regardless of their relationship with each other.

For school-age children, on the other hand, the relationship with their parents' new life partners is often particularly dominated by conflict. Jealousy can play an important role when children feel that the new partner receives too much attention, and teenagers in particular often struggle to accept new partners as figures of authority. There are patchwork families in which this is not the case - but even then, feelings of confusion can arise. For example, a child who gets along well with their mother's new partner might worry that they are betraying their biological father.

Relationships can start to relax if new partners build a casual friendship with the child instead of trying to replace their mother or father. It is also not advisable to surprise children with a new partner - e.g. by moving them in with the family too soon. A period of getting to know each other through joint activities is usually a more pleasant and successful start to life as a patchwork family.

### **In many patchwork families exists an element of competition.**

If both partners have children from previous relationships or if they have children together, the idea of having step- or half-siblings is something which it may be required to come to terms with. Clashes between new siblings often extend to parents, for example if each parent each chooses to defend their own child. The movie *Yours, Mine & Ours* (2005) with Dennis Quaid and Rene Russo is good illustration of this.

Ex-partners also often compete with each other, for example when they want to outdo each other in what they can offer their children, or when their parenting styles differ. In such instances it is important that the underlying conflict between the parents is resolved. When necessary, the patchwork family can be helped through counselling by a family therapist.

Finally, patchwork families can face tangible planning difficulties. Routine does both children and adults good, but it cannot always be achieved in the turbulent everyday life of a patchwork family. If parents live far away from each other, then this problem is exacerbated, due to, for example, different holiday

periods. Ideally, ex-partners should be willing to work alongside each other and share responsibility for their children.

## 4. Living with Children: Democratic family meetings: taking decisions together

Democratic family relationships develop most effectively when all members have an equal opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. Successful family meetings require such conditions.

The family meeting is a regularly scheduled meeting of all family members. Discussion topics consist of matters such as beliefs, values, wishes, complaints, plans, questions, and suggestions. It is an opportunity for all to be heard on issues arising in the family.

**The family meeting is an appropriate time to plan family fun and to share good experiences and positive feelings toward each other.**

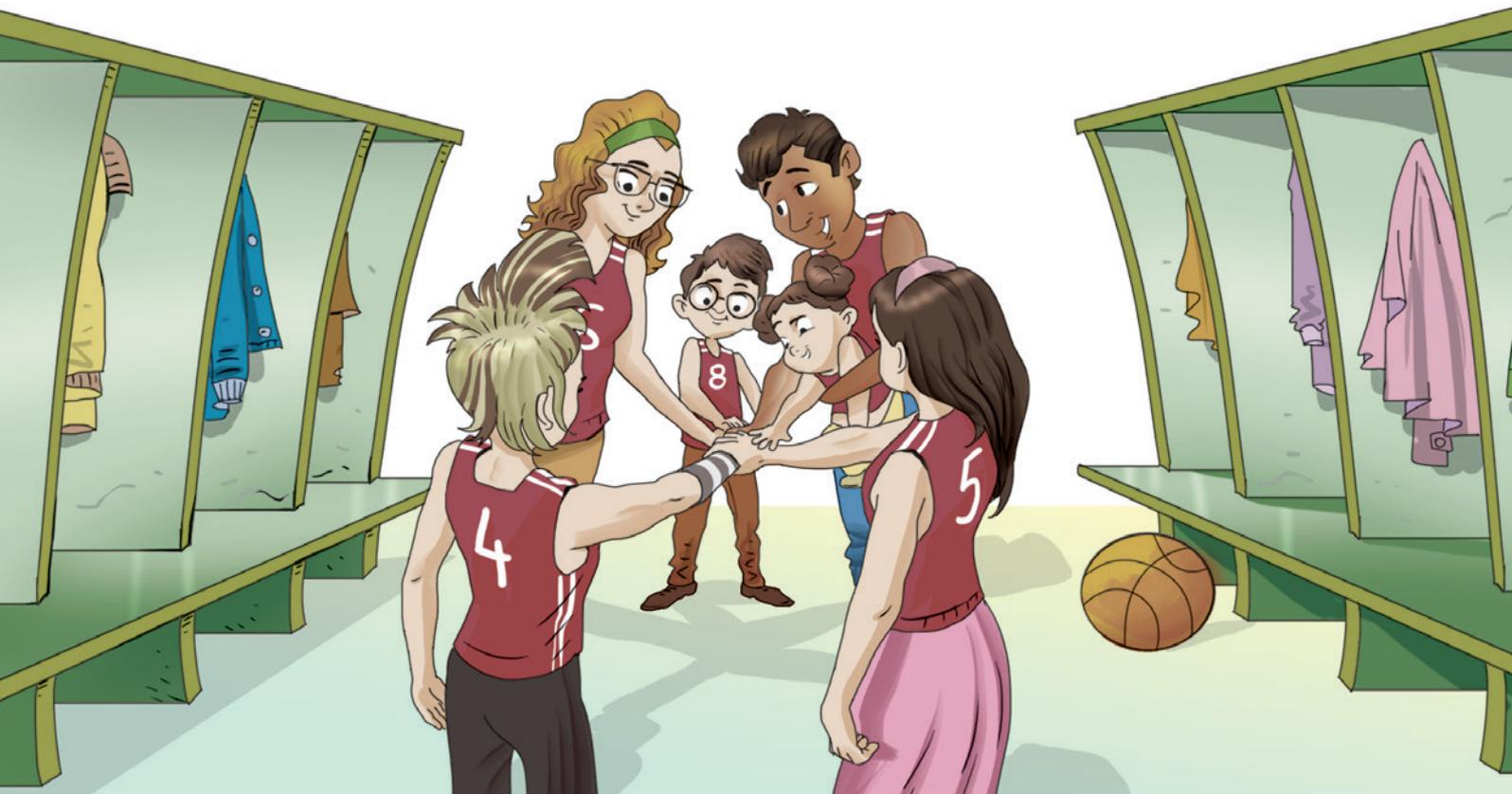
Regular meetings can promote family harmony by providing time to establish rules, make decisions, acknowledge good things happening in the family, and pointing out the strengths of individual members.

Nevertheless, we urge parents to set aside a routine time for family meetings, to promote a commitment on everyone's part to share in family concerns. The meeting time should be convenient for everyone.

If some members decide not to attend, they will have to accept the logical consequences of not attending; for example, being excluded from the decision-making process.

In summary, the family meeting provides opportunities for:

- Being heard.
- Expressing positive feelings about one another and giving encouragement.
- Distributing chores fairly among members.
- Expressing concerns, feelings, and complaints.
- Settling conflicts and dealing with recurring issues.
- Planning family recreation.



Family meetings also support a child's ability to communicate, express their thoughts and ideas, ask questions and expect answers, and listen to each other, among other relevant life skills. Besides that, they empower children's capabilities to be resilient to difficult life situations. Family meetings develop children's competences, self-awareness and attachment relationships. It takes patience and effort, but the end result of the development of important life skills is worth it. Similarly to building a house, it takes time but lasts for life.

## 5. [www.living-democracy.com](http://www.living-democracy.com): Democratic life in school and at home

In cooperation with specialists from various countries of the Council of Europe, a democracy website has been created under the direction of the PH Zurich, which shows teachers, headmasters and parents in a very concrete way what democratic action and learning can look like in everyday life. Here we briefly introduce the part of the website which is specifically aimed at parents and that deals centrally with questions of democratic and participatory communication between children of different ages and their parents.

Different situations are starting points for the discussion and the development of joint solutions: The eldest child in a fam-

ily is about to choose a profession and has no idea which profession might suit her. Recently, there has been more frequent feedback from school about the son's unfinished homework, and the youngest child of the family regularly makes shopping difficult, when her favourite biscuits do not end up in the trolley. Do these situations look familiar to you? Do you also sometimes have the feeling that you need to look for new ways of getting into conversation with your children?

**The website [living-democracy.com](http://www.living-democracy.com) offers various tips and tricks for everyday life with children of different ages.**

In addition, the website gives tips on raising children, which, in particular, promote democratic thinking, acting and communication. Only those who experience democratic communication and action in everyday life can develop a democratic attitude themselves and practice democratic communication and action.

For toddlers (1-3 years), children (4-12 years) and young people (13-18 years), there are several situations in everyday life which can be challenging for parents, for example cleaning up after toddlers, practising table manners with the youngest, doing homework, regulating teenagers' use of media and sex education: how do I talk about this with children and young people? The approach to the different topics is



always roughly the same and is based on the principle of “problem-based learning”. An entertaining cartoon with a description introduces the topic and the problem (or problematic behaviour) is made clear.

Now the user is confronted with the question “How would you as parents react? Further, smaller comic strip drawings follow, each representing a different way in which parents might react. The user selects the reaction that best corresponds to his own reaction in this situation and clicks on the picture. Now the advantages and possible disadvantages of this reaction are discussed: Will this reaction solve the problem? How will the situation continue? How does the child feel? How does the adult feel? Will the situation change? These and similar questions of reflection guide the evaluation of the adult’s reaction.

The next step is to identify alternative actions that can help to solve the problem. Here, modern pedagogical theories and approaches (such as sending ego-messages, non-violent and open communication) are linked to the concrete situation. However, the user not only has the opportunity to obtain theoretical information about the alternative action, but is called upon, with the help of suitable exercises, to train these new ways of communication practically. Some exercises can and should be directly integrated into everyday life, such as filtering out destructive messages from parents’ own communication style. This is because one’s own behaviour can only be changed if first observed and acknowledged in a practical sense. This

action makes abstract theory tangible and transforms it into immediate, new knowledge of the parents’ actions. The new patterns of action or conversational cues are relevant not only in the selected, exemplary situations, but can also be immediately applied to other challenging parenting situations at home.

**Some of the suggested communication strategies may seem unusual, if not strange and inappropriate, however trying something new is often the only way by which problems can be tackled and progress can be made.**

In this respect we would like to encourage you to get involved in this experiment! It is at least worth a try in your attempts to get educational problems under control!

We hope that entrenched conflicts and situations of seemingly insurmountable stress can be reviewed and re-evaluated with the help of the educational and communication strategies we have put together. Allowing these strategies to offer you solutions and enter into your everyday educational routine can allow you and your children to see this shared time as quality moments, vital in moving forwards on the exciting path of growing up in a democratic society.



## PART II

# Competences as help for the future



# 1. Competences as a goal of upbringing and of education

## 1.1 What are competences?

Nowadays, the whole world seems to be talking about skills: Am I competent enough to be a mother or a father? Do I have enough skills to ride my bike through dense city traffic? What about my cooking skills? My reading skills? My conversation skills? Many school curricula are based on skills and thus respond to new challenges in our society. Work and coexistence are changing because economic, ecological and social conditions are changing. In order for future generations to prove themselves in private and public life and find their place on the job market, children and young people should be able to apply their knowledge and skills in an innovative and responsible manner. In technical discussions, the term competence is sometimes used synonymously for terms such as talent, aptitude, skill, ability, performance, learning, knowledge or even intelligence.

In order to narrow down the concept of competence, one can try to differentiate it from existing terms. For example, a competency is primarily seen as changeable, learnable and trainable. Accordingly, a competence can be understood as the basis for a successful learning process, while knowledge can be regarded as the product of this learning process.

What is meant by a competence, therefore, is the ability and skill to solve problems and the willingness to do the same. This is very important in today's rapidly changing world:

**Nobody can predict which problems our children will be faced with in the near and distant future.**

If we give them the skills through which they have the courage and the self-confidence to confront their problems, then we prepare them for this unknown future. If we provide them with solutions, we make a big mistake.

## 1.2 What are competences for a democratic citizenship?

Competences are invisible, and we can only gain access to them by looking at the actions we all take in our daily lives. Democratic citizens demonstrate their competence through their actions and performance. This includes parents as well as children. In schools it is widely understood, that teaching through, about and for democracy and human rights are key approaches. Why should it not be applied in family life? To be more precise, let us look at different types of competences which support young people to become responsible members of their society. They include the following:

- analysis and judgment
- skills
- taking action and participating
- personal and social competences.

### Competences of analysis and judgment

Democratic citizenship requires citizens to understand the issues under discussion, which requires citizens to be informed and capable of analysing problems and lines of argument and conflict. This is the cognitive dimension of competence development (learning "about" issues of public life).



Without this level of understanding, a citizen is easy prey for demagogues, lobbyists and populists, and will not be able to identify and negotiate his or her individual or group interests. We depend on the media as a source of information, and we must be able to engage with it critically. Taking action in a democratic society is only possible if we know what we want to achieve. We must be able to define our interests and objectives, balancing wants and needs, values and responsibilities. Public life is a process of decision-making to solve problems and settle conflicts; there is no option not to make a decision, and decisions are not possible without judgement.

Increasing complexity in our modernising societies tends to overstrain the 'normal citizens' competences of analysis and judgment. Addressing trust or distrust towards existing political leaders is one way of reducing this complexity. Education is key in enabling citizens to stay well-informed of the political decisions that affect them.

### Skills

Children and young people need a set of skills or techniques in order to acquire and use information and to form their opinions independently and systematically. These tools enable future citizens to:

- acquire information both through media and first-hand experience and research – techniques of using print and electronic media, interviews, research, reflection, etc.
- select and study information thanks to techniques of planning, time management, reading, thinking, recording
- determine, present, share, and argue their views
- reflect on the outcomes and processes of learning and application.

To a considerable extent, these skills are necessary not only for young peoples' lives as future citizens but also for the life-long learning process more broadly. They prepare everybody for more advanced academic studies and for qualified jobs. The more this type of learning is also discussed, upheld, and shared within families, the more it will be applied by family members. There is no final goal. We remain learners for our whole lives. Parents and grandparents can learn from their children in the same way children learn from them.

**Taking action: The formal skills training just mentioned supports learning for life in democracy. But is not sufficient. Schools, neighbourhoods, and families can all be understood as micro-communities in which children and young people learn how to take part in society through practical experience.**

The competences they need to acquire to achieve a well-functioning family life include the following:

- reflecting wants and needs, clarifying and promoting different interests
- negotiating and decision making
- understanding and appreciating the need for a framework of rules and sanctions.

The decisive area of transfer lies beyond the family or neighbourhood, it lies in society as a whole, and extends into adult life.

### Personal and social competences

Perhaps the concept of competences is somewhat overstrained when it is extended to the dimension of values and attitudes. On the other hand, it is the performance, or the way children and young people behave, that counts, and the disposition to behave can be conceived as a competence. This dimension of competence development corresponds to learning "through" democracy and human rights and reflects the culture of democracy discussed in this manual. It includes the following:

- self-awareness and self-esteem;
- empathy;
- mutual respect;
- appreciation of the need to compromise;
- responsibility;
- appreciation of human rights as a collectively shared set of values

The framework of 20 competences for a democratic culture is therefore not just a framework for schools but gives a clear picture, of what we ourselves need to learn and apply throughout our lives.

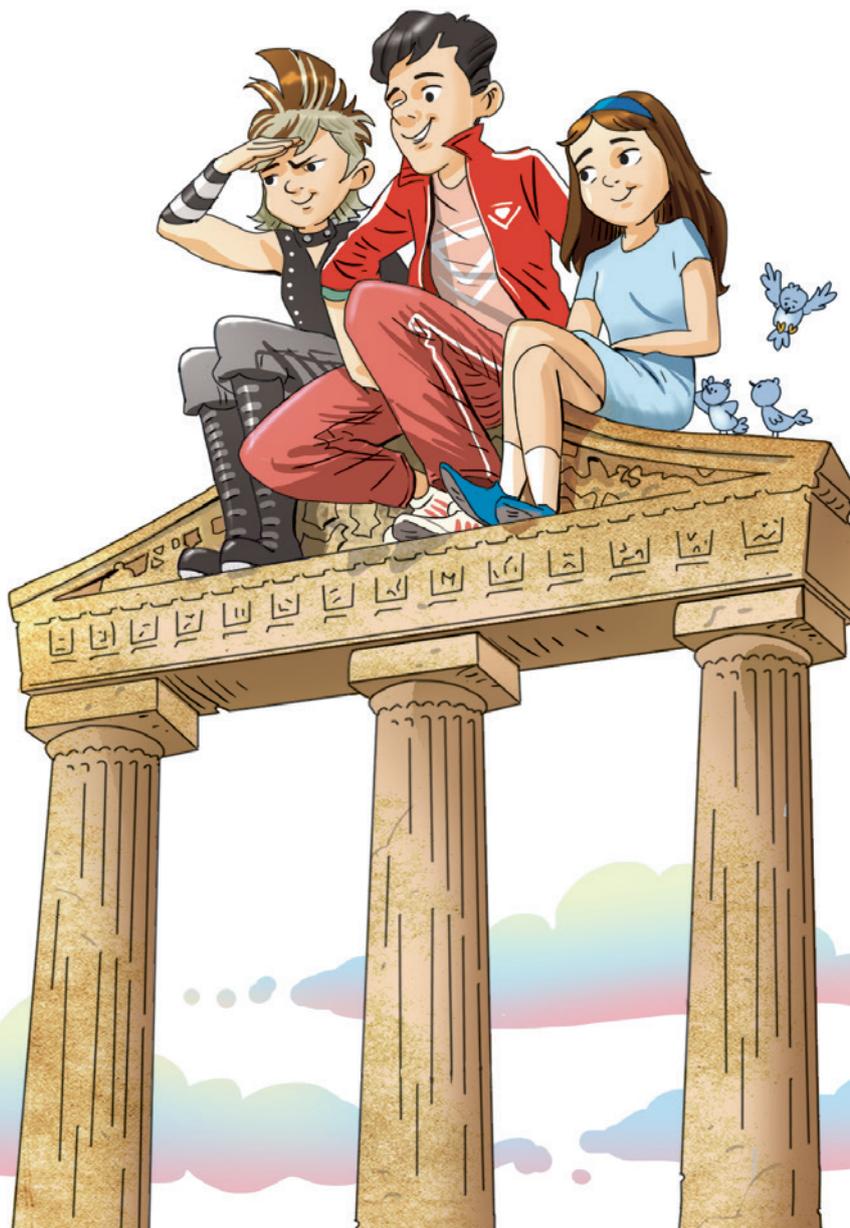


## 2. Competences for a Culture of Democracy

### 2.1 Democracy as a constitutional structure of the state.

First-and-foremost, democracy is something on paper, written into the constitution. In a democracy, the constitution is understood as the central legal document of a state. It regulates the basic organisational structure of the state, the territorial structure of the state, and the relationship with its constituent states. It also records the relationship between citizens and the state, and what rights and responsibilities apply to them. State powers constituted in this way are bound by the constitution as the supreme norm and their power over the norm is limited. In democratic states, the

constitution-making power emanates from the people of the state. Constitutions usually also contain state tasks and state objectives; these are often found in a preamble. Core democratic goals are freedom, equality, justice, security and welfare, which includes the recognition of human and civil rights, popular sovereignty through elections, parliamentarism, parliamentary control of power and the separation of powers. For citizens to be able to exercise their political rights and duties, the state must guarantee them basic social security.



Having a just constitution in which all the central elements of democratic coexistence are formulated is undoubtedly an important basis for an open society. However, the experience of many citizens around the world shows that what is written on paper is not always reflected in real life. What do articles of the constitution mean for living together (democracy as a form of society) and the everyday life of the individual (democracy as a form of life) if they are not implemented in real life?

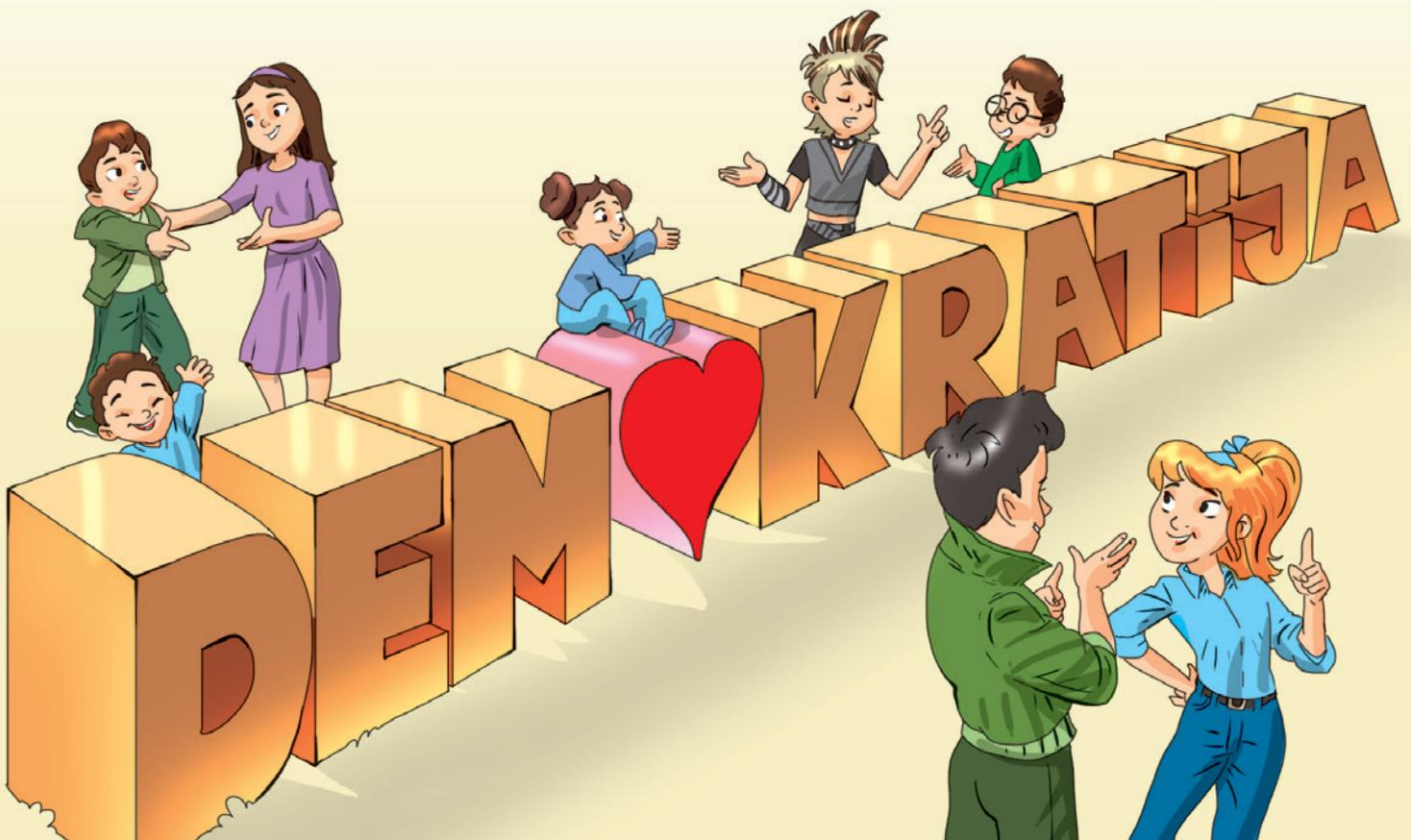
## 2.2 Democracy as a sign of the community-culture

Democracy is much more than just a constitution. Democracy also includes a social dimension: Democracy is – with other words – a form of society. The emergence of “young” European democracies and increasing globalisation, which has affected the borders of existing states, have shown that democracy is not limited to a legal system. Only social anchoring and the transmission of democratic principles enable the functioning of political democratic systems. This can be called the daily culture of democracy. This understanding requires a strong civil society in which pluralism and social difference can exist and conflicts are settled peacefully. Economic competition, carried out under fair conditions, should

also be possible in such a democratic civil society. A free and diverse public, supported by broad civic engagement, is another prerequisite for democratic societies. From the perspective of political cultural research, a third understanding of democracy was geared towards everyday life, towards the culture of social coexistence. In recent years, educational psychology, philosophy and political education have taken up this approach by asking about the individual and socio-moral foundations of the political understanding of democracy:

### How can democracy be made tangible, and how can such experiences grow?

This is about the micro-level of democratic culture, for example in each family or in the neighbourhood. It is seen as the basis of democratic political engagement and democratic societies in general. According to this point of view, anyone who grows up in an environment characterised by tolerance and fairness understands diversity of lifestyles as an opportunity, is educated in solidarity and self-organisation, and has good prerequisites to act democratically within society and to participate democratically in the political system.



The Council of Europe developed the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. The model with the 20 competences, developed within the scope of the Council of Europe Democracy Projects, describes how the values of democracy are implemented in schools and in everyday life. In every learning situation, some of these elements are visible. In every classroom many of them are already being im-

plemented, but we as teachers are often not aware of them ourselves.

All parents need to understand them and learn to identify what is happening in their families and homes concerning the development of the competences for all children and youths, in order to become part of a democratic society.

### The 20 competences included in the model

#### Values

- Valuing human dignity and human rights
- Valuing cultural diversity
- Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

#### Attitudes

- Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices
- Respect
- Civic-mindedness
- Responsibility
- Self-efficacy
- Tolerance of ambiguity

#### Skills

- Autonomus learning skills
- Analytical and critical thinking skills
- Skills of listening and observing
- Empathy
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills
- Co-operation skills
- Conflict-resolution skills

#### Knowledge and critical understanding

- Knowledge and critical understanding of the self
- Knowledge and critical understanding of language communication
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the world: politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment, sustainability

## 2.3 The visibility of competences: Descriptors

A democratic culture relies on citizens having the values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding described in the competence model above. Accordingly, the framework provides detailed descriptors for each of the 20 competences. These are written mostly for teachers and students to understand and implement democratic practices in the classroom and school buildings.

Competence descriptors are statements describing observable behaviours that show when a person has achieved a certain level of a particular competence. This is important for the development of a democracy, because when we see competences and descriptors being applied in family life, we know that society is not just democratic on paper, but that democratic actions and results are observable in reality. The family is an important training place for this: children experience democracy in action as a part of their normal daily routine.

This booklet provides you not only with the competences and descriptors, but also with a 'competence garden' (found on the final page). You and all other key players can make use of this poster to develop a democracy-profile of your class, your school, your staff etc. We explain how this can be done below.

Democracy, as it is commonly interpreted, means a form of governance by or on behalf of the people. A principal feature of such governance is to be responsive to the views of the majority. For this reason, democracy cannot operate in the absence of institutions that ensure the inclusion of adult citizens, the organisation of regular, contested, free and fair elections, majority rule, and government accountability. However, while democracy cannot exist without democratic institutions and laws, these institutions themselves cannot function unless citizens practice a culture of democracy and hold democratic values and attitudes. Among other things, these include: a commitment to public deliberation, a willingness to express one's own opinions and to listen to the opinions of others, a conviction that differences of opinion and conflicts must be resolved peacefully, a commitment to decisions being made by majorities, a commitment to the protection of minorities and their rights, a recognition that majority rule cannot abolish minority rights, and a commitment to the rule of law.

### **Democracy also requires citizens' commitment to participate actively in the public realm.**

If citizens do not adhere to these values, attitudes and practices, then democratic institutions are unable to function. In culturally diverse societies, democratic processes and institutions require intercultural dialogue.

A fundamental principle of democracy is that those affected by political decisions can express their views when decisions are being made, and that these views are taken into account by decision-makers. Intercultural dialogue is, first-and-foremost, the most important means through which citizens can express their views to fellow citizens with different cultural affiliations.

It is, secondly, the means through which decision-makers can understand the views of all citizens, taking into consideration their various self-ascribed cultural affiliations. In culturally diverse societies, intercultural dialogue is thus crucial for ensuring that all citizens are equally capable of participating in public discussions and decision-making processes. Democracy and intercultural dialogue are complementary in culturally diverse societies.

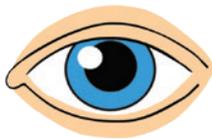




**Values** are general beliefs that individuals hold about the goals people should strive for in their lives. They motivate action and also serve as guiding principles on how to act. Values transcend specific actions and contexts, and they have a normative prescriptive quality about what ought to be done or thought across a range of situations. Values offer standards or criteria for: evaluating actions, both one's own and those of other people; justifying opinions, attitudes and behaviours; decision making; planning behaviour; and attempting to influence others.



A **skill** is the capacity for carrying out complex, well-organised patterns of either thinking or behaviour in an adaptive manner in order to achieve a particular end goal. There are eight sets of skills that are important for a culture of democracy, as listed on the following pages.



An **attitude** is the overall mental orientation which an individual adopts towards someone or something (for example a person, a group, an institution, an issue, an event or a symbol). Attitudes usually consist of four components: a belief or opinion about the object of the attitude, an emotion or feeling towards the object, an evaluation (either positive or negative) of the object, and a tendency to behave in a particular way towards that object.



**Knowledge** is the body of information that is possessed by a person, while understanding is the comprehension and appreciation of meanings. The term "critical understanding" is used to emphasise the need for the comprehension and appreciation of meanings in the context of democratic processes and intercultural dialogue to involve active reflection on and critical evaluation of that which is being understood and interpreted (as opposed to automatic, habitual and unreflective interpretation).

Underneath all four dimensions (values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding), the Council of Europe has developed descriptors which help to describe the observable democratic actions. These are developed mainly for school purposes yet can also be relevant and important in the daily life of a family.

As an example, we can look at competence 13 (empathy). There are 6 descriptors which show the actions displayed in a family member who maintains a sense of empathy in their daily life:

- Can recognise when a companion needs his or her help
- Expresses sympathy for the bad things that he or she has seen happen to other people
- Tries to understand his or her friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective
- Takes other people's feelings into account when making decisions

- Expresses the view that, when he or she thinks about people in other countries, he or she shares their joys and sorrows
- Accurately identifies the feelings of others, even when they do not want to show them

It is important here to note that the elements of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) are not just actions parents or educators should expect from children or youth. They should also be observed the other way round: If adults themselves do not commit to growing and learning to become better democratic citizens (failures are not only allowed, but considered a normal part of the learning process), then the process of teaching them should not even be started.

To aid the personal learning process and as a proposal to adapt them into everyday family life, the 135 descriptors shall be displayed in the following chapter.

## 2.4 All 135 Descriptors: How democratic competences appear

### a) Values

#### 1. Valuing human dignity and human rights

1. Argues that human rights should always be protected and respected
2. Argues that specific rights of children should be respected and protected by society
3. Defends the view that no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
4. Argues that all public institutions should respect, protect and implement human rights
5. Defends the view that when people are imprisoned, although they are subject to restrictions, this does not mean that they are less deserving of respect and dignity than anyone else
6. Expresses the view that all laws should be consistent with international human rights norms and standards

#### 2. Valuing cultural diversity

7. Promotes the view that we should be tolerant of the different beliefs that are held by others in society
8. Promotes the view that one should always strive for mutual understanding and meaningful dialogue between people and groups who are perceived to be “different” from one another
9. Expresses the view that cultural diversity within a society should be positively valued and appreciated
10. Argues that intercultural dialogue should be used to help us recognise our different identities and cultural affiliations
11. Argues that intercultural dialogue should be used to develop respect and a culture of “living together”

#### 3. Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

12. Argues that schools should teach students about democracy and how to act as a democratic citizen
13. Expresses the view that all citizens should be treated equally and impartially under the law
14. Argues that laws should always be fairly applied and enforced
15. Argues that democratic elections should always be conducted freely and fairly, according to international standards and national legislation, and without any fraud
16. Expresses the view that, whenever a public official exercises power, he or she should not misuse that power and cross the boundaries of their legal authority
17. Expresses support for the view that courts of law should be accessible to everyone so that people are not denied the opportunity to take a case to court because it is too expensive, troublesome or complicated to do so
18. Expresses support for the view that those to whom legislative power is entrusted should be subject to the law and to appropriate constitutional oversight
19. Expresses the view that information on public policies and their implementation should be made available to the public
20. Argues that there should be effective remedies against the actions of public authorities which infringe upon civil rights

## b) Attitudes

### 4. Openness to cultural otherness

21. Shows interest in learning about people's beliefs, values, traditions and world views
22. Expresses interest in travelling to other countries
23. Expresses curiosity about other beliefs and interpretations and other cultural orientations and affiliations
24. Expresses an appreciation of the opportunity to have experiences of other cultures
25. Seeks and welcomes opportunities for encountering people with different values, customs and behaviours
26. Seeks contact with other people in order to learn about their culture

### 5. Respect

27. Gives space to others to express themselves
28. Expresses respect for other people as equal human beings
29. Treats all people with respect regardless of their cultural background
30. Expresses respect towards people who are of a different socio- economic status from himself/herself
31. Expresses respect for religious differences
32. Expresses respect for people who hold different political opinions from himself/herself

### 6. Civic-mindedness

33. Expresses a willingness to co-operate and work with others
34. Collaborates with other people for common interest causes
35. Expresses commitment to not being a bystander when the dignity and rights of others are violated

36. Discusses what can be done to help make the community a better place

37. Exercises the obligations and responsibilities of active citizenship at either the local, national or global level

38. Takes action to stay informed about civic issues

### 7. Responsibility

39. Shows that he or she accepts responsibility for his or her actions

40. If he or she hurts someone's feelings, he or she apologises

41. Submits required work on time

42. Shows that he or she takes responsibility for own mistakes

43. Consistently meets commitments to others

### 8. Self-efficacy

44. Expresses a belief in his or her own ability to understand issues

45. Expresses the belief that he or she can carry out activities that he or she has planned

46. Expresses a belief in his or her own ability to navigate obstacles when pursuing a goal

47. If he or she wants to change, he or she expresses confidence that he or she can do it

48. Shows that he or she feels secure in his or her abilities to meet life's challenges

49. Shows confidence that he or she knows how to handle unforeseen situations due to his or her resourcefulness

### 9. Tolerance of ambiguity

50. Engages well with other people who have a variety of different points of view

- 
51. Shows that he or she can suspend judgments about other people temporarily
- 
52. Is comfortable in unfamiliar situations
- 
53. Deals with uncertainty in a positive and constructive manner
- 
54. Works well in unpredictable circumstances
- 
55. Expresses a desire to have his or her own ideas and values challenged
- 
56. Enjoys the challenge of tackling ambiguous problems
- 
57. Expresses enjoyment of tackling situations that are complicated
- 

### c) Skills

#### 10. Autonomous learning skills

- 
58. Shows ability to identify resources for learning (e.g. people, books, internet)
- 
59. Seeks clarification of new information from other people when needed
- 
60. Can learn about new topics with minimal supervision
- 
61. Can assess the quality of his or her own work
- 
62. Can select the most reliable sources of information or advice from the range available
- 
63. Shows ability to monitor, define, prioritise and complete tasks without direct oversight
- 

#### 11. Analytical and critical thinking skills

- 
64. Can identify similarities and differences between new information and what is already known
- 
65. Uses evidence to support his or her opinions
- 
66. Can assess the risks associated with different options
- 
67. Shows that he or she thinks about whether the information he or she uses is correct
- 
68. Can identify any discrepancies or inconsistencies or divergences in materials being analysed
- 
69. Can use explicit and specifiable criteria, principles or values to make judgments
- 

#### 12. Skills of listening and observing

- 
70. Listens carefully to differing opinions
- 
71. Listens attentively to other people
- 
72. Watches speakers' gestures and general body language to help figure out the meaning of what they are saying
- 
73. Can listen effectively in order to decipher another person's meanings and intentions
- 
74. Pays attention to what other people imply but do not say
- 
75. Notices how people with other cultural affiliations react in different ways to the same situation
- 

#### 13. Empathy

- 
76. Can recognise when a companion needs his or her help
- 
77. Expresses sympathy for the bad things that he or she has seen happen to other people
- 
78. Tries to understand his or her friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective
- 
79. Takes other people's feelings into account when making decisions
- 
80. Expresses the view that, when he or she thinks about people in other countries, he or she shares their joys and sorrows
- 
81. Accurately identifies the feelings of others, even when they do not want to show them
- 

#### 14. Flexibility and adaptability

- 
82. Modifies his or her opinions if he or she is shown through rational argument that this is required
- 
83. Can change the decisions that he or she has made if the consequences of those decisions show that this is required
- 
84. Adapts to new situations by using a new skill
- 
85. Adapts to new situations by applying knowledge in a different way
- 
86. Adopts the sociocultural conventions of other cultural target groups when interacting with members of those groups
-

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87. Can modify his or her own behaviour to make it appropriate to other cultures

---

### 15. Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills

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88. Can express his or her thoughts on a problem

---

89. Asks speakers to repeat what they have said if it wasn't clear to them

---

90. Asks questions that show his or her understanding of other people's positions

---

91. Can adopt different ways of expressing politeness in another language

---

92. Can mediate linguistically in intercultural exchanges by translating, interpreting or explaining

---

93. Can successfully avoid or resolve intercultural misunderstandings

---

### 16. Co-operation skills

---

94. Builds positive relationships with other people in a group

---

95. When working as a member of a group, does his or her share of the group's work

---

96. Works to build consensus to achieve group goals

---

97. When working as a member of a group, keeps others informed about any relevant or useful information

---

98. Generates enthusiasm among group members for accomplishing shared goals

---

99. When working with others, supports other people despite differences in points of view

---

### 17. Conflict-resolution skills

---

100. Can communicate with conflicting parties in a respectful manner

---

101. Can identify options for resolving conflicts

---

102. Can assist others to resolve conflicts by enhancing their understanding of the available options

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103. Can encourage the parties involved in conflicts to actively listen to each other and share their issues and concerns

---

104. Regularly initiates communication to help solve interpersonal conflicts

---

105. Can deal effectively with other people's emotional stress, anxiety and insecurity in situations involving conflict

---

### d) Knowledge and critical understanding

#### 18. Knowledge and critical understanding of the self

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106. Can describe his or her own motivations

---

107. Can describe the ways in which his or her thoughts and emotions influence his or her behaviour

---

108. Can reflect critically on his or her own values and beliefs

---

109. 109 Can self-reflect critically from a number of different perspectives

---

110. Can reflect critically on his or her own prejudices and stereotypes and what lies behind them

---

111. Can reflect critically on his or her own emotions and feelings in a wide range of situations

---

#### 19. Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication

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112. Can explain how tone of voice, eye contact and body language can aid communication

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113. Can describe the social impact and effects on others of different communication styles

---

114. Can explain how social relationships are sometimes encoded in the linguistic forms that are used in conversations (e.g. in greetings, forms of address, use of expletives)

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---

115. Can explain why people of other cultural affiliations may follow different verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions which are meaningful from their perspective

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116. Can reflect critically on the different communicative conventions that are employed in at least one other social group or culture

---

**20. Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (including politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, the environment and sustainability)**

---

117. Can explain the meaning of basic political concepts, including democracy, freedom, citizenship, rights and responsibilities

---

118. Can explain why everybody has a responsibility to respect the human rights of others

---

119. Can describe basic cultural practices (e.g. eating habits, greeting practices, ways of addressing people, politeness) in one other culture

---

120. Can reflect critically on how his or her own world view is just one of many world views

---

121. Can assess society's impact on the natural world, for example, in terms of population growth, population development, resource consumption

---

122. Can reflect critically on the risks associated with environmental damage

---

123. Can explain the universal, inalienable and indivisible nature of human rights

---

124. Can reflect critically on the relationship between human rights, democracy, peace and security in a globalised world

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125. Can reflect critically on the root causes of human rights violations, including the role of stereotypes and prejudice in processes that lead to human rights abuses

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126. Can explain the dangers of generalising from individual behaviours to an entire culture

---

127. Can reflect critically on religious symbols, religious rituals and the religious uses of language

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128. Can describe the effects that propaganda has in the contemporary world

---

129. Can explain how people can guard and protect themselves against propaganda

---

130. Can describe the diverse ways in which citizens can influence policy

---

131. Can reflect critically on the evolving nature of the human rights framework and the ongoing development of human rights in different regions of the world

---

132. Can explain why there are no cultural groups that have fixed inherent characteristics

---

133. Can explain why all religious groups are constantly evolving and changing

---

134. Can reflect critically on how histories are often presented and taught from an ethnocentric point of view

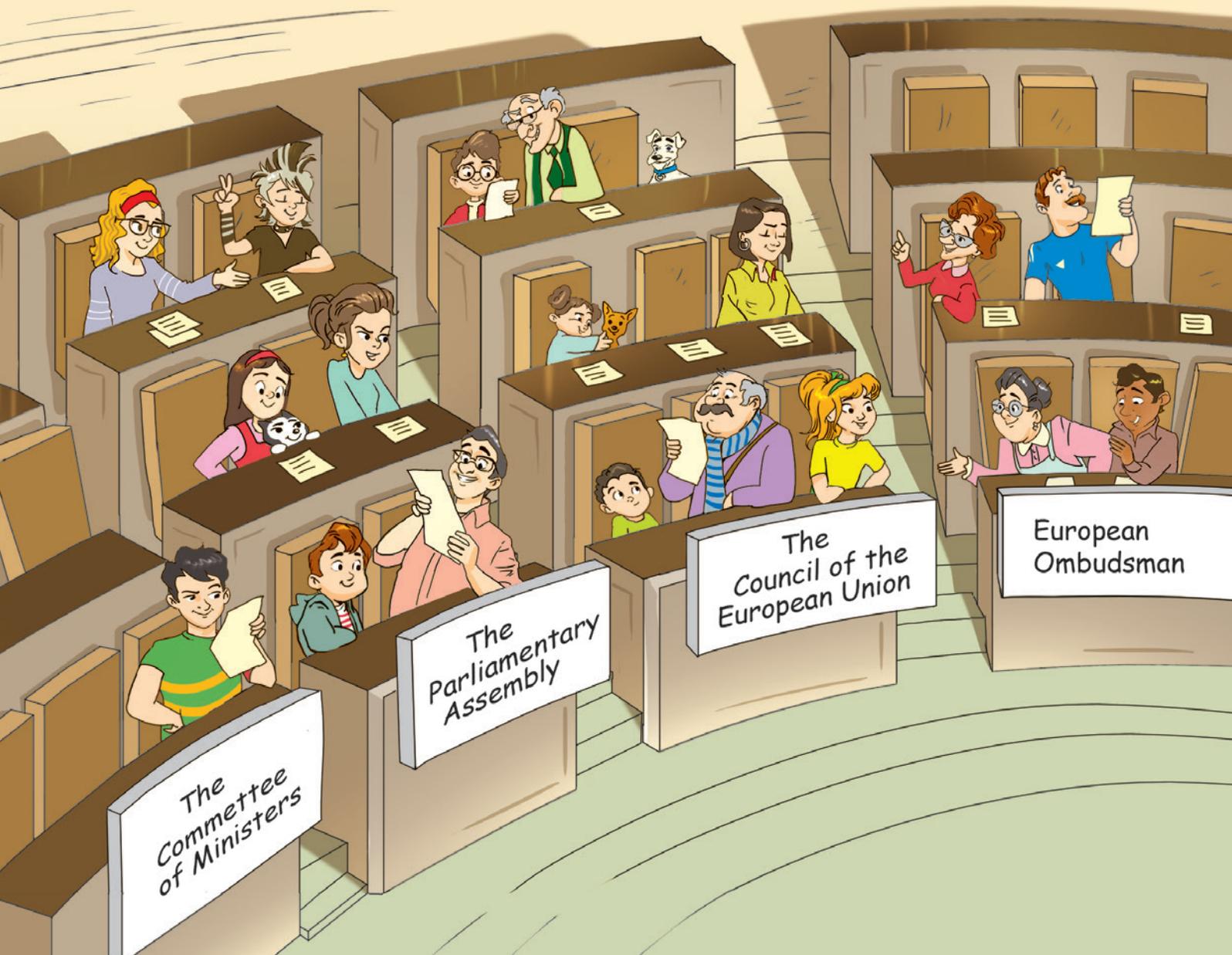
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135. Can explain national economies and how economic and financial processes affect the functioning of society

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## PART III

# Background information



## 1. The Council of Europe: a short history of an important institution

The Council of Europe is a forum for debate on general European issues. It develops intergovernmental agreements binding under international law, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, with the aim of preserving common heritage and promoting economic and social progress. Serbia became the 45th member State of the Council of Europe on 3 April 2003.

The Council of Europe, based in Strasbourg, was founded in 1949 and is the oldest intergovernmental organisation in Europe with the largest number of members. Its core themes are the protection and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It currently has 47 member states with a total population of over 800 million people.

One of the most important conventions of the Council of Europe is the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). It allows individuals to lodge an appeal with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Victims of a violation of the rights and guarantees set out in the Convention or one of its Protocols can lodge an appeal with the European Court of Justice. The violation must have been committed by a state bound by the Convention.

In addition to the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe has the following bodies:

- the Committee of Ministers, consisting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the 47 member States
- the Parliamentary Assembly, whose members are appointed by the national parliaments
- the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, which is composed of representatives of local and regional authorities in the Member States
- the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations, which is composed of delegates from those organisations which meet the Council of Europe's accreditation criteria

Serbia is present in the Parliamentary Assembly with seven parliamentarians and seven deputies.

Serbia's cooperation with the Council of Europe has a special significance in the context of Serbia's European integration, considering that CoE activities are also based on the so-called Copenhagen criteria, regarding the stability of institutions, rule of law, human rights and the respect for and protection of national minorities. The chairmanship of the CoE Committee of Ministers (May–November 2007) was particularly important for Serbia's international reputation, considered to be a demonstration of its commitment to European values, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Cooperation with the Council of Europe also takes place via the CoE Office in Belgrade, which started to operate on 16 March 2001 and which works together with the Government of Serbia and other competent institutions, particularly in the areas of reforms in the field of the administration of justice, support to the functioning of Parliament and local self-government, improvements in the higher education system, a strengthening of the capacity of institutions in combating serious crimes, and other fields.

## 2. Education for Democratic Citizenship: a new way to understand responsibility and rights.

Following the end of the Cold War, several processes of modernisation which had shaped our history for a long time suddenly began to accelerate and intensify. These events and changes taking place across Europe have challenged the traditional model of citizenship:

The globalisation of free trade and competitive market economies has brought a higher level of welfare to many people across the world, but not to all. The gaps of unequal distribution between rich and poor have widened, both within and between communities, threatening social cohesion and solidarity among people.

Competition drives enterprises to permanently increase their productivity and lower their costs of production. This has given rise to a permanent process of innovation, directly affecting products, technology and jobs, and indirectly affecting our whole way of life.

Economic growth has led to increased welfare, but also to an increased consumption of natural resources. Rising CO<sub>2</sub> emissions make it increasingly difficult and costly to avert, or to adapt to, climate change.

New information and communication technologies have provided new ways to increase productivity, to exchange and obtain information, and to deliver entertainment, alongside many other things.

**We live in a media culture, and media literacy – how to use the new media both for producing and receiving messages – is becoming an elementary skill like reading and writing.**

Due to economic growth and the achievements of modern medicine, the population in many European countries is ageing, while growing in the world as a whole. Both developments pose serious problems for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Modern societies are typically secular, pluralist societies. Migration across Europe has contributed to this development. Pluralist societies are more dynamic and productive, but also are more demanding in terms of social cohesion in order to integrate people with different beliefs, values, interests, and social and ethnic backgrounds.

Democracy offers us the best chances to meet these challenges, as any attempt to solve these and other problems

through authoritarian rule will fail to take the complex reality of society, economy, environment, conflict resolution, etc., into account on a national, let alone a supranational level. On the other hand, democracy stands and falls with the pledge of equal participation. The more complex our world and the challenges that define our future become, the more difficult it is for the “ordinary citizen” to understand and take part in decision making. Mistrust of traditional political institutions, forms of governance and political leaders are rooted in the feeling of being left out and not listened to. Democracy and human rights are precarious projects, and their survival depends on whether their heritage can be passed on to the younger generation.

In the face of challenges such as these, it has become clear that new forms of citizenship are required: citizens should not only be informed and understand their formal responsibilities as citizens, but should also be active; able and willing to contribute to the life of their community, their country and the wider world, actively participating in ways that express their individuality, and helping to solve problems. Mounting challenges require strong societies with competent – and therefore adequately educated – leaders and citizens. And families are the centres in which children experience what living together means on a daily basis. Until now, families have existed in many forms and circumstances, and all under different types of political system.

What is important to state here is that bringing up children in a democratic society should have a clear goal:

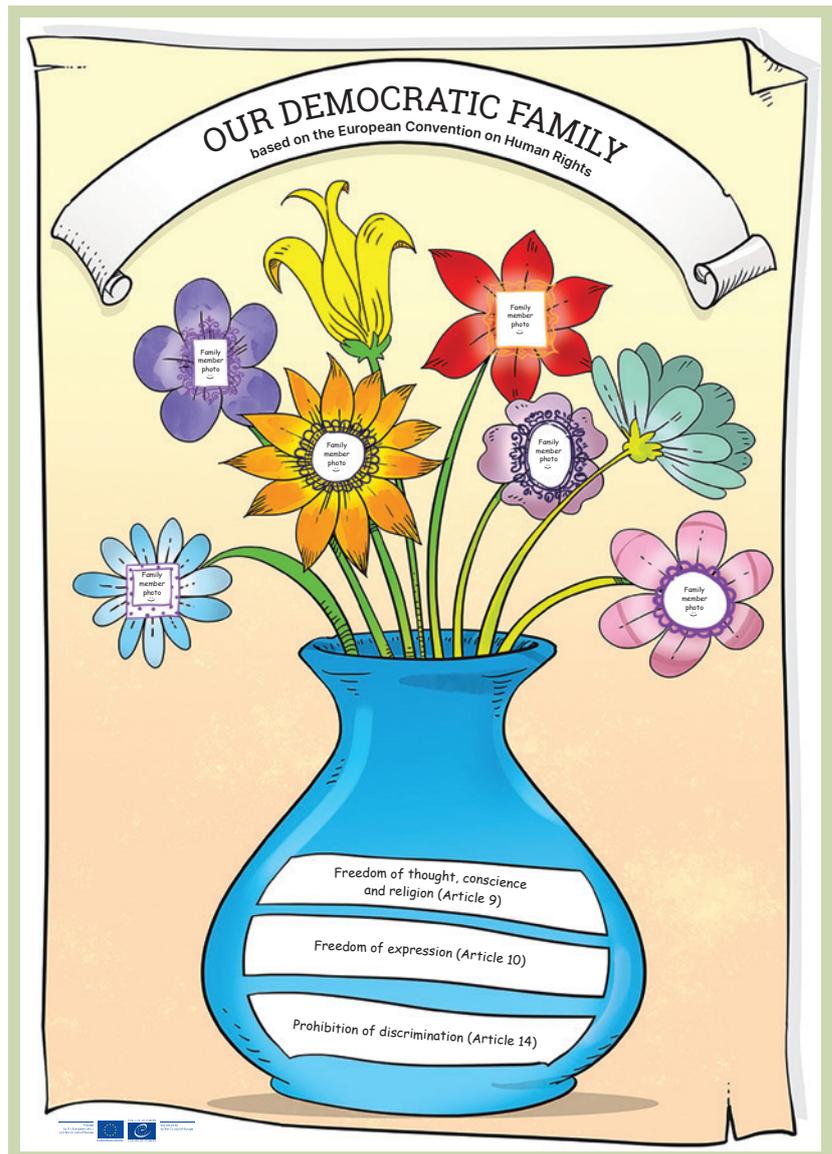
**teaching children and young people to exercise their rights and carry their share of joint responsibilities.**



## PART IV

## Additional Materials

### 1. Democracy poster: A checklist to rethink



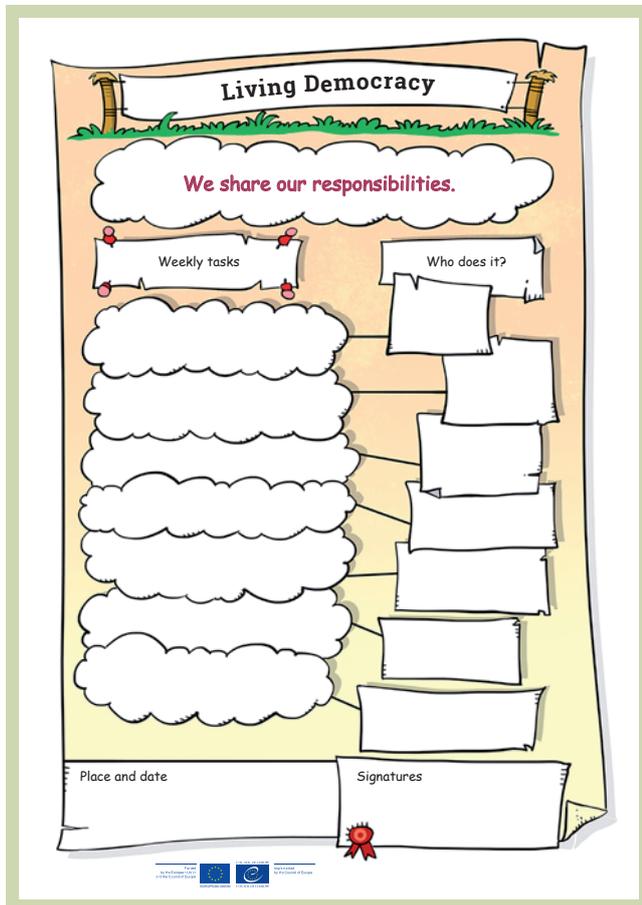
#### Many flowers in the same vase:

Families today are less understood as a legal community with fixed roles of husband and wife, parents and children. They have become more diverse, they change, but they function and develop their own strengths. In whatever form they appear:

**Families are meaningful living spaces and places of reliable care. They continue to be the first place that people turn to when they are in need.**

Time together in the family does not come about by itself, but must be actively “produced” by the family members. Working hours, school and lessons, leisure time, sport and voluntary work take place at different rhythms and times and place different demands on individuals. However, families need time together in order to experience the feeling of belonging together. Common celebrations, festivals and rituals support and strengthen cohesion.

## 2. Cooperation-organiser: the family as a team



### Living together – working together.

**Why do parents clean and tidy up? Because they look forward to a cosy evening in a tidy home.**

Parents derive real benefit from housework. Children, on the other hand, usually don't care at all whether their home is messy or tidy, whether the dirty dishes from the day before are still in the sink or not. They have the ability to feel at ease even in the greatest chaos.

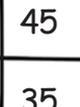
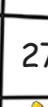
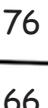
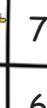
Nevertheless, it makes sense for parents to instruct their children to get involved in the household. For one thing, assignments promote a sense of community: it's fun to sit down at a beautifully set table together, for example. On the other hand, children who take part in household work at an early age become independent much more quickly. This in turn relieves the parents. Even a little support can be very helpful for parents. It is usually not difficult to motivate young chil-

dren to help out. Children love to copy adults. After all, they want to be big and do what the big ones can do. Even little kids can wash fruits and vegetables, water flowers, set the table, clear their own dishes, take care of toys in toy boxes and sort socks. Sure, letting a child join in with cooking and baking, vacuuming and washing up takes a good dose of patience.

And a side note in conclusion: Worldwide studies still show in the 21st century that many men could also get more involved in the household. That could also be a good democratic role model for children to aspire to.

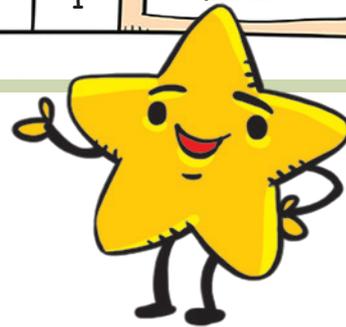
The poster proposed here is ready for print out online. You can change the roles for instance every 3 or 6 months. You might decide that other tasks are more realistic and certainly, somebody else can take out the garbage now out or water the flowers on the balcony. By adding the date and the signatures, this poster will be a document recognised by all.

### 3. Table game for families: with dice, brains and laughter

	99	98	97	96		94	93	92	91
90	89	88	87	86	85	84	83		81
80	79	78	77	76	75		73	72	71
70	69	68	67	66		64	63	62	61
60	59	58		56	55	54	53	52	51
	49	48	47	46	45	44	43	42	
40	39	38	37	36	35	34		32	31
30	29	28	27		25	24	23	22	21
20	19	18		16	15	14	13	12	11
10		8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

The game can be played with as many participants as desired. If only one die is available, it is rolled twice. If you come to an event field,  you roll the dice twice, read from the list which democracy event luck has chosen for you and move forward or back. Whoever reaches the goal first is lucky. If you are at the back, you know that in a democracy you have to be patient and live with frustration. The last will be first (maybe)

points	Event and decision
9	The children of your family have, on their own initiative, cleaned the streets around your home of rubbish, separated it ecologically and disposed of it properly. Great! 10 fields forward!
17	Once again you didn't take responsibility for your housework. Bad for everyone. 5 fields back!
26	The residents of the neighbourhood organised a street party together! 5 spaces forward for a strong community!
33	Someone has destroyed public sports equipment in your neighbourhood. This costs additional tax money. 4 squares backwards although it's not your fault.
41	You and your friends sold toys and clothes that were no longer needed and donated the proceeds to a Children's Rights organisation. Good thing! 6 fields forward!
50	You are too lazy to ride your bike more often, even though you know how much car emissions damage the environment. 8 fields back for you and your environment!
57	You have formed a family council and discuss the most important decisions together every week. Great! 7 fields forward!
65	You take time for personal conversations and listen patiently. 3 fields forward for your support!
74	Men and boys around you refuse to cook and clean. You didn't say anything against it. 8 squares backwards, you coward!
82	Your family subscribes to a neutral newspaper because you want to be well informed about all important issues. 5 squares forward, because democrats have to be well informed!
95	You rolled 6 twice. That is chance and luck. You can either go forward 12 fields yourself, or decide whether you want to give it to others.



Family or table games have a tradition that goes back thousands of years. In the tombs of the Egyptian pharaohs, precursors of today's games have been found that are up to 3500 years old. Family games are still very popular today, because they not only offer alternatives to everyday computer life, but also enable an intimate communal experience. They also promote numerous skills that are particularly important for children.

For smaller children aged 3-8, these include coordination or dexterity, matching colours and shapes, numeracy, memory, linguistic comprehension and, very importantly for our democracy context, children learn to "win" and also "lose" and to abide by rules.

But older children and adults can also grow from playing board games. Here, however, the focus is on the further development of other competencies: creativity, testing tactical skills, planning ahead, logical thinking, consistent action, assessing other players, etc.

The best thing about family games is that all these skills are developed "along the way". Because there is still one thing in the foreground of every game:

**the shared experience and the fun of playing!**



PART V

Living with  
adolescents 15 – 19

## Introduction

Adolescence can be a challenging time for young people and their families. It is a time when they are trying to find their place in the world and encounter rapid physical and emotional changes. Both parents and teenagers must make changes in their relationship to adjust to this new stage of growth.

**The adolescents are often self-conscious and easily embarrassed, and their bravado appearance and 'know-all' attitude masking their fragility.**

Teenagers go backwards and forwards between wanting freedom and yet still needing the security of the family. Parents want their children to grow to into happy independent adults yet fear for their safety as they watch them try to spread their wings. Parents must cope with the fact that the dreams they have had for their child may not come true, replaced by the teenager's own dreams for themselves. Teenagers have to cope with their parents who often don't let them do the things they want to. A good relationship with your teenager will help you both to weather the ups and downs.

These years require effort from parents and adolescents equally to:

- know how to properly listen
- tolerate differences
- give opportunities to learn from mistakes.

It makes a difference when parents and teenagers learn to deal with disagreements. Although it can be tough, try to understand each other's points of view and accept the fact that both people have a right to their opinion (without necessarily agreeing). Talk through issues together, and discuss family rules only when things are calm, rather than in the middle of a crisis. Matters such as the use of mobile phones, computers, internet, cars, and driving with others are more likely to avoid issues if teenagers feel they have some say in developing the rules and consequences. It is much easier for a parent to say "We agreed on this" when things break down. Sometimes parents are reluctant to say 'no' for fear their child won't love them or see them as their friend.

**Remind yourself that you're the adult and stay confident in your role as a parent.**



# 1. Characteristics and development of young adults

## 1.1 Who is my adolescent – who am I?

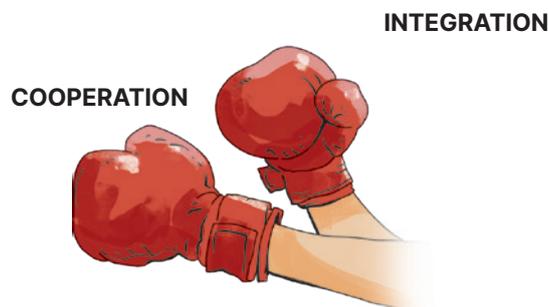
Sometimes it is very difficult to implement democratic practices in the family context. In a family setting all members have the right to true authenticity. Each individual has their own worries, responsibilities and views. Misunderstandings which can arise from these differences can lead to arguments and create an unpleasant atmosphere. This means that no one is happy.

**Trying to balance the need to be a good partner, parent, neighbour, employee etc. can be hard, and can lead to feelings of exhaustion and loneliness. Therefore, it is key to take care of your own health and wellbeing.**

In situations like this, we have a kind of 'fight' between two significant processes in human relations: cooperation and integration. **Cooperation** is the process of helping others and sharing in their ideas, worries and joy. **Integration**, on the other hand, is the process of feeling authentically, taking care of your own thoughts, feelings, and needs. These two processes are contradictory to each other, and having too much of one, at the expense of the other, can lead to problems. If a person only cooperates with others, he/she will start to lose sense of their own self, and this can lead to the development of negative emotions. On the other hand, if a person only thinks about themselves, they can quickly lose the support of other people around them. The key to life is to find an equal balance between these two points.

It is important to know that you can't offer others (cooperation) what you don't have yourself (integration). Without loving yourself, you can't love others properly, and without taking care of yourself, you can't take care of others. Because of that, sometimes it is better to stop with cooperation and take care of integration. It means that in some situations NO can be the best answer you can give someone. It's not easy to say NO. We have been taught to cooperate and feel good from helping others. But there is a catch: At the same time as saying NO to others, you say YES to yourself. To successfully take care of others you must first learn to take care of yourself. In family relations those processes are known as surviving and thriving. To be successful at this, it is important to understand some basic facts and findings in contemporary pedagogy and family upbringing which have derived from neurological developmental science. One of the most important things to learn is that the brain

is a 'social organ' developed through experiences. Every situation is an opportunity to learn and improve reaction(s) (Nelsen, Irvin, Dafi, 2007). Everything which occurs in a child brain correlates directly to what happens in the brain on an adult. However, children do not yet have the experience to process the daily information they are presented with through their experiences, as everything is new to them and their brains are busy making sense of this. Young children often cry as a way of freeing their brain of excess information. In this way, adults are at an advantage in that they understand reality, and it is therefore important to allow children to feel, and to give names to these feelings. Through doing so, children learn to understand their emotions, and recognise them in the future. In order to develop essential life skills it is important to integrate the parts of the brain in both vertical and horizontal directions.



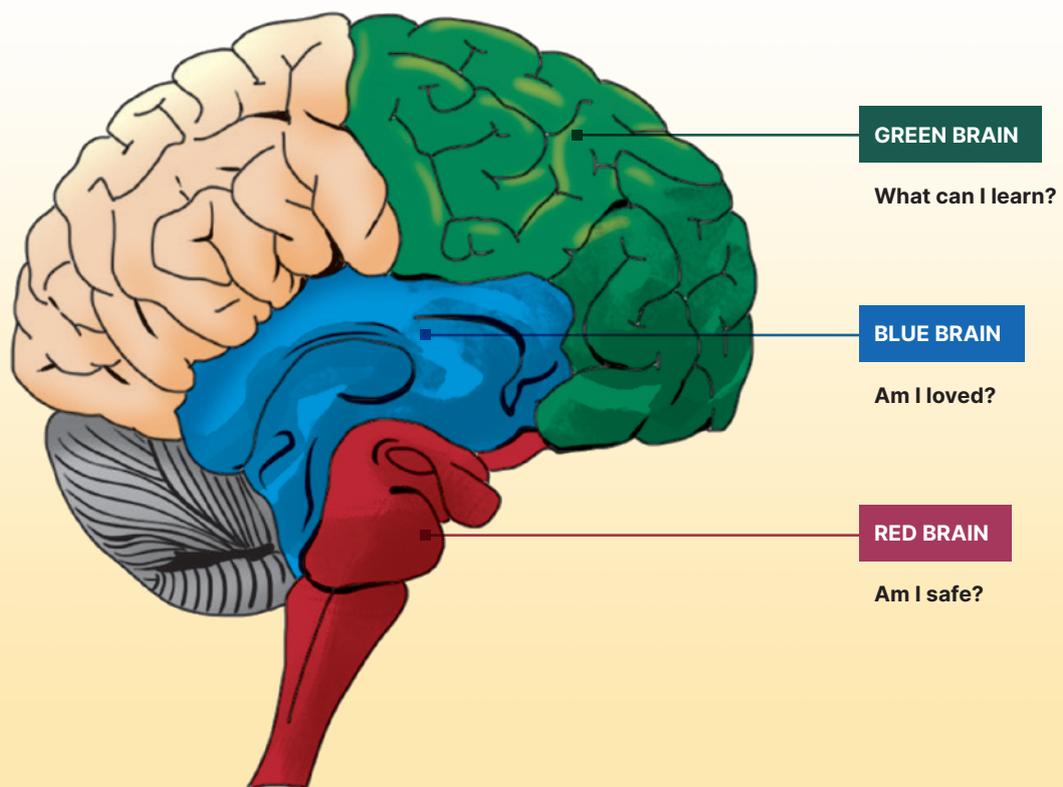
## 1.2 The architecture of my child's brain

“Knowing about the way the brain changes in response to our parenting can help us to nurture a stronger, more resilient child”. (Siegel & Payne Bryson, 2011, pp. 25).

The human brain shows potential for developing throughout the entire human life. This information is very encouraging, and for this reason, we should all learn to integrate own brains in a vertical and horizontal path.

### Vertical parts of brain

The human brain always functions as a whole (Lorch, 2016) and is made up of several parts in a vertical view.<sup>1</sup>

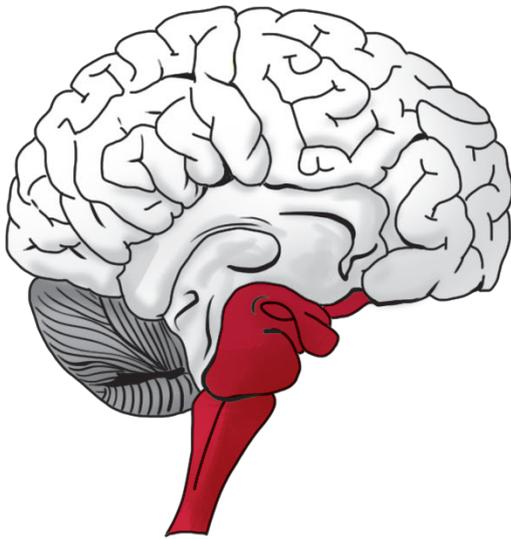


<sup>1</sup> Muškinja Ivana, national coordinator of Familylab association in Serbia. More at: <https://www.familylab.rs/ivana-muskinja/>  
It is digest of guest lecturing titled „Child brain development” she made in Preschool Teachers Training College in Novi Sad, on March, 4th, 2020.

## RED BRAIN

The RED BRAIN is called the 'reptile brain', since reptiles eat their children. This is where human's instinct to punish and beat their children comes from. It invokes primal, unconscious reactions, important for our safety, for example when in traffic, or in dangerous situations. The red brain is important, yet it can also be primal. For example when a person is surprised or shocked by something it can cause an instinctive reaction to jump in fear.

Functions related to the red brain are fight, run or freeze. Looking at the picture, telling the girl not to be afraid of the parrot won't help. Her body has frozen and the only thing we can do to help is chase the parrot away. The child in the yellow jacket is in the position of fight. He doesn't know what is happening to him (and might also be tired, hungry or thirsty) and the only way he can channel and present his emotions is by throwing a tantrum. The older boy in lower picture is protecting himself from punches and running away from the situation.



### FUNCTIONS:

- Fight, run or freeze
- It is active from the first day of birth

### DEVELOPMENT NEED:

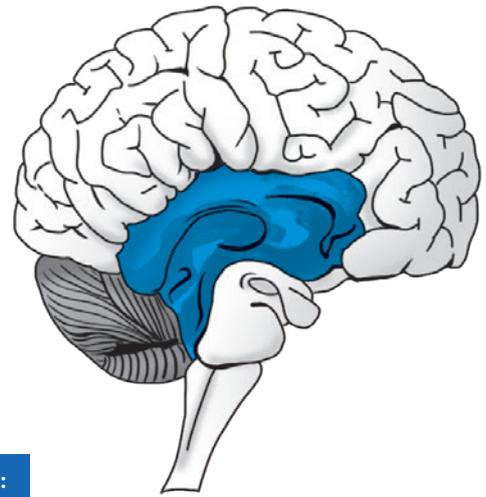
- SAFETY

## BLUE BRAIN

The BLUE BRAIN is reserved for emotions. Everything we feel, like love, anger, happiness and sadness is processed in this part of brain.

Try to recall a situation when a certain smell has transported you to a former time, triggering the exact same emotions you felt back then. Situations like this are activated by your blue brain.

It is important to understand that in situations of shock, triggered by the red brain, any emotional reactions such as crying, laughing or shaking demonstrate that the blue brain has then taken control of the situation.



### FUNCTIONS:

- Emotions
- Early memory

### DEVELOPMENT NEED:

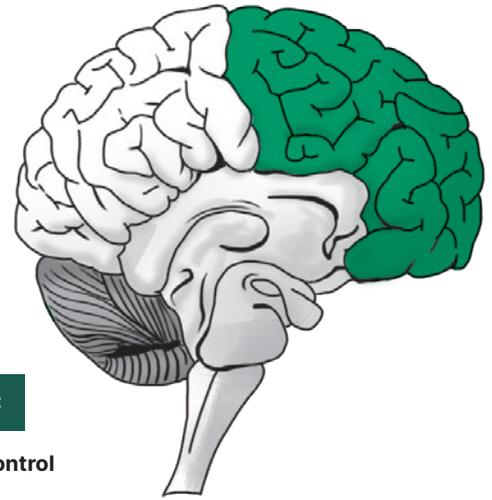
- CONNECTION



## GREEN BRAIN

The GREEN BRAIN is where we store all the information that we have learned and can explain.

Everything we learn, know, improve, find, try out etc. is dealt with in the green brain. This part of the brain is a unique attribute to humans.



### FUNCTIONS:

- Impulse control
- Empathy
- Problem solving
- Cooperation
- Moral judgment
- This part of brain knows the answer to question "Why?"

### DEVELOPMENT NEED:

- LEARNING IN RELATIONSHIP



But only in situations which are comfortable and familiar does the green brain stay green. When we feel insecure or feel any sense of disharmony in the vertical parts of our brain, the green brain (or upstairs brain) becomes less effective. If we are overwhelmed by unpleasant emotions, it can be hard to think rationally and we end up using the lower parts of the brain to decide how to act. The more we move away from the rational part of the brain, the closer we get to the reptile brain. Eventually we flip out!

We can see these kinds of situations in children of all ages as a part of everyday life. For example, a young child has a tantrum on the floor, and their parent is standing over them and shouting. Adolescents tend to yell and fight back against their parents, which, if the issue remains unresolved, can lead to the child walking off. In these instances, the brains of both parents and children drop from green, to blue, then to red. It is a natural reaction, independent of maturity level, education, or job.

In the first presented situation of a red brain, the young child is in a state of shock and deaf to almost everything. This is the time when the adult, after their first, natural reaction to yell, can make crucial improvements in their behaviour to protect both their own feelings and the feelings of their child.

**The moment when an adult starts to question events and their behaviour is the moment when their brain starts to integrate in vertical.**

Their mirror neurons are reactivated and, upon seeing the adult start to relax, the child also begins to calm down and then cry. The child's brain now shifts vertically to the blue part. Don't forget, the adult is responsible for maintaining the quality of their relationship and communication with their child. Therefore, they must be the first one to vertically integrate their brain.

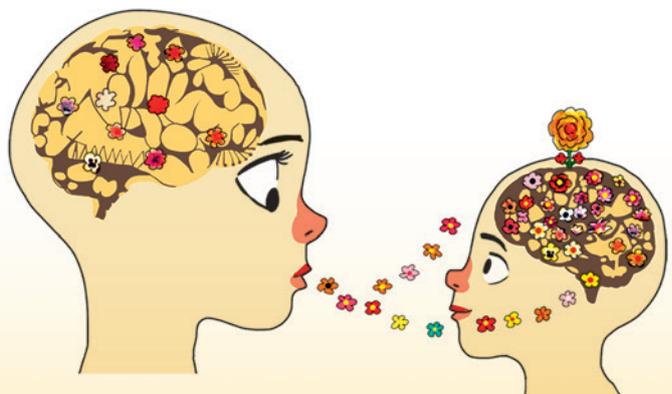


### Horizontal parts of the brain

Everything we feel is managed in the right part of the brain. In the left part of the brain we understand everything and thoughts are clear. The right side of the brain is the first part which develops after birth. Children only experience feelings and reality without truly comprehending the reasons why they feel or what the name of the feeling is. The left part of the brain is shaped by social experiences. For instance, when a child feels a particular way, and an adult explains the way they are feeling and the name of the emotions they are experiencing to them, it is very important for the child's wellbeing. The child becomes familiar with emotions and knows that their feelings have names, while also learning to recognise them and understanding that they will pass.

**It also means that every look, smile, telling off, and hug are important in shaping your child's brain.**

“ As children develop, their brains ‘mirror’ their parent’s brain. In other words, a parent’s own growth and development, or lack thereof, impacts the child’s brain. As parents become more conscious and emotionally healthy, their children reap the rewards and become healthier too. This means that integrating and cultivating your own brain is one of the most loving and generous gifts you can give your children” (Siegel & Payne Bryson, 2011, pp. 19).



Surviving and thriving are important human reactions, which help us to feel, understand, cooperate and act. These are very complicated and complex procedures which are determined by age, experiences, and roles in life. We are obliged to survive and to thrive throughout our whole lives, not just for ourselves, but also to help our children and to teach them to do the same:

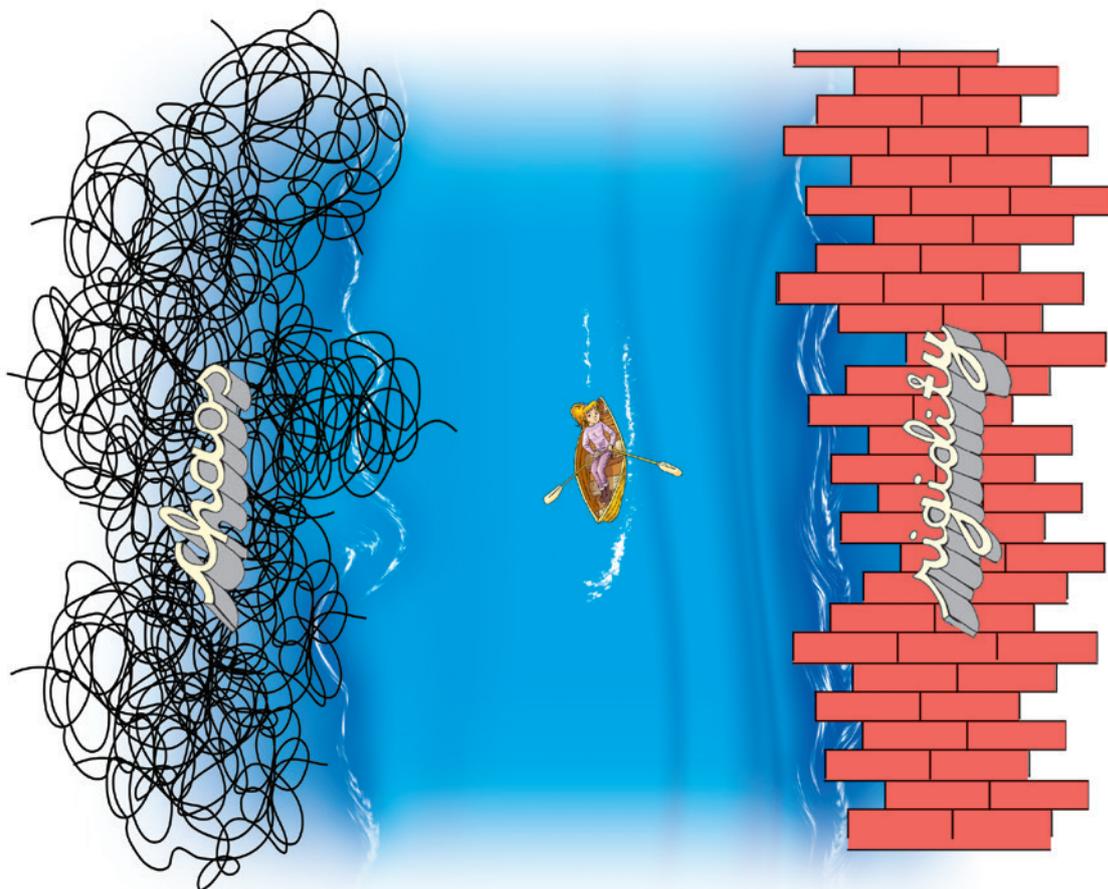
“ The moments you are just trying to survive are actually opportunities to help your child thrive” (Siegel & Payne Bryson, 2011, pp. 11).

If we imagine our life as a “river of well-being” (Siegel & Payne Bryson, 2011, pp. 44), then we float in the middle of two riverbanks, unable to moor due to their difficulty to access. The right bank (feelings) is impassable and full of plants. There

is no path to get through. The left bank (rational) is full of bricks structured logically. Neither side is nice. Waves near the banks are very high and the boat could roll over or run aground. Because of that,

**it is very important to sail in the very middle of the river, where the waves are smallest. This will help us to navigate through.**

Learning to integrate the vertical and horizontal parts of the brain is one of the most important skills to learn in life. It requires time, experience, wisdom and knowledge. It also requires communication between siblings, family members, and with the wider community. Full integration is generally reached by the mid-twenties. Girls integrate fully at around the age of 21, and boys at around the age of 23.



## 2. Topics – questions - information

### Introduction

Sometimes we have a lot of time, sometimes we don't. Both times can be good. Similarly to cooking, fast and slow can both be satisfying. Here we have prepared a collection of both longer and shorter texts for you as parents, in the forms of checklists, interviews, and informative paragraphs. What is discussed in all texts in different forms are the questions regarding growing up in a democratic society. But it is also about you as parents. How can you remain yourself and what happens after the children have left home?

### 2.1 As a starter: Participation in the family is an exercise in democracy.

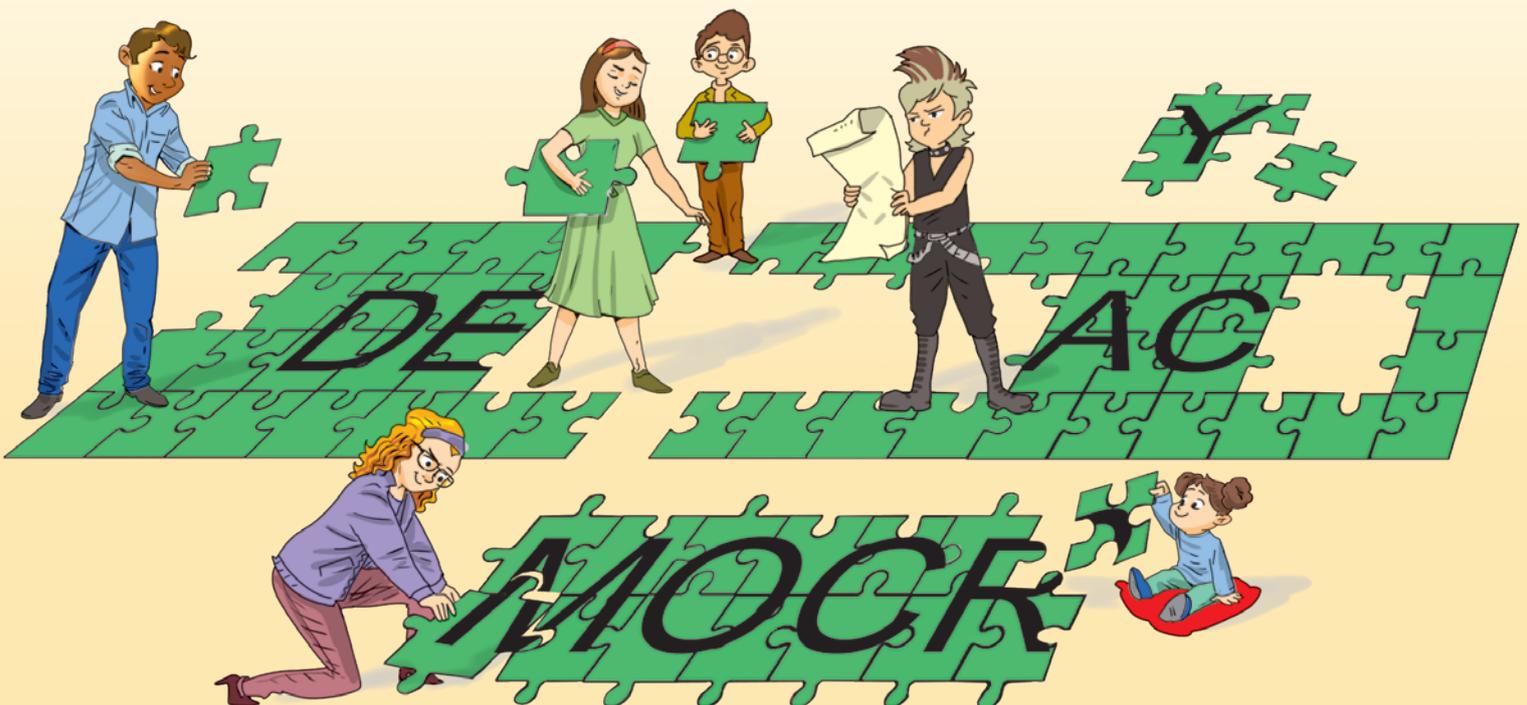
*The family strives to be the institution in which the basics of participatory behaviour can be learned and tested. The "training field" of the family has positive effects on democratic society.*

In many families today, children are involved in decision-making processes relating to their personal concerns and wider family matters. The negotiation culture cultivated in the family is also considered a training ground for participation in activities outside the family. Young people who take advantage of opportunities for participation at home are more likely to become active in political and social issues. Participation presupposes personal and social skills which are learned in childhood and youth. Those who were offered the opportunity at an early age to argue and take responsibility for their own interests, and those who were considered to be an equal member of the family as a child, are more likely to be prepared to be politically active and to assume responsibility in social contexts later on in life.

**Participation has become a key concept in discussions surrounding young people.**

It is addressed at different levels. The social frame of reference calls for more participation in order to ensure integration into the democratic system.

However, participation is also becoming a central variable in the course of the modernisation of childhood. In individualised societies, children and young people are increasingly subject to the need to help shape their own lives. They are thus faced with new demands in terms of self-control



and independent action; they are often called upon to make decisions at an early age and thus to play an active role in shaping their own life. Opportunities for participation are also gaining importance in the debate on education. If one follows a view according to which education and learning are seen as a self-driven processes, it can only lead to success if there is scope for self-participation. In a comprehensive sense, personality development under the auspices of reflexive modernity is no longer conceivable without individual design options. Consequently, opportunities for participation have become a prerequisite for successful educational and developmental processes.

Opportunities for participation and negotiation processes also play an important role in shaping intergenerational relations, i.e. in the relationship between children and parents, but also between children and teachers. Today, in various areas of life it is no longer clear to what extent the older generation can still claim to speak the truth just because they are older.

**Since superior knowledge and authority through age are no longer a given, the generational relationship must be understood in a new way.**

In view of this development of intergenerational relations in family, school and other contexts, a relation that must be defined again and again depending on the situation, there is an increased need for reflection and negotiation.

In the family in particular, a change in the dynamics of the relationship between parents and children has been discernible for some time. Many modern-day parents manage their children less strictly than authoritarian adults who dictate exactly what is to be done. Rather, they are prepared to engage in processes of argumentation, consultation and negotiation. This development is succinctly described with the catchword: from command to negotiation. Overall, since the middle of the 20th century, a transition from the “decision-making sovereignty” of parents towards a joint consultation approach can be observed. A dynamic which has meanwhile become widely accepted. The orientation towards children is not only reflected in a general orientation towards the norms of the concept of child protection, but also, more recently, towards the growing respect for children’s expressions of interest. Children and, above all, young people are involved in decisions to the level of their parents’ discretion, and their interests are generally taken into account. In addition to the acceptance of children’s interests, this also makes it possible - within certain limits - for children to act in a largely self-controlled manner. Children’s lives are thus enhanced in terms of independence and personal responsibility.

## **Successful negotiation processes lead to increased partnership and increase the willingness of children to participate in decision-making over time.**

In their everyday dealings with their children, parents understand how they demonstrate their ability to communicate with parents and siblings, imitating their actions and initiating interactions. They do this, for example through joint play, in their relationships with other children and adults, and when they are happy or angry. In these situations, they react to the actions and feelings of others and experience both approval and rejection. Interactions of this kind within and outside the family form the basis of social understanding, i.e. of understanding the intentions, feelings and needs of other people. Through such experiences, children learn to think things through and present arguments to their own beliefs and actions. A person who is socialised in this way respects others and is prepared to take different views and feelings into account. They can also go as far as to change their own view on significant matters, consciously allowing their own view to be changed by others. In other words, they are willing to be argued with.

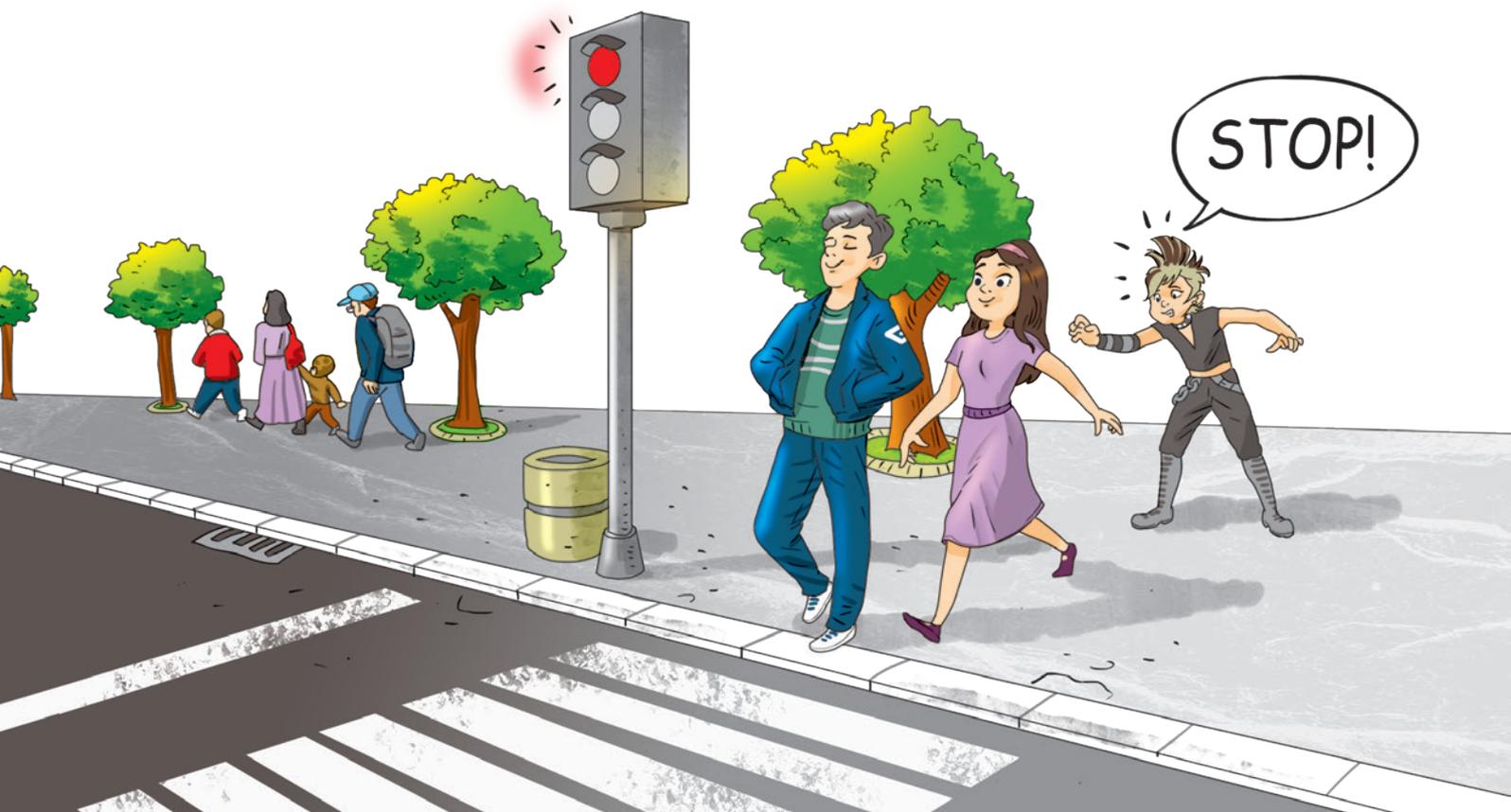
It is clear from this that children in the family have their first formative experiences shaped by the extent to which their interactions and expressions are respected, and their interests taken into account. The basic participatory attitude of parents corresponds to their general educational behaviour. If the parents cultivate an upbringing characterised by strictness, which is expressed, for example, in the fact that the child should not oppose or contradict adults and that the child is punished as soon as it does something against the parents’ will, then the opportunities for participation in the family are limited. This applies to both mother and father, in terms of the opportunities for co-determination in child and family matters. Only if parents respect children as people with their own, even conflicting, interests do they grant them the right to participate or be involved. Opportunities for shaping or co-determination experienced and trained in the protected area of the family have a positive influence on participatory action in a social context. These children are evidently better able to recognise opportunities to have a say in school, to take up these opportunities positively and to participate actively.

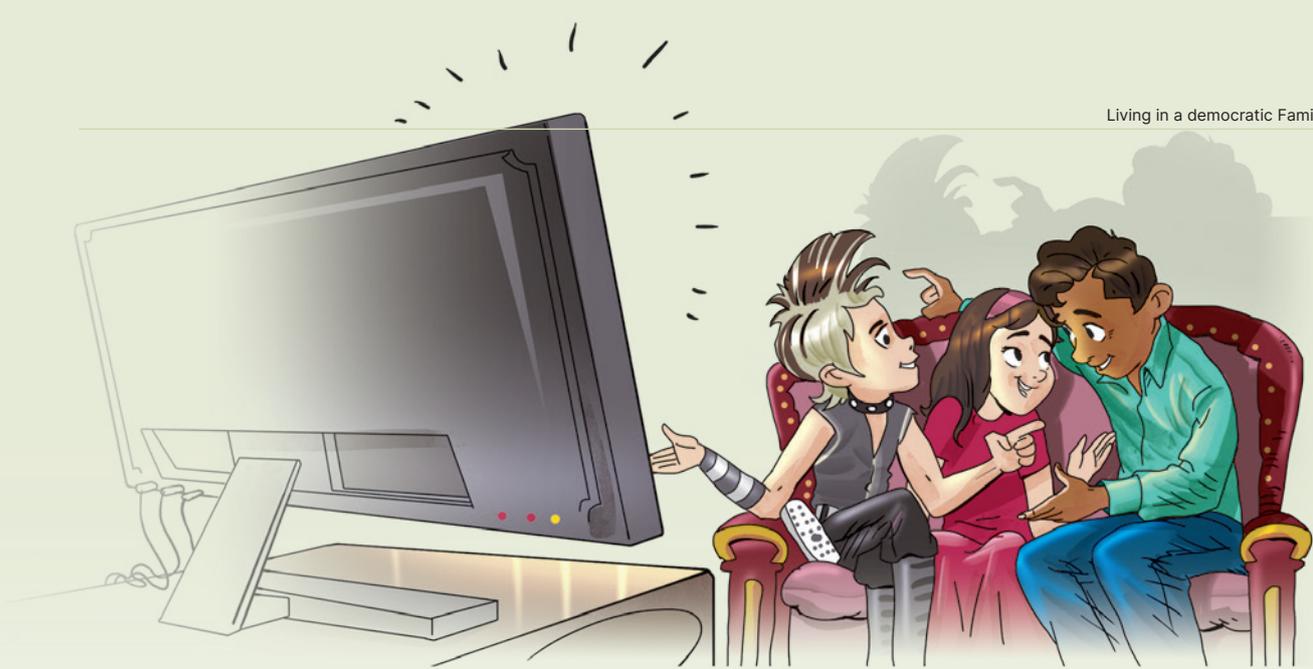
## 2.2 When you have only a little time for reading: 22 golden rules on how to live with teenagers.

Many parents get sweaty palms just thinking about it: their child's puberty. Just a moment ago you were watching Disney films together and baking biscuits for Christmas, now you're happy if the teenager even makes it out of bed in the morning and mumbles an incomprehensible "Good morning". But now they are starting to grow into the society around them, you might feel proud sometimes about their engagement in environmental projects or in human rights worldwide, despite their own life or their own room looking like a mess: both conflicts and joy are to be anticipated. A few rules for you as parents can help you to see the whole picture again and not to let the main goal out of sight: supporting your adolescents in finding themselves and their place in the world we live in.

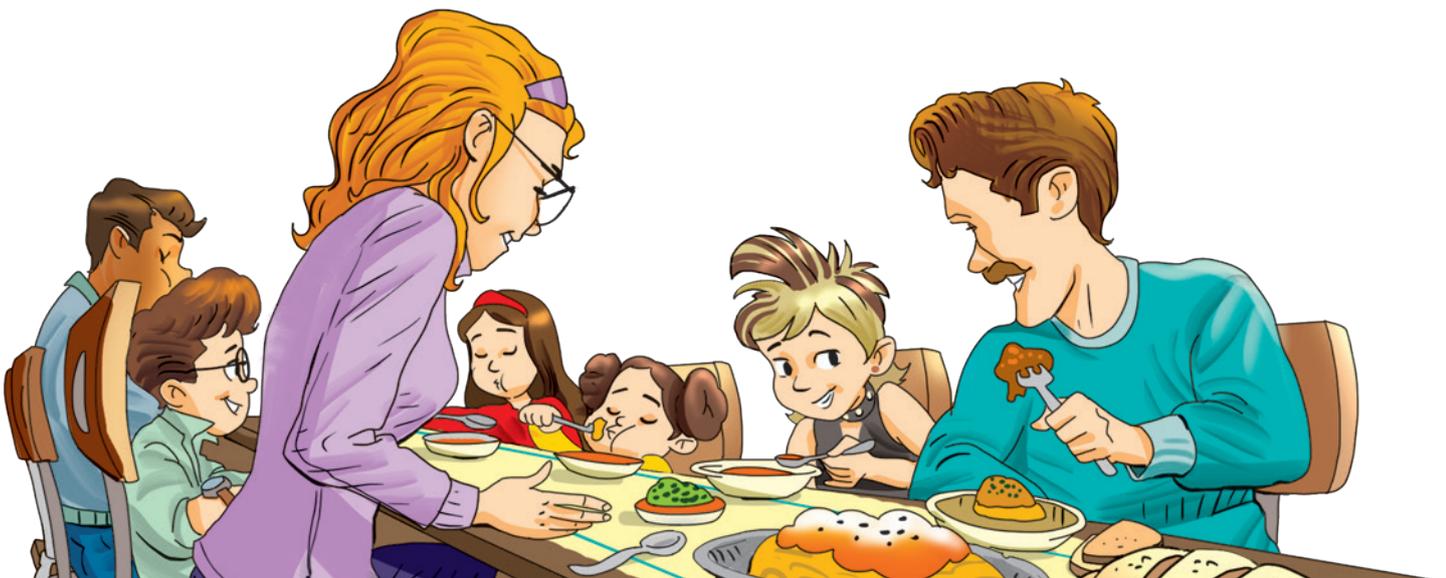
### 22 golden rules for a family life in democracy.

1. **It is as so often in life: You reap what you sow. How intense conflicts become during puberty depends on how you have raised your children till that point.** If you only start to be consistent and make clear rules to your children now, you will have a hard time.
2. **Your child is not a project.** If you are planning their future piano career while changing their nappies then you are in for some unpleasant truths in the teenage years. Instead of doing this, parents should teach their child to carry the torch which helps them find their own way through life.
3. **Teenagers should be allocated a fixed amount of pocket money, which they can spend however they see fit.** The amount should be high enough to cover the needs of a teenager, but no extra money should be given! If a special event is scheduled for the weekend, they must budget the money they have been given.
4. **Use a 'traffic light' system to enforce and categorise house rules.** Make a clear distinction between rules that apply at all times and to everyone, including parents (red), rules that can be discussed depending on the situation (yellow), and things that your child is mature enough to decide for themselves (green). Being consistent does not mean imposing strict bans. Be open to compromise where possible.
5. **Let your child make the wrong decisions.** The best way to learn is from mistakes. For an adolescent, the whole universe is changing: their own body, their friendships, their view of the world. They must first learn to navigate this new reality. If you want to protect your child from harm, it will only make them feel insecure and frustrated.





6. **Less is more.** If you want to know what's going on with in your teenager's life, spend time with them, but don't force them to talk. Take them to play sport or watch a film together, and they will start to open up on their own accord. Always be there to offer support to your teenager, even if quality time becomes limited. They will always come back to you when they need you.
7. **Don't call the teenager to dinner.** Loud communication between the kitchen and upstairs only provokes arguments. Knock on the room door and let him know. You can then also discuss whether or not their computer game can be played for another few minutes.
8. **Give the young person specific household tasks for which they alone are responsible.**
9. On weekends, lunch becomes breakfast for teenagers, and, becoming virtually nocturnal, they require plenty of time in the mornings to rest and wake up. **Important discussions should therefore be scheduled for the afternoon.**
10. **Whether lunch or dinner, one meal a day should be eaten together as a family.** Your Sunday roast should not disappear behind their bedroom door! Doing this is important for family cohesion. Use this time to talk about your day. Sharing experiences and problems will prevent your child from immediately panicking when asked how their day was!
11. **School grades are not that important.** A teenager is learning much more important things in life: How do my actions affect others? Where do I belong? How does sex work? You should understand this, but don't let it stop being a priority. Let the teen set their own goals. After all, they have an interest in not being left behind at the end of the school year.
12. **Respect your teenager's privacy.** Their room is their territory. Enter it only when permitted. Getting upset over their room being messy is a waste of effort. The situation will get better once they get their first girlfriend or boyfriend, at the latest.
13. **Do not install any Internet filters.** In today's omnipresence of the World Wide Web, it is unfortunately the case that we cannot protect our children from pornographic, violent or discriminatory content. Even if you install special software on your devices, such measures are powerless against the exchange of such content in the schoolyard or via chat. It is instead more effective to talk to your children early: educate them on the right way to deal with such content, explain the dangers, and make your point.



14. **Leave the teenager alone.** Always remember that when they come home from school, teenagers have spent the whole day doing things out of their control. Plenty of “chill out” time is an important way of finding a balance.
15. **Do not make comparisons between siblings.** Everyone is different. These differences become even more marked during puberty. Teenagers need these distinctions to find their own place in the world. Therefore, you should avoid telling your son that his sister can manage to study for school without missing out on time with friends.
16. **Do not snoop!** Even if you are worried about something, do not search your child's room, mobile phone or even diary. This breach of trust is more likely to provoke your child's resistance than to make them understand. Are you worried about whether your child is using drugs? Then talk to him or her about it in a quiet minute. Make it clear where your tolerance level lies and that you trust them.
17. **Have understanding of peer pressure.** Most conflicts arise from the young person's longing to belong to their clique. Agreements with parents or homework can be easily neglected. Show your teenager that you take their needs seriously, but that there are other important things in life. Do you want to know who your child is meeting with? Then don't be bothered by visits from their friends. The more open you are to them, the more open they will be to you.
18. **Be an example, make mistakes.** Studies have shown that children's ambition and sense of responsibility are strengthened when they have to overcome difficulties themselves. So dispose of the idea that you always have to succeed on your first attempt. As soon as your child sees that you sometimes have to make an effort to achieve things, they will start to take control of their own life.



19. **Parents often care so much about the relationship they have with their children that they begin to neglect their relationship with their partner.** It is important not to forget to take care of your partner as well. Kiss each other, do things together, and prioritise your sex life. If your relationship with each other is strong, it will be a big advantage for you both when raising a teenager. Enjoy the regained independence of having older children: you no longer need to find a babysitter if you want to go to the cinema.
20. **Every argument is a chance for teenagers to begin learning to stand up for themselves and to make compromises.** The fact alone that your child picks arguments with you means that they know that you will always love him. When things get too much, sometimes you have to let it all out. Not every disagreement needs to be discussed immediately. Space often helps. But be careful: always remove yourself from the situation rather than sending your child away. Doing this can prevent them from feeling rejected.
21. **Love your child and respect their strengths.** Even at school, the focus is too often on a child's weaknesses: what can't they do, what do they still have to learn? However, young people are often eaten up by self-doubt. Strengthen your child by motivating them and showing them what they are good at. Praise them for how hard they studied for a test, even if they didn't achieve the results they'd hoped for. Support them in their hobbies and show interest.
22. **Don't mourn the young child you have 'lost', but take pleasure in watching them grow and develop.**



## 2.3 When you have a little more time: Better an argument every day than no talking at all.

### Some puzzle pieces on questions of communication with young people at home.

Democracy in everyday life does not mean that life is always peaceful. This is true both in politics and in the family. Democracy means that different points of view, opinions and proposed solutions are made public and debated. As children grow older, attitudes and opinions can often clash. It is understandable that parents of young people are often quite hesitant to hold discussions. Parents talk carefully, but their child still reacts rudely, gets offended, or simply does not listen. There are some things you can do to make these conversations a little less explosive. And now and then, if it doesn't work out, don't blame yourself. Just remember: it's better to argue every day than to not talk at all.

**The topics shortly below should always be seen in the context of growing up in a democratic society and its democratic culture:**

- You are on their side
- Before understanding comes listening.
- About dealing with an insecure self-esteem.
- Criticism is allowed - but as an 'I'-message!
- Confirming the positive helps.
- Irony is a bad form of communication.
- Overestimating one's own capabilities is a sign of weakness.
- Young people and parents sigh: "Nobody understands me!
- Clarity also means transparency.
- Asking for help as parents is not a sign of weakness.

### 2.3.1 You are on their side

In any moments of crisis is important to make the following statements very clear to your child:

- "I consider you to be a valuable and lovable person, even if I criticise some of your behaviour."
- "I am interested in what you think and say. It is important for me to hear your opinions, even if I sometimes do not share them."
- "I will try to see things through your eyes so I can understand you."

- "I will try to respect your right to self-determination, even if wanting to protect you sometimes makes it difficult for me."
- "I want to look at you, I do not want to hurt you. Do not hide from me."

### 2.3.2 Before understanding comes listening.

To achieve a culture of democracy, communication skills are essential in an open society.

"Listen to me first!". People sometimes talk as if they were playing Ping-Pong. One says something, then the other follows with their comment. When one stops, the other continues. Everyone just waits until the other takes a break to continue with their own trail of thought. Both try to convince the other of their point of view without truly engaging with each other. Each person immediately hits the other's ball back to them, instead of first catching it, looking at it from all angles, and only once this is done, returning it. While playing ping-pong, waiting and looking would probably be annoying, but in conversations it is vital.

**If we want to engage with another person's views and thoughts, it is important to try and see things through their eyes. If we can do this as adults, we set a good example to our children.**

- Don't answer every remark your child makes with a comment.
- First try to understand what he or she actually means.

These are two simple rules of conversation, yet in everyday life implementing them can prove to be a challenge. What does that mean in concrete terms when you live with young people?



**One example: Suppose your son comes home from school.**

The first sentence of any communication is often just a preliminary skirmish, an expression of emotion, and a feeling of the other person's willingness to talk. You can respond to this (like a ping-pong player) with a lecture on how to talk properly as a well-behaved person. But you can also ignore it, and instead, do some digging into the cause of the annoyance: "What made you so angry?" "Julia is a stupid cow!" Answering: "I think Julia is your girlfriend?" the conversation develops in a completely different and constructive direction.

You will only get to the bottom of this issue if you hold back on comments, and instead focus on listening and encouraging him to open up. Perhaps you will find out that he had problems at school because Julia didn't want to let him copy during the class test. When he tried to look at the textbook, the teacher caught him, took his work away, and punished him with a bad grade. You don't have to tell him that he did not learn enough and that he deserved the bad grade. He knows that himself. Telling him this will lead him to shutting down and defending himself furiously. Do not provoke this defensive behaviour. When parents talk to their children, they often do so more from an educational standpoint than from a communication psychological one.

- I, your mother, your father, am telling you something important. So, you, my child, should draw your conclusions and act accordingly!
- If I am right about this, you, as my child, should understand and not be offended!
- If you slam the door at a harmless remark, that is rude!

Making such remarks is understandable, but it doesn't help to solve any problems, because conversations with our children are subject to the same rules, mistakes, and reactions as when we communicate with other adults.

**Above all, the style in which we talk to our children should serve as a model for how we would like to be spoken to by them, and how they should talk to others.**

When a person feels like their self-esteem has been attacked by another person, they typically become defensive. In the example above, this could look like this: In response to criticism, he might respond: "Don't tell me you never copied from others when you were at school!" Accepting one's own mistakes becomes easier when one can accuse others of doing the same thing.

If you see your own behaviour as a parent reflected in these examples, you can know that you have, at times, attacked the self-esteem of your counterpart, and avoid such confrontations in future. Holding back any defensive comments can let the conversation continue openly.

**Listening attentively not only helps you to see the other person's perspective, but also to empathise with their feelings. Above all, it also helps you to gain a clearer understanding of what happened, how you felt, and what conclusions can be drawn from it. This helps much more than any kind of criticism. Sometimes you may not realise straight away what your child actually wants to tell you. Maybe they expressed themselves clumsily, or maybe they haven't even realised the issue yet.**



You can help both yourself and your child if, instead of giving answers or added comments, you simply reiterate what you have understood and what you have been told. This is not so much about the words, but about the emotion behind the words. For example, to the comment “such shit”, you could reply: “It seems like you were very annoyed.”

This kind of communication can be very beneficial in trying to gain a clearer picture of why your child is upset. If something has been understood incorrectly, they can clarify with “No, not that, but...”, or continue the conversation using “Yes, because...”. It is a good way of getting to the bottom of the issue.

Holding back on comments and replies can even make your child reflect on their own behaviour, even making self-critical statements themselves or opening up about things they may not otherwise have shared. But this is only possible if they do not fear an attack or repercussions from you. Talking self-critically about your own weaknesses or mistakes is especially difficult for young people. Growing up and growing into a democratic society is a long journey, which never really ends.

However, insight and self-criticism are the only way to achieve reliable change in a democracy. This applies both to individuals and to society as a whole. Use the analogy of a snail, crawling slowly and putting out its feelers. One rough touch and it pulls the feelers back again. Critical, condescending, ironic parental remarks are similar to these rough touches. They make exploration, growth and confidence unnecessarily difficult to achieve.

This does not mean that you should treat your child like a porcelain doll. On the contrary. The older your child gets, the more understanding they can show for the logical relationships between different facts or different situations. When a child is small, you have to hold back some of your negative personal reactions or emotions because the child cannot understand them. Yet you can and should talk to older children about your own fears and shortcomings, and ambivalent and conflicting feelings. You and your child should increasingly become equal partners, where both have to understand, and consider, the feelings of the other. In this way children grow into society as competent democratic citizens.

### 2.3.3 Dealing with low self-esteem.

Over the course of a few years, you will be dealing with an adolescent whose self-image is blurred and unstable, and whose self-confidence can be thrown off balance by the smallest of shocks. This can be difficult to deal with. Sometimes your child will be brimming with overconfidence, and at other times, plagued by self-doubt. Sometimes conversations can be easy and reasonable, and other times, even

the most harmless remark can be taken badly. Even when dealing with the strongest adults, conversations can be particularly effective if neither party feels that their self-esteem is under attack. The moment a person's self-esteem is challenged, they find themselves no longer being able to react objectively and become defensive. Whether or not the attack was intended is irrelevant, what is important is that it led to those feelings. This is especially true for young people who feel attacked regularly, and for whom even an objective remark can be taken as hurtful criticism.

The teacher who criticises the style of a pupil's essay gets an insolent answer: “That's just my style, you don't have to like it!”, or the mother, who makes a remark about their daughter wearing too much make up receives the response: “You're just jealous that you don't look good anymore”. In such instances, it's possible that adults also get offended. Why can a child get away with talking like that, when they've just been faced with simple criticism!



These rude remarks can then trigger rude remarks back, and before you know it, a simple comment has turned into a fierce battle of words.

Parents who react in this way certainly do so with some justification. They don't want to be attacked harshly either, and they want to teach their child not to treat others badly. But it is not wise, as the message will get lost in the heat of the moment.

**As the more stable, self-confident party, we must create an environment in which a fragile self-esteem can heal and grow. Making concessions, even if difficult and unreciprocated at times, can help.**

As your adolescent's self-image emerges and fluctuates, it is important to be careful of your words. Do not comment on their poor choice of outfit or make them feel self-conscious.

**Let them grow and learn instead.**

### 2.3.4 Criticism is allowed - but as a first-person message!

In a culture of democracy, everyone should be able to voice criticism and stand by it. When criticism can't be repressed, what is the best way to get your words heard, without provoking a defensive attitude?

■ **Failure 1: "Are you going to the circus with your face looking like that?"**

This remark is perhaps intended to sound funny and to tone down the criticism. However, it is ironic, and people with low self-esteem react to this poorly. An angry response or a slammed door is guaranteed.

■ **Failure 2: "You look terrible!"**

This remark does not only criticise a certain peculiarity, but rather the whole person in a rather general way and not comprehensible in detail. This must offend someone who has just made a lot of effort to get ready for a party.

■ **Failure 3: "You look as if you've got a taste for blood".**

You think so? Your daughter doesn't, and you're about to hear it. Many women apply blood-red make-up to their lips and look good with it too.



You may just think that doesn't go well with your daughter's delicate, young face. It is, after all, still very unusual for you to see your child dressed up like a woman. And you may also think that it's not appropriate for her age and others may find it strange. In that case, say so!

To do so, above all, make sure not say, "You look...", or "You are..."; but instead, "I think that...". The difference may seem insignificant to you, but it is not. Immediately directing criticism at the other person can be taken as an attack and creates a definite judgement which cannot be changed. Using phrases such as "I think that..." starts a criticism with a gentle opinion rather than an accepted truth. It allows the other person the opportunity to agree or rebuff the remark. Sentences with "I find..." or "I think..." invite dialogue, discussion, and the sharing of opinions.

But let's assume that a remark, no matter how carefully chosen, provoked a defensive response from your daughter. She felt attacked, even though that wasn't the intention. Although you are angry, you do not want a war of words, but simply to have a diplomatic conversation, sharing different points of view. To do so, it may be necessary to back down and slightly reinflate your daughter's ego: "Sorry, I didn't mean to offend you. I just like you better without so much colour."

If backing down is too difficult, is better to end the conversation than saying something hurtful. If your daughter is interested in your opinion, and she usually should be, she may be less harsh in the next session.

### 2.3.5 Confirming the positive helps.

In a culture of democracy, it is important to emphasise the importance of empowerment. Suppose your son, in a fit of orderliness, has sorted out two piles of clothes, brochures, toys and bicycle parts from the floor of his room. Only the third one, under the window, is still there. This can be looked at like the famous glass of water- either half empty or half full. Should you be happy that two piles have gone, and things that had gone missing have reappeared? Or should you complain about the final pile, saying "you can never finish anything!"?

### If you must criticise - do not generalise.

- The more general you formulate your criticism, the more likely it is that the remark will be perceived as an attack.
- Never criticise the person as a whole, but rather, only individual behaviour patterns.
- Remove labels and quick judgements from your vocabulary.

**Stick to individual points that are understandable to others.**

DON'T SAY	BUT SAY
How in the world did you dress yourself?	I don't think the jumper goes with the trousers at all.
You are always late.	This is the second time this week you are late.
You always have to have the last word.	Please let me finish.

Generalised statements also have the disastrous effect of acting as a “self-fulfilling prophecy”. With phrases such as “again and again”, “constantly”, and “permanently”, and even more so with titles such as “You are a ...”, you are, so to speak, categorising a child who is still growing and developing into a certain bracket, attaching certain types of behaviour to them while ignoring others. The alleged dawdler does not

always dawdle but can sometimes be quite fast. Attaching a behaviour or trait onto an adolescent can significantly shape their self-image going forwards.

### 2.3.6 Irony is a bad form of communication.

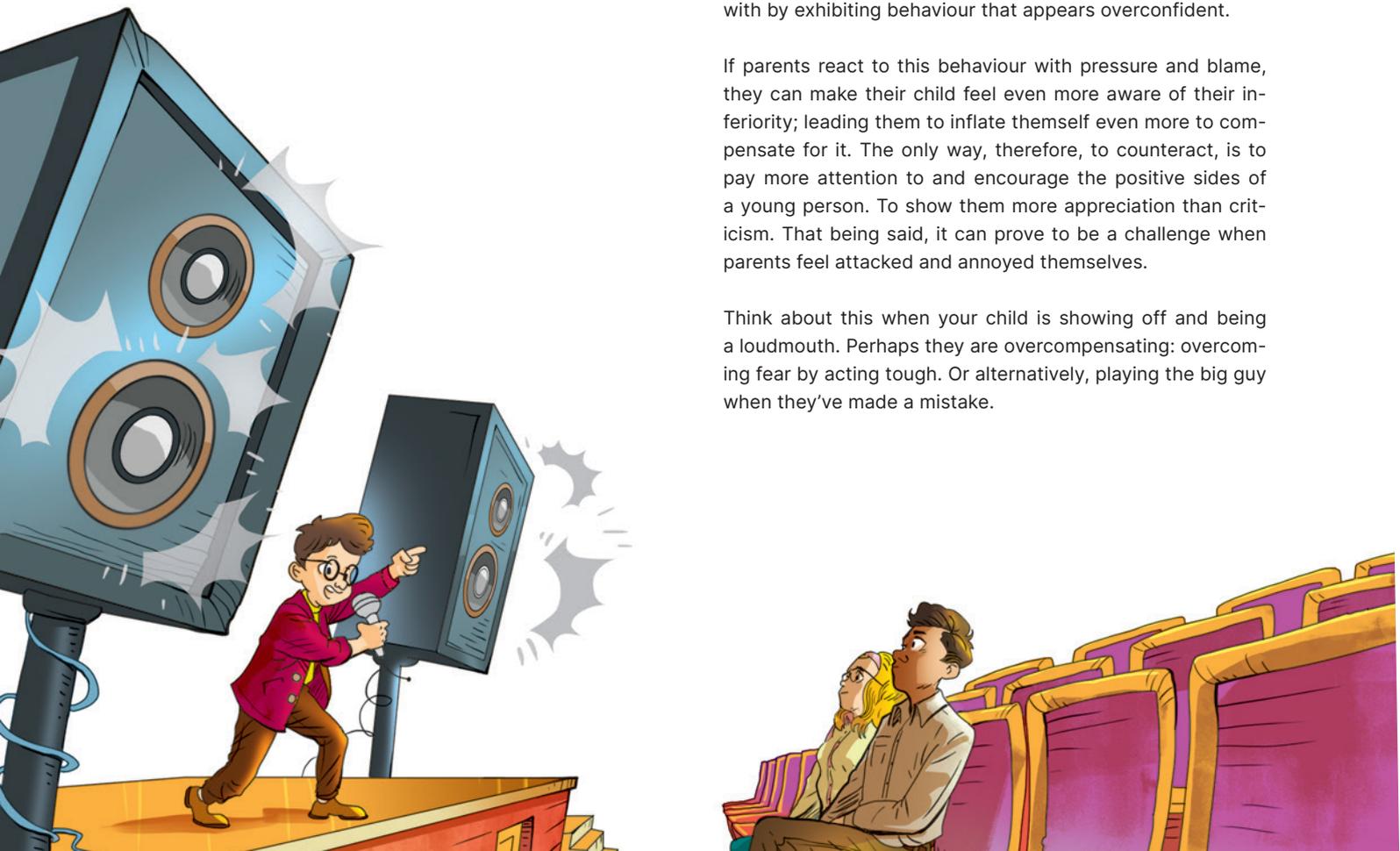
For a culture of democracy, everyone should have the right to recognition. Irony creates a feeling of distance and critical superiority, and people with little self-confidence can be particularly sensitive to this. If your son spends hours pondering whether to pick up his crush from the bus stop, or if your daughter acts as though the world has collapsed because of a pimple on her nose, don't let your feelings show. At seventeen you may have reacted the same! Furthermore, don't grin when your daughter tells you her fantastic ideas for fairer distribution of wealth in the world. It is gratifying that she is working on them. And Karl Marx did not write his “Kapital” when he was fourteen. Arrogance and irony are the surest way to make children retreat and fall silent. Why talk to old people about anything if they're not willing to understand?

### 2.3.7 Overconfidence is a sign of weakness.

For a culture of democracy, this means that mistakes should be an opportunity for learning. A constant, piercing feeling of inferiority among young people can sometimes only be dealt with by exhibiting behaviour that appears overconfident.

If parents react to this behaviour with pressure and blame, they can make their child feel even more aware of their inferiority; leading them to inflate themselves even more to compensate for it. The only way, therefore, to counteract, is to pay more attention to and encourage the positive sides of a young person. To show them more appreciation than criticism. That being said, it can prove to be a challenge when parents feel attacked and annoyed themselves.

Think about this when your child is showing off and being a loudmouth. Perhaps they are overcompensating: overcoming fear by acting tough. Or alternatively, playing the big guy when they've made a mistake.





### 2.3.8 Young people and parents both sigh: “Nobody understands me!”

For a culture of democracy this means trying to find your place in society.

Young people can often feel miserable, and- not in the mood to do anything, and having problems with their friends, adults, and the whole world.

Everyone puts them down, queuing up to step on their feet. When feeling like this, they can be quite unpleasant company – for themselves and for the others around them. Take the following example: A girl is getting ready to meet her friends right at the moment when she should have been helping with some repairs in the basement. While her mother gently asks her to stay and help, her father angrily disappears into the basement. The girl then raises her voice, telling them that it's their house anyway and the basement is for their wine. By now, tensions have exploded. At this point, with the daughter in this mood, let's assess what the parents' reactions are. Though maybe a bit stereotypical, this could be the case:

The mother, as usual tries to please everyone. She has just tried to mediate a dispute between the father and daughter - wanting to cushion the daughter's rude language a little, while also making the father understand the daughter's wishes better.

Her husband resents this, and now his wife has to put up with a bad atmosphere. And? Does the daughter thank her for her mediation? Couldn't she have volunteered to help with the

renovation? She has instead run off with an unfamiliar young man, who the mother does not approve of. Despite her very carefully worded reproach she made a furious remark. She is selfish and ungrateful. In a moment her husband will say, self-applaudingly: “You see what you get from your good-naturedness!”

The daughter thinks that her mother's partisanship was too half-hearted. After all, both parents are always picking on her. Her mother often acts so understanding, but when it comes down to it, she fails to stand up for her. Yet the father also feels misunderstood. Didn't he always try hard for his daughter? Do the women in his family really have to now portray him as a proud lion? Why does his wife always have to stab him in the back? Her partisanship for her daughter is completely unjust.

**Thus, especially in times when children want to become independent, whole families get tangled up in mutual misunderstandings, disappointment, unspoken reproaches and insults. Each interprets the words and actions of the others differently and considers his or her own view of things to be the only correct one. Everyone is angry with each other, and no one tries to see the others' perspectives. In fact, some do not even understand themselves.**

### 2.3.9 Clarity also means transparency.

For a culture of democracy, this means being transparent and comprehensible. Parents tend to make veiled statements and appeals. They want to be careful in their arguments, and want to formulate their sentences considerably, without offending anyone. However, children do not like such covert appeals. They often feel insecure in their interpretations and want to clearly know where they stand.

Suppose your daughter asks if she can stay at her friend's house overnight.

You answer: "Yes, yes, go ahead. It's always nicer to be somewhere else than home." But your wrinkled expression doesn't match your clearly expressed consent. It makes you feel insecure and angry. Because your daughter senses that you don't agree, but how much, and why, she cannot tell from your reaction. But if she really leaves, you resent her. Resentment is also a hidden reaction that encourages misunderstanding because it allows for different interpretations, and because the person who takes offense is usually silent, the other person cannot check whether or not their interpretation is correct.

### Why not speak openly and clearly about your thoughts?

For example, you have been annoyed for months that your son never goes shopping on his own initiative, at most writing his demands on the shopping list. Over and over again you make statements such as: "Why do I always have to go shopping?" "It's nice for you to have a waitress like that!", "I would like to experience...", and then you get angry because their behaviour does not change. Instead, why not just say, "I want you to do the shopping today.?"

It is never good for parents to raise children who swallow their own feelings for the sake of peace, neither for the parents, nor for the child.

### 2.3.10 Parents who feel comfortable in their own skin are also better parents.

Mothers and fathers who are timid in their statements expect the same from their children. But children hold back much less in their choice of words than we do and can often miss the mark. When you hear such statements, you may try to ask yourself not: "Why does my son say such bad things to me?"; but: "What is it that makes him so upset?". However, if you don't succeed, and his insolence drives you crazy, then say so, loudly and forcefully, if necessary. Say goodbye to the idea that in a good, intact family you must always talk to each other politely and in a balanced way.



Children are often extremely oblivious to covert appeals. Even if they understand them, they often pretend they have not. As Goethe said: "You notice the intention and you are upset". Both children and adults are very good at reading between the lines.



Loud, emotional, but reasonably fair arguments can clear the air like a thunderstorm. That is why the same applies to dealing with pubescent children as to any democratic society: it is better to argue every day than not to talk at all. Let's not forget, despite all the enthusiasm and desire to have clear discussions, even in the most benevolent atmosphere not everyone feels like talking all the time.

Sometimes young people react very grumpily to questions or the offer of talks.

- They feel questioned.
- They do not want to talk about it.
- They want to come to terms with something themselves first or prefer to discuss it with friends.

In these instances, further drilling is inadmissible and harmful. It can come across as a disregard for their privacy. And young people are particularly vulnerable to this.

Questioning tempts you to lie! If parents push too hard, they often tempt their children to offer them a cheap excuse as an answer, so that they can be left alone. Therefore, at any age and for any question, the answer should also be allowed to be: "I don't want to talk about that now".

It is a necessary sign of trust and a recognition of children's autonomy to allow such an answer, even if it can be difficult to accept sometimes. Especially when worried about something, you will want to know what is going on, but you should not force it.

Never allow yourself to be tempted to secretly read your children's letters or diary entries. This is such a serious and momentous breach of trust that can only be justified in situations of life and death, and it violates a fundamental democratic right enshrined in law: the right to privacy.

**The trick here, is to offer yourself without imposing. Your children must feel secure in the knowledge that you will always be there to support them when they cannot manage on their own. "When I need them, they're there."**

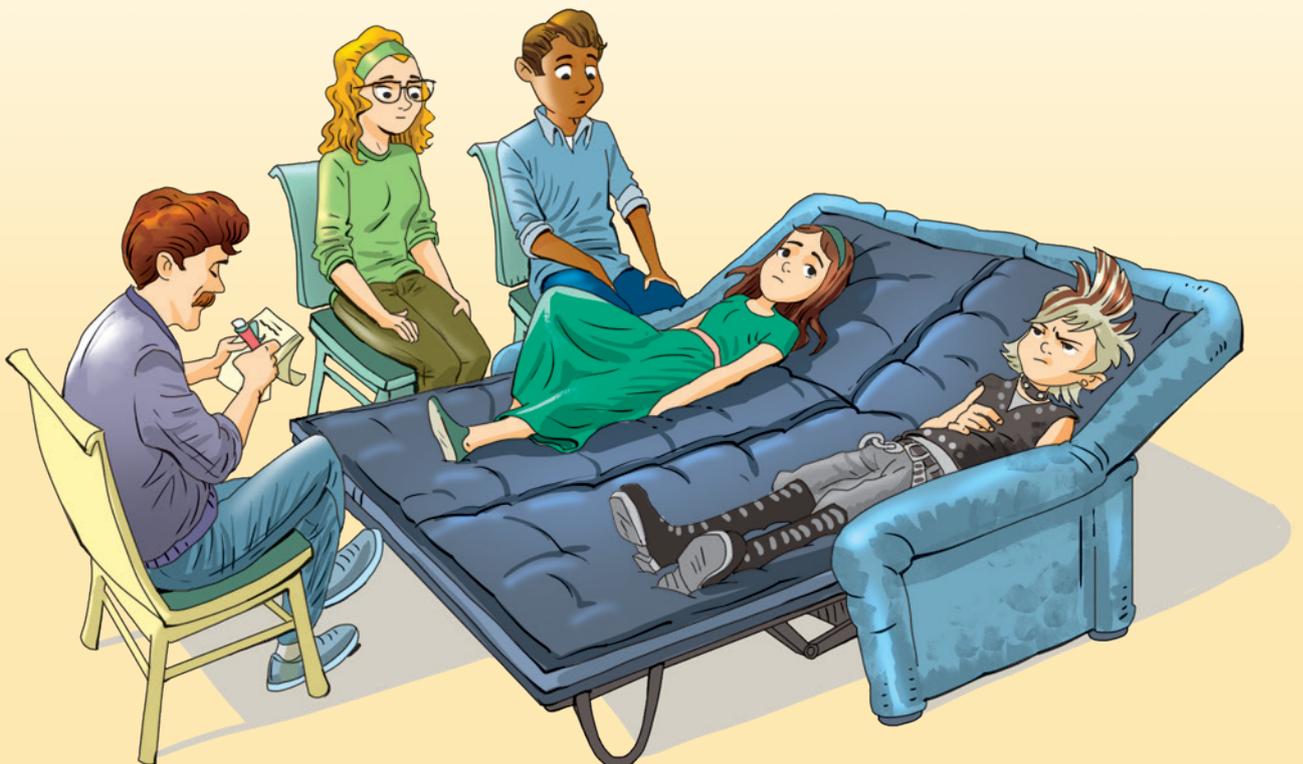
### 2.3.11 Getting help as parents is not a sign of weakness.

For a culture of democracy, this means that solutions require cooperation and empathy. In a quiet hour, it can be easy to look at what you read in books and make commitments and resolutions for the future. However, translating these commitments into reality is usually much harder.

That is why:

- when fear or anger repeatedly blocks your level-headed actions
- when you can no longer work with each other on your own,
- when one person repeatedly misunderstands the other

**...let experts help you.**



Making use of the services of a specialist is not an admission of your own incapacity. Often, when a person is too personally tied up, or has too much emotional involvement in a problem, they can struggle to act and move forwards. A stranger, on the other hand, especially one with a trained eye, can look at the whole thing with a critically and impartially, which can be very helpful.

Of course, it is best if the whole family can get help together, because when living together, nobody escapes involvement. Of course, it may prove difficult to convince your son or daughter to go with you. To drag them along against their will is completely pointless.

In your attempts at persuasion, avoid placing any blame.

- Not "I want us to go because you..."
- But: "I want to go there because I want to understand you better", "...because maybe we can be helped to get along better with each other.

If you don't succeed in getting your son, daughter, partner to go, you can also go alone. Since in a family everyone's behaviour affects and depends on each other, you can expect that a change in your behaviour can also bring about changes in the behaviour of other family members.

When you go to a counselling centre, you will not be told what you are doing wrong. You will not be bombarded with advice that you cannot put into practice. Rather, they will help you to explore and sort out your own feelings and thoughts, and to be clear about what you want to change. You will be supported in doing this in small, realistic steps.

If you go to a counselling session as a family, they will help you to talk to each other in a way that everyone gets heard, no one get offended or ignored, and solutions are found in a way that hurts no one. No counsellor will judge who is right or wrong in disputes, or who has a stronger argument. No one will take sides. Therefore, everyone can equally benefit from such discussions.

## 2.4 For the quiet moments: What Teenagers need. Seven steps to self-sustainability.

When you think back to your own years of becoming who you are now, you might remember what you yourself needed. Here we propose seven such needs. Not to be taken too seriously, but it is interesting to see how often the number seven appears in the history of mankind. The world was created in seven days, and a week has just as many. There are seven wonders of the world, and seven dwarves in the fairy tale. Scientists suspect that the special status of the number seven is based, among other things, on an astronomical phenomenon. In ancient times, the planets and stars that were clearly visible to the naked eye were considered to be the dwellings of the gods. And there were seven of them: The Sun and Moon, along with the planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Here we present seven needs which teenagers repeatedly express verbally or non-verbally. Understanding them also helps us to be good parents.

**Teenagers need praise, but not verbal fast food.**

**"You did good!" is a sentence that parents should say more often. A teenager desperately needs both approval and recognition.** Without appreciation, they become unhappy, bitter and insecure. Praise helps them to overcome obstacles, strengthen their self-confidence and motivate them, provided it is honest and comes from a reliable source. Researchers have found out that success leads to success. Failure, constant criticism and control have a negative influence on the self-confidence of a young person.



Nevertheless, praise for children is all too often the verbal fast food of time-poor parents these days. Two or three generations ago, children were often kept in fearful dependence by excessive hurtful criticism. But today parents tend to keep their offspring happy with unreserved approval and sometimes exaggerated appreciation. Many parents do not want to be authoritarian, knowing the values of a democratic day-to-day culture. They want to use empowerment to support and strengthen their children, but this only really makes sense if praise and encouragement are realistic. After all,

praise must be given in the right dose and on the right occasion. Has your adolescent set the table? Did they achieve a top score in their university exam? Win a soccer match? These are very different types of important occasion and must be acknowledged and responded to differently. Those who only say “You did a great job” to every achievement is almost as bad as someone who punishes his adolescent with disinterest. In addition, praise is by no means always the best way to improve performance. Praise can even paralyse curiosity and interest because sometimes performance is then only achieved by calculating the reward it accompanies. Behavioural research has found that children and youth who take on a task without any prospect of a reward do better than those who know they will be rewarded. This is because they soon lose interest and perform less well overall because they do not consider the activity important in itself, simply undertaking it for the reward gained upon completion.

#### Teenagers need tenderness.

The thought is deep inside us adults: teenagers seem to be too old for parental tenderness. But denying them this is not a good idea. **Physical tenderness is vital for everyone, including adolescents.** Hugs can overcome anger, grief, depression, stress, loneliness and fear, and in many cases is more effective than a deep conversation. Because love and tenderness are we might even go as far as to call them a human right and a basic element of our common understanding of a living democracy: tenderness connects us with other people and creates a feeling of belonging in the world.



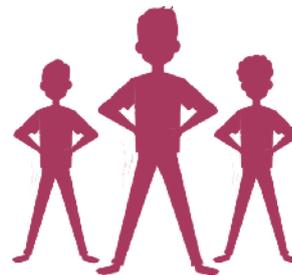
**However, it's not enough to simply tell your child, “I love you.” They must be able to feel it deeply and directly from a very early age.**

The skin is been described as the most important organ besides the brain. A child learns love primarily through the skin, its largest sensory organ. A firm embrace causes the release of endorphins- happiness hormones, which have a fast-acting calming, pain-relieving and uplifting effect. At the same time, levels of the stress hormone cortisol decrease. So, a child who is frightened or hurt that seeks protection in the arms of their mother or father instinctively does the right

thing. By hugging and stroking, immune functions also become stronger, promoting intelligence. Stroking and cuddling calms aggressive and hyperactive children of all ages and makes sad ones happy. Children who are kissed and cuddled a lot show significantly increased levels of activity in the left frontal hemisphere of their brains, the area responsible for joy and happiness. Adolescents gain security and self-confidence through strong, stable relationships with those they trust. This indispensably includes the “Twelve hugs a day”, of which the famous American doctor and psychotherapist Virginia Satir (1916 – 1988) stated everyone needs to grow and mature. She is quoted to have said that we human beings need a minimum of 4 hugs a day for survival, at least 8 hugs a day for maintenance, but 12 hugs a day for growth and development. Those who do not receive affection and tenderness from their parents suffer as a consequence.

#### Teenagers need their clique.

A child or teenager's involvement in gangs or cliques is almost never related to violence but is simply part of the normal development of an adolescent. After a child has learned to make friends with individuals, the ability to join a group is the second most important pillar on which children learn to build healthy social relationships. To cooperate, communicate, share, develop and participate with others are core democratic values. While in two-person friendships the primary goal is just to communicate, membership within a group goes a step further and strengthens a young person's trust and sense of belonging. They usually develop a strong sense of loyalty, whether the group is playing football or doing handicrafts together.



It is not a coincidence that the most beautiful children's books and films are about groups of friends. In their gang or group experience young people develop community and public spirit. They have the opportunity to show solidarity and empathy and they learn about boundaries through difficult situations the group faces. To do this, groups need a certain amount of freedom, where difficult situations are made possible, and where they can both punish and be punished without suffering from too far-reaching consequences. Parents, on the other hand, must accept that different rules apply in groups of adolescents than among adults.

The concern that the gang might have a bad influence on the children is unfounded in almost all cases. Children are far more likely to fall off the track due to unloving, disinterested and disrupted parenting. In fact, friendship groups can even protect teenagers from harm, reminding them that they are not alone.

### Teenagers need rules.

An education without standards and limits leads to selfish behaviour. **A family is a living organism, and while it needs a dash of chaos, it also needs structures and rules that everyone can adhere to.** Only then can children develop the wonderful art of muddling through and improvising. A certain amount of chaos is inevitable regardless, because children always live in the here and now. They don't care about yesterday or tomorrow, and only after many years can they draw on experience and then hopefully plan and act with foresight. But until that happens, they need rules and rituals, and of course generosity, imagination and flexibility.

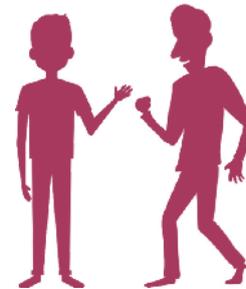


To learn all this, however, they need a family with support. The Canadian educationalist Barbara Coloroso writes: "The family with support is comparable to a backbone, it is firm yet flexible. It provides the necessary support that enables children to fully recognise and experience their unique and true self". But for this, parents must also be sufficiently strict. "Good parents don't give their children everything they want and teach them manners." These are not the words of adults, but rather the results of a representative survey of teenagers. Almost 70 percent of all 8 to 18-year-olds, according to the results, want parents to be figures of authority and role models.

But daily living together needs rules, even if some of them seem banal. Common examples of such rules include: everyone saying when they will come home; everyone having respect for each other's property; every family member having the right to be undisturbed for a certain amount of time during the day. This is the only way that pubescent adolescents become stable adults with humour, perseverance, and common sense.

### Teenagers need to learn to argue.

Children argue among themselves, with their parents, their siblings and their teachers, and with their classmates and friends. That is normal. Children must be allowed to fight. Arguing is just as important for their personal development and maturity as eating and drinking, and regular school attendance. Nobody can be sweet and nice all the time. However, long before starting school, children should have learned not to hit, pull hair, or poke other children. Furthermore, if siblings argue, parents should avoid taking sides, but instead, give each child the opportunity to express their point of view. Don't comment on their accusations and encourage them to find a solution to their problem between themselves. Even if older children sometimes press for an opinion from you, to prove who was right or wrong, do not make yourself a judge!



However, it sometimes seems that some children and young people react extremely aggressively to conflict. Many educators are now of the opinion that conflicts among teenagers are on the increase and are being fought out far more often than in the past in a form that goes far beyond what is acceptable. In addition to this, there are hardly any films on television or in the cinema that do not include tangible conflicts. In view of this, children learn conflict skills and peace-making abilities above all when they witness conflict between their parents, and see how their mothers and fathers can laugh at themselves, don't hold resentment towards one another, and refuse to bring up past mistakes with each other. When parents argue, they should try very hard to always stay fair because children observe their parents' arguments very closely. In the case of major disputes, children should not be in the room. It can cause them to feel scared and they generally would not be involved in the later reconciliation.

### Teenager need to find their own way.

Parents know a lot better than their teenage children, but that is no reason to patronise them. Bans and blind obedience belong in the pedagogical rubbish bin. All people have the fundamental desire to feel, at least in some areas of life, in control of their own actions, this of course also applies to teenagers. Commands like “don’t do that” or sighs of “that’s not the way to do it” rob a child of this experience of free-will. When good behaviours are prescribed by a ready-made system of rules and commands, they are hindered rather than encouraged. If a child is constantly signalled: “You are not allowed to do this and I will tell you exactly why”, this usually leads straight into the child searching for greater independence and developing an inability to assess the consequences of bad or dangerous behaviour.



In other words: on the positive side, children can represent constant surprises and spontaneous changes. On the negative side, however, they can also represent chaos and sheer anarchy. Parents therefore have a justified need to bring order to this chaos with a certain regularity through norms, principles and rituals. However, children want to find their own path in the world and not directly follow in the well-worn, predetermined footsteps of their parents.

Giving your child a set of rules and regulations therefore does not do any harm, but a certain element of freedom and flexibility should also be encouraged. Good manners, good methods of expression, and the curtailment of wild impulses should be controlled, but sometimes teenagers simply need to be encouraged to think for themselves. That’s why parents should also take interest in what motives their child might have had for doing something. The best way to avoid being patronising and critical is to make a short, personal statement. So instead of saying: “Don’t do that. How old are you?”, say “I don’t like you walking in with dirty shoes, it creates a lot of extra work for me.”

### Teenagers need to talk about feelings.

Children today are certainly better enlightened than their grandparents, but they are still just children. Society in general has opened up to the topics of love and sexuality more in recent years, yet on the other hand, teenage pregnancies are on the rise worldwide, and the number of people infected with HIV is also increasing. Nowadays, parents want to educate their children in such a way that they will later experience sexuality and love as beautiful and fulfilling. They want to give them a lot of knowledge, because that is the best protection against bad experiences. This is understandable, but information is not always the most important element to decision-making. Often, attitudes or values can play a larger role.



What is more important is that you as parents talk more about feelings with your children and adolescents. You don’t need to hide the fact that premature or unpleasant experiences can break their heart. Everyday children and adolescents take their own lives, sometimes as a consequence of such experiences. Therefore, teenagers urgently need to be informed about the emotional ups-and-downs that love can cause.

A child must of course also be informed about issues such as sexual abuse, as well as regularly reminded about contraceptives, protection against sexual transmitted diseases etc., which can frequently be ignored by teenagers. Anyone who has difficulty talking about sexuality should consult paediatricians and gynaecologists for support.

## 2.5 Staying close: Relationship instead of education.



Some clear words about education in a time of change.

*Many parents today are unsure how to bring up their children. This is mainly due to the fact, that we today, for good reasons, deviate educationally from the ways of our parents and grandparents, and thus from the long valid assumptions about a correct upbringing. But if we decide to take new paths, we alone are responsible for their success. Therefore, we are constantly afraid of making mistakes. In the following article we will explore this fear with some questions and endeavour to look together for possible alternatives.*

**Do we have a justified fear of making educational mistakes?** It is not a bad thing to be insecure. Only then can you look for new information, enter into discussions with others, and grow into your position. Our democracy is facing new challenges, of which the surprise Covid-19 pandemic is only one of. The worlds of business, communication, and values are changing rapidly. Nowadays, children who have serious problems in their development come mostly from families where old methods are still being used. In which parents are always very sure of doing everything right, and in which discipline, order and respect count above all else.

**What can I do to ensure that my young person takes this path?**

Are there golden rules?  
Parents should use their intelligence, curiosity and empathy to get to know their child in the first years of their life. They should spend as much time as possible with them. And in the later years, they should not interfere but be ready to be there when the young person needs support. An active presence in their early years and a passive presence in their later years is a good technique. But time is the magic word.

**Do educational programmes have a bad influence on children?**

For a long time, it was thought that education is mainly done by adults constantly talking to children, correcting them, and disciplining them. But if parents do this too much and apply certain educational concepts that they hope will be effective, children notice very quickly. They see the inauthenticity in their parents' behaviour and lose feelings of closeness to them.

**How can parents do better?**

Parents need to understand that 90 percent of parenting is done by children intuitively orienting themselves towards their father and mother: It takes place, so to speak, between the lines - through the way parents treat each other, their neighbours, and their own parents, as well as how they argue, eat, and love. Education is absorbed through the skin.

**What is the goal of education?**

The central question for parents should not be: How can I get my child to do their homework? The question should be: What kind of person should they become? Who do I want to see before me when they turn 25? And what are the social and practical skills that my child should have developed by then? All of this is not the result of any educational programme, but rather, of living together as a family. It is best developed when everyone learns from each other instead of constantly trying to teach each other instead.

**What is wrong with order, respect and discipline?**

The children of such families pay a high price. They become the object of education and do not respect their parents as human beings, but rather as their artificial authority as educators.

**Punishments and rewards should be avoided in education. Is this true?**

Punishments and rewards are both manipulative tools that send a message to the young person that is as clear as it is destructive: You are only good if you make us happy. Imagine a man rewarding his wife (or vice versa) every time she does something right. This would not be considered to be a close relationship, but rather as a relationship between a boss and subordinate.

**Again and again the keyword 'quality time' comes up. What is meant by this?**

When you spend time with your children be sure that you have their own personality at the centre of your interests. If young people find out that you do not see them as an individual human being, but simply as a projection of their parents own desires, this can result in low self-esteem. A child's ego cannot develop in isolation from the demands and expectations of the parents. A child does not need constant attention, and in fact does not like to be permanently at the centre of attention. A child of any age needs relationships above all else. They all want to participate in their parents' lives.

## 2.6 Something to think about: Your adolescents between global networking and individual challenges

Today's teenagers are equipped with digital technologies and virtual reality. For them, networking via the internet is an important and natural globalised tool in which all developments are somehow connected, and in which almost all regions of the world are easily accessible at all times. Their youth is characterised by an influential economic situation in which not everyone participates equally. Young people today are usually optimistic about the future, but also have a strong awareness of social inequality. They see that their future holds many opportunities for them, if they are prepared to put in the effort. To prepare themselves for this competitive environment, they must plan to be independent and learn to stand on their own two feet.



### Growing up in crisis mode

At the same time, today's young people and young adults are living in a time of crisis and unforeseen events: Covid-19, the global financial crisis, the climate crisis, the increasing global wealth gap, the dismantling of social security systems and increasing precarious employment, the demographic and pension crisis, the challenges posed by migration, and the growing threat of terrorism – to name but a few. Some experts call this the growing up in an economic crisis mode. Young people are now looking for stability and a sense of security mainly in their private relationships: within their family and friendships.



### Politically interested - but different

However, they are also aware of what is happening around them and they are interested and engaged in social developments. They recognise a functioning democratic system as an important asset. With a generally very pragmatic attitude they are prepared to make a personal contribution if they believe they can make a direct difference. Yet many young people find themselves under heavy pressure from the requirements of school, university, training or work, and so their commitment to other worthy causes cannot be met. Other brakes are widespread doubts as to the effectiveness of its own actions its commitment to more abstract political, social and cultural or environmental objectives. The majority is very distanced from official political structures, parties, and government. But that does not mean that they are apolitical, rather they just seek other forms of political expression.



### Environmental awareness – between idealism and the desire for self-development

Young people nowadays are generally very aware of issues relating to environmental and climate protection, and its effects on the future prospects of their generation. However, they often feel as though they lack more detailed information, and express frustration that sustainability issues are not given enough attention by public educational institutions. The principle of not consuming anything unnecessary is also often accepted in principle but contradicted in everyday life through their actions and motives to build something great for themselves. On one hand, they see a growing economy as a prerequisite for meeting their own job and income goals,

but on the other, they perceive it as a contradiction to the need to protect and preserve natural resources. This contradictory behaviour carries through to many areas of a young person's life: A desire to use air travel to 'see the world', but maintaining a vegetarian diet to prevent animals from suffering; wearing branded clothing to look good in front of friends, but participating in online campaigns to advocate for sustainable policies; and using a smartphone to keep up-to-date with modern technology, but opting for a life without a car to protect the environment in a world when private transport is no longer required. Many young people are aware of the contradictions in their life and develop a certain self-critical approach.



#### The most important thing in life: Reliable personal relationships

For young people, three things come first: having a trustworthy partner, good friends and a stable family life. This means that they feel secure in reliable relationships. The importance of personal support is particularly important in view of a world characterised by crises and unpredictable developments, and in which social and economic structures can change rapidly. Personal relationships therefore offer young people a safe-haven. Young people generally prefer a modern, partnership-based role model. It is to be expected that the division of labour between the sexes will become more equal in the future. In a family, both partners will be employed and both will take care of the children. When it comes to the children, however, the majority of this work will probably continue to lie with the woman.



#### Acceptance of diversity is important for most young people

For an overwhelming majority of young people, respecting and valuing diversity is important, particularly so because more and more people come from an international background themselves. Many adolescents have foreign friends or have experienced life or travel abroad. Thus, the recogni-

tion of cultural diversity and respect for other ways of life are almost a standard for them, and an indispensable prerequisite for a peaceful coexistence and tolerant, diverse future society.



#### Technical innovations and digitalisation are changing life drastically but unpredictably

Another development that young people discuss is digitalisation. They connect with it both positive and negative ways. On the positive side, there are many promising and diverse innovations, such as the ability to work and shop from home, the use of self-propelled cars and automated public transport, smart homes, or robots that do the housework. Furthermore, the creation of new technical professions opens the door to new career prospects and opportunities for future generations. All of these developments help to make life easier and more flexible for everyone.

On the other hand, these developments awaken also fears of unwanted social and economic consequences. For example, some fear that personal communication is diminishing, while isolation is on the rise. The younger generation is also concerned that more and more workers in the course of digitalisation could become dispensable and unemployment could rise further. They are aware of the risk of widespread surveillance through digital media and technologies. However, this knowledge barely changes their behaviours or actions.

## 2.7 For parents and adolescents: Living in the 21st century

**The world we live in is the only one we have. And that's OK.**

### What characterises the situation of individuals in our societies?

Central is the emancipation and the detachment of individuals from status, church and traditions; people have dispensed with everything that society was comprised of for a long time.

### Does this autonomy overburden us?

Mankind is overtaxed despite its supposedly superior knowledge and ability. That has always been the case. We were once also overwhelmed by feudal society, and never experienced a purely peaceful existence. But this discussion refers to individualism, not autonomy. After all, autonomy means that you make the laws yourself. We are all individuals, whether we are autonomous or not. Individualism, on the other hand, means that we always judge the consequences of our actions only in relation to other individuals and to society as a whole.

### But what about the autonomy of us individuals?

Based on their experiences, individuals can discover their wants and future goals. This self-determination of their life gives them the opportunity to define the meaning and path of their own life, which can be considered to be autonomic, or at least partially autonomic.

### Do people therefore still feel disoriented today?

The break with the old solutions has weakened the influence of the old ways of life. Today people can no longer imagine how little space the individual once had to make decisions for themselves. We now have a society of individuals rather than communities, and this has created a changed dynamic.

### So are we increasingly unattached, overburdened individuals?

Certainly, attachment to institutions has become weaker and more in doubt. One could say that the two world wars in the 20th century robbed institutions of their innocence. They no longer maintain a grip on power because they have lost authority and credibility. But at the same time individuals cannot live without clear rules and limits.

### **Where does an adolescent learn autonomy?**

Although it sounds contradictory, autonomy is learnt through relationships and the experiences had in these relationships. When tension arises the question comes about: 'Can I have a relationship and autonomy at the same time?'. Autonomy becomes a lived experience, developed through tension in relationships.

### **Is consumption also a form of autonomy? Or is consumption of goods only negative?**

What has characterised modern society since the 1950s is the explosion in wants and desires. People no longer have to be reserved and modest, and no one forces them to be ascetic; months of fasting and sacrifice have lost their meaning. Such rituals of modesty, which were also strongly based on religion, were virtually washed away. It is said: You have wishes, and they should come true. That is your autonomy. In the old fairy-tales it was always said: "Wishing brings bad luck, be content with what you have." And suddenly such sentiments are no more. Everything you could wish for is available to be bought, so you don't even have to make it yourself. Thus, little by little, the fulfilment of every desire leads to the purchase of goods. In this way, all objects are ultimately transformed into goods to be bought and sold. People really believe, through the power of advertising, that buying a new pair of trainers will bring them happiness and satisfaction. It takes individuals a long time to realise that, in fact, buying such things does not lead to contentment. With the realisation that despite the satisfaction of material desires, the feeling remains that something is missing, depression can set in. But what is missing is not so easy to find, so consumer objects continue to fill the hole.

### **And the alternative? To have no more wishes?**

Wishing is a wonderful thing, because it makes people think beyond what they have. It is a driving force to change reality. But people who are worn down have no power to wish, and generally accept reality as it is. Adolescence is the most important phase in an individuals' life, it is the time when wishes and goals for the future are developed. Over the next 10-15 years, young people must find a way to meet these goals by combining their dreams with their talents and competences. Otherwise, they may be forced to renounce them. It is crucial that the fantasies of greatness and omnipotence are replaced by awareness of one's own real gifts and talents. Only these can become reality. These considerations may also make it clear why youth unemployment is a serious issue. In addition to material misery, there is also a psychological misery of deep unease and insufficiency. Under such circumstances, young people will take every opportunity to find a way out of becoming the generation with beautiful fantasies, and instead to one of a good, secure future.

### **And how do we encourage creativity?**

There are many approaches to this. For example, the growing ecological awareness, which in the actions of Greenpeace, for example, shows possible solutions through grand actions. Also, the growing popularity of vegetarianism, which is leading to a reevaluation of the relationship between humans and animals, or the constant attempt to supply cities with new living and co-habitation arrangements. What is frightening, however, is how much resistance and hatred such efforts can trigger. And to fight against this hatred is a difficult and arduous thing, because we do not want to develop counter-hate.



## 2.8 To feel the gap: When the children are suddenly gone.

Once children leave home, many parents fall into an emotional hole. Psychologists call this the "Empty Nest Syndrome". In literature, terms like sadness, loneliness, abandonment, emptiness and pain are attributed to the Empty Nest Syndrome.

These feelings can become very intense and can lead to psychological issues. However, this pathologisation of a normal life transition seems to be outdated in many situations. The term was created in the 1950s when it was a fact that many women had problems at this stage of life. However, at that time women were mainly housewives and mothers and defined themselves almost exclusively through these roles. Moreover, the child's departure was usually permanent. They moved out at around 20 years of age, started earning their own money, and soon after, started a family. Biographical transitions today are more fluid and no longer marked by a clear start- and endpoint.

**The parental home has long remained the first point of contact.**

Take the example of school enrolment. In the past, children started school at around seven years of age, before which they had spent their whole life at home, and after which their whole life at school. Nowadays, many children attend a creche and kindergarten before starting school, with a slower, smoother transition between stages. It is similar when children move out. Many may live alone in a flat during the week, but head home on the weekends. If they break up with a partner they lived with it is also likely that the parental home becomes the first port of call. Today, experts tend to talk about the "Never-Empty-Nest" or the so-called "Boomerang Kids".

The departure of a child, which is one of the most normal transitions in life, is well tolerated by mentally healthy people. Moreover, many mothers today have jobs and no longer define themselves solely through their role as a mother. This means that when children move out, they are not required to completely reinvent themselves.





**Fathers are often more taken by surprise when their children move away.**

While women are often emotionally prepared for this event, for many men it almost comes as a surprise. Mothers are more likely to know what is coming and expect mixed feelings, knowing that they will be sad or lonely. Fathers, however, do not. The majority of them expect it to be a positive development and are surprised to say the least, because they had not mentally prepared themselves for it in advance. They have often left social issues like children's birthdays, school enrolment and so on to the women, who were thus able to prepare themselves more readily for the child's departure.

When the child is no longer there, it can be a big shock for fathers. What do I do now? Have I miss out on things? Could I have been more involved? Although their son or daughter comes home once a week with their dirty laundry, contact goes through the mother. The men are still all too often dependent on second-hand information from their partner.

**So it is the fathers who have the problem.**

Today's 50-60-year-old men tend to have more problems than women, when it comes to their children. But just as the role of mother has changed in recent decades, so has the role of the father. Young fathers nowadays play a much greater role in their children's development and will therefore be prepared for an empty nest in a different way from how their own fathers were.

Today, young adults move out on average at the age of 24, quite late compared to the previous generation. The period of adolescence has lengthened, and the completion of education, and the maturity and financial independence to be able to live independently all occur later these days. In addition, there is usually no longer any reason to want to flee an authoritarian, overbearing home as early as possible, as was the case 30 years ago. Different generations in the family have never understood each other as well as they do today. When

the children move out these days, most mothers and fathers are in their late 40s to early 50s. This is a unique phase of life for most adults, when their children have become adults, their parents are getting old and perhaps in need of help, and they have large amounts of professional responsibility. In addition, menopause can cause significant physical changes in the body. At this age, you are no longer young, but you are not yet old. This can cause people to assess their lives: What have I achieved? What do I still want to achieve? Statistically speaking, life satisfaction is at its lowest point among this age group.

**Most divorces also take place between 40 and 50.**

Divorces are not solely due to the children leaving home. Several factors come together. It is also about the partnership, the individual, and perhaps a career change. These many life-adjustments are a burden, and it is a great challenge not to become alienated from your partner over the years. As long as the children are there, you have a common connection. But once they've gone, it can often be replaced with a deafening silence. Both partners have developed in different directions and many notice that they no longer have anything that connects them. Parents are therefore well advised to not only invest time and energy in their children and their careers, but also in their partnership from early on. The average age of first time mothers is now getting older and older.



Many parents are 60 instead of 50 years old when the child moves out. At this age, you no longer have as many responsibilities on your shoulders, and you find yourself with more freedom than before. On the other hand, children are something extremely meaningful, and the later they are born, the more intensively you perceive parenthood. This can make it harder to let go. But there is a simple message that is very important to remember: children do not belong to their parents. The task of parenting is to make independent and happy adults out of them and then let them go. This letting go is not an absolute letting go, but rather a spatial distancing.

### Parental level and the child level

Family therapists emphasise:

**There is the parent level and the child level - and that should remain so! Sons and daughters are not their parents' friends.**

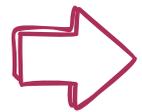
They get along perfectly, but there are also many points of friction. If the older generation tries to copy the younger one just to please them, that's where things can go wrong. In literature we speak of generational identity, and this is very important. Copying them to keep them happy can prevent the younger generation from developing their own identity and being able to defend it. An example of this could include two daughters, and a mother who likes to dress like a teenager. One daughter finds their mother's style cool, but the other pushes against it and makes a statement by wearing eco, boho-style clothing instead. However, even the daughter who initially supports their mother eventually starts to distance herself. Both daughters find it embarrassing as the mother is getting older. Many men and women today become parents later in life and only have one or two children, in whom they

put all their life goals. They define their success through their child's development. Once the children are out of the house, their own personal development suddenly becomes the focus of attention again.

Mothers and fathers suddenly take on the role of a woman or man once again, back to being a citizen without a parental role. In a democratic society this allows individuals to achieve new things and redefine themselves away from their role as parents.

### 2.9 Parents – take care of yourselves! A short checklist.

As children grow older, parents' schedules will become a little more relaxed again. Use the new free space to take breaks and relax. Be ready for a new phase in a new role within the same society.



### Finding out what is good for you.



There are people who feel very clearly that they are coping well. Others, on the other hand, need some training to do this. Perhaps you have pushed your own needs into the background for a long time and no longer know what you want. If this is the case, take the time to find out. What gave you great pleasure in the past? What have you not done for a long time? Which needs have long been neglected?

### Make it possible.



Recreation should be possible even if you have a demanding job or need a lot of time for housework. If there are younger children in the house, you might be able to hire your teenager as a babysitter. Alternatively, you could ask friends or neighbours if someone can look after your baby for a short time.

### New perspectives for "life afterwards".



Remember that there is life after puberty, and during your time parenting adolescents, it is important to start thinking about your own future once again. What plans are you making? Do you want to take on new challenges at work, try something new in your free time, or revive an old hobby? Make an increased effort to find new perspectives and a new lifestyle, to leave you feeling more satisfied.

### Plan for recreation.



To make sure that you don't forget to take a break and plan habitual activities. Develop new rituals. Drink a cup of coffee or tea regularly in peace and quiet, read the newspaper or a book, take a nap, go for a walk, take up a new sport, pursue a beneficial hobby, or meet up with friends. If you prefer something more expensive, a dinner for two or even a short holiday without children can also be wonderful. It is also important to remember that when planning breaks, the anticipation alone is part of the recreational value.

### Maintain your relationship.



If you have a partner, it is important to take time to maintain and nurture your relationship. Raising a child together can be much easier and more successful if your relationship is going well. The children will also benefit from a more positive atmosphere in their everyday family life. So, take the time to focus a little more on yourself as a couple again, and create other things to think about than just your teenager's poor grades or fashion choices. This can also help to maintain a healthy relationship with the teenager.

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