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Teenager in the Family: Challenges

There is nothing that constitutes a more important educational environment than the family. How the period of adolescence is lived and what results it brings depends to a great extent on the quality of the family and the way in which its essential tasks are carried out. Essential values, which shape the future of a person, are transmitted in the family. Values play a huge role, especially during the adolescence period, the time of intense personality development and search for identity. Psychology believes that values are an important factor that regulates the psychological functioning and activities of a person. They become the basis for choosing the general motives of activities and actions recognized as optimal under specific conditions.¹ Widespread recognition of the important role of the family in the process of growing up of its young members is therefore a frequent topic of research.

¹ H. Szczęsna, *Wartości cenione przez młodzież. Uwarunkowania rodzinne*, in: *Co się dzieje z wartościami? Próba diagnozy*, ed. E. Okońska, K. Stachiewicz, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza Wydział Teologiczny, Poznań 2009, pp. 359–386; Cf. A. Rusiecka, *Rola rodziny w wychowaniu do wartości*, in: *Edukacja wobec wartości*, ed. J. Kojkoł, J. P. Przybysz, Gdynia 2002.

A. Meanders of meetings with parents

Historically, the family was always based on kinship. Its important meaning was expressed in two functions: procreation and protection of existence. The shape of the family was formed through the influence of multiple social and cultural factors. However, the fact that the entire kin came from one ancestor was an important component. Women joined the kinship through marriage, and strangers were accepted under a solemn act (the so-called agnation process.) Over time, the cognate kinship – blood relation, which was essential in many areas of law, became the most important kind.²

The basic relationship in the family that exists between parents and children changes over time. Much depends on how parents treat their children from the earliest stage of their life. When parents choose to behave in a well-considered manner, then the process of upbringing is less confrontational, and the relationship between adults and young people is not too strained. But when the child is improperly brought up from an early age, relations in the family are not good. Later, in the adolescence period, they may cause a number of problems, even if the parents are right and try to correct their old mistakes, which, however, is no longer possible.³

Parents remain an essential source of misunderstanding in the family. Pope Benedict XVI, in his apostolic letter “On the Urgent Task of Educating Young People” (2008), wrote: “Thus, it is natural to think of laying the blame on the new generations, as though children born today were different from those born in the past. There is also talk of a «generation gap» which certainly exists and is making itself felt, but is the effect rather than the cause of the failure to transmit certainties and values.”⁴ The authority of parents comes from the divine order of creation, but they also earn it through their own behavior. However, they must also recognize it. This is the task of unconditional love for their children as well as enforcing obedience. It is a reflection of the authority of God towards his creatures, and at the same time, it is one of the main needs of the child. It is associated with necessary

² A. Lis, *Wychowanie w średniowiecznej Polsce*, in: *Wychowanie w dobie współczesności. Wybrane problemy*, ed. W. Kądziołka, Stalowa Wola 2015, pp. 261–285.

³ A. Jaczewski, *Wstęp do dorosłości*, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warszawa 1989, pp. 191–204.

⁴ After: M. i P. Wołochowicz, *Autorytet rodziców*, „Obecni” (2010), no. 2 (22), p. 7, cf. pp. 7–14.

awareness of parents that their children are to move on, they are not just for a moment and for them.⁵

For adolescents, family is an important value, because it is the closest environment in which they live and establish the most personal and intimate relationships. It is also an environment that accompanies the youth on a daily basis and where they learn the basic principles of social life. Children's basic conflicts and difficulties are manifested in their relationship with their parents.⁶ John Paul II reminded us about it many times. During a Holy Mass in Łowicz (June 14, 1999,) he preached that "the first place where the educational process of a young person begins is family home."⁷

For a young person, the family is a test of their own abilities regarding independence, dialogue and responsible decisions. In order for the family to be able to fulfill its educational role well and to assist children in the process of self-upbringing, it must have appropriate qualities. These include: the ability to secure the development and growth of each member, including the parents; the ability to meet the emotional needs of its members – such as finding a balance between autonomy and dependence and learning social behavior; it should be a place where the ego develops; has the ability to socialize and remains critical for the survival of society.⁸

Modernity has multiplied the challenges parents face in connection with their children's adolescence. Ulrich Beck, a German sociologist, points to new experiences of the "super-modern childhood" which are becoming an educational challenge. Among them he mentions: the need to adapt to various forms of family life; great independence of youth – active and reflective; the ability to coordinate, independently of their parents, various forms of activity, planning leisure activities and making their own schedules, separate from the family's; developing self-control in the use of the media, learning to manage their finances; develop individual taste in dressing, choosing cultural offers (e.g. music, films, literature;) living in "island-like spaces" and staging their own comprehensive social relations, through

⁵ Cf. B. Chale, *Mądra miłość*, Warszawa 2007, p. 25; J. Savage, *Mama – najlepszy zawód na świecie*, Warszawa 2007, p. 41.

⁶ H. Świda, *Młodzież licealna. Analiza wybranych klas warszawskich w latach 1956–1958*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1963, pp. 98–99.

⁷ Jan Paweł II, Homilia podczas mszy świętej – Łowicz 14 VI 1999, in: *Bóg jest Miłością. VII Pielgrzymka Jana Pawła II do Ojczyzny*, Olsztyn 1999, p. 194.

⁸ J. Bradshaw, *Zrozumieć rodzinę*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 18–42. Cf. Z. Zaborowska, *Rodzina jako grupa społeczno-wychowawcza*, Warszawa 1980, p. 7 ff.

friendships, by joining groups or communities; increasing independence in creating their own biography, such as the course of education, the direction of life, not only through participation, but also through reflective development and integration of one's own life; the lack of choice, e.g. of the family situation, which necessitates building independence adequate to the situation.⁹ It is emphasized that the child's world cannot be separated from the adult world, especially at an external level (e.g. consumption, consequences of external experiences.) However, there are no more spaces characteristic only for children, who participate in all aspects of the adult world. This is connected with the theory of de-pedagogization, which shows that children's experiences are closely related to the experiences of adults, and so young people lose their "child's space" and "child's values," and face problems and choices together with adults, and as adults. Adult experiences have an impact on the experiences of children, for example, social problems such as poverty, unemployment, and marginalization, the disruption of relationships among adults or the breakdown of marriage.¹⁰

In the process of education in the family, the roles of mother and father are different, but they complement each other closely. Functions are conditioned by sets of psychological characteristics that are specific to the representatives of particular sexes, which result from the difference of their psychological structure and have an impact on the approach to the child. According to Erich Fromm maternal love is: unconditional, all-encompassing, omnipresent and unending. The mother is a support which the child needs only for himself and which shapes the character of his future contacts and relations with people. Lack of ties with the mother is a very serious psychological injury. The masculinity of the father is expressed in the process of education as consistency, severity, setting more and more difficult requirements; it fosters positive characteristics in the child, such as identification with one's sex, assimilating the role of a man, husband and father. Men are more difficult than mothers to make contact with the child, and their love is conditioned. The child must deserve this love. Obedience becomes the main advantage, and disobedience, the main sin. Both mother

⁹ U. Beck, *Ulf Erdmann Ziegler mit Fotos vom Timm Rautert*, Munchen 1997, p. 17.

¹⁰ W. Danilewicz, *Dzieciństwo „supernowoczesne” a doświadczenia rodzinne*, in: *Rodzina w kontekście współczesnych problemów wychowania*, ed. B. Suchacka, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PAT, Kraków 2008, pp. 79–86; Cf. B. Smolińska-Theiss, *Odkrywanie dzieciństwa w małym mieście*, Warszawa 1993.

and father complement each other's "educational offers" creating the most important educational institution for children.¹¹

An important element of the educational process in the family is the maintenance of a lively and authentic dialogue between parents and children. This is the basis of a positive family relationship and proper education of children. Unfortunately, in this area of family life, we often observe a disruption of dialogue, which brings about feelings of helplessness, injustice and misunderstanding. Usually, four strategies are applied: denial – when family members are afraid to express their feelings and deny them; removal – not revealing one's real needs, not expressing the important part of the message; substitute expression – expressing feelings indirectly is allowed, for example, the child attacks the sibling because he or she is forbidden to demonstrate anger in the form of crying or shouting; incoherent communication – when a person's attitude, facial expression, tone of voice or rate of speech do not match the content of the statement. Active listening, precise creation of a message, giving quick and possibly full feedback, criticism of behavior and not the person, abandoning assessing and criticizing the interlocutor, revealing one's true feelings, all create a proper context for conversation, exchange of thoughts and even admonition or explanation of difficult matters. They improve communication and eliminate barriers.¹²

The disruption of fluent communication in the family can lead to very drastic and surprising behaviors in children, including aggression towards their own parents. Through taught aggressive reactions through computer games, commercials or films, children can challenge, threaten, demolish the apartment and even beat. However, it is often downplayed in families, even though it testifies to communication problems that occur between its members. This is transmitted to the adulthood of the children, and then there is aggression towards old parents, and reluctance or instrumental treatment of their presence at home. Old parents, on the other hand, prefer to die rather than complain. They treat their situation as a failure of their educational process, which is caused by their own neglect during childhood and the youth of their children.¹³

¹¹ U. Tokarska, *Rola matki i ojca w wychowaniu*, „Wychowawca” (2016), no. 1, pp. 13–15.

¹² I. Gołębiowska, *Komunikacja w rodzinie*, „Wychowawca” (2016), no 1, pp. 20–22; Cf. M. McKay, M. Davis, P. Fanning, *Sztuka skutecznego porozumiewania się*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2001, pp. 230–234.

¹³ A. Herbach, *Moja pociecha mnie bije*, „Do Rzeczy” (2013), no. 2, pp. 35–37; A. Szulc, R. Gębura, *Moje dziecko, mój kat*, „Newsweek Polska” (2013), no. 21, pp. 48–49.

There are very different types of parents. One of them is “hypersensitive parents”, especially mothers. Balanced sensitivity to child’s needs is one of the basic features of a good parent. However, excessive pressure, caused by fear or worries about the health or safety of the child leads to the situation when the parent becomes intrusive, and this attitude in turn generates anxieties that limit the freedom of the child. Excessive sensitivity changes over time into ceaseless indecisiveness, recurring doubts about the correctness of educational decisions. Such anxiety does not help solve problems, but rather multiplies them. Keeping the child “in a bubble” is justified by the fear of accidents and hazards. In some countries, at the request of parents, officials have banned “dangerous” games, such as playing tag, marbles or snowballs, as they carry the possibility of injury. The relationship with the child, instead of being a source of joy, becomes a never ending cycle of worries and troubles. The result is a phenomenon called “a flightless child.” The child feels safe only under the wings of the parents, and does not think about flying out of the family nest, nurturing immature dependence on the parents. Such skills as going shopping alone, coming back from school, going out to ride a bicycle, etc., are the key skills for developing a sense of independence and responsibility.¹⁴

The hypersensitivity of parents may lead to the adoption of an educational method, which resembles training. Adults and educators, focused on their own idea of the future of the child, stay vigilant all day and make success the goal of education, perceiving the child as a future genius, paying no attention to the need of a balanced development of all talents, individual abilities and interests of the child. The child or young person becomes a hostage of parental plans, and is forced to achieve success quickly. The ‘Slow’ movement, which appeared in Anglo-Saxon societies, opposes the cult of speed in pursuit of success and propagates peaceful and even slow development of the child’s abilities. The educative time cannot be speeded up, and the training does not lead to a truly joyous success.¹⁵

Adults justify an element of terror which they introduce into the process of upbringing by their concern for the future of the child. Imposing daily

¹⁴ W. Staszewski, *Nielot polski*, „Newsweek Polska” (2015), no. 22, pp. 26–30; Cf. G. and A. Astrei, P. Diano, *Błędy mamy i taty. Praktyczny poradnik dla rodziców*, trans. A. Popławska, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2009, pp. 75–76.

¹⁵ C. Honore, *Mamo, tato, wyluzujcie!* (“El Pais”, 2009), “Forum” (2009), no. 22–23, pp. 22–26; T. Stawiszyński, *Przez tresurę do sukcesu?*, “Newsweek Polska” (2011) no. 9, pp. 30–32.

drills and sometimes generating excessive strain, they do not notice social beings in young persons. Children are prohibited from visiting peers, taking part in school performances, choosing extra-curricular activities or getting lower grades. They are rewarded only for obedience and adherence to the strict rules of training. The type of an ambitious parent, which is more and more common, considers the child as a small genius, and fights the child's weaknesses with all possible and available means, including reaching out to psychologists and doctors for help. The boundary between the care that helps children and the care that incapacitates them is lost. Such parents should reduce their own – rather than their children's – desires and expectations.¹⁶

Raising a child is an irreversible and unique process, a one-time event often taken up by parents who are not prepared for this role. Multi-generational families facilitated achieving certain educational solutions thanks to the elderly at home. Young mothers often treat the educational process as another project that is carried out according to peer guidance on the internet. Young mothers post a dozen or so daily posts on development activities for children. One offers English for a 1.5-year-old child, another teaches her children letters with the method of global reading, and another encourages readers to send a small boy to a martial arts course or teenagers for a yoga course or Eastern meditations. The child is often just a pretext to present oneself, one's originality, and self-promotion. A generation of planners, realizing a "child project," has the voice nowadays.¹⁷

When a child appears as an additional element of a home that has been planned for a long time, without responsibility and mature love, it is not surprising that today there is an epidemic of bad upbringing and training of new, unhappy people. It turns out that many mothers, in order to realize the ideal of a child they have dreamt of; shout, use violence, or utter negative expressions intended to embarrass or humiliate their children. Toxic mothers are no longer something unusual – they lack patience, peace and maturity to perceive the real, even though small, person in the child they are bringing up.¹⁸

¹⁶ P. Singer, *Terror na medal* ("Guardianj News", 13 II 2011), "Forum" (2011), no. 9, pp. 34–35; Ph. Bethge, *Spalę pluszaki. Rozmowa z Amy Chua, autorką "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" propagujący surowy styl wychowania*, "Forum" (2011), no. 9, pp. 35–37; B. Hardinghaus, D. Neufeldt, *Ośle uszy Amadeusza* (Der Spiegel), "Forum" (2015), no. 23, pp. 54–57.

¹⁷ A. Gumowska, *Projekt dziecko*, "Newsweek Polska" (2015), no. 46, pp. 32–36.

¹⁸ W. Staszewski, *Kiedy matka truje*, "Newsweek Polska" (2015), p. 25, pp. 42–45; Cf. M. Cywińska, *„Niepokój Pinokio”. O naturze kłamstwa u dzieci i dorosłych*, "Moja Rodzina" (2016), no. 2, pp. 20–21.

A dysfunctional family certainly hinders the process of education, destroys it or at least blocks it. Each such family is a source of stress for the child at every stage. The basic features of a dysfunctional family include: denying one's problems – which prevents them from being resolved; denying the existence of five human potentials (feelings, perception, thoughts, aspirations and imagination); lack of intimacy; rooting in shame – children are often ashamed of their family; fixed, frozen, rigid roles played by household members; tangled boundaries between each other; no possibility to meet individual needs – their implementation is postponed to enable the needs of the system to be met; the existence of even a low level of anger and depression; a communication system based on open conflict or consent that there is no consent; excessive subordination of an individual to the family; stiffness and unchanging principles such as control, perfectionism, accusation; overt secrets that are part of the lies that keep the family in a frozen state – everyone knows them, but pretends not to know; denying conflicts and frustrations which create situations in which everyone wants to achieve their own goals; rejection of one's own boundaries to maintain the family system (rejection of one's own identity.)¹⁹

Teenagers who are subjected to family bullying become isolated, deprived of support, which leads to a reduced possibility of resistance. They become increasingly dependent and everyone's attention is focused on them. They are weakened and become tired. The goal is always to minimize the possibility of resistance. Threats, which are directed at them, intensify their fear and despair. Educators' demonstration of omnipotent power indicates the futility of resistance. Degradation sets the conviction that resistance will violate their self-respect. Therefore, their functions at home are reduced to the level of purely biological needs.²⁰ A young person, subjected to family pressure, develops a syndrome of a victim of violence. However, this is not an expected result of adolescence.

The feeling of rejection by parents can have different sources. It is revealed basically in three ways: neglect of children; severity and ruthlessness in dealing with them; stiffness, coldness and dissatisfaction with the way they

¹⁹ J. Mastalski, *Samotność globalnego nastolatka*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PAT, Kraków 2007, pp. 94–96.

²⁰ A. Lipowska-Teutsch, *Wychować, wyleczyć, wyzwolić*, Warszawa 1998, p. 37 ff.

are. As a result, children with a sense of rejection have low self-esteem and often reveal antisocial or even criminal tendencies.²¹

The 'absence' of parents, the lack of time to meet with their children, which may be associated with losing a job or pursuing a career, may be a huge educational problem. Pushing children into the background of the life of the adults results in a sense of rejection, an unnecessary rush their time together and chaos in decision-making. This deepens the feeling of loneliness in children, even when they are at home with their parents and siblings. It feels emptiness when the parents are physically absent, for example when they have migrated to work in another European Union member state (so-called "Euro-orphans") or when another day is busy again with many hours of overtime work out of concern for the family budget.²²

Research indicates an extremely small amount of time that parents spend talking to their children. In Poland as many as 66 percent of teenagers talk to their father less than one hour a week. The Internet contact is a substitute for real meetings for young people. A study of a group of 6,000 Polish students aged between 11 and 18, organized by the Mother and Child Institute in Warsaw, showed that to a question about the number of friends the vast majority of respondents answered that they had 400 or even 500. Others replied that they did not have friends because "I do not have a Facebook account." Research has shown how young people escaped their loneliness through the virtual world, which only deepens their true loneliness.²³

Pedagogues and psychologists are helpless about teenagers' loneliness, which is extremely diverse and shows the helplessness of young people. Adults can persist in lying, declaring readiness and good intentions of their absence from home. It turns out that parents do not care for their children, even when they have time. For example, unemployment does not increase the care of children, making the problem of adults the gist of the rhythm of life and style of running a home - bypassing the problems of the children. In Poland, according to sociological research, every fourth child up to the age

²¹ J. Rembowski, *Metoda projekcyjna w psychologii dzieci i młodzieży. Zarys technik badawczych*, PWN, Warszawa 1986, p. 150; Cf. G. Turzyńska, *Rola rodziny w wychowaniu dziecka*, „Karan” (2007), no. 3 (61), p. 35.

²² G. and A. Astrei, P. Diano, *Błędy mamy i taty...*, pp. 72–73.

²³ B. Łoziński, *Spływaj!*, „Gość Niedzielny” (2015), p. 25, pp. 18–21.

of 18 requires permanent medical care. However, parents do little to notice this problem, much less to remedy it.²⁴

Conflicts in the family, both between spouses and parents and children create difficult and complex educational situations. They always result in the weakening of emotional ties between family members, even when the children only observe parents' arguments. There can be many forms of conflict. The most frequent ones are: collisions and scratches – a small discrepancy between positions and views of family members; contradictions – higher emotional intensity, more visible and persistent; tensions – significant discrepancies that leave distinct traces; clashes – of significant severity and often stormy course; confrontations – open conflict, with extremely turbulent course and significant negative consequences.²⁵ The key to solving these problems is always in the family, between its members. Attempts to intervene with family conflicts prove to be extremely ineffective, even when it concerns drastic forms, such as taking away parents' rights to care for children. This trend is increasing, e.g. in Germany – in 2012, 40,200 children were taken away from their parents (an increase of 5 percent as compared to 2011.) This, however, is associated with further problems for children and the young generation, which the state cannot solve.²⁶

The way to repair relations between parents and children in families is a return to basic educational principles, tested and verified in the educational tradition. These basic principles include: returning to self-education, instead of using innovative techniques – more manipulative than based on real authority and trust; conscious involvement in the educational process of adolescents, and not the attitude of pushing it to the margin (“come what may!”); building relationships based not only on emotions, but mainly on virtues that require renunciation, sacrifice and noticing others; a return to putting character development before practical knowledge, economic effects and the importance of money in education.²⁷

²⁴ A. Dołowska, *Nie dbają o dzieci, nawet jeśli mają czas*, “Moja Rodzina” (2014), no. 11, pp. 10–11; G. Strzelecki, „Córki Jęftego”, “Frona” (2015), no. 6, pp. 88–91.

²⁵ S. Cudak, *Konflikty rodzinne a trudności wychowawcze dzieci i młodzieży*, in: *Rodzina w kontekście współczesnych...*, pp. 197–206; Cf. A. Olubiński, *Konflikty rodzice – dzieci. Dramat czy szansa?*, Toruń 2001.

²⁶ B. Falkowska, *Biznes na dzieciach. Rozmowa z Jorgiem Groselumernem z niemieckiej organizacji Netzwerk Bildungsfreiheit*, “Magazyn Naszego Dziennika” (2013), no. 60, p. M3.

²⁷ D. Zalewski, *Cztery błędy rodzicielskie*, „Cywilizacja” (2012), no. 42, pp. 104–108.

The most important educational postulate should be the individual attitude of parents towards their children. When they grow up, children feel their uniqueness strongly, they are ‘the only’ and ‘unique’ because they are persons. They are looking for a true friend, close relationships that will confirm their uniqueness and accept separateness. Teenagers expect an atmosphere of love in which they will be accepted. They want to know and have confirmation that: they can always ask adults for help; have the right to refuse if they feel threatened; they should defend themselves when they feel threatened; their parents will respect their right to secrecy, parents have a duty to know about the dangers that are lurking for children; there is a difference between a real gift and bribery; blackmail, ransom and intimidation are not allowed; strangers should not be fully trusted; it pays to have an own opinion which is worth defending and explaining when it is incomprehensible.²⁸ Despite different kinds of prejudices and stereotypes in thinking about the relationships between parents and children, family members can constantly be in friendly relations.²⁹ The only condition is that their close relationship grows with the passage of time and the growth of children, matures and consolidates as a relationship of mature people building the future of the whole family.

B. Between siblings

A strong relationship between siblings has its mark in ancient literature. Sophocles’ *Antigone* (staged in 442 BC) shows the love of the main heroine to her brother, Polyneices. It is so strong that after his death Antigone decides to oppose the ban of Creon, who forbade to bury the body of Polyneices, because he died as a traitor. Antigone consciously decides to do the act, exposing herself to the repression of the authorities. She is caught while trying to bury the corpse and thrown into a dungeon. Later Creon decides to free Antigone, but it is too late, she has committed suicide, which gives rise

²⁸ K. Wiber, *Psychologia integralna*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 153–154; Cf. E. Wójcik, *Rozumieć siebie, rozumieć innych*, „Wychowawca” (2016), no. 1, pp. 28–31; D. Bula, *Czego pragną dzieci?*, „Wychowawca” (2015) no. 6, pp. 24–25; Regionalny Ośrodek Polityki Społecznej, *Mediacje rodzinne w praktyce. Poradnik*, Kraków 2008.

²⁹ J. Czechowski, *Rodzic przyjacielem swojego dziecka – aspekt wychowawczy*, „Studia nad Rodziną” (2014), no. 2 (35), pp. 33–44.

to a number of other deaths, and in the end Creon is left alone. The drama was bound to end in a tragedy because irreconcilable values were placed on the scales of fate. Antigone has become a symbol of sincere brotherly love.³⁰

The collective life of youth is a relationship with peers in which adults do not participate. It can assume a spontaneous, or natural, form as is the case in a family, life with siblings, or an unorganized form – e.g. various forms of life within the peer group. The collective life of youth can also be organized, as is manifested by various organizations, more or less formal groups of young people based on common interests, hobbies, the desire to continue certain kinds of education, sports passions or other rules that can bring the young closer to one another. The role of a sibling or friend group in shaping the personality of its members depends essentially on two factors: the content of life of its members and the group's influence on the life of an individual, who feels more or less attached to it.³¹

Relations between siblings play a very important role. This is related to the fact that they are usually the most long-lasting of family ties – they usually last longer than the bond with parents, partners or children. They appear, and indeed usually develop, at an age when the personality of children is formed. Siblings spend more time with each other than with anyone else. The extent of these relationships is seen in the extent of feelings and the depth of experiences associated with the appearance of another child in the family. An older child or children treat the appearance of a brother or sister as a fundamental change in the family structure. A new field of experience emerges in the family circle. Feelings in the family enrich and complicate, intertwine and overlap. A child (children) must agree to the appearance of a certain competition, the emergence of a need to share, help each other, serve and cooperate, and the appearance of a partner to argue, play and fight, including an experience of losing.³²

Sibling rivalry is one of the most common features of family life. They compete at the kitchen table, in the room, at school and in participation in after-school activities. In almost every action they try to have an advantage over the others. This is often associated with the feeling of 'negligence' on the part of the parents and accusing them of partiality. Sometimes this leads,

³⁰ Cf. T. Januszewski, *Słownik pisarzy i lektur*, Warszawa 2001, p. 274.

³¹ H. Świda, *Młodzież licealna...*, p. 135.

³² J. Parker, J. Stimpson, *Rodzeństwo – rywalizacja i miłość*, Poznań 2003, pp. 18–36; H. Kasten, *Rodzeństwo. Idealy, rywale, powiernicy*, Warszawa 1997, p. 97 ff.

especially in the case of the 'middle child', to negative reactions, escape into illness, depression, sadness and doubt, showing their mental state through stubbornness, insolence, insubordination, reluctance and laziness. The most common areas of disagreement between siblings include: vaguely highlighted preference of one child by the parents and the accusation of indulgence to other children; jealousy about parents' attention, their time and love; a lack of intimacy – entering into the sphere of 'private' toys, things or souvenirs by a brother or sister; lack of loyalty – the siblings who are in conflict with their parents or tutors accuse each other of lack of resistance on the part of brother or sister; lack of discretion – 'informing' parents or peers; the fight for one's own corner – no possibility of discreet talk or quiet reflection due to the intrusiveness of siblings; the role of a parent – it usually concerns older siblings who usurp the right to take over the role of parents; prying – interference by the siblings in the personal affairs of a brother or sister.³³ However, in conflict situations with siblings, children learn something that will be useful later in their life: ways to overcome, end and solve conflicts. This may be useful later in becoming reconciled with peers in conflict situations at school, at work, and even in a marriage crisis.³⁴

Having siblings has many advantages. Every day children practice the skills needed in adult life. Children are mutual support for each other, they are less exposed to boredom. In order to emphasize the role of siblings it is sometimes said that only children are lonely among adults.

Traditional thinking about only children is associated with a number of stereotypes about them. Children without siblings were generally considered selfish, spoilt and lonely. Among popular opinions about only children, some consider them as unique children, privileged by fate, possessing favorable conditions for development and success. The majority, however, saw them as egoists, egocentrics and anti-social children. Both successes and defeats in the development of these children were explained by their being only children. However, studies and works concerning families with an only child do not indicate that they are socially less adapted than children from large families. Sociologists checked, in many different ways, whether

³³ G. Unverzagt, *Dzieci, pogódźcie się wreszcie! Dlaczego rodzeństwo nie może żyć tylko w zgodzie*, Kielce 2004, pp. 9–29; Cf. Ch. Kaniak-Urban, A. Lesxd-Kachel, *Kiedy rodzeństwo się kłóci*, Kielce 2007.

³⁴ J. Mastalski, *Samotność globalnego nastolatka...*, pp. 166–180; Cf. B. Heike, *Mamo, on mnie ciągle denerwuje*, Kielce 2007.

children who go to a nursery and do not have siblings have lower social skills than their peers who grow up with a brother or sister. American research, conducted by the Ohio State University in the United States, held a series of conversations with children in over 100 American schools between 1994 and 1995, asking the children to list five boys and girls from school, whom they consider to be friends. It turned out that the popularity of only children did not differ from the popularity of pupils with siblings. Their social relations were the same. The basic factors that diversified the results of the research were: social and economic status, age of parents, race and the fact whether the child lived with both or only one of the biological parents. All these factors can be and very often are fulfilled in families with an only child. Much indicates that the child's lack of contact with peers in the early phase of life is quickly and effectively supplemented during pre-school and school meetings.³⁵

Polish research confirmed differences in developmental conditions of the only child in the family. The child is often the center of special interest and concern on the part of parents, which may give rise to temporary difficulties in the child's independence. Often, the parents try to provide the child with everything he or she desires. Sometimes they protect the child excessively from contacts with other children. A pretentious attitude of the child towards guardians may be later transferred to school situations, and disappointment may lead to a defensive approach – the child cries to compensate for fear, or demonstrates excessive mobility or even aggression in order to attract attention. Pre-school education for an only child largely eliminates future school difficulties in establishing contact with peers. The educational conditions of only children can be reasonably and effectively corrected, taking into account the specificity of their environment. Accustoming the child to independence, skillful planning, avoiding domination of the personality of the mother over the personality of the father, finding the right balance between excessive and insufficient care, the uniformity of decisions in educational behavior, the right attitude of parents towards the stubbornness of the child – are tips and reminders common for every family model, not only for married couples with an only child.³⁶ Thus, for an only child, the

³⁵ O. Woźniak, *Mit jedynaka*, „Przekrój” (2010), no. 35, pp. 34–36; Cf. J. Jagieła, *Jedynak w szkole*, Kraków 2006.

³⁶ Cf. J. Zborowski, *Problem jedynactwa w rodzinie*, in: *Rodzina i dziecko*, ed. M. Ziemska, PWN, Warszawa 1979, pp. 388–400.

problem of loneliness may appear depending on the educational attitudes of the parents, and is related to their approach to the child. Among the most characteristic attitudes of parents of only children, which may be dangerous, are: excessive concentration of attention on the child; too much protection; exaggerated expectations and ambitions; treating a child as an adult.³⁷

During adolescence the only children may develop some defensive mechanisms that generate different attitudes, including: an escapee – hiding feelings, learning to cope with problems alone, inventing own world and ritual, escaping into the world of imagination; a disappointed celebrity – wanting to feel special, despite painful verification of this attitude by the world outside the family, which leads to disappointment and lack of certainty; a helpless loner – avoiding confrontation, unable to compete, sensitive to criticism from close relatives; a longing guardian – wanting to prove unselfishness, caring and readiness for sacrifices; a sad student – lacking openness and becoming a recluse in the class, imposing self-isolation; an avoiding egoist – deliberately avoiding a situation in which one has to sacrifice something, such as to lending or donating something; an accusing adolescent – seeking guilt in parents while the defense mechanism distorts communication with the parents; a naive searcher – looking for a way to lessen loneliness, sometimes very naive.³⁸

Being an only child is not the only source of alienation from the family. There can be many reasons for that: betrayal of trust, rejected friendship, breakdown of family, death of relatives, and breakdown of relationships, permanent disability or long-term illness, change of familiar educational environment.³⁹ However, a difficult relationship between siblings always depends on the general condition of the family. The more difficulties a family has and the more conflicts, the more fragile the ties between siblings. They are one of the elements of the family, co-creating the whole network of connections and relations between family members.

³⁷ Cf. J. Śledzianowski, *Jedynak*, Kielce 1992; M. Kumpel, *Jedynak*, Warszawa 2004; J. Pitkeathley, E. David, *Jedynacy*, Warszawa 2007.

³⁸ R. Pawłowska, *Trudności w przyswajaniu się jedynaków w szkole*, "Problemy Rodziny" (1994) no. 3, pp. 21–23.

³⁹ J. McDowell, *Wyobcowane pokolenie*, trans. K. Pawłusiów, Oficyna Wydawnicza Vocatio, Warszawa 2009, pp. 169–181; Cf. T. Kolesnyczenko, *Straceni nastolatkwowie*, "Wprost" (2015), no. 9, pp. 40–42; A. Kozieł, *Niepełnosprawne dziecko w rodzinie*, "Nasz Głos" (2011), no. 8–9, pp. 15–16; Regionalny Ośrodek Polityki Społecznej, *Mapa pomocy rodzinie z dzieckiem niepełnosprawnym*, Kraków 2009.

C. Left to themselves

Biologically, an individual is embedded, like a branch of a great bush, in a family, creating with it an inseparable connection and entirety regardless of one's own will, without choice and without being asked about one's decision. It is a determinant whose expression is genetic code. With it, the individual inherits proneness to certain diseases, eye color, appearance, and even fears and a kind of memory about traumatic experiences.⁴⁰ One may be surprised by the tendency to move away from relatives, to isolate oneself from them, any rebellion at the level of psychology and group relationships, because they aim at breaking the most natural bond, and make an individual lonely, and sometimes defenseless and lost. Still, only in literature and art, a strong bond between the close ones is presented attractively and in an ideal version.⁴¹

The term 'orphanhood' is used to describe various forms of loneliness of a child in a family. The so-called natural orphanhood caused by the lack of biological parents due to their death is considered 'authentic.' Accidents, wars, and incurable diseases mark the lives of many orphans, taking away their parents or one parent. This orphanhood is not connected with someone's fault and it cannot be liquidated, it is permanent. Death breaks the child's physical contact with his parents once and for all. However, the memory of those who died, sometimes passed on verbally by the rest of the family, continues. There is a full natural orphanhood – when both parents die, and half-orphanhood – when the one of the parents dies.⁴² Although it is always associated with a sense of loneliness of a child, natural orphanhood is understandable, easier to carry than life with the knowledge that one has been abandoned or put on the margin of parents' interests.

A very painful form of loneliness for children is emotional-spiritual orphanhood, which appears as a feeling of emotional isolation in the family. Although it is subjective, it is a reaction to the lack of love and understanding. It may have various causes: parental incompetency, breakdown of emotional ties in the family, lack of interest in the child or absence of parents who seek

⁴⁰ Cf. D. Romanowska, *Jak dziedziczymy lęk*, „Newsweek Polska” (2015) no. 25, pp. 82–85; and *Lęk dziedziczny, Lęk dziedziczny*, „Newsweek Polska” (2014) no. 29, pp. 82–85.

⁴¹ Cf. D. Koźlanko, *Wakacje i frustracje*, „Polityka” (2014), no. 29, pp. 22–25; M. Florek-Moskal, *Akademia serialowa*, „Wprost” (2008) no. 19, pp. 34–38.

⁴² T. Olearczyk, *Sieroctwo i osamotnienie. Pedagogiczne problemy kryzysu współczesnej rodziny*, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2007, pp. 102–103.

first of all to fulfill their economic functions. Although the family seems to function normally, the child is experiencing a drama of loneliness, emotional withdrawal, and closure. It can be the result of improper – excessive or insufficient – fulfillment of children's needs. This is the case, for example, when both parents are overloaded with professional work, or when pursuing a career becomes their most important goal in life. Raising a child cannot be accomplished without sacrificing a certain amount of time – and it is not only the time required for providing care and organizational activities, but also those performed for the whole family in the presence of the child. Engaging people from outside the immediate family to care for the child should always be exceptional. Uniformity and regularity of the influence of adults is of great importance to children. Spending time together with the child enables parents to fulfill child's basic psychological needs.⁴³ In the past, there were other situations that absorbed parents, as evidenced, for example, in the accounts of children from the period of war and occupation, when parents were too absorbed with the survival of the family to focus on specific needs of children. This gave them a sense of abandonment, and they treated their wartime childhood as lost.⁴⁴

Adults, who are often too busy and overworked, fulfill material needs of their children hurriedly and without sufficient consideration. The effect may be, for example, children's obesity, which can cause numerous diseases. As many as 75% of the parents of Polish children who are overweight do not consult the doctor to treat obesity. As many as 40% of these children will grow into obese adults and will be prone to diseases typical of excessive body weight. Numerous classes, including out-of-school activities, eating in a hurry and without adult control, late suppers, and lack of time for movement and sport deepen this state. Indeed, no child can lose weight without help and support of his or her parents.⁴⁵ An obese child becomes stigmatized by peers, even siblings, and is often left alone in this stream of negative emotions.

⁴³ H. Filipczuk, *Gdy oboje rodzice są obciążeni pracą*, in: *50 tajemnic o naszych dzieciach*, ed. D. Chrzanowska, Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych, Warszawa 1985, pp. 21–25.

⁴⁴ Cf. Y. Nir, *Utracone dzieciństwo*, trans. J. Mazur, Wydawnictwo Nowy Świat, Warszawa 2005, p. 23 ff.

⁴⁵ M. Suchodolska, I. Michalewicz, *Dzieci E66*, „Newsweek Polska” (2006), no. 40, pp. 76–80.

There are many more ways to hurt children and make them lonely in the family. Child abuse occurs in every country and applies to all cultural groups, often endorsed by cultural and legal norms. This is the case when children are considered to be property, which is not respected, because it is easy to have them, so they can easily be lost. In the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10), Chapter XIX, T66–T78, under the heading “Other and unspecified effects of external causes,” T74 reads: “Maltreatment syndromes.” Four main categories of ill-treatment of children by adults can be distinguished: physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse and neglect or abandonment.⁴⁶

Parents’ lack of time for children leaves in the adolescent’s psyche deep wounds. Lonely children often fall into sordidness, they are deprived of remorse and guilt. They are able to succeed in professions and tasks that require logical thinking and rational coldness – they make careers as politicians, lawyers, businessmen, policemen and military. Emotional illiterates are also great stock brokers. However, their emotional coldness becomes an obstacle in contacts with people – they have a problem in creating a home, environment, and opening up to others. They populate ranks of those suffering from alexithymia, i.e. inability to experience emotions and empathy, or even to name feelings. They are eloquent, irresistibly nice, yet skillful at manipulating they arouse fear, are hideously cold and ruthless. They do not feel fear, and if they are scared, it is mainly of punishment. American research says that in the United States there is about 1 percent of this type of psychopathic people. Psychological tests conducted in Finland show that 13 percent (10% women and 17% men) are people with symptoms of alexithymia. Most studies indicate childhood experiences as a source of emotional blindness.⁴⁷

Emotional orphanhood dangerously deepens or can even become a source of child depression. Depressions may even be suffered by a few-month-old child who, for example, separated from the mother cries, is apathetic, does not drink, does not eat, and gets little sleep. Depressive symptoms are found in as many as 28 percent of Polish ten-year-olds and 25% thirteen-year-olds. As many as 35.5 percent of all high school girls experienced feelings of sadness and hopelessness that lasted more than two weeks. It turns out

⁴⁶ K. Słupek, Dziecko krzywdzone, “Wychowawca” (2012), no. 5, pp. 16–17.

⁴⁷ Z. Wojtasiński, *Psychopaci i Królowa Śniegu*, “Wprost” (2010), no. 6, pp. 56–58.

that the presence of, at least, one loving parent for 93 percent of teenagers is an argument for not engaging in early sexual intercourse, which is often treated as a form of quick self-assertion and finding a close person. Girls who live with both parents are much less likely to suffer from growth disorders and delayed intellectual development than teenagers living only with their mother. Girls who live only with their mother have great difficulty controlling their behavior, and find it difficult to distinguish between good and evil. For 21 percent of all children aged 12 to 15 the most important concern is insufficient time spent with their parents.⁴⁸

Another aspect of the child's loneliness is the so-called social orphanhood, which is associated with the term "social child", the child that is common or no one's, not assigned to anyone, and who is threatened by identity disorder. This concept has been extended to children who, having parents, suffer from a lack of care and educational functions. A social orphan may be a child who is brought up in a full family or has one parent, but who is neglected, with a strong sense of loneliness (despite living with parents,) whose emotional bond with parents is broken or severely impaired. In the narrow sense of the term, a social orphan is a child who does not maintain systematic contact with the family, staying under permanent or temporary care outside the biological family. The child became a "social property" because the parents have limited rights or have no rights over the child, and the child has no obligations to them, and the State took over the duties of parents, such as education, and assisting the child in becoming independent.⁴⁹

One of the modern variations of social orphanhood is the so-called 'migration orphanage', which is related to temporary or permanent economic migration of parents (or a parent) abroad, whilst the child is under the care of other people. Currently, over 20 million Poles live abroad. They constitute about one third of the entire nation. It is mostly young people who leave in search for a job. Usually many of those who left for work or to learn a language come back after two or three years. They usually come back because they miss their family, relatives and the environment in which they grew up. The family bond proves to be an important aspect in this migration process.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ M. Meeker, *Ojcowie, córki i ich problemy*, „Frona” (2010), no. 56, pp. 22–47; E. Niec-kuła, *Depresja w kołysce*, „Wprost” (2010), no. 7, pp. 58–59; Cf. J. Rola, *Depresja u dzieci*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej, Warszawa 2001.

⁴⁹ T. Olearczyk, *Sieroctwo...*, pp. 105–108.

⁵⁰ I. J. Mazur, „*To nie kraj dla młodych ludzi?*”, „Tryby” (2013) no. 1, pp. 4–6.

Children, even those who are only a few months old, feel the absence of one of the parents. They are left to themselves, or under the care of their grandmother or relatively mature siblings. Institutions such as the police, social welfare, courts or school are interested in them only if they come into conflict with them or fall victim to violence. The latest term, which identifies these children, is “Euro-orphans”, and their number in Poland, during the holiday season 2008, was 45,646.⁵¹ In most cases, the only possible contact the children have with their parents is online (Skype). Children most often do not understand why their parents are economic migrants and why money is so important. The consequence of migration is a temporary or permanent family incompleteness. It puts excessive burden on the remaining parent, creating a situation of lack of time for the child, which generates increasingly more serious educational problems.⁵²

The loneliness of a child is thus a state of his or her mind, which results from natural, emotional or social causes. A specific orphanage is the so-called ‘decision orphanhood,’ which is understood as the loneliness of a child as a result of specific decisions made by parents, or by administrative bodies such as the Family Court. The child’s orphanhood may happen as a result of: disorganization and pathologization of the family; low level of life, poverty; unplanned motherhood; dislike of the child, abandoning the child or waiving rights over the child; the parents’ decision about migration without a child. It may be a decision of both parents, a woman without the husband, or a court limiting or terminating parental authority.⁵³

The intervention of the State and relevant social services is sometimes necessary. Its task is to find the lacunae in family life and, on the other hand, to create optimal, possible ways of dealing with existing situations.⁵⁴ It happens, however, that the intervention of officials is incomprehensible.

⁵¹ M. Markowski, *MEN: Eurosieroctwo? Taki sam problem mają dzieci marynarzy*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, <http://wyborcza.pl>, 10 III 2009. Cf. E. Winnicka, *Eurosieroty*, “Polityka” (2007), no. 46, p. 35.

⁵² Cf. B. Balcerzak-Paradowska, *Wpływ okresowej migracji na warunki życia rodziny*, “Problemy Rodziny” (1994) no. 5, p. 12 ff.

⁵³ Cf. H. Haak, *Władza rodzicielska. Komentarz do kodeksu rodzinnego i opiekuńczego*, Toruń 1995; Cf. I. Galińska, *Dzieci ulicy*, “Moja Rodzina” (2014), no. 9, pp. 6–7.

⁵⁴ Cf. J. Korczak, *Dom sierot*, in: *Pisma wybrane*, ed. A. Lewin, vol. I, Nasza Księgarnia, Warszawa 1984, pp. 318–382; R. Królikiewicz, *Rodzinnna opieka zastępcza jako forma kompensowania sieroctwa społecznego*, in: *Oblicza pedagogii*, ed. K. Jarkiewicz, series: Miscellanea Ignatianiana no. 1, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2005, pp. 105–121; M. Kolankiewicz, *Dzieci do trzeciego roku życia w instytucjach opiekuńczych w Europie. Statystyka i cechy charakterystyczne*

The “Social Worker’s Guide” (published on the website of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy) has vague reasons justifying this type of action on the part of offices: “shaming, imposing one’s views, constantly criticizing, controlling, limiting contacts, criticizing sexual behavior.” Parents can therefore be deprived of their children’s care when they try to raise them according to their own convictions and experience.⁵⁵

Every form of orphanhood poses a threat to the optimal possible development of the child. It is a road leading to the solitude of the one who especially needs warmth, closeness and meeting with loved ones. For parents are the most important gift of God to the child, who should be the same for them.

It is also possible to talk about a partial orphanhood of children when they are in conflict with loved ones, which deepens their isolation, but does not make it total. The relationship of an adolescent with his or her parents or relatives can be different. When these contacts are reduced to a casual exchange, when they are occasional, accidental, without time to build intimate bonds between them, then the young person’s sense of loneliness is deepened. Family can play a very important role in helping children and young people on their way to maturity.⁵⁶ The picture of man’s education, as portrayed by John Steinbeck, shows the young generation as a pillar, the next pillar in the great bridge of history, and the older generation is a span connecting successive episodes of history. When there is a fierce competition between generations and no communication, the so-called “conflict of generations” appears and the entire construction is in danger. The pillar can remain lonely, without cultural connectivity with those who have been building a joint work for centuries.⁵⁷

styczne, Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak, Warszawa 2007; U. Kamińska, *Zranione dzieciństwo. Wychowankowie domu dziecka mówią*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Śląsk, Katowice 2000.

⁵⁵ R. Motoła, *Rząd chce nam zabrać dzieci!*, „Polonia Christiana” (2010), no. 13, pp. 3–5; Cf. E. Polak-Pałkiewicz, *Po naukę – do domu*, „Polonia Christiana” (2011), no. 22, pp. 36–40.

⁵⁶ Cf. J. Kula-Lis, *Dorastający człowiek i jego relacje z rodzicami*, in: *Dylematy i wyzwania XXI wieku. Ujęcie interdyscyplinarne*, ed. W. Kądziołka, Stalowa Wola 2014, pp. 283–300.

⁵⁷ Cf. J. L. Hocker, W. W. Wilmot, *Interpersonal Conflict*, Dubuque IA 1985, p. 6; M. Janicki, *Między buntem a obiadem*, „Polityka” (2015) no. 30, pp. 14–17; N. G. Piкуła, *Rola rodziny w przeciwdziałaniu marginalizacji młodzieży*, in: *Polityka społeczna gwarancją ludzi młodych. Publikacja pokonferencyjna*, ed. N. G. Piкуła, Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy Komenda Główna, Warszawa 2014, pp. 275–292.

In the break of ties between generations, the economic situation of older people can play an important role. The oldest generations (grandparents, but also parents,) living at a low economic level, cannot effectively be a financial support for young people, who often contemptuously assess small pensions and salaries that adults are paid having worked long years. Elders become the object of disregard for an inept life, wasted effort, and the inability to become rich. Young people who do not want to repeat their mistakes are left to search for different solutions, on their own.⁵⁸

Adults should aim in their family relations to help younger generations to become more and more perfect people. Important family tasks include shaping dialogue with others, introducing young people to the educational practice and opening to the world of values.⁵⁹ It should mean accompanying young people while they grow and mature to undertake their future tasks. Parents cannot replace them, live their life or fulfill their duties. But they can journey with their children to strengthen them, to confirm the right roads that they will choose or suggest better solutions to the difficulties they encounter.⁶⁰

On the part of adults, meeting with young people is conditioned by the discovery of wealth that the young bring with them and the opportunities that arise with them. In an apostolic letter, John Paul II expressed this truth in these words: "... youth is the time for discerning talents. It is also the time when one starts out on the many paths along which all human activity, work and creativity have developed and continue to do so."⁶¹

⁵⁸ J. Solska, *Czarne chmury nad emeryturą*, „Polityka” (2015), no. 32, pp. 20–23; AG, *Srebrna gospodarka – jaka jest sytuacja osób starszych*, „Dziennik Polski. Dziennik Seniora. Magazyn” (2015) no. 154, p. A8.

⁵⁹ Cf. J. Tarnowski, *Przygotowanie dzieci i młodzieży do zadań wychowawczych*, in: *Dziecko*, ed. W. Piwowarski, W. Zdaniewicz, series: *Studia Pastoralne* no. 1, Instytut Teologii Apostolstwa Stowarzyszenia Apostolstwa Katolickiego, Pallottinum, Warszawa–Poznań 1984, pp. 155–168.

⁶⁰ Cf. K. Biel, *Towarzyszenie, czyli o postawie wychowawcy resocjalizującego*, „Rocznik Wydziału Pedagogicznego Wyższej Szkoły Filozoficzno-Pedagogicznej Ignatianum w Krakowie” (2004), no. 1, p. 144.

⁶¹ Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski do młodych „Parati semper”*, Kraków 1985, no. 12.

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II. Family Problems and Solutions

