

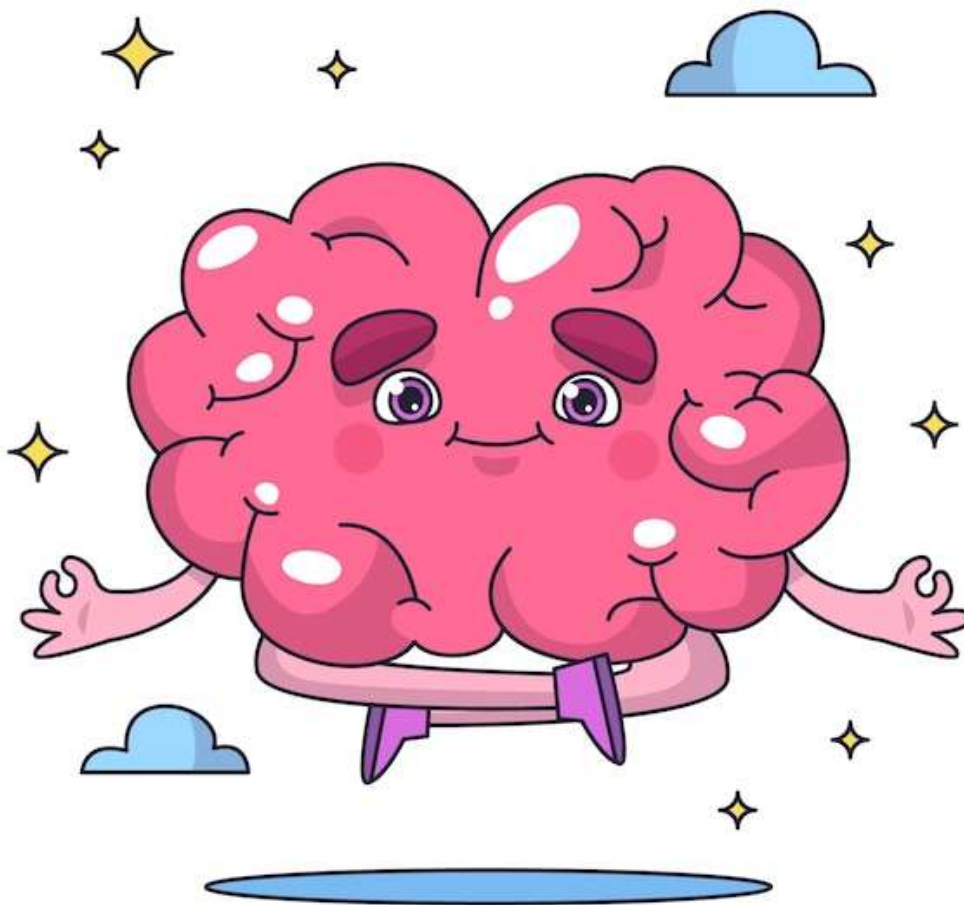
Chapter 1. Pre-adolescence and adolescence - crucial life stages in preparing for adult life

Chapter 2. Description of emotional intelligence and its components

Chapter 3. The development of emotional intelligence and its importance

Chapter 4. The role of teachers in the development of emotional intelligence

Chapter 5. The systemic perspective upon behavioural and disadaptive problems



Pre-adolescence and adolescence – crucial life stages in preparing for adult life

In the attempt to better understand and explain the ontological evolution, scientists have divided human life into several stages, each of them focusing on different goals and triggering certain changes that individuals go through in response to the constant challenges of the environment.

1.1. Pre-adolescence and adolescence

Pre-adolescence and adolescence are consecutive psychological life stages marking the transition of an individual from being a child to being an adult.

Pre-adolescence it's the first stage in which the child undergoes significant physical and psychological transformation towards becoming a fully functional grown-up. It is often assimilated with puberty, because they roughly overlap the same period - from 8/9 to 12 years old - but while puberty is a biological process triggered by the increased secretion of gender hormones and leading to sexual maturation of the reproductive system, pre-adolescence is mainly a psychological and social set of transformations marking the development of the individual's intellectual and relational abilities (Verza, Verza, 2000).

During this stage, the individual:

- ⊙ is motivated by the will to be independent;
- ⊙ is more aware of moral values, while exploring both the hero and the villain roles;
- ⊙ becomes more aware of his/her own traits and of the influence of his/ her behaviour upon the other people;

- ⊙ has a less visible intellectual activity, which reaches a deeper and more interiorized level;
- ⊙ cultivates relationships outside the family system and explores emotional and relational skills and strategies developed within the family in a nuanced way;
- ⊙ understands differences between people and makes sympathy and antipathy conscious choices.

Adolescence is the stage which follows pre-adolescence and in which the physical growth, the quest for independence and the personality structure are to be finalized so that the individual becomes ready for the challenges of adult life. It is usually set between 12 and 24/25 years old, but the age delimitations might vary. In most cases, adolescence - or teenage - is divided in two other stages (Verza, Verza, 2000):

- a) *the proper adolescence* - ranging from 12 to approximately 18 years old;
- b) *the late adolescence* - ranging from 18 to approximately 25 years old.

The World Health Organization divides adolescence into three stages, including pre-adolescence as an early adolescence stage next to the afore-mentioned stages. The division is less important though, as the effective characteristics of this period are the ones that really matter.

During this stage, the individual:

- ⊙ experiences complete body growth and development of all body functions (at the end of this stage, the individual reaches both his/ her maximum height as well as the maximum brain weight, the bones ossify completely, the circulatory system and the reproductive organs reach complete maturation);
- ⊙ reaches the maximum potential of the sensorial sensibility and speed of reaction;
- ⊙ becomes completely equipped with intellectual skills: logic memory, abstract thinking, extensive imagination, nuanced language, efficient and prolonged attention concentration;
- ⊙ is defined by stable and recognizable personality traits and by personal behavioural styles (dressing style, speaking style etc.);

- ⊙ experiences a wide range of emotional ups and lows, a variety of relationships and a deepening of the self-reflection and self-knowledge processes;
- ⊙ has an enhanced capacity of decision, but most often it is only in the late adolescence stage that the decision capacity is backed up by the necessary will to sustain the effort to implement those decisions;
- ⊙ has a wider range of interests and is more open for new experiences, while a more stable motivation will follow towards the end of the proper adolescence stage;
- ⊙ is defined by a nuanced sense of responsibility and loyalty towards own principles and people of reference;

During both preadolescence and adolescence, the individuals have a somewhat paradoxical social status, as adults around them tend to deny their former, more dependent, social identity as children and have higher expectations from them, while also preventing the teenagers to take on full grown-up roles and responsibilities. The teenagers are still seeking for the entertainment and carefree life specific for the childhood times, but also reaching out to obtain the social advantages of independence, authority and recognition that adults may enjoy, without willingly take responsibility for their decisions (Swindoll). This fact draws with itself an *identity crisis* - the adolescence stage is often referred to as the identity seeking stage -, which leads to high inner emotional distress and frequent conflicts within the inter-generational relationships (Cousinet). During this life stage, the adults-to-be are experimenting and making choices in their attempt to define themselves, they are seeking to prove themselves both in front of the others and in their own eyes, sometimes taking unnecessary risks and ending up hurt and vulnerable. The identity seeking process is a sinuous one and cannot be avoided, but it may be guided towards meaningful self-knowledge, healthy relationships and successful adaptation to adult life tasks and responsibilities.

1.2. Appropriate guidance in preparing for adult life

Because pre-adolescence and adolescence are preceding adulthood and are shaping the personality and personal identity of the future grown-up, they are to be considered transitional stages with an important role in the preparation for adult life. Thus, having the appropriate emotional guidance during these crucial times insures the structuring of a balanced inner self and an adaptive relational self.

There are five levels in which the individual needs to develop adaptation skills in relation with the surrounding environment (Şchiopu, Verza, 1989):

- a) *personal autonomy*;
- b) *temporal coherence*;
- c) *interpersonal relationships*;
- d) *social integration*;
- e) *moral conduct*.

Throughout pre-adolescence and adolescence the *personal autonomy skills* are refined and the individual becomes able to take care of oneself. In this respect, the teenager may benefit from the specifically skill-targeted assigned tasks which the parents, the teachers and the other significant adults may challenge him/ her with. For instance, the skill of budget managing may be shaped by offering a fair amount of pocket money only once a week, no matter if they run out sooner than that; preparing dinner once a week for the entire family or doing laundry might also be appropriate stimulation for developing healthy personal autonomy.

Temporal coherence means essentially to live in the present by implementing lessons learnt in the past in order to ensure a friendly future and usually the difficulties of the adolescent arise from dreaming too much about an often improbable future, while being detached from the current existence and insufficiently exploiting the past experiences. The proper support and assistance with building temporal coherence may come in the shape of stimulating deeper reflection upon past experiences and drawing relevant conclusions for the future, as well as in the shape of being mindful and gaining

awareness upon the present and its significance. Also, it is worth underlining the fact that the present is the proper moment to build the future and all current actions may have repercussions upon the future.

Adolescence is the time in which the adult-to-be is detaching from the tight social circle of the family and embracing a variety of roles in other *interpersonal relationships*. Sometimes those roles get overwhelming or the emotional investment in the relationships is not mutual, so the adolescent needs support to distinguish between mutually developing relations and toxic ones, while making sense of the behavioural expectations one has to meet in order to cultivate strong interpersonal bonds. The adult persons may offer a clearer perspective upon the entanglement of emotions brought by the confusion of roles and may explain what lies behind the people's visible reactions.

Social integration refers to the abilities of a person to be part of a group, to follow the norms of a group and to maintain mutual relationships in order to achieve a common goal. All humans are part of social groups all their lives, often even more than one at once, assuming different roles and behaviours. It's by being socially integrated that people are able to stand together in order to be safe, to cooperate in order to survive and face adversities in order to be successful, so the abilities which allow the teenager to integrate on social level are essential for his/ her well-being, personal development and easy access to resources and opportunities. In this respect, the adolescents need special guidance, as they tend to reject social norms at this age and create their own, without being aware that they cannot thrive apart from the social system. Thus, the main goals of their guidance should be to point out the importance of togetherness, of team effort and community spirit, to teach them how to integrate social norms and shape their own roles within the community and also to motivate them to be kind, helpful and tolerant in relation with their peers.

Last, but not least, the adolescence is the stage in which the *moral self* is structured and the *moral conduct* is shaped, as the future grown-ups are more prone to ask philosophical and moral questions, they are

more interested in what is right and what is wrong and they care about what their role in the world would be. Adolescents love to debate moral dilemmas and to imagine responses to ethical challenges, but also they are tempted to seek real-life situations in which to explore their own reactions and those of the others and sometimes they take high, uncalculated risks to achieve that. This is where they most need the intervention of the adults, which should steer them away from danger and provide real-life challenges and decisions - like managing a group of younger kids in a camp, organizing a fund raising, getting involved in community events etc. - in which the teenagers may explore their moral values and exercise their decision capacities in a safe and healthy way. Experiential and structured exercises - like role plays, forum theatre, debates, mock trials etc. - may also help the adolescents clarify their position towards a variety of social and political topics and make use of their moral criteria while judging the current situations. Offering them the chance to prove themselves as competent future adults will help them enhance their sense of responsibility, will shape their ethical principles and will lay the foundation for a healthy moral conduct.

All these levels in which pre-adolescents and adolescents need stimulation to grow are connected, one way or the other, with the domain of emotional intelligence and its components and it will be clear further on in this model how developing each of those components will actually contribute to enhancing the teenagers' adaptation process in the above mentioned areas, thus helping them navigate through the social maze they are part of.



Description of emotional intelligence and its components

Emotional intelligence is a wide spoken concept nowadays and the attention it gets from both scientists and the general public proves its great importance in reaching the human potential. Moreover, by accepting that emotional intelligence is a general ability - as opposed to innate talents - activities and strategies for developing it have emerged in the past decades in the scientific literature.

2.1. Emotional intelligence as a scientific concept - literature review

Emotional intelligence can be defined in a variety of ways, and there are numerous definitions online. Several of these concepts are based on popularizations of emotional intelligence that may be found in popular books and the media. But since it takes the concepts of emotion and intellect seriously, a precise and scientifically valuable definition of emotional intelligence may be identified. In other words, the definition of emotional intelligence specifically refers to the intelligent interaction of concepts and emotions. For instance: The ability to use emotions to support thought and to rationally reason with them is known as emotional intelligence (Mayer, n.d.).

The term "emotional intelligence" was first used by Salovey and Mayer in 1990 and they were aware of earlier research on non-cognitive aspects of intelligence. According to their definition, emotional intelligence is "a sort of social intelligence that entails the ability to monitor one's own and others' moods and emotions, to discriminate between them, and to utilize this information to inform one's thinking and action." (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Moreover, Salovey and

Mayer started a study to create reliable emotional intelligence tests and investigate its relevance. For instance, they discovered in one study that viewers who scored well on emotional clarity—the capacity to recognize and categorize an experienced mood—recovered more quickly after watching an unpleasant movie Salovey et al. (1995). According to a different study, people who scored higher on the capacity to effectively sense, comprehend, and judge others' emotions were better able to adapt to changes in their social settings and form supportive social networks (Salovey, n.d.). The outcomes showed that one was able to spread his emotion throughout the group, and that positive emotions enhanced cooperation, fairness, and overall group performance. In fact, quantifiable measurements showed that the happy groups were more adept at allocating the funds fairly and in a way that benefited the business.

Researchers have long recognized that emotional intelligence, and empathy in particular, play a role in professional success. More than 20 years ago, Rosenthal and his Harvard colleagues found that persons who were good at recognizing others' emotions were more successful in both their professional and social lives (Rosenthal, 1979).

Goleman has made an effort to illustrate this concept by differentiating between emotional competence and emotional intelligence. The personal and social abilities that result in greater performance in the workplace are referred to as emotional competence. Emotional intelligence is a foundation for and a relationship between the emotional competencies. Learning the emotional skills requires a certain amount of emotional intelligence, according to the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations (Goleman, 1996). A perfect example of this, is that one can build a certain talent like Influence by being able to precisely identify what another person is feeling. Similar to this, those who are more adept at controlling their emotions will have an easier time growing a competency like initiative or achievement drive. In the end, if we want to be able to anticipate performance, we need to be able to identify and assess

these social and emotional competencies (Goleman, 1996).

According to Goleman, emotional intelligence is a perspective that goes beyond the cognitive qualities of intelligence (like memory and problem-solving). We are mostly talking about our ability to successfully communicate with others and with ourselves, to connect with our emotions and manage them, to be self-driven, to control our impulses, and to get over our disappointments. Goleman explains that his theory of emotional intelligence has four fundamental dimensions: The first is awareness of oneself (self-awareness) and it alludes to our capacity to comprehend how we feel, to be in touch with our core principles. The second dimension is self-motivation, which refers to our capacity to focus on our objectives, bounce back from failures, and control stress. The third relates to social consciousness (social awareness). It has to do with our capacity to relate to, communicate with, come to agreements with, and establish positive, respectful connections with people which is unquestionably the fourth link and the philosopher's stone of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996).

Being emotionally intelligent generally entails realizing that feelings are an integral component of who we are and how we live. Being talented emotionally it can make us more flexible, adaptive, and emotionally mature. (Konsep Dan Makna Pembelajaran: Untuk Membantu Memecahkan Problematika Belajar Dan Mengajar / Oleh, H. Syaiful Sagala | OPAC Perpustakaan Nasional RI., n.d.) mentioned that one of the characteristics that teachers need to be aware of in order to assist pupils with learning issues is intelligence so as to raise pupil performance. Emotional intelligence skills to work in synergy with cognitive skills, people who are high achievers have both. Uncontrolled emotions can make people good at being stupid. Without emotional intelligence, people will not be able to use their cognitive abilities according to its maximum potential.

One study determines how emotional intelligence—which includes self-awareness, self-management, motivation, social awareness, and relationship management—

influences pupil accomplishment in part and simultaneously. It concluded that the purpose of The Impact of Emotional Intelligence Against Academic Success is to identify how emotional intelligence—which includes self-awareness, self-management, motivation, social awareness, and relationship management—affects academic achievement. 135 pupils from SMP Negeri 4 Lalan Great Earth Village in Banyuasin Regency served as the respondents. Strategies for data analysis using regression analysis, preliminary assay outcomes (t-test) Self-awareness, self-control, motivation, social awareness, relationship management, and a significant favourable impact on academic accomplishment are all examples of emotional intelligence that has been demonstrated. Emotional intelligence includes self-awareness, self-management, motivation, social awareness, relationship management, and has a strong favourable impact on academic accomplishment, according to the results of the Simultaneous Test (Test-F). Social awareness has a stronger impact on academic success (*GUIDENA: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, Psikologi, Bimbingan Dan Konseling*, n.d.).

2.2. The components of emotional intelligence

The most basic definition of emotional intelligence is the capacity to identify and control our own emotions as well as those of others. This definition's four key EI domains are the following:

- ① **self-awareness** - defined as the capacity of a person to recognize and name his/ her own emotions at any given time by being aware of own thoughts and body cues;
- ② **self-management** - defined as the capacity of a person to manage the expression of emotions, meaning the behaviours and reactions which are triggered by his/ her emotions, according to the situation they are in;
- ③ **social awareness** - defined as the capacity of a person to identify and name the emotions of other people by the verbal (words), non-verbal (mimics, gestures, posture, behaviours) and para-verbal

(characteristics of the voice: tone, volume, inflexions etc.) cues;

- ④ **relationship management** - defined as the capacity of a person to choose a reaction best suited to the situation they are in and produce the anticipated effects upon other persons, thus influencing the others' feelings, thoughts, behaviours.



Fig. 1. The four components of emotional intelligence are like four differently flavoured slices of the same cake

All of the primary EI theory variations refer to these four domains, though they are known by different names. For instance, the domains of social awareness and relationship management go under what Gardner (1983) defines as interpersonal intelligence, whereas the areas of self-awareness and self-management belong under what Gardner (1983) calls intrapersonal intelligence. Some distinguish between emotional intelligence (EI) and social intelligence (SI), viewing EI as a person's capacity for personal self-management like impulse control and SI as interpersonal competency. The phrase social and emotional learning, or SEL, is used generally to refer to the movement in education that aims to develop curriculum that teach EI abilities.

This domain is known as the Self-awareness stage, according to Goleman (1995), where one is able to identify a feeling as it arises. This idea is regarded as the cornerstone of emotional intelligence. The capacity to recognize and keep track of one's genuine emotions improves self-awareness and one's

capacity to keep an eye on and manage one's life. This idea enables an individual to consciously choose both important and unimportant life decisions.

A child's capacity for verbalizing emotions is a crucial aspect of satisfying basic wants (Shapiro, 2010). Gaining emotional control and effective communication both depend on the ability to recognize and express one's emotions. This idea is particularly helpful in creating connections that are loving and satisfying. An awakening of the self is the first step in the idea of understanding oneself. An individual gains the capacity to reflect inwardly on one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour as a result. It is comparable to psychoanalysis when someone employs self-reflection to develop a more accurate picture of who they are. One develops emotional competence of the self by fine-tuning the level of understanding of one's sentiments where conscious and unconscious thought are susceptible to a level of research Goleman (1995). Here is an example of knowing one's emotions: Anna's parents gave her the chance to experience her first concert as a birthday present. Anna finds out two days prior to the performance that the band had to postpone the show due to a member's illness. Anna expresses her displeasure in words and anticipates to the rescheduled event.

The impulses that are sent to the brain directly correlate with the cause and effect of emotions. According to Howard (2006), situations that have the potential to cause emotional reactions must first pass through the mind's and brain's appraisal process. This activity is thought to be a fast response that happens in the interval between the stimulus and the response. As a result, the brain regulates how and when emotions are triggered. A certain feeling is transmitted through the stimuli's impact. Because of this link, a person can control the intensity and duration of a certain feeling. Here's an indication of how to control your emotions: Ted is stuck in traffic on his way home from work because a semi-tractor trailer that has overturned is blocking all lanes of the highway. Ted is troubled by his current circumstance, but he chooses to vent his

anger by practicing deep breathing and listening to calming music Gardner (1983).

It's critical to consider other people's feelings and needs as one continues to develop a high level of self-awareness. One's social skills, empathic perspective, and social competence are all moulded by this sensitivity. According to Gardner (1983), the fundamental trait of interpersonal intelligence is "the ability to recognize and make distinctions among other individuals" in terms of mood, temperament, and motivations. He compares the basic form of interpersonal intelligence to a child's ability to distinguish between and recognize other people's moods. Here is an example of how to identify emotions in others: On the playground, Margaret was playing a game of soccer when she tripped and scraped her knee. Apart for Justin, who watched Margaret from the other side of the playing field, no one else intervened to assist Margaret as the game went on. Justin congratulated Margaret on her try to score a goal as he helped her to her feet and led her to the nurse to get her knee inspected.

The degree to which one builds and maintains relationships is a reflection of how self-aware and socially skilled one is. As a result, developing relationships is seen as a process. We must recognize some demands that are inherent in the process of forming relationships, such as creating, sustaining, and upholding affiliations with varied levels of intimacy. Given the complexity of emotions and how they affect interactions with others, this process may be rather challenging. The likelihood of forming effective relationships improves with exposure to social circumstances (Gardner, 1983). We obtain a sense of equilibrium in our exchange of emotional expressions and social competency by partaking in activities that broaden our viewpoint and improve our socialization abilities. Moreover, relationships can be seen as a state of reciprocity where the giving and receiving of emotions and interactions is a respectful and mutual exchange. According to Hendrick & Hendrick, humans have a wide range of feelings for other individuals. The degree to which we like or detest somebody might sum up such encounters. The idea of interpersonal

attraction, or just attraction, can be used to define like and disliking. Understanding relationships requires taking into account topics like interaction and affiliation as essential elements of the person's experiences and associations (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992). Here's an example of managing relationships: Judy was made team captain of her football team after five months as the team captain of her school's football team. Some of her teammates think highly of her as an intellectual, creative, and imaginative person. Judy is aware that certain members of her football team disagree with this appointment and have decided not to support the coach's decision. In order to win the confidence, collaboration, and respect of her teammates and give them the chance to express their ideas for the future of the school's football team, Judy has chosen to implement a monthly brown bag lunch series.

Goleman makes the case that emotional intelligence (EI) is a phenomenon distinct from IQ in *The Brain and Emotional Intelligence: New Insights* by citing studies to back up his claim (IQ). For instance, Goleman outlines a number of traits that contribute to EI, which are fundamentally different from a person's IQ. Creativity, desire, perseverance, motivation, rapport, and empathy are a few of these traits. He cites a number of published research findings that "inform us there are brain regions that govern EI, which distinguishes this collection of human talents from academics (verbal, math, and spatial) intelligence, or IQ," in which he claims that there are brain centres that govern EI (Goleman, 2012).



The development of emotional intelligence and its importance

The goal of teenage-hood in the length of human existence is for the individual to get to know oneself and to be able to perceive others as original, but socially connected beings and to understand that between oneself and the others there may be established a way of communication by using the processes of empathy and resonance. The prerequisite for those is recognizing and understanding the feelings of others. As abstract thinking progresses, adolescents are better able to anticipate and react to changes in others' emotional states and to detect others' emotional dissimulation.

3.1. The importance of emotional intelligence for teenagers

Teenagers with a high degree of emotional intelligence are:

- using their emotions in an effective and productive way, thus being able to have better relationships;
- adapting better and faster to new challenges, so they feel more self-confident;
- able to set personal goals and keep themselves motivated to accomplish them;
- better able to control their emotions and behaviour when things don't go their way, so they are happier;
- more autonomous, because they are relying on their own skills and competences to succeed;
- prone to do better in school, because they pay attention, take in information, stay motivated and get along with teachers and classmates.

Therefore, in order to offer them a great start in adult life and direct them towards a healthy, socially and morally functioning becoming, developing their emotional intelligence and helping them shape their relational and emotional skills is the most efficient direction to take.

Looking back, at the pandemic times that the humanity has recently confronted with, we may see anxiety and panic attacks at early age when confronted with the perspective of illness or death, we may see rage for being locked down and inability to follow rules, we may see helplessness and lack of motivation for self-setting learning goals and achieving them. All of those effects and many others that we might not be fully aware yet can be counteracted by developing emotional intelligence and, thus, providing the adolescents with tools and soft skills which will help them balance their emotions, seek for help, connect with others, understand moral concepts and social laws and norms, set their own personal development goals and achieve them.


Because of its crucial importance for personal development and functioning, as well as for social development and cultural evolution, emotional intelligence's development should not be left to chance or to sporadic sources, but instead should be assumed formally by the education system throughout the world. Teachers should be initiated in methods and techniques for developing the pupils' emotional intelligence and its components in schools, but also for guiding the parents towards a better understanding of the concept and a more efficient practical approach at home.


3.2. Methods and techniques for developing emotional intelligence


As recognized before, emotional intelligence is in fact a general ability, which may be developed and trained through specific methods and techniques. Because the brain of children is highly oriented towards absorbing information, skills and facts, the sooner we approach the training of emotional


intelligence in our lifetime, the better performances we get. Still, that doesn't mean that emotional intelligence cannot be developed during adulthood or at old age - actually it can, but the best way we may benefit from it is to master it before we reach maturity.


Further on, we list some educational goals and methodological approaches that may be applied in order to improve the emotional intelligence of adolescents:


 **Teach self-awareness:** Help teenagers understand and identify their emotions by asking them to describe what they are feeling. Encourage them to label their emotions and teach them that it is okay to express their feelings. Encourage pupils to regulate their emotions by teaching them self-soothing techniques, such as deep breathing, counting to ten or visualization exercises. This is particularly useful for teenagers who struggle with anxiety or are prone to emotional outbursts.

 **Practice mindfulness:** Introduce simple mindfulness exercises like deep breathing or meditation to help adolescents become more self-aware and manage their emotions better.


 **Build resilience:** Help pupils understand that setbacks are a natural part of life and teach them to bounce back from disappointments.


 **Foster empathy:** Encourage adolescents to put themselves in other people's shoes and develop a sense of empathy towards others. Teach them to actively listen to other people's perspectives and to show kindness and respect.

 **Teach social skills:** Teach teenagers to interact respectfully with others and communicate effectively. Encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings with others in a positive way. Practice social skills such as active listening, expressing empathy and resolving conflicts. Role-playing situations can be a fun and useful approach to help teenagers develop social skills.

 **Provide a safe and supportive environment:** Create an environment where pupils feel safe to express

themselves and where their emotional growth and development are valued.

 **Positive self-talk:** Encourage pupils to use positive self-talk, even during challenging situations, to build resilience and confidence. This can be done through positive affirmations, visualization exercises or mindfulness techniques.

 **Problem-solving:** Teach pupils how to identify problems, analyse situations and develop solutions. This can be done through brainstorming, group discussions and creative play.

Further on, adolescents have certain age particularities, which may be exploited in the favour of a more nuanced educational approach - here is how:

- ◎ They are prone to learn from their experience, by exploring, testing and failing.
 - Use experiential exercises to trigger reflection and point out concepts.
- ◎ They are trying hard to be independent and act like adults and they feel offended if treated like children.
 - Challenge them with tasks that make them feel more grown-up-like and independent or that they can see grown-ups are usually doing; you may include some abstract concepts or some difficult questions.
- ◎ They learn better when they enjoy themselves in the process.
 - Use gamification and humour.
- ◎ They learn more thoroughly when they feel challenged.
 - Create a healthy competitive environment (without forgetting cooperation).
- ◎ They feel more motivated if they see immediate results.
 - Teach what they can apply in their everyday life.
- ◎ They are stimulated by novelty and diversity.
 - Make use of diverse materials and tools, of the outdoor spaces and create adventures.

- ⊙ They are highly interested in their bodies and the transformations they are going through during this stage.
 - Including scientific facts about the physiological aspects of their emotions might be “cool” and interesting for them.
- ⊙ They are highly creative, but don't always know how to make use of their abilities.
 - Validate their personal resources and their original ideas, offer them a purpose; visual arts, theatre, music and movement are means of expression which may be used to combine creativity with the developing process of emotional intelligence.
- ⊙ They are very social and relationship driven.
 - Use small workgroups to help them interact with each other and offer them the opportunity to discover one another and connect through their interests and passions; challenge them with activities and situations they are most likely encountering in their every-day life.
- ⊙ They may be harsh with each other.
 - Keep them safe through firm rules and stimulate emotional connection.

Emotional intelligence may be developed through consistent practice and reinforcement. By using these methods, instructors can help teenagers develop emotional resilience, empathy and social skills that will help them throughout their lives. Moreover, the key is to make learning about emotional intelligence fun, engaging and practical. These techniques should help the adolescents develop critical skills and strategies that would benefit them as they grow and develop into mature and responsible adults (Mba, 2023).

3.3. Assessment of emotional intelligence

Development of emotional intelligence should always start from the current level of ability,

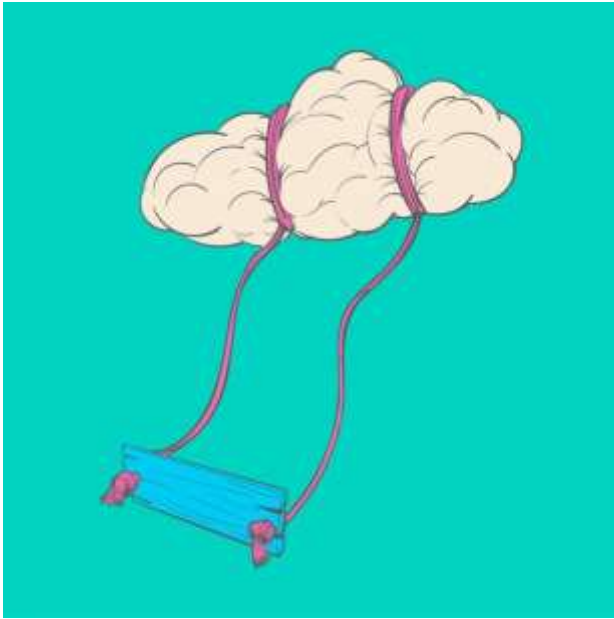
thus the starting point of any developmental approach should be a training need analysis.

Assessing emotional intelligence of teenagers may be carried on using several methods:

- ✓ **observational assessments** - teachers or parents can observe a teenager's behaviour in various situations to get a sense of their emotional intelligence; for example, how do they handle conflicts with peers, how do they respond to different emotions (their own and others) and how do they communicate their feelings;
- ✓ **self-assessment** - there are several tools which can be used to help adolescents assess their own emotional intelligence, such as questionnaires or surveys; these tools can help teenagers understand their own emotional strengths and areas for improvement;
- ✓ **interactive assessments** - there are games and activities which can be used to assess a teenager's emotional intelligence, such as role-playing activities or board games that require emotional intelligence skills, such as empathy or social awareness;
- ✓ **feedback from others** - teachers, parents or peers can provide feedback to a teenager on their emotional intelligence, highlighting areas where they excel and areas where they can improve;
- ✓ **observation of their emotional expression** - look for signs of emotional expression, such as facial expressions, body language and tone of voice. Adolescents who are emotionally intelligent tend to be aware of their emotions and able to express them in a healthy way;
- ✓ **component assessment** - empathy, emotion regulation, emotion expression are key components of emotional intelligence; observation or assessment of these separate components may provide a better perspective upon the adolescents' general ability of being emotionally intelligent;
- ✓ **standardized tests** - there are a number of standardized tests which may be used to assess emotional intelligence of adolescents, such as EQteens Test (developed as a complementary tool to

the EQteens model), the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test - Youth Version (MSCEIT-YV) or the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory - Youth Version (Bar-OnEQ-i:YV).

It is important to note that emotional intelligence is a complex construct which may be difficult to assess accurately with one method. Therefore, a combination of methods may be necessary to get a comprehensive picture of a person's emotional intelligence. Additionally, it's important to remember that emotional intelligence is a skill that can be developed and nurtured over time, so providing adolescents with opportunities to practice and develop their emotional intelligence is crucial.



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The role of teachers in the development of emotional intelligence

Teachers are role models for the pupils to regulate emotions appropriately in the classroom. Especially for pupils aged 11-15 years, teachers are perceived as role models and that is why they are a great influence on their life.

4.1. Teachers as guides towards the development of emotional intelligence

Throughout Europe teenagers spend, on a regular basis, between 5 and 8 hours in school, 5 days a week. That's up to a 3rd of their teenage life. Thus, the role models they have and the people they meet in school undoubtedly leave a mark on their psychosocial development.

Looking deeper, to the influence teachers have upon their pupils' development of their emotional intelligence, we may be able to extract a few different functions that teachers play within this crucial stage of personal growth and development with a distinct contribution on the development of emotional intelligence:

- ✓ **modelling emotion regulation** - teachers can demonstrate how to manage emotions effectively, serving as models that the pupils will imitate;
- ✓ **creating a safe learning environment** - a supportive and empathetic classroom atmosphere allows pupils to express their feelings without fear, fostering emotional awareness;
- ✓ **teaching emotional literacy** - educators can explicitly teach emotional vocabulary and recognition, helping pupils label and understand their emotions;

- ✓ **encouraging empathy** - teachers can promote empathy by encouraging pupils to consider others' perspectives and feelings;
- ✓ **enriching social skills** - teaching interpersonal skills like active listening and conflict resolution aids emotional intelligence development;
- ✓ **offering emotional support** - recognizing and addressing pupils' emotional needs helps them build self-awareness and self-regulation;
- ✓ **fostering self-esteem** - teachers can boost pupils' self-esteem through positive reinforcement and constructive feedback.

In essence, teachers play a pivotal role in nurturing emotional intelligence, guiding their pupils' in the maze of social interaction through the behaviour model they offer, through the knowledge they teach about the relationships and through the social skills they shape during the educational process.

Furthermore, by implementing emotional intelligence related activities into their everyday lesson plans, teachers might take their role to the next level of performance, in order to help the pupils reach their potential. Let's explore below the benefits that pupils have from such a practice:

- **holistic development:** Emotional intelligence is a critical aspect of human development, encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills. By incorporating these components into lessons, educators can help pupils develop into well-rounded individuals who can navigate not only academic challenges but also, the complexities of their personal and social lives.
- **improved learning environment:** An emotionally intelligent classroom fosters a positive and inclusive learning environment. When pupils are taught to understand and manage their emotions, they are better equipped to handle stress, conflicts and interpersonal relationships, creating a more harmonious and conducive setting for learning.
- **enhance academic performance:** Research suggests a positive correlation

between emotional intelligence and academic achievement. Pupils with strong emotional intelligence skills tend to perform better academically, because they can manage their emotions, focus on tasks and communicate effectively with teachers and peers.

- **long-term well-being:** Emotional intelligence is not just relevant in school; it is a lifelong skill that contributes to personal and professional success. Integrating emotional intelligence components prepares pupils for future challenges by equipping them with the tools to handle stress, build healthy relationships and make informed decisions.
- **conflict resolution:** emotional intelligence components help pupils manage conflicts and disagreements constructively. They learn to empathize with others, communicate their feelings effectively and work towards resolutions, reducing disruptive behaviour and fostering a more peaceful classroom atmosphere.
- **social skills:** emotional intelligence components enhance pupils' social skills, such as active listening, cooperation and collaboration. These skills are not only valuable in school, but also, in further careers and social interactions.
- **emotional resilience:** Teaching emotional intelligence helps pupils to develop resilience in the face of adversity. They learn to bounce back from setbacks, adapt to changes and maintain a positive outlook, which is essential for both personal and academic growth.
- **prevention of bullying and harassment:** emotional intelligence education can contribute to reducing instances of bullying and harassment. Pupils who understand the impact of their actions on others are less likely to engage in negative behaviours, creating a safer and more inclusive school environment.
- **self-advocacy:** Pupils with strong emotional intelligence skills are better at advocating for their own needs. They can express their concerns, seek help when necessary, and engage more actively in their own educational journey.

- **cultivating empathy:** emotional intelligence fosters empathy, which is essential for developing a sense of social responsibility and compassion for others. This promotes a more caring and compassionate society.

Gathering the educational resources that teachers have at their disposal and focusing them at developing emotional intelligence in a systematic way somehow resembles to how doctors use laser beams to solve a medical problem: a small, but concentrated beam of “emotional light” will produce massive effects in the overall personality and development of the individual.

4.2. Tips and tricks for teachers set on dealing with emotions

Dealing with emotions is a complex process parallel to the educational goals already set by the curriculum and the teachers, that requires a specific set of skills on behalf of the teachers, but once we start using those skills, we realize that they come pretty natural when interacting with other people, as they are part of human functioning relations repertoire.

Here is what teachers can do:

- 🕒 **Active listening:**
 - Pay full attention when the pupil is speaking.
 - Maintain eye contact and use nonverbal cues to show they are engaged.
 - Avoid interrupting or finishing their sentences.
 - Reflect on what they say before responding.
- 🕒 **Empathize and validate:**
 - Show empathy by acknowledging their feelings.
 - Validate their emotions by reassuring them that's ok to feel the way they do.
- 🕒 **Use open-ended questions:**
 - Encourage conversation by asking open-ended questions that require more than a simple “yes” or “no”

answer (e.g. “Can you tell me more about what’s bothering you?”).

- ☯ **Offer emotional support:**
 - Be available and receptive when the pupils need to talk or express their feelings.
 - Provide physical comfort (e.g. hug, reassuring touch), when appropriate.
- ☯ **Use their language:**
 - Adapt their language and communication style to the pupils’ age and developmental level.
 - Avoid using jargon or complex terms that may confuse them.
- ☯ **Respect their pace:**
 - Give the pupils space and time to open up. Some pupils may need more time to feel comfortable sharing their emotions.
- ☯ **Avoid judgment:**
 - Refrain from passing judgment or criticizing their feelings or reactions.
 - Create a safe and non-judgmental space for them to express themselves.
- ☯ **Share personal feelings:**
 - Share personal feelings and experiences, when appropriate, in order to demonstrate that it’s normal to have emotions and to show vulnerability.
- ☯ **Model emotional expression:**
 - Demonstrate healthy emotional expression by managing personal emotions constructively. Pupils often learn by observing adults.
- ☯ **Avoid over-reacting:**
 - Maintain a calm and composed demeanour, especially when the pupil is upset. The teacher’s calmness can help them feel safe.
- ☯ **Maintain consistency:**
 - Prove consistent responses and availability, so the pupils know they can rely on the teacher’s support.
- ☯ **Respect privacy:**
 - Respect pupil’s privacy and trust, by maintaining confidentiality if they share something personal.
- ☯ **Follow up:**
 - Check in with the pupil later to see how they are feeling. This shows

genuine care about their emotional well-being.

Sometimes pupils whose emotions teachers should address have behavioural issues of some sort which seems to complicate the interactions between them. Here are some recommendations for teachers in order to guide them in improving such pupils’ situations:

- ***build a positive relationship:*** establish a positive and supportive relationship with the pupils. Show empathy, patience and understanding.
- ***set clear expectations:*** clearly communicate classroom rules and expectations from the beginning of the school year. Be consistent in enforcing these rules and provide regular reminders.
- ***use positive reinforcement:*** recognize and reward good behaviour. Offer praise and constructive feedback to reinforce positive actions, in order to motivate pupils to exhibit desired behaviours.
- ***provide structure and routine:*** pupils with behavioural issues often benefit from a structured and predictable classroom environment. Maintain a consistent daily schedule with clear transitions and routines.
- ***offer choices:*** give pupils choices within boundaries (e.g., allow them to choose between two assignments or activities). This can help them feel a sense of autonomy and reduce power struggles.
- ***implement behaviour plans:*** work with the school’s special education team or counsellors to develop individualized behaviour plans for pupils with persistent issues. These plans can include specific strategies for managing and improving behaviour.
- ***use visual aids:*** visual schedules, charts, or reminders can be effective for pupils with behavioural issues. Visual cues help them understand expectations and manage their behaviour.
- ***teach self-regulation:*** teach pupils self-regulation techniques (e.g., deep breathing, counting to ten or using “cooling off” space), when they feel overwhelmed or frustrated.

- **provide immediate feedback:** address behavioural issues promptly and privately when necessary. Use “I” statements to express your feelings and observations rather than making accusatory statements.
- **differentiate instructions:** tailor the teaching methods to accommodate the pupil’s individual needs and learning style. Adjusting the curriculum and providing extra support can reduce frustration and acting out.
- **monitor progress:** continuously assess and monitor the pupil’s behaviour and progress. Keep records of incidents and improvements to track changes over time.
- **model appropriate behaviour:** demonstrate the behaviours and social skills you expect from the pupils. Pupils often learn by observing and imitating adults.

And here are also some ideas on how to approach a teenager with behavioural issues:

- ✓ **nonverbal cues:** Use nonverbal cues to convey understanding and empathy. Maintain eye contact, use a calm tone of voice and avoid crossing arms, which can be perceived as confrontational.
- ✓ **listen actively:** allow the pupils to express their feelings and concerns. Listen actively without interrupting or judging. Sometimes, pupils act out because they feel unheard.
- ✓ **validate feelings:** Acknowledge the pupils’ emotions and feelings, even when criticizing the behaviour. Validating their emotions can help them feel understood and less defensive.
- ✓ **use positive language:** frame instructions and feedback positively: e.g., instead of saying “Stop running in the hallway”, say “Please, walk in the hallway”.
- ✓ **set clear boundaries:** reinforce classroom rules and expectations consistently. Be clear about the consequences of certain behaviours while emphasizing the belief in their ability to make better choices.
- ✓ **reinforce positive behaviour:** recognize and praise the pupils when they exhibit positive behaviour. Reinforcement can motivate them to continue making good choices.

- ✓ **provide emotional support:** offer comfort and reassurance when the pupil is upset. Sometimes, a brief break or a few moments of emotional support can help them regain control. Sometimes it takes longer for a teenager to trust an adult, so it is important to be consistent in offering support.
- ✓ **individualized approach:** recognize that each pupil is unique and what works for one may not work for another. The approaches should be tailored for the pupils’ specific needs and changes.

Teachers may choose from so many different styles of teaching and so many different contents, so many methods and so many resources that they may use, but there is one thing which should remain a constant for every person who chooses this position: *the care* for the frail, yet full of potential young persons sitting in front of them and absorbing their every word.



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The systemic perspective upon behavioural and disadaptive problems

Human beings are developing a relation with their own physical and social environment ever since they come into this world. They are living in social systems - family, groups of friends, community - which they may get to influence, but that also leave an imprint upon their social behaviour and on their psychological development as well. Their psychological functioning is an inner system, as well, as all the processes and functions are interconnected. This chapter tackles the systemic perspective upon the psycho-social development of the individual and will attempt to explain how the behavioural and disadaptive problems are not actually individual, but social.

5.1. The systemic principles and the general theory of systems

The **system** is an abstract totality in which the whole means more than the sum of all its parts, because these parts interact with one another. Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968, 1969) was the first biologist who pointed out that living organisms' growth over time may be regarded as systemic and summarized the systemic principles:

As stated by Bertalanffy (1969), the characteristics of the system are:

- ⊙ *non-summativity totality* - the whole represents more than the sum of all its parts;
- ⊙ *open system/ closed system* - the exchanges with the exterior environment are accepted, but filtered in order to maintain integrity and identity;
- ⊙ *homeostasis* - the balance between two tendencies of a system: changing and maintaining of a status quo; this expresses the natural tendency of a system to maintain coherence, stability, security and balance in the physical and social environment;
- ⊙ *equifinality (unpredictability principle)* - in an open system any given state can be reached by many potential means; two different intermediary states can lead to the same final state, this is why in an open system the actual state does not allow us nor to deduct its history, nor to predict its future;
- ⊙ *adjustment mechanisms* - in order to maintain homeostasis, a system may use:
 - *linear adjustment* - in which an event A determines an event B, meaning that A influences B and B has no influence upon A; according to this mechanism, human behaviours can be explained through past experiences;
 - *circular adjustment* - events A, B and C influence the event D, which in return will influence events A, B, and C, resulting a circular relationship, without beginning and end in which A, B, C, D, influence each other; according to this mechanism human behaviours can be explained through direct observation of relational exchanges;
- ⊙ *tendency towards growth, development, change* - in any functional system there will appear several modifications to which the system needs to adapt; the incapacity to adapt to change indicates a rigid and dysfunctional system;
- ⊙ *hierarchic organization* - any system is hierarchically organized, having several subsystems; within the family we can identify the parental subsystem (parents), the couple subsystem (the couple relationship is different than the parents relationship), the fraternal subsystem (children), considering the hierarchy between the parents and the children.

5.2. The family as a system

The family members have established interactional patterns and the family is a lot more than the sum of its own members. Thus, any family is a system consisting of its members and all the relational patterns among those and having all the general characteristics of the systems.

The individual experience and behaviour take place within the context of an interpersonal system, in which the family represents the most basic and powerful system. Everything one thinks, feels or does is related to this system (Parsons, 1951).

Every behaviour, no matter how irrational it may seem when viewed from outside the system, makes sense in a certain context and the analysis of every problematic behaviour may reveal a certain function of the symptom. The symptomatic behaviours often arise at moments when it becomes necessary to adapt or change rules that have been in force until that point and are no longer adequate or useful for the system: such moments may be represented by the birth of a child, a child starting school or reaching adolescence, the separation or the divorce of the parents, the departure or disappearance of one member of the family etc., in which the homeostasis of the family is shaken and the rules and the relationships between the members of the family must be re-defined. In this context, every “bad” behaviour has a “good” reason, meaning every symptom has a function of protecting the family system from undergoing any dangerous change and in spite the pain it may cause, it brings benefits for each member of the family. The dysfunctional behaviour thus represents the best solution that the family has come up with to ensure its survival (Dău-Gaşpar, Muranyi, Zamoşteanu, 2018).

5.3. The school as a system

Not seldom happens that the school is compared with a family and that is because the rules that govern the dynamics of the two are very similar. In a school class, for example, each pupil takes on a certain role - the rebel, the geek, the teacher’s pet, the

buffoon etc. - that seem to fulfil his/ her emotional and social needs through various mechanisms that he/ she has learnt in his/ her own family and behaves accordingly. If the role one plays meets another complementary role, the two persons acting them will start a certain relational dynamic that will abide by the systemic principles. Further on, that might consecutively draw around other people, thus creating a wider system. For instance, if one pupil acts as a rebel, another one, possibly the teacher, might act as “tamer”, trying to control the rebel’s behaviour, but if the method of putting down the rebellion fails, other pupils might like the power that the rebel seems to have and will join in, thus forming a rebellious group. Other pupils will cease the opportunity to ally with the teacher and become teacher’s pets, snitches or the heroes trying to save the day (Dău-Gaşpar, Muranyi, Zamoşteanu, 2018). Gradually the dynamic settles in and starts to define that school group or class.

If we zoom out from the school group, we realize that in fact the school group is a subsystem in the system of a whole school. If we are to identify some of the components of the school regarded as a system, we might name: the management, the administrative staff, the teachers, the pupils, the nurses, the counsellors etc. All these components are related to one another and every single change of either one of them will eventually affect the whole system. For instance, if the secretary is not present for a week, not just the activity of the administrative and management staff will be perturbed, as they might get stuck or overloaded, but also that of the pupils and of the teachers, who might miss some information or get asked to work supplementary time to complete databases or such.

And if we zoom out even more, we will be able to see how any school becomes a subsystem in the educational system of a country or a certain geographical area. The systemic principles apply to each level, even though the components might be different. The dysfunctional links between some components will reflect upon all the others (Jones 2015).

5.4. Systemic thinking

Systemic thinking refers to the ability to see the relations between the elements of a system, to be able to look beyond the facts and understand situations in relation with the context that they happened in, to identify rules and patterns that are not explicit and only have meaning when viewed through the lens of interconnectedness.

Each individual represents an element within one or several systems and interacts with other elements of the same systems - in this respect any new interaction with an element from a different system creates a new system and if these systems are included in others we can refer to them as **subsystems**. In practice, the whole community is a big system, in which there are included family systems, support systems (friends, neighbours etc.), professional systems and each small system could be divided into several subsystems (couple's subsystem, parents' subsystem, children's subsystem, organizational departments' subsystems, project team subsystems etc.) (Minuchin et al., 2015).

The attributes that help identify each element are its behaviours and the behaviours are triggered by the contexts, not just by one context but several at the same time. As one can see in the picture (fig. 1.), one individual taken in any moment in time can be influenced by several layers of systems and subsystems and all these influences will be reflected in a simple, almost instinctive, gesture. For instance, if one child destroys a toy in kinder-garden, that is not just because he was in the mood to do that and systemic thinkers should be able to see a bigger picture in order to understand the motivation. If we look at the immediate context of the behaviour, we might find out that the little boy got frustrated because the toy he was playing with was taken by a little girl, a girl that he was really fond of. He was taught in the family that he should protest if other people make things that annoy him, so he would have liked to protest somehow, but he was also taught by his teacher that it is a bad thing to heart the people we love, so he won't discharge upon the girl. On the other hand he might also feel the pressure of the peer group

that might make fun of him because he let a girl take away the toy, so he wants to look strong and offer a power statement. He also knows that running away or leaving the room is a sign of weakness, because he heard his grandmother say that "while rabbits run away, wolfs stay and fight" and he also experienced some fear when he overheard the policeman say to his dad about their neighbour, who destroyed some things in anger, that for some juridical reason there is nothing he can do about it. All of these thoughts and emotions have thus conducted him towards an only logical behaviour: protect the girl, but protest and show his power, while staying invincible like the neighbour, through destroying the toy. Of course, there would have been different options to react, but in the little boy's mind that reaction might have been the one that made the most sense (Weist et al., 2017).

Along with the basic principles of the systems, the systemic thinking presumes a good use of certain concepts and terms that appear in a recurrent way in the systemic-dialectical approach (Lipman, 1995):

- ✓ **integrality** - refers to the interdependency and inter-relations of the members' behaviours within a system;
- ✓ **feedback** - represents the answers or reactions given by the system, most of the times through amplifying or diminishing certain patterns of interaction, as a result of the pressures or stimuli from the outside or from within the system;
- ✓ **equifinality** - the same results in terms of behaviours or emotions can be obtained through various ways or starting from different triggers;
- ✓ **circularity** or **circular interactions** - exchanges in a system have a circular nature, because each behaviour is a reaction to another person's actions (the so-called triggers) and most of the times the initial behaviour of the whole circuit remains hidden in the past of the system;
- ✓ **hierarchy** - the manner in which power is distributed among the members and the subsystems of the family;
- ✓ **complementarity** - the behaviours and the roles that individuals has within a system are complementary with the

behaviours and the roles that other members of the same system have; if one member of the system is low-functioning, another could become hyper-functioning.

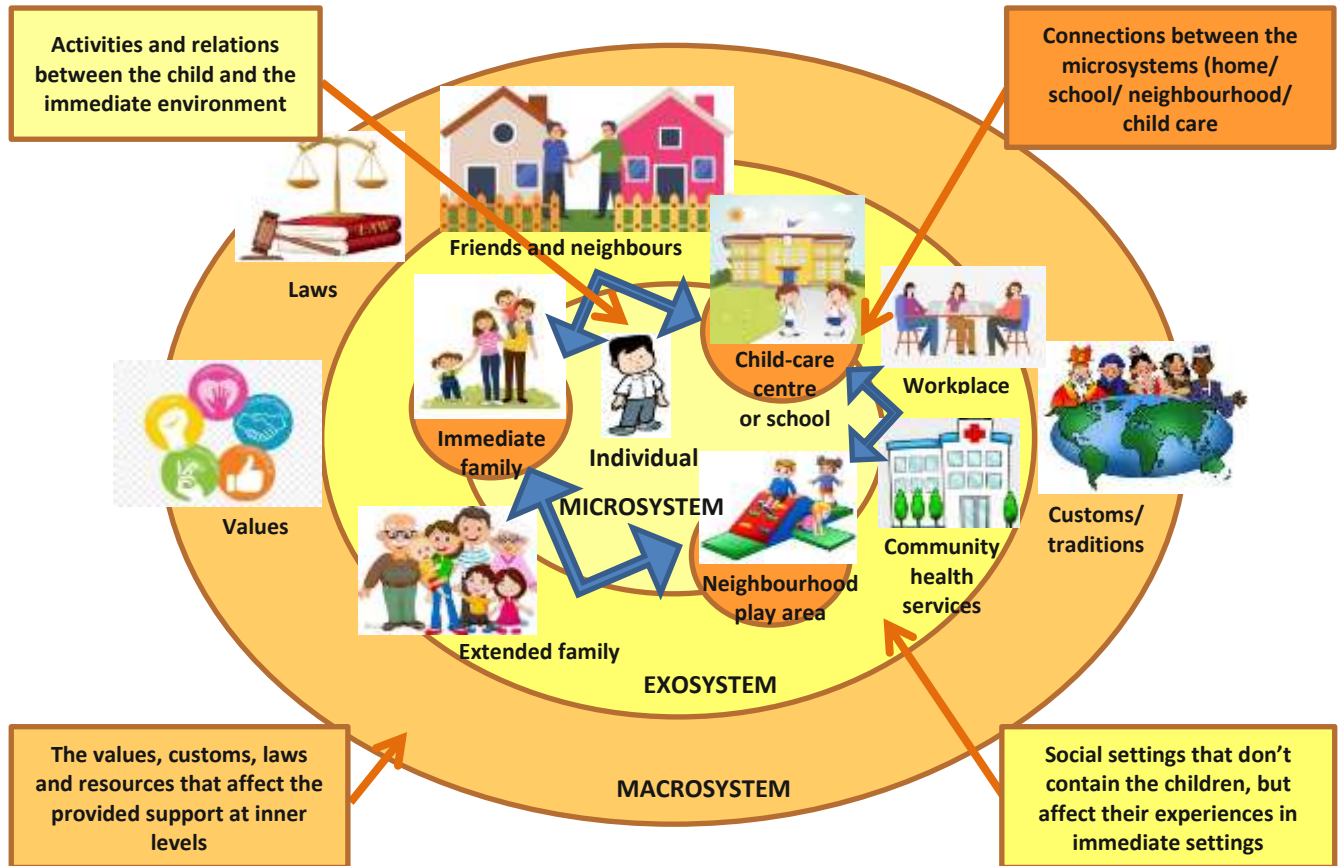


Fig. 2. Structure of systems and subsystems in the social environment

Any professional who uses the systemic lens in order to look at the behaviours of other people or, even children, should be able to extract a pattern from observing the interactions of that person in repeated circumstances and understand how the behaviours are linked to one another in the circular dynamic, how the power is distributed and in what manner are the members of the system trying to re-establish balance.

Teachers and educators of all sorts are invited to measure up to task of seeing the pupils, whose education they are trying to guide, beyond their dis-adaptive and non-

conformist behaviours and refrain from labelling them as “bad or undisciplined”, as these behaviours are just attempts of adaptation to a dysfunctional environment and pupils are not to blame for their behaviours, but they need to be supported to find new and more functional ways of coping to the social and emotional challenges they are faced with. The systemic lens will guide teachers and pupils with dis-adaptive behaviours towards a more secure path to an effective educational process.

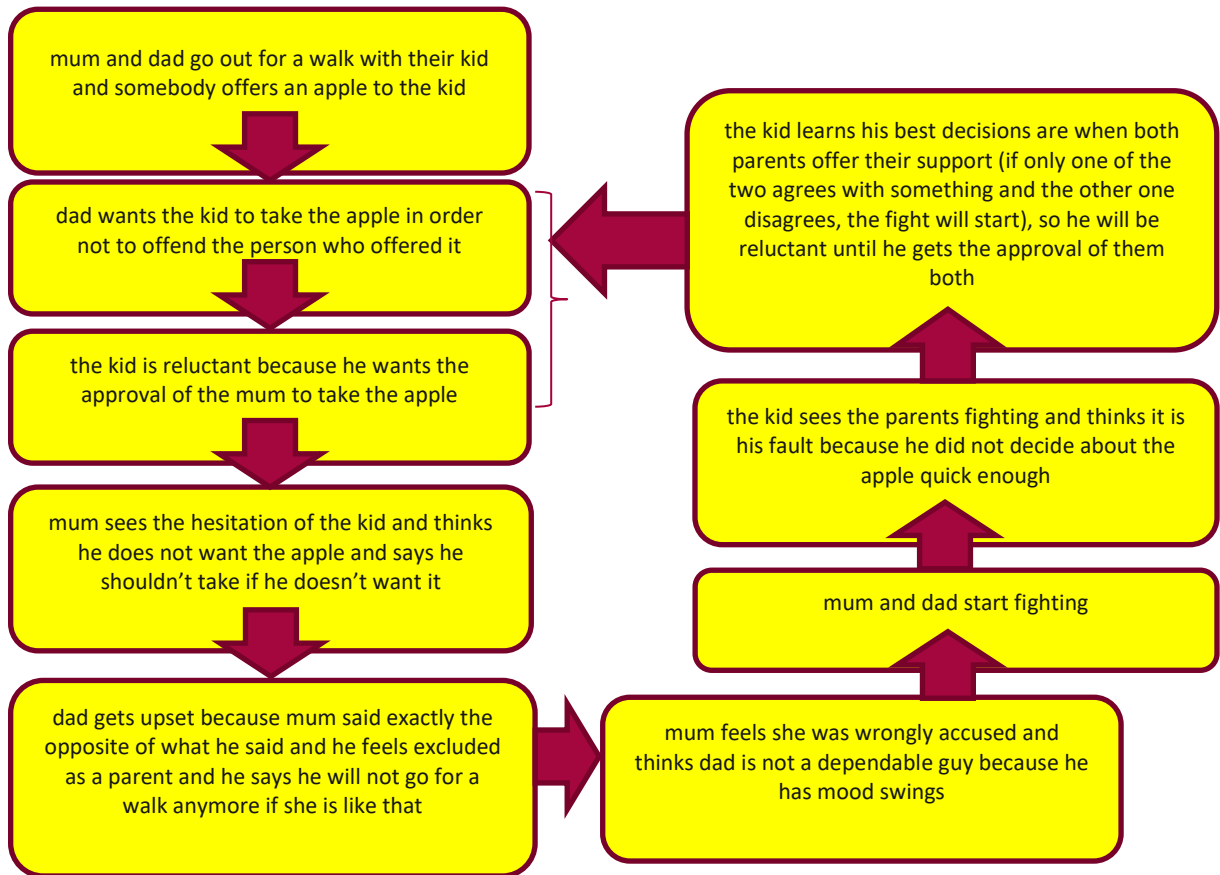


Fig. 3. Example of circularity in the family

5.5. How to apply the systemic lens

In order to be able to apply the systemic lens, here are some quick questions teachers and educators might ask themselves next time they witness a dysfunctional behaviour at school, at home or in the street:

- What is the vulnerability of that child/ pupil/ person? What is the emotional need that he/ she might have?
- What problem is he/ she trying to solve? What is the function of the disruptive behaviour? What does the child/ pupil/ person achieve by that behaviour?
- What can I do to make that child/ pupil/ person feel better about himself/ herself? If it was me in his/ her shoes, what would I need to feel safe and loved?
- How can I help the child/ pupil/ person to satisfy his/ her emotional needs in a different way? What alternative behaviours are there that he/ she is not seeing?

The rule of the thumb in all these chains of complicated - and sometimes dis-adaptive - behaviours is that all human beings need somebody to appreciate their qualities, to make them feel respected and important and safe and loved for who they really are. So, if the occasion of labelling a behaviour as being bad or labelling a child as being maladapted arises, let's try to look beyond it, at the vulnerable child who is "hungry" for love and just give him/ her that.

