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PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF EDUCATION OF “NEW” PARENTS

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Parental education is an area that has been considered as difficult one and causes many problems for practitioners. The search for specialist help particularly concerns the group of educated young adults who are people of the world. They are aware of parental rights and can effectively enforce them. They bring up children working intensively, suffering from time deficit, often deprived of family caring agencies. Parents seek help in experienced difficulties in different ways: in literature, in specialists' offices or in support groups. They learn how effectively, at the time they have, can successfully perform their educational function. “New” parenting aims to professionalize the maternal and paternal roles, seeking optimal solutions to problems with children. This expectation is often defined in short-term activities.

The article presents the narratives of parents who used the help, as well as their hopes and fears. Illustrates their experiences, difficulties and satisfaction. The collected empirical material made it possible to refer to the process of professionalizing the role of mother/father. The conclusions and reflections were used to formulate the challenges facing the market of specialist assistance to Polish parents.

Key words: parent education, new parents, professionalization of parent role.

Introduction. Many empirical sources pay attention to the increasing risk of parents experiencing educational difficulties in their relations with children; among others [Płopa M. (2008), Sikorska M. (2009), Biedroń M., Mitreġa A. (2013)]. The background to the phenomenon of experiencing difficulties in the relationship of parents with children are broadly understood social and cultural changes, including: changes that take place in family structures, changes in the functioning of education, as well as those taking place within peer groups.

The dynamics of socio-cultural changes that have been taking place in recent decades have intensively changed family tissues, forcing them to make metamorphoses of old and proven patterns. Social, domestic customs and the way of task implementation in the family also changed. In addition, the modern world is variable and ambiguous. An important element of family transformations is the change within its function. They consist in the fact that the former broad understanding of life in the clan covered many areas: economic, socialization and education, social and recreational, emotional, reproductive and sexual ones.

Present-day families have transferred many of their functions to the outside, they have limited their tasks mainly to emotional functions. Therefore, the goal of a modern family is, above all, that its members are emotionally satisfied, contented and happy. The definition of a functional family is mostly focused on ensuring that it provides development conditions for all its members. Problems appear when these conditions cannot be sufficiently met. All changes seem to be a kind of challenge for parents, mainly because one cannot refer to the wisdom of past generations. Modern parents are to face new tasks in the educational process, but there are no clear action algorithms to solve them. Education has become an own, individual project, but subjected to social evaluation.

Changes in family structures are another important factor. Currently, the family model is a small, separate community, composed of parents and usually an only child, less often a pair of children or more. Women give birth much later than before, later parenthood is more and more common. Many couples face the problem of infertility. These factors make the child a huge, immanent value for parents, valuable in itself, is a complement to the most important existential goals. The progeny is sort of a showcase of parents, their social status and a living confirmation of cultural capital. The relationship with child is increasingly recognized as the last, which is inseparable and usually lasting until the end of life, which gives it a unique character.

“New families” are characterized by emotional equality of its members, gender equality, mutual respect, autonomy, making decisions through communication and freedom from all forms of violence [3, p. 151]. All family members have the right to be individuals. In this sense, the home becomes an arena for continuous negotiations, compromises, and an ongoing process of interaction, as a result of which everyone creates mutual relations. All in here have their rights but also permanent obligations towards other household members. Functioning in such a way requires different competences from those acquired in their traditional families of origin. The above assumptions became the starting point for undertaking empirical analysis.

Research methodology. Clarifying the problem regarding the education of “new parents” and personalizing their expectations required explaining their problems and needs. Therefore, the two most important questions were asked:

1. What problems do “new” parents most often experience?
2. What help do they need to still functionally act as a parent?

Empirical material was collected while working with 62 cases of adults seeking psychotherapeutic or coaching assistance. Subjects are pairs of parents (48) or single parents (14). Two independent fathers also used the assistance. The research group consisted almost entirely (60 cases) of high status parents, only two of them had secondary education. Many of them were pedagogues, psychologists, doctors, etc. The feature that unites them is a commitment in the child’s affairs, the

belief that difficulties are a start in finding solutions. Parents are ready to work with a specialist if they see the prospect of change for the better.

Sessions have always been adjusted to the clients' needs (and their families) and consisted mainly of combining psycho-education, psychotherapy and coaching. All parents volunteered to the therapist, and the help was commercial. Usually, parental support was short-term and required 3–8 meetings. The initial consultations consisted of diagnosis of the problem, searching for and trying out solutions and their continuation. The ultimate aim has always been for the family to act functionally, achieve balance and stability in basic areas.

The subject matter with which parents turned for help and the course of joint work were thoroughly analyzed. Sessions are bound by many complementary methods (including observation, qualitative interview, tests, etc.). The idea of collecting data during therapeutic sessions is a strategy to increase the completeness and relevance of research by considering different perspectives. Triangulation of data (comparing studies conducted in different groups, in different time periods and in different places) leads to broadening the research perspective.

Description of "new parents". Parents came to the therapist nearly always when they strongly felt helpless in their relationships with children. Previously, they usually had tried many other activities, which, however, did not give the expected results. It was characteristic to expect that the work would consist in the therapist's influence on the child, making by him a kind of "repair". Some parents did not hide their disappointment that the subject of the work would be the parent, and only he/she with their own hands would try to restore the expected balance in the relationship with the child. However, many thought it was an efficient form of work.

Motivation was nearly always voluntary. Rarely the decision to work with a parent therapist resulted from education systems' pressure and was a reaction to suggestions coming from kindergarten or school teachers. It also happened that therapeutic work was recommended by a family court.

Parents usually chose people recommended by others who earlier had experienced working with a specific therapist. They carefully checked their formal competences, but also inquired about private matters, especially parenting experiences and their effects.

This group nearly always was of high education and economic status. Occasionally, they were parents with average status values. Many of them impressed with erudition, wide reading, and above-average participation in culture. It seems that "new parents" represent a sensitive, reflective awareness that allows them to define their own weaknesses in relationships with children, as well as to take steps to eliminate them.

The high status of parents means that it was an extremely committed professional group, often working over-standard time. They had a rather limited

budget of free time, and this factor in a characteristic way formatted their relationships with children. Educational tasks were carried out in a shorter period of time, so they had to be well-thought.

Educational problems of “new parents”. A very common reason for seeking therapist support were problems with the ability to set and maintain stable boundaries. This phenomenon is usually described as a complaint that a child “does not listen” to adults’ instructions. In this case, the parents were unable to effectively enforce the fundamental social rules. They were not aware that the child is not able to respond to too complicated verbal messages until the period of adolescence. Ineffective ways of interaction (too restrictive, too permissive) caused more and more problems in the parent–child relationship. As a result of this process, the parent did not believe that the child could be independent and responsible for themselves. In this case, the effective way of acting was the therapist’s work with parents on action messages that are easily absorbed by children. They were accompanied by behavioral procedures supporting the increase of independence and sense of responsibility of children.

Many parents lost their ability to manage and control their child’s behavior. The adult became a child’s partner, the relationship resembled a colleagues in nature. This condition increased the parent’s inability to control the child’s behavior. The ideal proportion: as much freedom as responsibility – has been violated. Too much privilege meant that the child became the most important person in the family – “*king child with parents*”. The parent was not able to facilitate child’s development, and often entered the service and subordinate role. The child, usurping the right to an undue place in the family, excess of privileges, was encumbered with excessive burden. Problems of this type, at varying degrees of sophistication, characterize a big number of “new families”. Realizing the harmfulness of such a family hierarchy can be the beginning of work on regaining the balance.

Many therapeutic interventions began when one of the parents started to seek support to protect children from the effects of conflict, separation and divorce. Most often it was work with one parent, but it happened that both mother and father try to settle their conflicts away from the child. However, almost half of these cases, consisted of both parents involving children in their own affairs and only reporting when the child started to struggle with various types of difficulties. At the time, both of them were in some sense forced to cooperate. Including children in their own conflicts is a popular reason for therapeutic work.

The separation and divorce of parents causes a lot of suffering to children. About 40% couples got divorced. Some mothers and fathers tried to cooperate with the therapist to limit losses. This was successful when the child was not directly involved in the conflict, or used in a court battle to fight for custody or the division of joint property. The practices of lawyers focused on long trials have become an

obstacle. At present, in Wrocław, divorce proceedings and adjudging in disputes have lasted even 4–4,5 years. A chance for couples was cooperating with a mediator, but this practice is still not sufficiently popular in Polish society.

The next criteria for seeking therapeutic help resulted from comparing the child to peers and noting various deviations. Parents basing on their observations, or as a result of comments and interactions, start to worry about whether their child stays in “norm”. Typical doubts concerned aggressive behavior, anxiety, depressed mood, withdrawal, soaking, starvation/overeating, experiments with psychoactive substances, abuse of electronic devices, etc. All of these topics required a detailed analysis and search for remedies. In some cases, it was necessary to refer children for psychological diagnosis.

Parents of the youngest children (0–3 years old) are a characteristic and very sensitive group. The leading topic for babies was problems with restless, often crying babies. Mothers and fathers were convinced that happy children do not cry. Monitoring the child’s activity being analyzed by them usually works on the basis of this opinion that the children’s day rhythm is obligatory. Calming rituals and props help toddlers. However, in the case of 2–3 year old children, the subject of aggressiveness is the leader. New parents overreact to all manifestations of violent behavior in the little ones. In this case, you usually work with parents, not children. The leading task was to support the parent in accepting natural, impulsive behavior and enriching the correct reactions.

Parents often reported their child’s difficulties in kindergarten or school. These are:

- Adaptation problems to stay in the facility.
- Poorly mastered purity training.
- Caring problems: eating, sleeping, self-service.
- Inability to part with the pacifier, fetishes.
- Too slow/fast pace of work.
- Difficulties in meeting educational requirements (in speaking, reading, writing or counting); slower implementation of the core curriculum.
- Avoiding homework, doing household chores.
- Negation of going to kindergarten or school.

Some of the enumerated problems were of a periodic nature, however, there were long-lasting and severe phenomena. All behaviors required detailed analysis, finding their sources, and effective solutions in the next steps. Many children were psycho-pedagogically diagnosed to personalize adequate support measures.

Educational needs of “new parents”. Parenting can be defined as a constant pursuit of functional balance in many areas of relationship with the child. The common denominator of working with a parent are the processes of achieving by them:

• *Greater trust in the child* – in the fact that they can be more independent, responsible, convinced that they can be left with a greater scope of freedom; recognition of their right to err.

• *Greater self-confidence as a parent*, acceptance of learning from mistakes, constant search for balance between being firm and accepting, between demanding and loving, belief in one's peace, ability to maintain one's well-being, as well as taking care for oneself and one's partner.

Parents while working with the therapist were striving to convince themselves that they are attentive specialists of their children. They may need periodic support when they are overloaded, but they know their child best and are able to find it best. Popular psychological knowledge meant that they could be afraid of more decisive interventions.

Parents at work with the therapist needed specific literature, hints in child support methods. Equally important was confronting behavior with knowledge in the field of development psychology so that the parent's expectations were adequate to the child's real possibilities. The Polish book market offers a wide range of guides for parents. The trouble is, they represent many options, sometimes ideologically staying in contradiction. It is worth talking about possible options and giving parents the freedom to choose the perspective which is closest to them.

Working with family requires special protection. It is necessary to maintain discretion, ensure of psychological safety and respect for family borders. The therapist's workshop must include their neutrality and maturity, and in addition a rich workshop.

The expected results of educational work should relate to strengthening the ability to set and maintain permanent boundaries of behavior without using any forms of violence. In addition, it is worth equipping the parent with the ability to identify and respond to childhood psychomanipulations.

The most important parental competences are expressed in the ability to fully secure the child's psychological needs: affiliation/belonging, recognition, feeling of being seen, feeling of being loved. In the process of working with parents, it is worth looking at the ways in which they perform emotional tasks.

An important aspect of educational work is the ability to effectively persuade and communication that integrates the parent and child. Precise messages, messages in action support socialization and educational processes.

Raising a child is a long-term process in which more difficult periods occur. An important resource is the parent's ability to adapt in difficult situations within the family or school. Maintaining balance in difficult circumstances enables correct and adequate reactions.

Parents are not an easy group – they are looking for therapists who understand them, will not evaluate, but will objectively look at the situation and support in finding solutions to problems.

Conclusions. The theoretical and empirical theses presented here make it possible to conclude that the modern parent increasingly needs therapeutic support. This applies especially to groups of parents sensitive to the needs of their children, trying to competently accompany their development. The therapist's workshop should include psycho-education, work based on resources (coaching) and work based on deficits (psychotherapy). Each family is a peculiar and individual creation and requires a very individual approach that is consistent with its character.

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ПРАКТИЧНІ АСПЕКТИ ВИХОВАННЯ “НОВИХ” БАТЬКІВ

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Виховання батьків – це сфера, яку педагоги-практики визнали як достатньо складну ділянку, що містить багато проблем. Пошук допомоги фахівця здебільшого є прерогативою групи освічених та знайомих із світом молодих людей. Вони усвідомлюють батьківські права і можуть їх ефективно виконувати. Такі батьки зазвичай не мають чітко усталених сімейних опікунсько-виховних традицій, займаються вихованням дітей паралельно з інтенсивною трудовою діяльністю, що продукує дефіцит часу. Допомогу у складних ситуаціях вони шукають в літературі, кабінетах спеціалістів, групах підтримки. Отже, вони дізнаються, як можна ефективно виконувати виховні функції, використовуючи той часовий ресурс, якими вони володіють. “Нове” батьківство прагне професіоналізувати материнські та батьківські ролі, знайти оптимальні шляхи вирішення проблем виховання дітей. Водночас, такі очікування вони прагнуть реалізувати, застосовуючи короткотермінові заходи.

У статті подано наративи батьків, які скористалися допомогою фахівців, опис їхніх надій та побоювань, а також проілюстровано досвід, труднощі та здобуті позитивні результати. Зібраний емпіричний матеріал дав можливість закласти основи процесу професіоналізації ролі матері/батька. Висновки та розмірковування використано для визначення викликів, які стоять перед ринком спеціалізованої допомоги польським батькам.

Виховання, яке провадять батьки, можна визначити як постійне прагнення втримати функціональну рівновагу у багатьох сферах стосунків з дитиною. Спільним знаменником роботи з батьками стало досягнення ними:

- більшої віри в дитину – у те, що вона може бути більш самостійною, відповідальною; переконання, що їй можна буде надати більше свободи; визнання її права на помилку;

- більшої впевненості у собі як батька чи матері, здатності вчитися на помилках, постійний пошук рівноваги між непохитністю і сприйнятливістю, між вимогливістю і любов'ю, вірою у власний спокій, здатністю підтримувати власне благополуччя, турботу про себе та свого партнера.

Найважливіші батьківські компетенції виражені у здатності повною мірою забезпечити психологічні потреби дитини: афіліації/належності, визнання, відчуття, що тебе помічають і люблять. У процесі роботи з батьками варто звертати увагу на способи виконання ними емоційних завдань.

Важливим аспектом виховної роботи є здатність ефективно переконувати та налагоджувати спілкування, яке інтегрує батька та дитину. Конкретні повідомлення, повідомлення в дії сприяють соціалізаційно-виховним процесам.

Ключові слова: батьківська освіта, “нові” батьки, професіоналізація батьківської ролі.