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**Promoting
a permanent system
to safeguard minors,
in the Church and
in the community**

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Project sponsors:

«This dark cloud also challenges all young people who love Jesus Christ and His Church: they can be a source of great healing if they employ their great capacity to bring about renewal, to urge and demand consistent witness, to keep dreaming and coming up with new ideas».

(Pope Francis, *Christus vivit,* n. 100)

To children asking to be cared for,
to young people looking for safe reference figures

Foreword

Lorenzo Ghizzoni*

The project and pathway "Safe: Educating and Welcoming in Safe Environments", coordinated by the Community Pope John XXIII, together with Azione Cattolica (more specifically its youth branch, AC Ragazzi), Centro Sportivo Italiano and the Department of Sociology and Law of Economics at Bologna University, with its inter-disciplinary Research Centre on Victimology and Safety (CIRViS), involving almost one thousand participants in twenty-seven Italian areas, is highly relevant and very well done.

Already the first publication by Raffaella Sette and Simone Tuzza, *Promoting Safe Educational Environ-*

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ments (Ave 2021), focused on "preventing abuse in ecclesial contexts", included an outline of the contents used for training staff, educators, coordinators and sport coaches in those three important faith-based movements, so widespread in many sections of the Italian Church.

These insights will allow for valid and scientifically appropriate tools for those who provide the child protection services required in accordance with the choices made by Bishops over the past few years, with the publication of the *Guidelines for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Persons* (CEI and CISM, 2019), as well as by selecting contact persons in Dioceses, regional coordinators, Bishops in charge of the issue for each region, in respect of the great effort expected from us in order to prevent abuse against children and vulnerable persons. The data included here provide a closer insight with regard to this terrible hidden scourge, how it is carried out and developed, as well as its application to institutional contexts in the Church, that is to say, all formation, sport and charitable activities where adults come in contact with adolescents, teenagers and children who are at least in part fragile and vulnerable.

The prevention we are organising in ecclesial communities, with Best Practices still far from being completely and satisfactorily implemented (as drafted for example in a teaching aid by the National Child Protection Service) is a topic for reflection and discus-

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sion regarding contents and experience of operators in the "Safe Project", as well as with those civil society organisations that have already made much progress and implemented important guidelines in this regard.

The Italian Catholic Church is also moving in directions which, so far, have been hard to take and conflictual within it: the focus is on transparency and overcoming the rule of silence and secrecy which ended up just harming the victims of abuse, without saving the life of the Church from the evil undermining several of its pastoral life centres. The main purpose is to create a culture based on respecting children, teenagers and adolescents, male and female, both in physical and psychological terms, against power, spiritual, conscience or sexual abuse, all dynamically interconnected.

In order to pursue this objective, thus preventing and facilitating disclosure of any abuse – as rightly mentioned in the book – it is necessary to train the whole Christian community – and indirectly all families and educators from any other centre. In fact, we have noticed that abuse often occurs where the reaction is "not knowing" and "not wanting to see or hear", "not believing" that such things may happen "among us", or that there may be people involved in any authoritative, important positions, possibly from the clergy or the religious world. Believing teenagers or children, when they send express or implicit signals regarding what they or their friends are being subjected to, is a necessary part of any educational, ecclesi-

al and family relation, although this is not taken for granted by the population at large. We need a sort of cultural "reclaiming" and it is urgent. As Italian Church we have started on this path, validated by the very strong input from Pope Francis, with his rather vigorous guidelines, also in terms of Canon Law, by the choice of Italian bishops to start auditing and investigation processes every time there are reports or complaints, and to always cooperate with civil authorities, possibly even against the wish of parents or guardians, whenever there is a clear risk of recurrence, because the wellbeing and protection of children is regarded as a paramount value.

In this second publication, *This is not an App. Promoting a Permanent System to Safeguard Minors, in the Church and in the Community*, so brilliantly introduced by its coordinator Chiara Griffini (psychotherapist and contact person for child protection in the Diocese of Piacenza, Italy), those (from the three ecclesial organisations) who conducted this formation pathway present a prevention model supported by experiences and pathways which is intended to become a stable option, thus creating a permanent culture in our ecclesial communities and civil society.

As a matter of fact, the cases emerging with increased frequency also in our family and association settings – including the Church – tell us how necessary it is to intervene to protect children from family and social distress, from violence, from physical or psycho-

logical abuse, as well as from those "adults" who hover like wolves in homes, faith-based organisations, places where minors meet or practice sport, or groom them on the internet, at a frighteningly increasing rate. It is a fairly new chapter, but it should necessarily become part of the educational relationship between parents or educators and children. The latter, in fact, already during their pre-teen years, browse the internet without criteria and without critical spirit, navigating the murky sea of easy and often perverse sex which they discover online.

Family, group, sport relations – as mentioned in the text – should be readdressed towards essential human and Christian values: they should be managed carefully, respectfully but also firmly, because the worlds of abuse are aggressive, subtle and destructive in respect of the body, psyche and soul of young people, often in an irreversible manner. It is worth mentioning that individual educators are not alone in bearing this new responsibility. Any component of both Christian community and civil society need to be made aware and involved in facing this "virus" which leads to exploiting and abusing the most fragile and the little ones; unless we do this, individuals will never succeed on their own. It needs to be a consistent and engaging action, to defeat the systematic trend aimed at diminishing, covering up, cancelling and dismissing crimes, to the advantage of perpetrators while causing their victims very serious damage.

On a positive note, it is worth mentioning that the indications by the Holy See and by Italian Bishops were readily and willingly accepted in many dioceses. This shows a sensitivity which is undoubtedly present in our Church. Also young people have shown great interest – which gives us hope, exactly as Pope Francis mentioned: alongside young people wounded by abuse, there may be young people committed to healing these wounds, and young people can give a strong impulse for renewal (*Christus vivit*, no. 99 e 100). In this regard, the "Safe Project" has involved many people in the formation activities (in the case of ACR all of them), which confirms the Pope's words. The effort put in by the almost one thousand participants in the "Safe Project", as well as by all those who participated as classroom trainers and tutors, did not make much noise, but it was there.

Of course, this is just the beginning: however, something that started so well stands a pretty good chance of growing and becoming consolidated. This is the wish and thankfulness that we, as National Child Protection Service at Cei, express not just to the three organisations that worked so well together (Community Pope John XXIII, Azione Cattolica Ragazzi and Centro Sportivo Italiano). It is a wish we extend to all pastoral operators, clergy and laity, to educators on all levels of the Italian Church: that this tool might help them become true "guardians" of our little ones.

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Introduction

Chiara Griffini

**Promoting safe educational
and welcoming contexts, a valuable
development window not just for minors**
The "Safe Project" – Educating and Welcoming in
safe environments", co-funded by the European Un-
ion, was launched in the autumn of 2019. For two
years it has helped create a network of faith-led move-
ments in the Italian ecclesial world, including three
associations: Community Pope John XXIII, Azione
Cattolica, CSI – plus the Department of Sociology
and Law of Economics at *Alma Mater Studiorum* –
University of Bologna, with its multi-disciplinary Re-
search Centre on Victimology and Safety.

The aim of this formative project is preventing
and facing sexual abuse against children in faith-led

groups working with minors in the areas of social protection, recreation and sports.

The three partner associations carry out educational and social activities in these contexts. They have promoted formative pathways for members and coordinators in 27 Italian regions. The university department, on the other hand, has supported the contents of the formative paths from a scientific standpoint[1], promoting a formation aimed at raising awareness about the issue and at increasing empathy among those (belonging to Law-enforcement agencies) who support abuse disclosure.

Preventing and supporting this disclosure are the two primary objectives of the formative pathways promoted. They are closely related, because they share one objective: to promote welcoming communities in respect of the wounds caused by trauma and crimes, such as those connected with sexual abuse and maltreatment of children. The next step is promoting educational pathways based on this welcoming approach, where children are guaranteed environments conducive to their development. Encouraging healthy growth means harnessing the awareness that any educational action entails risks and uncertainties. It is thus essential to practice and integrate them: in fact, only if we know them can we develop the will to make an effort to protect children, making sure

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[1] These contents laid the groundwork for the first publication related to the "Safe Project": R.Sette, S.Tuzza, *Promoting safe educational environments. Preventing abuse in ecclesial contexts*, Ave, Rome 2021.

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that they are accompanied towards physical and psycho-social wellbeing, as well as becoming mature adults.

Guaranteeing this security is a fundamental right for children, agreed at universal level, one on which the future of society is based.

In an essay written a few years ago, mention was made of the figure of the child as a person given to the world (BERTONI *et al.*, 2013), recalling the unchangeable elements which underlie, starting from the family, any educational process. Its aim is to accompany children in their becoming fully human, thus able to enter the adult world and express their intrinsic relational nature as individuals and social beings, with instincts and reason, passions and responsibilities. The "Safe Project", by restoring that vision of childhood (every minor is a child because they have been generated by someone and belong to someone[2]) has chosen to focus on how family, sport and group contexts should accompany any child, as they look onto and move into the world, offering environments and relationships which guarantee a healthy, happy and trusting development in respect of the outside world. At the same time, the project has involved the three associations, as an expression of different, complementary and fundamental life

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[2] The filial identity dimension of the child is widely promoted as best practice for safeguarding the minor in question in ecclesial contexts – never without parents! – in the text edited by G. MARCHETTI AND F. AIROLDI, *Best practices for abuse prevention and child safeguarding in the parish*, promoted by the National Service for minor and vulnerable person protection of the Italian Church.

contexts in a child's psychosocial development, to question themselves about how they respond to the implicit need for trust which all children carry with them, to make them increasingly feel that they are persons given to the world, whose reliability they have experienced, and from which they receive as legacy a drive to transmit the latter through and across generations.

Preventing abuse against children in educational and welcoming contexts, such as those within which the Community Pope John XXIII, Azione Cattolica and Centro Sportivo Italiano operate every day, requires focusing on knowledge of the psycho-pedagogical paradigm of prevention as integrated model of risk and protection factors related to the contexts and to the concept of window within which these factors can be enabled. For the three associations, the "Safe Project" constituted a valuable opportunity to focus on this operative window within each of them, turning it into a development opportunity; to reflect and review their educational mission with children, allowing for their friendly meeting with life; to train educators aware of the custody mandate they have been given; to start monitoring actions in favour of children, as part of an alliance and joint commitment among movements (all belonging to the Church) with a passion for educating young generations[3].

[3] See the papers by G. RAMONDA, V. BOSIO, M. TRUFFELLI in *The Safe Project: formation in the protection of minors and vulnerable persons*, promotional video for the "Safe Project", in bit.ly/39K9IRn

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A renewed culture for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons to rebuild educational relationships

The project started just before the pandemic broke out and was fully implemented in the course of the latter. The pandemic clearly showed the educational emergency which had been highlighted for years by those who work with minors or analyse educational pathways in ecclesial and social contexts, for instance school or youth clubs. Part of this emergency is also online grooming, to which many children have been falling prey during this period, and is including cyber-bullying among peers or *revenge-porn*, which have emerged dramatically during the *lockdown* periods.

The "Safe Project", therefore, even though it might have appeared removed from education and social reality, proved to be fully contemporary to it, delving into what can truly be defined as the present day for Church and society, in respect of their relationship with young generations and their education. The statement by the American Paediatric Society, whereby sexual abuse is the hidden epidemic of the third millennium, has moved from being distant or not belonging to the Italian context to being noteworthy; suffice it to consider the data published by the Polizia Postale on 5th May 2021, National Day against Child Pornography[4].

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[4] The National Centre against child pornography online has reported that, in 2020, there has been an increase by 77% of online crimes

The pandemic has definitely shed light on the risks of the Internet and on how sexual abuse against children online is much more widespread than we might imagine. However, the distress detected among children and teenagers leads us to wonder, as adults establishing a relationship with them on various levels (personal, social, institutional), whether and how their protection is actually at the core of what we live with them and how we are formed for the educational and caregiving mission in their regard. Talking about sexual abuse prevention and contrast is thus not a separate question from discussing the current educational and social emergency. In other words, it is not separate from what makes any relationship educational and transformative, raising a reflective contact with life.

A context shall prevent abuse if it is self-questioning on the basic paradigms of its education practices. Even the etymology of the word 'educating' in itself (*ex-educere*, "to lead out") is bound to raise the question of the conditions which favour the development

against children and teenagers: pornography, online grooming and cyber-bullying, as well as sexual extortions, *revenge porn* and fraud, are the most widespread forms of online aggression against minors. More specifically, during the COVID pandemic, the child pornography cases handled by police forces increased by 132% compared to the previous period, and the persons investigated by over 90%. Also cyber-bullying, due to boredom, social isolation, or monotony, recorded an increase by 96%, involving increasingly young children. In the early months of 2021, there were 77 reported cases involving children aged less than 13, compared to 34 in the first quarter of 2020. See bit.ly/2XSsTpu, 5th May 2021.

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of a child towards autonomy and affective, relational maturity. These paradigms are the same on which child protection has always been based: relationship, respect, responsibility. It is not possible to educate without a relationship, or rather, without a network of relationships. It is thus urgent to ask ourselves: what kind of relationships do we guarantee for children in terms of family, sports, leisure time? How does the tension towards accompanying them in the direction of a mature, well-structured affectivity (which is able to be independent and, at the same time, to establish relationships which take into account the wellbeing of the self and of others) help animate the reflections of parents, teachers, educators, coaches and all those who come in contact with minors in various ways? Talking about affectivity today is bound to lead us to the etymology of the word 'affection', which comes from *affectus* (passive form of *afficio*) and means "I am touched, moved by the other person", a direct reference to persons meeting. Any affective experience goes beyond us and immediately shows us the intrinsic dimension of human nature, of any human being in a relationship. One feature of any relationship, unlike interaction contextualised here and now, is that it takes a long time: it is the personal and social history which connects a man and a woman, two friends, parent and child, educator and pupil. Talking of the relational aspects in affective life thus means leaving a self-centredview in order to project affectivi-

ty into a perspective which cannot be exhausted in the fleeting interaction of momentary exchanges and hurried conclusions. Affection does not necessarily cause pleasure: sometimes it requires delaying the moment of its fulfilment. Affection is guided by ethics which might even drive a person to give up immediate pleasure for wellbeing, for what is right and good. In the affective experience, it is also possible to give up pleasure, to suffer for the other person's good (experiences of self-sacrifice, of forgiving the wrongs suffered...).

As educating and welcoming adults we cannot but start from our own affectivity, asking ourselves where we stand in that regard and taking care of it. We should wonder if and how, in our life, there are "relations among equals and with peers", that is to say with persons from the adult generation or with whom we share the same educational role. Starting from awareness of one's affectivity as educating and welcoming adults is a pivotal point in the "Safe Project". Clinical evidence suggests that those responsible for abusive behaviours are affectively immature, because they tend to focus relations on emotions, on the search for their own pleasure and on the here and now, using all means available, which includes abusing the other person.

In order to be reliable, these relationships need to respect the other person. During the "Safe Project" pathways, participants have been encouraged to ask themselves how respectfully they treat minors in their

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relationships with them, how they acknowledge the other person, most notably children. Do I address the other persons and get in touch with them with methods that go beyond the position of reliable and authoritative adult (asking questions and searching for privileged and exclusive contact spaces, thus shifting from an inter-generational to a peer and ambivalent relationship)? Or am I giving them space and time to emerge? I believe that asking this question as guidance and verification focus of a relationship with a child is a concrete way of returning the educational process to its original aim, namely allowing the other to emerge as a growing man or woman. This means that safeguarding children should be one of the formative priorities for those who have an educational responsibility in their respect, as parents, teachers, coaches, coordinators of recreational and leisure time activities, as well as educators in ecclesial environments such as parish youth clubs, groups or movements.

This responsibility consists in accepting rights and duties in respect of children, but also entails promoting the common good. Raising children in safe and peaceful conditions means encouraging them to trust the world and the future: this is a fundamental ingredient for the resilience which is so necessary in this complex pandemic age.

A responsibility which calls into question not just the adoption of safeguarding codes of conduct, but also sharing these codes within an integrated educa-

tional system, creating a network involving the various life environments of the child.

The "Safe Project" is a concrete experience with a system where the various life contexts, each with its own specific educational and social connotation, interacted in order to share paradigms aimed at ensuring safe growth. The experience of caring for persons wounded by sexual abuse actually showed that, due to the complexity of the wounds suffered, a systemic action is necessary. By the same token, this awareness should animate the creation of a prevention system which starts, once again, from a renewed educational alliance between the different places where minors live. In this regard, it is fair to say that the "Safe Project" has shared a community view of prevention, as expressed in the *Guidelines for protecting minors and vulnerable persons* (CEI *et al.*, 2019), according to which:

> The whole community is involved in responding to the scourge of abuse, not because the whole community is guilty, but because it is the whole community that should take care of the little ones. Every time one of them is wounded, the whole community suffers because it failed in stopping the abuser or in implementing everything possible to prevent the abuse. The question is notjust doing everything possible to prevent abuse: a community renewal is called for, focusing on the care and protection of the little and vulnerable ones as the highest values to

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be safeguarded. Only this conversion will allow the whole community to overcome any silence, indifference, bias or lack of action, thus becoming involvement, care, solidarity and commitment.

The "Safe Project", involving three Italian faith-led educational organisations as key players, is thus fully in line with the prevention pathway started by the Italian Church on 24th June 2019, when the *Guidelines for protecting minors and vulnerable persons* came into force, taking into account the issues which the Church included in its pathway, starting with John Paul II and Benedict XVI. The project has reached its implementation phase with Pope Francis, in terms of transparent procedures for reporting abuse, listening to victims and survivors of abuse, as well as preventing and facing the latter.

In the aid materials by the National Service for the Protection of Minors dedicated to this topic (*Best practices for preventing abuse and protecting minors in the parish* edited by Father Gianluca Marchetti and by Father Francesco Airoldi) mention is made of the right to formation by pastoral practitioners in Christian communities who are in touch with children. The "Safe Project" recipients include members of Azione Cattolica and of Centro Sportivo Italiano. It is thus fair to say that, in the territories where it has been organised, it has contributed to implementing the said good practices, because educators, coaches and sports managers

operate within these parish and Diocese contexts. This is another reason why the "Safe Project" can be intended as a systemic action, where the various parts of the ecclesial body are integrated to keep alive the beauty of the communional nature of that body and its loyalty to the evangelical mandate which has always characterized the pastoral mission with and for minors: «Let the little children come to me» (*Mark* 10,14). In addition, this systemic action is characterised as a cultural promotion service. In fact, for the three organisations involved in the project, dealing with topics related to safeguarding minors has actually meant adding to their educational pathways the shift from an alibi-based culture to co-responsibility.

At organisational level, the three associations have always kept and strengthened the community dimension in their own structures, by defining and assigning educational mandates. The latter aimed at containing the risk of encouraging approaches which could be described as "onlookers and mavericks", constantly promoting a sense of community focused on teamwork. The "Safe Project" has showed them that this is not always enough to prevent abusive behaviours. The risk factor here is specifically represented by an alibi-based culture, gaining ground among members of the organizations themselves.

Progressing from an alibi-based culture (that is to say, a culture which definitely leads me to acknowledging a criticality, but limits itself to reporting it to some-

one in charge, so they can take action[5]) to a culture of co-responsibility means reviewing all of one's actions, as they pertain to the system which generated the criticality, regardless of direct involvement in the latter. This encourages a shared review process throughout the organisation, making sure everyone becomes aware that it is up to all members of the organisation (each in their specific capacity) to define risk factors, to promote protection factors and the responsibility of mutual supervision, in the evangelical sense of looking carefully at oneself, at those one works with and at the impact of one's behaviours on children.

During the Ecclesial Conference of the Italian Church (which took place in Verona as far back as 2006) Professor Raffaella Iafrate, in her inaugural address regarding to the area of affective life, mentioned the implicit risks in vertical and hierarchical bonds, as well as the need for educational pathways to promote the coexistence of the affective and ethical dimensions within the said bonds[6].

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[5] Alibi intended as always having someone on a higher level in terms of role to whom responsibility for an event or occurrence can be assigned.
[6] «Bonds which are known as "vertical" (where the hierarchy once again does not concern the value of persons, but rather the intergenerational position they occupy and the level of responsibility they exercise) live and also feed on an ethnical-affective substance. In this case the affective dimension is expressed in the protection, trust and hope regarding the possibilities of the other and the ethical dimension; this is translated into responsibility in their regard and in educational commitment. Also in this case, the coexistence of ethical and affective dimensions preserves the bond from the risk of appropriation

Preventing and facing abuse against children is part of living a relationship, an affective and educational bond, as well as of its promotion and care. Preventing sexual abuse does not mean stopping relationships and contacts; on the contrary, it entails promoting them in their most intrinsic generative dimension, protecting the boundaries typical of each educational relationship, respecting one's own and other person's intimacy, appreciating individual uniqueness through narratives and gestures which preserve trust and support hopes, dreams, or projects as they emerge and become true. It means promoting education of one's own and the other person's sensitivity, because (all things considered) each case of sexual abuse implies a deviant use of sight, touch, hearing.

Educating to sensitivity means: starting a learning path in one's life, by listening to oneself in order to be able to listen to those who are entrusted to us; keeping in touch with one's intimacy to learn and contact that of others mindfully; asking ourselves where we stand in our being adults, as a choice of taking care of the other, thus making empathy a fundamental trait in our relationships. Preventing abuse within educational and

(the other person is "my stuff" to enjoy) and usurping (the power I exercise on another person makes them slave to my needs), projecting them in a value dimension where the other is acknowledged in his/her freedom and dignity, then led towards full realization of their humanity. All hierarchical bonds share these characteristics, including parent-child, grandparent-child and, in general, all relationships among generations encountered at social level» (Iafrate, 2008).

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welcoming contexts also means asking ourselves how the organisation itself supervises its relational and decision-making styles, in terms of power and trust management by those who exercise responsibility roles at various levels and among peers. It is worth noting what has been written in this regard by Franco Imoda (2005), expert in community relational and formative dynamics:

> All these realities look very much like the many independent rings which a juggler in a circus turns around his head, arms and waist. They are autonomous areas but, in order to find unity, they shall turn or appeal to the personality of a leader. It is up to the juggler to coordinate the points where the rings intersect, keeping his eyes on both one and the other, making sure that the meeting is not a clash which would reduce moving forces to zero. A leader is definitely not the centre of the rings, nor is he or she one of the many and individual rings. Therefore he needs to be aware, even before the others, of where and how he positions himself.

Preventing abuse against children, from "emergency App" to permanent and systemic formative element in the Church and society

«Preventing abuse should not be like an App, which we can turn on or off. It should be something that always appears, alongside other elements, on our desk-

top, reminding us that prevention ought to be natural, that it should be simply part of all our activities». This is what Professor Hans Zoller said during a webinar on 2nd October 2020, which marked the beginning of territorial formative pathways in the "Safe Project", whose contents will be outlined in chapter one and two of this volume.

For the three partner associations, the "Safe Project" constituted a generative passage, to make sure that preventing and facing abuse against children and vulnerable persons should change from something like an App to a permanent formative element in the pathways to educate welcoming parents, group educators, coaches, sports managers, association managers on various local community/parish/Diocese/ province/area/nation levels.

As we shall see in the chapter on the assessment of the project, leaders of the associations involved acknowledge (as a priority for prevention targeted to their members and volunteers) permanent and specific training on safeguarding children. The assessment completed on members involved in the pathways showed that, after the formative period, the individual formative level is considered as having substantially increased, in terms of knowledge and competences acquired on the subject of preventing and facing the various types of abuse against children, with specific regard to sexual abuse.

For effective prevention with regard to facing abuse

against children in educational and social contexts, there are two intervention elements: contents (which affect the behaviour of individuals) and structures (through the instruments and procedures selected and offered, at both personal and institutional level, appropriately reviewed to generate long-lasting and updated effects, in respect of the relevant context development). It is important, in this regard, to bear in mind that an abusive relationship is never something exclusive and definite between the victim and the abuser; on the contrary, it takes place within a context, which becomes abusive the same as the abuser. Once the abuse is revealed, that same context will show consequences of the event from various perspectives and with different manifestations in the short, medium and long term, the same as the victims themselves.

The "Safe Project" takes place within an organisational context, both in terms of implementation and involvement by members and leaders. This is why its action has been focused on

promoting awareness among members of the risk of becoming an abusive association context, which involves members and leaders not as individuals but as systems. The steps through which an abusive conduct is enacted clearly show how the abuser gradually weaves a web, where the victim is first of all groomed then entrapped; at the same time, he "fogs up the context itself", manipulating trust and making it difficult for the latter to take responsibility for noticing

its criticalities, for detecting the often non-verbal and disguised signs sent by the victims.

Only if formation is focused first and foremost on the knowledge of the dynamics through which the abusive conduct is enacted, is it possible to raise awareness about the fact that abuse is never something unexpected, but rather a web constructed stepwise and that the relational context, as third-party element, if duly formed in terms of knowledge and competences, can truly make a difference for potential victims as well as for itself. To provide an educational and welcoming context, it is a priority to ask oneself if appropriate instruments are available for safeguarding. This means: keeping an open mind, choosing to interrupt any possible grooming as it unfolds, supporting the breaking of individual barriers put up by the abuse itself in the victim, as well as the socio-cultural barriers in itself. Or rather, if one has become abusive, in the same way as the abuser.

A context is abusive if it ignores potential signs sent by the victims, failing to support disclosure by those who have been brave enough to speak out, thus causing in the latter a second break in terms of trust, a process known as "re-victimization": this occurs because the context, towards which there were expectations of protection, has instead betrayed the victim's trust, including its wounds delivered to be welcomed, denying support in its credibility. The first break, on the other hand, is caused by the abuser because – as

research has shown – in most cases the person involved is someone trusted by the victim and by the context itself.

Abuse against children, in particular if it is of a sexual nature, constitutes abuse of power (because of a deviant use of the latter within the educational relationship) and abuse of trust (CENCINI *et al.*, 2021). Several authoritative therapist colleagues, over time, have assisted minors abused by parents or other family members. They have noted that, during the therapy process, at a certain stage, the child asks to meet not the family member responsible of the abuse, but the witness of his/her suffering. Faced with such a request, practitioners in charge of protecting minors on the psycho-social area (who have supported their removal from the abusive family context or have welcomed them) often record and interpret it as protection, thus pointing out to the children that those figures failed to protect them.

This request, on the contrary, emerges as part of the therapy process, as expression of the need by a minor to oblige that family member to contact the pain they suffered for lack of support, for lack of the trust they were expecting, in order to break together the individual defence barriers erected as a consequence of the abuse. Establishing a contact means "testing" any potential change in that family member, possibly hoping that they might have become reliable again. This is the same framework which contains the si-

lence of many children (in respect of the abuse they have suffered) after they have been removed from the relevant contexts. Silence is a form of self-protection in respect of getting in touch with the pain caused by trust betrayed by those who saw and possibly listened, but remained silent and continued on their way, as in the evangelical parable of the Good Samaritan.

It is thus fair to say that a context is abusive also to the extent that it sees any ambiguities and criticalities of the abusers but chooses not to take responsibility for action, looking away from something extremely painful and hard to confront.

The "Safe Project" also highlighted that an educational and welcoming association or institution can become abusive if it does not have appropriate safeguarding policies. This means establishing transparent procedures for reporting alleged in-house abuse, ensuring support, appropriate assistance and care for victims and contexts, focusing on the protection of children and vulnerable persons as a priority in the initial and permanent formation of members, volunteers, and leaders. This includes selection of the latter and defining *accountability* spaces for leaders, especially with regard to the protection of children and vulnerable persons.

This essay is therefore intended as a concrete attempt, by three associations committed to caring for and educating minors in faith-based family, educational and association contexts, to establish a perma-

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nent system for preventing and facing abuse against children in house, thus contributing to promote the cultural renewal in progress within the Church, and then relaunching it also within the community. The first section – *Knowing to prevent. Preventing to educate in safe and generative environments* – includes insights by authoritative experts on the subject, which help us focus on prevention as best practice which cannot be delayed, for the Church and for society, especially nowadays. Chapter one, with contributions by Professor Zollner and Professor Ghisoni, offers sapiential and prophetic reasons for the urgency of starting permanent formative pathways on safeguarding minors and vulnerable persons, as guarantee for the protection of little ones, which the Gospel has entrusted to us and which civilian entities have already approved on several occasions.

> We should discuss the topic of sexual abuse within the Church and in our societies, without associating it to the Pope alone, to bishops, to priests, to the clergy: also the laity needs to talk about it for various reasons. First of all because, according to statistics, abuse against minors most frequently tends to occur within the family. For this reason, it is necessary that parents should take responsibility for their children's education, accompanying them in the most appropriate way, providing a suitable environment, creating healthy family relations, thus encouraging

a harmonious and integral growth of their children on all possible levels. Also bear in mind that most educators in schools, training institutions, sports clubs, and in the parishes consist of lay persons who should not improvise in terms of the need to create healthy relationships and safe environments[7].

The "Safe Project" is a concrete model for cooperation among faith-led associations, aimed at promoting the communional nature of the Church and the beauty of its educational action. It was exactly the joint sharing of objectives and pathways that has made it possible to take on such a delicate formative action. The latter, of course, also caused some anxiety and suspicions; however, it has proved that by confronting these issues, it is possible to find reasons and to support individual and association development pathways in terms of competences, knowledge and enthusiasm in taking care of the little ones. It also provides an opportunity to live the evangelical calling to be outgoing, something Pope Francis has always invited us to do, from the beginning of his ministry. In this specific project, it has meant networking with all those, in the Church and in society at large, who have been committed on this front for a long time to

[7] L. GHISONI, *Calling abuse by name*, in *infra*, chapter *Educating and welcoming in safe environments for a Church and a society on the side of the little ones*, page 42.

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jointly promote, at ecclesial and community level, a change of cultural paradigms regarding the protection of minors. In this wake are to be placed the chapters in this essay edited by Father Fortunato Di Noto and by Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence, as well as the insights in the monthly blog of the project's website, which include authoritative contributions from experts in the psychological, pedagogical, legal and communication fields, who belong to academic, ecclesial and civil contexts.

The first part of the text also includes a focus on the complexity of the phenomenon of abuse from a legal perspective and its occurring through the Internet, also considering the specificity of our time and how relationships have acquired new meanings and forms through the Web (where connections have become ways to rebuild relationships and meetings) with communication as sharing of contents and narratives.

The chapter edited by female researchers at Istituto degli Innocenti invites the reader to use as reference paradigm (for the prevention of abuse in educational and welcoming contexts, such as those involved in this project) the fact of focusing on the concept of operating window, within which risk and protection factors are enabled, in respect of any relationship and activity with minors. A survey of the latter, within each organizational and institutional context, is paramount as a starting point to guarantee competence and effective formation and prevention.

In the second part of the essay (*Promotion of* child safeguarding *to rebuild educational relationships in the family, in groups, in communities and in sports*), insight is provided regarding the contents and pathways developed through the "Safe Project". This is done by describing the project itself, by assessing its impact on the centres involved and suggesting ideas to promote the protection of minors and vulnerable persons in the various life contexts where children live, which is an essential element to enable safe educational processes, and also to generate systemic and integrated actions for preventing sexual abuse.

The book is enriched by a chapter with reviews of books and films posted once a month on the project's website, concerning several aspects of abuse against children. If the starting point for prevention consists in promoting a renewed culture on the topic, then we shall promote it through the instruments used by culture itself and for its dissemination. The stories told and the films suggested, with their specific languages, help readers and viewers approach the topic, giving them food for thought and opportunitiesfor a constructive debate. They both place the sensitive issues under discussion within the life spheres of a past to be reviewed, a present in which we are immersed and a future towards which we are moving, as individuals, organisations or institutions.

Teamwork is bound to generate a prevention system: this is the challenge which, during these two years, we

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have taken up and carried out together, each of us in their specific area of intervention, and which we offer you in this essay as Community Pope John XXIII, Azione Cattolica, Centro Sportivo Italiano and Sociology and Law of Economics Department at *Alma Mater Studiorum* – University of Bologna. This challenge has allowed us to move on from feeling the protection of minors and vulnerable persons as a burden to viewing it as a gift. It is, indeed, an opportunity to acquire the necessary instruments to face, together and better, the countless and unavoidable complications which welcoming and educating minors entail today. It is also a chance to devote time to what really matters (relationships, their promotion and care) and to allow for the emerging (through listening, search, and a patient wait) of the change and beauty which may arise also and specifically from within complications, risks and the unexpected. We will keep working in this direction, each according to our own educational mission and to our own possibilities. We will also continue networking amongst ourselves and with all ecclesial, social, civil organisations, with a view to protecting minors and vulnerable persons. This can be expected to regenerate, in the Church and in the community at large, the passion for education and responsible care of our little ones, leading to a renewed educational covenant among generations, which is something Pope Francis himself invites us to strive towards.

Knowing to prevent. Prevent to educate and welcome in safe and generative environments

Chapter one
Educating and welcoming in safe environments. For a Church and a society on the side of the little ones[*]

Hans Zollner, Linda Ghisoni

Let us open our eyes, open our ears, open our heart

Thank you for the invitation and for organising this very important event for everyone who is attending now, as well as for those who are listening and who are able to contribute as well.

We can all open our eyes, open our ears and open our heart. The topic here this evening is not something reserved to specialists. It increasingly needs to become a commitment on the part of all of us, of all those who are in contact with young persons: in sport settings, in schools, in the families, in parishes; this is why I say it is an important commitment. Unless we make a joint effort, we will never get anywhere. Therefore, this is one of the things I consider significant.

As you rightly said, we already have statistics, there are several papers containing data in this regard which confirm that – specifically during the recent period of lockdown, with many people confined at home – the cases of physical, psychological or sexual abuse have increased.

It is easy to understand why the number of cases has increased: the economic duress, the tension caused by living together in a confined space, without any possibility of going out, deprived of what used to be social control by schools, friends, families living nearby, has of course increased the risk of abuse. I therefore believe that a necessary exercise for us Christians is not to be totally distracted by external developments, important as they undoubtedly are, which are a cause for great concern, because the whole economy, all aspects related to health, and so on, are in our heart. Nevertheless, we also need to be sensitive to the needs

The texts published here have been reviewed and authorised for publication by both speakers.

of the most vulnerable, be they children, adults, or disabled persons.

My point is that, for us Christians, it should be normal and routine to take an interest in those persons who appear to be in the most dire straits. We too, unfortunately, require a conversion every day; this is a difficult topic to handle, and many people dismiss it, because it is so repugnant and so uncomfortable that we very often choose to look elsewhere; on the contrary, we should be attentive, we need to be aware of the risks, and to act bravely in the various environments where we happen to live. This is true, first and foremost, with regard to the family, where it is probably more difficult to speak openly, because we are all connected in various ways and it is not easy to open our mouth when we should; on the other hand, it also applies to settings such as sports, where there is friendship, there are people you have known for a long time, and it is hard to believe that something bad may happen, especially to the most vulnerable persons. This is the invitation which is being made to all of us: to open our eyes, our ears, to open our heart, and – when the time is right – open our mouth as well.

Calling abuse by its name

My heartfelt greeting to Dr Vinai and to all those who have logged in to this webinar, and thanks to the organisers – the Community Pope John XXIII, Azione Cattolica Italiana, Centro Sportivo Italiano – which

have promoted such a valuable project, because, during this second year of the "Safe Project", it is focused specifically, on formation; by dealing with the formation of trainers, it becomes a multiplier of culture, to the advantage of preventing any kind of abuse.

I am grateful for the question which was posed to me, because it gives me a chance, first of all, to say how fundamentally important it is to discuss what abuse actually is. As Father Zollner said: it is so important to keep our mouth open in this regard...

It is important to call abuse by name, for what it really is, in order to allow victims to recognise it, to protect themselves from it, to consider it from the appropriate perspective: namely, that of being actual offences, crimes against the person, so that abused persons are in a position to ask for help as appropriate.

We know that, still today, there are plenty of negationists around us, those who believe that this issue is just something the Pope or some members of the clergy have become fixated on, in the same way as we know that there may also be a sort of morbid curiosity by others in speaking about it. Last but not least, there are some people who prefer to avoid the subject altogether, as in the case of the lady I mentioned in my report during the *Summit* in the Vatican dedicated to the protection of minors. They feel that it is best avoided because it is considered touchy, sad, or because it is felt that it somehow casts a shadow over all the good that the Church actually does.

To my mind it is crucial that we leave these useless dead ends, that is to say any negationist attitude, morbid curiosity or the denial I mentioned earlier, and honestly deal with the reality of abuse which may be of a sexual nature, related to conscience or to power; we should focus on the person, and especially on the little ones, the fragile, the weak, the vulnerable. We need, however, to talk about this in a competent and qualified way, in order to raise awareness, inform, educate and – in this way – prevent. Talking about it is the exact opposite of the typical dynamics put in place by abusers, which revolves around a pact of silence. In actual fact, we know that those who abuse another person, a child, a fragile person, takes advantage of what I would call the "perverse game of silence".

The abuser makes the victim feel as if he or she is privileged; these mechanisms can be described very clearly by Father Zollner, who has studied them in depth. Victims are encouraged to feel they are privileged, we know this from their testimonies. Privileged, for instance, because they are one of the few people allowed to enter the abuser's bedroom, or to go there at night, or possibly to be in a lift alone... This privilege, though, binds them to secrecy, to this perverse game of silence, something that leads the victim to withdraw, to gravitate only around the abuser, with whom there is a secret connection that shall not be betrayed. Silence is made worse by the sense of guilt that the abuser instils in the victim, so that the latter

feels like an accomplice, or – even worse – the victim feels to be the cause of those forbidden actions; this triggers self-destructive dynamics, further withdrawal and isolation.

Some of the victims who have written to us, members of faith-based organisation, use a recurring phrase: they refer to a system of *omerta*, that is to say, a code of silence to which they feel bound and which makes them feel guilty for not speaking up earlier.

This game of silence, therefore, allows for the perpetuation of abuse, which is exactly why it is urgent to talk about it within the Church, in our communities, so that the chain of this deadly game can be broken, as well as in order to raise awareness, inform, educate, and prevent the victim's isolation. Talking about these issues helps create a sort of safety net, by creating a vigilant, critical, communicative context, which is suitable for care and prevention. I would say that this network provides a source of strength, a deterrent against abusers. With this initiative of the "Safe Project", you – as promoting organisations – have joined forces, as Matteo Truffelli said: "You have created this alliance and give testimony to this alliance, of a synergy, a joint action, for a prevention which is centred around taking an issue to heart and investing in suitable formation".

In conclusion, going back to your question, Doctor Vinai, it is true that we need to speak about this issue of sexual abuse in the Church, in our communities, and we need to do so without delegating it to the

Pope alone, to bishops, to priests, to the clergy: also the laity needs to talk about it – as you rightly said – for various reasons. First of all because, according to statistics, abuse against minors most frequently tends to occur within the family. For this reason, it is necessary that parents should take responsibility for their children's education, accompanying them in the most appropriate way, providing a suitable environment, creating healthy family relations, thus encouraging a harmonious and integral growth of their children on all possible levels.

Also bear in mind that most educators in schools, training institutions, sports clubs, as Bosio mentioned, and in the parishes consist of lay persons who should not improvise in terms of the need to create healthy relationships and safe environments. We see, therefore, that lay persons are on the front line in the environments, in educational, formation tasks, as well as with their specific competence in various sectors: teaching, the Law, health. This means that they can really contribute in a valuable way to effectiveness in prevention by the Church. Nevertheless, let us not forget that – within the Church – the voice of the laity is fundamental, simply because the Church is the people of God walking in today's world. It is a visible body where all component members are called – by virtue of being baptized – to help grow, keep safe and nourish this body, each of them giving their own contribution and according to a specific mission.

This image of the body helps us understand that all contributions may be different, but each of them is fundamental to preserve its health. Doing without the contribution from the laity, in a certain sense, would mean mutilating this body. To my mind, it is not a matter of democratic participation or of sharing in the completion of specific tasks: the contribution from the laity is necessary because it is rooted in the nature of the Church itself, in its communional nature.

Re-focussing on the victims

The commitment on the part of the Church from its beginning, since Jesus Christ founded it, has been, must be and shall remain its effort to support those who have been wounded, those in need, becoming ever stronger and more consistent and coherent. I would say that this is part of the large plan, of the great programme by Pope Francis. However, I would say that this has always been the outgoing part of the Church, because it is the Church that takes itself seriously in its main mission of loving people, in its words and even more in its deeds, as Saint Ignatius of Loyola would say; in other words, we – as Christians – are called to consider first of all those who are poor, wounded, in need, then what we ourselves need. This encompasses the message of Jesus Christ, which He lived in an exemplary way for our safety: He sacrificed and gave up His life for this message. If we wish to be a little closer to Him, to the message He passed

on through His life and His words too – but most notably through His passion and resurrection – this is what we should follow.

An outgoing Church, in this regard, should listen to the victims, should not cover its ears in respect of what happened in the past. And we heard earlier, what happened in 2018, as many as 43 times in Italian sports, although figures (as it was rightly pointed out) are probably much higher, possibly five, even ten times more, in sports alone – not to mention other environments, for example in school, and especially in families.

Therefore, these are the areas where we need to pay attention: as persons, however, we should listen to those who have suffered. This will also teach us that our life can be spent in the mission of a Church not overly concerned about appearances, about embarrassing itself, or causing scandal; indeed sometimes we tend to think that not mentioning these topics means avoiding scandal.

I always say that this keeping silent, this not uncovering things, is the main road to causing more scandal, that is to say, when someone else will take the floor to cry out loud that those were in charge, those who could have supervised, those who had seen what was happening but failed to speak up in time... At that point the issue will hit newspaper headlines, be posted on Facebook or on Twitter, and spread the news that "within sports associations, families, the Catholic

Church, in parishes, there have been unspeakable offences happening, and I can tell you the whole truth!"

Because this is certainly one of the fears that are understandable: nobody will easily admit to behaving wrongly, all the more so in the case of a crime such as sexual, physical, psychological abuse against a child, or any vulnerable adult person. Indeed, this is one element of conversion. What can be more important than a child who is growing – and wishes to keep growing for their whole life – trusting that this life can also be a great project: to discover the world, to establish relationships, to raise a family? In many cases this proves impossible for victims of abuse, so what is more important? Protecting this child or not talking about subjects that may be excessively uncomfortable? I find that the answer given by Jesus is totally straightforward: "Let the little children come to me". (*Mark* 10,14).

This is all that can motivate us to make an effort and to be committed in all areas, in a continuous and constant way.

Formation, starting processes of discernment, attention and prevention. The strength and courage to speak

The "Safe Project", in my view, is an eloquent and valuable example of taking charge of the call to start processes aimed at raising awareness about issues related to sexual abuse and preventing abuse itself. It is an extremely concrete action which is part of the

routine, everyday fabric of the centres where the three promoting organisations operate, together with the Alma Mater[1] as university completing the project.

In many Episcopal Conferences significant steps forward have been taken: with regard to the Italian context, the National Service for the Protection of Minors (which is coordinated by Doctor Vinai here) has been established by Cei, creating inter-diocesan or regional services and appointing contact persons for child protection in the diocese. As far as I know, also the laity – men and women, with specific competences – have been involved in this respect.

I think it is a good start, and I would add that we should persevere to make sure that this involvement becomes more qualified, making sure that this is really the case. In other words, it is noteworthy that people should be appointed, offices established, with contact persons for the Diocese, who – supported by others – deal with facing abuse. In this regard, very important texts are being published: guidelines and other aids. Nevertheless, in order to complete the process, we need to verify how effective we actually are. If, within a specific context, nothing is being reported, nobody asks to be heard, even though we may have excellent structures in our office, there is obviously something wrong.

This is why your formation effort, as "Safe Project", is extremely valuable; it helps make sure that any victims chained to silence may find the strength, find

[1] *Alma Mater Studiorum* – University of Bologna.

the courage to speak up, that they may meet someone who tells them that it is indeed possible, where it is possible and how it is possible to tell about what happened, and to do so safely.

Formation and education.
Not a form of oppression, but a mission

First of all, there are several levels of formation, which means that every person working with young persons or living with young persons should have basic training and education in this regard. This also means learning to recognise the signs of abuse and how to approach someone who I know or suspect has been abused, then how to make sure that the abuse does not continue, possibly also confronting an abuser, and finally how to create safe environments. These are topics which – at least to a basic extent, in essential terms – should be familiar for everyone, coaches or teachers in schools, or even all those who serve as volunteers in parishes. We all know very well that this is not something you learn once and for all: on the contrary, it needs to be repeated time and again. What is even more important, in our area, is that it is not just something you consider merely or exclusively as a hypothesis. It is something that should be engraved in the heart of a person, and become an intrinsic motivation, that is to say a driver which, practically and by default, drives me to always strive for the protection and safety of those persons who are most vulnerable.

Those who teach, the educators, may also pass this information to many more people, who should be those who know about the processes and measures, from a psychological to a legal perspective, from Canon Law in this case within the Church. People who know at least something concerning structures and administration. This means, for example, clarifying whom I should turn to if I have a suspicion, and – if this person does not act in an incisive manner – where else could I go?

There are many areas here which – once they have become well structured – can be clearly communicated, by posting them on websites or on notice boards in the relevant centres, so that anyone who has seen or suspects a possible case of abuse – or if they have been abused themselves – can readily find all the necessary information about whom to contact.

Formation is mandatory also for all seminary students, for all priests, for all men and women of the clergy; according to the latest indications given by Pope Francis, it should be routine and commonplace for all male and female staff in parishes or, in relation to the topic of this webinar, also in all sports clubs. Even the choice of those who are hired, or who apply to serve as volunteers, should be based on careful recruitment, avoiding to let in people who are actually looking for a chance to contact young people because they have a hidden interest, possibly of a sexual nature, or of any inappropriate relationship.

Therefore many areas of prevention also include the spiritual aspect, the theological aspect for our sector within the Church: as I said earlier, where does our motivation come from? Not from Laws, by definition, or from the threat of legal sanctions, but from an intrinsic Christian motivation which any individual, according to the words of the Gospel, should find within themselves, in order to lead life in its fullness, in its Christian fullness.

Unfortunately this is an area that, over the past few years, with all the attention to regulations which are of course absolutely necessary, we have forgotten, even within the Church, and which today makes education more difficult. People are sometimes obliged to pursue this type of ongoing formation, or an initial training in the area of protection, of safeguarding[2], that is to say the care, protection of the person; if they are obliged and do not want to attend, because they feel forced, of course they will be people who do not learn much, and do not learn very willingly.

It is essential to understand that this is not something we can set aside, or which is not particularly important. This education should be something that arises out of personal interest, and not merely something forced, an obligation which is seen as an oppression, but rather as an expression of the mission of the Church itself.

[2] i.e. keeping safe

The role and perspective of women

There are no two ways about it: we have to acknowledge that women, by nature, are predisposed to caring, to the custody of life and frailties, as well as being naturally predisposed to maternity. This distinctive element that characterises them, to my mind, is the key to answering your question and to recognise that women have a specific role in terms of listening, welcoming, prevention and care.

We know that not all women experience biological maternity; nevertheless, I would say that nature, in a certain sense, has programmed us to express maternity in what we live and what is entrusted to us. Think for example of the many consecrated women we know who – even though they have never given birth to a child – take care of a very frail humanity, with a life-giving maternal approach; I am thinking of persons like Mother Theresa of Calcutta, just to mention one shining example solo. This caring approach serves to protect, help little ones grow, fortifying them in view of the challenges of life.

Therefore, regardless of pathological cases of women who abandon or kill their children, I would like to draw your attention to the care that a mother typically has for little ones, something which makes her sensitive to each detail.

We know that there are educational contexts where some distorted relational dynamics, manipulations by members of the clergy, abuse by men have been detected very early by women, who were however rele-

gated to the sidelines and silenced specifically for this reason. In this case it is women who relentlessly protected with their gaze, with their teachings, the little ones, bringing them to safety. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that women are also capable of abuse; most of us will have read a recent article by Father Giovanni Cucci published in *Civiltà Cattolica*, where he described pathological, criminal relational dynamics enacted by nuns against sisters in a subordinate position: these are cases of abuse of power in everyday life and in the secluded life of the nunnery, which sometimes has even led to sexual abuse among the sisters living there.

Apart from cases like this, women – with the appropriate formation – are able to work effectively, creating suitable environments for listening, for accompanying and caring for victims, as well as for education to formation and prevention.

We should not forget that, in many cases, those who have been abused by men find it easier to talk to a woman, rather than to men or priests. To conclude, I would say that, when we establish places for listening and welcoming, we need to bear in mind that the availability of persons with different backgrounds and characteristics, including a significant presence of qualified women, can make it easier for those who – being victims of abuse forced to keep silent – need special care by persons who can make them feel confident enough to speak up.

Competent formation.
Prevention is not an app[3]

I am not a prophet, I am more of a realist. The first steps that have been taken in order to face abuse have been by Bishops who had to investigate cases, and one very important step we have learnt to take in the past few years is that sincerity always pays.

In other words, one step I expect from all of us, and which I also expect from leaders – be they directors of schools, presidents of associations or sports clubs, priests, bishops, members of the provincial clergy – is sincerity.

Who, if not us Christians, can admit to being wrong, to not having paid the necessary attention? Who, if not us Christians, can admit to the sins – and possibly to the crimes, if any – that have been committed? Who, if not us Christians, can confess and acknowledge the evil done in our lives, in our centres and in our Church?

We trust that – if we are sincere and admit our guilt, and if we confess sincerely, accepting the penance which necessarily follows – we can be confident that the Lord will forgive us; this ought to inspire us not to keep things hidden and not to abide by the code of silence which professor Ghisoni mentioned at the beginning. This means that we should not act in such a way as to obfuscate or hide reality, the truth.

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[3] In computer science, a mobile application (also known by the abbreviation app, from the English *mobile application*, or *mobile app*) is a software application intended for mobile phone devices.

Jesus says "the truth will make us free", this is what we truly believe in and hope for.

Therefore, one step which I hope will follow is that the realism and sincerity I have referred to will grow as a Christian virtue.

The second necessary step consists in listening to the victims, as I have already mentioned, but not in a position which suggests something like: "Now you can have your say, then we will carry on as if nothing ever happened". No: the victims of abuse have a right that we should listen to them, but they also have a right that we should follow their indications, bear the consequences of their experiences. In other words we should really learn to be meek, which means drawing consequences from what these wounded people within the Church and society tell us, because they are those who can teach us how – in the future – we may prevent these sins, these offences from occurring again.

Third step: the Church. And the Church means all of us, all Christians, all baptised persons. We have a duty to say that this Church of ours is called upon not to keep going at the same pace, and just do things superficially. We need to take these issues to heart and not merely learn by rote. We should learn from our experience that it is by creating safe environments that we can contribute to a safer Church, to a safer world, to people who are healthier and also enabling them to act in a more saintly way. This might sound a bit idealistic, or possibly oversimplified. I would say that it

is not an oversimplification, because the feeling I have had over the past few years while working in this area, and all over the world, is that, indeed, we are very good at saying the right words and we have also introduced guidelines, as well as providing all-round formation.

However, unless we are able to welcome this message, namely that we – the Church – are willing to protect the most vulnerable at all cost, unless this message reaches our heart and finds an expression on all sports grounds, in all leisure time activities, in all meetings, also in the parish... unless all this finally happens, there will always be a danger that preventing abuse may become an addition, an extra like an "App", something that you access when needed. It should not be like an App which we can turn on or off; on the contrary, it should be something that always appears, alongside other icons, on our desktop and which keeps reminding us that this is something that ought to come naturally, that ought to be part of normality: it should just be made part of all our activities. Anything we do should be characterised by paying attention and preventing abuse, because this is not something which is added to our Christian existence, it is actually one of its core expressions.

What counts is real life and care in establishing healthy relationships

Faith-led movements and associations are called upon, first and foremost, both in terms of their life within

their respective realities and of their social commitment, their apostolic service with third parties, to respect the regulations in force in the countries where they serve and conduct their work. They cannot and should not be exempted from the duties which the members of these ecclesial organisations have as citizens.

By the same token – exactly because they are forms of aggregation which should make the Church visible and give visibility to its commitment to live the Gospel in everyday life – they are obliged to abide by what the Church itself has stipulated on the subject of preventing and facing all forms of abuse.

More specifically, as regards faith-based organisations, ecclesial movements and all communities recognised by the Holy See, one whole day has been dedicated by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life – on 13th June 2019 – to the topic of preventing sexual abuse within these associations of the faithful. On that occasion, one of our guest speakers was Father Zollner. You can refer to the website of the Dicastery if you wish to read more about the contents shared during that meeting.

Also during that meeting, the Dicastery – represented by its Prefect, Cardinal Kevin Farrell[4], asked international faith-based associations to draft protocols for facing all forms of abuse within them and their apostolic service, as well as to establish educational activities for preventing any abuse.

[4] Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life.

Several guidelines have been sent out, in various languages, to the different associations, movements and communities of Pontifical Law. Most of them have already drafted protocols – many of them adequate, others not so much – of which, in some cases, a second updated edition has already been published. There are others who still need to make the necessary arrangements, or to add improvements in order to follow these indications.

It is true that protocols and guidelines – as I mentioned earlier in another context – are fundamental, a prerequisite to act appropriately and with competence; however, even when you have perfectly drafted protocols and guidelines, what counts most is real life; in meetings, in the context of retreats, overnight stays, do we really implement what has been written? What about our actions and behaviours? We are well aware that prevention first of all means establishing healthy relationships, based on respecting the individual dignity of people, of everyone, of the little ones. Experts have concluded that, even in highly structured contexts to guarantee safety, there are cases of their becoming hyper-structured, which leads to power relations that are often extremely prone to abuse.

In conclusion, the challenge for associations consists in providing formation opportunities – as you are doing through this project – aimed at preventing *improvisations*, at avoiding any *spiritualisation*. I wish to underscore this, even though I do not have time

here to go into detail on the subject, in order to avoid being excessively rigid, which is something that – for various, sometimes opposing reasons – possibly hinders the healthy relationships we strive for. Contexts such as faith-based organisations can serve as beacons; they can and they should be prophetic for all ecclesial and social contexts where minors are welcomed. You can provide a model, serve as an encouragement for other centres, to the benefit of parishes, of dioceses, by divulging – for instance – the outcomes of this formation activity you have followed. What you are called to do is live the exhortation which Father Zollner mentioned earlier and which comes from today's Gospel, namely *Matthew* 18, «Anyone who welcomes one little child like this in my name welcomes me».

Living in this way, this mission which you have given yourselves, living it as a way to welcome the Lord who comes to us in this child, in this teenager, student, athlete, person attending this group or the other, or as the child who needs to be welcomed and who is entrusted to our care, to our family, is what makes any project which you might decide to implement totally meaningful.

Chapter two
Legal protection for minors and vulnerable persons
Antonella Perricelli

During the whole twentieth century, with regard to the attention in respect of the needs and interests of minors, there has been a cultural development which has had significant repercussions in the legal field. This has meant, first of all, acknowledging the need to make sure that children are especially safeguarded and protected; secondly, it involved giving them the status of person with legal rights. Alongside the increased social awareness in respect of children, also the concept of abuse has acquired increasingly precise meanings within our legal framework. There has been one first phase – around the middle of the last century – during which awareness started to increase with regard to the damage caused to a child by any behaviour contrary to the principle of absolute protection (mal-

treatment, indifference, disregard or neglect), which was followed by a second phase – in the final decades of the twentieth century – where the concept of abuse was further clarified, from both a psychological-clinical and legal perspective.

Abuse and sexual exploitation of children are very serious crimes because they affect people who should be entitled to special care and protection. These forms of violence cause lasting physical, psychological and social damage to the victims, as well as undermining the fundamental values related to special protection for minors. Even though no precise statistics are available, research has shown that this is not a decreasing trend: on the contrary some forms of sexual violence appear to be increasingly frequent.

The definition of abuse is especially difficult given the complexity of the phenomenon which tends to develop on different levels and implies multiple levels of intervention. As a matter of fact, the institutions dealing with abuse are faced with new types of issues. There is no doubt that any action for preventing, taking charge and protecting a victim of abuse needs to be supported by a global action enabled by the relevant network of services.

Abuse in an international framework

One of the first attempts at defining abuse dates to the IV Criminological Colloquium of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, 1981, which characterised the

concept as: «a set of actions and shortcomings which seriously upset the child, jeopardising bodily integrity, physical, affective, intellectual and moral development, whose manifestations include neglect and/or injuries of a physical and/or psychological nature by a family member or others who have the care of the child».

One of the main international instruments which have been made available for the protection of children is the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, a document signed in New York on 29th November 1989, which entered into force in 1990; it was then ratified by Italy with Law 27 May 1991, no. 176. This first legislative intervention on the subject then led to a series of Laws at international level, and laid solid groundwork for the construction of a system to promote clearly defined and inalienable rights for minors. More specifically, art. 19 stipulates that «States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse». It is thus clear that it is not just a first classification of the main forms in which abuse becomes apparent (all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse), it also requires that multiple levels of intervention need to be enabled by Govern-

ments (from a legal, administrative, social and educational perspective) to eradicate this issue.

Using wording similar to that in the UN *Convention*, Who (the World health organisation) has stated the following in its definition of child maltreatment, which includes «all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation».

The concept outlined in the UN *Convention* is presented in even greater detail in the *Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse* (also known as *Lanzarote Convention*), which entered into force on 1st July 2010 and was ratified by Italy with Law 01 October 2012 no. 172. It originated from the need felt by the international community to make available more efficient instruments of a preventive, regulatory and operational nature for the protection of children against crimes of a sexual nature, trying to contextualise the regulatory data within a deeply changed social fabric. The following forms of abuse are expressly mentioned here: child prostitution, child pornography, forced involvement of children in pornographic performances, cases of *grooming* (online) and of sexual tourism.

The general objective of the European Union, with regard to the topic in hand, is to prevent and combat crimes against minors, including abuse and sexual exploitation, by creating a more consistent framework for the fight against such crimes within the third pil-

lar, and strengthening their effectiveness (see art. 29 of the *Treat of the European Union*). The specific objectives here are: effectively prosecuting these crimes; safeguarding the rights of victims; preventing any abuse and sexual exploitation against children, and creating effective monitoring systems.

At international level, over time, there have been a set of interventions, instruments and international programmes whose common objective is the protection of minors against any form of sexual abuse. This shows how strongly the need is felt, at international level, to achieve the common objective of protecting minors against sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as to support the victims. The need is duly taken into account to draft global international instruments focusing on aspects related to prevention, protection and penal Law measures aimed at fighting all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse against children, by establishing specific control mechanisms.

The international framework which has been outlined here illustrates what is meant by legal protection of minors and vulnerable persons who are victim of abuse.

Legally protecting a person who has been victim of abuse entails the application of interventions and measures stipulated by Law, which may be implemented by various organisations, entities or persons with specific competences, with a view to achieving the following purposes:

- preventing and avoiding abuse;
- stopping any ongoing abuse;
- eliminating or reducing its harmful consequences;
- allowing for recovery of the psycho-physical wellbeing of the victim, on an individual and social level.

In conclusion, the objective of the system for legally safeguarding and protecting children and vulnerable persons is possibly to prevent, otherwise to eliminate or repair, any damage caused by actions associated with sexual violence, regardless of who the abuser it, which prevent or hinder the full and harmonious development of the child's personality (art. 3 UN 1989 *Convention*; art. 2, 31 (2), 32 Const.).

The final purpose of the whole system for legal protection is the physical-psychological wellbeing of minors and vulnerable persons.

Abuse in the Italian legal framework

On the subject of sexual violence, until 1996, the Italian legal framework included crimes related to the sexual sphere, classified as offences against morality and public decency. It was society to be considered as possibly offended by any sexual act which involved violence, deceit and the use of force against someone who had not consented, or against a minor, the latter being unable to give consent fully and with awareness.

It was Law 15 February 1996, no. 66 (*Norms against sexual violence*) that catalogued sexual violence among crimes against personal freedom (by introduc-

ing Articles from 609-*bis* to 609-*decies* of the penal code). The legal asset to be safeguarded is now sexual freedom, namely having free availability of one's body in the sexual sphere, and the inviolability of the latter. Moreover, Law 66/96 has the merit of stipulating that the protection for minors who are victims of sexual violence should be strengthened. The original intent of this consolidated protection is to safeguard the integrity of the personal development pathway of any minor, being aware of the serious damage caused by sexual abuse to their physical, affective, intellectual and moral development. All this is achieved by:

- establishing stricter penalties in cases of sexual violence against minors;
- accepting the principle of assumed lack of consent;
- introducing forms of protected listening for the victim, guaranteeing psychological support.

The Italian penal code considers sexual violence – pursuant to Article 609-*bis* – any conduct that:

- induces another person to engage in or suffer sexual intercourse using violence, threats or abuse of power;
- forces a person to engage in or suffer sexual intercourse by exploiting conditions of physical or psychological inferiority of the abused person at the time of the event (the possible penalty in this case is a jail term between six and twelve years).

It is worth noting that the concept of sexual acts by Law includes not just any actions involving the genital area, but also all those associated with erogenous

areas without the person's consent, even if there is no physical contact with the victim (i.e. online).

As for abusing of conditions of physical or psychological inferiority of the injured person at the time of the event, by Law the abused person does not necessarily need to be in a condition of full-blown psycho-pathology, in the sense they may even merely be suffering from a basic handicap, which may be due to permanent or transient pathological situations of an organic and functional nature, and both to traumas and environmental factors which have a negative impact on the formation of the individual personality. It is therefore a pre-requisite that the victim should be forced to have sexual intercourse by abusing the said condition of inferiority; in that case, even though consent is apparently given within a context of absolute freedom, it is actually fLawed because the victim's capacity to resist external inputs is absent or diminished.

The victim's age is considered an aggravating circumstance of crimes involving sexual violence:

- the age of the victim is an aggravating circumstance (art. 609-*ter* penal code) in case of crimes involving sexual violence, and ignorance of this information may not be used by the abuser as a mitigating factor (art. 609-*sexies* penal code);
- in the specific, sentence increase if the offence is committed against a person who, at the time of the abuse:
    - a. is less than eighteen years old (the sentence is increased by 1/3);

b. is less that fourteen years old (the sentence is increased by 1/2);

c. is less than ten years old (the sentence is doubled).

Furthermore, our legislation includes a specific punishable offence with regard to sexual abuse against minors.

More specifically, our legislation includes the crime of "sexual intercourse with a minor" (art. 609-*quater* of the penal code), namely with a person who, at the time of the abuse:

- is younger than fourteen;
- is younger than sixteen, if the abuser is a parent, possibly an adoptive parent, guardian, or any other person to whom – for purposes of care, education, teaching, supervision or custody – the minor is entrusted.
- the minor is sixteen or older, if the abuser is a parent, possibly an adoptive parent, guardian or any other person to whom – for purposes of care, education, teaching, supervision or custody – the minor is entrusted, and who abuses that position (three-six years) (Same sentence stipulated by art. 609-*bis* penal code: jail term from six to twelve years).

Therefore, more specifically for any child who is less than fourteen years old (a minor who has not yet turned fourteen):

- the presumption principle applies, in other words, the lack of consent is assumed. It is considered that consent by the minor is fLawed by the condition

of inferiority due to age, and the crime of sexual intercourse with a minor is punished with the same sentence as that of sexual violence (art. 609-*quater* penal code);

- if, on the other hand, violence, threat or abuse of power is exercised against a minor aged less than 14, it becomes a possible case of aggravated sexual violence, and the sentence stipulated for sexual violence is increased accordingly (art. 609-*ter* penal code).

In the case of any minor who is less than sixteen:

- the penal code provides that any sexual abuse is punishable if it has been committed by a parent, possibly an adoptive parent, their live-in partner, guardian, or any other person to whom – for purposes of care, education, teaching, supervision or custody – the minor is entrusted or who is currently living with the child;
- as a consequence, sexual intercourse with a minor aged less than sixteen who has consented by a person who is a "stranger" to the minor in question, is not punishable.

According to Italian legislation it is not possible to prosecute a minor who engages in sexual intercourse with another minor who has turned thirteen, provided that the difference in age between the two is no more than four years.

Italian Law, moreover, prosecutes those who intentionally engage in sexual intercourse in the presence of children aged less than fourteen, for the purpose of

having them watch, an offence classified as "child corruption" (art. 609-*quinquies,* penal code). This article was introduced by Law 15 February 1996 no. 66, and replaced by art. 4(1)(s) of Law 1 October 2012 no. 172 (*Ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention for the protection of minors against sexual abuse and exploitation, signed in Lanzarote on 25*th *October 2007, including adjustments to domestic legislation).* Law no. 172/2012 introduced two types of conduct, one of them consisting in allowing a child to watch sexual intercourse, the other which involves showing pornographic materials to a child, for the purpose of inducing them to sexual intercourse. Also in this case, the purpose of the provision is to protect the child concerned, and guarantee the proper psycho-physical development of any minor aged less than fourteen. In this regard, by Law, the said development should not be upset by any trauma which might be caused by watching other persons obstinately engaging in sexual intercourse.

Another relevant step for our country on the subject of the protection of minors has been the introduction of Law 3 August 1998, no. 269 (*Provisions against the exploitation of prostitution, pornography and sexual tourism involving minors*). As matter of fact, Italy – by acknowledging the protection of children as a priority to be pursued against any form of sexual exploitation and violence, in order to safeguard their physical, psychological, spiritual, moral and social

development, has introduced new provisions aimed at facing paedophilia and child pornography. All this was done pursuant to the *Convention on the rights of the child*, ratified according to Law 27 May 1991, no. 176, as well as to the provisions in the final declaration of the World Conference in Stockholm, approved on 31st August 1996. Law 269/98 has made sure that Italy is aligned with the international approach involving the possibility of prosecuting child pornography as a criminal offence, as well as the possibility of cross-border prosecution for crimes related to sexual violence and exploitation against children. These cases, regrettably, are increasing in number and becoming widespread to a degree that causes concern, always finding new forms of expression.

More specifically, this legislative stipulation:

- has added new provisions in the penal code (from art. 600-*bis* to 600-*septies*) in order to counteract and punish more effectively, with harsher sentences, any actions and behaviours typical of paedophilia and child pornography, such as child prostitution, the exploitation of minors for pornographic performances, the production, trade, publishing (also by posting online), possession of child pornography materials, the smuggling and trafficking of minors;
- generally speaking, any actions which seriously harm the child's personality and dignity, reducing him or her to an item used for pleasure or trade.

It is clear that the approach chosen at international level strongly influences any new regulations being added to Italian legislation in respect of the topic under discussion here.

Disclosing abuse

In most cases, abuse has a history that is hidden and not listened to; the language of abused children is often decipherable too late compared to the wounds suffered by the minors involved. The child's experience does not make it possible to immediately focus on the negative side of the abusive actions incurred. The victims will thus be subconsciously led to hiding their distress. Moreover, the abuser often follows behavioural models which are strongly manipulative (intimidations or reassurances) to make it possible for the abuse to continue. If, on the other hand, the abuse takes place inside the family or in what is assumed to be a context of care, the child's silence may be the result of a choice. Therefore, in most cases, there is a significant gap between the time the victim is seriously harmed by the abuse and the time that the decision is made to disclose it.

This clearly shows the importance of mechanisms for disclosing the offence and reporting it to the judicial authority. It is essential that, once the abuse has been disclosed and reported, the information should reach someone who is able to recognise and take it in, then mentor the victim. The first step to be taken with regard to the abused person is to acknowledge what has

happened, then put in place – without delay – all necessary protection measures. In order to legally safeguard a victim of abuse, it is necessary to make sure that the minor concerned does not suffer the effects of secondary victimisation. In other words, it is necessary to prevent any further negative consequences from an emotional and relational perspective which the abused person might incur other than primary victimisation, that is to say, the set of harmful consequences of a physical, psychological, economic and social nature incurred as a direct consequence of the crime in question.

It is important to avoid contaminating any sources of evidence with inappropriate questions. In a criminal case, taking the first statements is considered one of the essential moments. Possible suggestions (even if involuntary) or mistakes in the relationship with the witness may cause significant – possibly irreparable – damage to the testimony. A hearing which is irregular (suggestive, misleading or merely not emphatic) has repercussions on the truthfulness of the first statements.

On 9th June 1996 a conference was held in Noto (Siracusa, Italy) on *Sexual abuse against minors and criminal prosecution,* where the speakers included several professional figures operating in the delicate professional area of abuse against children (lawyers, magistrates, psychologists, psychiatrists, criminologists, forensic experts). The discussion among professionals, the exchange of mutual experiences and difficulties, as well as of operational proposals, resulted in a document – known as the *Charter*

of Noto – with guidelines to be followed and put in practice whenever one deals, in a professional capacity, with a case involving alleged victims of abuse. On 7ᵗʰ July 2002, the *Charter of Noto* was updated, taking into account the introduction of new regulations, the progress made in terms of scientific research, and the constant updating of the professional figures involved.

Listening to the child

When taking statements it is necessary to reduce the number of hearings to a minimum (*Charter of Noto* IV, art. 3). Particularly in children, repeating the narrative entails a risk of the relevant memory being distorted, possibly leading to mistakes and changes (*National Guidelines*, art. 2.18). Children construct their memories through their narrative, meaning that – in listening contexts – they review and repeat to their counterparts the events they have experienced, sometimes introducing elements which become constitutive part of the memory, thus reducing its truthfulness (*National guidelines*, art. 2.22). The hearing should take place as soon as possible after the abuse report. The passing of time leads not just to a fading of memory, especially in small children, but it also leads to its possible reprocessing and contamination. Whenever a child is exposed to repetitions of the memory, the tendency is to distort the memory in question. The ideal approach is to contact competent professionals as soon as possible, because the more time passes between the disclosure of

abuse and the hearing, the greater the risk becomes of the narrative being reprocessed and contaminated.

All victims of abuse deserve being properly listened to, deeply respecting their dignity, acknowledging with empathy the pain they have suffered, and being aware of the seriousness of the wound they have suffered.

Prevention, reporting and helping the victim's recovery

As already mentioned, the legal protection for children and vulnerable persons who are victims of abuse entails, by necessity, the application of actions aimed at preventing and avoiding abuse: stopping any ongoing abuse; eliminating or reducing harmful consequences thereof; allowing for recovery of the psycho-physical wellbeing of the victim, both on the individual and social level.

These are all routes to be followed by the actions of those who have educational responsibilities: preventing abuse (through formation, vigilance and good practices); stopping any ongoing abuse (deciding whether the case should be reported to the authorities in charge); eliminating or reducing harmful consequences thereof, both on the individual and social level (by mentoring the victims of abuse).

With regard to prevention, those who have the task of educating or caring for minors and vulnerable persons (regardless of whether this occurs in associations or centres where fragile persons are welcomed and cared for) always need to supervise their own behaviours in

respect of the persons in care. Their way of relating to them should always take into account individual experiences, consider any consequence on the persons in front of you, with their life baggage, possibly involving psychological and physical vulnerabilities. This can lead to strong psychological addiction in respect of the adult, which may cause misunderstandings and/or distortions. It is necessary to guarantee a form of supervision appropriate for the actual situation; all standards of diligence and efficiency need to be applied taking into account the physical and psychological conditions of the persons we are taking care of. It is important to implement prevention strategies based on relational procedures and strategies, creating environments that are as safe as possible, considering the available spaces and locations. Those responsible for children or vulnerable persons must make sure that any dangerous or ambiguous situations are correctly assessed.

With regard to reporting, it should be noted that anyone may report cases of minors being abused or abandoned, thus in need of legal protection; however, reporting may be made mandatory in some cases. More specifically, any public official (e.g. mayor, police and armed forces, fire-fighters and municipal police), or any civil servant (e.g. employees in government offices, nurses, operators in care or nursing homes) who is informed or discovers that a child may be victim of abuse and/or maltreatment (either physical or psychological) is expected to report the abuse

and/or maltreatment to the judicial authority, if they have become aware of the case while on duty (art. 331 Code of Penal Procedure).

In the event that a history of abuse should emerge, it is important to act in order to eliminate or reduce its harmful consequences, thus allowing for complete recovery of the psycho-physical wellbeing of the victim, by means of constant and long-lasting mentoring, deploying the necessary professional instruments.

Abusers and their mentoring

Mentoring the victims is therefore a fundamental aspect of protection; however it is also necessary to use appropriate strategies with a view to helping the person who has committed violent or abusive actions against minors or vulnerable persons. The aim of this is to allow the person in question to actually become aware of their actions, as well as to enable prevention of possible recurrence.

At international level, the first programmes targeted to maltreating and abusive men date to the 1980s. The first projects in this regard, based on a model developed in the United States, served for outlining procedures to work with abusers as part of a community strategy revolving around the safety of victims, raising awareness in the abusers and offering them a chance for redemption. At international level, the drive towards the first treatment programmes for abusers came from organisations against violence, often involv-

ing those already providing support for the victims. In Italy the first treatment programmes involving the authors of abuse and violence, accessible outside jails, date to 2009. It is worth mentioning that, since 2013, there has been an increase in projects of this kind, also as a consequence of having a more favourable legislative and institutional framework.

Actions aimed at abusers have become at the same time more numerous and differentiated. The first projects which were started years ago are now becoming widespread and articulated in different ways depending on the areas where they are being implemented; by the same token, projects inside jails are being continued with an extended scope. It is also worth mentioning that several public services have started to pay attention to the topic, starting from pilot projects implemented in some local health units.

Centres for abusive men, with their different formation pathways, are being established and keep growing in number, following the inauguration of the first in 2004; after 2010 there has been an acceleration in their establishment. The synergy between private associations, public institutions, cultural centres and prisons – complemented by support from several academic institutions – bears witness both to how articulated the situation is for the players involved, and to the need, also in our country, for a structured and widespread action aimed at mentoring men who have been responsible for violent and abusive actions.

GLOSSARY

Listening to children
When taking statements it is important to reduce to a minimum the number of hearings; the hearing should take place as soon as possible after the report has been made; the passing of time leads not just to memory fading, especially in small children; it also entails the possibility of reprocessing and contamination in the narrative. It is important to resort as soon as possible to professionals for the necessary support.

The Italian legal framework
Since 1996 our legislation has included strengthened protection for minors who are victims of sexual violence. The concept behind consolidating these safeguarding forms is to protect the integrity of the personal development path of the child, by providing for more stringent sentences in cases of sexual violence against minors, based on the principle of assumed lack of consent; procedures for protected listening to the victim, with the guarantee of psychological support.

Definition of abuse
The complexity of this issue, which becomes apparent on different levels and involves several areas of intervention, makes it especially hard to define sexual abuse. Institutions, together with the profession-

als dealing with abuse, are more and more frequently faced with a variety of new problems on multiple levels; as a consequence, any action aimed at preventing abuse, taking care and protecting the victim requires a global intervention on the part of the relevant service network.

Disclosing abuse

In most cases abuse has a history that is hidden and not listened to; the language of abused children is often decipherable too late compared to the wounds suffered by the minors involved; in most cases, there is a significant gap between the time the victim is seriously harmed by the abuse and the time that the decision is made to disclose it. Hence the importance of mechanisms for disclosing the offence and reporting it to the judicial authority.

An international outlook

The *Convention on the Rights of the Childs*, signed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 1989, ratified by Italy on 27/05/1991 with Law no. 176 stipulates as follows: «States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse».

The system for legal safeguard and protection of minors

Its main objective should be to avoid in advance, or to remove and repair, any damage caused by sexually violent actions, regardless of who the abuser is, which prevents or hinders the full and harmonious development of a child's personality. The final aim of the whole system for the legal protection of minors is their psycho-physical wellbeing.

Secondary victimisation

In order to legally safeguard a victim of abuse, we need to make sure that the minor concerned does not suffer the effects of secondary victimisation; in other words, to prevent further negative consequences from an emotional and relational perspective which the abused person might incur other than primary victimisation, i.e. the set of harmful consequences of a physical, psychological, economic and social nature incurred as a direct consequences of the crime in question.

Chapter three
Life in the digital continent: between risks and potential
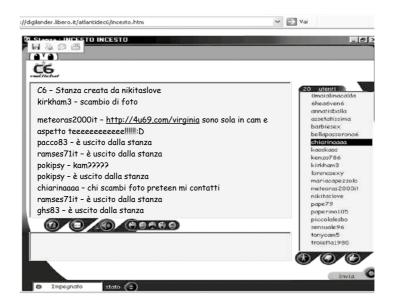
Fortunato Di Noto

In 1998, in a "*chatroom*" "*incest incest*", part of the instant messaging service Atlantide C6Multichat[1], one of the numerous users asked for "pre-teen materials" and for the possibility of contacting minors to manipulate their weak and innocent minds, filling their loneliness with "affection", "love", as well as sexual experiences. The image below can be defined as a historical document; as a matter of fact, for the digital universe and for digital natives, Atlantide C6Multichat looks like prehistory, and those who use it are

[1] Derived from a project of the website atlantide.it, it used to be the only instant messaging service entirely produced in Italy, which allowed for private chatting, in the system rooms (with *Atlantis* and *Aspy*, i.e. the coordinators), or in the rooms created by the users (approximately 300 in total); it has not been active since 2011 (from https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/C6_Multichat).

considered ancestors. However, what has not changed is the sexual perversion of individuals – men and women – who, for their sexual enjoyment, cause serious harm to any children who fall into their trap.

With the progress of technology this kind of sexual deviance has not gone down at all; on the contrary, the practice of *sexual exploitation of minors* – also online – has grown considerably over the years, to the extent that it can be defined as a criminal structure which keeps developing and consolidating, turning into a new form of slavery.

Figure 1: Figure 1: a page of the online "room" Incest incest of Atlantis C6 Multichat (1998)

From Atlantide C6Multichat to new social media – dynamic, immediate, invasive and inhabited by the masses – a long time has passed, however technology has developed as well. *Artificial Intelligence* is preparing new scenarios, new possibilities, new growth paths, which will hopefully encourage a strong action aimed at counteracting abuse against minors. Hopefully *Artificial Intelligence* will not take over *Human intelligence.* The digital revolution is currently in progress and constantly developing.

Those who use the Web "badly" run the risk of being shipwrecked in *digital peripheries*, places of affective and relational poverty. It is in these *technological favelas* that new forms of slavery originate, where children and teenagers are exploited, with their bodies digitised and abused for economic purposes. The Internet is not a 'bad' technology; in actual fact, it presents endless opportunities but, on the other hand, it has led to countless hazards, including identity loss, grooming, cyber-bullying, isolation which can also cause anorexia or bulimia, sexual abuse, paedophilia and child pornography, all described as new forms of slavery[2].

The Internet is not a neutral place[3]. Good and evil clash. The actions of those who abuse children

[2] See also: F. Di Noto, *Web mission tra le periferie digitali*, Passioneducativa, 2016.
[3] See F. Di Noto, *Pedofilia e pedopornografia: per non stare solo a guardare bisogna capire e agire*, Aleteia 20/02/2021 https://it.aleteia.org/2021/02/20/pedofilia-e-pedopornografia-per-non-stare-solo-a-guardare-bisogna-capire-e-agire/

and falsely love them are subtle and articulated, serving as the extension of criminal organisations. The online actions of a paedophile are complex and, in some way, obscure. More often than not they are not isolated individuals, but rather actual criminal organisations, which – apart from sharing, profiting from downloads of child pornography materials – often also produce the latter. Sexual abuse is filmed, photographed and shared; there are actual sets being created where this violence is documented. Children, however, are not actors; there is no fiction in this horror film. Children are actually abused, the violence is totally real and the damage suffered is indelible. The abusers are not actors either: they are criminals to be found and punished. After they have been produced, these videos and photos are posted and end up in the deep web, where there is a profitable market for illicit materials. Apart from the business component, the fact alone of downloading, sharing and possessing child pornography materials is punishable by Law. A survey by *Meter*[4] had confirmed that most of the

[4] As part of the systems for child protection and the fight against paedophilia and child pornography online, it is a significant point of reference in Italy, as well as being acknowledged worldwide (from China to Japan, from the USA to Europe) as one of the most reliable authorities for preventing distress in children and designing actions targeted to concrete support for victims of sexual abuse. With regard to the fight against child abuse, *Meter* actively cooperates with Government institutions, the Italian Polizia Postale, the Polish Police and several Public Prosecutor's offices in Italy. It has also been a member of the technical working group of the National Observatory against

materials tracked down by monitoring the Internet is found on free online portals or platforms, accessible by any user. In many cases, the links which have been reported are still active and usable after years. Through the web chats, **cyber-paedophiles** can meet to share links or folders with child pornography materials, using *file sharing services* free of charge, to upload and share materials anonymously and time-sensitive, or through social media channels such as Whatsapp and Telegram.

Inhabiting the Internet in a responsible and mature way

There are numerous risks for minors of being harassed and groomed in chat rooms. The Internet is often a useful tool for paedophiles in the initial phase for contacting minors, because it allows them – without risk of being exposed – to enact "soft" forms of harassment of a verbal kind, or the first approaches to facilitate a

paedophilia and child pornography online at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department for Equal Opportunities. The core of this Association is OS.MO.CO.P. (Worldwide Observatory against Paedophilia), a highly specialised office in searching for data on the Internet and in processing the flows of traffic with a view to counteracting paedophilia and child pornography. An essential pillar of the Association is the *Centro Ascolto* helpline for young victims of abuse and their families. Thanks to numerous protocols of agreement with schools at all levels, as well as with universities, *Meter* carries out capillary work for training and education at the *Polo Formativo ed Educativo* on the topic it is specialised in (bullying, cyber-bullying, sexting, the use of social networks, paedophilia, frailty, disability).

meeting in person with the child. The dangers lurking for our little ones on the Internet – of course, alongside the wonderful opportunities for growing and discovering the world around them that can be found on line – need to be taken into serious consideration by their parents. The latter should stay close to their children, guide them along their online path. They need to learn to speak their language, in order to understand their interests and their world. It is necessary to train and raise awareness in adults, as well as to educate children about how to browse the Internet safely.

Cyber-paedophiles and their actions
The cyber-paedophile is an individual who finds the possibility of satisfying their sexual fantasies online, without contravening any of the moral rules imposed by the society they live in; moreover they are able to satisfy their impulses in a virtual manner. All this leads to nothing but more deviance and detachment from real life. It is also worth noting that they are highly skilled in efficiently using technology to reach their purposes.

There are various types of paedophiles who use the Internet:
- *closet collector:* they jealously store their child pornography collection, and are never involved in person, in abuse against minors;
- *isolated collector:* collector of child pornography, selecting a specific group, and directly involved in abuse against children;

- *cottage collector:* sharing their collection and sexual activities with others, but without profiting from them;
- *commercial collector:* directly involved in the sexual exploitation of minors, producing, copying and selling child pornography materials.
- *Paedo-crime* (organised): a complex and hierarchical structure which – with the forced consent of parents – attracts young victims, making them available merely for purposes of sexual violence, in order to make a business profit, through meetings in person or online.

Childhood emotional neglect, fertile ground for paedophilia

It is not easy to draw a profile of a paedophile, because these persons are totally ordinary, apparently respectable and usually very close to the child. These situations are not necessarily found in contexts of degradation, but rather of affective solitude. The paedophile, when choosing a victim, generally prefers children who are lonely, neglected from an affective perspective, and have no friends, which means they are more likely to mistake their attentions for affectionate gestures. Children victims of paedophilia are "*orphaned children with living parents*", children with parents concerned about their material wellbeing, but who underestimate their child's emotional wellbeing, forgetting that what he or she essentially needs is to be hugged and spend time with them.

A paedophile, or anyone intending to harm the child, actually uses the loneliness of the latter to fill it, to become their friend, a reference figure, giving them the love they are lacking, thus leading them into an *emotional trap.* The victim's family does not belong to any specific social class, nor does it have unified and unmistakable requirements. In many cases they are families where parents are excessively career-oriented, focusing on achievements rather than on the wellbeing of their children and of the family; they tend to spend too little time with their children, possibly are unable to understand their actual needs; they do not realise the requests for help coming from their children, and do not question their parental role.

A paedophile's actions online are complex and, in some respects, obscure

In most cases they are not isolated individuals, but rather actual criminal organisations, which – apart from sharing, speculating on the download of child pornography materials – also produce the latter. Sexual abuse is filmed, photographed and shared; there are actual sets being created where this violence is documented. Children, however, are not actors; there is no fiction in this horror film. Children are actually abused, the violence is totally real and the damage suffered is indelible. The abusers are not actors either: they are criminals to be found and punished. After they have been produced, these videos

and photos are posted and end up in the deep web, where there is a profitable market for illicit materials. Apart from the business component, the fact alone of downloading, sharing and possessing child pornography materials is punishable by Law.

Surveys by *Report Meter on paedophilia and child pornography*[5] are evidence of a clear and undisputable "criminal movement" inside digital peripheries, where millions of children have drowned or risk drowning. Inhabiting the Web means, on the one hand, using all potential *opportunities*, and – on the other side – being *responsible citizens* of the Internet, also in order to support and help anyone who might be in difficulty: this is a civic, ethical and moral duty, as well as religious: respect and protection of each person's dignity, all the more so in the case of children.

On the Internet there are spaces that are open, *unchecked* and with no *safety paths*; this means that children and vulnerable persons are exposed to multiple risks, and getting trapped in a market which is one of the most 'inhuman' is frighteningly easy. Recruiting, grooming are actions which are structured with deceit, emotional blackmail and entrapment by a new, well structured criminality.

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[5] *Report Meter* surveys are published by the Association every year; they are evidence of its concrete and operating commitment to child protection against any form of abuse. Its official website is www.associazionemeter.org

Meter reports: paedophilia and child pornography are a global crime

The phenomenon of child pornography online is widespread worldwide, with no continent being immune. It is becoming increasingly clear that there are no geographical borders and the Internet is still no-man's-land, with an undefined and borderless *landscape* where criminality can act almost undisturbed. Very often, the links under investigation show that the extension – although it geographically belongs to one country – includes services provided by servers in other nations; America and Europe are the main locations of the servers which manage this flow of information.

Users in one continent may register a domain which geographically belongs to a country in another continent, then post whatever they like on the Web pages they have bought, including illegal materials. There are *file sharing* services allowing to send, in a matter of minutes, zipped folders to the other side of the world. As a matter of fact – over the past few years – *Meter* has recorded an increase in the number of folders reported, considering this one of the fasted and safest ways for Web predators to act, also because in most cases these are time-sensitive folders which leave no trace. In other words, online crime makes the most of the technologies and resources made available by the Internet to forward materials involving horrific abuse against children. Also the Laws on privacy currently seem powerless against the activities

of online paedophiles. The submerged world of online abuse has become inscrutable; Web giants claim that the privacy of their users needs to be protected. This is a sacrosanct principle for everyone, however it causes deplorable hindrance to investigations by police offices worldwide, which seem to be fighting against windmills, without being equipped with the appropriate contrast weapons, because privacy codes, also at European level, prevent authorities from using instruments which may jeopardise the confidentiality of those who browse the Internet...and cyber-paedophiles thrive, taking advantage of all this.

Can the concept of privacy coexist with the shameful crimes perpetrated by abusers against children?[6]

Is there a political commitment in this regard? Unless there are international legislative directives and a joint action by police forces against child pornography online, it will never be possible to find the abusers and their young victims. If any investigation is carried out, it is unlikely to lead to the hoped-for outcome of identifying the abusers and possibly sentencing

[6] As reference, see also the interview given by Father Fortunato Di Noto to «Vatican News», where he points out that the recent regulations approved by the EU to protect minors against online abuse is too weak and not brave enough. The right to privacy seems to have prevailed over the protection of minors. www.vaticannews.va/it/mondo/news/2021-07/don-di-noto-pedofilia-pedopornografia-bambini-parlamento-ue.html

them. Repression is even more complicated because – in many countries – there is no legislation dealing specifically with child pornography or online crimes related to this form of abuse.

International politics – given that this is a dramatic cross-border issue – needs to pass incisive legislation on the matter, thus allowing police forces to operate without legal and bureaucratic hindrances which slow down the progress of investigations. What about domain administrators? What are their responsibilities? Domain registers, administrators of websites and *file sharing* platforms are called to supervise all materials circulating under their name. It is true that they have no control over the materials uploaded by the users; nevertheless, they have the authority to demand that such materials be deleted, and – if the Laws in their country allow it – they may also provide the authorities in charge with the IP addresses of those who have uploaded and/or downloaded the relevant materials. The fact remains that, due to loopholes in complicated legislation, to transferring responsibility among offices and to the ineffectiveness of repression, children drown all over the world.

A disgrace, a global plague

How can we disclose this evil? God has actually given us the strength of an ox in order to free someone from slavery, and this compensates us for all the effort and pain. It is true: it has happened, and all we can do

is thank the Lord, who has given us all that is good. Saving a child means saving the whole world, an expression that I have heard for other human tragedies and cruelties. The commitment on the part of Meter continues, it has never stopped. As for everything that serves good purposes and the protection of the little ones, those who are weak and poor, there is often much discouragement and loneliness involved. The keywords are safeguard, hear, protect and act.

One should not talk about something one does not know, this is why we have chosen the *2020 Report survey* as reference.

The Meter 2020 Report in a nutshell, for insight regarding this global Internet issue

Paedophilia and child pornography appear not to have been affected by COVID.
In 2020 we were all forced to stay home, and this has meant a lucrative chance for those who rape children and exploit the materials produced using these young slaves of our modern times... and for the time being there seems to be no vaccine against abuse.

The pandemic has not stopped paedophiles
In 2020 *Meter,* through OS.MO.CO.P. (its Worldwide Observatory against Paedophilia) has monitored the Internet and compiled specific reports, forwarded to the Italian *Polizia Postale* (investigat-

ing online crime) and to police forces abroad. This means that our data and links are counted one by one; as a matter of fact they have often provided the starting point for investigations at national and world level, which have led to the arrest and trial – followed by the relevant sentencing – of actual paedophile and child pornography networks.

The links have almost doubled compared to 2019: a total of 14,521 instead of 8,489. *Meter* has highlighted something which is interesting as it is disconcerting: the amount of reported videos has more than doubled, with 992,300 videos in 2019 increasing to 2,032,556 in 2020. The zipped folders have increased from 325 to 692. In 2019 there were 7,074,194 images reported, in 2020 the figure dropped to 3,768,057, almost half the amount. It seems clear that "mere" photos are no longer enough: paedophiles search and produce more videos to satisfy their unhealthy wishes; their deviant perversion finds a more effective outlet and satisfaction in moving images. The videos, swallowed up by "consumers" of child pornography, make it easier for them to enter the "picture", to be "proactive" in front of a screen, witnessing actions against poor helpless victims. *Meter* recorded an increase in materials reported between February and May 2020. Due to lockdown measures, the use of social media and the time dedicated to browsing the Internet by children has increased. On the one hand, the Web provided

the only way of keeping in touch with their friends, with their peers, to study and find distractions from domestic routine; on the other hand, it has exposed children to online risks; as a matter of fact, the potential number of children being groomed online has increased.

Social network and instant messaging services. Exchange channels for paedophiles

In 2020 Meter reported 192 groups on WhatsApp (92) and Telegram (100) to the Italian *Polizia Postale*, as well as to other police forces abroad and to the service providers themselves. Both these services offer their customers end-to-end cryptography, allowing for maximum privacy. A message may be read only by the sender and by the recipient. The message is actually encrypted on the sender's smartphone, forwarded to the recipient, then finally decrypted. Telegram seems to be especially concerned about protecting its users' privacy; moreover, it offers the possibility of joining public or private groups to share various kinds of files. Some private groups serve as a channel for messages sent with a criminal intent, which also includes child pornography contents. The application is based on a *Cloud* system, with all multimedia attachments being saved online and not stored in the memory of the relevant device; there are also confidential chat lines which allow for self-destruction of videos and messages, with the

possibility of setting an allowed time for the recipient of the message to view it.

Here again, technological instruments are used by child pornographers, with clear-minded perversion, to groom minors, to exchange materials and disseminate pro-paedophilia ideas. Facebook recorded 262 chat rooms with a child pornography content. There are still groups of paedophiles who choose to discuss this topic via Facebook, then – using a Whatsapp connection – exchange materials through the latter, taking advantage of the *end-to-end* technology which guarantees the privacy of the exchange. In February 2014 Whatsapp, one of the most widely used instant messaging applications worldwide, was bought by Facebook, offering users new functions and more possibilities for interaction; and, once again, as already mentioned, paedophiles are able to make the most of technological innovations and, unfortunately, they manage to achieve their nefarious purposes.

For Twitter, the monitoring by Meter recorded just two chat rooms.

Politics and the cultural and educational world need to make a commitment on the front of education and prevention in order to avoid the digital overexposure of minors' bodies which are sent (in the form of photos and videos) to strangers who use the method of blackmail.

Over a period of six years, 20 millions of images reported
If we take a look at the time series, we can say that Meter has sent 63,688 protocols since 2002 to police forces all over the world, with 189,232 links reported. Through our *Centro Ascolto* helpline we followed 1,832 cases and received 30,280 phone requests. There is more: in just six years, between 2014 and 2020, we have reported 19,771,071 photos and 5,501,752 videos. Reports were filed on 13,066 mega-archives and 1,214 chat rooms.

It is also worth noting that, in many cases, *Meter* was able to file reports thanks to the form on the Association's website, www.associazionemeter.org, through which users, 17,507 times between 2007 and the present date, have forwarded suspicious addresses. As regards social media, from 2008 to the present date, we have sent 8,661 reports to police forces while, in the case of the Deep Web, the most hidden and unknown scourge on the Internet, there have been 47,539 reports filed.

Increase in generic domains
In 2020 different data emerged compared to the previous years: most of the reported links were included in the .com domain (11,049 in 2020; 2,483 in 2019); out of a total of 14,521 links reported, 12,387 had a generic domain (5,977 in 2019). This shows a change in the methods for sharing child pornography materials. Cyber-paedophiles seem

to prefer exchanges through *file sharing* platforms, often free of charge and time-based, using websites which offer temporary space on their servers, making it possible to share – with just a few clicks of the mouse – files and folders, often in a totally anonymous manner; alternatively, materials may be exchanged via chat rooms or social network groups. Of course, these web services have multiple advantages: child pornographers all over the world are, of course, well aware of them and use them almost undisturbed for their shady trafficking.

Domain ranking and the responsibility of service providers
Let us now consider the location of first level domains, that is to say the international "registration codes" for links where the images and videos reported by Meter were found.

Ranking first is New Zealand (453 reports, domain.nz), Grenada (353, domain .gd), Montenegro (241, domain .me); in 2019 the island of Haiti in the Caribbean Sea in Central America ranked first, with 640 links (domain .ht); France ranked second, with 484 links (domain.fr); ranking third, with 410 links, was New Zealand. Let us now consider a breakdown of these figures by continent, bearing in mind that in 2020 there were 30 countries involved in our monitoring.

• *Africa: Libya, São Tomé and Príncipe, Mali.* The African Continent totals 40 reports. Libya ranks

first with 26 (compared to 8 in 2019), followed by *São Tomé and Príncipe* (8), Mali with 6.

- *America: Grenada, St. Vincent & Grenadine, Colombia.* The Americas totalled 527 reports: Grenada, with 353; followed by St. Vincent & Grenadine, 97; Colombia with 59. At the bottom of the ranking are the Island of Anguilla (12) and Belize with 6.

- *Asia: British Indian Ocean Overseas Territory, Reunion, India.* As regards Asia, ranking first just as in 2019 is the British Indian Ocean Overseas Territory, where the number of domains has dropped from 284 to 119, followed by the island of Reunion (22), India (20), then by the Philippines with two reports. Total: 163.

- *Europe: Montenegro, France, Russia; Italy ranks fourth.* Let us now move to the Old Continent. Ranking first, here, is Montenegro, with 241 reports, followed by France (161) and Russia (97). Italy is also in the list, ranking fourth with 70. The latter figure is disturbing: in 2019 Italy totalled just two reports, compared to 27 from Montenegro; France – ranking first that year – had 484. The total number of reports has risen from 644 to 671.

- *Oceania: New Zealand, Wallis and Futuna, Tonga.* Last but not least, let us turn to Oceania, where a total of 733 reports was recorded, with an increase if compared to 681 in 2019. Again ranking

first, like last year, is New Zealand, with an increase from 410 to 453 reports, followed by Wallis and Futuna (129, compared to 15 in 2019), Tonga (72 compared to 60 in 2019). The ranking is completed by the Cocos Islands, from 12 to 61 reports, Micronesia, from 69 to 9, Palau from 90 to 7, and finally Tuvalu from 20 to 2.

Deep web: an on-going scourge

The *deep web* and *dark web* (i.e. the hidden part of the Internet) constitute a free space where criminal associations from all over the world can expand their trafficking. Illicit practices are able to move at an exponential rate within these uncontrollable free zones, where intervention by police forces from all over the world proves difficult. It is actually the largest and most obscure section of the Internet, which is not indexed by search engines, therefore it will never come up on Google. The dark web, the deepest section of the deep web, includes pages with the .onion domain. The best known software in order to access the dark web is Tor; it looks like a browser which can be downloaded free of charge. Tor was originally created by the United States Department of Defence to allow for anonymous and secure communications. In 2004 it became a public domain, therefore an instrument to protect one's identity. Browsing with these systems means safeguarding personal confidentiality, as if users were wearing a hood which allows them not do

disclose their identity, actually making it changeable with every click. These areas in the Web, for obvious reasons, serve as humus where the atrocities documented and described in the report can thrive. It is important to state clearly that the figures presented in this paper are not statistical data, abstract calculations: they are reports where – behind each image or video – there is a child. Those responsible for supervision and justice should do their utmost to make sure that what happens every day on the Internet is no longer silenced.

Pedomama

Among new trends on the Internet, the phenomenon known as "Pedomama" identifies female sexual abuse, that is to say abuse which is perpetrated by women, mothers, against a minor, or their child. In a society where the expectation is for men to be guilty of these crimes against humanity, definitely not the mother, abuse by a mother against a son or daughter causes more indignation than if it were committed by the male parent (father). This happens because it implies a violation of the social expectations which frame the female and maternal figure. Realising that women – whose role traditionally involves caring, protection, assistance and education – may be the abusers causes discomfort and distress, but the phenomenon is regrettably on the rise today. It is important to become aware of this phenomenon, because acknowledging it

allows us to protect young victims. Minimising this crime has a detrimental effect on the type of intervention to face these crimes. In 2020 Meter reported as many as 2,652 videos and photos found inside folders called pedomam, familypedo, mamborn, which show mothers abusing their children.

Lack of homogeneity in Laws worldwide
Once again it is worth highlighting and reporting a legislative vacuum on the subject of child pornography. As a matter of fact, not all countries in the world have suitable legislation to face criminality related to paedophilia and child pornography. There is often no actual obligation of collaboration among server providers, which – in many countries – provide data to competent authorities just "on a voluntary basis", thus continuing to protect for intolerable reasons the privacy of Internet users, even of criminals. Over the past few years Meter has started important partnerships with servers and domain administrators at national level. The most immediate result of this is removal of the materials; nevertheless it often happens that, following the reports, the outcome is merely the following default response: «We have received the report and are forwarding it to the authorities in charge». To date the abundant amount of reports sent does not lead to the starting of investigations and fair outcome of the legal actions. In many cases, reports just fall into oblivion: evidence of this circumstance

is that – many years later – the same material that had been reported is found to have been "relocated" to other web pages. It is necessary to find the guilty parties, otherwise any fight will prove ineffective and useless. Immobility is a final blow both to the victims and to those who deal with safeguarding and protecting them. Nevertheless it is worth mentioning the constant action and synergy between Meter and the Italian *Polizia Postale.*

Meter reporting has led to as many as 24 operations against the phenomenon of online paedophilia and child pornography... but this cannot and should not be enough.

Cultural paedophilia

The Internet is not just an instrument which is used to disseminate photos and videos with paedophilic and child pornography content for money-making purposes; it is also a way of "defending" paedophilia and attempting its standardisation. There is actually a well-structured and organised lobby (fund raising and international day pro-paedophilia) which provides advice on how to groom children and points to websites where photos and videos with child pornography can be found. In order to counteract the paedophile ideology, the *Lanzarote Convention* of 25th October 2007, ratified by Italy in 2012 with Law no. 172, introduced into our legislation art. 414 bis of the penal code.

For the first time, the expression "cultural paedophilia and child pornography" was used in our legislation: «Unless there is a more serious offence involved, anyone who – with any means and form of expression, also on line, and solely for cultural purposes – publicly legitimises, disseminates legitimising judgements, instigates to committing or actively defends any of the conducts referred to in articles 600-*bis*, 600-*ter*, 600-*quater*, 600-*quater*.1, 600-*quinquies*, 609-*bis*, 609-*quater* and 609-*quinquies*, involving minors, is punishable with a jail term of between three and five years». Despite the *Lanzarote Convention* (2007), there is still a proliferation of such websites. They use various logos and forms of identification to recognise each other, to diversify their sexual preferences and to specifically indicate the gender favoured by the paedophile; this is why members of paedophile organisations encourage the use of descriptions such as *boylove, girllove* and *childlove.*

How can we protect the little ones?

There are two trends regarding online paedophilia: on the one hand, someone considers child pornography sites a virtual way to satisfy one's desires; on the other hand, there are others who believe that it is just a way of encouraging online paedophiles to enact something that, until then, had remained dormant. The risks of harassment and grooming for children in chat rooms are numerous; as a matter of fact, even though there

is a physical distance between the two counterparts, it is possible to erase any age or cultural gaps which would normally inhibit face-to-face relations between children and adults. The Internet, in many cases, represents a useful tool for paedophiles during the initial contact phase with minors, as it allows them, without disclosing themselves, to implement "soft" forms of verbal harassment or first approaches to foster a real encounter with the child in person. The dangers reserved by the Internet for the little ones, alongside – of course – the wonderful opportunities for growth and discovery of the world around them, call for special attention on the part of parents. The latter always need to remain close to their children in terms of guiding their way of browsing the Internet; they should also learn to speak their language so as to better understand their interests and their world.

From awareness about the phenomenon of online grooming to rules for browsing safely

Children tend to be highly fascinated and attracted by the Internet, to the extent that they pretend to be older than they are to be allowed to register with social networks, blogs and for online gaming. The extreme ease and accessibility of online browsing for young people often leads them to crossing the boundaries of prudence, and to reach with their natural curiosity to freedom without the rules set by adults, far away from the prohibitions of real life. This excessive and prema-

ture exposure of the child to use of the Internet leads to a risk of online grooming. By "*grooming*" reference is made here to a phenomenon with various intertwined facets, between a trust relationship and manipulation. When talking about *grooming* it is impossible not to mention Rachel O'Connell (2003)[7], who describes six phases in the online grooming structure; these variables are confirmed by the various empirical studies in literature and by the analysis of this phenomenon by OS.MO.CO.P. (Worldwide Observatory against Paedophilia – Meter). Grooming is a long process of manipulation which adults carry out on the Internet to approach minors, inducing and forcing them to engage in actions which are not appropriate for their age. A cyber-paedophile is driven by an uncontrollable impulse, leading to a spasmodic search for contact online with children-teenagers who have their own profile, establishing a power relationship between abuser and victim. The basis of *grooming* is virtual dialogue, extended over a length of time which may vary, with the objective of establishing a trust relationship. The photo chosen by abusers for their online profiles is not always a reflection of their actual appearance; however, they put in place all necessary strategies to promise the victims to provide them with anything they wish and to ask for specific photos and for their

[7] O'CONNELL, R. (2003). *A Typology of Child Cyberexploitation and Online Grooming Practices, Cyberspace Research Unit: University of Central Lancashire*, Preston, pages 1-22.

Part one **Knowing to prevent**

silence. Parents are often unaware, or find it hard to understand, that what their children are experiencing is actually a crime, a wrongful behaviour enacted by an adult, an illegal action which should be prosecuted as such. The keyword, apparently simple, is **make adults aware and educate the little ones** in respect of safe browsing; the association Meter provides a set of simple rules in this regard, aimed at promoting awareness and safety when browsing.

Aligned on the Internet. A useful decalogue for safe online browsing

1. *Beware of new friends online.* Who is this friend? Can someone you do not know well enough and with whom you have not shared moments, experience, emotions be considered your friend? Always tell your parents when you receive a friendship request on a social network: they will help you understand how to deal with it.

2. *Photos and videos online forever. Beware* that sharing personal photos and videos through social media channels is irreversible. Think carefully about sharing intimate materials online: they will stay there forever, for many years even. The Internet never forgets.

3. *Smartphone and tablet yes, but in moderation.* Technology is a source of learning, socialising and entertainment. Like all good things, though, it needs to be used in moderation. If you eat sweets

all day, nice as they may be, they will end up making you feel sick. Use technology only for a specific amount of time, agreed with your parents, with care and for the right purposes.

4. *Do not share personal data online.* Would you give your phone number, home address or car keys to the first stranger you meet on the street? The same as in real life, on the Internet there are people you cannot trust. Therefore, do not share your password, your position, your phone contact, the places you visit and the address where you live.

5. *Share your password exclusively with your parents.* Choosing a password is not a trivial matter, because it has to be difficult to guess. Ask your parents for advice: together everything will be easier.

6. *The Internet can hurt.* In real life, just like on the Internet, you need to respect the other person, in line with your values. Do not offend others, online or offline. Never bully others.

7. *Beware of requests for sending personal materials.* Beware of someone who asks you to send photos or videos, and possibly suggests meeting offline. Who is on the other end of the line? Ask an adult for advice: do not hesitate.

8. *Age counts.* There is a minimum age limit to register with social networks; do not register if you are younger than that, because this means providing false personal details. That is illegal. Are you allowed to drive a car before you are eighteen? To

have a driving licence you need to be a certain age. Also in the case of social media, wait until you are old enough.

9. *Online "ecology".* While browsing the internet or using your private chat line, it is possible that you receive materials unsuitable for children of your age. Tell your parents and report the inappropriate content: you will help get rid of online "trash".

10. *The rule is respecting the rules.* Abide by netiquette, that is to say all rules for online behaviour. Rules help you live better, respecting others; make sure you follow them!

GLOSSARY

Cyber grooming
Grooming of children online. It is an interactive process through which a power relationship is developed between the abuser and the victim, where the former paves the way in the emotional sphere for the possible strategic action, aimed at developing an intimate and manipulative relationship.

Cyber-paedophile
An individual acting with clear-thinking criminal intent, who finds online the possibility of satisfying sexual fantasies (an incontrollable drive, the spasmodic search for online contact with the child) without contravening the moral rules imposed by the society where he or she lives. Moreover, the achievement of virtual satisfaction of these impulses leads to nothing but more serious deviance and detachment from real life.

Domain
It is an address which identifies a specific space on the Internet. A distinction is made between: first level, second level and third level domain. The first level is the domain suffix (i.e. the international registration code) of the Internet address (e.g. .com, .org, .edu). The second level domain consists of an extension (first level domain) plus a unique name for recognition

(e.g. associazionemeter.org). The third level domain, also known as sub-domain, is dependent on a second level parent domain (e.g. casa.associazionemeter.org).

File sharing
Sharing of files, documents among users through the Internet. Cyber-paedophiles use these file sharing services to upload and share materials (child pornography photos and videos) which are anonymous and time-sensitive.

Digital peripheries
This word was used for the first time by Father Fortunato Di Noto, in 1990, with regard to places of affective and relational poverty. Those who use the Internet improperly tend to drown in these digital peripheries. They are continuously increasing, due to the fluidity of human identity, exalting each person as the "unique individual", living in an anarchic community consisting of single individuals and mostly anonymous groups, scattered all over the world and across the vast expanse of the Internet (both known and unknown areas, for example deep web and dark web).

Chapter four
Preventing sexual abuse against children between risk and protection factors

Erika Bernacchi, Raffaella Pregliasco

Introduction.
The phenomenon of violence against children in Italy

Violence against children is a phenomenon which can be found in all societies; nevertheless, the data on which the design of effective interventions can be based are limited. The United Nations define as violence against children, in line with Article 19 of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*: «all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse».

This paper is based on the many years experience accrued by Istituto degli Innocenti in preventing and facing abuse against children in its multi-faceted forms, paying specific attention to the issue of sexual

abuse. The focus will be on results and evidence from research and numerous projects, more specifically the *Cross-border survey on the drivers of violence against children. Report on Italy*[1] conducted by Istituto degli Innocenti as part of the study coordinated by the Unicef Office of Research. The latter, in turn, is based on a review of literature regarding the phenomenon of violence against children, and the national retrospective sample survey *Lives on the brink: a retrospective survey on maltreatment and abuse against children*[2] conducted by Istituto degli Innocenti on cases of violence suffered during childhood by women aged between 19 and 60. Moreover, reference will be made to more recent research, including the second national *Survey on the maltreatment of children and adolescents in Italy*, conducted by Terre des Hommes and Cismai, on behalf of the Authority for the protection of children and adolescents[3].

The data available for Italy, though limited, show that the phenomenon of violence against children is present and widespread. Collecting data about an is-

[1] Bernacchi E., Fabris A., Zelano M., *Studio multi-paese sui drivers della violenza all'infanzia. Rapporto Italia,* Istituto degli Innocenti, Florence, 2016, available on-line at the address www.istitutodeglinnocenti.it/sites/default/files/rapporto_ita_0_0.pdf

[2] Bianchi D. and Moretti E. (a cura di), (2006), *Vite in bilico: indagine retrospettiva su maltrattamenti e abusi in età infantile*, Florence, Istituto degli Innocenti.

[3] Cismai, Terre Des Hommes, Italia (2020) Authority for the protection of children and adolescents*, II Indagine nazionale sul maltrattamento dei bambini e degli adolescenti in Italia*, Torino, Cismai.

sue which is – still today – conditioned by social taboos makes the topic of violence a particularly delicate research topic. Nevertheless, over the years, substantial research has been carried out, bringing to light significant data regarding the question.

The national sample survey *Lives on the brink: a retrospective survey on maltreatment and abuse against children*, conducted by 'Istituto degli Innocenti' in 2006, takes into account the cases of violence suffered in childhood by women aged between 19 and 60. Even though it was completed several years ago, this survey is interesting not just because it provides an estimate on the prevalence of violence and maltreatment against the female child population in Italy, but also for having investigated a number of aspects related to the characteristics of personal and family life which help us understand risk and protection factors in respect of violence. The results of this research show that as little as less than one third (26%) of women reported not to have ever suffered sexual abuse or maltreatment. Half of the women interviewed reported that they have been victim of some form of maltreatment[4], 6 percent

[4] The definition of physical maltreatment considered by the survey includes the following behaviours: recurring physical punishment; hitting with objects, pulling hair or violent shoving; traumas caused by hitting.
Psychological maltreatment has been identified as: debasing critical or ironic remarks.
Material neglect: failing to call the doctor or accompany for medical check-ups in case of illness; clothing unsuitable for the season, failure to supervise the child's diet.

of sexual abuse[5], while 18 percent reported instances of both sexual abuse and maltreatment.
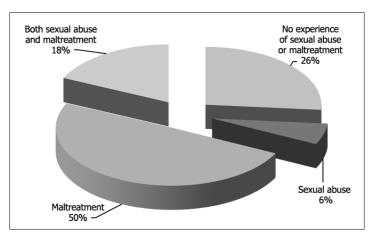
Figure 1. Prevalence of violence, in retrospect, among women aged 19-69

More recently, research was completed for the second national *Survey on maltreatment of children and adolescents in Italy*, by Terre des Hommes and Cismai, on behalf of the Authority for the protection of children and adolescents in 2019-2020, which does not take into account the population at large, but only children and teenagers assisted by social services in

Emotional neglect: lack of support and attention in respect of the child's school activities; not being there for the child's bedtime; failing to share moments of play between parent and child; entrusting children to strangers or very elderly persons; witnessed violence.

[5] The forms of sexual abuse considered in the survey are: indecent exposure; verbal harassment; exposure to the presentation of child pornography materials; fondling and masturbation acts; attempted penetration; penetration.

Part one **Knowing to prevent**

Italy, amounting to a total of 2.1 million minors, residents of the 196 Italian Municipalities involved and selected by Istat. Research shows that among the 401,766 children and adolescents assisted, there were 77,493 victims of maltreatment, with the prevalent form being the pathology of care (neglect, inappropriate or distorted care), of which 40.7% of children assisted by Social Services is a victim (32.4%). A total of 14.1% of children, on the other hand, are victims of psychological maltreatment, while physical maltreatment is reported in 9.6% of cases, and sexual abuse by 3.5% of respondents. As regards gender differences, the survey shows that there are more boys assisted by social services, while girls are more frequently supported in cases of maltreatment (201 in total out of 1000, compared to 186 boys). Also, the victims of maltreatment are more often foreigners than Italians: out of a total of 1,000 minors, 7 are Italians and 23 foreigners.

The survey also shows that minors who are victim of multiple forms of maltreatment are 40.7%, and in 91.4% of cases the abuser is a family member (parents, close relatives, friends of the parents, etc.). Compared to the previous survey conducted in 2013, the issue seems to have become more significant in all respects: there has been a growing number both of minors assisted by social services in general, and of those supported in cases of maltreatment; more specifically an increase by 3.6% of children and teenagers assisted

by social services in general, and a rise by 14.8% of children and teenagers in care due to maltreatment.
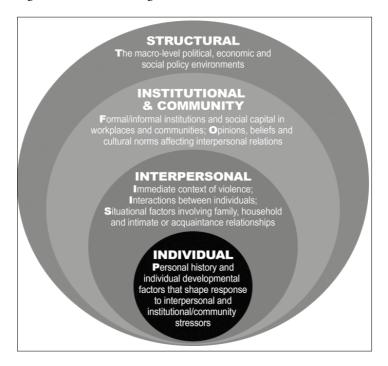
Preventing abuse against children

Before going into detail about risk and protection factors in respect of the various forms of abuse against children, more specifically of sexual violence, below is an outline of the concept of child abuse prevention. A model which is frequently used to contextualise the protection polices of children and prevention of violence is the socio-ecological model which is used in order to understand the effects and interactions between the macro- or structural level (socio-economic and political level), the inter-personal level (relationships between children and parents, their peers and other members of the community) and the individual level[6]. The inclusion of the institutional and structural level which also takes into account socio-political and economic issues is fundamental in order to contextualise prevention programmes against violence. In addition, the success of prevention measures depends to a large extent on the ability of the public and private sectors to work together by involving community and public institutions. More specifically, the role of the communities – also through local branches of

[6] See also in this regard: Maternowska, M. C. & Fry, D. (2015). *Understanding the drivers of violence. A step-by-step guide to conducting preliminary research around what drives violence.* Florence: Innocenti. Available online at www.unicef-irc.org/research/pdf/440-TOOLKIT-step-by-step_28Sept2016_OK.pdf

Part one Knowing to prevent

these associations – in supporting (or eliminating) the social regulations which justify violence is important, which is why it needs to be thoroughly analysed in order to understand how change takes place.

Figure 2. The socio-ecological model

The multi-level analysis is a reference framework for protective actions, by providing insight with regard to how risk and protection factors interact within the household context, in a community setting, at institutional and national level, thus highlighting what should be done in order to curtail violence.

A second model used for this study is characterised by the intersection between age and gender, the latter being extremely important meta-factors for preventing abuse against children. The research approach chosen here is based on acknowledging that opportunities and risk factors – as already mentioned – do not depend only on the various economic or political contexts, but also on the development skills of minors through the various childhood phases. Actions aimed at protection should therefore be able to respond to the combination of all these complexities.

Drivers of violence against childhood

The *Cross-border Study* refers to the concept of drivers with regard to the set of risk and protection factors with regard to violence in respect of the socio-ecological model, thus taking into account the interaction between the individual, family, community/institutional and structural dimensions. Within the Italian context, at individual level, the drivers of violence which emerge with the highest frequency are victimisation, including any experiences of prior violence, psychological distress and compromised health conditions, low education levels and limited protection skills. The drivers at interpersonal level concern relationships within the family sphere and in a school setting; this includes the relationship between parents, parental skills, family stress factors, stress factors in school, and forms of communication between parents

and within families. At institutional and community level, the main drivers of violence, recorded by analysing data, concern family isolation and institutional factors associated with the management of educational facilities. At structural level, socio-economic disparities and the phenomenon of migration have emerged as potential drivers, as well as the existence of well structured criminal organisations in terms of sexual exploitation for money-making purposes.

Sexual abuse

Having regard to sexual abuse, the cross-border Study on drivers of sexual violence analysed 15 research items, which showed relevant topics in respect of the drivers of sexual abuse against children, more specifically: unequal power relations, prior experiences of abuse and witnessed violence, family structure, and the invisibility of some forms of violence and of the victims.

Psychological manipulation occurring as part of unequal trust and power relationships
The survey data show that the most frequent types of sexual violence are minor forms of abuse which do not involve physical contact. According to the research paper *Lives on the brink: a retrospective survey on maltreatment and abuse against children*, as many as 64% of women who are victim of sexual abuse during childhood did not report any physical contact, but rather forms of abuse such as indecent exposure, ver-

bal violence and exposure to child pornography materials. A total of 34.4% of them reported having been subject to fondling, masturbation and attempted penetration; on the other hand, 1.6% were forced to sexual intercourse. The victims of sexual abuse appear to have been manipulated with deceit in 10.2% of cases (games, control of growth), or through promises and gifts in 7.7% of cases. The dynamics of abuse was characterised by violence (the type of violence is not specified) only in 2.6% of cases.

Witnessed violence
Children who witness violence by the father against their mother appear to be more likely to perpetrate violence against their partner (ISTAT, 2015). For example, Istat has noted that the likelihood of people engaging in acts of intimate violence against their partner increases by 5.2% to 22% if they have witnessed violence by the father against their mother (ISTAT, 2015).

Prior experience of (sexual) abuse
The likelihood that people might engage in acts of intimate violence against their partner appears to increase from 5.2 to 35.9% if they have been victims of physical abuse by their mother (ISTAT, 2015). Moreover, experience of prior sexual abuse increases the vulnerability of minors to sexual exploitation, as recorded by practitioners working with children who have been traded for sex purposes.

Unaccompanied migrant children

According to research studies, for example the survey by the Parliamentary Commission for Children (Italian Lower House of Parliament, 2012), there is a definite connection between, on the one hand, the presence of unaccompanied minors within migration flows throughout Europe and, on the other side, the phenomenon of sexual exploitation.

Invisibility of trafficking victims

Several factors contribute to the invisibility of victims of trafficking: mobility, forged documents and the existence of internal circuits for exploitation (Italian Lower House of Parliament, 2012; Save the Children Italy, 2013).

Physical abuse

A total of 16 studies, as part of the research taken into account by the survey, provides useful information about the drivers of physical abuse. More specifically:

- quality of the couple relationship, lack of emotional support, rage and impulsiveness of the parent;
- stress at family level, a combination of low income, health issues, and children being born prematurely or with a health condition;
- experiences of witnessed violence and experiences of prior (sexual) abuse;
- some fathers being convinced that physical punishment can have an educational value (Lansford *et al.*, 2010).

Psychological abuse

The review of literature for this paper has identified 15 studies which provide information about the drivers of psychological abuse, which also include material and emotional neglect.

- Stress on the parents' part due to separation processes and/or to the condition of being a single parent; conflictual relationships and lack of affection in the couple;
- families characterised by social isolation or conflict.
- material deprivation and socio-economic difficulties.

Polyvictimisation

The phenomenon of polyvictimisation has emerged as a common experience, while witnessed violence often points to the risk of other types of abuse. According to the results of *Lives on the Brink*, 64% of the women who declared to have been sexually abused during childhood also witnessed domestic violence episodes; on the other hand, 48% appeared to have been exposed to verbal abuse episodes against another member of the family. The survey also showed that a total of 18.1% of women experienced a combination of sexual abuse and maltreatment during childhood. It is interesting to note that – out of 100 women victims of sexual abuse at least once in their lifetime – 75% reported having been maltreated as well. On the other hand, out of 100 maltreated women, only 26% reported having been sexually abused as well. With regard to sexual ex-

ploitation, the children affected by this phenomenon are often victims of physical and psychological violence (Save the Children Italy, 2013; Carchedi, 2004; Italian Lower House of Parliament, 2012).

Sites

The *cross-border study* shows that there is little data in respect of the sites where violence takes place.[7] This is undoubtedly a limitation with regard to the possibility of analysing and planning effective prevention policies. As for sexual abuse, there seems to appear, however, a prevalence of abuse within the family and what is referred to as 'circle of trust'. For example, according to official data from the Department of Justice for Children, in 2012, a total of 48% of children who were victims of sexual crimes knew the author of the abuse well because they were part of the same social context; on the other hand 33% of the victims was abused by someone from within the family (Department of Justice for Children, 2012). Nevertheless, more research seems to be necessary to shed light on the prevalence of abuse in some community and association settings, for example religious or sport contexts.

As regards forms of abuse occurring online, on the other hand, the research under examination focused

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[7] See also: Bernacchi, E. and Zelano M., (2018) *The transformatory process of the Cross-border Study on the Drivers of Violence against Children in Italy. In Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, vol. 13, No. S1, pages 75-82.

on a set of drivers. It is worth mentioning, in particular, the results of the international study on strategies to avoid sexual violence online against adolescents, which was conducted in five European countries – including Italy (Ainsaar *et al.*, 2012):

- supervision by parents in respect of how their children use the Internet (Meter Onlus, 2015; Ainsaar *et al.*, 2012) influences the risk to which a minor is exposed. The adolescents interviewed as part of the research conducted by Ainsaar *et al.* seemed to agree that communication via the Internet should be allowed only after a certain age, and that small children should be supervised by adults. Nevertheless, respondents also highlighted the generational gap with adults – including their parents – as one of the main hindrances to preventive actions (Ainsaar *et al .,*2012);

- limited information competences and social skills;

- minors are often unaware of the risks of online behaviours, which are in many cases associated with dynamics related to sexual experimentation, rather than to problematic behaviours by the child in question (Ainsaar *et al .,* 2012);

- adolescents from different European countries appreciated the feeling of freedom and the possibility to explore sexuality on the Internet, because this gives them space to play with identity and social interaction. In addition, discussing sexual matters on the Internet is easier than it is in real life, which

makes the Internet an attractive place for experimentation (AINSAAR *et al .,* 2012).

Age and gender

As regards the intersection between age and gender, the cross-border study has highlighted the following elements:

- children and young teenagers (aged 7-14) seem more vulnerable to sexual violence;
- bullyism is more widespread among young teenagers (11 for males and 13 for females), and seems to become less frequent as they get older;
- girls have a significantly higher probability of falling prey to sexual abuse compared to boys; boys – on the other hand – are more subject to corporal punishment;
- girls are generally more strongly involved in unequal power relationships than boys;
- sexual abusers (irrespective of being adults or minors) are almost exclusively male.

Factors which facilitate the disclosure of sexual violence and make it easier to manage trauma.
The institutional response to this issue

Having regard to the institutional level, when talking about sexual violence in general, and more specifically on children or adolescents, it is important first of all to start from a definition and from assessment criteria which are as standardised as possible. It is actually

necessary to face and distinguish the various forms it can take in respect of language, behaviours, the various instruments used, for instance online communication. A clearly defined terminology would make it easier for practitioners and for children themselves to recognise cases of sexual violence. When talking about factors which make it easier to disclose sexual violence, it is worth remembering that, as a general rule, the absence of hindering elements can be expected to facilitate any effective prevention and contrast actions.

There are numerous aspects, nowadays, which do not facilitate an institutional climate that is welcoming and supportive for victims; this appears necessary both during the awareness raising and prevention phase, and in terms of contrast. Among these aspects, there are: lack of a gender perspective, limited attention paid to groups at high risk, the issue of staff turnover, and so on. A suitable institutional response is associated first and foremost with the following:

- *Codes of conduct.* There is no detailed code of conduct which specifies the behaviours that are acceptable, and those that are not, in relationships with children. Any organisation, any agency working with children or adolescents should have a code of conduct. In this regard, bodies and associations promoting the rights of children, as well as organisations working with children and teenagers, seem increasingly willing to implement a *Child Protection Policy* for the purpose of pointing to a set of

specific procedures which need to be followed with a view to preventing cases of sexual violence. These policy documents are expected to include indications with regard to recruiting and involving employees and co-workers in respect of procedures to be followed in cases of suspected abuse, of monitoring processes and of the responsibilities on the part of the association's management body[8].

- *Groups at high risk.* There are groups at high risk to whom specific attention should be paid, namely children and adolescents living in residential facilities or in youth prison, unaccompanied foreign minors, children from ethnic minorities. Within these groups, the rate of sexual violence is much higher than among the population at large, due to their specific conditions of vulnerability.

- *Dead ends and risk of re-traumatisation.* Reporting processes can get stranded in various phases (e.g.: someone mentions sexual violence experiences, the professional in charge informs the authorities, but no formal support is provided to the abused child). It is worth mentioning, in this regard, that failure to act or acting inappropriately constitute a form of secondary abuse against the child.

[8] For examples of Child Protection Policy, see also: Save the Children (2013) *Policy sulla tutela di bambine, bambini e adolescenti e codice di condotta,* Save the Children Italia onlus; Keeping Children Safe (2020) *The International Child Safeguarding Standards* available online at the address: www.keepingchildrensafe.global/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/KCS-CS-Standards-ENG-200218.pdf

- *Action protocols.* The widespread lack of action protocols in cases of sexual violence shared by all stakeholders, institutional and otherwise, who are called to intervene in situations of sexual abuse or violence. Moreover, the existing protocols are not properly divulged and are not part of the formative syllabus for practitioners, which means that the practitioners in charge are not aware of them or do not know them in enough detail. In some cases, there are Laws and mechanisms for the protection of minors, but it is impossible to apply them effectively due to being unable to even recognise a case of violence. In addition, these protocols often fail to include a gender perspective (for example, no distinction is made between different signs and actions depending on the gender of the abused child).

- *Formation.* All too often practitioners are insufficiently knowledgeable about multi-disciplinary support systems at local and national level, about the responsibilities and legal framework, as well as about judiciary procedures and organisation of the relevant actions. In addition, the existing protocols are often not widespread and are not part of the syllabus for training the practitioners in charge, which means that the latter often do not know them at all or not sufficiently in detail. Knowledge and formation, more specifically in respect of sexual violence against children and adolescents, is a key issue; also dialogue, supervision among peers and

exchanges between practitioners within specialised organisations are additional useful opportunities to discuss cases of possible sexual violence. It is also important to encourage supervision by experts.

- Last but not least, *multi-disciplinary work* is very important in order to involve a support network when dealing with a case, in partnership with paediatricians, school and social-health services, youth organisations, as it is appropriate.

Gender and sexual violence prevention: focus on male victims

As already highlighted, all statistical data available show that girls and young women are considerably more subject to the risk of incurring sexual abuse compared to their male counterparts. Considering this evidence, it is necessary to take into account a series of elements, first and foremost the fact that data regarding prevalence of sexual violence against male children and adolescents are difficult to find, as confirmed by the fact that research in Italy generally tends to focus only on abuse incurred by female children and teenagers (an example of this is also the research paper *Lives on the brink: a retrospective survey on maltreatment and abuse against children* and the survey conducted by Istat on a regular basis on violence against women).

Several international research papers, including a meta-analysis of prevalence studies about male gender

victims show that – on average – 5.6% of respondents reported to have suffered sexual violence during their childhood and/or adolescence (STOLTENBORGH *et al.*, 2011). It should be noted that this is just an estimate, because prevalence studies use different definitions of sexual violence and can be based on assorted methodological approaches. Moreover, we know that boys are less prone to disclosing sexual violence than their female contemporaries (PRIEBE AND SVEDIN, 2008).

Recent studies have shown that, among the reasons which lead to not disclosing instances of violence, first of all there is a lack of knowledge and awareness about the abuse suffered, but also the fear of consequences. This, in turn, is associated with the characteristics of violence (for example: the connection with the abusers, any manipulation or intimidation strategies), as well as with gender-related concepts, more specifically the characteristics of masculinity, which can be regarded as a plausible explanation for low disclosure rates by male victims.

Masculinity and gender stereotypes

Even though the features of masculinity may differ depending on factors such as class, age, social and community context, generally speaking, masculinity is associated with concepts such as rationality, authority, strength, ability to defend oneself, independence, self-control, and heterosexuality (CONNELL, 1996; CICCONE, 2009; GASPARRINI, 2016). In addition, successfully taking a dominant position is one of the

most important criteria for the male sex. The set of characteristics to be identified/to identify oneself as male can constitute, in many respects, a hindrance to disclosing cases of sexual violence. Being victim of a sexual aggression, being vulnerable and needy of help seems to be incompatible with the traditional idea of being a boy or a man.

These stereotypes can hinder the awareness of being a target of violence, thus making boys and men feel less free of disclosing their emotions, of establishing relationships of trust and seeking help. In conclusion, the traditional concept regarding dominant male roles is contrasting in various ways with the processes for disclosing sexual violence on the part of male victims.

Myths and misinformation regarding sexual violence

As clearly highlighted by the European project "Culture of care. A supportive environment to face sexualised violence" (www.boyscultureofcareit.wordpress.com) there is also a whole set of biased and wrong information regarding sexual violence which makes it more difficult for boys to disclose the issue[9]. These include:

[9] In this regard, see also the handbook which has been produced by the project: Täubrich, M. et al. (2019) *Creating a supportive culture to face sexualised violence. A guide for practitioners working with male children and teenagers*, which has been published as part of the European project called *Culture of Care – A supportive environment to face sexualised violence against boys.*

- the idea that sexual violence is a cause or consequence of homosexuality
- the idea that sexual violence should necessarily lead the victims, in turn, to become abusers
- the idea that only men can be abusers and that only women can be victims of abuse
- the doubt about the possibility that women may be abusers as well, and the reluctance to see them as such in suspicious cases.

It is especially during adolescence that boys find it difficult to disclose that they have been sexually abused. Among the most frequent reactions, there is concern of being regarded as "effeminate", of being seen as homosexual and/or the fear of being considered as potential abusers (MOSSER, 2009). As a matter of fact, during adolescence boys tend to enact behaviours aimed at implementing mechanisms known as "masculinity vigilance"; in other words, males appear to be strongly consistent in preserving gender norms and making sure that they are respected, which also involves punishing any deviation from the relevant standards: anyone who differs is mocked and humiliated, possibly abused.

Other hindrances to disclosure are lack of knowledge and awareness in regard of these topics. More specifically, sexualised violence is «the topic on which boys have less information and appear reluctant to exchange it» (MÖRCHEN 2014, page 187). For many boys, the idea of sexual violence against them is still considered taboo, which makes it unthinkable for

them to become its victims. Disclosing violence is even more difficult when the abuser is a woman, because it is often seen as impossible that women may be responsible for such actions.

High-risk groups: institutionalised minors and migrant children

As already noted, research shows that there are groups of minors who are at higher risk of sexual violence than others, for example children and teenagers living in residential facilities or in youth prison. Within these subgroups, the sexual violence rate is much higher than among the population at large. It also appears that migrant children are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, more specifically in the form of trafficking and prostitution, especially during the journey to other European countries.

The hidden nature of sexual violence against children and adolescents

It is fair to conclude that, for all the above mentioned reasons, sexual violence against male children and teenagers is still a largely hidden and therefore invisible issue in our communities, as well as not being sufficiently discussed in public, other than when there is some sort of scandal. Sexual violence against boys is often associated with what has been defined as «double wall of silence» (Bange, 2007). The reasons for this silence can be explained, on the one hand, with strategies

enacted by the abusers, on the other side, with specific conditions which make it difficult for boys and their environment, as well as for any practitioners involved, to recognise that abuse has been committed.

Escaping silence: creating a culture based on welcoming, trust and education about gender stereotypes

Based on all of the above, it thus appears fundamental to create a supportive culture, where children feel welcome to disclose the abuse suffered, through the creation of a relationship of trust between the children and the practitioners involved and, more in general, any adults who come in contact with minors, for example teachers, coaches, persons in a religious capacity. A series of surveys has shown that a good relationship between practitioners and children/ adolescents, plus a supportive approach on the part of the practitioners involved, makes it easier to disclose violence. It is very important to establish spaces where trust-based relationships can develop, where it is possible to speak freely and to create relationships not based on dependence. It is also very important for practitioners to receive the appropriate formation in respect of gender stereotypes, so that they are able to understand the way boys and girls of any age may experience and react with regard to sexual violence. It is important for male and female practitioners to educate boys and girls to get rid of gender stereotypes

and, most notably in what said above, that they show how it is possible to be men in a number of different forms. This also means that speaking up if you have been a victim of violence, far from being a sign of weakness, is evidence of a person's ability to take care of oneself and of others.[10]

Conclusions

Violence against children is a widespread phenomenon in all societies, although data and research available on which prevention and policies can be founded are still limited. The evidence available highlights the importance of a socio-ecological approach to prevention, which takes into account not just the individual and inter-personal dimension, but also community/institutional and structural dimensions. As for sexual violence, the drivers which emerge as being most significant from research conducted are: unequal power relationships, prior experiences of abuse and witnessed violence, family structure and the invisibility of some types of violence. As regard sexual abusers, research has shown they are, in most cases, family members or persons known to the victims, from what is known as "circle of trust". Nevertheless, available studies often

[10] In respect of practitioner training, see also: Holtermann et al. (2019). *Boys in Care. Strengthening boys to pursue care occupations.* A guide for teachers and professional orientation counsellors, who work with boys and professional orientation trainers, considered from a gender perspective, published as part of the European project called "Boys in care".

fail to specify the location where abuse is committed. It seems therefore advisable to conduct further research on associations of a recreational, sport and religious nature. In addition, it would definitely be advisable to conduct further research with regard to violence suffered by male children and teenagers. As a matter of fact, although evidence suggests that female children and teenagers are considerably more at risk of being sexually abused, it is also true that surveys often focus just on the female population and that, due to gender stereotypes, males find it more difficult to speak up when they have been victims of violence.

In the light of all the above, there are a few elements which appear to be essential for prevention policies. First and foremost, the appropriate formation of practitioners on the dynamics of sexual abuse and on how gender stereotypes affect any process of disclosure and calls for help; attention to particularly vulnerable groups, for example institutionalised children, minors who are in youth prison and unaccompanied foreign minors. Last but not least, it seems that establishing appropriate procedures, for example codes of conduct and child protection policies, is increasingly becoming a task which associations need to undertake as well, in order to equip themselves with suitable instruments for preventing and facing violence.

GLOSSARY

Drivers (risk or protection factors)
They refer to the complex of risk and protection factors against violence in relation to the socio-ecological model, thus taking into account the interaction between individual, family, community/institutional and structural dimensions.

Masculinity
The set of social constructs associated with being a boy/man; generally speaking, masculinity is associated with concepts of rationality, authority, strength, ability to defend oneself, independence, self-control, heterosexuality. This social construct can make it more difficult to disclose sexual violence.

Socio-ecological model
This is a model used for social policy surveys in order to study the effects and interactions between the macro-or structural level (socio-economic and political), the inter-personal level (child relationships with parents, peers and other members of the community) and the individual level.

Polyvictimisation
Being subject to several types of violence during childhood (e.g. physical, psychological, sexual, wit-

nessed violence); in many cases, those who are abused during childhood are subject to more than one form of violence.

Sex and Gender
Sex refers to the biological characteristics which differentiate men from women (and inter-sexual persons); gender, on the other hand, refers to social construction processes in respect of biological differences, namely traits attributed by society and opportunities associated with being a man or a woman, to relationships between men and women or boys and girls.

Gender stereotypes
The set of beliefs and traits attributed by society to behaviours and approaches which should be followed by men and women based on social gender constructs; given that this is a social construct, stereotypes may vary over time and space, depending on the historical and geographic context which, in turn, depends on the dominant culture in a given society.

Promoting child safeguarding to reconstruct educational relationships in families, groups, communities and sports

"Safe Project – Educating and Welcoming in safe environments". Working as a team in order to encourage the safeguarding of minors in the social protection, education, recreation and sports sectors

Chiara Griffini

The call and mission of the "Safe Project"

The "Safe Project – Educating and Welcoming in Safe Environments" – is a project co-funded by the European Union, and its lead partner is the Association Community Pope John XXIII; the other partners are Azione Cattolica Italiana, Centro Sportivo Italiano, the Department of Sociology at *Alma Mater Studiorum* – University of Bologna – with its Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Victims and Safety (CIRViS). The project involved partners in a two-year project, from October 2019 to November 2021. It will continue through an online space, the website of the project – which will be described in more detail later on – whose aim is promoting a renewed culture for safeguarding minors among those who operate, in

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the community and in the Church, directly in contact with the minors themselves, as parents, teachers, educators, coaches, professionals in the area of welfare and wellbeing of children and adolescent.

This is an extremely topical challenge, for society and the Church in the contemporary age. The objective has always been and will continue to be that of creating a culture of prevention by promoting safe environments and interpersonal relations which are respectful and sustainable, in environments aimed at social protection, as well as recreation, sport or leisure time.

The main priority of the "Safe Project" is promoting the integration of policies for the protection of children in various contexts and sectors, such as sports organisations, extra-curricular activities and/or recreation/entertainment for children (including religious, female, scout associations and state schools), and as a means to protect and safeguard children, providing the staff in charge with the necessary formation and orientation, according to the standards of "Keeping Children Safe".

The "Safe Project" is domestically-based, but with a high potential cross-border impact. It was drafted thanks to the long-standing expertise of its Lead Partner, the Community Pope John XXIII, in helping vulnerable children and victims of abuse, in close partnership with a number of experts, including psychologists, teaching experts, social workers, Lawyers, academics. The authorities for the protection of children at na-

tional and regional level (www.garanteinfanzia.org) have expressed their appreciation and their availability for proactive involvement in the planned activities with official letters of commitment. The Lead Partner has been able to count on consolidated partnerships with several agencies and services for the protection of minors, thanks to its 365 residential structures present in Italy, which have welcomed 734 vulnerable children in 2017. The Community Pope John XXIII has more than 40 years' experience in caring for children outside their family of origin, through its family homes – residential communities entirely modelled on the natural family – as well as through a wide network of foster families, following its mission of "giving a family to those who do not have one".

According to article 5 of the Convention for the Protection of the Child against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (also known as *Lanzarote Convention*) it is necessary to guarantee adequate awareness and knowledge of the topic among persons who are regularly in contact with children in the areas of education, health, social welfare, justice, as well as police forces and in sectors related to sport, culture and recreational activities. Even though Italy ratified the Lanzarote Convention through Law 172/2012, not much has been done in this regard. The "Safe Project" has attempted to try and fill this gap through extensive formation sessions, conducted across 27 provinces in 13 Italian regions, reaching 1,200 people, including

local leaders, professionals and volunteers from faith-led organisations, who are in contact with more than 46,300 children on a regular basis.

Promoting a system for preventing, facing and supporting the disclosure of any form of abuse against children and adolescents

The "Safe Project" is aimed at promoting a view of fostering the prevention and contrast of any form of abuse against children and adolescents, as a system action which, on the one hand, requires the involvement, as part of an educational and social alliance, across all environments where the life of a child takes place: the family with the home, household relations in their inter-generational and trans-generational dimension; sports with the playground, the changing room, the team, the coach-child relationship, the peer group; socialisation outside the family during leisure time, in associated or spontaneous form. On the other hand, when faced with the emergence of critical situations, it aims at promoting an alliance between the environments where this happens and emerges and those who are in charge of ensuring its disclosure for the purpose of protecting truth and justice.

Scientific evidence and the direct experience in caring and therapeutic mentoring of victims of abuse show that there are indeed barriers to bring down, making sure that victims are able to disclose their

painful and dramatic experience, feeling supported in the process.

These barriers affect not just the personal dimension, but also have a social and cultural impact.

In this regard, the "Safe Project" has played a role as part of a systemic action involving centres which operate in the various life areas of the child – the three associations involved – and, on the other hand, the centres in charge of collecting disclosure and act in view of a search process of truth and justice – the Department of Sociology with the Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Victims and Safety (CIRViS). Only in this way will it be possible to generate a community, at ecclesial and civil level, which supports the victims, making sure that they can move on from feeling alone and silent to being welcomed and mentored with a view to curing their wounds. All this should lead to a renewed action for reviewing the relational and environmental system in its promoting relationships which are reliable and emotionally mature, respect for everything and everyone, responsibility as vigilance and relaunching values, rights and duties.

A formative pathway
for a safeguarding community

The "Safe Project" as part of its formation activity (targeted to: members, leaders of the three partner associations, students of the degree course in Sciences of Safety and Investigation, to all those who browse the website

of the Project) is based on the socio-ecological model for prevention, widely discussed in scientific literature. More specifically, it starts with the individual's physical, psychological, social well-being, from the closest relationships, the community (that is to say: family, sport, leisure time, peer group, parish, town, the neighbourhood) also reaching the societal level.

The Community Pope John XXIII, Azione Cattolica and Centro Sportivo Italiano have developed formation paths dedicated to their members and coordinators at local level in 27 Italian territories[1], with the objective of making the educational and welcoming style – which animates relationships, environments and activities – increasingly authoritative and sustainable. A healthy educating community is not driven by anxieties, suspicions, or re-actions, but rather by pro-actions: positive and pro-active interventions. The latter are turned into a vigilant and open gaze, in actual and co-responsible discernment, in shared codes of conduct which make it possible to manage not just "the unexpected" (which is what abuse often looks like), but rather to prevent it, promoting the culture of respect in contrast with that of power. Each person, starting from the little ones, from those who are vulnerable, has individual dignity which needs to be recognised, welcomed and harnessed.

[1] To find out more about the territories where these pathways have been implemented, please refer to the "Safe Project" website: www.progettosafe.eu/il-progetto-safe

This formative pathway is aimed at making adults aware that their being reliable is the first and fundamental step required for welcoming and for a responsible and safe education. An adult who does not betray the trust received, but rather protects it delicately, in order to safeguard those who have been entrusted to their care. An adult who promotes the growth of emotional maturity, starting from the awareness and care of their own affectivity as a protection factor to educate the affectivity of the child concerned.

Participants were offered a pathway aimed at providing knowledge of abusive dynamics from a psychological and legal perspective, with regard to potential traumas and crimes, acquiring instruments to support discernment of risk and protection factors, in relationships and environments where they operate with minors, promoting generative and protective actions in educating and communicating with children, among the adults involved and within the organisations themselves.

Moreover, in view of the specific period when the project has taken place, there have been formation sessions specifically focused on activities with children online. The purpose of this was to promote, among adults, the awareness of a generative use of the Internet, through knowledge of forms of online abuse – also among peers and minors – and the awareness that social media need to be interpreted as part of an

educational grammar[2]. As adults, we need to accompany children in inhabiting the Internet in a responsible and creative way, given that it is now an essential component of the relational and social world of adults and minors. Being reliable adults means being so both in the real and in the virtual world, starting from an authentic and consistent life testimony, facing social change by selecting new languages, which preserve the educational character of experience, made of borders, respect, trust and responsibility. Only in this way will a connection generate good life stories and a narrative to promote hope and trust.

The formative pathway for a Safeguarding Community has been shared by the three associations, starting from a research report produced by the Department of Sociology with the Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Victims and Safety (CIRViS) with regard to sexual abuse inside European faith-led organisations, focusing specifically on analysing the phenomenon, in its risk and protection factors, as well as in its selected prevention practices and instruments, which finally resulted in the publication of this volume.[3]

The formative pathway was aimed at promoting, among members of the three organisations, the ac-

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[2] Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, no. 86-90.

[3] *R. Sette, S. Tuzza* (2021), *Promuovere ambienti educativi sicuri. Prevenire gli abusi nei contesti ecclesiali (Promoting safe educational environments. Preventing abuse in ecclesial contexts),* Ave, Rome 2021.

quisition and sharing of competence in respect of the three Child Safeguarding levels:

- *safe self:* from feeling exempt from the risk of incurring in abusive dynamics of any kind to sharing, open communication, supervision;
- *safe community:* making sure the community experiences are focused on the quality of style and care of interpersonal relations in the environments where they are developed;
- *safe organisation:* acknowledging, as protection factors, the sharing of association codes of conduct and prevention as a wide-ranging and proactive intervention.

Among risk factors for abuse in institutional contexts, there is a lack of checks on the work done with minors and, in particular, on considering the relational style in the activities the focus of such reviews and discussions among working groups.

The "Safe Project", therefore, offers itself – within each partner organisation – as a concrete space for pro-action in respect of safeguarding children. Through interactive groups, its members are offered an opportunity to review, through concrete cases, the educational experiences which are part of the routine with minors, leaving some space for reviewing them, discussing any criticalities and – from this review – attempting to generate restyled protective relationships and contexts.

Each association then outlined the pathway, combining general sessions, in common among all three

associations, with specific sessions in respect of its specific area of action.

For instance, the Community Pope John XXIII organised a specific module on welcoming the wounds of victims of abuse, to promote communication styles with children that are generative and protective. Learning to listen to cries for help, deep and bleeding wounds, requests for protection, intercepting risky silences and disclosing secrets, increasing awareness about the value of shared codes of conduct, as individuals and as community, to promote safety and co-responsibility.

During the sessions with a legal profile, the focus was on knowledge of the instrument *Anyone who welcomes one little child like this in my name welcomes me. Guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons*, which the Association has adopted as part of the process. More specifically, there has been a capillary and concrete action, on the part of members, to raise their awareness, with regard to instruments and procedures for reporting, to be implemented in respect of cases possibly emerging. The Association has decided to use this instrument, following the indications given by the Pontifical Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life.

Centro Sportivo Italiano offered modules where topics were dealt with, such as: changing room management, taking care of relational dynamics, the respect of athletes' intimacy and corporeity, gender differences between coach and athletes as risk and protection factors, the relationship with athletes' fam-

ilies, emotional and psychological abuse in the sports world, the concrete application of the safeguarding policy which was approved by the Centre itself.

Azione Cattolica analysed the signs of social and individual distress which children may show in group dynamics and in their experiences, as well as the promotion of contexts which are able to strengthen the protection factors, aimed at containing intrinsic risks for ecclesial institutional contexts with regard to the occurrence of abusive conducts against minors.

The same Department organised three training seminars for students of the Master's Degree Course in Criminology and Investigation Sciences and for Police Forces in several Italian regions, working on the investigations of crimes committed in relation with the topics of this Project.

The Project thus concretely followed, in terms of its formative structure, a systemic approach, based on the connection among the various social and family contexts where children live, where it is necessary to implement protection from a preventive perspective, as well as in contexts of reporting and supporting victims at institutional level.

Promoting child protection policies: a safeguarding policy serving as selective and effective policy

One of the basic objectives of the "Safe Project" has been the integration by faith-led organisations of a

policy for protecting children and vulnerable persons, moving from approaches which inspire actions and activities to implementing practices and instruments for preventing and reporting, which are transparent and public.

The safeguarding policy is one of the protection factors which has been brought to light by scientific research evidence with regard to any change in behaviour within an association in respect of victims, before abuse occurs (primary prevention by means of formative pathways), when there is risk of abuse (instruments for reporting) and after abuse (in order to avoid re-victimisation and to prevent the crime from being repeated by the abuser), with caring and accompanying pathways for victims and abusers. All this follows the traditional model for prevention of abuse suggested by Caplan in 1964.

The safeguarding policy, in order to be effective, should contain a set of clear and transparent indications of pathways through which anyone who becomes aware of any abuse, past or present, within the associations, is able to report them as appropriate to the proper authorities, making them publicly known through the information channels of the associations themselves.

The model for prevention proposed by Caplan appears to be effective for the definition of pathways for reporting and taking charge of the latter, in respect of prevention, as initial and ongoing formation of mem-

bers and volunteers. It appears that reference can effectively be made to the model suggested by Gordon (1983), namely where the author defines selective prevention, i.e. in respect of safe recruitment, education and training, for the creation of safe environments.

In the course of the project, Centro Sportivo Italiano implemented an action for adopting the Policy which it had already arranged; the Community Pope John XXIII drafted and implemented its own *Guidelines*; Azione Cattolica started a pathway of discernment with the objective of starting a process for drafting the relevant safeguarding policy.

The pathways started by the three organisations and the ensuing safeguarding policies help integrate the prevention models outlined above, enriched by external reviews conducted by organisations or professionals who, already as part of their educational and social action with children, have started to adopt policies aimed at safeguarding minors and creating safe environments.

In the course of this project, specific sessions have been organised for the leaders of the three entities, aimed at increasing their knowledge and skills on the subject of individual and association accountability.

These insights have made it possible to specify what is necessary to know on the subject of child protection. The contents of prevention strategies, which are the target of safeguarding policies, are effective to the extent that they contribute to changing behaviours.

The analysis and knowledge of risk and protection factors, which make a structure "abusive" in its being an institutional entity, make it possible to carry out a review. The latter, in turn, leads to harnessing good practices already implemented and to the awareness and subsequent change of any practices which are not educative and might entail the risk of criticalities or negligence.

Therefore, the knowledge supporting know-how and good practices needs restyled reflection and awareness about what is already implemented, to achieve shared and proactive accountability.

The degree of awareness of the phenomenon and of sensitivity in its regard, on the part of leaders, is the first protection factor for drafting an effective policy. Coordinators are thus offered a first opportunity for preventive formation on the subject of accountability, because they are called to exercise an extremely delicate form of authority, as well as to provide guidance in respect of the safety of activities and environments. It is from this awareness that safeguarding policies will gain not just enlightenment, but also be shown a direction for the pathway.

By direction, reference is made here to the minimal standards to be ensured for the promotion of an effective safeguarding policy, as well as to the cultural and operational changes required in the long term with regard to protecting minors within an organisation, but – most importantly – to make sure that they are

followed as part of association pathways on a permanent basis.

The assessment by an external entity has made it possible to objectively evaluate, without any internal interferences, which factors are likely to allow for achieving what has been outlined here, that is to say, all minimal standards for prevention and action; and then, to decide which corrections may be necessary in the medium and long term (through an ongoing review action) together with an early accountability measure in respect of abuse within a specific association.

The formative pathway for drafting, adopting and implementing a safeguarding policy in the three associations has led to an operating instrument to support the adoption of this policy by indicating good practices, which an association of the faithful of Pontifical Right is called to follow in order to make its environments safe and its relationships educational[4].

Communication to promote a child safeguarding policy in the Church and in society, a permanent website for in-depth analysis and prevention: www.progettosafe.eu

Communicating in order to create spaces for insight and meeting in order to promote, within the Church

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[4] See: *Child safeguarding policy: Priorità e impegno per un sistema di tutela per minori e persone vulnerabili (Priorities and commitment to protect children and vulnerable persons)* at www.progettosafe.eu/politica-di-tutela

and in society, a culture of child protection, where it is possible to discuss any issue transparently and proactively. This is the purpose of the website www.progettosafe.eu, which has accompanied the project throughout its development and will remain active, offering insights and pathways for formation to those who wish to get to know and approach the topics related to safeguarding minors and vulnerable persons from an educational and prevention perspective. Talking about these issues in order to create culture is already a first step towards prevention, because it means starting to discuss something that has always been taboo in any society.

In the website there is one section containing a blog, updated on a monthly basis, with thematic insights regarding the various facets of the phenomenon, how to prevent and counteract it. These monthly contributions, also containing proposals for reviews of books and films, have offered, already during the Project itself, an opportunity to raise awareness and train those who – in various capacities – work with minors or vulnerable persons, and to promote (on an ongoing basis) a safeguarding culture for minors and vulnerable persons, in contexts of: social protection and educational, recreational and sport activities. The starting point was provided by papers and reviews to help understand the topic, encouraging awareness among those who work with minors that no context can consider itself exempt from risk. This means they

are all called to reflect on the types of protection they offer for ensuring safe educational environments, also including specific aspects such as personality profiles of abusers and possible pathways for mentoring them.

The in-depth papers and reviews, as well as all the videos introduced as possible complements thereto, will be available for the whole time they appear to be pertinent and updated.

A list of essential film and book references for the relevant contributions is included in chapter ten.

From the website, it is also possible to download two public webinars, which have accompanied the start of the two formation sessions at local level. The first one, in October, intended as actual kick-off event for the Project, involved prestigious speakers and the most accredited experts on the matter, namely Prof. Hans Zollner and Prof. Linda Ghisoni, who focused on the ongoing nature of child protection within formative pathways, aimed at making ecclesial environments safe, and on risk and protection factors with regard to abuse occurring in these contexts, for the purpose of a restyled cultural action aimed at prevention, to promote the beauty of the communional nature of the Church which has been deeply wounded by the abuse[5].

The second one, in February, focused on the subject of the victim's vulnerability and of mentoring the

[5] The first chapter of this book *Educating and welcoming in safe environments* includes the contents of that webinar.

abuser, with a view to preventing the crime from being repeated, which is just as often the case, and of achieving justice (which serves not just to repair the damage caused but, most importantly, for review and care in respect of the contexts where it developed). The presenters here were Father Claudio Burgio, who shared his extensive educational and rehabilitation experience with children in the Youth Prison "Cesare Beccaria" in Milan, and Professor Claudia Mazzucato[6].

At the end of an intensive process at local level, a training package was also made available on demand, which will remain fully operational and accessible free of charge to anyone involved in educational activities in contact with minors or vulnerable persons in general, after registering and filling out an initial and final form to test the competences and knowledge acquired. Its title is *The syntax of reliable relationships. Promoting educational relationships to safeguard children and adolescents.*

The course focuses on providing a formation pathway, which is aimed at understanding the issue of child abuse by analysing the data from clinical and scientific research, the wounds remaining in the life of those who have been its victims, as well as its consequences from a civil and penal Law perspective.

[6] Lecturer in Penal Law at *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore* in Milan Claudio Burgio, chaplain of the Youth Prison Beccaria in Milan and president of the Association Kayros. "Safe Project" trainer for the path managed by Centro Sportivo Italiano and the online course "The syntax of reliable relationships. Promoting educational relationships to safeguard children and adolescents", https://progettosafe.eu/

This knowledge is expected to lead to a careful analysis and reflection in respect of the relational styles adopted as parents, teachers, coaches, or educators who – in various capacities – come in contact with minors, being aware that all relationships and life contexts entail potential risks which need to be detected, as well as the promotion of safeguarding actions. This means knowledge, discernment and formation in order to be reliable adults who promote relationships based on respect of individual and other persons' intimacy, filled with a safe perception of the borders within which every relationship and educational experience takes place, thus generating a set of vertical relationships characterised by solid connections between generations for the purpose of building a new narrative.

Specific attention will be devoted to the online world, an integral and everyday part of all social and educational relationships, in order to educate children and adults in respect of a generative relational syntax in the use of social media.

The active dissemination of project results will continue within the framework of other projects or activities on related topics implemented by the project partners.

An innovative aspect: safeguarding actions with minors

One of the pillars of the "Safe Project" is the involvement of children, according to Article 12 of the Unit-

ed Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in the implementation and planning of a child safeguarding Policy. The participation of children and teenagers has been on an inclusive, voluntary, significant, transparent and adequate basis. The children and teenagers involved have had the means, space and opportunity to freely express their opinions, which will be properly weighted, according to their age and maturity level. The involvement of children and teenagers from different contexts has been especially encouraged, in order to guarantee representation of all experiences, ideas and thoughts as part of the latter's involvement process.

The Community Pope John XXIII, as lead partner, organised two workshops, which were run by therapists with experience in the area of education to affectivity and sexuality during the development age and adolescence. They have involved children and teenagers from different age groups, with a view to better understand their point of view and to give them a right to have their voice heard, to be listened carefully, and to be able to affect the decisions which concern them, especially with regard to safeguarding their dignity.

The first pathway, a set of activities for children aged 6-11, was organised in the course of a Summer Camp specific for their age group. It lasted five days and included games and expression activities, as well as time for listening to oneself and to others. The children thus had the opportunity to find out that they are beautiful,

unique, important, and to learn something valuable for helping them feel better with themselves and with others. «We should cherish the value of our intimacy, thoughts, emotions, histories, and of our body»; «It's not easy to tell everyone»; «Some things are just not right»; «We need to find people we trust».

The second pathway comprised two laboratories, lasting one whole day each, involving minors aged 12-15. Being one month apart one from the other made it possible to assess the impact on the teenagers over time, through active involvement based on listening to their voice.

The first laboratory, called *Dare Parola (Voicing)*, started with a short presentation of the trainer and of the project, finally leading to a presentation of the participants in turn. This was followed by experiential activities centred around trusting and on the subsequent reprocessing and sharing of what had been experienced.

The second Laboratory, called *A Partire dai miei bisogni* (*Starting from my needs*), included a narrative moment by participants with a thematic focus on "how I feel", also with regard to the experience of the first laboratory; then it supported participants in acquiring competence as regards listening to their body, expressing and sharing their needs through the latter.

Assessing the efficacy impact of the project with regard to objectives and results

One of the pivotal points in the "Safe Project" has been an evaluation of the impact and efficacy of the Pro-

ject in question on organisation members and leaders; considering the complexity of the matter, this part was entrusted by the Syndicate of partners to an external agency, through a sub-contracting call for tenders.

This served the following purposes:

- using assessment methods which provide solid results in order to understand to what extent the initiative is effective;
- producing an impartial assessment in order to facilitate decisions concerning the drafting of a Policy to Safeguard Minors and to expand the Formation Package, thus making it easier to gain support from the stakeholders.

The agency selected for this purpose was the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Economics and Law at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Piacenza Campus, which involved a dedicated multi-disciplinary team, consisting of lecturers and researchers from these departments.

A detailed Project assessment, in terms of its objective results, will be provided as part of the next chapter.

The results of the work regarding an assessment of Project impact and efficacy will be an important instrument for its partners, especially the three associations involved, in order to test the pathway selected and to plan further steps geared towards safeguarding children and vulnerable persons within their respective organisations.

The assessment by an external organisation constituted a fundamental added value in terms of imple-

menting a protection factor in respect of promoting the protection and wellbeing of children in associations such as those participating in the Project. It was thus possible to conduct an objective test regarding the efficacy of the prevention pathways undertaken in respect of the changes which the latter have generated from the point of view of individual members' behaviours (through the transmission of contents) as well as on the associations within their organisational and formative dimension, in terms of safeguarding children and vulnerable persons (knowledge and integration of policies aimed at supporting, sustaining and reviewing the relevant activities, promoting the quality of the relationships and educational experiences under examination).

Conclusions.
Giving protagonists a voice: formation which becomes part of everyday life...

I would like to end this chapter, where the "Safe Project" has introduced itself as a concrete preventive experience aimed at safeguarding minors and vulnerable persons, by leaving the floor to some of its participants, members of the various organisations.

I would like to use their words to translate what has been described, analysed and reflected on as regards its direct incidence on the life of adults who, every day, are expected to make the choice of being responsible and reliable, because it is starting from there that we

can offer a small though valuable fragment of trust and peace of mind to our children as they grow up. They trust us and we are called upon never to betray such trust, making sure that, in turn, they trust society, the Church and all the environments they live in every day.

Investing in formative pathways such as the "Safe Project" means offering a possible answer to the education emergency frequently mentioned in this period (which has been brought to light very clearly by this pandemic and can no longer be postponed) as a response and commitment on the part of adults, of civil and ecclesial institutions. Minors, in their capacity as children, students, athletes, or members of a peer group, are entitled to grow up in a peaceful, safe and healthy way from all perspectives. Our duty is to ask to be trained and supported to accompany them in that regard. As individuals, as caregivers, educators and relational contact persons in the family, at school, in sports and during leisure time. As civil and ecclesial organisations and institutions we should team up in order to provide a safe and safeguarding system for individual vulnerabilities. An African proverb says that "it takes a village to raise a child"; this could be paraphrased saying that it takes a village also to educate a child or a vulnerable person.

Angelo:

Answering the questionnaires of the control sample, I realised that I have missed an excellent formative

opportunity, despite being convinced that I knew a lot about the subject, after many years working with children. On the contrary, I found out that ongoing formation is essential, and that prevention in respect of abuse against children is much more connected than I used to believe with my everyday service for minors, at home or outside, as educator."

Stefano:

A detailed definition of a healthy and functional relationship, learning to tell the difference from one which is abusive, has led me, together with the other educators participating in the project, to feel supported in our common mission which involves looking for welcoming relations, paying attention to each child, a style based on co-responsibility, formation and testing.

Patrizia:

We tackled some subjects that are extremely transversal and caused me to reflect on how some situations – which we tend to take for granted – actually risk deteriorating and becoming dangerous for kids. Regrettably, violence against children is far from being something of the past, although we sometimes fail to realise this. For this reason it is important to follow refresher courses and understand how to act,

especially in a sports setting, which involves meeting many children and teenagers in a dynamic context, which requires specialised skills in handling any occurrence.

Roberta

This course has been very useful for me, because we have been working on ourselves as persons, rediscovering parts of us which might have been long silenced. I believe that preventing sexual abuse also means preventing abusive approaches which we might have in respect of others.

Pietro:

I actually knew I was ignorant and distant from this world... already the introductory test made me see it... The teaching has been very instructive, so has the work in small groups. I'd love to learn more about the subject, and I hope this will be the start of an ongoing formative process.

Francesca:

A useful course to learn how to follow carefully any relational dynamics and any contexts, especially when minors are involved. I was often reminded of something Father Oreste Benzi used to say: "A man

is not his mistake"… It's hard to bear this in mind when faced with trauma and crime, as in the case of abuse in its various forms… That's why it might be important and interesting to organise a course to acquire more advanced skills and behavioural approaches in respect of abusers, to understand what can be done with them, before they commit the crime and afterwards, to break the chain of re-victimisation and repetition of the offence, thus making the environment truly safeguarding. It is encouraging to see members of an association who walk together, trying to find shared procedures for taking care of people.

GLOSSARY

Accountability
In the area of governance, the word refers to the obligation on a person's part to account for their decisions and be responsible for the results achieved.

The concept then actually extended beyond its basic meaning of "being called upon to account for one's actions". It can be described as a relationship between one or more groups or individuals, where "A" is accountable to "B" when A:

- is obliged to inform B about any actions taken and decisions made (also past or future);
- may be called upon to justify them;
- may be sanctioned in respect of these decisions.

In this form, accountability has become a central topic in terms of child and vulnerable person protection, with regard to violence prevention in institutional contexts, where the main factors for protection against abuse are: the integration of safeguarding policies and their review on a regular basis, having clearly defined roles and responsibilities; the involvement in decision-making processes; the checking and supervising of any work done with minors or vulnerable persons with regard to the selected relational style and environments.

System-based action

The complexity of the phenomenon of sexual abuse (which develops on multiple levels and involves several degrees of intervention to deal with the consequences it generates) leads us to define it as a relational and structural reality, where individual aspects are always connected with systemic ones. The Institutions and operators dealing with abuse are faced with problems which are always new and on multiple levels; any action aimed at taking care and protecting the victim requires a global intervention of the network of services and a review of its structure.

Best practices

The most significant approaches, procedures, experiences and actions which focus on minors and vulnerable persons, allowing for the creation of a safe environment to foster children's development and maturity. Best practices are aimed at encouraging the acquisition of a co-responsible style in caring for children, highlighting and promoting protective actions and procedures already in place, and allowing for the correction of any distraction, negligence and practice which might prove educationally harmful or risky.

Child safeguarding policy

It consists in an organisation's responsibility to always protect all male and female children and ado-

lescents it comes in contact with from any form of violence or inappropriate conduct. Preventing abuse within organisations requires not just practices and procedures: it needs leadership, responsibility and a cultural shift. Safeguarding means: protecting children from abuse and maltreatment; preventing damage to the children's health or development; making sure that children grow up being safely and effectively cared for; acting in order to allow all children and young persons to achieve the best results; listening to children and turning the whole structure of the organisation around focusing on their rights, dignity and safety when making any decision. Drafting a Policy for Child Safeguarding means that the organisation in question is taking the first step to make sure that its staff, activities and programmes are always beneficial and never harm the male or female children or adolescents it cares for, and that any concern is immediately reported and handled in a prompt and appropriate manner.
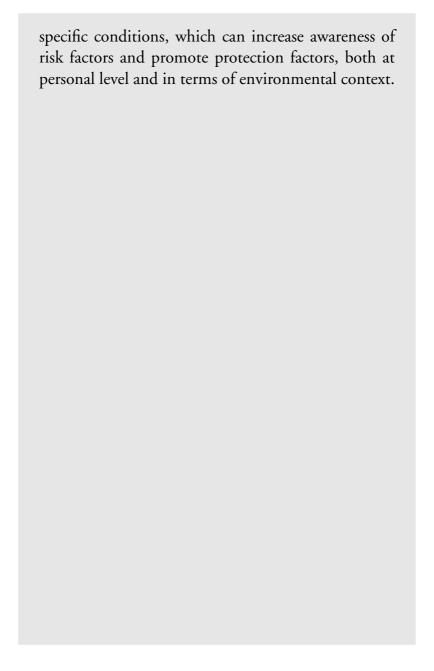
Prevention
There is sufficient evidence, also considering scientific literature, allowing for stating with confidence that maltreatment against minors can be prevented (WHO 2006). The WHO (2006) also points out that preventing violence requires a systemic inter-disciplinary approach, based on developing ac-

tions aimed at preventing violence against minors from occurring (primary prevention); detecting cases of violence and intervening early on (secondary prevention); providing ongoing assistance to victims and families whenever maltreatment occurs, also with a view to prevent violence from being repeated (tertiary prevention). Prevention should be seen as a way of strengthening protection factors as opposed to risk reduction, therefore it is essential to identify any process which may help increase resilience, not just at individual level, but also in the family and at community level.

Pro-action

Pro-action within the context of abuse and maltreatment prevention, as opposed to reaction, allows not just for assessing in advance any outcomes related to a specific behaviour. It also entails moving from a defensive interpretation and from mere curtailing of the issue and of the damage it causes to a systemic reading of the latter, which can be expected to lead to its actual reviewing with regard to the consequences which have brought it on.

Being pro-active means keeping an open mind, discussing and sharing criticalities in a behaviour, in a relationship, in a context, leading the healthy and positive dimension of the latter to emerge and keeping it safe, then relaunch it within restyled global and

specific conditions, which can increase awareness of risk factors and promote protection factors, both at personal level and in terms of environmental context.

Chapter six

An assessment of "Project Safe – Educating and Welcoming in safe environments"

Barbara Barabaschi, Enrico Fabrizi, Elisabetta Musi, Sonia Ranieri, Paolo Rizzi

This chapter includes the first results of the assessment activity of the "Safe Project", whose aims will not be discussed here because they have been already extensively introduced in this book.

This chapter, after a brief presentation of the method chosen, will concentrate on the main results of the focus groups with the national leaders of partner organisations, which were held in February and March 2020; the results of interviews with local leaders of partner organisations; the results of the quantitative analysis conducted among participants in the formative activities, promoted as part of the project in favour of operators and educators from partner organisations (the questionnaires were either administered ex-ante, before starting the courses, or submitted "ex-post", i.e. after the formative activities had been completed).

The assessment method

The *methods* chosen to answer the three research questions, and therefore to assess the three variables, are differentiated based on what is known as *mixed method* approach, taking into account the different subjects involved and the objectives to be achieved (Dallago, Santinello and Vieno, 2004). The evaluation group also used a participatory approach, focused on the maximum sharing of instruments and results with the partners and recipients of the projects. The definition of the measurement instrument according to a participatory approach, jointly constructed by the various subjects involved – first of all, researchers from *Università Cattolica* and coordinators of the partner organisations – was inspired by the *Participatory Action Research*, whose main objective is to record the learning process, that is to say to measure change in respect of theoretical knowledge and practical skills (Arcidiacono and Marta, 2008).

The instrument used for quantitative analysis purposes is a self-report questionnaire, developed using the Qualtrics software and filled out online. The questionnaire was presented to participants in the training course before the formative activity and at the end of the latter. One version of the questionnaire was also presented to a selected group, consisting of members of the three partners involved not participating in the formative activities (control sample).

The questions asked as part of the "Safe" assessment research were the following:

VAR1: have partner organisations incorporated a child safeguarding policy?

VAR2: has the "Safe" formation contributed to raise awareness among participants with regard to detecting, reporting and preventing cases of abuse against children?

More specifically:

VAR1. In order to answer the first question, an online focus group was organised with directors/coordinators of partner organisations. This focus group concentrated on assessing the level of knowledge regarding the issue and of dissemination/implementation of child safeguarding policies in the organisations involved, both in formal terms (statutes) and informally (practices), highlighting any factors which constrained or favoured child safeguarding measures. The focus group also provided an opportunity to share various instruments and methods for assessment.

VAR2. In order to answer the second question a counter-factual method was chosen, based on two different measurement tools for the two different types of recipients (local coordinators, members/volunteers) in two different moments: before the formative activity and after the latter.

The ex-ante analysis of the intervention focused on:

- level of knowledge of the issue,

- how frequent known abuse cases are at local level,
- level of adoption of practices for detecting, reporting and preventing cases of abuse against children at personal level.

The ex-post analysis of the formative activity focused on the effectiveness of training in terms of increasing awareness, on the part of participants, with regard to practices for detecting, reporting, and preventing cases of abuse against children.

For local leaders of religious and/or faith-led organisations, involved in the formative activity, the expected target included 38 people, in the case of members and volunteers 500 persons. Given that the formative modules were delivered in different moments during the second year, the groups of recipients to which training was imparted at a later date were considered as control groups for the groups which were the first to participate in the formative modules.

Main outcomes of the interviews and focus groups with national and local leaders of the organisations

In order to answer the first research question (VAR1 "Have partner organisations incorporated a child safeguarding policy?"), an online focus group was conducted with the directors/coordinators of the various partner organisations.

Following that meeting, questionnaires were sent by e-mail to assess the same variables at the level of

local leaders of partner organisations: a total of 50 answers were collected from local leaders.

Focus groups and questionnaires made it possible to measure the level of knowledge regarding the issue, to what extent such knowledge is divulged within the organisations and how it is translated into actions through child safeguarding policies, both officially (statutes) and informally (practices).

Azione Cattolica (AC) and the Association Pope John XXIII (APJ) filled out one cumulative form for national leaders; on the other hand, Comitato Sportivo Italiano (CSI) filled out six forms.

Main results of the interviews with national leaders of the partner organisations
The answers to questions regarding awareness about the issue of abuse against children, most of them affirmative, confirm the importance of promoting formative activities in the three partner organisations of the project. The role carried out by these organisations shows a high likelihood that practitioners may detect cases of abuse, either within the organisations themselves or in the territories where they operate.

AC has no policies or practices for preventing abuse against minors, either official or informal.

In the case of APJ and CSI, half of the national leaders confirm that there are policies and practices in place, especially at informal level. Most notably, according to questionnaire respondents, the staff of the

Association and the staff of partner organisations, as well as their representatives should:

- be vigilant in detecting situations which might entail risks for children, knowing how to manage them;
- organise the work and work environment in order to reduce risks to a minimum;
- always be visible to others, as far as possible, when working with children;
- ensure the dissemination and preservation of a culture of openness which allows staff, representatives, children and those who take care of them to raise and discuss any type of subject or concern;
- guarantee that staff members have a sense of responsibility with regard to their job, making sure that any inappropriate actions or behaviours in respect of children are not unnoticed or considered acceptable;
- tell children about what type of relationship they should expect to have with staff or representatives, encouraging them to report any concerns they might have;
- harness the children's skills and capabilities, by discussing with them their rights, and what is acceptable versus what is not, as well as what they can do if they experience any problems;
- always keep a high personal and professional profile;
- respect the rights of children and treat them in a fair, honest, dignified and respectful way;
- encourage the involvement of children in order to develop their self-protection capability.

None of the partner institutions has a code of ethics.

With regard to the reasons which delayed or hindered the actions to prevent abuse, the national contact persons mentioned first and foremost the lack of specific training, and – although to a smaller extent – limited knowledge of the issue. These data also show the importance of formative actions suggested by the "Safe Project". It is worth mentioning the different opinion of national representatives compared to local representatives: the former attribute greater responsibilities to the lack of policies or guidelines by the organisations, while the latter to the difficulty in detecting cases of abuse.

Among the factors which favour child safeguarding policies, representatives of the three organisations agree in highlighting the importance of practitioners' sensitivity in respect of this issue and of having received specific training. By the same token, there is unanimous agreement in listing as less important any policies/guidelines received from the organisation; on the other hand, knowledge of the issue is seen as a point in favour only by APJ, much less so by CSI and AC.

Having regard to the intervention priorities which national representatives would suggest for their own organisation, their preferences seem to range from specific policies/guidelines by the organisation, to formative actions aimed at developing relational and communication skills, as well as context management, also including support from advisors/experts on the

subject. Less importance is attached to the organisations having dedicated services/offices.

Main results of the interviews with local leaders of the partner organisations

Awareness of the abuse-related issues against children is fairly high, among local coordinators of the three organisations (66.7%), most notably those of APJ (85.7%).

Awareness of abuse against children in respect of the work done by local leaders, on the contrary, is fairly limited. It amounts to just over 50% as a whole, being higher for APJ (64.3%) and AC (62.5%), lower in the case of CSI (35.5%).

Surveying the level of knowledge of the phenomenon from a quantitative point of view, the organisation apparently knowing about the highest number of cases is APJ, especially within the organisation (6.3); the number is significantly smaller in respect of known cases at local level (2.2), and in carrying out individual activities (2.0).

By means of example, these are some types of abuse of which Leaders at local level are aware in the territory where their organisation operates:

- a boy sexually harassed by a volunteer during a local meeting;
- abandoned minors and attempted sexual violence;
- abuse in the family, abuse among peers, abuse by strangers;

- sexual abuse against young athletes by their coach;
- several members of the organisation have reported cases of abuse in the family, bullying, psychological violence;
- dozens of cases of minors who have been abused in the family, specifically by their own parents;
- some situations of abuse committed by members of the clergy or by other adults, adults with histories of abuse suffered as children;
- verbal violence; indecent exposure; negligence and abandonment.
  Examples of abuse occurring within the organisations:
- three children involved in paedophilia trials;
- abuse within the family by trafficking criminal organisations;
- approximately fifteen cases of persons welcomed to protect them from abuse within the family; three cases of abuse committed by educators, one case of abuse suffered by a child; at least three members with histories of abuse;
- administration of alcohol and drugs;
- one child has been sexually harassed by mobile phone, with serious psychological effects. The abuser in this case was someone from outside the organisation.
  Finally, successful cases of prevention and response to abuse used by partner organisations in the project are mentioned:
- case reported of personal disclosure by an alleged abuser willing to cooperate with the investigation.

The approach by the representatives of the association was firm, based on a clear line of action and an open discussion with other members in contact with the alleged abuser;

- reported case of physical violence; reporting to the police and contacting the proper social service offices;
- reported case of successful collaboration with a school administration and public services in charge of removing supposedly abused children from their family;
- case of collaboration with the school, networking with social services and removing abused children from their family;
- reported case of a street unit which contacted a young girl, after realising that she had been the victim of sexual abuse, helping her along the psychological path to overcome her traumatic experience;
- case occurring during a camping experience, when a case of sexual abuse was disclosed by a boy who was brave enough to tell his experience of abuse and went ahead reporting it to the police;
- reported case of a young girl in a foster family successfully assisted from a psychological perspective and supported through her difficult passage in living the trauma related to abuse.

According to local coordinators, individual sensitivity to the issue and knowledge of the latter are the most important factors which facilitate protection of children from abuse. A smaller incidence, on the

other hand, is attributed to the existence of policies/ guidelines within the organisation and – at the end of the day – of specific formative actions.

As regards intervention priorities, many of them have been indicated. Considering the average of all answers, ranking first are policies and guidelines from the top management, followed by support from experts, formation aimed at developing relational and communication skills, the dissemination of information, management of contexts. At the bottom of the list is the enabling of services through agreements, that is to say dedicated offices within the organisation itself.

Analysing the answers given by each organisation, it appears that APJ attributes considerable importance to support from external experts (8.0); on the other hand, AC assigns a crucial role to specific formation on the issue, as well as to divulging information with regard to child safeguarding (8.2 and 8.0 respectively).

Main outcomes of questionnaires administered to participants in formative activities

Having regard to the quantitative survey included in the assessment activity, mention is made here of the main evidence emerging in respect of some questions posed to respondents. The answers which were complete and could be used for processing were 511, respectively 341 for the Association Pope John XXIII (APJ), 120 for Azione Cattolica (AC) and 50 for CSI.

Table 1a – Are you aware of cases of abuse against minors in the area where you live?
(% values out of the total by gender)

	Male	Female	Total
Yes	25,5	25,5	25,5
No	74,5	74,5	74,5
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

Table 1b - Are you aware of cases of abuse against minors in the area where you live?
(% values by organisation type)

	Apj	Ac	Csi	Total
Yes	30,9	17,5	8,0	25,5
No	69,1	82,5	92,0	74,5
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

As a preliminary conclusion, Table 1 shows that most of the practitioners are not aware of abuse against minors in the area where they live: as a matter of fact, approximately 2 out of 3 say they are not aware of it, equally distributed by gender (Table 1a); if the chosen benchmark is the individual partner organisation in the project (Table 1b), the largest percentage of practitioners who say they are aware of the issue locally is from APJ (30.88%), compared to AC (17.50%) and CSI (8.00%).

The same goes for the question "Are you aware of cases of abuse against minors within your organisation?" (see Table 2), with a considerably higher percentage of affirmative answers from APJ practitioners

(32.1%) compared to educators from AC (5.1%) and CSI; in the case of the latter, no affirmative answer has been recorded.

Table 2a – Are you aware of cases of abuse against minors within your organisation?
(% values out of the total by gender)

	Male	Female	Total
Yes	20,1	23,7	22,5
No	79,9	76,3	77,5
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

Table 2b - Are you aware of cases of abuse against minors within your organisation?
(% values out of the total by organisation type)

	Apj	Ac	Csi	Total
Yes	32,1	5,1	0,0	22,5
No	67,9	94,9	100,0	77,5
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

The most interesting data emerge from comparing figures from the sample survey conducted before the formative activities (ex-ante analysis) with those collected after completing the latter (ex-post analysis). All the evidence of difference between ex-ante and ex-post analysis appears to be statistically significant (t-test or test of the Wilcoxon type).

In general terms, it is worth mentioning the relevance of formative interventions, which have led to an

improvement of the level of knowledge regarding the issue of abuse against children (+2.1 points on a scale 1-10) and the relational modes for dealing with suspected cases (+3 points), as well as of competence in recognising such cases (+2.7 points), then in responding both on a personal level (+2.6 points), and at association level (+2.7 points). The benchmark is in Table 3.

Table 3 – Grade your knowledge and competence with regard to abuse against minors.
(from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 10)

	Ex ante	*Ex post*	Variation
Level of knowledge of the issue of abuse against minors	4,9	6,9	2,0
Level of knowledge of the relational modes for dealing with suspected abuse	3,9	6,9	3,0
Ability to recognise cases of abuse against minors within one's own association	4,0	6,8	2,8
Ability to respond personally in detected cases of abuse against minors	3,9	6,5	2,6
Ability of the association to respond in detected cases of abuse against minors	4,6	7,4	2,8

Table 4 shows that there appears to be greater awareness in detecting possible cases of abuse, and – at the same time – a higher level of competence

in interpreting body language in order to manage or prevent any cases of abuse. Finally, the formative interventions seem to have resulted in more knowledge as regards the different types of abuse at the end of the courses, compared to when the latter started, specifically with regard to categories of sexual, physical, emotional/psychological abuse and to conditions related to abandonment/neglect. The measured levels of increase in terms of knowledge and competences, according to the statements by respondents, vary between +1.2 and +2.6 points.

Table 4 – Grade your knowledge and competence with regard to body language expressions (from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 10)

	Ex ante	*Ex post*	Variation
Importance of body closeness/ distance in the relationship with others	6,5	7,7	1,2
Importance of emotional closeness/distance in the relationship with others	6,8	8,0	1,2
Ability to recognise emotions and feelings starting from body signals	6,2	7,5	1,3
Ability to detect signs of sexual abuse	4,2	6,8	2,6
Ability to detect signs of physical abuse	4,6	7,1	2,5

Ability to detect signs of emotional/psychological abuse	4,8	7,0	2,2
Ability to detect signs of abandonment/neglect	5,5	7,5	2,0

One of the focal topics on which the formative actions focused is communication, specifically safeguarding communication towards minors, as well as among peers. In this case, at the end of the project, there appears to have been consolidation of both knowledge and competences with regard to communication styles to be adopted in the adult-child relationship (Iafrate and Bertoni, 2010) and to be promoted among minors with whom practitioners/educators come in contact during their association work. In this regard, Table 5 shows, from a quantitative viewpoint, the achievements as regards knowledge (+2.4) and competence (+2.3).

Table 5 – Grade your knowledge and competence with regard to safeguarding and generative communication (grade from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 10)

	Ex ante	*Ex post*	Variation
Knowledge of safeguarding communication styles with minors and among minors	4,6	6,9	2,3
Competence in promoting safeguarding communication styles with/among minors	4,5	6,8	2,3

Last but not least, it may be useful to mention the significant improvements measured with regard to the level of knowledge and awareness on the subject of best practices in detecting and managing abuse cases, as well as in respect of the importance of shared codes of conduct within individual organisations, not just on the informal practice level, but – first and foremost – of association statutes. Such recognition derives from the importance of being able to rely on reference codes of conduct for individual practitioners/educators, to provide them with more confidence about their everyday service. These official codes contribute to divulging more solid and sustainable awareness in terms of being aware of child abuse cases (even before managing them). The evidence of increase in the level of knowledge and competence in Table 6 show increases by 2.9 points in both cases; on the other hand, the importance attributed to shared codes of conduct recorded an increase by 1.8 points.

Table 6 – Grade your knowledge and competence in respect of best practices and shared codes of conduct (from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 10)

	Ex ante	*Ex post*	**Variation**
Knowledge of best practices in the relationship with minors victim of abuse and violence	4,2	7,0	2,8

Competence in applying best practices in the relationship with minors victim of abuse and violence	4,0	6,9	2,9
Importance of having shared codes of conduct at association level	6,6	8,5	1,9

In conclusion, the opinion regarding the outcomes of the formative pathway seems to be positive, both from the side of self-assessment by participants (who acknowledge increases of knowledge and especially of competence, with regard to abuse) and in terms of objective assessment, measured through specific questions regarding the level of learning recorded ex-post.

Chapter seven

Prevention in the family, reliable adults for reliable communication with minors

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Family as a safe haven: is that always the case?

Family as a "safe haven": is that always the case? We could start from this basic question in order to linger in this "haven", the family, to rediscover the beauty of relationships which inhabit it, the mutual taking care of everyday life, and how the relationships which are generated there accompany children, adolescents and adults to grow together, to develop the potential and generate evolutionary co-responsibilities.

What makes it a "safe haven"? Using Bowlby's words, we could say that the possibility of having a safe attachment provides the child with a "safe base". This

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concept has been redrafted at the end of the 1960s and refers to an environment characterised by an adult with whom the child feels totally protected and accepted. The child feels supported by this safe base, and this makes it possible to feel at ease when alone and to explore the surrounding world without fear. The family is also a place of intimacy, where children grow and become stronger, learning to trust others, to listen, to differentiate between the self and others, to get to know their body and feelings, experimenting with the borders between the inner and outside world, experiencing the challenge of the first social context, namely *being with* mum and dad, brothers and sisters (D. STERN, 1987).

In such a rich evolutionary cradle, the Self is born, grows and develops. This is where a child learns to know him or herself, to listen and to listen to him or herself, to discover the multiplicity of languages which reside in the family and which the latter promotes. In this regard, the family becomes a venue for creativity, care and prevention, a dynamic laboratory which the children may use later in order to establish healthy and reliable social relationships. As part of this articulated context, it is extremely important that each parent should engage in continuous inner work, which will allow them to become increasingly aware of themselves and of the other, as well as developing an effective communication with their children and/or with the minors in their care.

Another piece of the puzzle is attention to intimacy and body language, which are essential in order to foster affective and sexual wellbeing in adults and teenagers. The feelings and narratives which reside in our bodies constitute a library of information regarding ourselves, to which we are often not taught to pay attention, being more focused on the verbal and cognitive level, of which we feel more in control. Everything that concerns the body has deep roots in time, traceable to the first caring gazes, cuddles or "bad caressing" which the child we used to be has experienced during the pre-verbal age. (WINNICOTT, 1964). How is it possible to get in touch and dialogue with our body? In order to listen to our body, it is useful to create a space where words are silent, harmonise our breath and "stay still".

In our experience as psychologists and trainers, we have studied in depth the development of mature intimacy with adults, both in therapy settings and in formative contexts.

"Safe Project": promoting pathways to generate reliable and co-responsible adults in preventing abuse

The "Safe Project" "Educating and welcoming in safe environments" has made it possible for us to meet a large number of parents and educators, motivated by the purpose of accompanying minors within and outside their families, by focusing on topics related to

education in respect of affectivity and aimed at becoming promoters of health, developing greater co-responsibility with regard to sexual abuse prevention.

The objectives of the workshops and of the ensuing discussion were to encourage and experiment with a positive approach with the body, fostering the structuration of a personality with assertive, emotionally competent traits and a good sense of effectiveness. The focus was on the importance of enhancing awareness and the narrative of individual intimacy; we did this through experiential workshops, using psycho-corporal techniques, because it is not possible to listen to the body without the body. For participants, this meant a chance to listen to themselves and to their body while being stroked, in the pleasant or distressing feeling resulting from distance or closeness of bodies, in contacting sedimented recollections in sensorial memory, in producing images evoked by body narratives. Delving into languages which were sometimes totally new, through the techniques of brainstorming, storytelling (narration and redrafting of new endings in a group), watching videos, of the expressive technique used in experiential activities proposed to the adults attending, helped develop a greater ability to voice one's experiences, introducing thoughts related to the differentiation between the self and the other and the subsequent need to tell about oneself.

Reaching further levels of reflection encourages better integration between parts of the self, leading to

the narration of a richer story of oneself, with fewer taboos, but – at the same time – keeping a "safeguarding attitude" when talking to kids.

Therefore, being promoters of prevention in the family, committed to growing as reliable adults, able to dialogue with one's children through a reliable communication with them is all very closely connected to a self-exploration pathway which adults, at the beginning, need to undertake on themselves.

Being pro-active in safeguarding one's child is a personal exercise enabled by the opening of new narrative spaces, which encourage recognition of risky and unclear situations.

One further objective is to generate competence in observing others and their body, based on what I know about mine, in order to interpret languages and educate to the exchange of "good caressing".

Sometimes adults believe that they are already mature in respect of these abilities; in actual fact this idea could be a defence with regard to an evolutionary process which lasts a lifetime.

Following the different activities proposed, the adults were trained to learn important skills for the prevention of any form of sexual abuse.

The main steps were:

1. to listen to one's body and to that of others: "touching and being touched";
2. to recognise one's feelings: "pleasant and unpleasant caressing";

3. to communicate these feelings: being able to say «I like it» and «I do not like it»;
4. to learn to refuse unpleasant caressing: group discussion in order to acquire effective strategies for saying "no".

Educating to affectivity and sexuality, a primary safeguarding factor to promote a safe educational environment

The suggested laboratories are part of a broader pathway for educating to affectivity and sexuality.

Education to affectivity and sexuality is a delicate and complex act. It is worth noting that it is the first abuse prevention form. There are many possibilities for children and adults in this regard.

As practitioners, we think that it is good to be "honestly partisan", in other words, choosing and being able to present to reference adults the steps in the pathway (what will be done), but also the sense and significance of the suggested activities (how it is done, why it is done). Through *clarity* and *awareness* everyone is left *free* to choose whether to start a path... they are also the basis from which one can start to build and live "possible good caressing".

This is why we consider it important to read the following pages, even if they might sometimes appear a little "complicated", in order to understand the method, the reference map, the theories, the scientific research and instruments, in other words the clearly defined trace to explore together in order to build

"possible good caressing" (which gives sense and significance to the proposed laboratories).

As methodological reference model we found it useful to integrate the Interactive Narrative Model (F. VEGLIA, 2012) with the pedagogical method propounded by Father Oreste Benzi (GHINELLI R., 2011), both centred around relationships.

Having regard to this method, the question is not mainly to develop skills or to pass on information; education in respect of sexuality mainly takes place through self-narrative techniques (finding shared words to talk about something personal), by means of a relationship which may be:

- biunivocal (educating one another... when I realise I am learning something from the persons with whom I am exploring, then we are mutually educating one another);
- asymmetric (those who receive the educational proposal must feel that – while they are looking for their own path – there is a safe base, following them in some stretches, in others walking near them, anyway present, to precede and protect them, when there are difficulties);
- significant (feeling that someone is thinking about us, that we are close to their heart, is a source of safety and meaning for the self and for life);
- emotionally involving (because its aim is to generate knowledge: feelings play a fundamental role in mental learning processes).

In order to favour the above, it is necessary to make sure that the educator is well aware of his or her sexuality (mechanisms, significance and personal history), both in its "comfortable" aspects and in those which may cause "discomfort", provided that the relevant reasons and significance are clear, and that he or she lives with the expectation of a better future.

Knowing a topic very well and being passionate about it almost always means emotionally affecting those who are listening, keeping their interest and motivation to learn alive, facilitating the internalising of a personal significance of the experience.

All this was well described, already in the 1970s and '80s, by Father Oreste Benzi. To educate pre-adolescents he used a pedagogical method with the same characteristics and purposes as the interactive-narrative method suggested by Veglia: «The adult should not take a stance of superiority, but rather of equality, making sure teenagers learn to see for themselves the behaviours which do not help growth» (GHINELLI, 2012). He should guide their choices, but also be aware that – when boys and girls learn freely, giving meaning to their experience – they learn for life.

Our sexuality can be developed on endless maps: on the Italian and international scenario we find several proposals (F. VEGLIA, *Sexual Education Handbook*, Vol. 1). Considering that good sexuality is first and foremost sustainable sexuality, the "reference map" chosen to try and talk about sexuality is the one sug-

gested by F. Veglia (VEGLIA *et al.*; PELLEGRINI, 2003). Like Veglia, we too think that it makes sense to place human sexuality on the traces of the evolution of life. It means having a universal outlook in its regard, valid for all, important signs of which remain in the genetic code of our species, therefore in the structure and operations of our brain, bearing in mind that they take a specific form of expression in each of us: true to the evolution of life, we understand that human behaviour – as is typical for homo sapiens – is not characterised just by instinct and by the drive to reproduction, but also by emotions, by the need for attachment, the need to belong and the need for generativity. (VEGLIA, 2012, 2018).

According to this reference map, the coordinates of human sexuality are organised around six important dimensions which will be introduced here through the story of Lucia and Luca.

Lucia is a pretty and smart sixteen-year old, with a slightly conflictual relationship with her parents, like many adolescents. One evening, exasperated by a mother, whom she perceives as being excessively intrusive, and by a father, who is charming but often absent, she storms out of the house. She then meets Luca, the type of boy she would never dream of dating! She dances with him, drinks with him and, without paying any attention, she lets him "have his way" outside the club. It could happen to any teenag-

er: conscious inhibitions are abandoned, giving way to the very ancient force of life which carries on at all cost. (Mediated by the most ancient set of brain structures, from an evolutionary viewpoint, this dimension expresses the ancestral procreation function of humans, aimed at preserving the species. Before consciousness emerged, sexuality was present in the reproductive dimension: all this was a good thing and has been preserved for us).

After that night, having regained consciousness, Lucia and Luca still look for each other, make space for the relationship between them, add words... to say and share things about sex..."let's play a little", "let's cuddle each other", "stroke me". This makes us think of people who do not intend to experience sexuality in its entirety (to be totally honest, their age makes this difficult for them... but it's actually just a matter of time...). However, having acquired a little more awareness compared to their first meeting, they experience it in the form of a game, with the intent of discovering a few rules, shared by both. Even though it is geared towards the search for wellbeing confined in the present, it becomes "*a gym to learn while having fun", which is exactly the same as a game* for children. However, limiting oneself to the playful dimension of sexuality, though it may be pleasant, still means playing oneself down, in a way, or making do.

Lucia has other words in store for sexual life: she wishes to *be together* with Luca, possibly make love,

have a liaison. Following up on the concept of the evolution of life, we see that humans go beyond survival and reproduction: they look for an arrangement with other human beings, they need to *build relationships*, a typical train of many living species. After we are born, we search for the protective closeness of someone, then we also tend to take care of ourselves and of others... this is why Luca and Lucia gradually start looking for a female or male companion respectively; they also meet him or her physically, in order to experience the pleasant feeling of being thought of, desired and searched by someone! They need to rediscover the primal wellbeing of physical intimacy experienced with the first caring figures, although this time it is characterised by sexual pleasure. They experience the social dimension of sexuality which releases sexual pleasure from its original reproductive aims and opens up new horizons of relationships with other humans. They start to understand what it means to live a bond: thanks to the limbic brain [seat of the amygdaloid complex and of other fundamental structures related to the control of impulses – sexuality, appetite, etc. –, to implementing a behaviour which follows an emotion and the processing of the emotion itself] (MORGANE *et al*; MOKLER, 2006) they feel emotions which transform instinct into motivations, needs into occasions, impulses into intentions. Bonds are attractive and they give back intimacy; Luca and Lucia gradually learn

that they also entail risks: losing some freedom, losing love, losing borders... when we live the intimacy of an experience we are excited, not just physically, "we strip off", "we are naked", more exposed also to the "wounds of the soul". What does this mean? In a bond, we become "fragile" like crystal objects, not in the sense of being weak, but "valuable"... This is why it becomes important not to forget to say: «touch me, but hold me properly, with care, keep me safe... if you fail to hold me properly, I may get seriously hurt». When a bond is established, the experience of pain may resemble that of Love: we need to be accompanied in order to become experts and able to handle it. Intimacy always needs "maintenance".

The last three dimensions of sexuality are controlled by the neocortex, that is to say the phylogenetically most recent part of the brain, which deals with the highest cognitive functions of the human being: sense of time, logical connections, meanings, narration, communication, planning, implementation and enabling of behaviours geared towards one purpose.

Having in your hands an object you desire so much, touching it, stroking it, is almost always very exciting. However, touching a Person is much, much more than enjoying an object. Within the experience of bonding, Luca and Lucia are experiencing that everything acquires meaning, moving from I to Us: "How come you no longer take me to our cherry tree?" The two young people access the semantic dimension of sexuality: also

the body is no longer just an item of love, but rather it becomes "a place to invite each other, to meet", where you patiently get to know one another, finding meanings and sharing them... you're not meeting just "one penis" and "one vagina": Luca meets specifically Lucia and Lucia meets specifically Luca. It is a new experience! Luca and Lucia *make Love*. But how did Luca and Lucia get to realise that now is the right time to start living this experience? Well, it was definitely when they felt, as they were living it, that it may be written on pages of a history which they may read again, recollect and tell about with joy.

Now they can no longer stand the idea that such an extraordinary experience may be repeated one time only. They thus access the narrative dimension of sexuality. They start to find space among their memories for this experience, an exciting present to tell about, a sense for the future. *They want a Story*! If we think about it, each adolescent, each human being just wishes... to have a Story! Stories have the power to transfigure us, to transfigure a meeting, in time: when Luca gets old and sees an elderly woman, naked, he may think: "you should put something on!"... If he gets old with Lucia he will see an elderly, naked woman "inside a Story"; he will see his partner, his wife. He will see Lucia and think: "how wonderful!... are you still inviting me?".

At a certain point, in certain stories – although it is not quite clear when and why – you feel like creating

a new character... also Luca and Lucia will feel like creating not just one of the usual walk-on parts, but rather a protagonist who may share their belonging with them, who will write new pages, who will change their lives, will be a source of new sense and of new meanings, will become a possible future, and they for him or her... sexuality transforms a love story into a creative act (procreative dimension).

Finally it is worth adding the seventh dimension of human sexuality: Luca and Lucia – apart from the wish to create new characters – might also wish to take in already existing characters from different Stories, possibly abandoned, wounded, not sufficiently "seen", angry or depressed, convinced that they are worth very little... they will change their life, too, sometimes turning it upside down, causing totally unexpected "twists", which are not easy to live, but – if they are lived together – will become exciting, stimulate the energy and vitality of all the characters in the Story (generative dimension of sexuality).

Educating to human sexuality by exploring together, using this as "reference map", seems to us a respectful and dutiful approach when we talk to children (but also to adults/educators/parents) who have a homo sapiens brain: even though it may sound ambitious, possibly a little "out-of-the-box", they have the potential to live it; it can be such a beautiful experience, what is the point in giving up before starting?

The education pathway to affectivity and sexuality suggested here, focusing on the value of diversity and on sexual wellbeing, is supported by:

- scientific evidence, emerging in the medical environment, which sheds light on how the male and female proprium has roots which are not just cultural, but connected to a close relationship between anatomical, genetic, neuro-physiological, psychological and cognitive characteristics, directly related to behavioural, social, phenomenological characteristics (*see The Meta-Analysis, Female and Male Education, Cantelmi – Scicchitano, chapter II, 2013*); even though these characteristics which make up identity integrate one another, turning into an individuality which cannot be preordained;

- multi-disciplinary model of self-effectiveness in development (*P. Gambini, 2015*), strongly supported at theoretical and scientific level (*standardised on a sample of 1375 adolescents*), through which there emerge *factors which are positively correlated to healthy sexual development* (protective factors), which can be grouped as follows:
  - self-awareness,
  - awareness of emotions,
  - living diversity respectfully,
  - a safe attachment style.

Attachment and sexual wellbeing

Just after we are born, our main needs – related to our physical and psychological survival – are the needs to identify and to belong. Being able to answer questions such as *Who am I?* and *Whose am I?* guarantees the development of a solid personality structure.

How can we learn to meet these needs?

Humans have an intrinsic disposition to process and construct forms of social interaction which allow – through learning in a relational environment – for developing complex systems for control and interaction, each of which regulates specific areas of interpersonal behaviour (Lichtenberg, 1989; Lichtenberg, Lachmann and Fosshage, 1992, 1996, 2011; Liotti, 2001, 2005; Liotti & Monticelli, 2008).

Ranking first among "interpersonal motivational systems" is Attachment.

The ability to regulate emotions and to meet basic needs is developed during early childhood in the course of Attachment dynamics (Liotti, 2005). There are several styles of attachment: each attachment style corresponds to different emotional and cognitive profiles of attachment, various ways of seeing oneself and others, specific modes for living interpersonal relations. According to the theory of Attachment (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980), each child has an innate need for safe attachment.

Why is it important to see the connection between Attachment and sexuality? Sexual behaviour is actu-

ally closely related to attachment: it is enacted with different methods and purposes depending on the attachment style. (CANTELMI, LAMBIASE, *Psychotherapy and Human Sciences*, 2007, XLI, 2: 205-228).

This overlaps with the theory by Eric Berne (1910-1970): all small children unconsciously acquire specific beliefs (about themselves, others and the world) depending on the quality of relational inputs they have established through their relationship with their caregivers, which Berne sums up as follows: «I am ok, I am not ok; you are not ok, you are ok».

Combining these "script decisions" (*see note 1*), depending on the gaze each person internalises on him or herself and on others, there are four resulting statements about oneself and others, which are referred to as Existential Positions (ROMANINI, 1999):

- Io am not ok, you are ok (I −, you +);
- I am ok, you are not ok (I +, you −);
- I am not ok, you are not ok (I −, you −);
- I am ok, you are ok (I +, you +).

Several authors agree on the fact that each existential position corresponds to a different attachment style, and subsequently to a different behaviour, also with regard to sex.

Everyone internalises a way of "asking for and giving caresses, of expressing or not expressing needs and emotions" (ROMANINI, 1999 – BARTHOLOMEW AND HOROWITZ, 1991 – STEIN AND CO-WORKERS, 2002). Safe attachment among partners who live any sexu-

al experience is a prerequisite for the sexual experience to be lived freely, fully and in a non-conflictual way. (Cantelmi, Lambiase, *Psychotherapy and Human Sciences,* 2007, XLI, 2: 205-228).

Promoting self-awareness and social and relational competences: on the path to mature intimacy

Given that any existential Position is based on (unconscious) decisions, like any decision it may be changed, starting from self-awareness.

For this reason, in this educational pathway to affectivity and sexuality, the proposed activities help participants develop awareness and self-acceptance, an essential characteristic which encourages good emotional competence and the ability to live diversity respectfully; this may help participants experience an intra-personal and inter-personal functioning which underlies the existential Position "I am ok, you are ok" (related to safe attachment), which includes personal and relational wellbeing, also with regard to sex.

In order to train the experience of safe attachment (which means, emotional and cognitive integration to achieve what can be referred to as "good behaviour"), you also need some basic concrete instruments. Life skills are an interesting instrument, especially during the age of development, because they focus on the area of competence rather than on risk (scientific research shows that risk during adolescence is attractive,

therefore ineffective if we wish to achieve positive and protective behaviours (P. Poppen, Gender and Patterns of Sexual Risk-Taking in College Students, in Sex Roles 32 (1995) 545-555 – it's best not to take any risks with regard to sexuality!).

Life skills: defined by WHO (World Health Organisation) in 1998, as "*social and relational abilities*, which enable adolescents to deal effectively with the demands of everyday life, relating confidently with themselves, others and their community*", "abilities and competences* which you need to learn in order to relate to others and deal with the problems, pressures and stress of everyday life. The lack of such socio-emotional skills, especially in young people, may cause negative and risky behaviours, in response to stress".

Figure 1. The ten life skills identified by the WHO

The essential tool for learning, in the end, remains the BODY. Teenagers (as well as adults) need to know, understand, experiment: you cannot explore together, in the area of affectivity and sexuality, excluding the body. Generally speaking, when we ask questions before starting a process with adolescents, they are always direct, concrete and expect adults to be the same. Psycho-corporal techniques become the preferred channel for knowledge, integration and communication.

Figure 2. A relaxation psychocorporeal technique

Each psycho-corporal technique fosters full awareness *(encouragement to get in touch with oneself)*, invites us to focus on the present (here and now), self-acceptance *(observing without being judgemental, without trying to change it or live it differently), authenticity (true awareness in spontaneity), thereby breaking automatic responses (which cause or increase our suffering)* and *training intentionality.* The game, followed by verbali-

sation in a group or by the production of some drawing, is the simplest and most effective psycho-corporal technique we know, having tested it ourselves, as young girls, in the educational contexts we attended (e.g. scout groups).

Shared words to tell about something personal.
Prevention of abuse, between recognising signs and generative communication.
Always giving care, in a different way

The caregiving system guides us towards protecting and supporting other individuals that are in a state of need (Bowlby, 1982); it is triggered when someone is suffering or needs care and protection (Canterberry and Gillath, 2012). The parent/child bond naturally predisposes to caring and protection. In this regard, abuse prevention plays out in two opposite directions: presence versus autonomy. The smaller a child is, the more caring – also physically – and presence is required on the part of the parent or caregiver. During this phase, taking care means being vigilant, and leaving spaces for autonomy only to the extent appropriate for that child age, which will increase as the child grows. A child, even if he/she has been taught to say no, is never able to protect him or herself from abuse; during this phase it will therefore be essential to ensure presence and attention. Taking care of a small child (of pre-school/

school age) means being vigilant and carefully supervising spaces and times; it entails also responsibly deciding to whom our child should be entrusted if necessary. In the meantime, with the broad scope of a good education perspective, it means preparing the future autonomy of a child, who will grow and will be less and less under control. It is thus important to immediately start working on respect for the body (think of a small child washed, clothed, carried in an adult's arms), asking ourselves about the borders we put up to respect the child's intimacy (where we undress the child, who is allowed to do it, whether we respect the first signs of modesty, and so on). A view which is as clear and objective as possible of the child's needs, not polluted by household needs or models, helps appropriately dose the level of caring, because it allows to read the real need for which a response is required, focusing on growth and autonomy wherever it is more necessary. This gaze needs to be even more attentive in the case of disabled children, where caring is sometimes long-term, possibly for a lifetime, and needs to consider the dignity of someone who is growing, physically and emotionally, and needs to experience all possible forms of autonomy.

As the child grows and becomes a pre-teen, then an adolescent, there is an increasing shift in the direction of autonomy. Caring becomes less and less related to "doing" (for example: feeding, clothing, supervising)

and more and more to "being there" (as a presence which is unobtrusive, but available, not controlling but vigilant).

Sexuality, which is an integral part of our whole personality, emerges in a prepotent way during this phase of life. It is important to bear in mind that adolescent offspring experience a strong sexual drive, that they have a strong wish to explore, to try out something new, all of this with the emotional effervescence typical of this age, where emotions are intense and ever-changing. During this phase, sexuality risks being experienced mainly as an emotional part, neglecting the affective and value-driven components.

Adults have the task of accompanying, of continuing to sow without expecting to reap, of keeping an open dialogue, of monitoring choices and behaviours, helping adolescents express the seeds of good they have inside them, of reminding them of values, making sure they are always oriented to self-respect (of one's feelings and body) but still mindful of others. The important thing is allowing them to become independent, to set them free without abandoning them, to be vigilant but never oppressive or controlling. The wish to explore and discover, which is experienced by minors in this age group, is physiological. It is necessary, however, to provide the proper instruments, to enable thinking and reflection. Especially during adolescence, it is essential to create good communication, also with regard to sex.

Encouraging the development of respect

About one child out of five is a victim of various forms of sexual abuse or violence. It is something that can happen to children of any age, regardless of skin colour, social class or religious belief. The abuser is often someone the child knows and trusts; the abuser, in some cases, can be another minor.

It is useful to let children know that certain adults can be part of their circle of trusted persons who create a safety net in order to protect them.

The adult can encourage them to choose adults who are able to inspire confidence, available to listen and help them. Children may learn to choose trustworthy persons both from within the household and in the sphere of social life.

In certain cases the abuser may be unknown. For this reason it will be useful to teach the child a few simple rules to encourage self-respect and for contacts with strangers: never get into the car with someone you do not know; never accept presents or invitations from a stranger. It is advisable to tell children that there are professionals who can help them (teachers, social workers, ombudsmen, doctors, psychologists, police officers), as well as dedicated phone numbers for children to ask for advice and help.

According to Cismai (Italian Coordination of Services against Child Maltreatment and Abuse) when a child is ready to tell about abuse, it means that he/she has made contact with the self and become aware

of suffering. This situation, although it is a positive experience, involves the risk of post-traumatic stress temporarily becoming acute again. This suffering can be alleviated by the child's loved ones respecting the individuality and pain, taking care of the minor's psychological and physical needs. It is useful to bear in mind that, the more a child has been damaged by abuse, the more damaged the ability to remember and recount may be jeopardised. Respecting means remembering that disclosure is a process and goes through steps which may not seem linear and logical.

Disclosure always needs to be collected and reviewed in depth, even if it sounds fragmentary and confused, or far-fetched; it needs to be accompanied by means of appropriate safeguarding and support actions. Given that sexual abuse is a phenomenon strongly characterised by the victim being forced (expressly or implicitly) to secrecy and silence, and by the enabling of feelings which inhibit any narrative (for example guilt, shame, betrayal), the collection of disclosures needs to be accompanied by special attention in avoiding elements of "negative suggestion" (disparaging remarks, repeated questions, the adult expressing doubts or perplexities, moral blackmailing).

In order to better foster the development of healthy respect, it will be necessary to pay special attention also to avoiding elements of "positive suggestion" in the dialogue, i.e. overlapping ideas, suggestions and feelings of the adult in respect of the child's narrative,

anticipating situations or details which may influence the child or alter the quality of listening.

The "Underwear" rule

In order to voice a difficult life experience, or something traumatic, a deeply personal subject, it is necessary to use simple words. The topics may be broached in a simplified way. The Council of Europe has drafted a set of materials to help adults teach their children the "Underwear Rule". They include a television ad (in the form of cartoons), an illustrated book (for children aged 3/7), posters and postcards. These materials can be downloaded from the website www.underwearrule.org. The Underwear Rule is part of the Campaign by the Council of Europe called "One in Five", launched in order to counteract and eradicate sexual violence against children. Further information about other prevention and protection measures by the Council of Europe is available on the website: www.coe.int/oneinfive.

Fairy tales are one of the privileged instruments to educate and narrate. Using the fairy tale suggested by the Council of Europe, we can translate into words the topics of respect for one's body and of sexual abuse. The story we present here is the story of *Kiko and the hand*, aimed at launching and setting the stage for the Underwear Rule. It is a simple guide which helps parents explain to their children where they should and should not let themselves be touched, how to react if

something happens and where to seek help. Use can also be made of basic and intuitive pictures, referring back to precise and clear choices against any form of violence. Children should not let any of their body parts be touched which are generally covered by underwear, nor should they touch others in those parts. The Rule also helps explain to children that their body belongs to them, that there are good secrets and bad secrets, that some ways of touching are good, while others are bad.

This rule includes several important aspects:

- *your body belongs to you.* Children own their bodies and nobody should touch them without their permission; an open and direct dialogue from a very early age regarding sexuality and "intimate body parts" is bound to help children understand what to consider inappropriate. Children have the right to refuse being kissed or touched. It is vital to teach them to say "No", immediately and firmly, in the event of inappropriate physical contacts, or to escape possible risky situations, as well as to talk about the subject with an adult they trust;
- *good way of touching/bad way of touching.* Children are not always able to recognise if touching is appropriate or not. It is not right to allow someone to watch or touch their intimate body parts, or to accept to watch or touch somebody else's intimate body parts;
- *good secrets/bad secrets.* Secrecy is the main strategy used by sexual predators. For this reason it is im-

portant to teach the difference between good secrets and bad secrets, and to create an atmosphere of trust. Any secret that makes them anxious, causing them to feel uncomfortable, afraid or sad, is not a good secret and should therefore not be kept as such; it needs to be disclosed to a trusted adult (parent, teacher, police officer, doctor).

• The responsibility for prevention and protection is in the hands of adults. Abused minors feel a sense of shame, fear and guilt. Adults should try to avoid creating taboos around sexuality, and make sure that children know who to turn to if they feel worried, anxious or sad. Children might have a feeling that there is something wrong. It is up to the adults to tread carefully, with a view to understanding their feelings and behaviours.

Learning to welcome suffering

It is essential to establish good communication with children. In this regard the relationship needs to be open, determined, honest and to take place in a setting which is conducive and not intimidating. It is never too early to teach a child, because abuse can occur at any age. If a parent feels uncomfortable talking about this subject to the child, it is important to bear in mind that it is probably a more difficult topic for an adult than for a child.

In most cases the abuser is someone known to the child. It is especially difficult for small children to re-

alise how it may be possible that someone they know might decide to abuse them. It is important to bear in mind that online grooming is an instrument used by potential abusers to gain the child's trust.

One of the rules established in the family should include informing parents on a regular basis if there is someone who offers presents, asks to keep secrets or tries to spend time alone with the child. If you suspect that a child may be a victim of abuse, it is important not to be angry with them, nor to give them the impression that they have done something bad. Rather than conducting a formal interview about why something happened, it may be better to steer the dialogue towards what happened, where and with whom. It is important not to show children that adults are upset (which is what understandably occurs), because children may be easily led to feeling guilty and refrain from disclosing information. A useful effort consists in not drawing hasty conclusions, based on limited and fuzzy information. Supporting the child while they tell their story also means reassuring them, telling them that they can count on you and that you will take care of them. Abuse is a wound for the whole family, it involves all those who are close to the victim; this is why it is useful to establish a network of contacts which is able to help (for example friends or relatives, neighbours, psychologists, a specialist in paediatric assistance, a doctor, a social worker, a member of the clergy, or the police).

The way in which you choose to communicate with someone who is in a distressed condition is very important: children who have been abused may be extremely upset, anxious or confused. Some may blame themselves for what happened during the crisis. Staying calm and showing that you understand them can help children in distress to feel safer, understood, respected and properly cared for.

Some of the persons who have experienced a traumatic event might wish to tell their story. Telling the story, translating the trauma into words can provide great support. Nevertheless, it is important not to push anyone to tell about what they have suffered. Some people might not want to talk about what has happened, or about the circumstances they experienced. They might also find it helpful if someone just stands by them in silence, or to be told that there is someone available if they wish to talk, or to be offered concrete help. It is important to refrain from talking too much, thus allowing for silence. Keeping silent for a while might leave room for the person and encourage them to confide in the other person, if they so wish.

In order to communicate properly, you need to be aware of both your words and your body language, which includes facial expressions, eye contact, gestures and the way you stand or sit in relation to the other person.

In 2011 the World Health Organisation provided some guidelines aimed at making it easier to listen to victims of trauma. They include for example find-

ing a quiet place to talk, and reduce to a minimum outside distractions; respecting the person's privacy and keeping their story confidential; being close to the person, though keeping an appropriate distance based on their age, gender and culture; letting them know that you are listening, by giving short verbal confirmations or head movements; remaining patient and calm; acknowledging the person's moods and expressing our closeness; recognising individual strength and allowing for silence; not pushing anyone to tell their story, because it takes time to deal with trauma; do not interrupt or rush someone who is telling their story (for example, do not keep looking at your watch and do not speak too fast); do not touch a child unless you are sure it is appropriate to do so; do not judge what they did or failed to do, or how they feel; never say "You should not feel like that", or "You should count yourself lucky: something worse might have happened"; do not invent things you do not know; avoid using words that are too technical; never tell people someone else's story; do not make false promises or give false reassurances; do not think or act as if you were to solve people's problems in their place; do not deprive a minor of their sense of being strong and able to take care of themselves; do not talk about people in disparaging terms (for example, never call them "crazy" or "insane"); you may judge bad behaviour while still respecting individual dignity (a man is not his mistake).

Recognising the signs of violated trust

Knowing about mechanisms and critical nodes which characterise child grooming can be useful for prevention purposes, in order to both inform minors about the potential risks caused by trusting strangers, and to be vigilant, thus recognising any alarm bells. The "spider's web" described by Perrone Nannini, adjusted by the TiAma Centre, describes the steps which lead to grooming in a gradual and inexorable way, through a building up of actions and emotional aspects which ingenerate themselves, then make it difficult to escape, once you get caught in the "web". Abusers may present themselves in different ways: they may be overbearing and threatening, as well as sweet and gentle; it is impossible to predict. Fairy tales teach children that nice persons are "good" and bullying persons are "bad". In a child's world there are no nuances: there is good and evil which are always clearly separated. Reality, on the other hand, is always more complex than that. This means that, although it is important to warn kids not to trust strangers, we know that grooming can also take place as part of a relationship with people they know. It is just like in a web which is spun exactly on the basis of a trust which is built gradually. The underlying messages of the abusive relationship are often very powerful: "you are unique"; "I do this only with you"; "what would I do without you..."; "I could never live without you", and so on. Feeling "special", "important", "at the cen-

tre of an adult's attention" attracts and gratifies the child; these are natural feelings and it is important never to blame a minor for them; nevertheless one should remain vigilant and intervene if a situation characterised by exclusivity were revealed. Another feeling which may hinder the interruption of an abusive relationship is the sense of guilt deriving from leaving a person for whom a minor feels to be so important, more specifically because an abuser is often perceived as a person where frightening aspects merge with pleasant ones: they are at the same time "angel" and "devil". Such emotional ambivalence in respect of an abuser, with the child feeling they love them and hate them at the same time, creates a situation which can be perceived as a "dead end", or a crossroads with no possibility of choosing the right turn. On the one hand, keeping the situation secret means accepting the continuation of pain and fear; on the other side, talking about the abuse will cause serious trouble for the abuser (someone the child is fond of), as well as having serious consequences on the minor and his or her family. A child's fear of being considered guilty and of causing their family to suffer might prevent them from speaking up.

Another element which makes it difficult for a child to realise there is a problem and thus to ask for help, is the "standardisation" attempted by the abuser, with a view to making a child feel that what they are experiencing is normal, that everybody does the same,

therefore there is nothing wrong in it. This will cause a child to feel confused because, on the one hand, they feel there is something wrong in what is happening while, on the other side, they trust the abuser as they would any adult.

This produces a tangled network made of contrasting feelings, where shame and sense of guilt block thought and action, to the extent of the child feeling on the verge of breaking down and extremely confused. These emotional states often have behavioural indicators which always need to be investigated as soon as they appear. The most frequent signs in children are: crying frequently; attention deficit; trying to introduce something into their vagina or rectum; swings in appetite; sleep disorders and/or nightmares; fear of the house or of a specific place; appearing excessively scared with regard to men or women; sex games inappropriate for their age, using toys, playing with themselves or with others (for example, repetition of explicit sexual actions); drawings and/or descriptions which are sexually explicit, inappropriate for the child's age; knowledge of sex which appears bizarre, sophisticated or unusual; starting to wet/soil the bed again, poor personal care.

In an older child or in a teenager, the following can be indicators or consequences of sexual abuse: sudden lack of interest in friends or activities; anxious and jumpy reactions to physical contact; morbid interest in sexual activities; hostility to figures of authority;

constantly being in need of company; regressive communication patterns (for example childish talk); difficulty in school or school performance suddenly worsening; running away from home; wearing suggestive apparel or dressing in several layers to cover possible injuries (for example, keeping one's jacket on indoors), lack of trust in others, poor personal hygiene, engaging in sexual intercourse in a variety of ways.

GLOSSARY

Caregiving
In the words of Bowlby, (1907 – 1990) we could say that the caregiving system guides us towards providing protection and support to other individuals in a state of need. It is activated in the presence of someone we know to be in need of care and protection. Parents are naturally and spontaneously motivated to help, comfort and support their children. This relationship risks breaking boundaries if one fails to consider that, as the children grow, it is also necessary to change the way in which this relationship is offered. Therefore *"always caregiving, in a different way"*

Awareness
Awareness of the Self, of one's history and sexuality (mechanisms, significance and personal history), both in its "healthy and happy" aspects, and in cases of "discomfort and/or fatigue".

Body
The site of the most archaic memories, an integral part of the Self. Using psycho-corporal techniques it is possible to start listening to it in the dynamics of a relationship with the other; being able to interpret the pleasure or discomfort resulting from feeling the distance or closeness of bodies; recognising sediment-

ed recollections in the sensorial memory; producing images evoked by body narratives.

Trust
Trust is a feeling that characterises the relationship we have with ourselves and with others. Trust is based on the feeling of being safe, on the certainty that we can count on the other, or on our own skills. When trust is violated, you are led into a difficult and painful dimension. Being the victim of an aggression, as in the case of sexual violence, involves an experience of being blocked or constricted, with a direct physical attack on the person. The result for the human mind is experimenting one of the worst situations of danger for one's survival; it requires acknowledging the needs of the child to undertake the long and difficult processing of the trauma. The parent is called upon to mentor the child, learning to *"recognise the signs of violated trust"*.

Integration
Reaching further levels of reflection through specific techniques is a way of encouraging knowledge of new parts of the self, increasing the perception of ones' complexity and individuality.

Intentionality
A research approach which can also be trained by using specific techniques aimed at achieving full self-aware-

ness; this in turn can be expected to allow each person to focus on the present, to become less judgemental and to accept oneself more, setting aside automatisms and becoming more authentic.

Mature intimacy
Gradually favouring an increase of the knowledge of one's intimate sphere and a positive approach with one's body stimulates the structuring of a personality which is healthy and emotionally competent.

Narrative
Developing a greater ability to voice one's life experiences through narrative techniques makes it possible to introduce thoughts related to the differentiation between the self and the other, and to the need to tell a story of oneself which is richer, with fewer taboos, keeping a healthy and protective dialogue with teenagers.

The Underwear Rule
It is important to explain to children that their body belongs to them, that there are good secrets and bad secrets, as well as good or bad ways of touching. A child should never allow any touching of body parts which are generally covered by underwear, nor should they touch others in those parts. *"The Underwear Rule"* has been designed to help parents and those involved in caring for children to start a dialogue with

them on the subject, an effective tool to prevent sexual abuse. It is a basic guide aimed at helping parents explain to children where they should not let themselves be touched, how to react if this happens, and where to seek help.

Respect

Self-respect is a pre-requisite to be respected by others and to live one's life feeling one has the right to exist and express oneself. It is only a deep sense of self-respect, for one's individuality and uniqueness, that can lead to the ability to establish constructive and healthy inter-personal relationships, based on mutual respect. "*Encouraging the development of respect*" entails the challenge of showing one's perspectives and needs and, at the same time, of listening and welcoming other persons' viewpoints. In other words, respect means competence in expressing one's feelings, in shaping one's behaviour and in taking decisions based on the current context, as well as in having the ability to defend and support one's rights when the situation calls for that. All this should be done without imposing one's will on that of others or, on the contrary, without passively submitting to the will of others.

Translating

Sexual violence is a traumatic experience which affects a large number of aspects in an individual's life. It may

seriously compromise one's mental balance, socialising skills, ability to assess the surrounding environment and its possible hazards. Anyone who has been sexually abused suddenly finds oneself projected into an extremely altered dimension of the world as one used to perceive it: the impact with the way of seeing oneself and others is thus deeply compromised. The disclosure of sexual abuse by a child is not a simple and straightforward process at all. On the contrary, it is a winding and bumpy route. During a certain phase, as a matter of fact, the child may appear to be confused, inaccurate and uncertain, shifting from disclosure to denial. It is important to prioritise all types of actions whose purpose is *"to welcome suffering"*.

Prevention in groups and in communities. From voids to openings: cultivating resilience

Alessandra Augelli

> «People often get ill in order to be helped.
> We need to help them before they get ill. [...]
> When we look caringly
> we have small silent celebrations».
> *(F. Arminio)*

In a story by Anna Llenas, *The Hole*[1], little Giulia suddenly finds herself dealing with a large hole in her belly: a hole from which *cold air gets in* and *monsters come out*, a void she tries to cover up in various ways, *filling it with cuddles, goals, treats, presents...* but she can never find anything suitable. In the sadness and discomfort of her exhausting search, *she decides to listen to her void*, then a small voice tells her *no longer to search outside,* but *within.* She thus realises that, from that hole, there can *come out* words, melodies, colours, whole realities which give her back a *feeling of belonging* to something [...]. Pleased with her discovery, she starts *approaching others in a different way.* They have their voids as well, through which they discover new

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[1] A. Llenas, *Il buco [The Hole]*, Gribaudo Editore, Milan, 2016.

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realities, from which they return with beautiful gifts to be shared all together... and just as Giulia's void connects to that of others, *it gets smaller, without ever disappearing though*; there remains an *opening* in her inner world and a bond with the world of others.

This short but significant story raises several questions and intercepts several levels of reflection, especially at a time like this, when every day we are called to face voids and shortcomings, the search for significance, contact with others and the sense of community in respect of individual needs. How is it possible to enable, at community level, a listening of needs which is focused not just on compensatory responses but rather on forms of involvement and human sharing? How can the experiences proposed by Catholic associations become truly re-creative, thus re-generating a significant fabric of relationships and removing the danger of turning into compensations or palliatives for deeper human needs?

These are open questions, intended to guide our reflection, being aware that we need to be constantly vigilant in respect of human relations and that nothing should be ever taken for granted.

There are moments in life when people seem to be more exposed to their own inner voids and are forced in some way to get in touch with them: these contexts can be especially edifying or – on the contrary – extremely delicate and destructive. The possibility that voids and shortcomings do not become pervasive

and noxious chasms, but rather be turned into a *passage*, depends as much on the ability of the *individual* to *listen to the search which is encouraged by the void* – in the words of V. Frankl[2] – as on the *availability of a community network* which is able to welcome the search by these persons and create the conditions whereby each of their shortcomings is unveiled gently, acknowledged as something that makes us more human, freer and authentic in our relationships. It is the connection between individual voids that creates a network for ongoing passage, support, opening and discovery.

"One step back": being faced with our frailties

Many recent reflections in the field of human sciences seem to concur in highlighting that the experience of the pandemic merely brought to the fore several critical nodes which were already present in the current social and anthropological fabric: the paradoxes of distances and closeness with regard to others, the ambivalent traits of a lifestyle which is hyper-programmatic and not much used to considering the unexpected in order to deal with large-scale exposure

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[2] According to V. E. Frankl: «There is also an existential frustration: the feeling of lack of meaning of one's existence. [...] The human quest for an existence which is as significant as possible is so non-pathological in itself that it can – and must be – mobilised through a therapeutic action» in V. E. FRANKL, *Man's search for Meaning in Life. The spiritualistic foundations of logotherapy*, Mursia, Milan, 1974, pages 103, 114.

to precariousness and uncertainties, the antinomies related to extending and deepening a knowledge set, and – at the same time – a certain difficulty and weakness in delving into the defining mysteries and questions of existence. We have been forced to realise, like never before, that our need to meet, to be with others, should be balanced with the ability to keep in touch with ourselves, and that rising up to a further and project-based dimension always needs to be accompanied by being rooted in the *here and now* and by welcoming current forms of conditioning. This is what, using other words, Binswanger defined as "*anthropological proportion*": the concepts of *proceeding towards the other* and *withdrawing*, moving within the space of horizontality, and of *rising* and *descending* in the dimension of verticality[3] are nothing but the "*measurements*" of the relationship with the self and with others, as well as with the Other, dimensions which need constant remodulation because they are subject to changes and transformations[4]. Caring for this "proportion" actually allows us to create balanced relational contexts: more specifically, when you live the dimension of *company,* of being-with the other, without preserving and cultivating the dimension of interiority, of being present to yourself, even the

[3] D. Cargnello, *Alterità e alienità. Introduzione alla fenomenologia antropoanalitica. (Alterity and Otherness: An Introduction to Anthropo-analytical Phenomenology),* Feltrinelli, Milan, 1977, pages 134-141.
[4] Ibidem, page 142.

Part two Promoting child safeguarding

most constructive relationships may be misled in their intentionality. Familiarity with oneself, awareness of one's resources and weaknesses, of twilight zones and frailties, means – at the same time – paving the way and reaching out for a more authentic relationship with the other. This is where much of the educational responsibility comes in which needs to be promoted in formative pathways: caring for oneself seems extremely obvious and trivial or, sometimes, even as "one step back" in the wish to go towards others, to do good, to be involved in the care and "salvation" of the other. Instead, it is increasingly becoming an essential step to create bonds for the growth of all persons concerned.

According to Bruzzone:

The invitation that phenomenological pedagogy makes to education and caregiving professionals is to recognise themselves and take care of their own self to get to know others and care for them. Indeed, education can only be the result of one person meeting another, and only those who are deeply involved in this can help others to do the same [...]. Pedagogy, then, is not (as most people seem to think) a matter of how to educate learners: not primarily, at least. It is more, preliminarily, a question of how educators are formed, making sure that they feed in themselves and in others (rather than quashing or losing them, as is sometimes the case) knowledge

of the self, being open to experiences, the search for significance and love of life. [...] Without deep and constant contact with the self, any relationship with others becomes merely utilitarian or functional. Given that education is not a performance which needs to reproduce "expected results", but rather the ability to awaken in the other the wish to exist, then we cannot avoid delving into the "underworld" (even unconsciously) where that desire originates and is rooted[5].

The very subtle risk in all educational contexts is failing to recognise subtle forms of manipulation, subjugating, dependency; it is a web, often hidden, of small "violence forms" contaminating and spoiling relational integrities, although they never lead to striking gestures or actions: a substratum deriving from a person's difficulty to see oneself as a value, therefore worthy of being loved.

Those who consider themselves unworthy of love find it very difficult to welcome love and regenerate it around them: being an *object* of love and its *subject*, *letting oneself be loved* and *giving love* to others are complex indissoluble motions, both of them nec-

[5] D. Bruzzone, *Per fare una persona ci vuole una persona. Fenomenologia e cura di sé nella formazione degli educatori (To make a person it takes a person: phenomenology and care for the self in the formation of educators)*, «The Node. For a pedagogy of the person», 2014, no. 44, pages 103, 112.

essary for balanced relationships[6]. This is why self-esteem, "safeguarding" individual value and dignity, the inviolability of each person are the greatest existential achievements as part of formative pathways for the individual: through a patient and painstaking effort (centred around new life experiences, reflections about what is being enabled, human and relational support) it is possible to cut a dent in even the deepest life beliefs, in that regard, and in already sedimented noxious experiences.

Helping a person's self-esteem is a very valuable formative investment: as a matter of fact, those who have low self-esteem also tend to easily bring down the self-esteem of the others, because it seems the easiest way to dominate them[7]; they also find it difficult to be assertive, to be in contact with and to properly express personal needs and positions, which frequently leads to oscillating between passiveness and aggressiveness[8]. This is clearly a complex item of reflection, because it leads to significant thought and action interconnections. For the purpose of our research, suffice it here to consider to what extent the formative pathways in

[6] For more details, see A. Augelli, *Il mistero dell'educazione. Spunti e orientamenti pedagogici sulle tracce di Gabriel Marcel (The Mystery of Education. Pedagogical Insights and Guidelines following Gabriel Marcel),* FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2020, pages 65-78.

[7] Pope Francis, *Encyclical letter "Brothers All",* no. 52.

[8] See O. Castanyer, *Assertiveness. Expression of healthy self-esteem,* Cittadella, Assisi, 2006. See also M. Giannantonio, *Mi vado bene? Autostima e assertività (Am I good enough for myself? Self-esteem and Assertiveness),* Erikson, Trento, 2009.

which children and teenagers are involved sometimes risk bypassing important steps of identity awareness and self-esteem, which then encourage, on the one hand, visions and postures which are not constructive in the relationships with others and – on the other side – to failing to detect important notes to care of at personal level.

Living in a perfectionist, highly achieving and competitive society, where the imperative is always "succeeding" at all cost, has put us in a condition of refusing (even implicitly, by using small tricks) any forms of personal listening because we are afraid of coming in contact with weaknesses and frailties. Obsessed by the fear of making mistakes and of revealing shortcomings and limits, we engage in a fight against our humanity itself, and risk projecting onto others the same quest for perfection we feel in respect of ourselves. The danger (in the socio-anthropological context we live in) is that the refusal of imperfection, the search for the other in terms of affective compensation, the rising of expectations with regard to little ones (in order to mitigate our uncertainties) may be an extremely widespread approach among reference adults, who therefore adopt such attitudes without any critical perspective. The danger of unconsciously sliding towards forms of *emotional abuse* is thus considerably higher. In actual fact, mirroring to children – in a repeated way and in situations with a high emotional density – their imperfections, transmitting

a sense of love conditional to the adults' personal satisfaction, with recurring emotional blackmail or forms of indifference, rejection or underestimation, actually means triggering processes which damage the psycho-emotional development of the young[9]. Many scholars agree that emotional abuse is very insidious, being difficult to detect and reveal, in households as well as in schools or formative contexts in general. These communication and educational approaches are, sometimes, underestimated or disregarded because they are considered harmless, of little value and with a limited impact on individual growth. On the contrary, everything which is taken for granted and goes unnoticed fails to become a topic for reflection and review: therefore it risks becoming a noxious habit in the ways of talking and relating to others.

This is why it is important that, in formative and educational contexts, one should learn to acknowledge relational processes and dynamics, and to call what is happening by name: if we are able, thanks to experiences and reflections, to outline the various dimensions of emotional abuse, it will be possible to review some behavioural patterns, the words we use. We will be able, then, to redraft a more appropriate and personal vocabulary, mirroring ourselves in what we do or what we have seen others do, containing

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[9] APSAC, American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, *Guidelines for Suspected Psychological Maltreatment of Children and Youth* 1995, page 5; www.apsac.org/guidelines

some dynamics, not reproposing them, "reporting them" for ourselves and for others. The forms of *contempt* (hostile, verbal and non-verbal, which rejects/degrades); the *terrorising* expressions (a behaviour which threatens or could physically damage the child, or endanger the child or something which is dear to him); any forms of *exploitation* or *corruption* (encouraging a child to develop inappropriate behaviours); *any denial of emotional sensitivity* (ignoring the child's need to interact, failing to express a positive attitude in respect of the child, and showing no emotion when interacting with the latter); *isolation* (denying the opportunity for children to interact/communicate with the group of peers or adults); *neglecting mental and physical wellbeing* (ignoring or being unable to meet the child's needs)[10] should constitute a sort of mapping of risk territories in relationships. Awareness of these dimensions – not just and not only from an informative and cognitive perspective, but rather from an experiential viewpoint, connecting them to emotions and feelings, to situations in life experienced in the presence of these expressions and approaches – is the only way to understand its significance and its impacts on the self and on others.

In order to recognise and try to contain them, it is then necessary to move on to welcoming them: as a matter of fact, it is not easy to accept that there are weaknesses, frailties, pettiness, lowliness, limits, inad-

[10] Ibidem.

equateness, imperfections. The shadows found in the life experiences of any adult – all the more so in the case of a parent, educator, teacher, or spiritual guide – are difficult to accept, because they appear to diminish their dignity and credibility. In a false ideal of being perfect and irreprehensible, these fragile elements are not contemplated and, therefore, easier to hide, to be obscured and denied, first of all to oneself. Shadows which are not recognised and welcomed can cause projections and distortions in relationships and much more often, to try and avoid confronting our weaknesses, we exercise forms of power and subjugation of others.

> The dynamics of giving and receiving hide a greater complexity than is generally assumed. Moreover, if help is part of a professional contract, there are factors at play which – rather than increasing the self-esteem of those who are in a position of need – may weaken it or cause it to become chronic, in the name of an exclusive professional skill which disables persons. In the educational care, this constitutes a constantly present risk, given the thin border separating the responsibility of caring for another person and their growth from appropriating their existence and tame it in the service of outside logics. This constitutes the dark side of care, its subjugating declination[11].

[11] D. BRUZZONE, *It takes a person to make a person,* ibidem, page 110.

In order to contain the risk of a "standardisation" of forms of violence and emotional abuse, of a silent complicity in what we have seen in others and of an unwitting perpetuation of communicative choices or behaviours which are not constructive, it is necessary to make sure that educational figures spend time and energy in *taking care of themselves*: beginning to listen to one's story, to the voids and gaps which one is encountering, to the affective holes which characterise one's pathway, to the weaknesses and frailties which are easy to incur. All this is a necessity in order to safeguard the construction of significant bonds, both among adults themselves and with the young.

Being familiar with one's limits and establishing a dialogue with one's shadows[12] is a fundamental task for educators: this entails being able to live any shortcomings, mistakes, errors in their right dimension, without making them larger or smaller than they really are. It also implies the ability to go and look for implicit dimensions which, over time, have become sedimented in us, and which – without our noticing it – keep conditioning and defining us. Our shadows, our dark and incomplete sides are disquieting, but they are also what contributes to our personal "depth". An adult who is able to say to him or herself: "I can make mistakes without feeling totally out of

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[12] See D. Bruzzone, V. Iori (eds.), *Le ombre dell'educazione. Ambivalenze, impliciti, paradossi. (The shadows of education. Ambivalent, implicit, paradoxical aspects)*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2016.

place" will be able to welcome also any imperfections and errors of the little ones, considering them as moments of growth, and giving up to either laxism or intransigence. This will also allow to live the unreducible difference between persons, even within the asymmetry between different educational positions, in a respectful way, grasping the inviolable borders of their dignity, which is not overshadowed by frailties, but rather shines in them.

Bonds and/or knots: the sense of companionship

The first impact with frailties and shortcomings, as already mentioned, leads people to becoming inflexible, to isolating themselves, to searching for remedies and solutions on their own in respect of their distress. The relationships with others appear to be distorted by the fear of being judged, the fear of not being totally understood; as a consequence, the fragile dimensions of human experience risk becoming walls of incommunicability and distance. «Frailty and proximity – according to Levinas – are complicated: without experimenting the limits, the shortcomings of human weakness, we could not understand any other persons' needs; we would not own the sensitivity to understand in which way we should help and let ourselves be helped»[13].

[13] Pialli L., *Fenomenologia del fragile. Fallibilità e vulnerabilità tra Ricoeur e Levinas (Phenomenology of frailty. Fallibility and vulnerability*

Without the awareness of our limits, we walk in the illusion of certainty, of superiority, feeling that we are all-powerful; we are also less keen to consider the frailties of others, making ourselves inadequate and inaccessible to other people's calls for help.

Therefore, by harnessing a joint experience of human "smallness", we can create relational contexts where frailty is not seen as a problem to be resolved, for which a solution needs to be found quickly, but rather as a complex reality to be observed, listened to, assessed and transformed.

The freedom to *call for help*, as a matter of fact, can be found in an environment where showing one's limits or shortcomings does not lead to labelling, judgement, forms of isolation or blaming.

The paradox of our time is that doing things on one's own is seen as point of pride, without asking for support, even when you feel a need for it: it almost seems as if self-sufficiency and the lack of dependency on others is something useful and constructive in itself. Relational generativity can only derive from the meek approach of someone who does not expect to *become a person* on their own, but acknowledging the fundamental presence of others. The fact that we "depend" on others does not mean being subject to them: exactly in the light of the presence and essential differences of others we can distance ourselves from

between Ricoeur and Levinas), Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Naples, 1998, page 145.

them in a healthy way. The help that another person offers me, the returned knowledge this allows for, the possibility it creates for my fulfilment does not tie me in a double knot: on the contrary, it makes me freer when that relationship is placed within a sense horizon which transcends both[14].

There are relational *knots* which are developed specifically when the relationship becomes univocal and preferential, which tie up an individual because they are exclusive, actually eliminating any other connection. The authenticity of a *bond*, on the other hand, is founded on the possibility of embracing – thanks to the bond itself – other realities, to extend our network of knowledge, being aware that what any person needs to feel well and to be happy can never be provided by one relationship alone, but rather by a relational network as a whole.

For this reason, the experience of the group is especially significant in the growth of a person and constitutes a concrete opportunity for diversifying the various contributions and for creating a supportive network in respect of individual frailties. As a matter of fact, introducing a person into a network of relationships and making them live in a concrete space,

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[14] «Man – according to Frankl – is himself to the extent that he overcomes and forgets himself. [...] Being human essentially means being oriented towards something that transcends us, towards something which is beyond and above ourselves, something or someone, a meaning to be realised or another human being to meet and love» in V. E. FRANKL, *Man's Search for Meaning in Life*, Mursia, Milan, 1974, page 72.

which is *inhabited by difference*, means entrusting the other to a complex system which is broader and more constructive compared to what a single story and point of view may offer.

The group is an incubator of creativity; it leads to diversifying the gaze on our dynamics and enables various types of relationship among persons; therefore, it breaks exclusive dimensions, redundancies and recursiveness. In the context of a group, any person has the possibility of meeting several ways of being, of questioning their habits and of meeting/confronting other paradigms and possibilities; the standardisation dynamics of some communication and behavioural styles thus become less easy. In fact, despite the mutual influence and forms of conditioning[15], individualities find a way of expressing themselves, keeping the most authoritarian forms under control[16].

More similar to a tangle than to a sum of elements, "the group becomes an instrument for complex formation, because it includes all conditions whereby – if all the elements under examination come together – it is possible to bring about truly significant changes which involve multiple levels of the person"[17].

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[15] See J. Luft, *Group dynamics. Theory and procedure of work in small groups*, Città Studi Edizioni, 1997, pages 30-31.
[16] See also, in this regard, the film *The Wave* (directed by Dennis Gansel; Germany, 2008) where a teacher conducts an experiment of a "dictatorial regime" in the classroom. The film leads to reflect on the dynamics for building a group and under which conditions they may degenerate.
[17] B. Pojaghi, *Il Gruppo come strumento di formazione complessa. Il farsi e*

The various gazes which can be generated in a systemic context, therefore, can guarantee the safeguarding and growth of individuals, provided that attention is consolidated and that there is care not just on the part of the "leader", but also by all those who are part of it. In this regard, what is necessary is not just an awareness of the dynamics at play and a willingness to approach them with a constructive spirit, but also a *sense of ethics* which is expressed in the ability to detect inequalities and injustices, then take care of them.

Living the sense of belonging to a group means learning to read the signs which come from people, to interpret their moods, listen before making decisions, living the efforts made by each as an occasion to harness the abilities and attitudes of each component, as well as developing in a safer way some areas where there is potential.

Integration among the various components together with *interaction*, *decentralisation* with *opening*, sharing in respect of *being* as well as of *doing* are all specific dimensions which need to be cultivated to make sure that the group – in a way which is not taken for granted and obvious – becomes a growth experience. Indeed, one should not forget that in a group it is also possible to experiment with opposite life experiences: the exacerbation of prejudices and labelling, forms of exclusion, inadequacies and sense of inferiority, return-

il disfarsi delle idee (The group as an instrument for complex formation. The making and unmaking of ideas), FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2000, page 25.

ing and confirming to the individual the same short-comings and frailties which are felt. Therefore, even though it is an intrinsic anthropological dimension to the person's experience – because we are all born in a community experience – the group needs intention-alities to be redefined and confirmed, choices to be made all the time, maintenance to be completed, in the search of a communication and relationship style which gives trust to the caring gaze and competence for individual care. Those who observe first are the first to explain and take a specific situation in hand. This is an assumption which should be considered and shared within the group in order to prevent dis-content, misunderstandings, implicit rules which are not profitable from gaining ground and dragging the whole groups to unpleasant outcomes. The sense of *belonging* is often questioned and assessed today, due to the dangers of estrangement and self-referentiality it might entail. In its etymological sense, it expresses the possibility of making a person feel *part* of a larg-er reality, and not the whole. It is in that small part of a whole that it recognises its uniqueness. Belong-ing marks a connection, the reference to something/someone that came before me: in some cases, for ex-ample belonging to an unfortunate family or social context, may be a difficult constraint to let go, also in the eyes of others. Sometimes, though, for the persons who are most fragile, finding a group, an association, a community they can feel part of, may mean their

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life is worthy of the challenge, of being and loving, because someone has loved it before[18].

Within a wider texture, even the most fragile thread is able to follow the direction of the pattern and discover the value of its specificity. We should be vigilant in this regard, because each context of belonging should keep the windows open onto the world and onto others, without becoming a search for alterity, an enemy in order to define oneself, in order to turn its efforts towards a constructive prospect, without fear of being questioned. Says Pope Francis:

> In a world that constantly witnesses the emergence and growth of social groups clinging to an identity that separates them from others, who organize themselves in a way that prevents any outside presence that might threaten their identity, there is no space for feeling moved. In such a frame, even the possibility of acting as a neighbour is excluded: one is a neighbour only to those who serve their purpose. The word "neighbour" loses all of its meanings: there can only be "associates", partners in the pursuit of particular interests[19].

[18] See A. D'Avenia, *A chi appartieni? (To whom do you belong?)* Column in the newspaper «Corriere della Sera» *Per chi suona la campanella (For whom the school bell tolls)*, March 2011; www.profduepuntozero.it/2011/03/27/a-chi-appartieni/

[19] See *Pope Francis, Encyclical letter "Brothers All"*, no. 102, and the reference note to Paul Ricoeur, *The partner and the neighbour*, in *Histoire et vérité*, Ed. du Seuil, Paris 1967, pages 113-127.

Discussions and negotiations which are faced within a group experience are valuable dimensions because they allow not just a person to understand the right distance from others, but also because they constantly train them to better understand their needs, to communicate properly, to welcome the needs of others and to let go something of oneself with a view to building something together. Negotiation is also an acknowledgment. The *conflict*, very often hindered and regarded as not particularly noble, may find its reason of being in the group, when it becomes a chance to grasp the multifaceted views of reality and legitimise them. Leaving room for the various voices to which the group exposes each individual allows all persons to recognise in themselves a myriad voices, sometimes dissonant, not always consistent, though all legitimate and noteworthy.

The issue here, therefore, is to live *the group as a living organism*[20], bringing to a halt the mechanistical drift which tends to make us see group relations as a set of gears and devices, where – in order to get on well together – it is sufficient for everyone to do their part, without interacting with others. The realities of association groups are called upon to release themselves from activism, which is an end in itself, and to reinvigorate a way of acting which is a lively

[20] See also E. Musi, *Caring for those who take care: groupwork* in V. Iori, A. Augelli, D. Bruzzone, E. Musi, *Starting again from experience. Sense directions in social work,* FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2010.

and dynamic expression of the processes underway. When you are living an authentic group experience, its value is not so much in its beginning, or in its conclusion, but rather in what there is "in between", *in itinere*, the beauty of building despite one thousand imperfections[21].

Resilience: a community exercise

All human persons are born as a result of a complex system of interactions, of a sophisticated and very delicate apparatus of exchanges and modulations; therefore, also their whole development is characterised by a search for connections aimed at ensuring growth. A deprived social and relational context is a significant risk in terms of possible forms of distress, subjugation or violence[22].

"Any lack of systemic wisdom – according to Bateson – is always punished"[23]: in educational and formative contexts, being guided by this assumption means that, both in recognising difficulty or distress and in taking care or prevention, it is necessary to nourish a gaze which is able to keep together the different di-

[21] See the musical text *Costruire (Building),* by Nicolò Fabi.
[22] Report on Italy in the *Cross-border study on drivers of violence against children*, Istituto degli Innocenti, Firenze (2016). See also *Preventing child maltreatment: A guide to taking action and generating evidence*, WHO, 2006; www.apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/43499/9241594365_ita.pdf
[23] G. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Adelphi, Milan, 2000, page 138.

mensions of the individual and the relational levels on which they live.

All the most recent studies on resilience, i.e. the ability to gather energy from failures in life and re-orient it positively, agree that the latter is not a characteristic of the individual, an intrinsic predisposition. It is rather a competence to be acquired over time, which is developed as part of social processes, supported by several presences[24] and by a reference socio-cultural environment.

Depending on the nuance of the resilience concept which we wish to highlight, it is worth paying attention to a few socio-educational points. If we consider it as resigned acceptance and stress resistance, it is possible to assess its risk variables in order to prevent them (for example, material or cultural poverty, family instability, and so on), then observe a series of protective factors; from a perspective of recovery after traumatic events (disasters, wars, maltreatment, disease, etc...) attention should be focused on all those elements which promote the recovery of energy and useful resources aimed at facing distress. In any case, it is also worth noting, in a transversal way, that resilience as a competence tends to be increased by an individual motivation system (personality traits), by a system which includes the attachment figures and

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[24] Cyrulnik calls *resilience tutors* all those persons with whom an individual establishes a relationship of trust and creates attachment relationships; in CYRULNIK, B. (2003), *The Courage to Grow: Adolescents and their search for their own identity*, Milan, Frassinelli.

quality of basic relationships (family cohesion), as well as by an external support system (church, school, work) which encourages and reinforces any attempt at *coping*[25].

What has been noticed, and seems relevant for the purposes of our study, is that – in respect of the change of paradigm and of an increasingly complex and comprehensive connotation of resilience, also the educational and caregiving gaze is shifting from individual elements to community-based factors. More specifically, resilience is expressed as the "ability individuals have to move within physical and social contexts to find resources and to learn how to access family and community resources"[26]. It is therefore clear that – in order to build *resilient communities* – it is essential to enable persons to know themselves/one another, and to allow for "proximity" possibilities of rebirth. The issue here is not so much promoting networks of solidarity and support, following a critical moment, but rather to create a system which provides spaces and times where an individual can experience the resources which a community can set in motion in themselves and in others. In a community setting, any ac-

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[25] Garmezy, 1985 in E. H. GROTBERG, *A guide to promoting resilience in children: Strengthening the human spirit.* The Hague, Netherlands: Bernard van leer foundation, 1995.

[26] M. UNGAR, L. LIEBENBERG, R. BOOTHROYD, W. M. KWONG, LT. Y. LEE, J. LEBLANC, A. MAKHNACH, *The study of youth resilience across cultures: Lessons from a pilot study of measurement development*, research in *Human Development*, 5(3), 2008, pages 166-180.

tivities aimed at promoting resilience are those which allow people to express and harness their thoughts and emotions, to strengthen their sense of self-esteem and autonomy, which encourage free expression.

It is often the case that, in some association and community contexts, a proposal of personal "engagement" in communal activities is only aimed at filling a gap, at responding to a concrete need, paying little attention to the overall experience which a person might draw from it. Making a *request* (of service within a context, of engagement in an activity, and so on) mobilises a set of resources in the person and prevents them from turning to the community context just in order to *take* or ask for a set of actions/compensations in respect of one's needs[27]. On the other hand, though, this engagement also needs to be surrounded by some form of mentoring, a guarantee for moments of reflection, making sure that it is possible to shed light on individual points of strength, to find the most appropriate modes for expressing them, to create connections which open and make that experience "porous". In other words, the issue is going beyond a *utilitarian* view of service to the community, entering a more complex *expressive* and *experiential* prospect. A person needs a community space to get to know and enable one's own resources: I

[27] See also, in this regard, the concept of *generative Welfare*, a sense framework from which many of these comments are derived. See Fondazione Emanuela Zancan, *Generative welfare. Empowering, giving back, regenerating. The fight against poverty; 2014 report*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2014.

can become aware of what *I have*, of what *I am* and of what *I can* only thanks to external factors which make it possible to experience those dimensions[28], but also through spaces for quiet reflection to review that experience and cherish it[29].

A community context will thus be generative if it is close to individuals, without attempting to keep them within its own "circuit", to make them gravitate around the same reality and to subject them to one single relational movement, but rather to help them be themselves more and more, and to help them try and find their own place in the world.

A community reality which intends to question and assess itself with regard to this educational task, which is generative from an existential and relational perspective, can ask itself if it is committed:

a. at personal level, to nourish the dimensions of self-esteem, emotional management, confidence in the future and awareness of one's resources;
b. at group level, to caring for a true sense of belonging, of cohesive and partnership dynamics, exercising responsibility, decentralisation and opening[30];
c. at community level, for healthy involvement of all

[28] L. WORSLEY, *The Resilience Doughnut. The secret of strong kids.* Sydney: Wild and Woolley publications, 2006.
[29] L. MORTARI, *Apprendere dall'esperienza. Il pensare riflessivo nella formazione. (Learning from experience. Reflective thought in formation)*, Carocci, Roma, 2003.
[30] See also *P. Triani, La collaborazione educativa (Educational partnership)*, Editrice La Scuola, Brescia, 2018.

individuals, for promotion of family collaboration and support, for networking among the various services and institutions.

In conclusion, becoming *resilient communities* does not mean to put a damper on emergencies, to coalesce in order to face and resolve difficulties quickly, making sure that the previous state is restored. It means listening to frailties which the individuals and the context express, making sure that the situations lead to guidance and resources in the search of a restyled way of establishing a relationship, where we are all willing to change and to transform what is already there.

Re-creating: a constant tension

Based on the above, the "recreational" connotation of educational and formative contexts can be seen in a different light: not just a label given originally to activities and proposals, also to make them somehow attractive, and not even as an escapist and light-hearted alternative to more engaged realities. Recreational activities aim at *expanding the experiential field*[31] of individuals by encouraging other registers and developing other levels. They therefore have a very strong educational intentionality and allow for carrying the person beyond the boundaries of what is known and

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[31] On expanding the experiential field, see also Piero Bertolini with L. Caronia, *Ragazzi difficili. Pedagogia interpretativa e linee di intervento (Difficult teenagers. Interpretation pedagogy and intervention lines)*, republished by FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2019.

defined. Especially for persons in a condition of frailty, of cultural and material poverty, of distress, and so on, this means accessing new versions of the self and a new concrete opportunity for redemption[32].

Pursuing the aim, therefore, of not proposing formative spaces and procedures which retrace routes which have already been drawn, but rather help people look for new and personal routes more pertinent to the humanising of their life path, these contexts also help counteract social injustices and inequalities because they overturn the situation, causing significant upheavals at personal level, as well as in their families and in the realities they come from.

Unless formative activities preserve a deep core of creativity, in the most authentic anthropological and pedagogical sense, of giving life, of regenerating it, of leading persons to fall in love with it, in themselves and beyond, then they gradually lose their "revolutionary" charge and end up moving into a mundane, utilitarian ground, where they easily run the risk of competing with a series of other modern-day proposals.

Preserving the creative breath also means not counteracting the *unexpected* and controlling the fear related to it, rather cultivating the *blank margins*, being aware

[32] When I heard a "difficult" boy in the Beccaria youth prison humming a parish youth band song while he was writing an Italian assignment, I stopped surprised, questioning. Noticing my surprised look, A. said to me: «Eh, prof. I used to go to a parish youth club, too. That's why I want to get out: because I know I made a mistake, but I also know what the right way is... and I want to get back on track».

that only what escapes our control and our planning can lead our gaze beyond, to grasp new nuances and to confront, sometimes harshly, any *differences* we might wish to keep confined or get used to. A providential action can surprise us only provided that we review our benchmarks of possibility/impossibility.

The issue is that to pay attention, with eyes, heart and mind, especially in some moments in life and in crucial spaces, where individual and community approaches come to the fore in a significant way. Says Ivo Lizzola:

> You can call "ethical cells" those places where people are face to face and feel the need for an ethical choice before others, questioning themselves. In the ethical cell you find the meaning of the human adventure. It can be found in the gaps which are opened where individual experiences lead universal meanings to emerge. Starting from the ethical cells, therefore, you grasp what is really worthy, you give meaning to things, […] you reflect on proximity and institutions. The real issue is reinforcing a "generative membrane" which keeps under control the destructive (as well as self-destructive) dimensions, which people also carry within them[33].

[33] I. Lizzola, *Condividere la vita. Legami, cura, educazione (Sharing life: Bonds, care, education)*, Editrice Ave, Rome, 2018, pages 14-15.

These spaces for research and deep questioning about one's being and one's actions, about the sense of formative styles and proposals, is not something that just happens in a random manner, in respect of some historic and social junctures. These spaces need to be controlled and created in an intentional way, with precise commitments and important road marks. Danilo Dolci wrote: "There can be no growth without trusting communication, without knowing each other in depth, without knowing that love grows where everyone grows"[34]. Self-care, trusting relationships, awareness of living on a ground where everyone can democratically draw expressions and possibilities for doing good. This is the horizon which should guide us, for the purpose of creating openings, or even interstices or small cracks, in those stories which are so monolithic and asphyxiating where, sometimes even unconsciously, one risks getting stuck.

[34] D. Dolci, *Se gli occhi fioriscono (If Eyes Blossom)*, Edizioni Martina, Bologna, 1997, page 53.

GLOSSARY

Self-esteem
It is a person's ability to assess (in a balanced way) their individual resources and limits, weakness and potential. A person with low self-esteem experiences a difficulty in receiving love, tends to underestimate also others, to control and subjugate them in the relationship, contaminates relationships with personal projections, without properly communicating one's needs and thoughts. In formative pathways, allowing people to cultivate good self-esteem makes it possible to live interpersonal and community relationships to the full.

Self-care
A dimension which is often neglected in formative and educational pathways in favour of relational dimensions aimed at caring for others and community service activities. It is essential and valuable not just in order to watch over one's educational motivation and to avoid the risk of sliding into excessive involvement of others, but also to vent the significance of personal life, the sole space and "instrument" to revive the quest for sense, dignity and fullness of the other.

Knot

It is a distorted form of living the relationship, where the wish prevails of keeping the other for oneself in an exclusive form, without contemplating their autonomy and personal growth. The knot is tied tightly in the exact moment when the other would be willing to distance themselves and live their difference: it is a symptom and expression of an inauthentic relationship which requires care and vigilance, also in groups.

Anthropological proportion

It is an expression which makes it possible to visualise the relational dimensions of self-care and care for the other, of rising towards objectives related to transcendence – change and transformation – and to being rooted in one's original situation.

Community resilience

It expresses the community's ability to offer individuals and groups some space to live edifying experiences, thanks to which they can become aware of the resources available, which can be developed at personal level, as well as to make visible the network of interchange at group level. It is the thin substratum which is developed over time and in a constant way, which then helps individuals – in difficult and distressing times – to intercept any frailties, welcome them and reprocess them within a broader system.

Twilight zones

They are all those aspects which connotate, on the one hand, the frailties, errors, incompleteness, unexpressed or repressed sides of a person and, on the other side, the implicit, paradoxical, ambivalent dimensions of educational systems as a whole. Recognising these aspects, considering them and calling them by name, helps give depth to one's individuality, to take them as moments of growth and not to give way to laxism or to intransigence.

Chapter nine
Prevention for safety in sports

Lucia Todaro, Fabio Carlevaro, Francesca Magno*

The relationship with athletes and families

Empathy... at the right distance

It is all a matter of *relationship*. And we cannot – indeed, we should not – take it for granted that knowing others, spending time, doing something with them should be enough to create, harness and target a valuable and effective relationship, both in terms of education and prevention.

We start a relationship when we are "intentionally aware" of doing so, and if we are able to "make the other person feel and perceive" our true intention in

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* This chapter is a result of the collaboration between the authors. L. Todaro wrote the sections on the relationship with the families of athletes and abuse in the sports world, F. Carlevaro and F. Magno those on group and changing room management.

their regard. This, of course, is true for any relation, but not every relation turns into a relationship. This does not need to happen every time; however – if we are adults, if we have a social and educational role, if (in a nutshell) we wish to be *responsible* – it is essential that our "good intention" reaches out, engages, motivates the other person to transform an occasion into something more than a "chance encounter".

Responsibility means "the ability to respond": respond to fundamental needs, respond to wishes of self-fulfilment, to needs of care and wellbeing, of one's own and of others. Therefore, those who have an educational role or function should be able to act responsibly, regardless of the persons they meet, and they should be competent enough to then target each word, choice, gesture, or proposal – concretely, in everyday life, this means living each experience – for the purpose of making the other person perceive a "competent and intentional response" – which is the attention and care everyone wishes to receive when they express a need.

It may happen – unfortunately it is often the case in the sports sector – that you realise there is not just a need, but also some form of distress; then the relationship is no longer enough, and you will need to enable an effective and useful "helping relationship", even without reaching a resolution.

The Quality of a Relationship is not in the perfection of the response we might provide, but rather

in the *care* with which the other person will feel we wish to "be" with them. And the help we can provide – possibly to someone who did not even ask for it, because they do not perceive or are unable to express their need or their distress – cannot be based on our "goodwill" as nice people: it requires relational competence, effectively deriving from training, reprocessed experiences, sharing and ongoing updating of life skills.

So those who read this can start strengthening their Response-Ability bravely asking themselves:

- What relational intentions do I have towards my athletes, their families or towards my staff?
- Am I able to declare and state this intention of mine, and am I able to make it felt so that the other person perceives they are important for me, considered by me, cared for and protected by me, deriving a benefit – as well as pleasure – from that?
- Am I aware that I have qualities, capabilities and characteristics which – in the service of the other person – allow them to feel well, to harness their value and feel "mentored" in their personal, as well as athletic or sporting, progress?

When a responsible and competent adult asks him or herself these questions, they need to be willing to give – at least to themselves – answers which are sincere, critical, authentically aimed at increasing their educational potential and their competence in helping. Otherwise, the risk is that they might confuse

the roles, appear not to be credible, thus unable to serve as significant reference figures, which needs to be the case in order to achieve educational relational intentionality!

Each of us is potentially able to establish a relationship, but only provided that we are aware of it, and that we know which intentions move and motivate us to reaching out; only in this way will it be possible to define the style we wish to adopt and the characteristics required to achieve our objective. Those who wish to "feel well and make others feel well" thus need to follow a stringent approach where "goodwill" alone is not enough, but it needs to be turned into "relational competence" through our "willpower".

Those who know, love and practice sport know that the driver – engaging, saving and winning – behind each sport performance is willpower. I do believe that in effective relationships, which truly educate and help, the same principle applies: if I know what I want for myself and for the other person, if I wish for it because I am aware that it will help the wellbeing of both, if I am able to listen, to establish a dialogue, giving value and significance to the relationship with the other person... then we win together with those we manage to reach intimately with our relational intention!

Nobody is able to do this unless they know. Nobody can do this unless they want to. Nobody will do this even when it is necessary, unless they are aware that the value of being with others depends on serious

intentionality, which can and should be trained like a muscle... based on targets, schedules, procedures and exercises appropriate for the purpose!

Therefore, those who wish to grow and strengthen their willpower may ask themselves:

- Am I able to resist in relationships which are hindered, difficult or not pleasant, thanks to my deep motivation to do so, to be there – always and in any case consistently with my role?
- Do I know which points of strength and weakness, in me, are characteristics which determine the effectiveness of my relationships? And am I able to manage them in order to be successful – which sometimes may mean admitting you have lost, you were wrong, or that you are unable, on your own, to educate, support, help the other person and humbly try again or ask for help?
- Am I training with perseverance and continuity, in everyday and basic relationships, to be the other person's "caregiver" (by listening, understanding, harnessing their value, and showing in any situation or contingency my wish to "be there" for him or her, possibly also in occasions where I have to say no, correcting or criticising them with a constructive intent)?

I would like to underline again that only authentic answers to these complex questions – answers proven by actual and everyday experience – may help us grow in the art of educating. The rest (whatever we might

not be fully convinced of) will not appear convincing to the eyes of those we meet and will never have the chance to touch their hearts – because it will stop at the ears of those we are expected to care for.

A relationship can be defined as effective when it shows awareness, as well as a clear and expressed intention, the willpower which gives value to it... it should be based on emphatic competence, which is built over time, with experience, and is not achieved instinctively but through a wish to serve the other person in the relationship.

Showing Empathy means being able to recognise one's thoughts, emotions and motivations, keeping them at the "right distance" from the thoughts, emotions and relational motivations of the other person, of those we meet or wish to educate, to help... It requires three fundamental life skills (and empathy itself is a vital competence!): self-awareness, the management of emotions and stress. It is the effort of a lifetime, and we need to use all possible opportunities for training, strengthening ourselves and being able to reprocess everything that happens or takes place around us.

Helping relationship: more than just being together!
The experience of our human relationships serves and helps us improve its competences only if we are able to draw a teaching from each occasion – positive or negative as it may have been –, reprocessing it in order to understand and make sense of it... It is the action

aimed at transforming each event (= something that happens) into an opportunity (= something I need, I wish for, is good for me and helps me grow). Taking advantage of this mechanism, we can become more empathetic and succeed in deeply "understanding" – therefore, not just understanding – even the nuances of the other person, which may be different, distant or diverging compared to ours.

In order to educate and help, it is often also necessary to place ourselves in a position of contrasting, dissenting and criticising the other person in a consistent and assertive manner. It is not easy, but those who act empathetically and know themselves well are bound to be more respectful of any otherness; they will be able to point it out, without judging it based on their own mental patterns, but rather through the other person's gaze; they will not risk falling into the trap of compassion or rage, of identifying or despising, of becoming dependent or rejecting the relationship. It is also a matter of self-control: those who are masters of themselves will always know what they are doing and what the other person really needs!

Without empathy we are in danger: another person may drain us up in their distress, without us being able to be objective and clear-sighted enough to help them. It is a matter of respecting roles and of competence in helping. Empathy is as necessary a competence, as passion is for human happiness.

In the case of athletes who are training, of staff members and families, a surplus of empathy is necessary, which plays out in a relationship which needs to be "authoritative though focused on the other person". Being able to preserve the position of someone who educates, trains, motivates and organises, while still focusing attention on the real needs of the other, always acting with relational competence and intentionality, can show your competence in your role, the authoritativeness which is perceived and becomes a point of reference.

Someone said that "where your treasure is, there is your heart!". If our treasure is sport itself, victory or the prize, all our competences (human and technical) will be channelled in this direction. We would be penalising the persons, the group, and neglect what is essential, what makes the life of each person intense and significant: human relationships!

Without empathy, nothing that we wish for may happen. Without authoritativeness, nothing is effective. Unless you help…

These are questions which any adult, who wishes to be a Significant Reference in the sports sector, can ask themselves:

- Do I know how to approach another person, so that they may feel that I am an ally in their life, rather than a stranger vested with a role which they are not interested in accrediting as part of the relationship?

- Am I able to detach my emotional energy from personal involvement, which may be self-centred, rather than sizing up what the other person needs in a serious way and without any presumption or selfish expectations?
- Do I understand clearly (and am I able to show) that my criticisms depend on the responsibilities associated with my role or rather, first and foremost, on my intention and willingness to help others have a better experience in games, sports and personal relations?

These reflections lead us to defining the essentiality of effective relational competence which cannot be improvised just because we are sport enthusiasts or willing to commit; we should therefore ask ourselves what specific and widespread needs require attention, "regardless" of the issues and forms of distress which every person "bears". In sports, the relationship is a source of wellbeing in itself; even if all the athletes, staff members or families we deal with were happy and serene, we would in any case need to think, act and aim our presence at keeping that wellbeing.

Caring for the other is a form of "maintenance" for effective relationships; only by allowing ourselves to experience beauty, emotional satisfaction and relationships as a resource, will we be able to set a benchmark for what is a source of wellbeing and, on the contrary, for what "should not be the case", of the danger you might incur if you mistake the other person's interest

for benevolence, or misunderstand selfish intentions as forms of motivational encouragement.

Experiencing successful relationships allows us to recognise good intentions or other forms of dangerous contact: through relational competences we prevent hazards such as abuse, maltreatment, maliciousness or violence. If relationships are "well built", they constitute a protection Factor which saves us also where risk Factors are present, at individual, family, community level or otherwise.

What a huge, wonderful and demanding responsibility! What a significant challenge against the risk of apathy, of social withdrawal, of the feeling of loneliness, of the temptation of indolence and indifference with regard to the taste for life!

Networking without gaps
Today, in particular, it would be good to invest in the possibility of no longer feeling sorry for ourselves, due to the consequences of the pandemic, to the uncertainties and disorientation which it has created in each and all of us. It would be good if we could wear a protective shield against those who make negative and catastrophic prophecies, and – like modern-day and successful "superheroes of real life" – try to defend ourselves and raise the stakes.

To those who fear and/or risk bad companies, being conditioned by other people, dependant from social media, socially withdrawn, apathetic and indifferent to

everything, or who fear the meanness of a soul which has become arid (often just merely frightened), we could answer with "true and winning" testimonies of adults who:

- believe in what they do, but first and foremost, believe in human beings;
- consistently live the values to which they adhere, because these alone protect them from the risk of degeneration of the innate goodness of humans;
- are passionate and committed with Willpower, without raising their voice or demanding, but are always there, respectfully and hopefully;
- are able to listen – in a proactive and empathetic way – because they are interested, not just in what the other person says, but in what they are, which means that they wish to get to know and discover them, because they realise their value – like a good talent scout would do because it is a success for both!
- On tiptoe, but with loving firmness, are also able to criticise, object, challenge the other person's choices or actions, making it clear however that their intent is to support the other's wellbeing, not to impose their position;
- offer occasions and help reprocess them to make sure they constitute opportunities. They are extremely careful and generous in this regard, because nobody can truly believe in themselves, unless they live personally their experiences and manage to attribute sense and significance to each one, which also serves as a set of guidelines for life;

- never give up, because you can risk giving up exactly one minute before a miracle happens... it would be a shame not to persevere after having worked so hard for a goal!
- Are able to hope, always and regardless of how things go: hoping is free, and if hope is more than "waiting patiently", but rather becomes a relational style – consisting of respect, actions which favour the positive outcome and emotional support of the effort – then those who hope are able to make sense also of what then never comes true. Life, in fact, is made of the intensity of the "present moments" it consists of, and not of waiting for "futures" which may prove impossible!

Relationships in which we try to be "the best me I can wish for", with no expectations of perfection or infallibility, lead to wellbeing and to prevent the evil which may occur.

Every time someone is truly "close" to somebody else, wishing and showing it, I believe there is an endless and often incredible scenario of human "possibilities" opening up.

Alone one cannot; alone one is not able to; alone there is no point. Together the opposite is true: a social, educational, formative, preventive, proactive and project-oriented network can lead to a human masterpiece, of which I have only outlined the beauty and value of the frame!

One final remark, which however constitutes the nail, firmly driven in to hang the frame: let us try to

be "humble" in relationships! Those who are humble are well rooted in the ground (Humus, Humilis...), they are concrete and realistic. Positive realism is what we need: I see the other person and know their limitations and fLaws, but also wish to learn their potential, qualities and resources, unknown to many and often even to themselves. Then, the two of us can establish a relationship which will gradually transform us and allow me to grow, to the extent that I help him do it, with humility, to the extent which is humanly possible... the One who can will think about the rest!

Abuse in sport settings: what forms can it take, how can they be recognised and prevented?

Caring rather than worrying

It is humanly impossible to read, hear or think the word "abuse" without getting a deep, common and pungent feeling of "aberration". This is probably why we talk about it so seldom. We force ourselves to think that the phenomenon of abuse is so remote from us, from our cultures and sensitivities, so focused as they are on the wellbeing of each person. Possibly because of this widespread vulnerability, we also avoid thinking that the civil – I would say human – responsibility of each of us should at least contemplate its existence. As a matter of fact it is something that exists, occurs frequently, spreads across every social setting; it may appear in a variety of forms, as crime or destruction,

in any environment, and not merely in those we are willing to accept as risky or deviant, due to insensitivity and every kind of meanness.

Also on this topic, as in every state of life, we get to a point when we have to take sides, and we cannot avoid it. Not choosing, in fact, already means siding with those who agree with something inhuman happening! Closing our eyes will not make the monster disappear, if the monster is there... And thinking that it will never happen to me, to my own child, to my athletes or students, means choosing a pretence, being false – culpably ignorant – and therefore involved, whether we wish it or not, in a network of meanness, violence and responsibility, where we are accomplices, whether we admit it or not! Shall we call indifference the position of those who pretend, look away, or justify themselves by saying «what on earth can I do about it?». It is true that abuse is often so hard to bear that victims deny it to themselves, even though they are torn apart by the pain it causes; they cannot find the strength, the courage to express themselves and call for help. Those who have reached the adult age should be able to see further, and hear, even through silence, that something wicked is affecting harmless and fragile little ones; those who have reached the adult age should observe and listen more, better and everything, because they know that their role, their responsibility, as ability to respond to needs, does not consist in intervening when there is a cry for help, but rather in something

else. Otherwise, what would be the point in telling children and teenagers that they should trust those who are older, more experienced, mature and wise?

I believe there are children and teenagers who have a dyadic perception of the adult age: there are grown-ups who are authorised to harm them, as part of the role they have or allegedly have in their regard; and then grown-ups who are friendly and loving, but show that you can keep pretending that nothing is happening, that in the end suffering in silence makes it possible to play the game of "let us pretend that you are happy". This is a trick, an example of the art of lying, aimed at making us feel "grown-up", without truly being it!

For years now, during my courses, in pathways oriented to educational and educating adulthood, I say that the ideal would be to stop worrying and start caring for the life, peace of mind and growth of our young people.

Worrying means getting there late, realising – possibly by chance or maybe after the tragedy has happened – that someone was in distress while we were playing at being "nice and relaxed adults". Worrying means taking care of a problem which is by now apparent and being disoriented by it, to the extent that our need to understand overcomes the urgency of intervening. Worrying also means allocating our mental and emotional energies to dealing with ourselves, to reassuring ourselves to cool off; to taking care, however, of our own distress or embarrassment, of any

feelings of outrage or guilt which emerge, rather than helping or supporting the concrete and lacerating need, which the abused person carries, with the appropriate empathy.

There is no point in worrying: it does not help, nor does it look for constructive solutions. It shifts attention rather than focusing it. All children or teenagers who have suffered or are suffering abuse and find themselves disclosed, uncovered in their role as victims, do not feel better if the adults close to them are worried. On the contrary: they may have to hide or downplay even more, or to accuse themselves so that the fragile and worried adult will not feel so bad. In other words, they may have to avoid having one more cross to bear on their shoulders, already burdened by the abuse, rather than finding refuge and shelter in the arms of an adult who is strong and effective in dealing with the monster.

Any adult who is truly a "grown-up" should learn to prevent all this – even though they might not be able to concretely prevent the abuse. This means they are able to "care for" the child or teenager.

Caregiving is an action which is both preventive and useful to deal with the issue. First of all, you need to acknowledge the problem exists, regardless of figures, statistics and news reports, of our experiences and protective mental mechanisms which lead us to believe that "I know it is something existing, but not here, not now, not for me...".

Knowing and believing that it is true, that many children and teenagers have trusted adults who have taken advantage of them, who (with their words and actions) made them feel incapable, useless, wrong; it means accepting that evil exists. Knowing and believing that some adults may find pleasure or take any interest in using and abusing bodies of children or teenagers causes a feeling of disdain, indignation and fear; knowing it, however, is necessary to avoid pretending with ourselves, and with any potential victim, and to be there at the right moment.

Knowing and believing that abuse often comes from unsuspected adults (possibly friends, relatives, or educators we thought we could trust) forces us to deal soon, in advance that is, with our raw, bad and destabilising emotions, to be ready to focus with assertive and realistic maturity on the needs of children or teenagers that live with us, that we train, educate, or that are entrusted to our care.

Knowing and believing that abuse sometimes hides behind apparently close and strong ties helps us learn that respect does not involve an approach based on an overbearing, morbid attachment, on emotional dependence, complacency and obedience, and is already a first step. It means becoming aware and, consequently, motivated – which moves us and causes us to act – to rise up to our role as adults!

Caregiving thus means being aware that we are not dealing with a passing fad, which is discussed from

time to time, but rather with a monster that actually exists and swallows up young lives, jeopardising their safety, dignity, peace of mind, will to live.

Moreover, those who are aware cannot look away, and they are bound to find the courage (which means having a brave heart) to question themselves and prevent. Prevention entails competence in constructing relations and the ability to enable helping relationships.

Prevention also means talking about the risks, dangers, abuse, without wishing to emphasize nor dramatize, but rather in order to give testimony (to young persons, to their parents, to anyone) that we are aware of the issue and will not sweep it under the carpet, letting it seep into relationships, in changing rooms or bedrooms, in classrooms or parish youth clubs, because we are attentive, we are "careful adults". In actual fact, we should appear to be careful rather than concerned when faced with the reality of abuse. Then we will be strong enough to scare off anyone who might be tempted to harm the minors we are called to protect, and to make sure that potential victims of a system of shameful silence and complicity feel safe and well supported.

Talking to kids and telling them that the problem exists, but there are also forms of caregiving, protection and defences sufficient to contain it, deal with it and fight it, and that we are there... that is real prevention!

Protection means caring for body, mind, heart and soul
Caregiving is necessary... because it's caring that truly protects. If in an educational and helping relationship the other person feels (even before and even without any signs of danger or distress at the time) that the adult cares about him or her, this encourages a perception of being protected and makes it easier to ask for help if necessary.

Caregiving means caring for the person as a whole: body, mind, heart and soul are something that those who truly love are attentive to.

The point, therefore, is to be careful – observing and listening in order to truly understanding – in respect of the development, health and harmony of any physical maturity process. This is why sport can be seen as a vantage point, especially in the age range where kids no longer need to be cared for by their parents, and are very much keen on being independent as regards managing their wellbeing, appearance and physical efficiency.

Let us ask ourselves with true attention and interest: do they eat and sleep in a balanced and healthy way? Does the physical activity we propose for them help their bodies, or is it just targeted to agonistic efficiency? Do they know their bodies, their efforts and potential? Do they stimulate, train and relax them appropriately? What perception do they have of their physical appearance in respect of their age and of their contemporaries? Do they seem to be at ease in the

changing room? Do they appear to have an appropriate sense of decency, but without shame? Do they appear to respect others but without judging them with a critical eye?

As the body grows, the mind develops as well. We should ask ourselves if and how the way of changing of these teenagers that I knew as children is changing; teenagers that I wish to discover in their way of interpreting sports, the team, their performance, their friends, but also their projects for the future, any fears or feelings of inadequacy which might emerge. Of course it is important to set aside some time for dialogue, which does not mean interviewing, but it will be time well spent, because it will pave the way for any minor – regardless of whether they are an athlete, a student or your own child – to feel that the adult is not just interested in what they say or do, but rather in the person they actually are! And what a minor thinks should not be discovered in order to assess, judge, correct or criticise, but rather because it is fascinating to feel how their uniqueness – even during a phase of development – is characterising them and making them truly unique. Those who manage to be really convinced of the beauty of a person who is developing will succeed in being convincing when helping them develop and when confirming their value!

As the body and mind develop, there is an increase in the possibility of expressing emotions and feelings, because there is a form of emotional intelli-

gence (which the heart contains in itself) that makes it possible to guide their physical health and cognitive ability towards the added value of wellbeing in terms of perception of oneself (self-esteem) and in the relationship with others (sociality). Only if we allow a teenager to discover his or her inner world, to recognise its physical, somatic, sensorial expressions, assigning a name to the emotions experienced; only if we encourage them to express what they are feeling, without any fear of being judged, for that part of interiority and intimacy which they are finding out to be fantastic but also vulnerable, will we allow that boy or girl to learn to protect themselves. Those who know themselves are able to discern and to discover the other person's intentionality better than those who remain, without being aware of it, caught in feelings (pleasant or disgusting as they may be) or in emotions (attraction or dependency), which they are then unable to handle. Taking care of the heart of young people, therefore, does not mean asking them: "are you happy?", but rather suggesting experiences and occasions where they felt happy, then help them reprocess those experiences, making sure they remain engraved in their emotional memory forever. Then, if someone proposes them a dazzling pleasure or happiness with very different connotations – and harmful intentions – they will have a benchmark for comparison, knowing therefore that it is not a good idea to let themselves be seduced, accepting or giving in...

From concerned adults to careful educators!
The holistic wellbeing of a person is like a coffee table with four supporting legs: body, mind and heart also need the support of a soul, which should not be neglected by the educational system. The most important questions in life and on life cannot find an answer in human beings, even when they are feeling well, understand everything and know themselves psychologically. Happiness derives from the calm acceptance – not resignation – that nobody is enough for themselves, that we need to trust others and to Surrender, when it is necessary. This is why we should make room for the deep questions in life, starting at a young age, not in order to find answers, but to feel the endless joy in the surprise we can experience with regard to what we cannot understand but allows us to hope.

Preventing abuse thus means caring, in a constant and positive way, stimulating body, mind, heart and soul, to make sure that all children become protagonists of their existence and give great value to their life, to the extent of wishing to protect it – and to protect themselves – rather than risking or trivialising it!

Every time an adult has the impression that one of these four pivotal elements is shaky, they should try and stimulate the boy or girl (without scaring or making them feel guilty for this limitation) by involving them in concrete and feasible projects, making sure that they feel the strength of being mentored with care and complicity, to reinforce any area which may be fragile.

In an educational environment such as a sport setting, it will thus be easier to suggest ways of training aimed at consolidating any part which is necessary for agonistic or competition purposes, as well as for merely playful or recreational intent, which characterises physical exercise.

You will be able to stimulate the body more and better (so that muscles, weight, agility, strength and reactiveness ensure better results in terms of training achievements) but also adding that, in terms of self-perception, this is bound to be beneficial, by making us brave enough to try, to run risks, to be determined to act and to resist. Our heart will benefit from the wellbeing of our body!

Mentally, it will be beautiful and motivational to help others reflect on how they acted, individually or as a team; however, it will be just as interesting to prove that in life, in our choices, relationships, and in any activities other than sports, we need to reflect, applying our common-sense, problem-solving and decision-making skills, exactly as we do in the changing room after a match.

What about the soul? It is there: we should tell that to young people, without being ashamed of believing it, because we know that "the essential is invisible to the eyes".

You can cultivate yours: we should teach them to. Also, we should not be afraid of showing that we – as adults – still have many questions without a definite

answer, and nevertheless we remain serene and hopeful that, somehow, everything always makes sense in life!

And it is also possible to realise and protect ourselves from those who have no soul and, therefore, are able to hurt other persons. In this way, our children will not feel powerless before the monster, they will not put themselves, naively and superficially, in danger; they will search – also with their soul – for what is beautiful, good and right in relationships!

Group and changing room management
From group to team building
Olmstead (1963) reminds us that a group consists of a set of individuals with something in common who keep in touch and recognise each other mutually; on the other hand, Lewin (1972) points out that a group is not just the sum of the individuals which constitute it, but rather something more or, more precisely, something different. In fact, inside it, we can find a clearly-defined structure, with its purposes and relationships, given that its members have established a mutual interdependency relationship, which is able to create a dynamic totality.

Therefore, in short, the typical traits in a group can be summed up in the following way (Nepi, 2004):
- they have a common purpose;
- they acknowledge a shared set of rules, agreeing to follow them;
- they have mutually interdependent roles;

- their interactions create bonds;
- they have unified cultural values, which means they express themselves as a single person.

These are essentially the characteristics which allow for creating a group; however, in isolation, they are not sufficient to create a team which can produce the expected results; this is why Quaglino and Cortese (2003) have pointed out that there are actually two parallel levels along which the group tends to develop. The first one is of a rational-objective nature, characterised by *doing together*, with the focus being on the objective which has been set, as well as on the need to achieve a specific result. The second level, on the other hand, is irrational-symbolic, in the sense that it meets the need persons feel of *being together* for the purpose of socialising without necessarily having an objective. These two levels should never become conflictual, on the contrary they need to converge one with the other, by harnessing interpersonal relationships. Only in this way will it be possible for the group to move on to the next step, leading it from being a mere set of individuals to a team which is able to set itself objectives and to achieve the expected results. In other words: "the development from group to team [...] is founded on interdependence, that is to say, on single individuals becoming aware of how much each one of them needs the others" (NEPI, 2004). The same author, referring back to the porcupine's dilemma postulated by Schopenhauer, highlights the importance

for the relational aspect within the group/team, where the relational conflicts (deriving from interaction and interdependence) need to be, if not resolved, then at least placed in a position of balance, founded on mutual trust, on the ability to negotiate, as well as on sharing; here, again, the relational aspect is the only leverage which can allow the group to become a successful team.

Normally a group needs to go through five steps, which have been listed by Tuckman and Jensen (1977), in order to become a real team; they do not necessarily all need to be taken. Nevertheless, it is useful to be able to recognise them. In this way it will be possible to intervene with specific measures depending on which stage the group has reached. On the contrary, it is possible that one group may stop at one stage and find itself unable to move on to the next. If this is the case, it will definitely be more difficult for a group to turn into a team which is cohesive and able to optimise its results. Below is a description of the various phases:

1. *forming,*
2. *storming,*
3. *norming,*
4. *performing*
5. *adjourning.*

1. *Forming*: during the initial phase, group members do not know each other yet, or have just established superficial relations; the effort should thus be mainly

devoted to mutual knowledge. At this stage, individuals tend to study one another in order to get to know each other and to understand what their roles are. For example, in a sports team, players will watch how the coach behaves towards them and towards the others, comparing how many minutes each of them plays or the roles which have been assigned to them. This is why it is important to clearly define roles, thus establishing a communication atmosphere which is relaxed and focused on the utmost clarity, with the aim of preventing any misunderstandings, pointing out the strengths of each member.

2. *Storming*: during this phase, the competition among group members tends to increase; on the other hand, the figure of the leader tends to be challenged (be it a coach or team captain), which means that it is highly likely that sub-groups will emerge. The latter can be expected to be in conflict for a dominant position, often through authoritarian behaviours. On the contrary, the most fragile members frequently have emotional reactions and are generally opposed to the rules. In order to manage this phase it is very important to pay attention to the emotional aspects shown by individual members and by the group in general. An attempt should be made to keep them at an acceptable level, to prevent them from getting out of control; communication on the part of the coach needs to be as open and sincere as possible, pointing out in a clear way the objectives of the team and the roles each player

is expected to fulfil. Any stress which may be experienced by individual members should be kept within specific levels, to prevent hostility from growing too much, which would have negative effects on the team as a whole.

3. *Norming*: at this point, hostility is replaced by an atmosphere characterised by unity and interdependence which, as already mentioned, is one of the most significant traits to facilitate the building of a goal-oriented team. At this stage, roles are acknowledged, so that objectives can become clear and shared; decisions are taken by consensus, through a wide-ranging exchange of information. The relational aspect tends to be increasingly relevant, at this point, with the team's tension being focused on the goals which it has set for itself.

4. *Performing*: group members, at this stage, generally tend to share a common goal, which can be achieved through team spirit. This means they are all role-oriented and geared towards their task, with the maximum individual effort; each of them tirelessly contributes to building the team, making themselves available to help their mates if necessary. Competition and aggressiveness among members is reduced to a minimum. The prevailing approach is based on mutual attention, trust, acknowledging the characteristics of others, respect for differences, being optimistic that it is possible to reach the set goals, and so on. In other words, the emphasis is on what Quaglino and Cortese (2003) refer to as *being together*, with a

substantial increase of interpersonal affectivity in relational dynamics.

5. *Adjourning*: this is where the sense of interdependence among group members tends to wane. The bonds which used to be very strong until just a short time before now become weaker; there is a gradual emotional disinvestment in respect of the group and of one's own teammates. The dominant feeling is whether the objective which had been set has been achieved (or not). In any case, the end of a cycle is inevitably in sight now, which tends to modify any previously established dynamics, with unexpected consequences both in terms of the group and of the individual player. In team sports, for instance, such a situation is likely to occur at the end of a season, of a particularly important tournament, or when a new coach arrives. It is not by chance that the phrase "a cycle coming to an end" is used for that group: it will not be possible to restore previous conditions unless the same dynamics are retraced. All of the above clearly shows that the set of stages described so far has a circular trend, leading to the final phase of adjournment; this is where the team will need to start again, in order to try again to turn into a successful group. On the other hand, if it has remained stranded during one of the previous phases, change will be an opportunity to start again from scratch, with renewed enthusiasm towards the expected goals.

Psychological and social components in a group

The development of components which are not just physical, but also psychological and social, is important for the development of any individual, as well as for building a cohesive team which can expect to achieve positive outcomes; this applies more specifically to teams of children or teenagers. In this case, among intra-individual competences (whose purpose is to improve an individual as a function of the team in a sports context) it is worth mentioning: commitment, discipline, resilience, the ability to understand objectives, the ability to assess oneself, emotional control and concentration (Holt & Dunn, 2004). Apart from these competences, it is essential to bear in mind what Harwood (2008) has defined as the 5 Cs, namely *commitment, communication, concentration, control, and confidence.*

A valuable systematic review of literature has allowed Kleinert *et al.* (2012) to study in depth three relational dynamics on which it is necessary to work in order to develop the mutual interdependency which has been mentioned as fundamental to transform the group in a team. They are: cohesion, role management and leadership. The next section will focus, in particular, on their work.

Cohesion within the group may be seen as a dynamic process whereby the groups aims at remaining united in order to achieve concrete objectives or, on the contrary, in order to meet needs of an

affective nature (Carron *et al.*, 1998) and it is probably the most significant element in terms of improving the team's performance. More specifically, it is possible to find positive correlations between the performance of a team, in terms of achievement in sports, and the level of cohesion among individual members (Carron *et al.*, 2002). On the other hand, there are significant differences between males and females. More specifically, among girls, cohesion is a very important element in order to achieve a result; for boys, instead, although the latter is important, it appears to be less relevant. In other words, for a team to be successful, it is essential for the group to be cohesive in the case of females, whereas for boys this is an important though not indispensable element (Wood, 1987). Moreover, these results can be generalised, regardless of the level of competition, which does not influence the relation between cohesion and achievements in a substantial way (Gruber & Gray, 1981). It is clear that, in order to preserve a high level of cohesion within the group, it is essential to try and minimise the levels of conflict which might be generated. Also in this case there appears to be a gender difference regarding conflict management, more specifically, in the case of boys, arguments tend to be more evident and apparent, but to last less. For girls, on the contrary, they tend to be expressed in a less evident way, but they generally appear to have a longer aftermath (Eys *et al.*, 2015).

The roles within the team group are fundamental structural elements; more specifically they can be defined as the set of specific behaviours which are expected by each individual group member (BIDDLE & THOMAS, 1966). For a smooth functioning of any group, it is essential that each member should have a correct perception of the intended role, as well as the ability to adhere to it in a convinced and responsible way at all times. It is important, in this regard, to make a distinction between structures which may be either formal (with regard to those roles which are specifically sketched out, for example that of captain) or informal (deriving from interactions within the group which are not officially stipulated), because this distinction provides valuable information as to the variety of behaviours which can be expected from group members (COPE *et al.,* 2011). The effect the role has on the performance by an individual within the team group may depend on a variety of factors. The latter include: being clear about one's own role; the level of satisfaction experienced; the perceived effectiveness (i.e. feeling that one is able to fulfil one's role) and the ability to face responsibilities in respect of the group (EYS *et al.,* 2006). It is therefore clear that, the more each individual athlete adheres to the intended role and makes it his or her own, the more this approach will influence the performance level of the whole team (BEAUCHAMP *et al.,* 2002; CARRON *et al.*, 2005).

Leadership is a fundamental element to manage the team, and it is the basis for the relationship which is established between the coach and the players, as a whole or taken individually. It can thus be concluded that the quality of these dyadic relationships is the basis of aspects such as: group cohesion, the ability to develop objectives and the perception of one's role within the group (JOWETT, 2007). The salient elements for optimal implementation of this relationship are the following:

- closeness (that is to say, the level of emotional connection between athlete and coach);
- commitment (i.e. the level of investment on the part of both in preserving the relationship);
- complementarity (i.e. the level of cooperation which exists between the two);
- the ability of both the athlete and the coach to understand how the other person sees and perceives their relationship (JOWETT & CHAUNDY, 2004).

The means by which these aspects can be developed include the opening of appropriate communication channels (SMITH *et al.*, 2013). Fortunately, sports clubs allow for the creation of hierarchical structures more rapidly than in other types of groups (EYS *et al.*, 2015). It has been convincingly demonstrated that there is a close correlation between leadership style and motivational climate within a team (HODGE *et al.*, 2014), cohesion among members of the latter (HEUZÉ *et al.*, 2006) and collective effectiveness (MAGYAR

et al., 2004). In addition, a positive correlation has been established between how convinced a coach is about his acting effectively and the achievements of the team in question (Feltz *et al.*, 2008).

As already mentioned, these relational dynamics tend to have a direct impact in terms of favouring the development of a group towards becoming something more, with the direct consequence of an increase in terms of performance and of higher effectiveness in achieving the expected outcomes. Bandura (1997) considers group effectiveness as a shared belief in the ability to organise together and carry out the actions which allow for achieving a certain goal. On the other hand, Zaccaro et al. (1995) see it as a form of collective competence which allows for making available one's own resources in a coordinated manner, with a view to providing a unified response to requests from the environment for a positive outcome. One significant element, in this instance, is that the perception of a group's effectiveness somehow appears to be directly correlated with the cohesion level in the latter and, subsequently, with achieving the intended results (Carron *et al.*, 2005; Short *et al.*, 2005)

In order to achieve optimal results it is possible to implement interventions of a psychological nature (as a complement to athletic training), geared towards the management of a group, in order to support the team from the following perspectives (Brawley & Paskevich, 1997):

- increase effectiveness;
- meet the needs of individual members and of the group as a whole;
- improve work conditions.

All team-building actions, taken as a whole, appear to have satisfactory results (MARTIN *et al.*, 2009) provided that they last longer than two weeks. If this is not the case, the results are definitely less encouraging. Generally speaking, the topics on which these interventions tend to focus are the following:

- goal-setting for the team as a group;
- inter-personal relations;
- experiences which are diversified and not necessarily related to the specific sport activity, for
- example adventure camps;
- developing the group's structure, for instance by defining roles, consolidating individuality within the group or outlining processes.

One interesting aspect is definitely related to the fact that this kind of intervention seems to have a smaller impact in terms of social cohesion, or of cohesion related to a given task; on the contrary, these actions have a markedly more significant effect in terms of team performance levels (MARTIN *et al.*, 2009).

On the other hand, there are stressful factors, both at personal and organisational level, which could undermine the efficiency of the team group; in this regard, it is worth mentioning, for example (KLEINERT *et al.*, 2012; FLETCHER *et al.*, 2006; FLETCHER & WAGSTAFF, 2009):

- factors related to competition or matches;
- factors intrinsic to sport (for example travelling, training timetables, etc.);
- factors related to one's role within the sports organisation (for example, ambiguity of roles, failing one's role or not accepting it properly);
- factors related to the relational sphere (for example difficult communication with one's teammates, subgroups within the team, conflictual situations with the coach, etc.);
- factors related to the athlete's career (for example issues related to wages, contractual issues, etc.);
- factors related to the organisational structure and climate within the team (for example the level of personal autonomy, perceived importance with regard to one's contribution to the decision-making process within the team, lack of appropriate personal and sport development opportunities).

Changing room management
It has been said that the changing room is the soul of a team, the place where a team is formed.

It is exactly within this space that athletes experiment with the possibility of expressing their feelings in a totally sincere way, as well as their fears and their social role within the team.

By the same token communication, be it verbal or non-verbal, can provide us with important information regarding the dynamics which are being formed

within the group. Generally speaking, communication is "an interactive exchange taking place between two or more persons, characterised by mutual intentionality [...] able to share a specific significance [...] depending on the reference culture" (ANOLLI, 2002). It is well-known, however, that non-verbal communication is important, too, and its significance even more so (FURLEY & SCHWEIZER, 2020). It is more sincere than verbal communication and includes: spatial behaviour, posture, facial expressions, gaze and gestures.

An example of non-verbal communication is proxemics, i.e. the science which studies social distances, classifying them as follows (HALL, *1959)*:
- intimate distance (from 0 to 45 cm) for close relations;
- personal distance (45-120 cm) for "household" relations;
- social distance (120-360 cm) for more impersonal relations;
- public distance (360-750 cm) for public appearances.

The distance kept by teammates inside the changing room can already provide information regarding the type of relationship they have built; it is also the place where emotions are expressed most freely. Emotions are defined as intense, short-lasting affective states, which are enabled by external or internal inputs and may be shown through specific body expressions. They include three components: a physiological state (which enables the central nervous system and the independent nervous system), a subjective

experience (whose main seat is face expressivity or the body with its set of gestures), plus a set of non-verbal signs (which involves enabling one or more actions, aimed at achieving a purpose) in the face, voice, or in other body parts (ARGYLE, 1975).

The face is the channel which provides most of the information available with regard to expressing emotions, corresponding to eight categories (ARGYLE, 1975): happiness, sadness, surprise, anger, disgust/contempt, fear, interest, shame. These are the emotions which can be found most frequently in a changing room. Often, when athletes are on a sports ground, on a platform or elsewhere, during a competition, they try to repress them in order not to be seen by the opponent, by the coaches or by those who are there to root for them, for example parents, relatives or friends. There are several reasons why an athlete might wish to hide his or her emotions. Teenagers, for instance, may feel shame in showing emotions such as sadness or fear in front of others. They might not wish to show that they are afraid of performing poorly in front of the coach, and they definitely know that, during a match or a competition, they are not allowed to show rage in respect of referees or opponents, at the risk of a warning or disqualification. On the contrary, in the changing room, they feel free to express themselves without inhibition, and possibly being aware of support and understanding from teammates.

If, on the sports ground, an individual is required to show technical competence, it is in the changing room that they can express themselves in relation to teammates. In other words, a group is made of many individual relationships and as many dynamics, which intersect each other, creating the solid network which can be interpreted at times in a positive and sometimes in a negative way.

The changing room is the place «where the soul of a team is created and magic realism dominates. It is a container of symbols through self-referential and pseudo-religious rites. A leadership position is not chosen, it is established through a credibility curriculum» (Barba, 2007). It is where social situations and dynamics are enabled and disabled among members of the team.

Inside the changing room, the group is formed and its dynamics develop; the latter may serve the function of preventing any falls and attacks from the outside world (opposing team and adults), but it can also be the place where conflict situations are enacted. This means that, in the changing room, there may be a positive situation which is relaxed, supportive and friendly, or a negative one, where several conflicts emerge which lead to arguments, envy, and sometimes fear. There might even be cases of bullying by the strongest members of the group against those who are weaker (O'Connor & Graber, 2014).

In a conflict, however, there may also be opportunities for development and growth, where compe-

tences related to negotiating and communication can be enabled.

One can thus conclude that the changing room is a place which can have a dual side, one positive and one negative. In any case, it should never be self-absorbed, but rather it needs to be supervised and managed, using all positive or negative situations to the advantage of the group component. If the coach (male or female) is able to successfully implement behaviours aimed at containing conflictual situations, viewing the discussion about problems from a positive perspective, hostility may be replaced by cohesion, and it will be possible to consider the team-group as one unit (Eys *et al.*, 2015).

In the changing room the true feelings and thoughts of athletes emerge; the latter, if they are managed with a positive approach, will lead to a more stable and cohesive team group, which will, by default, result in successful and higher-level performances.

GLOSSARY

Soul
The vital, innate dimension which needs to be educated and enriched through the reprocessing of experiences, which allows us to seek the deep meaning of the survival instinct and of the desire for happiness which are intrinsic features of human beings.

Cohesion
As regards the group, it can be seen as a dynamic process, where the group tries to stay together in order to make its objectives concrete or, vice-versa, in order to meet its affective needs (CARRON *et al.*, 1998), thus becoming one of the most relevant elements with a view to achieving a better level of performance, turning the group into a team.

Courage
Finding it in one's heart, in other words, going beyond the fears and emotions which limit our ability to search for solutions to a perceived problem or obstacle.

Empathy
Competence, life skill, which makes it possible not just to "acknowledge" the other person's reasons and accept them, but also to "understand the others" in their individuality and uniqueness, keeping the right

"emotional distance" in order to establish a really useful helping relationship.

Group phases
In order for a group to optimise its performance levels and become a team, there are five typical phases in its life cycle, namely: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Only in the fourth phase is it possible to achieve the best performance levels, and subsequently the expected results.

Group
Several individuals who make up a dynamic total, which is different from the sum of individual parts, who keep in contact and mutually recognise each other (Olmstead, 1963; Lewin, 1972). The group, to be defined as such, needs to include the following components: have a common purpose; recognise itself in a set of rules; have roles which are mutually interdependent; interact by creating bonds, and present some unified cultural values (Nepi, 2004).

Emotional intelligence
The ability to "reason" with regard to the instinctive feelings which come from our senses and to the thoughts on which the mind focuses. To "know, recognise, express" any emotions and feelings which our

heart experiences as a reaction to our experiences, and to "reprocess" (in a sort of "inner dialogue") all the information, which allows for greater awareness and a better ability to discern and approach the various situations in our life.

Educational and relational intentionality
The willpower of those who, with humility and determination, use effective communication and an authoritative style in order to "be" with the other persons and "care" for them.

Responsibility
This is a trait of mature persons who, faced with their own or another person's needs, are able to "respond" in verbal and behavioural terms which are consistent with the quest for Wellbeing of all the ones concerned.

Changing room
With regard to group dynamics, this is the place where the latter are expressed and developed in their most emphasized form. It becomes the place where "the soul of the team" is created through an elaborate construction of symbolisms. The emerging dynamics may be protective, or otherwise conflictual, depending on the atmosphere which the team has been able to create.

A survey of abuse against children through book and film reviews

Simone Tuzza

Background

The aim of this chapter is to provide a reasoned overview, divided by topics, of the contents of the blog of the "Safe Project"[1] website, based on reviews – drafted and produced on a monthly basis by the author – on books, films and other audio-visual materials which have been selected between October 2020 and June 2021, on the topic of abuse against children. The purpose of this section is to provide readers of this volume with an additional instrument for an in-depth overview on topics and issues based on contemporary cultural productions related to the said questions.

The reading sheets and film or book reviews, which will be provided below, is an essential didactic and formation supplement, aimed both at capturing attention and at diverting from mere theoretical assimilation,

[1] progettosafe.eu/blog

using novel keys for interpretation through languages which go beyond a merely formal discussion, thus acquiring other types of reference for the use of materials related to the topics under discussion.

The reviews will be presented on the basis of specific topics, as was already the case for the online version of the blog mentioned above. For each topic, in general, one book and one film or a TV series are introduced, amounting to sixteen reading sheets in total.

A criminology and victimology perspective on the topics under examination

The macro-areas which will be discussed and analysed in depth, based on books and audio-visual materials, amount to eight in total; they concern respectively: abuse in society, culture and the Church today; the victim of abuse; the abuser; the context of abuse and risk relations; risk factors; protection factors; educating to affectivity; managing online communication. All the topics, discussed below through reading sheets, will be introduced by a short criminology and victimology analysis, based on the most authoritative theoretical approaches, also in order to provide a scientific framework for the subjects under examination.

The survey topics

Abuse in society, culture and the Church today
Abuse against children can appear in various forms (therefore not just of a sexual nature) and contexts: it is

becoming an increasingly relevant issue in contemporary societies. Its manifestation in recent years, also following news reports, has made it the most widespread topic in collective imagination, even though there are still some situations and contin-gencies where the issue is regrettably underestimated (Sette *et al.*, 2021; Easton, 2013), which is why some of its unique aspects have not been appro-priately surveyed yet. As regards forms of abuse found in society, we know that they vary from maltreatment to neglect, to psychological and sexual abuse. The latter are generally characterised by being perpetrated inside the family or, in any case, by persons the young victims know (Bartholini, 2013) and can jeopardise their psycho-physical development (Kempe *et al.*, 1980). Nevertheless, abuse may also be commit-ted by those in charge of caregiving and protection for children, such as a spiritual mentor or a teacher. One of the characteristics mentioned in literature, shared by all these abusive conducts against persons who are still emotionally fragile, has become known by the English word *grooming* (McAlinden, 2013). This essentially means gaining a child's trust, then abusing them, without any fear of being discovered because of the trust relationship which has been established with the victim that prevents the latter from reporting the forms of violence they have been subject to. Two insight sheets will be presented below (one book and one film) which consider the relationship between abuse against children, grooming and its perception by society.

Lost Memory of Skin by Russell Banks bravely explores the very delicate topic of paedophilia, trying to find humanity in persons who are feared and despised, often with good reason, and raising questions not just about the public treatment, often horrendous, reserved to these individuals, but also about the way in which the relevant socio-cultural environment may affect their committing crimes. As vehicle for the narrative, Banks has created a memorable character, known as Kid, a young person who is so lost, lonely and deprived of everything that you would need to have a heart of stone not to feel some affection for him. Abandoned by his father, not cared for by his mother, it is not surprising that, as a friendless teenager – apart from his giant iguana, Iggy – Kid has got into the habit of browsing porn sites, trying to alleviate his isolation and boredom. Now aged twenty-two, Kid is a sexual criminal on parole, forced to live with a tracking device attached to his ankle, with companions who are outcasts like him, under a viaduct. His crime? After logging onto an online chatroom, the young man made arrangements to meet an underage girl, who hid her true identity under the nickname "brandi18", in her home while her parents were away. The meeting, however, did not take place because Kid was arrested before that and sentenced for seducing a minor; he spent three months in prison, was then released for good conduct. He thus finds

himself living, free, in a world where, for the next ten years, he is forbidden from leaving the area but also can't live less than 2500 metres from any place attended by children. He has chosen the name Kid because his real name, if entered on a search engine, would prevent him from renting a flat or finding a job. Through a narrative on the verge of morality, the author never absolves Kid of his actions, although he sympathises with him. Another pivotal character in the story is The Professor, a genial sociologist who approaches Kid, first of all in order to study his case from an academic perspective, then establishing a "friendship" relationship with him. Even though his secrets and lies make him an ambiguous figure, Kid feels a desperate need of attachment to him in order to survive his loneliness.

Doubt, directed by J.P. Shanley, USA 2008

The first film we present here is *Doubt*, interpreted by the Academy Award winners Meryl Streep, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Viola Davis, and with Amy Adams. The film script is based on a celebrated theatre play and has been directed by the playwright himself: John Patrick Shanley. It is set in the 1960s in a Catholic school in the Bronx, Saint Nicholas, run by Mother Superior Beauvier (M. Streep). The new priest, Father Flynn (P.S.Hoffman), wishes to bring in a wind of change, but clashes with the strict code of behaviour imposed by the headmistress who controls the

school. The *doubt* in the title refers to what the strict female protagonist and school manager feels in respect of the new priest, guilty of paying too much attention to Donald, an Afro-American schoolboy with few friends. The plot actually hangs on the unsaid, leading the viewer to choose with whom to side and which dogmatism to embrace between the two opposed characters. There is a dichotomy, often underscored, between the strictness of the values incarnated by the nun, who runs the school with an iron fist, and – as its counterpart – the priest's "cool" and friendly approach. The film is a poignant, almost philosophical interpretation of the concept of doubt, fed by suspicion, which leads us to pose questions, first and foremost to ourselves, in respect of our way of living relationships, of clarity of roles and the balance between structured environments and under-structured realities. Despite its theatrical layout, the movie is emotional-ly engaging and leads the viewer to feel for the protagonists of the story.

The victim of abuse

Victimology, today, is considered by some scholars a discipline independent of criminology, at least according to the theory known as *general victimology* (MENDELSOHN, 1976). There are others, instead, more oriented to *criminal victimology*, who are considering

exclusively the victims of criminal offences and therefore see it as an area of criminology (Fattah, 2000). In the case of the former, victimology deals not just with the dynamics between abuser and crime victim, but also with the needs for recognition and with the right of those who have been somehow violated. Both general and criminal victimology originated in the 1940s, with the ground-breaking work by von Hentig (*The criminal and his victim*, 1947). There are also scholars who reject both the position of independence of the discipline and its ancillary role in respect of criminology (Cressey, 1985). Fattah (2000), in his contribution, rejects the idea and tries to serve as a *trait d'union*, as a link, between the prevailing trends, once again placing at the centre the need for a unified area of study regarding the victim's role. In the broadest sense of the word, the interpretation of the concept of victim is thus based on the individual's ability to acknowledge his or her status as a victim, whose role should be seen within a wider context (Lopez, 1997; Viano, 1989). In the two reading sheets presented below, the *recognition* of the role as a victim for those who have been abused is the basis of the narrative. It reveals the suffering which the fact in itself has caused and which creates a division between "before" and "after" in the life of all those who survive what they have suffered.

Nobody will believe you by Danielle Scherer is a dramatically simple and sincere book/account. It makes for fast-moving and engaging reading. The reader is immediately led into the memories entrusted to Father Gabriel Ringlet by a devout catholic (Danielle) who decides, once and for all, to get rid of her past. This girl, whose progress we follow from becoming a teenager and then a woman, lives in a farming village in Belgium, on the border with France, in a numerous and very Catholic family, possibly the most proudly Catholic in the village. The relationship between young Danielle and her family is far from idyllic: she is often marginalised and lonely, but her faith is strong and her vocation granitic. At the time when the protagonist is a little girl, in provincial villages, everything revolves around the local church and the arrival of a new young priest is welcomed as the event of the century. Also for Danielle that meeting will be a watershed, marking a division between a dramatic "before" and "after" in her life. When she is aged only ten, Danielle is the victim of much harassment, violence and psychological subjugation by a man who is referred to by the protagonist in the whole book just as "the curate". The curate is the core of the joys (initially, for having found someone willing to listen to her), but especially of the pain of the young woman who will suffer his violence and bullying for years. Her relationship with the abuser is never discussed in the text in

lengthy morbid detail. On the contrary, the manipulating mechanisms enabled by her abuser are carefully described, as is the spiritual subordination of the wretched protagonist, with her huge sense of guilt. Only through her willpower, faith and the passing of time, Danielle, thanks to her own strength and after not being believed many times, will manage to leave a painful past behind her.

Grâce à Dieu (By the Grace of God), directed by F. Ozon, France-Belgium 2019

In the film *By the Grace of God*, the director takes us to contemporary France, specifically to Lyon, reconstructing the events related to abuse against children committed by Father Preynat and to analyse how the Church, in the person here of Cardinal Barbarin, acted (or failed) to remedy it. In the wake of legal-journalistic investigative films such as *Spotlight* (2015), the movie describes the history of the victims who, years later, find it in themselves to report the violence they suffered. As a matter of fact, between twenty and thirty years have passed since the abuse suffered by these kids (now adults) who tell their stories. The film also makes reference to the issue of statute of limitations in the case of crimes distant in time. The film's approach is understated, a narration of personal stories and drama without lingering. Moreover, the choice of focusing the narrative on three main figures, dealing with their respective ways of pro-

cessing the dramatic abuse events and with their different current lives, engages the viewer and encourages a reflection about the impact of violence on the life of each of the individuals. As a consequence, there are three perspectives in respect of the intent to report what happened: there are those who seek justice within the Church itself; those who try and make sure that what happened is publicly disclosed; and those who wish for the abuser to be punished. All these approaches share some-thing that one of the protagonists says in the film: «We should break the chain of silence». For this purpose, the victims created an association, *La Parole Libérée* (still existing) through which, over time, dozens of others have found strength and courage in themselves to tell their story. *By the Grace of God* is a necessary film, whose value consists in narrating without voyeurism, thus posing uncomfortable questions in the most rigorous way possible.

The abuser

Unlike the victim, any person responsible for deviant behaviours, jeopardising the safety of others, thus perceived as a danger for society, has been a subject for discussion by criminology for a long time. Between the 18th and 19th century, in Italy, scholars showed significant interest in crime and criminals.

The traditional concept which then became widespread involved a rational view of the crime, whereby

anyone who behaved in that way did so after considering their choices based on *free will.* Cesare Beccaria, for example, believed that all individuals were masters of their own destiny, free to make their own decisions and rational choices. More specifically, Cesare Beccaria was interested in defining, from a juridical perspective, based on Enlightenment concepts, how to duly punish, with fair penalties, those who commit a crime. He focused on the administration of justice, a branch of criminal law, and on justified punishment in his book *On Crimes and Punishments,* published in 1764. About one century later, criminal anthropology began to emerge. This was definitely due to Cesare Lombroso's book *Criminal Man* (1876), with a deterministic approach typical of the positivist school of thought, marking a watershed for studies in this area. The positivist approach was based on the scientific value of a study of delinquent persons through concepts such as *atavism,* that is to say, assuming that propensity to crime was of biological origin, thus innate in any individual. Scholars later discovered, following a rigorous scientific method, that these ideas and the procedures followed for data collection were based on significant *bias*[2], and that the samples chosen and studied by Lombroso were not representative at all.

To sum up, the theories by Lombroso were not confirmed by reliable scientific data.

[2] In psychology and in social sciences, the term bias refers to an opinion, or better to prejudice, not necessarily based on elements which are logically connected.

These two approaches, traditional and positivist, can be considered as the two schools of thought which, over time, most influenced the study of criminality and which, in some cases, still underlie the reflections and theories regarding concepts such as deviance and crime. The two following reading sheets thus follow on the authors of a crime and on their being abusive.

I. Schilperoord, *Tench (Nuvole di fango)*, Fazi Editore, Rome 2015

Tench is the name of a common, large carp-like fish, who raises clouds of mud when moving. The fish in question is one of the protagonists of this novel, sincere and kind at the same time, masterfully written and carved out in its phrasing. It is a direct and gentle text, which however gets straight to the point, using an extremely engaging no-frills style. The true protagonist of the story is Jonathan, a thirty-year old, who has just been released from prison, having been accused of violence against a child, a charge which was overruled on appeal. We follow his return to a semblance of normality after life in jail, the latter occasionally re-emerging in his memories, especially through the mentoring by a psychologist (with regard to managing his emotions and behaviour) to whom Jonathan clings with all his strength. The boy returns home to a deprived, shabby context, with a distant mother, where the

only joy consists in planning his days and taking out the family dog for a walk. The meeting with a little girl, living in the neighbourhood, totally upsets the protagonist's routine, subjecting him to a harsh test. The story is told in a streamlined and precise manner, most notably without being morbid, but also unsparingly in the description of human impulses, even the most inenarrable. The book has become so successful also because of the cultural background of the authoress, the Dutch forensic psychologist Inge Schilperoord, who surprisingly and skilfully manages to enter the labyrinth of the thoughts of a fragile person, with no judgement, constructing a complex character with whom it is difficult not to familiarise. Despite a description of all the doubts, obsessions and fears experienced by the protagonist due to his "deviant" condition, the whole story is told with heart-breaking and true humanity. The taboo underlying the story is merely an expedient to talk about a suffering soul and the existential dramas experienced by all of us.

The Woodsman, directed by N. Kassell, USA 2004

This is a story with a strong impact and a powerful film. Walter is released from prison after twelve years, having been sentenced for abuse against children. However, his "new life" will never be free because the protagonist is *on*

parole, that is to say, under constant control by the prison authority that shall supervise his path also outside jail. It is the "outside" context that reminds Walter, at all times of his new existence, who he is and which crime he has committed: from the distrust of his colleagues at the sawmill where he works, after having discovered the reason for his imprisonment, to his neighbourhood, with the ban on going near the local school, to the supervisor who checks his behaviour, without hiding his prejudice and contempt towards him. Throughout the film we follow the protagonist's perspective and his fight for redemption, the wish to repress his impulses, the attempt to abide by the rules and his desperate search for a normal life, which will probably never exist for him in the way we intend it. Only a female colleague (Vicky), who also has quite a number of dark secrets to hide and sins to expiate, will help him truly (re) start again, finding comfort and living a fulfilling relationship, despite huge difficulties.

The context of abuse and risk relations

As already mentioned, *grooming* is the term used to define a behavioural pattern followed by abusers to gain the trust of their victims (Sette *et al.*, 2021; McAliden, 2013). Therefore, the context within which violence occurs is fundamental for any abuser,

who intends to annihilate the defences of their "prey". The following two reviews focus on the procedures through which abusers manage to defuse the fears and reticence on the part of their victims, also based on the context where the events unfold (in schools and in religious institutes).

K.E. RUSSELL, *My Restless Vanessa,* Mondadori, Milan 2020

Kate Elizabeth Russell, with her debut novel, introduces us into the mind and unspeakable desires of a young girl dealing with a toxic relationship between herself and her literature teacher. The novel unfolds alternating two timelines: the story of when the protagonist was a fifteen year-old schoolgirl, and her life now, as an adult in 2017, with the birth of the social movement #MeToo as a background. We stare impassibly at the fast-paced progression of the story of "a restless Vanessa", her falling in love with Professor Strane, a figure at the same time charming and smart, who manages, as time goes by, to gain the trust of the girl, also thanks to his manipulating ability and to a carefully devised strategy aimed at making her feel one of a kind, different from all others, more similar to him and to his "darkness", therefore special. The emotional turbulence felt by an introverted girl, who has recently been disappointed by her best friend, is the catalyst leading Va-

nessa to slide into the trap of a man who is weak and sick, but most notably ruthless. This toxic relationship will lead Vanessa to suffer sexual abuse, which she perceives as the discovery of sexuality, unhealthy as it may be, in a relationship which will continue for years, between highs and lows, disappointments and frustration, in particular causing her problems both in school and in the relationships she will struggle to establish following that experience. In the part of the novel told in the present, we learn about Vanessa's painstaking search for a balance: even though the relationship with Strane is over (because he is no longer attracted by an adult body), he still remains an uncomfortable presence in her life. Vanessa is forced to deal with the ghosts of her past; she finds support in a girl who attended the same school as her who, in the wake of the reports encouraged by the movement #MeToo, plucks up the courage to speak out against the literature teacher. Vanessa is thus forced to reflect on her past and on the troubled relationship which totally compromised her life, thus having to question herself about how that relationship constituted a series of violent acts against her. *My Restless Vanessa* is an extreme and intimate exploration of the emotional upheaval in a young woman who has suffered physical and mental abuse, by a supposedly caregiving and safeguarding figure who exerts huge power over her, turning into her abuser. This exploration is all the more painful for readers because they are made aware that the protagonist, except for rare moments when she is able to think clearly, is never totally conscious

of her situation; on the contrary, she craves this unhealthy affection because she never knew any different.

La malaeducación, directed by P. Almodóvar, Spain 2004

La malaeducación is a small jewel encompassing the whole poetic style of the Spanish director. It is a difficult film, a continuous sequence of mirroring, exchanges of identity, plus a "film inside the film" which, through this complexity, tries to convey to the viewer the difficulties of a life, from childhood to maturity, spent between suffering and abuse. The film starts with a narrative of life in a Spanish boys-only college in the early 1960s, where Father Manolo, the headmaster, has a fondness for young Ignacio (aged only ten) whom he abuses. Although the abusive events are perceived by the viewer, they are never shown explicitly in the film, other than through the consequences which suggest something without showing it. This is where Almodóvar is most expressive: in revealing violence without making it explicit, while the whole rest of the film is extremely clear in telling about the life of the protagonists: blackmailing, drug use, being transvestites, homosexual loves, existential tragedies and difficulties in transition processes. The director masterfully mixes several narrative registers, through aesthetically and emotionally heart-breaking scenes, alternating with low points and blackmails, all originating, as Almodóvar seems to suggest, from a stolen childhood. Also because Father Manolo, apart from harassing Ignacio, ends

up sending away Enrique, his classmate and first love, to prevent the two from seeing each other. The director, apparently, drew inspiration from autobiographical experiences and the life he spent in college as a child. *La malaeducación* is a multi-faceted film which includes several narrative periods, from the Sixties in a boarding school to Madrid in the Eighties, which are intertwined with a world of people who feel they live on the fringes of society, experience emotional, economic, relational, identity difficulties but, despite such difficulties, even in the most culpable ones, convey an extreme sense of humanity. In this film by Almodóvar nobody is truly innocent or truly guilty; this is why the director's narrative turns out to be credible and deeply insightful.

Risk factors

In order for sexual abuse against any child to occur, there needs to be an adult intending to harm the minor, in combination with other contingent dynamics and situations depending, for instance, on the minor being vulnerable and on the presence of an "environment" favouring such abusive behaviour and offering the adult an opportunity to commit violence. Abuse against children in institutional contexts (for example religious institutions or associations, schools or summer camps) can be perpetrated on site or while the children are engaged in activities elsewhere. The one-

to-one relationship between adult and child is one of the most frequent risk factors. In other cases, on the contrary, risk emerges when the child is unsupervised. By the same token, nowadays there may be online abuse occurring when

an adult shows children pornographic materials or arranges virtual sexual encounters with them.

The next two reading sheets present, in a different way, the risks minors are subject to when an abuser targets them. The book deals with the issue of abuse in the Catholic Church and how to prevent power abuses. In the film review, mention is made of the lack of supervision and of how this may constitute a key factor for preventing the issue of abuse.

A. RINALDI, *Siding with Little Ones*, La Meridiana, Molfetta (Bari) 2018

The author of the book, Angela Rinaldi (PhD in Social Doctrine of the Church and Public Ethics at Pontificia Università Gregoriana), with a lean writing style, tries to make sense of one of the most "uncomfortable" issues and of a "very ugly crime" such as abuse against children in the Catholic Church.

The essay, starting from an overview of the scandals which have deeply hit ecclesial institutions, undermining their relationship with the faithful and with faith itself, then

reviews the various regulatory responses implemented by the organisations in charge within the Church to put an end to this heinous offence. In order to deal with the problem seriously, ecclesiastical authorities should not underestimate the issue, but rather take a zero-tolerance view. In this regard the approach to interpreting abuse against children is extremely interesting in the way it also focuses on the persons who are considered most vulnerable, a concept which the author exemplifies as abuse of power from both a spiritual and hierarchical perspective. More specifically, according to Angela Rinaldi, members of the clergy who abuse minors take advantage of their power in respect of their young victims to gain their obedience and trust: «Those who hold a position of authority in the Church should know that the latter is not their property, but rather a gift, of which they are not allowed to abuse», she comments. The essay also includes a comprehensive discussion, from educational processes to the formation of those who take their vows, which essentially disputes the view, within the Church, whereby consecrated persons have the power to influence members of their congregation. The author refers to the balance, to the psychological stability and affective maturity which are essential elements any member of the clergy should possess to fulfil their mandate. Last but not least, Angela Rinaldi points out that an appropriate formation is the basic and essential part of any effort aimed at preventing abuse within the Catholic Church.

The Captive, directed by A. Egoyan, Canada 2014

This dramatic thriller directed by Atom Egoyan focuses on a thorny issue, namely minors being kidnapped by criminal paedophile organisations which take advantage of the Internet in order to perpetrate their heinous crimes. The plot is based on something that really occurred in Canada. The setting is in deep winter; the landscape is hostile and snowy. A few minutes into the film, we see a father (Ryan Reynolds) who is distracted and loses sight of his nine-year old daughter (Cass) who, from that moment on, is missing. The uniqueness of this movie is, first and foremost, in the director's style, with the whole film being embellished by more or less hidden symbolisms. The shots are all cutting, geometrical, splitting the images like a blade in order to cause an even deeper feeling of estrangement in the viewer. Colours are desaturated and, thanks to the cold setting, the progress of events being narrated reaches a further dramatization level. The viewer actually follows a desperate father, on the verge of insanity, who – for eight years after his daughter has disappeared – never gives up the search, with her loss jeopardising forever any prospect of balance in his family and work. Eight years later, expert child pornography investigators reach the conclusion that Cass may still be alive... Without going into detail about the plot, in order not to spoiler it, it is worth mentioning that the film paves the way for a whole set of reflections on

the viewer's part. Even though, at times, the film seems to take an excessively stereotypical view (the paedophile sect consisting of persons who are, at the same time, respectable and monsters), it is however able to provide valuable insights, also in terms of criminology and victimology, skilfully focusing on the risks related to online crimes and paedophilia, as well as on the complex instruments necessary to face this issue, which is regrettably underestimated. Atom Egoyan builds this film on a "difficult" topic through the typical style elements of a thriller, behind which there is however a true, often undecipherable drama.

Protection factors

Prevention of abuse is effective to the extent that there is awareness about the risk factors which increase the likelihood of creating any suitable conditions favouring the victimisation of minors. The negative consequences of inappropriate behaviours and educational practices may indeed pave the way for transgressive and abusive conducts. Such awareness supports the implementation of protection factors which may limit the occurrence of dangerous conditions and their consequences. Being able to prevent abuse is a pathway which takes various forms. It means being able to recognise the "signs", implementing strategies to limit any access and to discourage one-to-one relationships between adult and child and, definitely, formative policies for practitioners in contact with little ones.

All these strategies are the basis for a successful approach to protect young people. Last but not least, guidelines should be adopted by all organisations working with minors as a further component among the various possible actions aimed at promoting safe educational environments.

In the following reading sheets, the protection factors are highlighted which may serve as a deterrent with regard to abusive conducts against children.

V. Carlevaris Colonnetti, C. Rossa (eds.),
*Safeguarding childhood: Promotion
of the wellbeing and protection of minors,*
Città Nuova, Rome 2019

In this essay, the editors Viviana Carlevaris Colonnetti (psychologist, therapist, psycho-pedagogist and member of the Commission for the promotion of wellbeing and protection of minors of the *Focolari Movement*) and Carina Rossa (PhD in developmental psychology and social transformation, researcher at the University Institute *Sophia* in Florence) gather contributions facing the topic of promoting the protection of minors in the ecclesiastical environment, using a multi-disciplinary and integrated approach. The book is divided in three sections: the first deals with the topic of minors' wellbeing in terms of psycho-pedagogy and of children's rights as acknowledged worldwide; the second, with child violation dynamics

through abuse, discussing its consequences from a clinical and legal perspective – configurations of the crime and how it is prosecuted – and according to Canon Law (based on the new practices stipulated by the *Guidelines* of the Italian Church, which include responsibility in dealing with reports and prevention in promoting safe pastoral environments). The third part of the book, on the other hand, translates the principles and contents into formative pathways for educators. The book is meant, at the same time, as insight and working instrument, for all those caring for minors at relational or educational level, from parents to teachers, from coaches to Sunday school teachers and educators. This formation is intended for individuals but, at the same time, for the educating community where they belong which, in the *Foreword* by Mons. Vincenzo Zanni, is referred to as «the safest condition».

Sleepers, directed by B. Levison, USA1996

Sleepers is a dramatic movie which is set in New York between the end of the Sixties and the Eighties. It is based on a true story, although city authorities have always denied it happened. The title is a slang term which, in the immigrant neighbourhood of Hell's Kitchen in the Big Apple, referred to former youth prison inmates, the "sleepers". The film protagonists are four young boys whose life is changed forever by the time spent in jail. The film gives

plenty of food for thought (possibly too much). There are apparent protection factors for the boys, such as the community (despite its criminal traits), the neighbourhood priest, but also risk factors such as coming from dysfunctional and disadvantaged families, plus boredom, which will lead the youngsters to their doomed fate. Let us proceed with order, though. The film is divided into two parts. In the first one, the four boys of multi-ethnic origin (Italian and Irish among others) commit a small crime, out of boredom, which will prove fatal for them, because they will be sentenced to one year in youth prison. Here everything starts spiralling downward for them, marking their life forever. They are threatened by some of the prison guards who subject them to all sorts of abuse: food deprivation, torture, psychological, physical and sexual violence. The movie vividly outlines the whole spectrum of abuse against children. Within all this suffering, the boys always stick together, and the neighbourhood priest, as well as the local boss, never abandon them. After being released from youth prison, two of them start on a criminal path (with a passing reference to the topic of jails as places conducive to crime) while the other two succeed in fitting into society. The focal event, occurring in the Eighties, around which the second part of the film develops, is when the two (by then adult) criminals happen to meet the guard who had most seriously abused them as children and take their revenge by killing him. They are thus sentenced to trial and, during the inquest, their experiences

as boys will be disclosed... This is a very eventful film, engaging the viewer in a raw and dramatic account of events, with moral implications which may prove hard to bear, although an attempt at expressing hope is always made, underlining to what extent protection factors may play a fundamental role to avoid a painful outcome. Moreover its cast is start-studded: it features Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Brad Pitt, Kevin Bacon and Vittorio Gassman. It is not a recent film, but definitely well worth watching for those who haven't seen it yet.

Educating to affectivity today
Among the protection factors for children, there is definitely the possibility of an education which is healthy, well balanced and compliant with their psycho-physical and cognitive development processes. Education to affectivity is part, in its own right, of the appropriate development pathway of those who discover the world, relationships among peers, friends and young love. The family plays a pivotal role in this regard, but so do school and care institutes: they all need to watch very carefully how young people relate to one another, making sure that learning about affectivity is a gradual process, mindful of development into the age of adulthood and independence. The next two reading sheets are about two adolescent

worlds where the protagonists deal with the first romantic experiences, with peer relations and education to differences within the school walls.

J. GREEN, *The Fault in our Stars*, Rizzoli, Milan 2014

The novel published by John Green in 2012 called *The Fault in Our Stars* (title based on a scene in *Julius Caesar* by Shakespeare) became a worldwide success, and a film by the same name was made in 2014. The plot revolves around the difficulty on the part of young people to live with cancer. It is a very touching and delicate book, even though no painful descriptions of the disease are spared, but it is also a *Bildungsroman* for young generations. It is the story of a girl (Hazel Grace) who falls in love (and learns to do so) with a boy (Augustus, known as Gus), also a "survivor" of a bone disease which caused him to lose one leg; the two meet in a self-mutual help group for persons suffering or recovered from cancer. Relationships among teenagers, family, first love, self-help groups and the phantom author of a book whose female protagonist is charmed are among the topics described.

The text is extremely streamlined and readable, which also makes it suitable for a young audience that, through this novel, can identify with the difficulties encountered during adolescence, which are amplified here behind the powerful

issue of terminal disease. This is possibly the most interesting element in the book: the disease is never described in pathetic or soppy terms. On the contrary the author makes an effort to depict the situation of those living with the disease every day, using frank and raw terms. This is why, despite the dramatic and accurate details of the story, there are funny moment where "evil" is exorcised, and life takes over and is celebrated "despite everything". In this regard, it is a book ideally suited for reading by young people, who will feel for the protagonists and, at the same time, understand the difficulties of fragile persons who are forced to fight more than others, every day, in order to get something simple, which we who are "healthy" take for granted.

The Class (Entre les murs), directed by L. Cantet, France 2008

This film by Laurent Cantet was awarded the *Palme d'Or* in Cannes in 2008. It tells the story of a teacher (François Bégaudeau) dealing with a multi-ethnic group of students in a school on the outskirts of Paris. The viewer, rather than watching a movie telling a story, is drawn into a sort of documentary, in a microcosm set inside *les murs (the walls)* of the school, among teachers and students. It is worth noting that none of the actors are professionals: they are either members of the staff (including the headmaster)

or students in the school where the plot is set. The protagonist himself, the French teacher, wrote the script with the director. Through the conflict, friendship and interactions among the characters, the film tells about a multi-ethnic and multi-racial France dealing with its contradiction. *The class* actually represents a broader context, where integration, second generations and sense of belonging merge together. This feature film, however, is more than a metaphor of current French society: it also includes a survey of the educational process, of the victories and defeats in a profession which is often undervalued, guiding children to the adult age, and with a pivotal role for social processes. The beauty of the film lies in its being so outspoken. This semi-documentary never takes sides, though: it just gives an overview of the significance of school today in a Western European country, and of what hides behind those *walls*. It is a film which is well worth showing in all Italian schools because it is educational on several levels, not just for students but for teachers as well. The young cast members, representing several ethnic and cultural groups, are astonishingly clever; they lead the viewer inside the school dynamics with a realism which is disarming exactly because it is spontaneous and unaffected.

Managing online communication

We live in a time where the new revolutions are those related to the digital world and the use of the Internet. The interconnections made possible nowadays by the latter are bearers of opportunities for new relationship paradigms; this, however, also entails unknown roads and may open up Pandora' box of the most insidious and difficult hazards to trace for minors dealing with

social networks and online communication. The use of digital platforms is the "daily bread" of young people today, but the risks related to this type of instruments are innumerable. It is, first and foremost, parents and adults in general who should be able to use these media, being aware of their benefits and dangers. In this way they will be able to recognise them and, subsequently, to educate minors and intervene as appropriate. The next two titles being reviewed go exactly in this direction.

M. Faccioli, *Children in the Web. Paedophilia, child pornography, deep web, social networks, sexting, gambling, grooming and cyberbullying in the digital age*, Key Editore, Milan 2015

This book by Marco Faccioli is intended as a handbook, a manual to help reflect about the risks which native digital generations are subject to when surfing the Net and during virtual interactions. A number of issues are discussed here, based on a legal-sociological approach; the author tries to point out and then analyse the most dangerous elements associated with the use of the Internet by young people. The questions and hazards which minors might encounter in approaching the Web and new technologies are systematically described, with a specific chapter dedicated to each. One whole section, for instance, is devoted to child pornography (focusing on the networks used by paedophiles); surprisingly, there is also one on *grooming* and on which online strategies are enacted in order to entrap young victims. Another interesting chapter in the book is dedicated to *sexting* and to these increasingly widespread practices among teenagers, which would not constitute a risk in themselves, until the exchange of materials among consented persons ends up in the hands of third parties or directly online. The other sections are devoted to cyber-bullying, to the risks of the *deep web* (contents which are not listed or indexed in search engines), a survey of the social networks most used by teenagers, as well as

to online *gambling*. Moreover, before the index, there is a short glossary which includes a list of Web-related keywords for those who know nothing about it. This short and user-friendly handbook is undoubtedly a useful tool for anyone who needs to approach issues related to young people and the risks they face when using the Internet, because it also includes concrete case studies and examples. It is written simply, though full of information, which means that it can be used both by family members or parents and by educators or teachers, in order to raise awareness and guide young people through the Web. *Children in the Web. Paedophilia, child pornography, deep web, social networks, sexting, gambling and cyber-bullying in the digital age* is recommended reading for an overview on all aspects and dangers in respect of young people on the Internet.

Nudes, directed by L. Luchetti, Italy 2021

A new series has been recently published on the free streaming platform RaiPlay, which is attracting the attention of young persons, and not only. The series is entitled *Nudes* and it has an anthology connotation, meaning that the stories are told through a series of episodes which finally reach a conclusion, then the narration continues with a new plot and with other protagonists. The series has one sole topic, namely *revenge porn* among adolescents in the Bologna area. In the first four episodes we follow the

protagonist, Vittorio (the other episodes focus on other stories, for example those of Sofia and Ada), an upstanding young member of the community, popular among his contemporaries, who is accused of posting child pornography materials online. From that moment on, the viewer follows the journey to hell of the protagonist who, as the story is being told, becomes aware of the impact his "stunt" had on the female victim (Marta), on his life itself and on his close contacts. As the episodes unfold (each of them lasting about twenty minutes), the narrative shifts from everyday scenes, in which many teenagers can easily be expected to identify, to becoming increasingly dramatic, as if we were faced with a thriller, where the protagonist, now a captive of events, is no longer able to survive and is overwhelmed. The strong point of this TV product, intended especially for a streaming platform, is its appeal to a young audience (but not only). The message it sends is powerful: the consequences of our actions, harmless as they may seem, may prove devastating for everyone concerned. Due to the topic being investigated, it is a highly educational series, targeted not just to a young audience, but also to adults. The latter often tend to be distracted in regard to the real lives of their own children who, through the lens of this format, might manage to see themselves and acknowledge the risks related to the production and posting of private materials online. *Nudes* is a surprising, well-made series, which ought to become part of the syllabus in schools in its own right.

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Vicar and Director of the Office for frailties and social distress at the Diocese of Noto; Diocese contact person for the Regional Child Protection Service in the Diocese of Noto (SR); Coordinator of the Regional Help Desk of C.E.Si. (Sicilian Episcopal Conference). He is a member of the technical working group in the National Observatory against online paedophilia and child pornography for the Italian Council of Ministers – Department of Equal Opportunities; member of the inter-institutional technical group for the fight against paedophilia and child pornography of the Sicilian Regional Government; member of the scientific committee of the *Polizia Postale e delle Comunicazioni.* Professor of Bioethics at *'Istituto Superiore di Bioetica e Sessuologia'* of *Pontificia Università Salesiana* in Messina. Promoter, with others, of Law no. 269/98 and, with the Association Meter, of Law no. 38/2006, as well as of the Law to ratify the *Lanzarote Convention.*

Enrico Fabrizi, professor of Economic Statistics at the Department of Economic and Social Sciences of 'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore', he previously worked at the Universities of Bergamo and Bologna. He specialises in sample survey methods and systems for the measurement of poverty and social inequality.

Linda Ghisoni, undersecretary at the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, she obtained a *Vordiplom* in Philosophy and Theology from *Eberhard-Karls-Uni-*

versität in Tübingen (1991); a PhD in Canon Law at the 'Pontificia Università Gregoriana' (1999); graduated as rotal attorney with the *Studium rotale* at the Roman Sacred Rota Tribunal (2002) and completed a degree in *Administrative Practice* at the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments (1994). She has served as defender of the bond, auditor and magistrate for the Vicar General's Courts in Rome. At the Holy See, she has held the position of deputy Defender of the bond at the Roman Rota Tribunal (2003-2009), of Commissioner in charge of defending the bond (in causes of annulment of ratified but unconsummated marriages) at the Congregation for Divine Worship and Sacramental Discipline (2006-2011) and, since November 2011, at the Roman Rota Tribunal. In 2018 the Holy Father appointed her Consultor of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Commissioner for marriage annulment *in favorem fidei*. Author of scientific publications on Canon Law, since 2011 she has been a visiting lecturer at the Faculty of Canon Law of the Pontificia Università Gregoriana.

Chiara Griffini, general coordinator of the "Safe Project" – Educating and welcoming in safe environments. Psychologist, specialised in clinical psychology and in couple therapy. Forensic psychologist, graduated in psycho-pedagogy of consecrated life and religious ministry at the 'Pontificia Università Regina

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Apostolorum'. She serves as expert for the *Tribunale Ecclesiastico Emiliano*; works as Official Technical Consultant on civil and criminal Law matters; deals with training and clinical mentoring for couples and parents, foster families, priests and seminary students, consecrated people, prevention against children abuse. She coordinates the Central Child and Vulnerable Person Protection Commission at the Association Community Pope John XXIII (of which she has been part as consecrated person since 2004), serving therein as trainer and clinical supervisor for therapeutic-rehabilitation communities. In addition, she is currently the contact person in the Diocese of Piacenza-Bobbio for the Protection of Minors.

Lara Maestri, psychologist, specialised in systemic-relational psychotherapy at Ipr (Istituto di psicoterapia relazionale) in Rimini. For a long time, she has been dealing with projects aimed at preventing adolescent distress through school projects, as consultant for street education and trainer for educators and teachers. She works as psychotherapist in a private firm. She is a psychologist for the Community for the Education of Convicts "Casa Madre del Perdono" of Taverna di Montecolombo, trainer for the Diocese of Rimini and for the Association Community Pope John XXIII, an association to which she belongs and whose values she shares. She also specialises in parental consulting, therapy with families, children, adults and couples.

Francesca Magno, master's Degree in Science and Techniques for Adapted Physical Activities, Ph.D in Human Sciences, specialised in Development and Education Psychology, she currently works for the Coordination Office of the Degree Course in Physical Education and Sport Sciences at the University of Turin, where she teaches the following courses: Physical Activity: Methodology and history of physical education and sport; Physical Exercise Basics and the Module on Physical activities for children in pre-school and school; she also teaches a course for the Master's Degree in Physical Education and Adjusted Activity Sciences as part of the module on Project planning in schools. For several years now she has been coordinating projects related to well-being, throughout human life cycle, from which her main research activities and publications in the academic and scientific sectors are derived.

Elisabetta Musi, professor of General and Social Pedagogy at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. Together with Vanna Iori and Daniele Bruzzone, she manages the book collection "Vita emotiva e formazione" *(Emotional life and formation).* She is part of the group Eidos – Phenomenology and formation, coordinated by Vanna Iori. She is member of the Scientific Boards of the book collections "Infanzie" *(Childhoods)* and "I territori dell'educazione" *(The Territories of Education),* (FrancoAngeli). She does research on topics

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related to childhood and educational services, emotional life and educational care as part of professional and family relations. She coordinates formation paths for the development of relational and emotional skills in health care premises, education professionals, kindergartens and in companies.

Maria Concetta Pappalardo, psychologist, development age psychotherapist, Cipa Analyst in training, Area Coordinator for the Youth Sharing Sector of the Association Community Pope John XXIII, of which she has been a member since 2010 and where she serves as trainer. Apart from a private practice for children and adults, she has been dealing with formation and counselling for educators, teachers and parents, in school and educational contexts, for several years.

Antonella Perricelli, lawyer, in charge of the legal sector and of the Law firm of the Association Pope John XXIII, of which she has been a member since 2006, and where she also serves as trainer. Over the years she has accrued specific competence in the area of human right protection, family and children Law, rights and protection of persons with disabilities, in the social and welfare sectors. She is a member of the Central commission for Children and Vulnerable Person Protection at the Association Community Pope John XXIII.

Raffaella Pregliasco, legal expert and family mediator, researcher at *Istituto degli Innocenti*, where she is in charge of the International Activity Service, Strategic projects and European projects. She has been involved in numerous research and formation projects, in partnership with the Commission for international adoptions and the Department for Family Policies, most notably on the subjects of adoption, abuse and maltreatment of children. She also worked as consultant for the Office of the Regional Authority for Childhood and Adolescence. She coordinates the implementation of European and Exchange projects organised by *Istituto degli Innocenti*. In 2013 she was appointed Honorary Judge at the Children Division of the Court of Law in Florence.

Sonia Ranieri, psychologist and Professor of Social Psychology at the Sciences of Formation Department of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. At the same university, she is a member of the Internal Advisory Committee of the University Research and Study Centre on Family; she is also a member of the Management Board of C.A.R.E. *(Centro Studi Contesti, Affetti e Relazioni Educative,* that is to say *Research Centre for Educational Contexts, Affections and Relationships).* Her study, research and intervention activity is focused on topics related to couple and parental relations, co-parenting, foster families, family enrichment and wellbeing promotion interventions.

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Paolo Rizzi, professor of Political Economy at the Department of Economics and Law of Università Cattolica. He is the Director of the Local Economy Lab, a research centre of the same University which, for over twenty years, has been dealing with local development and assessment of territorial policies in the economic and social sectors. His research areas also include sustainability indicators, non-profit and social capital.

Lucia Todaro, psycho-pedagogist and training consultant. Having obtained a degree in Philosophy, a specialisation in Human Sciences and Social Psychology of the Family and a Master's Degree as Orientation and Training Counsellor, she has had more than 30 years' experience in pedagogy (not just in relation to education but also as prevention) and oriented to the implementation of Life Skills and of useful managerial competences from a professional and human perspective.

Simone Tuzza, Ph.D in criminology at the Université de Montréal, research fellow at the Department of Sociology and Law of Economics at Alma Mater, University of Bologna, he works with CIRViS (Interdisciplinary Centre on Victimology and Safety), as well as having a contract as lecturer with the Department of Psychology "Renzo Canestrari". He recently published the book *Il dito e la luna. Ordine pubblico*

tra Polizia e potere politico, un caso di studio (The Finger and the Moon: Law and Order between Police and Political Power, a Case Study), (Meltemi, 2021). Most recently he co-authored, with Professor Raffaella Sette, the essay *Promuovere ambienti educativi sicuri. Prevenire gli abusi nei contesti ecclesiali (Promoting safe education environments: preventing abuse in ecclesial contexts),* (Editrice Ave, 2021).

Hans Zollner SJ, completed a Ph.D in Theology at the University of Innsbruck and a Licence in Psychology at the Institute of Psychology of Pontificia Università Gregoriana in Rome. Hans Zollner is a registered psychotherapist. Since 2003 he has been a lecturer at the Psychology Institute of the Pontificia Università. From 2010 to 2019 he was Vice Academic Rector and Dean of the Psychology Institute of Università Gregoriana. In 2021 he was appointed Dean of the Anthropology Institute of Pontificia Università Gregoriana. He is a member of the Pontifical Commission for Child Protection since it was established in 2014 and was confirmed again on 17th February 2018. He is also President of the Centre for Child Protection (Ccp) at Università Gregoriana. In the 2010-2011 two-year period, he was member of the scientific working group of the "Round table on violence against children" set up by the German Federal Government. He is also Honorary Professor at the Department of Theology and Religion of Durham

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University (UK). On 1ˢᵗ April 2017, Pope Francis appointed him consultor at the Congregation for the Clergy. As at October 2020, he has visited 70 countries to speak during Episcopal seminars and conferences about the need to raise awareness and establish measures for *safeguarding*.

Content

Networking in order to generate a prevention system has been the challenge which – over the past two years – *the Community Pope John XXIII, Azione Cattolica, Centro Sportivo Italiano and the Department of Sociology and Economic Law – Alma Mater Studiorum Bologna,* have been dealing with together, as part of the "Safe Project", each within their specific area of intervention. This essay comprises insights, input for reflection, the contents developed through the "Safe Project" and arising from it, for parents, educators, coaches and sports managers, and all those who are in contact with children because of family ties, work, study, association or institutional responsibilities.

It is a challenge that has allowed us to move on from feeling the protection of minors and vulnerable persons as a burden to considering it as a gift, equipping us with extra tools to deal – together, and better – with the innumerable and unavoidable complexities associated with educating and welcoming children in this day and age, so that we can make time for what is really worth it: relationships, their promotion and care, as well as allowing for change to emerge, the "beauty" that can be disclosed even inside the unexpected, through listening, research and formation.

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