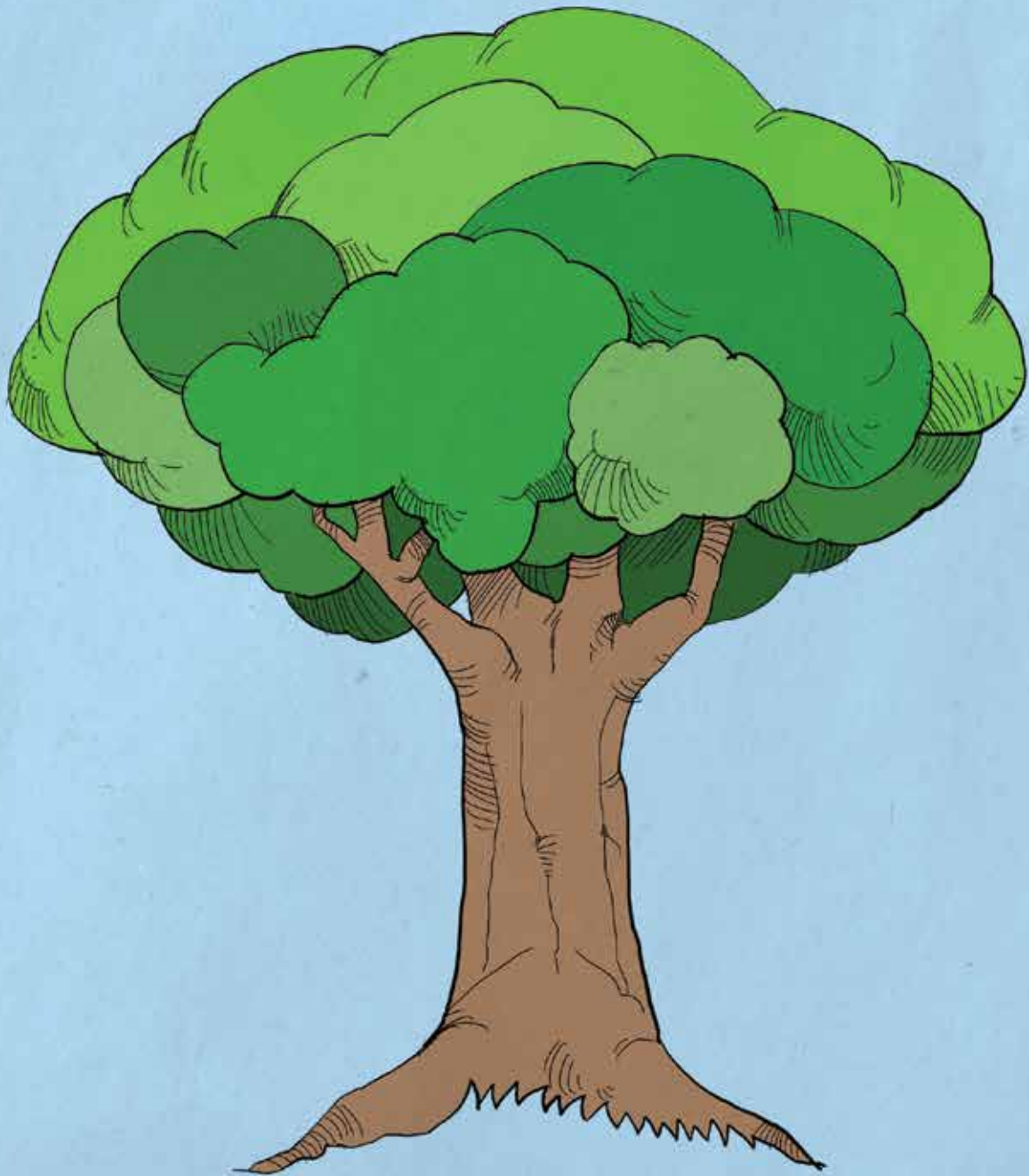# PROGRAMME FOR DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S SOCIO-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCES

Save the Children

Programme for Development of Children's Socio-Emotional Competences

October 2020

"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." Antoine de Saint Exupéry, The Little Prince

Save the Children believes that every child deserves a future. In the countries of the Northwest Balkans, we work daily to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn, and protection from harm. When crisis strikes, and children are most vulnerable, we are always among the first to respond and the last to leave. We ensure children's unique needs are met, and their voices are heard. We deliver lasting results for millions of children, including those hardest to reach. We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – to transform their lives and the future we share.

Together, we can do more.
Tell us what you think of our work!
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Introduction

The Programme for Development of Children's Socio-emotional Competences was created under phase II of the ENVISION – Creating ENabling enVIronment for Social InclusiON of children – project, implemented by Save the Children North West Balkans (SCNWB), via its office in Sarajevo, in partnership with non-governmental organisations "Nova Generacija" Banja Luka, "Otaharin" Bijeljina, "Vermont" Youth Centre Brčko, "Altruist" Association Mostar, Centre for Children's Rights Podgorica, and "Defendologija" Association Nikšić, as well as centres for social work in Banja Luka, Bihać and Nikšić.

The development of the Programme was preceded by an analysis of models, practices and programmes applied in working with children living and/or working on the streets and children at risk in daily centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region. The analysis also included a needs assessment for establishing new programmes that would contribute to improving the quality of services being provided by daily centres for more than ten years to highly vulnerable children and their families.

The analysis showed that there was a need to develop and apply programmes aimed at making children more resilient to various risks, challenges and difficulties they face while growing up, and in a way that would develop their skills for recognising and managing their own emotions, controlling their own reactions, withstanding pressure, developing empathy, prosocial behaviour, etc.

Social and emotional competence develops as part of growing up, through social interaction – relationships with others, primarily with parents and other close persons. Street-involved children usually have experiences of negative interactions and often rejection (by parents and other important persons in their environment), which is why they often exhibit aggressiveness and hostility towards others, have difficulties with self-acceptance, and lower levels of self-esteem and prosocial behaviour. It is, therefore, crucial that drop-in centres implement programmes to develop the social and emotional competence of children who have usually been deprived of these skills on account of growing up in adverse conditions.

However, the Programme for Developing Children's Socio-emotional Competences is not intended only for drop-in centres, but has been conceived to contribute to the following objectives:

● to enrich the programme opus and create a common frame of reference for the work of various professionals engaged at drop-in centres and/or providing other services in the community intended for street-involved children (children involved in living and/or working in the street) and children at risk of becoming street involved;
● relying on general and flexible contents, to enable adaptation of the Programme, or its implementation, to the needs of the group of children and their families using the services of drop-in centres, as well as the specific characteristics of the environment/community where the Programme is being implemented (in the sense of adding and/or expending existing content and introducing new content);

- to provide a programme framework that can be used, with small modifications, for developing the socio-emotional competences of other groups of children, such as those with developmental difficulties, without sufficient parental care, in alternative care at social protection institutions and/or foster families, as well as children of different ages from the general population that are enrolled in pre-school and/or the regular schooling system;
- The Programme promotes the participation of children, strongly impacting their development, because children develop their competences through activities. Offering children opportunities to actively participate in their own development leads to a broadening of competences, which in turn enables more complex forms of participation and leads to new, more complex competences. In this way, participation is not just a means by which a child introduces change, but a way to develop autonomy, independence and new social competences.

The Programme contents are designed around three key areas that cover topics relevant for understanding the process of developing socio-emotional competences in children. The **first area** gives an overview of the **theoretical basis** of the Programme that gives rise to the **value framework** we are advocating, promoting a model of positive development where the child and her welfare always have precedence, and learning is a process through which the child changes her self, her understanding of the world, her relationships, and by extension her community. The **second** part presents the **most important findings on child development**, stages of development and developmental tasks, with a focus on key characteristics of early and middle childhood and adolescence. The **third** main area gives a detailed overview of **socio-emotional competences**, defined as the ability to understand, manage and express social and emotional aspects in the life of the individual in a way that is conducive to successfully managing life tasks such as learning, building relationships, resolving daily problems, including the ability to achieve personal growth and development. There is also a description of five groups or clusters[1] that are interconnected and include social and emotional competences. The first relates to self-awareness, the second to self-management, the third to social awareness, which includes the ability to adopt the perspective of others and feel empathy towards other people from the same or a different culture. The fourth group relates to the area of social skills that include establishing and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships, while the final group relates to responsible decision making about one's own behaviour and social interactions, taking into account ethical guidelines and social norms, which at the same time contributes to the welfare of the person's community.

The Programme is intended for all practitioners, pre-school teachers, teacher's assistants, teaching staff and other professionals[2] implementing various programmes with pre-school and school-age children at pre-school institutions, schools, day-care, drop-in centres or other institutions that cater to children. Starting from a common theoretical basis and agreed values about how we see the child and her development and our role in it, the Programme allows them to implement various activities, depending on the specific context in which the Programme is being developed and the objectives they are trying to achieve. Children and grownups can actively shape the Programme, making it their own, always new and original.

1 Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

2 Terms used in the Programme in one grammatical gender for purposes of readability shall pertain without discrimination to both men and women.

I Theoretical and Value Foundations of the Programme

The Programme is based on a broad circle of contemporary theoretical concepts that, though they may differ in some aspects, share a common approach when it comes to a fundamental understanding of developmental particularities, needs, rights and the overall welfare of children and families.

1.1. Humanist Orientation in Psychology

The humanist orientation in psychology starts from the conviction that every child has an innate tendency towards self-actualisation and that, therefore, given a suitable environment, every child will be able to develop her personal potential. The basic assumption is that all children deserve respect and trust, that they possess potential and resources for development and self-realisation, that they are capable of improving self-understanding and receptive to constructive changes and a productive life:

- every child, irrespective of how difficult their living circumstances or problems, has healthy potentials that need to be recognised, activated and put in the service of further development;
- every child, irrespective of age, developmental stage, difficulty of problems or resistance, can change and develop, as long as we find a way to provide motivation, guidance and support;
- positive changes and development are more easily achieved when using abilities and potentials and when the child (and family) is empowered than when only weaknesses and problems are being addressed;
- it is children (as well as families) and not experts who are the key bearers of their own changes and development.

1.2. Ecological Systems Model of Development

The ecological systems model is based on the following assumptions:

- individuals and their social environment are in constant interaction, leading to constant changes on both sides;
- individuals are active participants in their own development;
- the relationship between the individual and the environment is reciprocal;
- subsystems are holistically linked in the global system so that changes in one subsystem cause corresponding changes in subsystems closer or further away from the individual.

The ecological model always places the child at the centre, but the child is surrounded by family, an active component of the local community, and by extension the global society. Taking an ecological systems approach requires understanding the internal structure and dynamics of each subsystem (child, family, local community); as well as an analysis and understanding of multiple reciprocal re-

lations between the subsystems. Proponents of the ecological approach stress that development always takes place in a certain environmental context that influences the course, nature and outcomes of developmental changes. **Ecological systems theory** is based on the assumption that if we want to understand development, we must understand interaction, or more precisely, the mutual influence of the child's personal characteristics and those of her environment or environmental context. Bronfenbrenner[3] believes that the child and the environment (in which the child grows and develops) are constantly influencing each other. These influences are two-way or transactional – there is a reciprocal relationship between the child and the environment, and mutual conditioning.

Environmental conditions influence the development of certain characteristics, but these influences will depend on the nature and qualities of the child and are partially shaped by them. For example, parents indisputably have a strong influence on the child's development, but their attitude is always also determined by the characteristics of the child herself – if parents have more than one child, they never have the exact same attitude towards every one of them. In Bronfenbrenner's model, the environment is represented as a series of interconnected layers or systems that he terms ecological systems. They make up the ecological environment or context in which the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development of the child takes place. The circle "closest" to the child, directly "surrounding" her, is the first ecological system, called the MICROSYSTEM. This is the child's immediate environment that has the biggest and most direct influence on her. For most children, the microsystem includes the family, pre-school or school, peers and places in the community (parks, playgrounds) where she interacts and plays with them, etc. The microsystem is not constant but changes as the child grows. It is, of course, made up of people: parents and other family members, the child's peers, schoolteachers, etc. The people that make up the microsystem have certain characteristics that can be relevant for the child's development (enabling). These are, for example, the parents' education or personal characteristics, as well as the ideological attitudes of teachers, the upbringing received by the child's peers and the socio-economic status of their families,[4] etc. It is clear that the microsystem is also made up of the relationships that the child creates with others in these environments. Bronfenbrenner also cites numerous research findings showing that the quality of family support provided to children is linked to their psychological characteristics, as well as their capacity for constructively dealing with many frustrations and crises that are an inevitable part of development. However, there is much less research on how other environments, beyond the family, help mitigate the stressful and detracting conditions of growing up. Nevertheless, existing research has shown that the school is an environment that can have such an influence on individual development. It has been found that children from at-risk and problematic families are less likely to develop psychological issues if they attend schools with dedicated, child-friendly staff and better school achievement (Rutter, 1987). Similar analysis can also be applied to other institutions catering to children, such as pre-schools, kindergartens, day-care, drop-in centres, etc. In the depicted ecological model, we have Mesosystem, Exosystem and Macrosystem.

The MESOSYSTEM consists of interconnections between the elements of the microsystem. For example, it includes the relationship between parents and their children's pre-school and

3 Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917–2005) developed the ecological systems theory in the second half of the 20th century.
4 The importance of the family as a context for development is pointed out by authors of all theoretical orientations.

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schoolteachers, or the relationships between the children's siblings and their peers. Generally speaking, the more the subsystems are interconnected, the more the child's development will have clear and consistent support.

The EXOSYSTEM is the social environment that impacts the child and her development, even though the child does not participate in it directly. This "third" layer of the context includes, for example: local authorities that decide which families will receive social assistance or whether children's playgrounds will be replaced by large shopping centres; the parents' place of work that determines how much time they will spend at work (and their workload) and whether they will be entitled to paid leave for the purpose of childcare; the school council that decides on field trips or the choice of textbooks that will be used in the school; the organisation and work of social services that determines the availability of healthcare or day-care services for employed parents; mass media, and especially the availability and quality of television pro-gramming, given the large amount of time children spend watching television today (the media also connect the family with the wider social context), etc. The importance of this wider envi-ronment in which children live, and which is related to the socio-economic status of the family, best shows that the different ecological systems are interconnected and can only conditionally be separated.[5]

It was also found that a strong social support network, made up of relatives and family friends, as well as social services, can significantly diminish the negative consequences of adverse developmental conditions in the above environments. The last and broadest context of development is the MACROSYSTEM, comprising the culture and subculture in which the child lives. This ecological system impacts development through a particular system of values and attitudes characteristic of a given culture, as well as behavioural norms and patterns de-rived from them. The macrosystem is more stable than the other ecological systems, but it too changes along with the development of society and major social changes. The macrosystem can also refer to the values, norms and patterns of behaviour prevalent in narrower groups or subcultures.

Figure 1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Development
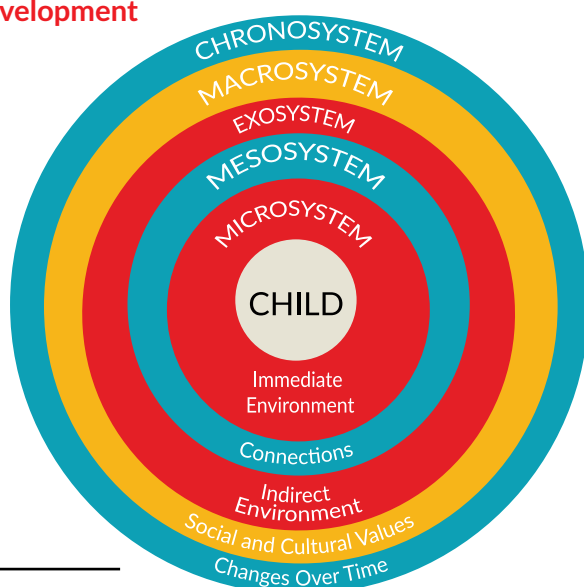
Numerous research studies have shown that children growing up in families of very low socio-economic status and in impoverished "bad" neighbourhoods (urban areas), usually attain lower edu-cational results and are more likely to drop out of school, etc. This supports the thesis that the social environment shapes developmental conditions, influ-encing many development outcomes, such as the level of formal education, the type and quality of knowledge and skills, self-confidence and self-image, attitudes and values (Werner and Smith, 1982).

5 Werner and Smith, 1982.

1.3. Social Learning Theories and Cognitive-Behavioural Methods

Cognitive-behavioural therapy is based on the principles of social learning and takes as its starting point that every behaviour, including asocial behaviour, is learned and can be unlearned, i.e. that new prosocial behaviour can be learned. All developmental learning, including learning that is corrective, takes place through special trainings at which the child masters new skills step by step, gradually adopting individual skills that are subsequently combined into complex behaviours or complex socio-emotional competence. This model has grown into a holistic approach that bases human development, functioning and changes in behaviour on aligning three main aspects of human beings: rational, emotional and active. Methods based on theories of social learning and the cognitive-behavioural approach have as a rule received the highest marks in evidence-based evaluative studies. This model has developed a very broad circle of methods to improve social and emotional competences, life and self-control skills, managing stress and resisting various developmental challenges, temptations and pressures.

> **Research has shown that there is a significantly higher risk of psychological developmental difficulties for children living in impoverished urban neighbourhoods than for children living in equally impoverished neighbourhoods in smaller towns or rural areas (Lavik, 1977).**

1.4. Positive Psychology and Positive Child Development

The focus of this orientation is positive development and positive, healthy functioning, which can be achieved through an empowerment approach, empowering the child, the family and the local community. The approach relies on the ecological systems orientation, promoting the strengths and potential of the child, the family and the local community, establishing and nurturing partnerships and working towards change at all levels relevant to the child's life and development (individual, family, group, local community).[6]

1.5. The Values We Advocate

The programme seeks to promote a model of positive child development based on the following assumptions:

● the child and her **welfare** must always come first;
● the **security and safety** of the child must be ensured in every environment where the child spends time, which means that children must be protected from harmful influences, but also be free to actively participate, explore, to freely develop and construct both their own identity and a feeling of belonging to the family, peer group and broader community;

6 Through PPP, drop-in centres adopted the key preconditions of this approach and seek to balance working to neutralise risks and improve positive potentials of children and families, creating the necessary conditions for healthy growth and development of children in their programmes.

- all children (and their families) have **equal rights** to participate in programmes that enable various aspects of their development;
- the **individuality** and personality of each child is understood and respected, with awareness of the need to provide suitable support to children from vulnerable groups;
- **respecting diversity** means accepting and promoting the personal, cultural, linguistic and family identity of each child. Children have different experiences, knowledge and skills that they bring to the learning process; active participation of children and grown-ups in various activities promotes understanding and respecting diversity;
- all children **have inherent development potential and strengths**, irrespective of their current situation or condition; children are rich in potential, competent, strong and powerful; they are agents of their own development and learning;
- opportunities are created for each child to **fully participate** in decisions that affect her; the child receives continuous support for active participation in all activities of the Programme; full participation and meaningful engagement, meaning the possibility to actively influence her own learning and development, are the major strengths of the Programme;
- children are **the most vulnerable, but also the most valuable resource of any society**; if given the opportunity and if they are well organised, they can contribute to and support each other, their families, programmes and their schools;
- if the child is provided with **opportunities to succeed** in one area of development, she will tend to align other aspects of her behaviour with this new, positive self-image;
- a close, accepting and collaborative relationship with grown-ups – preschool and schoolteachers – gives the child an opportunity to become increasingly engaged in sharing and ultimately taking over responsibility for her own learning, development and life;
- **relationships** are critical for learning and upbringing; children build relationships with their peers, with **grown-ups and the community**, and they learn and develop through these relationships;
- learning is a process by which the child changes herself, her understanding of the world, her relationships, and by extension her community;
- **parents/family** have the most important role in providing support that leads to children's well-being, learning and development; the relationship established by educators and other practitioners with parents must be based on partnership principles;
- children's **interaction** with educators, parents, other children, members of the local community and the physical environment, helps improve knowledge and build understanding and a sense of everything surrounding the child.

II Important Findings on Child Development

2.1. Key Development Issues

There are three main questions that are of equal interest to psychologists and other experts, even when they espouse opposite theoretical approaches to development.

1. Is development characterised by continuous, gradual quantitative changes or does it entail discontinuity, i.e. a series of qualitative transformations?

The discussion surrounding the problem of continuity and discontinuity centres around the question of whether changes appear slowly over time (continuous development) or through a number of preparatory steps at a certain age (discontinuous development). Proponents of continuous development view changes as quantity – the child will express more competence as she grows up. Other theorists,[7] those promoting the idea of discontinuous development, define a series of consecutive sages where each results in at least one task the individual must complete before moving on to the next stage. Proponents of the developmental theory of stages (psychoanalytical and cognitive) believe that individual development goes through critical periods denoted by times of increased sensitivity of certain aspects of development.

2. Is development primarily determined by genetic factors, i.e. inherited traits and maturation, or is the external environment the main source of change? What leads to development, what conditions going from one developmental stage to the next, what can speed up or slow down development?

Discussions about the relative importance of nature vs nurture have been around for a long time; it is one of the oldest problems in both philosophy and psychology. Today, most psychologists believe that it is the interaction between these two components that drives development, and the extent to which one or the other will be more pronounced depends on the individual herself and her living conditions.

Biological factors of development are primarily related to innate foundations, i.e. inherited dispositions, and the process of maturing. Environmental factors can be conditionally divided into the physical, social and cultural environment, though in reality, their effects are intertwined. The conditionality of this division is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that it is difficult to define the physical environment independently of the social or cultural environment. The social and cultural environments are even more difficult to distinguish, so we often speak of socio-cultural development factors. There is no doubt that social relations and the specifics of interactions in all groups that the individual belongs to (e.g. family, school, but also society as a whole) are determined by culture (e.g. patriarchal or individualistic), as well as the characteristics of each child.

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7 According to Freud and Erikson, development includes discontinuity, a series of qualitative transformations. In psychosocial development, an individual passes through a series of phases in a universal and unchangeable order.

3. What makes people different from each other and how stable are these characteristics over time?

The factor that mediates the effects of both biological and environmental factors is the activity of the individual. The environment does not act of its own accord – what is key is experience, the activity of an individual in a given environment. Also, inherited dispositions are actualised through the experience and activities of an individual in a given environment. Development should be viewed as the result of interaction between all these factors: biological, environmental and the individual's activity.

2.2. Stages of Development and Developmental Tasks

Various psychological theories of human development are based on the concept of "periods or developmental stages". Periods are unique stages of development with characteristic behaviours, cognitive and other psychological functions. According to research in psychology and child development, all people go through the same development periods in a firmly defined chronological order, though genetics and/or the environment can speed up or slow down going from one period to the next.

Developmental tasks are skills, knowledge and attitudes a person should adopt in order to function effectively, in a manner considered mature for the period of life in question. In that sense, each period has its developmental tasks.

Periods are viewed as hierarchical and integrative, meaning that the more advanced are based on preceding periods and progress leads to a "reorganisation" of different skills. In addition, the periods are viewed as universal, so that children growing up in completely different cultures and environments and with different genetic backgrounds still all go through the same periods and in the same order.

Erikson[8] also believed that every stage has a characteristic developmental task that the individual resolves with less or more success. Whatever the outcome of resolving that basic developmental task, the individual goes on to the next stage and faces the next developmental task. Individuals that fail to resolve a certain developmental task in a satisfactory manner continue to "struggle" with it later in life.

At every stage of development, i.e. in resolving each developmental task, certain difficulties arise as well as temporary failures to form a stable identity, which Erikson terms crises. A new stage of development is always a challenge and a potential crisis due to changes in perspective and passing from one established balance to another. Crises are periods of high vulnerability, but also heightened potential for development. Development itself takes place through crises, which are both an opportunity and a risk. Having overcome a crisis, the individual emerges with an increased sense of internal unity, with a better sense of good judgement and an increased ability to "do good", according to its own standards and the standards of people important to them (Trebješanin, 1993, p. 75).

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8 Erik Erikson (1902–1994) was Freud's student. His theory of psychological development is an example of contemporary psychodynamic concepts derived from Freud's teachings.

There are different developmental theories that emphasise the cognitive, physical, emotional, social and moral development of the child. Newer theories, based on new research in child development, have revealed better abilities and powers of understanding than was previously thought. New findings also call into question the concept of development periods and offer alternative ways to explain differences in development. Today, greater emphasis is placed on the context in which children grow up and in which they develop, the micro-environment of their home and the macro-environment of the society and culture surrounding them. In addition, neuroscience and brain research have made huge advancements, giving us new information in different areas, including how environmental influences affect brain structure and the overall development of newborns and how brain structure can affect behaviour and the understanding of messages in youth.

Of interest to us are the **three major periods of development**, taking into account that their boundaries are not firmly defined. The transition from one period to another differs from one individual to the next and there are certain differences within each period. We will be looking at the period of early childhood that lasts from birth until six years of age. According to some authors, that period can last up to eight years of age, but in most societies, children are sent to school at age six or seven. We will then look at middle childhood, the period between seven and eleven years of age, because in most societies puberty and adolescence start at age eleven or twelve and end in the first years of legal adulthood, between age 19 and 22/23. Authors who deal with adolescence note three periods: early adolescence (from 11 to 14), middle adolescence (from 15 to 17) and late adolescence (after 17 years of age), stressing that any such division is approximate and arbitrary.

> The early years in the life of a child are critically important because they put in place the foundations for her entire life. Patterns of behaviour, competence and learning are initiated and established in early childhood. Social and environmental factors start to act on genetic inheritance, brain cells grow intensively and "records" appear that help the child deal with stress.

The three major periods of development are described below. An overview of their unique traits, cognitive, behavioural, socio-emotional, will be given, as well as the needs that arise out of them.

> The process of development requires specific incentives that should be provided in certain periods. It is up to all adults caring for the child to provide these incentives. The process of development requires specific incentives that should be provided in certain periods. It is up to all adults caring for the child to provide these incentives.

2.3. Early Childhood

Early childhood is rightly thought of as the most important stage in human development. With minor differences, experts mostly agree that it covers the period from birth up to eight years of age, where the period up to three years of age is key for brain development and function.[9] In this period, in addition to good nutrition and healthcare, it is crucial that the child have a secure affective relationship with the parent/guardian and suitable stimulation. In the period from age

9 Previously, it was believed that brain development was completed by that period, but scientific advancements have brought out precise evidence that brain development extends to much later, continuing even in the period of adolescence.

3 to 6, the child is ready to engage in group activities, to play with peers and develop trust, to explore, and to gradually get a sense of herself. This is the period when pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills develop. Research has shown that from age 3 to age 6, it is important that children, and especially those from vulnerable groups,[10] attend programmes in preparation for school.

Figure 2
Stage of Brain
Development in an Infant

|	Conception	Age 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Vision Development		▮							
Speech Development		▮▮							
Emotional Development		▮							
Math/Logic		▮▮							
Social Attachment and Skills		▮▮▮							
Motor Development	▮▮▮▮								
Peer Social Skills					▮▮				
Language		▮▮							
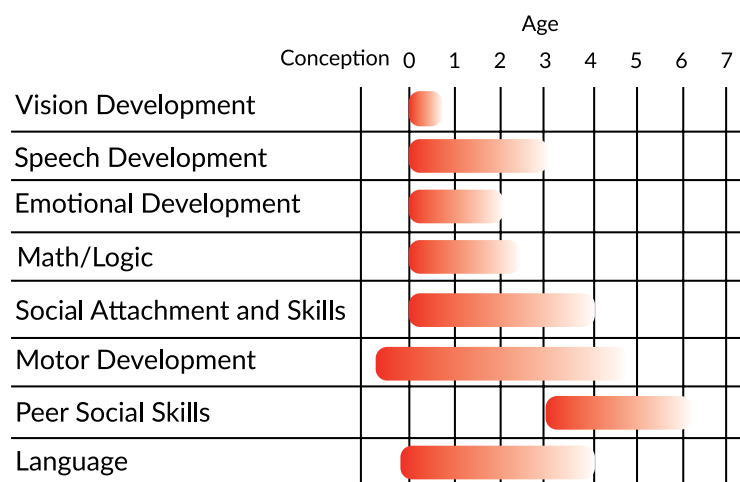
By the age of 6 or 7, children become ready for formal education and enrolment in primary school, but preparatory programmes ease this transition and increase their ability to smoothly integrate into a regular school routine and achieve success in formal education.

The first years of life are at the same time a period of high vulnerability, but also of huge opportunity.

● In the first years, children learn faster than at any other point later in life. In order to develop to their full potential, in addition to appropriate care, they need love, attachment, attention, encouragement and mental stimulation.
● Brain development in the early years influences physical and mental health, learning and behaviour throughout life.
● Neuroscience has proven that positive early experiences create a healthy brain architecture, but also that adverse and negative early experiences can weaken it.
● Early childhood development programmes that comprehensively include fundamental health, good nutrition, emotional, social and intellectual development needs provide all children with the basis to develop competences and skills for dealing with stress later in life.
● Early childhood development programmes should be strongly promoted, because they are one of the best ways to ensure children's rights, reduce socio-economic inequality and all other polarisations, such as those between the rich and the poor, urban and rural populations, majority groups and ethnic minorities. Research, as well as practice, has shown that children from families living at or below the poverty line are insufficiently prepared for the school environment, in terms of both knowledge and social skills. This is the consequence of a non-stimulating environment: little to no access to books, educational games and toys, or various educational content outside the home (theatre, zoo, museums, etc.).

10 Children from low-income families, children with developmental difficulties, street-involved children, etc.

Figure 3
Vocabulary Growth -
First 3 Years

Vocabulary

1200

600

0

High SES

Midle SES

Low SES

12   16   20   24   28   32   36

Age - Months
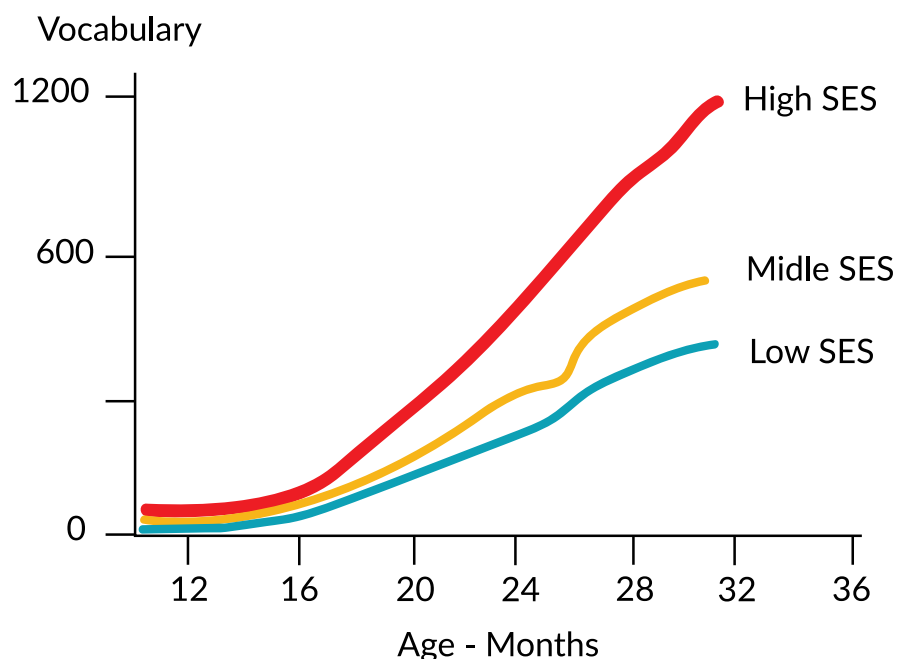
Children change rapidly during the first years of life, and these changes are the result of a complex mutual interaction between what the child is born with and the environment she grows up in, i.e. her genes and her surroundings. The quality of upbringing and care in the environment and the relationships children develop with their parents, guardians, family members and the community are among the most important and lasting influences on their development. All children develop similar abilities, but at different pace, which depends on their genetics and on the conditions of their environment. The social environment where they grow up has a strong impact on whether they will develop curiosity, motivation for learning, enthusiasm, self-confidence and other important competences.

2.3.1. Areas of Development

In the early years, children grow in every sense of the word, developing in a number of inter-connected and interdependent areas.

- Physical and motor skills development – relates to mastering movement, balance and gradually developing the ability to use the large and small muscles of the human body. These skills are called gross and fine motor development.
- Social and emotional development – relates to the child's ability to establish and maintain relationships with others, through which she gains and applies knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to understand and control her emotions and behaviour, make valid decisions, set and achieve positive objectives, establish and maintain good social relations and suitable social functioning.
- Cognitive development – relates to the ability to learn, think and reason. In their early years, children develop a number of cognitive abilities, where curiosity is key for the learning process and should be encouraged in various ways. It is important to extend the child's attention span and help her gradually increase the skills needed for concentrating on problem solving tasks.

- Development of speech and communication skills – includes language comprehension skills and the ability to express thoughts, needs, wishes and feelings. Children go through stages from unintelligible expression, through speaking one or two words, to expressing themselves in full sentences. A child gradually learns to describe experiences and participate in conversations with peers and grown-ups.
- Self-care and autonomy skills – include the skills a child develops to adapt to her surroundings and get used to a daily routine. They start with mastering simple skills so that by the end of early childhood most children are able to dress, feed themselves, bathe, clean their teeth and use the toilet without adult assistance. Children also learn to tidy up their toys and books, and adopt simple routines, such as getting ready for bed, etc.

2.3.2. Major Developmental Milestones

Neuroscience has indicated that brain development affects physical and mental health, learning ability and behaviour, not just during childhood, but also in grown-ups. The basic neural circuits are created first and more complex ones come later. Children first develop and acquire simple skills which they later use as foundations to continue developing increasingly complex skills. There are critical periods when the brain must receive certain inputs. In humans, the critical or sensitive period for such inputs depends on developmental tasks at different ages. Thus, in the first three or four months of life, the brain needs visual and auditory stimulation in order for the child to develop depth perception and a sense for the sound of language. The period from six months to three years of age is critical for speech development. Higher order thinking skills, such as reasoning and problem solving, develop in children from the end of the first year all the way until starting school. In this context, skills such as making the first step or the first smile are called major developmental milestones. The major milestones are achieved in the same order in various areas of development. When it comes to gross motor skills, the child usually learns to roll over, sit, crawl, stand, and only then walk. It is similar with fine motor skills and skills in other development areas.

> **If children are not given the stimulation they need at critical periods of development, it is less likely that they will develop their full potential.**

> **Sources of toxic stress can include physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, parental addiction diseases, as well as domestic violence.**

2.3.3. Consequences of Adverse Conditions while Growing up

We have already pointed to scientific findings that tell us how early positive experiences create a healthy brain "configuration", while early negative experiences can harm that development. Studying children's brain activity using electroencephalography (EEG), scientists have found that children from caring family environments exhibit stronger electrical activity, or impulses, than children who have spent the first years of their life in conditions of extreme neglect.[11]

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11 Poorer results were also seen in children who grew up in orphanages.

Effects of Deep Deprivation on the Brain

Supportive relationships

Extreme neglect

Children who grow up in extremely adverse conditions are exposed to higher stress levels, often termed "toxic stress". They can have less ability in reasoning and controlling their own emotions. Toxic stress can occur when the child is physically or emotionally punished, exposed to violence, neglect or abuse, when she grows up in extreme poverty or in a family whose members suffer from addiction diseases. Insufficient stimulation and neglect experienced in early childhood can affect brain development and create a predisposition for emotional and cognitive problems throughout life. Early negative experiences have far-reaching consequences for children's physical and mental development. However, it is important to note that not all stress is equally harmful. Low-level stress will not do harm if parents show love and sensitivity to the needs of the child. Stress levels that people are exposed to in early childhood shape their ability to mitigate and control reactions to stress later in life.

Appropriate stimulation is an important part of the developmental process. Inappropriate stimulation is stress that deforms the growth process. Stress mediators, such as serotonin, can cause permanent physiological and behavioural disorders. Stress in early life can harm learning, cause aggressive or compulsive behaviours, teach the child helplessness, shyness, and later in life, it can contribute to alcoholism and other issues.

The period from age 4 to 6 is characterised by enormous positive potential for interaction with grown-ups – not just parents, but also others – as well as with other children. In that period, children learn intensively to establish contact, and after age five, to build friendships. They learn how to cooperate with other children, they are generous to them and can be protective of younger children. They socialise less with the opposite sex than before.

2.3.4. Main Developmental Traits of Early Childhood

Cognitive	Behavioural	Socio-emotional	Needs
• first experiences in everything: with people, animals, sounds, colours, shapes, rhythms • language development • awareness development and early social attitudes • difficulty distinguishing imagination from reality • difficulty understanding causality (how one action leads to another) • concentrating on specific aspects of reality (everything they can see, hear and touch) increasingly aware of gender differences	• learn mostly through play • learn by repetition and habits • development of motor skills – from crawling to walking, running, exploring their surroundings • development of fine motor skills in fingers learn to express and control feelings	• experience new emotions • development from complete dependence on grown-ups to separation and a certain level of independence • increasing awareness of own and others' emotions • increasing understanding that others think and feel differently • playing with others, learning to solve simple conflicts and cooperate expressing signs of empathy, prosocial behaviour and readiness to help others	• feeling loved and safe • knowing that the range of feelings and fears they experience is normal • feeling good about new knowledge and experience • gaining resilience by knowing how to recover and seek help • gaining positive feelings about themselves and others

Between the age of 4 and 6, children start worrying about whether they are accepted with the group and peer relations become increasingly important. Interesting in peers is a sign of children developing independence from parents. They start giving their toys and show increasing interest in cooperating with peers. Conflicts with peers may be frequent, but they are very short-lived, children are prepared to compromise. Most like playing with friends of the same gender. They readily learn how to solve conflicts with other children, communicate with others even when they disagree, stand up for themselves and for others, resist peer pressure and bullying.

2.4. Middle Childhood

In middle childhood, children become **increasingly independent and self-sufficient** human beings who want to and can explore the world around them. They use language in more complex ways and absorb a huge amount of information. They gain a whole set of new skills, including literacy, school curriculum and knowledge about the world and the people in it. They gradually abandon an egocentric view of life where they were at the centre and can imagine themselves in someone else's place. They are curious, they develop social skills and friendships, but they also encounter exclusionary practices such as gender and racial stereotyping, bullying and harassment. They can take on more responsibility for their behaviour, they gradually get used to delaying gratification/reward and are ready to take on tasks that develop self-confidence and independence. During this period, everything that children see and hear at home, in school, in their community, including the media, influences their behaviour, their attitudes and views of the world.

The ages at which children go from early to middle childhood (around 6 or 7) and from childhood to adolescence (around 11 or 12) are periods of critical developmental change. As long as children are in the company of parents (grown-ups), their behaviour can be guided step by step. However, when they start spending time alone, they must be able to follow what they have learnt without constant reminding. Research has shown that when they enter middle childhood, children have an increased ability to perform tasks independently in line with a set sequence of instructions. In everyday life, children of this age are given various responsibilities that they are able to do themselves (Flavell, 1985).

The most obvious explanation for why younger children have difficulties following instructions is that they simply forget what was asked of them. This conclusion is supported by findings of numerous experiments that show a significant increase in memory from early to middle childhood. In light of this information, psychologists often connect memory improvement with progress in other cognitive and socio-emotional skills during middle childhood.

A combination of **four factors** leads to changes in memory from early to middle childhood:

1. increase in **memory capacity**: progress in terms of the amount of information retained in short-term (working) memory;

2. development of **remembering strategies**, which improve the transfer of information to long-term memory;

3. development of the **knowledge base** as the basis into which new information is incorporated;

4. development of **metacognition**, primarily an understanding of one's own cognitive processes.

Memory Capacity

As children grow up, the number of randomly selected numbers of letters they can retain in memory at the same time steadily increases. Most four- and five-year-olds can remember 4 digits given consecutively; most nine- and ten-year-olds can remember around 6 digits. Some researchers believe this increase reflects a maturing of the child's capacity for retaining information in short-term (working) memory. Accordingly, they use this to explain children's new ability to solve tasks consisting of multiple steps (at the age of 6 or 7).

Development of Thinking

At this age, children are often excited and genuinely interested in the outside world. Most will be able to accept information with enthusiasm and will often retain remarkable details that are of interest to them. By the age of nine, a child may have a favourite subject at school or prioritise certain activities or areas. She will have a beginner's ability in reading, writing, mathematical ability, and the ability to express relatively complex ideas.

If the child is worried, upset, scared or unhappy, she will not be able to think as described above. Therefore, support is needed to overcome the problem weighing down on the child. Similarly, if the child has low self-confidence, she will be less willing to try new tasks – in order to avoid failure. Cognitive development at this age has a lot to do with the support given to try new things and expand understanding.

At this age, the child can:

- start to have an understanding of money (around 6 or 7);
- understand that Santa Claus is not real (around 7 or 8);
- tell the time (around 7 or 8);
- read;
- start planning ahead;
- know left from right;
- like to collect things (pictures, games, cards, etc.).

Physical Development

At this age, children place special emphasis on developing their physical abilities. Activities such as kicking a ball, riding a bicycle fast and skilfully using their hands (whatever they are playing) will usually gain the child a certain status among the peer group, especially for boys.
Speech Development

By the age of seven, the child should be speaking clearly and using with ease all the words she knows and has learnt at home and in her social environment. At this age, the child will express a wide range of different ideas and will be able to describe even complicated events with lots of details.

At this age, the child will be able to:

- confidently use the phone (around 8);
- distinguish tenses (past, present and future) and use them properly in sentences;
- enjoy telling jokes;
- enjoy reading.

Socio-emotional Development

In middle childhood, the child will be more aware of the world around her and outside the home and this awareness will grow progressively. She will build up her self-confidence and start to make real friends, but she will still need (trusted) grown-ups to intervene and help her solve problems from time to time. During this period of development, the child gradually develops social skills and has an increased ability to connect with others. The desire to fit in with the peer group will grow immensely. A certain level of acceptance is essential for self-esteem. At this age, many children want to play with their own gender and may sometimes reject children of the opposite gender. This is normal and gives us an opportunity to explain to the child that both genders are capable of doing many different things together.

While children of 6 or 7 can participate together in activities and enjoy the company of their peers, it is only from the age of 8 that they will be able to imagine what it is like to be someone else and to form sustainable friendships. Because of emphasis to stick to certain rules, the child's efforts to make friends may not yet lead to results. Guidance and assistance from grown-ups can help keep play with other children positive.

At this age, the child can:[12]

- understand many rules and may want to add some of their own (around 7);
- start to like common/collective games (around 8);
- begin to understand different views (usually from 8 and up);
- take more care of their personal belongings (at 9);
- be full of courage and self-confidence, or reversely, full of self-doubt – this varies depending on personality type and on upbringing;
- start to show signs of responsibility;
- like to win at games, but is unable to deal with losing;
- sometimes lie and not always have a completely developed understanding of right and wrong;
- like going to school, except if there is a specific problem;
- have problems with friends – this is normal for most children from time to time;
- enjoy going for sleepovers at a friend's home.

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12 Every year at this age has something specific, for example, seven-year-olds can be bossy and demanding, they take life seriously and worry, eight-year-olds are enthusiastic and social, and nine-year-olds are independent and rebellious.

2.4.1. Main Developmental Traits of Middle Childhood

Cognitive	Behavioural	Socio-emotional	Needs
• better at distinguishing imagination from reality • understanding of causality (how one action leads to another) • use of more complex language • developing problem solving and critical thinking skills developing an ability to understand various content	• gradually acquire greater independence in everyday self-care, including hygiene, feeding, care for personal belongings • learning to follow the rules of the game and interaction • showing greater interest for engaging in free activities • showing greater preoccupation with body image taking more responsibility for their actions	• peers gradually take on a central role in their lives • they still need grown-ups who support them and act as role-models • prefer friends of the same gender • learn about telling right from wrong and about moral choices becoming exclusive and perceiving the environment as such	• nurture positive feelings they have abzout themselves, others and the world • explore and test out their own ideas, skills and talents • learn how to use their potentials in positive ways know that their feelings and fears are understood and respected

2.5. Adolescence

Adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood when children are at the threshold of important changes that will gradually usher them into the world of grown-ups.

This is a time of transition when one phase of development, childhood, is replaced by another, all of it accompanied by intense physical development and psychological changes. During this period, mood swings are frequent, while changes on the social plane are significant. Children focus on peer groups they identify with, but they also exhibit a need for independence. Physical and psychological developments influence the child's self-image. She feels different from before. There is often a discrepancy between physical, intellectual and social maturing. This leads to a feeling of confusion, possibly to worries about how the environment will respond to drastic changes, so that preoccupation with physical appearance often comes to the forefront. Younger adolescents often have a subjective sense of being in the centre of attention, with everyone critically judging them, so it is not uncommon for them to respond impulsively, without due consideration of the consequences.

Gradually abandoning old and constantly experimenting with new roles is one of the main traits of this period that many call the rebellious age of standing up to authority. Notwithstanding any disagreements about when adolescence starts and ends, most authors dealing with this phase of development agree that it is a period of transition, i.e. change, imbalance, and that the adolescent is no longer a child, but not yet an adult – the immaturity of childhood has been left behind, but the challenges and opportunities of adulthood have not yet been reached. Changes usually lead to achieving important developmental tasks in adolescence, such as: developing new, more mature relationships with peers of both sexes, accepting male/female gender roles, achieving greater emotional independence from parents and grown-ups, adopting a system of values, an ideology and attitudes, and adopting socially responsible behaviours (Havighurst, 1972). Changes during the period are extremely important for further personal development, and if developmental tasks are not successfully completed, they can later lead to maladjustment in adult life. All these changes aim to integrate events from earlier phases of life and enable the development of stable identity.

2.5.1. Changes in Physical Appearance

In the period from early adolescence onwards, the body and physical appearance go through many changes, most significantly: change of hormonal status, appearance of secondary sexual characteristics, as well as rapid changes in height and weight of the child/adolescent.

These changes are very important because they affect how adolescents perceive themselves, i.e. their self-image. Given that in adolescence, continuity is important for identity and self-image, adolescents face a problem: how do they incorporate new changes into their existing self-image in order to feel adequate? The rapid increase in height and weight is most prominent and often leads adolescents to feel awkward and clumsy in their attempts to adapt to these new changes. Numerous studies have shown that adolescents are very sensitive to changes of their physical self, especially if it does not conform to what is considered attractive in their culture (Lerner and Karabenick, 1974). The timing of physical changes is another important factor affecting the formation of self-image in this period.

2.5.2. Cognitive Changes

Emotional development in adolescence is character-ised by an intensive search for emotional support out-side the family circle. In this period, parents are no longer the only source of security and emotional exchange. Adolescence is characterised by a process of psychological separation from parents and achieving autonomy; adoles-cents seek emotional support and acceptance among their peers.

Qualitative changes in cognitive functioning take place during adolescence.

- The ability for abstract thought develops, making the adolescent capable of thought experiments, formulating various hypotheses and testing them out. Thanks to abstract thinking, adolescents are able to understand metaphors, proverbs and all manner of analogies, as well as irony and sarcasm.
- In the period of early adolescence, at age 11 or 12, children most often think in extremes (black or white, good or bad, etc.) and do not understand that there are intermediate positions or grey areas. However, already by age 14 or 15, they become aware of different ways to look at things and can take up relativist standpoints. Thinking becomes more flexible, critical and pragmatic (Adelson, 1971).

- As opposed to children who think in terms of the present, in adolescence, the dimension of time expands to include the near and far future. Adolescents become interested in the future, planning it, which helps them engage with grown-up roles and take on the responsibilities expected of those roles.
- As opposed to a younger child who starts from real, concrete, observable information to form conclusions, an adolescent has mastered the dimension of the possible. So, starting from what is possible, the adolescent tests out the theory, comparing it to previous experience or with information available in the environment.

Socialising with peers starts to take up a prominent position in everyday activities, relationships with peers become extremely important for further emotion-al and social development, and children start spending more time with their peers and less with their parents. First friendships are formed. Adolescents share their experiences and spend their free time with their best friend.

All these changes in cognitive functioning have a large effect on behaviour, attitudes and the way adolescents experience the world around them. The dimensions of possibility and the future enable them to understand and formulate social theories, which is usually accompanied by a desire to change society, even to destroy it (in their imagination) in order to make it better (Piaget, 1980). If reality is experienced as something negative, and there is the dimension of possibility, then it is not surprising that they express a desire to change everything, which adults interpret as rebellion.

2.5.3. Emotional Development in Adolescence

One of the most important tasks in adolescence, necessary to progress from childhood towards adulthood, is the **psychological separation from parents**. The main developmental task is **acquiring autonomy and independence**. What is thought of as the crisis of adolescence is actually a process where parental values and early identification with them are now critically re-examined in order for adolescents to form their own identities distinct from their parents.

In this period, parents have the role of validating the changes and providing guidance about possible directions of development. Only in an atmosphere of parental acceptance can adolescents experiment with new roles and values, make important decisions and thus gradually become autonomous from their parents. The importance of the peer group (especially in early and middle adolescence) in no way means that parents are no longer an important frame of reference. Many research studies have shown that in this period, they are equally if not more important than peers, that advice from parents is often valued more than the advice of peers, especially when it comes to important decisions and choices. It has also been shown that when adolescents prefer to seek help and support from their peers, this does not mean that having a good relationship with parents is of no importance, because satisfaction in the relationship with parents is more closely correlated with being well adapted and having good mental health in adolescence, compared to satisfaction in relationships with peers (Coleman and Hendry, 1996).

The transition from childhood to adolescence is characterised by important changes in social life. The living area broadens, the adolescent now has access to more roles and enters areas of life that were previously unfamiliar. The family is no longer the only frame of reference. Peers also serve as sources of validation for some important beliefs and values that are being tested (Duck, 1973). In the beginning, the peer group helps overcome feelings of loneliness and provides the opportunity to meet new friends and broaden the circle of acquaintances, and later becomes important because it provides adolescents with a sense of belonging, trust and support, emotional security, self-confidence, a chance to be popular and recognised. Peers also influence the formation of the adolescent's self-image and help her define her beliefs, values and goals.

Until recently, it was believed that the brain's basic structure developed by around age three and that the brain was fully developed by age 10 or 12. However, newer research indicates that the adolescent brain is still very much developing and continues to do so up to age 25.

Namely, the brain does not develop all at once, its development takes place in stages. One of the last regions to mature is the prefrontal cortex. This is particularly important, because it is precisely this part of the brain that is in charge of mental functions such as planning, strategising, organising, attention management, self-control and foreseeing consequences.

The fact that the biggest changes in adolescence are related precisely to areas of the brain responsible for controlling behaviour might explain why the actions of adolescents often confuse grown-ups, such as poor decision-making, carelessness or emotional outbursts.

Two processes in adolescence are crucial for brain development, according to experts from the US National Institute of Mental Health. The first is increased production of grey matter, the

substance that makes up regions of the brain in charge of the above functions, which happens at the very start of adolescence. The second and even more important process involves the pruning of synapses in the brain. This process follows overproduction and actually means that unused synapses disappear, while those that are used often are strengthened following the principles of "use it or lose it". This process serves to improve brain function and is shaped by the young person's activities and experiences.

This means that the experiences of young people set the foundations for their future mental functioning, which is particularly exciting, notes Dr Giedd from the National Institute of Mental Health. In contrast to small children, where this shaping is relatively passive, influenced by the environment and parents, adolescents have the opportunity to actively shape their own brains. This is precisely why it matters what activities adolescents will engage in – whether they focus their brain on learning, playing an instrument or vegging out in front of the TV. Even though, in light of these findings, adolescence is a time of enormous opportunity, it is also a time of enormous risk.

In adolescence, parts of the brain involved in emotional response are completely active, even more so than in adults, while parts of the brain involved in maintaining acceptable and controlled emotional-impulsive reactions are still developing. These differences may explain the need of adolescents for new experiences and their tendency to react impulsively, whatever the consequences.

Despite knowing a lot about how the adolescent brain functions, it is still impossible to tell to what extent a behaviour or ability is the result of brain structure characteristics or of changes that are taking place. Changes in the brain take place under the influence of many other factors, including inherited traits, personal history, family, friends, community and culture.

It is evident that the period of adolescence is highly culturally conditioned and that growing up looks different in different societies. Cultural differences have an important impact on what it is like to be a child or young person at a given stage of development, so it is important that our interventions/programmes implemented with children are culturally specific, i.e. culturally sensitive. However, what is common to all cultures is that children growing up still need dedicated and sympathetic grown-ups to advise them, serve as positive role models, set clear boundaries and expectations and discretely guide them towards choosing the best solutions.

2.5.4. Main Developmental Traits in Adolescence

Cognitive	Behavioural	Socio-emotional	Needs
• abstract and logical thinking abilities like those of grown-ups • increased concern about the future and exploration of different possibilities • high level of literacy, but may not correspond to calendar age	• increasing independence and separation from adult authority (culture dependent) •experimenting with new forms of behaviour, including risky behaviour • experimenting with gender, racial, religious, class, etc. identities	• often under the influence of peer culture • have strong convictions and principles • rebelling against authority • developing romantic attachments (culture dependent)	• introduce them to adult life and inform them about risky behaviours and taking responsibility for their psychophysical and mental health • having strong positive role models with high moral standards • knowing that their opinions and ideas are recognised and respected • learning from their mistakes in order to correct self-destructive behaviour
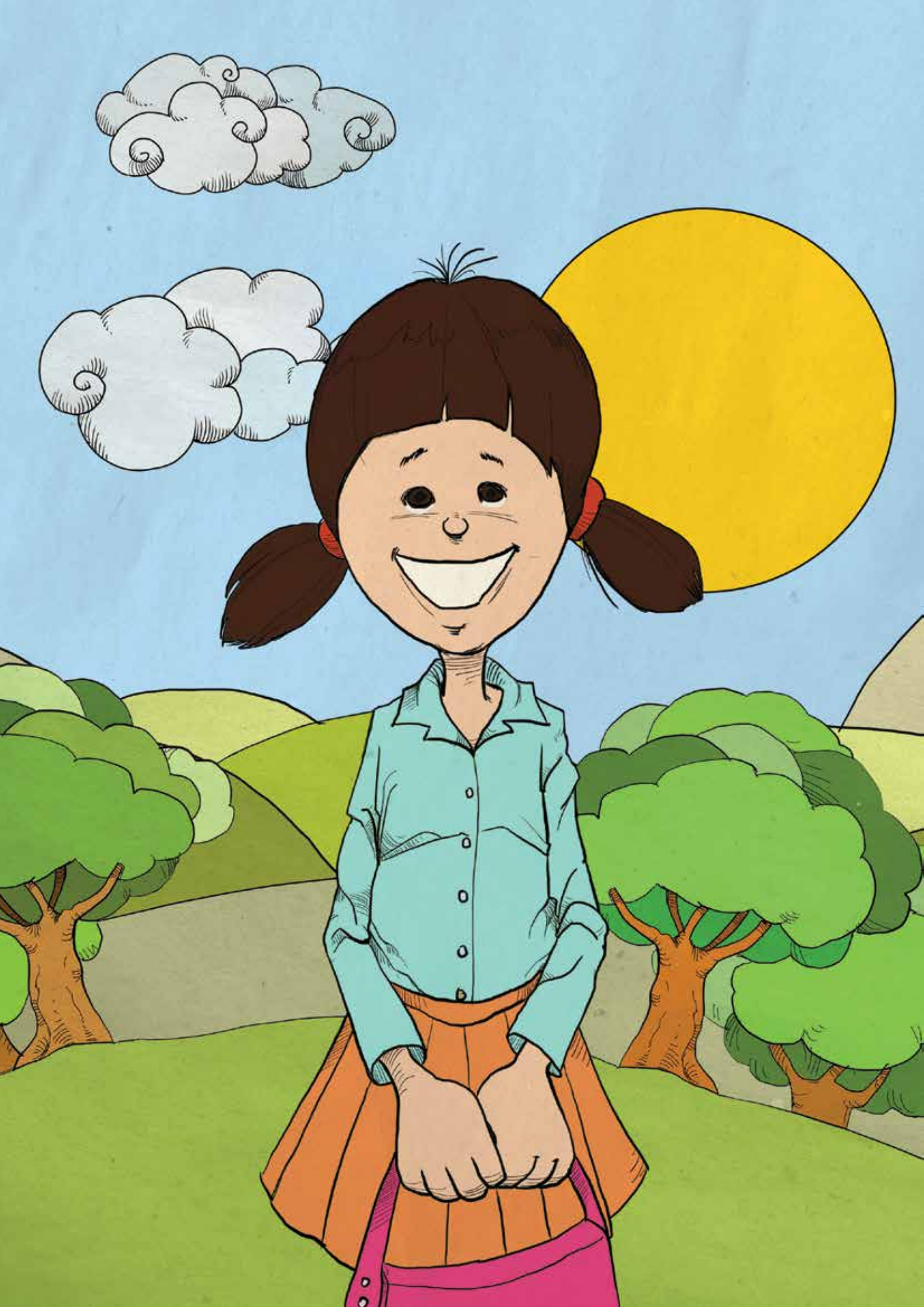
III Socio-emotional Competences and Socio-emotional Learning

3.1. Children Are Not Small Adults

From everything that has been noted above, it is clear that it would be wrong to view children as small adults that are gradually growing up. On the contrary, there is a high degree of consensus among experts working on child development that children should be thought of as self-contained human beings. Similarly, we must fully accept that at each stage of their development, children have unique needs and deserve special attention in order to develop all their potentials.

Children are different – we need to take into account that as developing beings, they feel, think, judge life situations, make decisions and behave differently from adults.

If we see children and young people as our biggest "social capital"[13] and if we are aware that they are undergoing a unique period of their lives, then our most important task is to devote to them the greatest attention and place our best resources in the service of their well-being. At the same time, we must bear in mind that children and young people are not a homogenous group. They grow up, develop and learn in very different social and family circumstances and face numerous challenges on a daily basis. Many children do not enjoy the protection of a caring family and are deprived of various rights, often being unable to access their right to attend school. Some of them have experienced trauma, discrimination, neglect and abuse, and often shoulder responsibilities beyond their nominal age and degree of psychosocial maturity. Despite this, most children respond well to socio-emotional learning and can develop their potentials.

We can say that there is generally a universal path of development for all children, but they do not traverse it in the same way, at the same rate and speed.[14] Understanding individual differences in rates and styles of development is important when we are creating and applying different programmes aimed at enabling a child's development.

When children are exposed to negative early experiences, there is still hope to remedy the situation. Understanding how negative experience affects brain development gives us an opportunity to intervene and prevent future difficulties and problems. We can apply programmes that will help children develop the abilities that failed to develop earlier.

Research into early brain development strongly supports the position that from birth onwards, children are ready for learning and have a sensibility for learning and development based on general biological maturing and maturing of the nervous system. This means that grown-ups must know and understand the importance of early development and how to stimulate learning and development

13 The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child reminds us that children are human beings in their own right and that they deserve the best society can provide at every stage of their development.
14 There is scientific evidence that even identical twins develop in different ways.

in a child. We want children to grow up and become adults who are satisfied with themselves, have confidence, and are active and productive. In order to achieve this, it is important that we meet children's needs for security, love and belonging. Research has shown that people who received enough love, support and understanding in early childhood were later better able to overcome stressful and difficult situations because they had developed a feeling of security and self-confidence.

3.2. Definitions of Basic Terms

In the rest of this section, we will first give more details and define key terms such as: emotional intelligence, emotional competence, social and emotional competence and socio-emotional learning. We will focus on a detailed description of five groups of socio-emotional competences, including the key skills they entail, which is the essence of the Programme for Developing Children's Socio-emotional Competences.

3.2.1. Emotional Intelligence

This term first appeared in the early 1990s. By now, it is a thoroughly studied concept and the subject of numerous scientific papers. However, emotional intelligence continues to be of interest to various experts around the globe, and most of all to those working in mental health. Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to perceive, assimilate, understand and regulate emotion. These abilities are arranged according to the complexity of psychic processes – from simpler ones such as perceiving and expressing emotion – to more complex ones such as awareness, reflectiveness and regulation of emotion. Emotional intelligence includes the ability to quickly perceive, assess and express emotion; the ability to understand and generate feelings that facilitate thinking; the ability to understand emotion and knowledge about emotion, and the ability to regulate emotion in order to promote emotional and intellectual development.[15]

According to Goleman,[16] who is most often cited when considering the nature and components of emotional intelligence, emotional intelligence is made up of noncognitive abilities, competences and skills that impact an individual's ability to deal with the demands and pressures of the environment. Emotional intelligence is partly owed to genetic inheritance, **but to a significant degree, it is acquired through a process of learning**. Daniel Goleman believes that social skills are an important aspect of emotional intelligence and that they are expressed as the possibility of successful and good interaction with others. In addition to understanding one's own emotions, real emotional understanding includes understanding the emotions of others, as well as the skill to use this understanding in everyday interactions. According to Goleman, some of the most important social skills include active listening, verbal and non-verbal communication skills, leadership, etc.

Emotions, as well as emotional intelligence, are regulated by two important brain systems: the limbic system and the amygdala. Once cell within these structures can make up to 15,000 synapses, or neural connections, with neighbouring cells. This is important because by exercising emotional intelligence skills, new neural pathways are created in our brains.

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15 Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., Caruso, D. R. (2000). Models of Emotional Intelligence
16 Goleman, D. (1995). Emotional Intelligence

3.2.2. Emotional Competence

Some authors use other terms to speak about the same set of skills and abilities. Thus, **emotional competence** is defined as the ability, in addition to experiencing emotion, to think about it, to understand how it arose, and to influence its course. This means that we not only experience emotions, but we develop abilities to recognise them, name them and distinguish different emotional states in ourselves and others.

We also have the capacity to understand different factors that influence the generation of emotions. This includes our interior states, motivation, values, external events, our context, etc. Another important aspect of emotional competence is empathy, which enables us to recognise and experience a degree of the same emotion as our interlocutor. It is precisely these abilities – understanding emotions, emotional regulation and empathy – that are important segments of emotional competence and significantly influence the quality of our social life, because they shape our relationships with others and how well we adapt.

> **Many problematic behaviours (risky behaviours, delinquency, addiction diseases, mental health issues) can be prevented or mitigated by comprehensive efforts towards developing social and emotional competences.**

3.2.3. Social and Emotional Competence

Socio-emotional competence is the ability to understand, manage and express social and emotional aspects in the life of the individual in a way that is conducive to successfully managing life tasks such as learning, building relationships, resolving daily problems, including the ability to achieve personal growth and development.[17] Socio-emotional competences are crucial for the development of a healthy, well-adjusted person able to easily use her capacities to achieve goals, maintain good relationships with others, be involved in the community and deal with life's challenges. Simply put, social and emotional competences are crucial for well-adjusted functioning in all aspects of life, including the mental health of children (and adults). Social and emotional competences are crucial for developing a healthy personality and a successful and satisfied individual.[18]

3.2.4. Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning is a process through which children acquire and apply knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to understand and manage their emotions and behaviour, make valid decisions, set and achieve positive goals, establish and maintain good social relationships and good functioning in society. The principles of social-emotional learning are based on scientific findings in developmental psychology, clinical and social psychology, the psychology of learning and other related disciplines. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL[19]) has defined 5 interconnected groups or clusters of social and emotional competences. The first is **self-awareness**, defined as the ability to recognise and assess one's own emotions and thoughts, as well as how they influence behaviour, interests and values.

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17 Elias et al, 1997

18   Longitudinal research studies have shown that schools that encourage developing social and emotional competences have lower rates of problematic behaviour, absences and dropping out, as well as lower rates of emotional problems in pupils.

19   Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

This includes being able to recognise one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) conducted research to show the links between socio-emotional learning programmes and academic achievement. For children who participated in programmes for the development of socio-emotional competences, the findings showed how they were exhibiting better-adjusted behaviour and were more motivated for learning (Richardson, Myran, Tonelson, 2009).

Self-management refers to abilities to express and control one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, impulse control, self-motivation, as well as setting and focusing on achieving personal and academic goals. The third group relates to social awareness, which includes the ability to adopt the perspective of others and feel empathy towards other people of the same or a different cultural background. It also refers to understanding ethical and social norms of behaviour and recognising family, school and community resources and supports. The fourth group pertains to the area of social skills, ranging from abilities to establish and maintain healthy interpersonal relations and constructive conflict resolution to seeking and offering help when needed and the ability to resist peer pressure.

The final group is responsible decision-making about one's own behaviour and social interactions, taking into account ethical guidelines and social norms, while at the same time contributing to the well-being of the local community.[20]

Diagram of the CASEL framework with five groups of competences

SELF - MANNAGMENT
Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one's goals

SELF - AWARENESS
Recognizing one's emotions and values as well as one's strengths and challenges

SOCIAL - AWARENESS
Showing understanding and empathy for others

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Relationship Skills
Forming positive relationships, working in teams, dealing effectively with conflict

Responsible Decision Making
Making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior

20 Munjas Samarin, Takšić, 2009.

These five groups of competences reflect intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of functioning. **Self-awareness and self-management belong in the intrapersonal domain, while social awareness/awareness of others and social skills are a dimension within the interpersonal aspect. Responsible decision-making is at once an individual and a social process.**

Children who realistically assess their abilities (self-awareness), are able to control their emotions and behaviour (self-management), interpret emotions, behaviours and actions of others correctly (social awareness), successfully resolve conflicts (relationship abilities) and are able to make good decisions in everyday challenging situations (responsible decision-making) are socially and emotionally competent and are on their way to growing up successfully.[21]

Strengthening skills for controlling emotions and behaviour, as well as for building relationships and friendships, in younger children, especially if they are exposed to numerous stressors in life, can play an important role and act as an important protective factor when it comes to school achievement. Further research has shown that academic success and personal advancement cannot be achieved without acquiring socio-emotional skills.

Socio-emotional competences are often equated with social skills, but it is important to distinguish them, despite many shared characteristics. Skills are related to specific behaviours of children, such as tolerance, assertiveness, non-violent conflict resolution, while competences refer to **how children use these skills in relation to others**. It is impossible to be socially competent and function in society without appropriate use of acquired social skills. Knowledge of the norms and rules of a given society is also needed. The competence includes the relation towards one's self and one's feelings, as well as towards others, their feelings and needs.

We can say that **socio-emotional competence is a complex construct made up of multiple specific skills, but it is important to note that they can be learned, i.e., that socio-emotional competence can and should be developed.**

3.3. Developing Key Skills within the Five Clusters of Socio-emotional Competences[22]

Self-awareness is the individual's overall understanding of her self as a separate, distinct and unique entity with its various aspects (physical, social, moral).

1. Self-awareness – the ability to clearly recognise one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and understand how they influence behaviour.

Key skills:

- recognising emotions
- realistic self-image
- recognising strengths
- self-confidence
- self-efficacy

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2. Self-regulation/Self-management – the ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours effectively in different situations.

Key skills:

- impulse control
- stress management
- self-discipline
- self-motivation
- setting goals
- organisational skills

3. Awareness of others/Social awareness – the ability to see the perspective and understand the position of others, including those of different backgrounds and cultures.

Key skills:

- decentring
- empathy
- accepting and respecting differences
- respecting others

4. Establishing relationships – the ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships with diverse individuals and groups.

Key skills:

- communication skills
- social engagement
- relationship building
- teamwork

5. Responsible decision-making – ability to make constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions, based on ethical standards, safety and social norms.

Key skills:

- identifying problems
- analysing situations
- problem solving
- evaluation
- ethical responsibility

3.3.1. Self-awareness

Self-awareness is usually defined as the ability to correctly identify one's own emotions, thoughts and behaviours, as well as their mutual influences. Correctly identifying one's strengths and weaknesses and realistically perceiving one's self are also important. In the same context, importance is placed on self-respect, self-confidence, self-efficacy and faith in one's self, or self-confidence in achieving goals, developing relationships and achieving one's potential. In addition to identifying one's emotions, it is important to be aware of the effects of one's actions, moods and emotions on others.

In order to achieve self-awareness,[23] we need to develop the ability of:

- monitoring our own emotions,
- identifying different emotional responses,
- correctly distinguishing between emotions.

People with pronounced self-awareness can, among other things, identify the link between how they are feeling and their behaviour. They are aware of their own capacities and limitations, are open to new information and experiences, and learn from interacting with others.[24]

What are emotions?[25]

Emotions are one of the most important factors affecting the overall functioning of an individual and they have a central role in our social lives. We respond emotionally to our surroundings. There are many theoretical schools that various define emotions, but all theories agree on the following:

- emotions are made up of a series of connected responses to an event or situation;
- they reflect how an individual relates to an object, event or person;
- they are manifested by a recognisable mental state and emotional expression.

> **Self-image starts forming from the earliest age and continues developing throughout life.**

Emotions can be intense, short-lived, accompanied by various physiological changes and, as such, they can interrupt current behaviour. They affect interpersonal behaviour and individual adjustment. It has been found that there are six basic emotions that are universal and appear in all cultures around the world. They are:

- happiness,
- sadness,
- anger,
- fear,
- surprise,
- disgust.

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23 Self-awareness, the ability to identify and understand our own emotions, is a key component of emotional intelligence, according to many authors.

24 Goleman notes that they have a pronounced sense of humour, confidence in themselves and their abilities, and are aware of how others perceive and experience them.

25 Adapted from: Jovišević D., Petrović J., Trbojević J. (2019). Kaži kako se osećaš [Say How You Feel]. Novi Sad, Public Health Institute of Vojvodina (Programme for Developing Emotional Skills in Children as Part of Regular School Subjects)

Of course, these are only basic emotions. We are additionally capable of experiencing and manifesting other emotions, where these are sometimes different modifications in the intensity of expression of the same basic emotion (e.g. sadness or happiness can have different levels of expression). Understanding, i.e. identifying and naming emotions, develops from an early age. Some research[26] indicates that already at age two, children can understand the facial expressions that accompany the six basic emotions, even though they cannot name the emotion itself. Expressing happiness is identified at the earliest age and with the most accuracy, followed by sadness and anger, and then surprise and fear.

People differ in the degree to which they can recognise and name emotions, but this ability can be developed through various activities where people learn to connect facial expressions, body language and gestures with emotions, expanding their emotional vocabulary and learning to distinguish between similar emotions, such as, for example, worry and fear, guilt and regret, etc.

Children begin developing an understanding of emotions in parallel with speech development. Initial explanations are basic and most often relate to behaviour and external factors that cause emotions. From age four, children have the ability to understand also the internal origin of emotions and can connect them to the person's desires and goals, and not just to external events that give rise to an emotion. From that age onwards, children understand that different people have different desires and goals regarding the same object. This ability to understand the mental states of others becomes more pronounced as the child grows up.

> When we work with children on understanding causality, or the origin of emotions, we help them understand how different people can have different emotions in the same situation, and how different internal, motivational, as well as external, situational and contextual factors contribute to emotions. Children also learn that they can have multiple different, sometimes opposite emotions about the same situation.

Emotions Can Be Pleasant or Unpleasant[27]

Emotions are not positive or negative, but pleasant and unpleasant, or adequate and inadequate. We often encounter the misguided attitude that emotions are positive or negative, i.e. that positive emotions such as happiness, joy, excitement should be felt, while emotions such as sorrow, anger, fear are negative and should be avoided. This is not true. Emotions are not divided into positive and negative, but into pleasant and unpleasant, and both are important for survival. Sometimes, unpleasant emotions can be more important. Pleasant emotions serve the purpose of affirming a value we hold important, informing us that our functioning and adaptation to the environment is going well at the moment, that we don't have to change anything much, that the context is good for us. In contrast, negative emotions tell us that some of our important values are under threat, that the situation we're in means that something has to change in order for us to function well again. This means that unpleasant emotions warn us to

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26 Michalson and Lewis, 1985, cited in: Petrović, 2007.

27 Adapted from: Milivojević, Z. (2003). Emocije: psihoterapija i razumevanje emocija [Emotions: Psychotherapy and Understanding Emotions]. Novi Sad: Prometej

change something, they make us act. We then decide to respond in some way and re-establish balance. It follows that unpleasant emotions should not be avoided, instead we should pay attention to their warnings. Thus, for example, fear tells us that a situation can be avoided and makes us escape. Anger tells us that we want some situation to change, that we want someone to change their behaviour towards us, or something similar. Grief tells us about an inevitable situation we are facing: we grieve when we lose a loved one, it helps us get accustomed to living without them.

Characteristics of the Self-confident Child
- **knows how to make decisions**
- **sure of herself**
- **creative**
- **satisfied with her work**
- **expects to succeed**
- **successfully cooperates with peers and grown-ups**
- **happy and full of energy which she often transfers to other children**
- **makes friends easily**

The Importance of Pleasant Emotions[28]

There are numerous pleasant emotions such as happiness, joy, love, pride, satisfaction, enthusiasm... They are very important for our functioning and are directly related to well-being. They have a motivating impact on learning and advancement, they strengthen social relations and encourage intellectual activity.

With children, we can work on expanding the emotional vocabulary and differentiating various pleasant emotions. Through workshops, they can bring awareness to what causes pleasant emotions, and then realise how we can influence having pleasant feelings. The self-image that the child forms can be predominantly positive or predominantly negative, and it will influence what the child expects of herself, but also the level of success in many later activities. At the heart of a positive self-image is the feeling of worth, the child's experience of harmonious relationships within the family, with other grown-ups, with peers and with herself. The following are developed based on a positive self-image:

- self-respect (I have value)
- self-confidence (I have knowledge)
- self-assurance (I have ability)

Grown-ups (parents, schoolteachers, pre-school teachers) teach children to recognise and name emotions, to see links between emotions and the situations that cause them. They also teach them about how expressing emotions affects them and others, how to control the expression of their emotions and how to do so in a socially acceptable way. Learning about how to express and control their emotions helps children:

- achieve better socialisation
- be better accepted in society by their peers and the community in general
- establish a basis for developing stable close social relations in adolescence and adulthood

28 Adapted from: Vranješević J. et al. (2019). Kindergarten as a Safe and Enabling Environment for Children's Learning and Development

- establish the basis for a balanced emotional life later in life
- establish more successful social relations throughout life

Key skills and knowledge, an important segment in socio-emotional learning for this group of competences, include:

- support for children to **learn to recognise, express, accept and control their feelings**, as the basis for building relationships both with peers and with grown-ups;
- **ability to express feelings in a way that is acceptable and not harmful to either themselves or others**, as an important factor in children's emotional development.

3.3.2. Self-regulation

In addition to an awareness of one's own emotions and their impact on others, the ability to control and manage emotions is just as important. This in no way means that feelings should be suppressed, hidden or curtailed. On the contrary, it is about the ability to wait for the right time, place and way to express them. Self-regulation means adequately expressing emotions.

People with a high degree of self-regulation are flexible and easily adapt to changes. They are skilled at managing conflict, especially in tense and difficult situations. Goleman[29] notes that they are highly conscientious, taking care of how they impact others and taking responsibility for their actions.

Emotional Regulation – Dealing with Unpleasant Emotions[30]

Emotional regulation is the competence used to "manage" our emotions, primarily to influence their intensity and duration, as well as how we express our feelings. Emotional regulation ability starts developing already in early childhood. Thus, in the first month of life, when stability in functioning is disrupted, the baby sends signals to her surroundings, which then performs the role of regulation. Later, the child starts thinking about events, finding various ways to interpret them and self-soothe. In interaction with the environment, the child learns to modify emotions, deal with frustration, recognise danger, overcome fear and anxiety in order to achieve meaningful and good interpersonal relationships.[31] Emotional regulation strategies are particularly helpful in dealing with unpleasant and intense emotions such as anger, fear, grief or shame. Some emotional regulation strategies are a way to divert attention from the distressing event (for example, a child afraid of receiving an injection can close her eyes or remember that it wasn't so bad last time), seek help from a grown-up or leave the distressing situation.

The ability to manage and control our own thoughts, emotions and behaviours in everyday and stressful situations enables us to function in adaptive, flexible and socially acceptable ways. self-regulation is our ability to maintain the degree of emotional expression at the optimal level.

29 Goleman, D. (1995). Emotional Intelligence

30 Adapted from: Jovišević D., Petrović J., Trbojević J. (2019). Kaži kako se osećaš [Say How You Feel]. Novi Sad, Public Health Institute of Vojvodina (Programme for Developing Emotional Skills in Children as Part of Regular School Subjects)

31 LaFreniere, 2000; Oatley and Jenkins, 2000; Vander-Zander, 1993, cited in: Brajša-Žganec, 2003.

Appropriate self-regulation is the basis for the child's social, emotional and cognitive development.

Self-regulation Factors

Inherited biological structure or temperament significantly affects the development of emotional regulation. Temperament refers to inherent tendencies of the child towards experiencing and expressing certain types of emotions. The self-control aspect of temperament is particularly relevant for a child's emotional regulation. Self-control enables a person to suppress desires and behaviours led by impulse and includes controlling and regulating behaviour or attention in certain situations. Self-control has an important role in regulating negative emotions.

Learning self-regulation is a process that enables the child to manage her emotions and behaviours in order to achieve goals, communicate prosocially with others and be engaged in the community.

Children with poorer self-control can have lower emotional regulation abilities, potentially making them vulnerable.[32] Apart from the child's personal characteristics, self-regulation is also determined by the emotional climate in the family as expressed in the behaviour of parents towards the child and through relationships among family members.

A child's emotional regulation is most often adversely affected by parental conflict, because moods and behaviours from the couple's relationship are transferred to the parent-child relationship.[33]

Learning self-regulation

Self-regulation includes various factors, such as:

- prepotent response inhibition (stopping unconstructive feelings, thoughts, behaviours),
- guiding, shifting attention and resisting irrelevant stimuli,
- perseverance on tasks and deliberate effort to achieve goals (even when not enjoying the activities),
- active steps to reduce stress levels when needed.

Difficulties in regulating emotions are manifested in children as losing control, or the inability to control thoughts, emotions and behaviours.

Persons who have mastered self-regulation are able to think before they act and will not allow unpleasant emotions to overwhelm them. They act deliberately, not impulsively, and they **understand and monitor their emotional responses**, using them as guides for effective action in social relations. Emotional regulation enables a person to align expression of emotion with the demands of the environment, protect themselves from unpleasant emotions, restrain them and channel them so as not to disrupt functioning.

32 Murris and Ollendick, 2005.
33 Parke, D. R. (2004). Development in the Family

With weaker self-regulation, emotional reactions tend to be more intense, such as shouting, hitting, loud crying and aggression. Aggression can be directed at objects, peers or one's self. That is why an important part of a child's development includes learning how to properly manage emotions.[34] Difficulties in developing self-regulation skills influence the overall socio-emotional development of children and mental health difficulties.[35]

Anger management is another skill that is important for socialisation and acceptance among peers. Children with strong expressions of anger are often at risk of being excluded by their peers.

Similarly, these difficulties can lead to a feeling of helplessness over behaviour and make it more difficult for the child to have adequate social interactions due to inappropriate and sometimes intense emotional reactions. In addition to having an important role in the process of socialisation, if a child does not master emotional regulation, this will negatively impact her interaction with the environment and the adoption of social norms and rules of behaviour. Children have a hard time when their peers behave this way, because they cannot take on the role of a grown-up and they don't know how else to help the child overcome her feelings or to respond in a different/constructive manner.

Children who express their emotions strongly or even uncontrollably are seen as being problematic, often also by their parents and even their pre-school teachers. This often leads to a vicious circle of negative or asocial behaviour. The more a child expresses anger in an inappropriate manner, the more negative reactions she gets from pre-school teachers and peers, and this can cause additional anger and dissatisfaction. Thus, the circle closes and it seems there is no way out. [36]

It is important to note that self-regulation is not the same thing as self-control. Self-control refers to the ability of stopping our initial impulse to do something, while self-regulation is the ability to manage our own behaviour, cognitive and emotional capacities, as well as the ability to manage various forms of frustration and stress and help ourselves recover from it.

Children learn how to deal with their own feelings by modelling the behaviour of grown-ups and other children. By age ten, most children can successfully use two approaches to managing emotions.

- One focuses on the problem: recognising the problem/challenge/difficulty, thinking about how the problem situation can be influenced in order to change and/or resolve it; making a decision about how to act.

- The other focuses on emotions: if little can be done to influence the outcome of a problematic situation, internal, personal mechanisms of controlling discomfort and unpleasant feelings are activated.

34 Eisenberg, N., Morris, A. S. (2002) Children's Emotion-Related Regulation
35 Bartolec A. (2013). Social Aspects of Everyday Life of Children and Youth with ADHD and their Parents
36 Petrović, J. (2007). Emocionalni temelji socijalne kompetencije [Emotional Foundations of Social Competence]

Children should start learning and developing self-regulation skills from the earliest age because this contributes to:

- **being better at solving problems and succeeding in school** (e.g. the child is able to follow rules, focus and direct attention at various tasks, etc.);

- **more successfully adopting socially acceptable behaviour** (e.g. the child is able to adapt her behaviour to the context, she will not talk loudly in the theatre while watching a performance and will not comment out loud about the behaviour or appearance of people she meets, even though this is an initial impulse);

- **making and maintaining friendships with friends** (e.g. the child will be able to judge when to take the lead and when to let someone else have the lead in an activity, or when to express joy or anger in acceptable ways);

- **gaining independence sooner and with more success** (thanks to self-regulation skills, children will have the ability to decide independently on socially acceptable behaviour in new situations);

- **better stress management**, because self-regulation helps us deal with strong feelings and mitigate them (e.g. tantrums, etc.).[37]

Children experience emotions much more intensely than grown-ups and often don't know what to do with them. Grown-ups can help in this regard.

An emotionally skilled child knows how to recognise and say how she feels, knows how to calm down, alone or by seeking help, and has the ability to understand and feel what others feel. Emotional skills are the basis for being well-adjusted in society, succeeding in school and growing up happy.

In the context of self-regulation, it is important to also define self-motivation – the internal motivation that can play an important role in self-regulation. It is believed that persons with pronounced emotional intelligence are motivated by things beyond external rewards (such as material rewards, money or social recognition). They persevere in meeting their internal needs and goals and have a high degree of self-regulation that enables them to focus on actions and defined goals, even when these activities are not enjoyable; on the contrary, they may be tiring, boring, require delaying other enjoyable activities or investing a lot of effort, etc.

Self-motivation is important for a child's development. From a very young age, children express curiosity about their surroundings and a desire to master their environment in various ways. The shaping of the child's awareness of her own possibilities begins in the family environment. Still, parental expectations are not enough. Without emphasising the importance of learning and appropriate support, the child will not develop self-respect and self-motivation. **Giving the child an opportunity to find the answer herself is a way to hell her that it is good to rely on yourself and your own abilities.** Success means knowing how to deal with failure. Even though failure brings with it unpleasant emotions (sadness, anxiety, anger), in order to succeed, the child must learn to deal with these feelings. In order to master the world around

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37 Adapted from: Vranješević J. et al. (2019). Kindergarten as a Safe and Enabling Environment for Children's Learning and Development

her and her reactions to it, she must sometimes experience failure and feel bad about it, but then try again – until she succeeds, which is also the way to develop self-motivation.

3.3.3. Awareness of Others/Social Awareness[38]

As her sense of self develops, the child also becomes aware of the existence of others as separate persons, and of differences and separateness from others. Children who develop a sense of self have a more developed awareness of others. How much an awareness of others has been developed can be deduced based on the following behaviour of small children:

- the child begins playing with similar toys and in similar ways to another child (starts at around the age of 18 months and indicates that the child is somewhat aware of the activities and intentions of another child);
- empathy, care and comforting another show that the child is aware of the feelings of others.

We can infer that by developing a sense of self, the child also realises that every person experiences an internal state known only to them and nobody else. This conclusion can be reached based on the following observations:

- children who recognise themselves in the mirror and exhibit developed forms of play where they imitate other children at 18 months will show signs of empathy and comforting others at 20 months;
- already by the age of two and a half, the child can speak about her internal processes, using terms such as "I want", "I think", "I'm afraid";
- the child's understanding of internal experience starts developing from the age of 3; she increasingly understands two types of internal experience: emotions related to desire and emotions related to thinking;
- the child understands that we are happy when a wish comes true (we get a present) and sad when it does not (we don't get the present we wanted);
- around the age of four, the child understands that we will feel surprised if something unexpected happens (we will be surprised by rain if we were expecting it to be sunny);
- between four and five, the child can imagine a person having a "wrong belief", i.e. she can "set up" a false trail to get someone else to have the "wrong belief", e.g. that she is hiding in one spot when she is actually hiding in another;
- between 6 and 7, the child fully understands that her internal state differs from the internal state of another – which enables her to depart from egocentrism.

This is how Selman and Birne present the stages of development of the ability to take on the perspective of others (Selman, 1976; Selman and Birne, 1974; quoted in: Vranješević et al., 2019)

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38 Adapted from Vranješević J. et al. (2019). Kindergarten as a Safe and Enabling Environment for Children's Learning and Development

STAGES	APPROXIMATE AGE OF CHILD (YEARS)	DESCRIPTION
Stage 0: non-differentiated perspective taking	3–6	The child sees that she and others can have different thoughts and feelings, but often confuses the two.
Stage 1: perspective taking based on social information	4–9	Children understand that differences in perspective may arise because people have access to different information.
Stage 2: perspective taking based on self-reflection	7–12	Children can "step into someone else's shoes" and observe their own thoughts, feelings and behaviours from the perspective of another person.
Stage 3: taking the perspective of a third person	10–14	They also recognise that others can do the same. The child can step out of a two-person situation and imagine how she herself and the other person is seen by a third, neutral party.
Stage 4: social perspective taking	> 14	Adolescents understand how taking the perspective of a third party can be influenced by broader social values.

Children also go through different phases of developing empathetic behaviour, so that already around age two they show concern for the welfare of others and by age six are able to understand another's point of view. By the time they are 12, children should start being able to expand their empathy beyond the circle of people they know and start showing concern for abstract causes – protecting animals, natural resources, as well as people they will never meet.

Awareness of others is the basis for understanding moral and social norms. The ability to understand the feelings of other people, imagining yourself in someone else's shoes, caring about others and kindness are the foundations of children's moral development. Children also start experiencing unpleasant emotional reactions, such as shame and guilt over breaking ethical rules.

Already from a pre-school age, children learn to understand the difference between "good" and "bad" behaviour, and to develop behaviours that are aligned with what is considered socially acceptable. They also begin to develop concern and a feeling of responsibility for the welfare and rights of others and express this through care, compassion and kindness. Socialising with peers plays a large role in the development of moral thinking. Given that in their everyday socialising with peers, children face various moral dilemmas, they gradually progress to higher stages and resolve similar dilemmas with more complex and effective reasoning. If we want children to be empathetic and cooperate, it is important they be provided with different opportunities to learn about these values at home, at school and in the community. Activities that encourage socio-emotional learning have been created so that children encourage other children to establish good relations and show care for others.

Already from a pre-school age, children learn to understand the difference between "good" and "bad" behaviour, and to develop behaviours that are aligned with what is considered socially acceptable. They also begin to develop concern and a feeling of responsibility for the welfare and rights of others and express this through care, compassion and kindness. Socialising with peers plays a large role in the development of moral thinking. Given that in their everyday socialising with peers, children face various moral dilemmas, they gradually progress to higher stages and resolve similar dilemmas with more complex and effective reasoning. If we want children to be empathetic and cooperate, it is important they be provided with different opportunities to learn about these values at home, at school and in the community. Activities that encourage socio-emotional learning have been created so that children encourage other children to establish good relations and show care for others.

> **If we want children to be empathetic and cooperate, it is important they be provided with different opportunities to learn about these values and that they develop the ability of decentring.**

Empathy or the ability to understand how another person feels is a key skill in socio-emotional competence. It includes much more than simply recognising the emotional states of others: It also entails appropriate responses to recognised emotional states. Empathy enables people to understand the complex dynamics of mutual interaction in various situations in life.

Empathy is the ability to recognise and understand the emotions of another person while maintaining a clear distinction between ourself and the other person. It is crucial for creating good relationships with other people. When we have developed empathy, it is easier to connect with people and build close relationships.

Empathy is an emotional response stemming from an understanding of another person's emotional experience or state, and is identical or similar to what the other person is feeling[39]. Therefore, it is not just observing things from the point of view of another person, but entails experiencing the same emotion that the other person is experiencing. Even though empathy does not in and of itself include helping and other prosocial behaviours, many authors believe it is the basis for such behaviours, which is why it is so important to work on developing empathy from an early age. Empathy should also be distinguished from "over-intensive" empathy or personal distress, when the person feels distress because of having been exposed to another's negative emotional experience and does not deal with the other person, but with her own

39 Eisenberg and Fabes, 1998; as quoted in: Petrović, 2007.

distressing experiences. A child who feels empathy is able to help another person, while a child feeling personal distress is focused on calming herself.

In order to develop the optimal degree of empathy in children, we need to develop their emotional regulation or self-regulation. Empathy develops in children who grow up in an environment that:[40]

- meets the child's emotional needs and does not elicit excessive self-concern;
- encourages the child to express and experience many different emotions;
- enables the child to communicate with others who openly express their emotions.

Decentring is the ability to step out of our own position, our own point of view, and place ourselves in the position of another person, to grasp and understand why the other person behaves and feels as they do. Simply put, decentring is the ability to walk in someone else's shoes. Without this ability, we cannot understand others or build good relationships. Decentring is often the most important factor in the process of successful communication that helps us understand others and better understand ourselves. Only people who understand themselves can understand others; and those who understand others will be naturally inclined towards valid and meaningful exchanges that improve the quality of life in the whole community.

3.3.4. Building Relationships

The ability to build and develop relationships is a life-long process, but its beginnings can already be seen in the first weeks of the baby's life. Six-month-old babies already show interest in other babies and respond positively to them. Affective attachment is usually used to describe the deep and strong emotional bonding of the child with the important person in her life. Good relationships that support the child's well-being and competences include an affective bond with other human being, whether a parent, guardian, teacher or anyone else who has an important role in the child's life. Establishing strong affective relationships enables the child to discover and get to know the world around her and to develop and learn through that process of discovery. Children develop and learn primarily through relationships they establish with grown-ups that have an important role in their life and provide them with love, security and care.

Through relationships, children:
- **express their needs and feelings**
- **build a sense of trust, security and belonging**
- **develop an image of themselves and their identity**
- **develop positive ways of interacting with others**
- **develop mechanisms and capacities for resolving conflicts and dealing with various problems in life.**

In order to develop successfully, the child needs to be provided with the opportunity to participate in, developmentally speaking, increasingly complex activities of exchange with one or more people involved in her upbringing and care with whom she has developed a secure affective bond. Close grown-ups are parents or other grown-ups directly caring for the child. In addition to parents/guardians, they can include other family members, as well as professionals caring for the child.

40 Barnet 1987, as quoted in: Petrović, 2007.

Through play with peers, children learn:

- **how to share, give and receive**
- **to understand their needs, feelings and actions, but also to control their impulses**
- **to explore their surroundings safely**
- **to understand and respect others' views**
- **to communicate and interact**
- **to be accepted and to accept others**
- **what is expected of them and what they can expect of others**
- **to identify strengths and weaknesses in themselves and in others**
- **to take on new roles and responsibilities**
- **to develop a feeling of belonging and acceptance**

Peers and opportunities to interact with them, as well as with younger and older children, to participate in joint activities and build friendships, are all of special significance for the child's development. The key skills that are developed during childhood through relationships with peers are related to developing self-regulation and friendship capacities. In developing relationships with peers, the degree of closeness depends on age, as does how children behave and how they perceive friendship. Between the ages of six and eight, children usually describe friendship and their friends in terms of concrete situations such as joint activities, mutual help or closeness ("He is my friend because we play together"). In that period, criteria for choosing friends are pragmatic, based on concrete activities and not on relatively lasting characteristics. Older children, aged nine to twelve, define friendship by pointing out similarities, liking each other, loyalty, and other more "abstract" criteria. This becomes even more pronounced in the period of middle adolescence when there is significant reciprocity and when children become very sensitive to the needs of others and to inequality and injustice.

Friendship is then defined through caring for others, helping, exchanging emotions, mutual understanding and similar values.

The child's overall development takes place under the influence of a strong mutual relationship between the family and the community. The community is the child's broader environment, both physical and social – various institutions, organisations, and social groups (neighbourhood, relatives, friends, peers), and the social and cultural milieu in which the child grows up. Competences are acquired not only in the process of development, but are also manifested through the relationship between the child and the context supporting competence. In other words, the child's competences are part of a child-context system, and whether they will be manifested and how depends on the quality of this relationship, the extent to which it is enabling and supportive. That is why the relationship between the child and significant grown-up is a crucial regulator of development – it is through this relationship that the child is formed, shaped and guided.

Successful communication is the basis for establishing positive social relationships. At an early age, children should master the skills of introducing themselves, developing dialogue with other children and participating in conversations with their peer group. If the child has not developed communication skills, she may choose the wrong way to interact with other children. Criticising children in such situations can lead to feeling uncomfortable, having low self-esteem and general dissatisfaction. A much better approach is to teach children skills that will enable them to experience the advantages of good communication and success in social interactions.

That is why socio-emotional learning in this area should be geared towards helping children:

- **learn that we as people are always communicating, even when we are not speaking;**
- **learn the skills needed to make and maintain contact with other children/people;**
- **learn to communicate their interests, to tell others what they care about in relation to their peers, games, activities, but also in relation to grown-ups, and why;**
- **articulate how they are trying to achieve what they want (e.g. if someone cares about being good at a sport, why is it important and what are they doing to achieve this goal, etc.).**

When it comes to communication, it is important to make sure that children develop both verbal and non-verbal communication skills. In order to have successful interaction with peers and grown-ups, children should also be aware of non-verbal messages they send to others and be able to recognise the emotional meaning hidden in the "cues" they receive from others. Problems in communication arise when there is a discrepancy between spoken words and body language (verbal and non-verbal messages).

Non-verbal communication skills are divided into two main areas:

- body language (e.g. gestures, eye contact, posture, facial expression, awareness of physical distance and physical appearance),
- paralinguistic cues (e.g. tonality, volume, voice modulation, accent).

Developing communication skills to help build good relationships with others means creating situations where children can learn and practice:

- developing verbal/non-verbal communication skills
- presenting arguments for and against certain views
- avoiding and/or getting out of conflicts or resolving conflicts constructively
- learn, practise and show interest in actively listening to others
- being caring and compassionate
- providing and feeling empathy
- teamwork
- contributing to the group
- respecting the contributions of others

Teamwork encourages the development of socio-emotional skills, enabling children to:
- **suggest, adopt and respect agreed rules (self-control);**
- **try out different roles and responsibilities;**
- **give and receive support and encouragement to take on a task and to take risks;**
- **belong to a group and live with others/those who are different (tolerance; empathy; self-control);**
- **develop group identity ("us");**
- **find positive role models among peers and identify with them;**
- **have a say and participate.**

Teamwork

Developed teamwork skills have multiple uses: not just in building relationships, but in the overall emotional and social development of children. Teamwork can help develop many skills, especially problem solving, reasoning, critical thinking and evaluation skills. Good teamwork also includes learning how to share responsibility, which is an aspect that can be better experienced through doing a joint activity than through executing tasks individually. Working with others, children encounter new ideas, different points of view and solutions. This encourages deeper understanding and higher order thinking, as well as tolerance of others and of different opinions. Teamwork is a good opportunity for every child to show others their skills, knowledge, abilities, talents, and to develop self-confidence. Teamwork is not the same as group work.

Tolerance

The world today and the people in it are characterised by diversity. Some differences among people are evident, visible at first glance, while others are less visible, but no less present and pronounced, such as cultural and religious differences, differences in attitudes, opinions, values and beliefs. Understanding and accepting others, as well as ourselves, is a precondition for peaceful coexistence and individual contentment. The term tolerance is often heard in the context of numerous conflicts, as a way to reach a solution or, even better, a way to prevent conflict. Its importance is also highlighted in an increasing number of research studies concerned with socio-emotional competences.

It is important to know that no one is born either tolerant or intolerant. It is encouraging that tolerance is learned. Contributing to its development are empathy, moral values, knowing right from wrong, familiari-

UNESCO definition of tolerance:

Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.

(from the Declaration of Principles of Tolerance, 1995).

ty with basic human rights and perceiving similarities shared by all people. The development of tolerance is hindered by prejudice (negative views about members of a social group to which the individual does not belong, often accompanied by violent behaviour, discrimination, the isolation of individuals or groups) and stereotypes (unjustified and unfounded beliefs about a person or group).

Societies with a high degree of tolerance respect all differences among people. Tolerance means accepting others just as they are, with all their specificities. When a society seeks to achieve such desirable behaviours and foster such values and virtues, then it is important to teach children tolerance from an early age. Children learn by observing people in their surroundings and this is how they adopt many patterns of behaviour, so it is important to be consistent and express tolerance towards all forms of difference.

3.3.5. Responsible Decision Making

Developing responsible decision making should be supported from the earliest age and consistently throughout the child's period of growing up, because this is a key skill needed by all people and throughout life. Directly related to developing this competence is the concept of **children's participation**, one of the central concepts of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,[41] which also introduces the idea of **evolving capacities** as a criterion for assessing how the child will be included in the process of decision making on matters that concern her.

Children develop their competences best through activity. Enabling children to actively participate in their own development leads to developing competences, which in turn enables more complex forms of participation and leads to new, more complex competences. **In this way, participation is not just a means by which the child is included in the decision-making process, but a way to develop autonomy, independence and new social competences.** That is why it is important that children are given the opportunity to make choices and decisions from an early age.

According to the Convention, there are four levels of children's participation in decision making and their involvement will depend on their evolving capacities:

- information;
- expressing own (informed) opinion;
- right to have their opinion taken into account in decision-making,
- right to participate alone or in cooperation with grown-ups in decisions concerning them.

We know that even very small children are able to express their opinion, if not verbally, then in other ways, as permitted by their communication abilities. Parents learn to understand the signals sent by the child and respond to them as best they can, while the child learns new ways of communicating with parents. At the child grows up, communication becomes increasingly complex, until linguistic abilities and verbal communication develop. The child learns to recognise ways to solve a problem and/or satisfy a need, and to distinguish which responses lead to the desired outcome and which do not. She also learns that perseverance can lead to the desired outcome, in which situations she has a choice and in which she does not, and where

41 Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989

the parents/grown-ups have set the boundaries. However, when determining the "weight" of the child's opinion, the key factor are her evolving capacities, or estimated level of developmental competences. Even though the Convention (Article 12) says that all children are capable of forming their own views and that these should be taken into account, many experts and practitioners are still debating whether children can decide for themselves, whether they can participate in the decision-making process, while grown-ups maintain responsibility for the outcome of the decision.

When it comes to children's competences for participation, various authors provide various definitions, but most of them are concerned with the highest level of participation, i.e. decision making. Given that the decision-making process can be independent and children can decide on their own, or in cooperation and agreement with grown-ups, this highest level of participation includes informing children and giving them the opportunity to express their views, which will be taken into account in joint decision making.

Some authors have identified the following as important competences for participation in decision making:[42]

- ability to understand and exchange relevant information – the child should be able to understand alternative possibilities in problem solving, to express what she prefers, articulate the reasons and ask questions relevant to the problem;
- the ability to think independently (to a certain degree) and to make choices – the child should be able to choose without coercion and to independently think about a problem/topic;
- the ability to assess potential benefits, as well as risks and negative consequences of a decision/action – the child should be able to assess the consequences of a decision/action, its impact and the degree of risk involved, as well as the short- and long-term implications of the action.

> A child's participation competence must always be assessed against a given context, a specific situation, i.e. the environment and the child's evolving capacities.

Hart[43] cites a number of competences considered relevant for participation:

- developed language ability (ability to use language to communicate with others);
- decentring ability (understanding different points of view);
- ability for abstract thought and planning;
- understanding temporal perspectives;
- ability to concentrate.

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42 Lansdown, G. (2005). Early Childhood Development
43 Hart, R. (1997). Children's Participation

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In addition to mostly cognitive competences, there are also important competences for participation that fall within the **scope of social, emotional and moral development** of the child. Thus, some authors refer to a relatively stable system of values accepted in a given cultural and social context as the basis for decision making, while others note the ability to cooperate, empathy, the ability to control impulses, especially negative feelings such as fear and rage; the ability to delay gratification, tolerance of frustration, self-respect and assertiveness.[44]

Relevant literature also notes the importance of the self-image that is dominant within a given developmental period,[45] including self-perception, understanding of own competences, desirable and undesirable characteristics, attitude to success/failure, goals, values and the ways a person interprets messages about themselves received from other significant persons. Self-image is closely related to the feeling of self-respect and self-confidence, which will depend on the extent to which our self-image corresponds with feedback from important persons in our environment.[46]

Similarly, prosocial behaviour, care for others, respecting others and being prepared to help them, taking responsibility for one's actions, all these are important competences for participation. Autonomy, i.e. independence in decision making and behaviour, is what makes the most difference in terms of competence and incompetence.

All of these competences fall within what the Convention refers to as the evolving capacities of the child. Participation competences can be gradated, where the child can have them to a greater or lesser degree and they evolve gradually, are perfected and become more complex. The decisive role in their development is played by **social interaction and stimuli from the child's environment**. Similarly, participation competences should be assessed in terms of the given area of decision making. Competence cannot be assessed on its own, without taking into account the types of decisions the child is supposed to make, her previous experience in these matters, the information she has received and the way such information was presented. Participation competences do not depend only on cognitive abilities, those of understanding and reasoning, but also on:

- the information available to children and the way it is presented,
- the environment where the decisions are being made (is it familiar or not),
- the meaning and significance of the decision for the child,
- contextual knowledge, i.e. the child's previous experience in the matter to be decided.[47]

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44 Ibid.

45 Thus, for example, in middle childhood, the dominant feelings include diligence, motivation, focus on the environment and desire to affirm competences in the environment.

46 Flekkoy (1993), Monitoring Implementation of the UN Convention on the National Level, The International Journal of Children's Rights, 1(2), 233–236.

47 Vranješević J. (2007). Participativna prava deteta i pojam razvojnih mogućnosti. [Participative Rights of the Child and the Concept of Evolving Capacities] Zbornik radova: Didaktičko-metodički aspekti promena u osnovnoškolskom obrazovanju.[Conference Proceedings: Didactic and Methodological Aspects of Changes in Primary Education] Teaching Faculty, Belgrade, p. 251–260.

How Grown-ups Can Support Children in the Decision-Making Process

Grown-ups can help children understand that decision making means we are able to review all the possibilities and their implications, assess advantages and shortcomings, as well as feasibility, and choose the best for us or for our situation, taking care to make sure our decisions do not harm others. They can also help children understand that decisions and opinions are not once and for all, but change depending on the situation, age and other circumstances. New experience or new information can make us change our mind or our decision. In order for children to make good decisions, it is important that grown-ups create opportunities for children to learn how to make decisions, taking into account their own opinions as well as the opinions of others and thinking about the potential consequences of their actions, for them personally and for others. They should be supported in re-evaluating their decisions by seeing causal links between a behaviour and its direct consequences. It is important that in making decisions, we are accountable to ourselves and to others, but also that we remain true to ourselves and our values, desires and aspirations and not give into persuasion or pressure.

Decision making and critical thinking skills include creating situations where children can learn and practice:

- **searching for and finding reliable sources of information,**
- **critically appraising known and less known facts and logically connecting available information,**
- **analysing the situation, taking stock of potential activities that can be undertaken,**
- **critically analysing various options,**
- **assessing implications for themselves and others,**
- **finding alternative solutions,**
- **analysing myths and delusions,**
- **analysing the role of peers,**
- **analysing social and cultural norms and influences,**
- **objectively making decisions/solving problems.**

Peer Pressure

During childhood, and especially in adolescence, many children face peer pressure from either a group or an individual. While peer pressure can be positive, it most often refers to pressure on a child/adolescent to engage in risky behaviour. This includes various behaviours, such as smoking, experimenting with psychoactive substances, alcohol, early start of sexual relations, participation in delinquent activities, etc.

Children/adolescents can find it very hard to withstand peer pressure for a number of reasons:

- they are afraid of being rejected,
- they want to be accepted, they want others to like them,

- they don't want to lose a friend,
- they don't want to be teased or made fun of,
- they don't want to hurt someone's feelings,
- they're not sure what they want,
- they don't know how to get out of a situation in which they are exposed to pressure.

Peer pressure can appear in the form of open, verbal or concealed, non-spoken pressure. It can be manifested as open threats, belittling, teasing, false argumentation or quasi-arguments (marijuana is not a drug, everybody drinks...), etc. In some situations, a child feels she is expected to act a certain way, even though she was never explicitly told to do so. An adolescent feels pressure to do something everyone else is allegedly doing (e.g. "everyone" has already tried marijuana... and they keep talking about it).
Grown-ups can help children learn how to resist verbal and non-verbal pressure. Activities need to be organised for children to practice standing up to pressure by:

- checking whether their impression is accurate (e.g. are all adolescents really having sex or drinking alcohol or smoking marijuana...),
- thinking about how certain behaviours entail risks and consider those risks,
- leave a situation in which they feel pressured.

Children, and especially adolescents, should be told that sometimes it is ok to give into peer pressure. What the adolescent should learn is how to recognise situations when going along with the group will be more harmful than beneficial, either to the adolescent or to others, and how to stand up to pressure in such situations. Adolescents should learn that they should never go along with a group of peers if this goes against their conscience and/or the values and norms accepted in a community.

The Importance of Assertiveness in Responsible Decision Making

Assertiveness is the ability to express yourself and advocate for your rights without endangering the rights of others. It is adequate, direct, open and honest communication with others. A person acting assertively feels self-confidence and is usually respected by her peers and friends. Assertiveness increases the likelihood of healthy relationships with others, feeling good and having better control over everyday life. All of this increases decision-making ability and the likelihood of achieving what you want in life.

Assertiveness includes the following:

- The person clearly expresses what they feel, need and how to achieve it.
- The person is capable of communicating calmly, without attacking others.
- The person says "yes" when they want something and "no" when they don't want something (they do not go along just to please others).
- Decide to persevere with their demands, set clear boundaries and defend their position, even when this will lead to conflict.
- Be self-confident in resolving any conflicts that may arise.
- Understand how to communicate if two people want different outcomes.

- Be capable of openly talking about themselves and able and willing to hear others out.
- Body language (non-verbal communication) is open, self-confident and does not show hostility, distress or confusion.
- Be capable of receiving positive and negative messages.
- Have a positive, optimistic attitude.

It is important that children learn to be assertive and:
- **know how to express their wishes and needs,**
- **stand up for their rights**
- **resist peer pressure and pressure from other persons pushing them into various risky behaviours.**

Those who are not able to act assertively may respond in essentially two ways: they can be passive, or they can be aggressive in various circumstances in life. When a person puts the needs, attitudes and judgements of others before their own needs, attitudes or judgements, they are likely to feel hurt, anxious or angry. In such situations, the person may use sarcasm, put up a resistance or remain quiet and withdrawn to their own detriment. As opposed to assertiveness, aggressiveness means that the person insists on their rights at the expense of others or by belittling and humiliating them. Aggressiveness in an interlocutor usually causes anger or a desire for revenge, and can have the opposite effect to what the person acting aggressively intended. One of the common misconceptions about assertiveness is that it entails aggressiveness. While assertiveness means clearly and calmly thinking and negotiating, where both persons are respected and each has the right to their opinion, aggressiveness means caring only for your own needs and is accompanied by intense feelings that escalate and leave no room for communication. As opposed to aggressive persons, passive persons do not express their will or wishes, they give others precedence at their own expense, they give in to the wishes of others and keep their concerns and needs to themselves.

How to Explain Ethics and Moral Responsibility to Children

Adopting moral rules and norms is inextricably linked to intellectual and emotional development. It is important to understand two main stages in the development of morals and distinguish between what is known as heteronomous morality, typical of early childhood, and autonomous or mature morality. In the first case, the child adopts norms and rules of behaviour under adult guidance – the child knows what is allowed and what isn't, but grown-ups oversee her behaviour. Autonomous morality, which begins to develop already around age ten, means "internalising" or accepting norms and behaviours and developing a conscience. There is less need for external oversight in order for the person to behave morally. Grown-ups can very successfully help children adopt moral norms (know the rules, norms), and act in accordance with them. Just like any other behaviour, moral behaviour has its pleasant and unpleasant emotions (pride, gratitude, respect, shame, regret, guilty conscience). This triangle, knowledge – behaviour – feelings, is the domain of activity for children's moral development.

Already at a young age, children can be led to understand that being honest means not lying, not deceiving, but telling the truth, not breaking rules in order to gain some benefit, not cheating, not taking something that does not belong to you, not stealing, and not doing anything they would rather conceal because it goes against what is considered morally right. It can also be explained to children that it is morally right to do good things even when no one sees you doing them (e.g. not making a mess, protecting the environment, helping those in need, etc.).

It is not always possible, and neither is it necessary or good to control children's behaviour. What we can do is be consistent in our actions towards and requirements of children, making it clear that insincerity and dishonesty are unacceptable behaviours. We should bear in mind that most children sometimes lie, and this should not cause too much concern or a hasty reaction, especially not punishment. However, if such behaviour is frequent, a response is needed in order to:

- determine the nature and context of the lies, i.e. cause, motive;
- when the child admits to making a mistake/lying, we should appreciate that honesty;
- criticise the lie/action and not the child personally;
- point out how to behave next time;
- help the child understand why it is important to tell the truth.

A very useful strategy for educational action is making skilled use of learning opportunities – be they topics from real life situations that provide direct insight into an action or virtual and/ or imaginary situations where the child's behaviour and responses can be analysed.

It is important to create situations and conduct activities to help children learn to believe in themselves, because this renders insincerity and dishonesty pointless. Research has shown that grown-ups can use their own characteristics and actions to help children develop faith in themselves, by showing them:

- care and dedication,
- a clear system of values and behaving in line with those values,
- generosity and acceptance of differences,
- ability to overcome obstacles, showing children that success is possible.

The values and virtues adopted in this environment can easily be generalised and extended to other areas of life.

Children need an environment where they feel:

- safe, but not overprotected to the point where experiencing things for themselves is unjustifiably restricted,
- sure that their needs and interests will be respected and supported,
- included, in harmony and like they belong,

where they can:

- be involved in diverse, creative, meaningful and satisfying activities,
- be heard and communicate,
- be surrounded by things that are familiar as well as new challenges,

The child is the bearer of rights – every child has the right to a happy childhood, good quality education, and active participation. Every child has the right to respect for differences in terms of personal, cultural, linguistic and family identity.

where they learn:

- how to make good choices,
- how to negotiate and reach agreement,
- how to explore,
- how to develop close and reciprocal relationships based on respect and acceptance.

Instead of a Conclusion

Childhood is shaped by society and culture, and children are at the same time the most vulnerable and the most valuable resource of any society. The child is viewed as rich in potential, competent, as strong and powerful, as an agent of her own development and learning. Children's individuality, strengths, rights and needs are the basis of working with children and implementing the Programme for Development of Socio-emotional Competences.[48]

The Programme for Development of Children's Socio-emotional Competences is created, constructed and developed in the real-life context of educational practice. From the perspective of the child, the Programme is closely related to and manifested as the achievement of her well-being. The well-being of the child is achieved through relationships that are developed with the environment, peers and grown-ups in real-life situations of educational practice and everyday life. Educators, given the child/children they work with and starting from the actual programme for children, work together with children, their parents and other significant grown-ups to plan, review, document, develop and constantly improve the Programme. That is why it is important for everyone to understand that the Programme cannot and should not be a predefined document that educators strictly follow, but has to be developed with joint participation of all stakeholders in the educational process and shaped by the culture of the implementing institution/organisation, family, local community and broader social context. The immediate community is the place where children grow up and learn, and it is, therefore, crucial that children participate meaningfully in the life of the community, and above all the institution implementing the Programme for Development of Socio-emotional Competences.

Participation is the catalyst of development; children develop their competences through activities, so it is important to give them ample opportunities to be active participants in their own development. In terms of the values at the heart of the Programme, we have pointed out the importance of the family for children's development, which is why the Programme is developed with respect for family and cultural specificities and different ways of including the family and the community in its development. A good-quality programme will ultimately promote and support play as a natural and constructive way for the child to interact with peers, grown-ups and the environment. Through play, children gain benefits, they learn and develop, and that is why it must be part of the Programme.

The implementation of the Programme for Development of Children's Socio-emotional Competences is a specific and dynamic process that cannot be fully mapped out. It should not be simply applying theoretical knowledge, a prescribed programme and ready-made instructions, but requires constant re-examination of theoretical postulates, current practices and one's own attitudes and values in a given social context. This process should proceed through continuous exchange with other educators and practitioners, with parents and children.

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48 Pavlović Breneselović D., Krnjaja Ž. (2017). Kaleidoskop/Osnove diversifikovanih programa predškolskog vaspitanja i obrazovanja
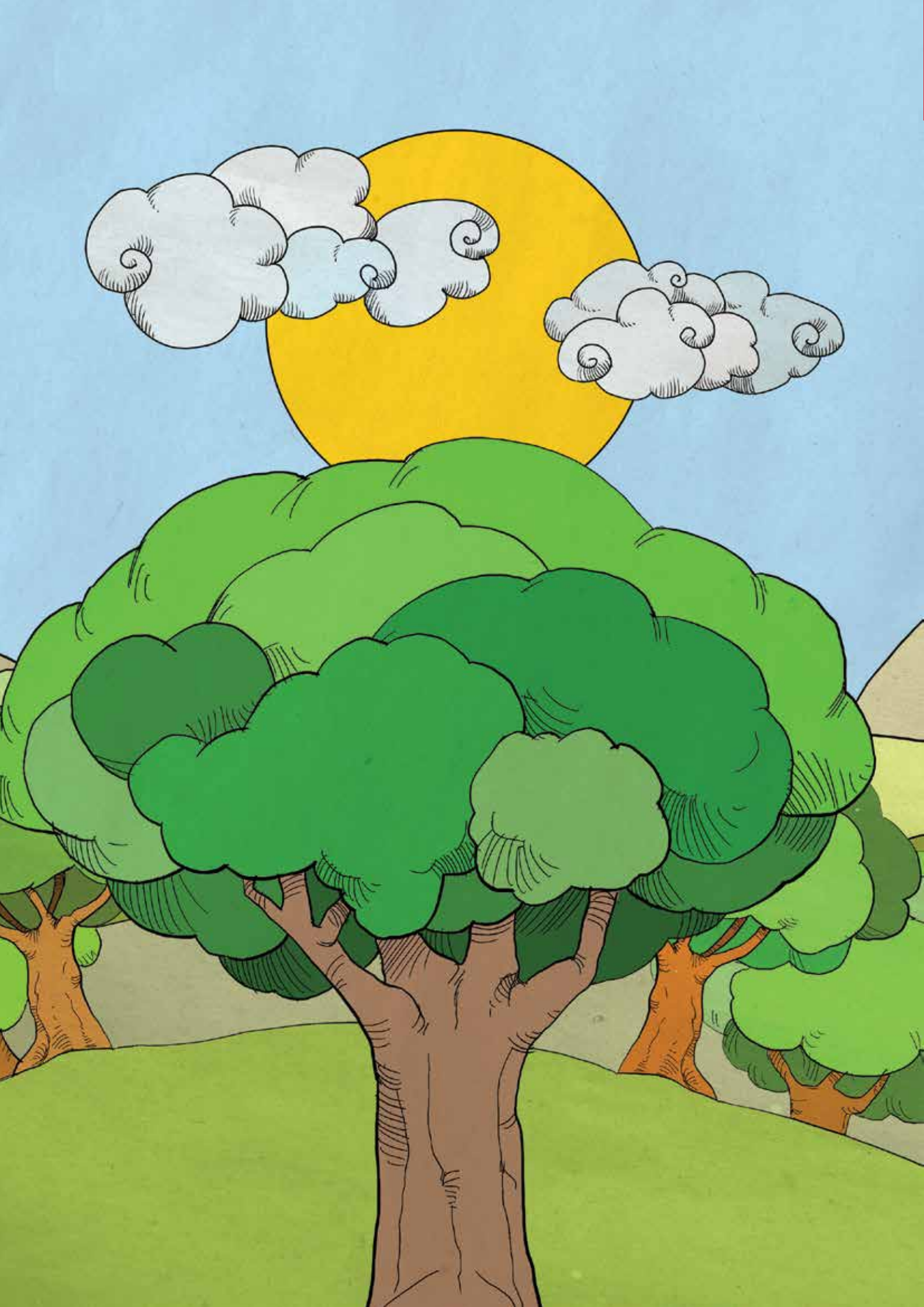
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