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## The Relation between Anger and Emotional Synchronization in Children from Divorced Families

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### Abstract

Affective life is extremely important. Emotions determine well-being, satisfaction and fulfillment. The regulatory process of affectivity reflects the relationships between individuals in subjective experiences.

Family is the first healthy environment where a child must satisfy his need for love, acceptance, emotional synchronization and full emotional tank.

Anger often occurs, altering interpersonal relationships. Poor anger management is closely related with child's current and future problems such as school abandonment, failure, poor human relationships, resulting in a rejection of his family values.

Our survey deals with the child-adult relationships management. A divorced family generates poor attachments and grief in children. Parents should support and help children to satisfy their affective needs and overcome the divorce trauma more easily. A play-centered parental action is proposed.

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*Keywords:* Anger; divorce; emotional tank; emotional synchronization

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### 1. Introduction

Motto: “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it”  
(Solomon's Advice)

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Affective life plays an extremely important role in everything we do, because emotions determine the human well-being, the long term satisfaction and fulfillment of the individual.

Affectivity is the regulatory process which reflects the relationships between individuals, under the form of subjective experiences resulted from the fact that certain needs are or are not satisfied.

We are social beings and we have feelings, we need to belong to certain groups, to love and to be loved therefore we must be aware that attachment is essential for our development.

There is a determining relationship between the quality of the attachment established in childhood and the adult's life.

## **2. Theoretical foundation**

Psychologists specialized in psychoanalysis believe that attachment styles, generally the affective relationships established between parents and children in their early childhood, have a great impact on the future development of the adult and on the adult configuration of human personality.

To a certain extent, the attachment styles come to light in any close relationships where love relationships can most easily be noticed. Each of these styles ultimately influences the love life of the individual (Hazan, C. and Shaver, P., pp. 511-524).

Family is the first healthy environment of a child, where he makes his first small, timid and clumsy steps toward his development. It is essential that family should satisfy the child's needs – the parental support involving both the material and the cognitive support, but mainly the affective support. The child should feel that he is loved, accepted, valorized and his emotional tank should be maintained full.

All these three types of support are most important and they are both interdependent and interrelated. None of them can miss or be less important. But the lack of the affective support may be considered a form of emotional abuse and has negative consequences upon the child's development.

Children permanently need to integrate into their own minds the ideas and feelings about their parents. In conflicting families, the foundation for the child's feelings and also for his future behaviour is built upon the frequent fights, separations and violent speech between his parents. The child's mental representations of his parents cannot be put together, they cannot function together, they will always contradict each other and so the child will be find it difficult to transpose these representations in everyday life. Some parents avoid tense talks in the presence of their children, but they overlook a very important aspect, namely that the child has an innate tendency to interpret and imagine scenarios.

Therefore, parents should voice their disagreements in an open manner, maintaining a calm tone, instead of simulating a perfect relationship between them. They should deal with anger in a mature way.

## **3. Anger**

Anger is the emotion which most often creates problems in interpersonal relationships, hence within the family. Not necessarily the occurrence of anger itself, but the way it is expressed creates problems. It often leads to verbal or physical ill-treatment within the family and equally often it has an impact upon the child.

Anger is an emotion we, as adults, have so far understood very little, although it is a normal, real and human emotion. Anger is neither positive nor negative, but it can be stimulating for us, it can guide us to adopt an attitude or another.

We can hardly express in words what we feel when we are angry. And we know even less how to deal with it and transform it into something constructive, how to master it. If we, the adults, cannot understand this emotion of ours, we cannot define and maturely manage it, how can we ask a child to master his anger?

Poor anger management is closely associated with all the child's problems, whether current or future, from school abandonment and failure to poor human relationships. Dealing with anger in an immature way becomes the main for the rejection of the family values by the child.

Thus, the atmosphere in disorganized families after divorce, the lack of self control and expressed affectivity lead to social maladjustment and inevitably to the formation of a deficient attachment style in the child.

Furthermore, the families characterized by a *strong* conflicting potential, with *psycho-affective and psycho-moral* lacks, largely affect the psychological and psycho-social maturation process of the child.

The valorizing or non-valorizing model provided by the family, the values transmitted by his parents, whether negative or positive, as well as his own representation of his parents will contribute to the structuring of the child's personality.

The child's behaviour is always configured through the identification with and the interiorization into the self and the others. Thus, the human ego is usually shaped in a triangular constellation of factors: love, authority and family safety. Any affective lack, as well as any abuse of authority will cause behavioural disorders in the child, following the parents' failure to fulfill their tasks, and the child identifies with his pathogenic parents.

The family becomes a true school for the child's feelings, based on maternal affectivity and paternal authority.

If he spends his childhood in a family environment which is full of privations and hostilities, in conditions depriving him of affection and of the adequate satisfaction of his natural desires and aspirations, the child will experience the so-called conflict of adjustment, expressed in an attitude of protest against any resistance, opposition or interdiction from outside.

The divorce has negative consequences for the whole family, whether adults or children. Specialized studies show that the effects of divorce upon adults are similar to its impact produced upon children. The adults feel that their affective safety is threatened, they mourn the loss, have feelings of frustration, guilt, anger, low self esteem, while the children have a poor performance at school, behavioral problems, even a delinquent behavior, adjustment difficulty, feelings of guilt, anger .

Unfortunately, the statistics show that the number of divorces has significantly increased in recent years, but the violent environment in which the children live, the fights and disputes occurring between the parents in the presence of their children have a much greater impact than the divorce itself.

The child learns through imitation, he observes the others acting around him and then he exercises himself and is convinced that he is doing what and as he should do. In other words, witnessing all the disputes between his parents, the physical and verbal expression thereof, the child starts imitating this behaviour when he is interacting with his peers, believing that is the normal way to behave, while later on he will interiorize this behaviour which is to be also manifested in his intimate relationships.

After his parents' separation, the child remains with a certain attachment figure. However, if the parents focus on their own emotional problems, their attention towards their child becomes increasingly reduced and in this case the child may develop an insecure attachment style towards both of his parents, feeling unsafe and abandoned, neglected not only by one parental figure, but by both of them.

Divorce causes a great deal of negative psychic effects, such as anger against one or both parents, insecurity, sadness, even depression. Fortunately, many children learn – helped by their parents or by the psychotherapist – how to accept their past, while the parents learn how to make a place for their future, to cut their own way in life.

The child coming from a divorced family has the same needs as the child who comes from an intact family, but the way in which the needs of each are satisfied differ a lot.

The parent who remains alone is also emotionally hurt, his/her emotional tank is emptied and he/she "tries to take care of his/her child who is affected by the trauma of the divorce and he also has an empty emotional tank. The other parent has gone, but the most important thing for the adult who is now alone is to try to convince the child that life is beautiful. For that, the parent must act as an authentic parent and, on the one hand, he/she needs to fill his/her own emotional tank and on the other hand to find the necessary place and time, in the few moments when he/she is not busy, to have an authentic relationship with his/her child.

If he satisfies his need to be loved, mainly in times of physical and emotional separation, the child may overcome the divorce traumas more easily.

The feelings occurring most often in children who experienced the drama of a divorce are the following: anger, fear, anxiety and guilt. These may empty his love tank, as the child feels he is abandoned, excluded and not loved, and also responsible for his parents' divorce. He has an acute need to express these emotions orally, physically and

in an artistic manner. Anger may be expressed in words, but most often the child cannot define it, anger remains blocked inside him, and then he starts somatizing or expressing it in his own behaviour.

The child's need for love is the same as before his parents' divorce, but now his emotional tank is empty after this separation trauma. To repair and refill this tank means to express affection, to make or re-make the bond between parent and child. It is not only an emotional, but also a physical synchronization with the child. Emotional synchronization means the parent's presence, measured by quality not necessarily by quantity. The parent should be connected with his child and physical synchronization is touching, patting, hugging.

When the children feel connected with their parent, even if for a short while, they feel they are better centered and are belonging to each other. The bond with his parent is like a string tied to an air balloon. If the string is untied, the balloon will further float in the air in a chaotic way. The emotions of the child who feels he has been disconnected will accompany him anywhere and everywhere, in all his behaviours, in all his present or future relationships. Moreover, these behaviours will serve as models for the future generation. And so on...

#### **4. Emotional synchronization**

Our theoretical research and experience in psychology (as a psychologist) have demonstrated that emotional synchronization and physical touch are the first two requisites of a secure attachment and the basic elements for children's healthy growth, acting like a magic wand for them. Every day, parents should intentionally connect with their children in the three critical points of the day: at breakfast time, at lunch time and in the evening, at bedtime, when he/she should stay with them, talk with them, tell or read them stories in bed before they fall asleep every evening.

Through synchronization with the child's grief, through emotional support, sympathy and physical touch, the parent will help the child "unblock" and become aware of his moods, emotions and feelings, able to let them out or express them freely, under various forms. The child should be allowed to consume his grief and then to find comfort and acceptance near his parent.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler identified 5 stages of grief: (1) denial, (2) anger, (3) bargaining, (4) depression and (5) acceptance.

Yet, none of us has a linear move through these stages of grief, completing one stage and immediately going to the next stage, we all move back and forth, between them. We can even reach acceptance and after that we can be thrown back into anger or depression, in the context of an anniversary date or other memories.

As time goes on, particularly when you are encouraged to share your feelings with someone who supports you and is close to you, those emotions of anger and despair are increasingly milder, while during the periods of acceptance they are increasingly stronger.

The children who suffered the trauma of a divorce are scared by the intensity of their own deep feelings of sadness, anger, grief and anxiety. The child should be able to reveal his soul, he should be allowed to feel and experience his emotions, verbalize them, exteriorize them under any form which he himself will find adequate, so that he could stand the traumatic memories and the intense emotions he has experienced during his life. These children cannot be forced to open themselves unless they feel safe or prepared to overcome their grief.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The ideal family therapy should ensure that the child learns how to verbalize his sadness and knows he will be working on his grief only under his therapist's guidance.

Grief is something that persists over time, transforming from an "overwhelming" to a "tolerable" grief. The therapist will try to remove the barriers against the child's grief and, as time goes on, he/she will be able to normally process this grief. The synchronization between the parent and the child, the physical and emotional bonds are vital in bringing the necessary comfort and safety in the child's life.

Awareness, sympathy and consideration for the child's needs, self-analysis, expression of own needs (emotional in particular) build the foundation for an environment based on love, empathy, sympathy, respect, confidence and the expression of confidence. This environment ensures the framework for the emotional balance, the maturation of the personality and the pro-social behavior of the child.

## 6. Proposal for a future survey

Time pressure, busy timetables both for adults and children, extracurricular activities, sports, piano, dance, even personal development lessons, homework – all these may be real barriers against the child's synchronization "in the real play".

Unstructured time is beneficial to the child, it allows him to relax, simply to play, to experience life situations, in other words, to live his childhood.

Within the therapeutic intervention model based on experience psychotherapy through play, we propose to encourage the child to play and progress in various areas, by initiating games together with his parent, bringing out lots of "real" toys, such as dolls, cubes, drawing tools, backgammon, clothes for disguise games – all these can facilitate the child's imagination, creativity and interrelationship formation.

We believe this interaction is an extremely important benefit for both the parent and the child, a win-win game: to play together, to emotionally and physically synchronize with each other, in other words to enjoy together, to share their happiness and to fill their emotional tanks with love. Spending as much time as possible with children, emotionally synchronizing with them, is for a parent the easiest and handiest way to bring the necessary comfort and safety in their life.

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