



Rotary Club di Terni

IIS PROFESSIONALE TECNICO COMMERCIALE
"CASAGRANDE. CESI" TERNI



Leonardo da Vinci

Progetto P2P Peer Tutoring

GUIDANCE TEACHING

Social-cognitive model life-skills development and peer tutoring

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

The guidelines that follow are based on the socio-cognitive model and on Soresi/Nota studies at Padua University, Italy. The material produced is not intended as a code of standards of conduct to be applied rigidly, but wants to act as a stimulus for reflection and personal paths that lead to a change in the communication style, resulting in an improvement of the educational activity.

There are various dimensions that contribute to increase not only academic success, but also the ability of personal and social adjustment, and, in a single expression, the "quality of life" of the people. It is important to understand the variables that affect the development of the following skills: self-assessment of knowledge, strengths and weaknesses; self-efficacy; deal effectively with new, difficult, frustrating or rewarding situations (Coping); initiate and manage effective interactions, know behavioral styles, but also the prejudices and stereotypes characterizing educational and social interaction (social skills); make effective decisions (decision Making).

Self-efficacy and Human agency

The concept of **self-efficacy** refers to how much we are convinced of our ability to determine the success or failure of our performance. A low self-efficacy belief often corresponds to avoidance behaviors, poor performance or failure, while the person who "thinks positively" expects to have a good chance to get satisfactory results with his/her commitment.

The greater self-efficacy is, the greater the commitment and effort invested, perseverance and consistency in the application.

The person who feels "effective" also feels able to act on reality (**human agency**). Less able people but convinced to be able to succeed get higher performances than more capable people who do not believe they will succeed, who tend to:

- ❖ avoid activities they perceive as "difficult";
- ❖ have little interest and engage little to achieve their objectives;
- ❖ dwell, in the presence of "difficult" tasks, on their own deficiencies, on the obstacles they encounter and all the adverse consequences they will have to face;
- ❖ lose confidence in their own abilities even with few setbacks, because they attribute poor performance to lack of ability and personal qualities;
- ❖ be prey to stress and depression.

It is like "a cat chasing its tail": "I'm worried about the maths test tomorrow (expectation of response), I'm sure I will panic and will not write anything, as always (ritualized behavior); the teacher will scold me (expectation of stimulus). Tomorrow I will not go to school (avoidance). I can not control panic (decrease of self-efficacy).

Conversely: "I am preparing for an important meeting and I am sure I will be able to be calm (coping self-efficacy and expectation of response); I will receive congratulations (expectation of stimulus). I will prepare myself very well (behavioral response=coping) and I will communicate effectively (increase of self-efficacy).

How self-efficacy develops:

With the experience of previous successes or failures: we often have weak perceptions of self-efficacy due to the fact that some tasks are associated with discouraging experiences. The student who is bad at maths and is mortified by the teacher keeps a bad memory of the experience and will be subject also in the future to panic and doubt about his self-efficacy, which in turn will affect his/her commitment in the study of mathematics and encourage avoidance/giving up behaviors. The stereotype that hardness can "forge" and that situations involving the experimentation of frustration feelings make people "grow", has to be fought! How many have had success in a subject because the teacher has made them love it!

Watching the experience of others, that is, how much and how you can learn through observation and imitation of models. (the student sees that his/her classmate is able to control anxiety during maths questioning and thinks: "Then I can do it as well." "Oh, look, Pierino, that is usually bad, can read well without stuttering! So, I can do it too! ")

With positive power of imagination: a student with fertile imagination will anticipate all sorts of physiological consequences associated with maths questioning: anxiety, panic attacks, lack of saliva, sweating, flushing, palpitations, and representations of failure behavior: be dumb, stutter, give a completely wrong solution to the problem, which will cause him/her doubt of his/her efficacy beliefs and will feed negative outcome expectations.

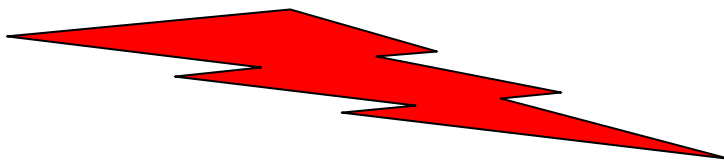
Conversely, the teacher the student fears but respects and admires (persuasiveness and authority of the source), reassures him/her about the possibility to control his/her anxiety reactions during questioning, which will be short and approachable (plausibility of the event) , anticipating the state of well-being that he will feel later (attractiveness of the positive anticipation of the event).

What are successes and failures attributed to

The locus of control (place of causality) is the degree people expect the result of their actions depends on their own (internal) rather than being the result of chance, luck, destiny, under the control of others or simply unpredictable (external). The cause of success or failure is ascribed to may be internal, stable and uncontrollable ("I'm not clever"), internal variable and controllable ("I do not succeed because I am not committed), or external, stable and uncontrollable ("this work is not suitable for me"), external and variable ("I am unlucky"), external and controllable ("this work will be less challenging as time goes on"). Other combinations are possible, based on the self-perception the individual has, the level of self-esteem and the sense of efficacy he/she feels when faced with problem solving.

Internal locus of control

One of the most important internal causes seems to be **intelligence**, which is generally considered to be stable and controllable: a failure attributed to it will be perceived as a constant feature out of individual control.



It is therefore necessary to be very careful to the behavior of "significant or authoritative" adults and peers which, even if not intentionally, induce a student to attribute failure to lack of ability! This could destroy his/her self-esteem, beliefs and expectations of efficacy and associate with the event feelings and reactions difficult to modify!

A "tightening of the learning process" can be created with even irreversible outcomes.

Perception of deficit:

“they make me feel I am not able to ...”,

loss of self-esteem:

“maybe I am not actually able to...;

fall of motivation:

“Why am I supposed to be committed”?

Everybody knows that students lacking motivation since characterized by low self-esteem have very poor listening skills.



Avoid epithets or qualifications related to someone's ability: "You have not understood", "You do not understand," "Ah, but you're dull ..." "Better give up ..." "He won't understand anyway..."



Adopt task related qualifications (without epithets):

"This exercise contains errors, let's review the rule, you'll see that you'll be able to do it again without errors"
"If you cannot, do not be discouraged! Be persistent and you will succeed "(recall commitment, internal modifiable feature)" Your observation is correct (increase of self-esteem), but it is best applied to another case. Here it would be better ...".

Other internal causes are commitment/perseverance/method of study, which are generally variable and controllable causes: a failure ascribed to them will be perceived as a modifiable feature through a will effort and therefore controllable. The student knows that he/she has failed because he/she has not studied/has studied little/has studied while watching TV, etc. and also knows that if he/she studies more or better he/she will improve.

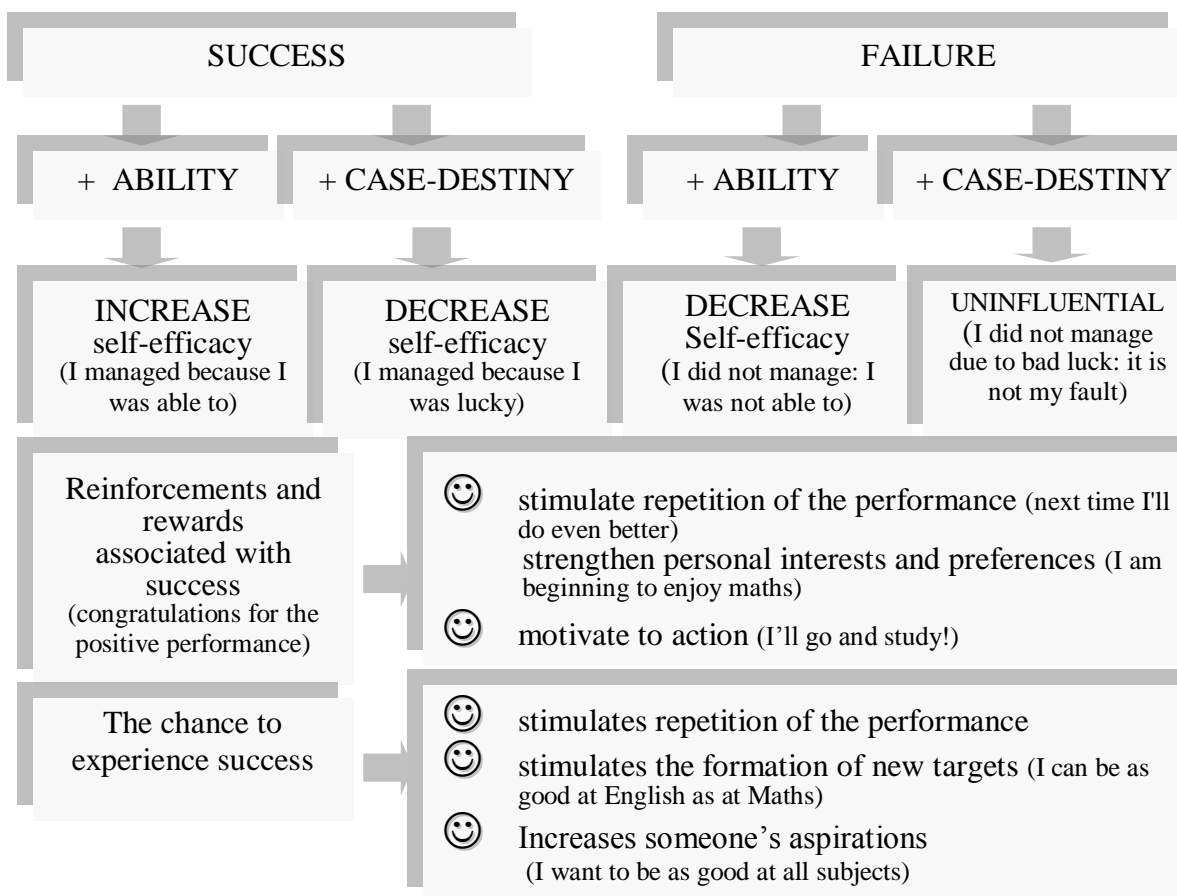
External locus of control

Typical external cause is **difficulty**, which is a feature of the task or the environment and not of the subject, it is stable for very unmotivated students with low self-esteem and lack of self-efficacy beliefs, and variable for motivated students with a good level of self-esteem.

The benevolence of the evaluator is another environmental cause, variable (today my teacher is in a good mood), uncontrollable (my teacher was in a bad mood, questioned me and I failed, while I usually get along) .

Finally, **the presence of favorable or unfavorable environmental conditions, luck / bad luck**, characteristic of the environment, variable and non-controllable (today there was strike and none of my classmates came to school. So the teacher has noticed that I had not done my maths homework!).

The locus of control, that is, the causes students attribute their successes or failures to, significantly affects their future performance. The following diagram tries to illustrate the various combinations of internal-external locus that determine success in a task.



Learning difficulties, passivity and "lack of will" can be the result of events previously tested and deemed uncontrollable by the person (intelligence/capacity). In depression, young people tend to attribute negative events to internal causes (I am bad at school because I have no ability) and positive events to external causes (I did well on the maths test, but it was pure luck), with further increase of depression feelings.

The role of the "leader" in increasing self-efficacy

An important element for self-efficacy to develop in individual and group learning is the presence of a leadership who can appear as an "expert model", that is, who can:



give effective verbal suggestions and anticipate results and positive consequences: threats, recommendations, sermons, biting irony are the least effective forms of persuasion. Better would be to highlight positive aspects and benefits associated with thoughts and actions.

(Caio never does homework because he thinks it useless to waste time at home when you can copy them at school. Consequently, his tests are all negative, and his motivation poor. ("Come on, let's try this: instead of copying your homework for tomorrow, try to make even one part by yourself .I'm sure you will succeed and you will make a great impression before your classmates. Besides, your next test will be better". **Among peers:** "Come, I'll show you. Now you try it. See? You can do it!")



understand and let others understand that a failure does not involve a negative evaluation of the person, but only the temporary lack of achievement of certain goals.

(Tom failed at maths. He is terrified by the reaction his father will have when he returns home with the bad news. The teacher says to the class: "Maybe some of these topics were a little difficult: shall we see them again together? After correcting the exercises in the test, the teacher will reformulate an identical one and lets Tizio correct it ... Well, now you did it! You will see that the next test will be a success, I am convinced, and dad will be very pleased with you ". **Among peers,** "Okay, you've failed. It's because you did not understand the rule, not because you do not understand. It has happened to me too. Let's make the exercises together. You'll see that you succeed! "



match the verbal prompt with examples, "let the kid see" how to face and solve cognitive-relational problems

(Rosy is always ready to answer. She raises her hand and stifles continually her teacher and her classmates with her attempts at always answering as first. Every performance is accompanied by overt manifestations of nuisance by the others, who have gradually isolated her. One day, the teacher proposes a role-play activity: "Imagine to prepare a school newspaper, and each of you will have a specific task. The teacher calls Ciro on one side and agrees with him that he should intervene continuously, saying he wants to do that because he is the best of all, especially when it's up to Rosy to play her role. At the first sign of impatience on Rosy's part, the teacher says, "Rosy, in a work group each has his/her own task. You see, if you interrupt constantly, you become unpleasant, and sooner or later you will be isolated"). **Among peers:** Tom behaves as a bully: he knows everything, he does everything, and continuously mortifies Dick, who suffers but shuts up. Harry intervenes and praises Dick several times, ignoring Tom. At the first reaction of Tom, Harry says: "It bothers you, isn't that true, to be ignored and humiliated! So, why do you do it with Dick? "



match the verbal prompt with soothing gestures, calm voice, relaxed facial expression that expresses encouragement, "empathetic" attitude (I know what you're feeling); no threatening gestures, yelling or aggressive use of silence, gloomy facial expression expressing depreciation, disgust.



notice gestures and facial expressions indicating uncertainty or confusion, activate additional explanations and effectively involve the students.

(lost expression of Tom, Dick and Harry during the explanation: "Harry, you look puzzled. Did you understand what I said?" Harry, not understanding, feels even more troubled, but says yes not to make a bad impression with the others who, in turn, do the same. "Guys, this is a rather difficult topic. Shall we repeat it together?" the teacher summarizes it on the board making more examples until he/she notices some understanding light in the eyes of the three boys: in this way he/she does not draw the attention on Harry's difficulties; when he/she sees that the students express facial expressions indicating understanding, "Well, Harry, I see that you have understood everything, let's repeat the topic together with Tom and Dick")



create a relaxed, collaborative, engaging and stimulating atmosphere, highlighting sharing of the educational process: "We" and not "you";



Mary teaches mathematics; for some years she has noticed lack of attention and learning decrease in her students. As soon as she gets to school, she shows discouraged mimic and gestures, complains constantly with her colleagues that times have changed, students now are no more like past students, and she cannot retire yet. She prepares her lessons with precision and care, but she is very impatient with students who do not have a satisfactory performance, who deserve accusations, shouts and blows of the hand on the desk, followed by the usual: "You do not do anything. What do I work for? I look forward to retiring, since I cannot stand you anymore. "Her students, who are mortally bored during her classes, spend five minutes a day to pray for her to leave.



Lucy also teaches maths, but she declares herself happy with her job, she loves her students, constantly gets updated and changes her teaching strategies based on the response she receives from students. During her classes, the kids have some freedom of movement; 4 of them, on monthly turns, are in charge of responsibility tasks involving them in the management of the educational process:

- check that all have done their homework, report any failure on a grid whose analysis will lead to rounding-up the evaluation upwards or downwards at the end of quarter;
- take the names of those who disturb during the lesson;
- write assigned homework on the register;
- remind the teacher the contents of the latest lesson and the exercises to correct.

At the end of each oral test before the teacher evaluation on the performance of mate on duty is recorded on the register, all the boys express theirs very quickly. During Lucy's lesson, you can breathe an atmosphere of active participation, students will make every effort to get the Lucy's praises, and those who do not perform their full duty know they can count on extra exercises for home. The negotiations for moving a test, do a remedial extra test or for any other request are accepted, as long as they are expressed in an assertive way. In each lesson forms of peer tutoring among students are activated to help mates in difficulty. Lucia organizes activities that are fun and varied, times are carefully organized so that everything that was planned is in the lesson; the teaching pace is fast, but leaves room for jokes and brief digressions. Lucy, though defined by his students "a tough teacher" is loved and listened to and children count on her also to solve their personal problems and relationships.



be an example and do not call students to respect rules the teacher him/herself does not respect;



- ❖ Comply with times
- ❖ Carefully plan teaching schedules, materials, verification tests
- ❖ Return corrected tests in a short time / immediate feedback in the oral tests
- ❖ Express "transparent" assessments, that is, expressed in accordance with explicit and shared criteria
 - referred to the performance
 - really integrated with non-cognitive parameters: progression compared to the starting level, effort and commitment
- ❖ Involve students in the assessment and encourage them to self-evaluate
- ❖ Respect the colleagues' work with, where possible, forms of "mediation"
- ❖ Always look at "the big beam" in one's own eye before going to remove the others'
- ❖ Avoid comments about one's own skills: the students are good observers and evaluators.



- ❖ Be systematically late
- ❖ Improvise
- ❖ Separate feedback from the performance
 - Express assessments on non-explicit and shared criteria
 - linked to factors outside our control (mood, memory)
 - referred to the person (sympathy/dislike)
- ❖ Evaluate ex-cathedra with the total exclusion of students from the evaluation process
- ❖ Disqualify the colleagues' work with negative appreciations regarding the same actions you use to do too
- ❖ Boast continuously about one's own actions: "if I were not there, guys" "you're lucky to have a teacher like me" "I'm always right."



draw attention towards reaching objectives:

shared, since they have been clearly explained:

(Children, today I will teach you to make additions. This ability is crucial for your practical life: imagine what bad impression you would make in a shop going to the cashier with two packets of stickers that cost € 0.25 each and wanting to give the cashier only € 0.40!

reasonably achievable (which depends on the accuracy the possess of basic necessary prerequisites is determined) (We can deal with the additions because we have already learned about the numbers, we have put objects together with our hands and we have counted them ...)

in the short term, as their achievement it will facilitate motivation and perseverance in the effort; (Let's take one step at a time: we will design a set with two objects and somewhere else another set with two other objects. We will combine everything into a greater set ...);

process objectives..., which relate mainly to techniques and strategies to use ("You see, we added two elements making it manually, the same thing we have to do with numbers. Can you imagine the effort you would have to do and the time you would have to lose if you were to use your hands to add large numbers? ... Try, Tom, to add to your twenty packages fifteen more, counting with your hands ... with the system of the addition, however, you will do that very quickly ... ")

...rather than performance objectives, which make reference to the results to achieve, the quantity of work or time to invest ("We have got to add two items. To do so we will use the scheme of the addition. After explaining it, I will give you 20 additions for homework, which will keep you busy for about an hour ... Tomorrow, I'll question Tom and Dick to see if they have understood ... ")



lead students to choose educational social relation goals that increase self-esteem, self-efficacy beliefs and expectations, the use of effective ways of problem solving (coping), the increase of social skills, rather than "maladaptive" objectives that justify rejection, dependence on the others, ineffective models of problem solving (coping), decrease of beliefs and expectations of self-efficacy;

lead students to reformulate their educational socio-relational goals, if little realistic and achievable, "Bravo, you've earned a positive evaluation because you could tell me the paradigm of 10 British irregular verbs, and I'm glad you want to double the number for the next lesson, but, in your place, I would feel equally very happy if I could memorize 10 (downsizing of goal), then another 10 for the next lesson ... "(target fragmentation in proximal sub-objectives).

"Okay, Tony, I see that all our strategies are working: you have a much more confident attitude, you control your emotions so as not to be overwhelmed in times of stress. If you continue like this, we will also try to make that famous phone call to that girl you are so interested in III B. I'm sure you can invite her to your birthday party".



be supportive towards all the students in the class, especially those who believe less in their skills, emphasizing skills and expertise possessed (present even in a modest degree) and reinforcing with "**injections of trust**" attempts to commitment and small successes, encouraging overestimation of ability and "positive thinking", which seem to facilitate perseverance of commitment, likelihood of achieving the objectives and improvement of the same competence;



stimulate the cohesion of the class avoiding differentiation between " better" and "worse" and marginalization of the "worst"



individualize the assignment of roles and establish clear rules so that all students have the perception to make the same efforts as the others (thinking that not everybody contributes equally and that there is someone who benefits from the others' efforts decreases the sense of efficacy and motivation to work for the benefit of the members of the group);



provide "feedback" soon after the performance: feedback is useless if distant from the performance (two days after the math test, "Well, you did the test correctly", and immediately after the questioning, "Well , you deserve a positive evaluation because you've studied and have expressed yourself correctly"); **attributional**: attribute the success to the efforts (the Italian teacher: " Very well, I notice that you have followed the suggestion of scanning the passage silently,highlighting the most important events in history, "paste" them with the conjunctions we have studied and repeat the summary aloud. I really appreciate your commitment, you deserve a positive evaluation "; **addressed the progress made** (After history questioning: "Well, you deserve a positive mark because you've studied, you've expressed with greater correctness than previously and you have shown that you understand and know how to apply the summary strategies we have insisted so much on". "Bravo, I see that your method of study is more effective: you have been able to analyze the passage respecting the steps we described for the correct reading comprehension";



create situations where students can, at least a certain number of times, **experience success**, which is the most powerful way to increase self-efficacy beliefs, by facilitating maximum learning with a short and incisive explanation (remember that the curve of attention in a boy begins its downward trend after about 20 minutes), facilitating the replacement of ineffective coping strategies used in the past with effective ones and using team-working so as to be able, for a number of times, entrust cognitive "problem-solving" activities graded for difficulty to level groups, facilitating success from less competent students;

Situation: correction of exercises, graded by difficulty. Ex 1: easier/Ex 2: more difficult. Dick has generalized difficulty. Tom has a rather good knowledge of English.

Let Dick correct exercise n°1 (after making sure that he knows to do so), and Tom n° 2; invite classmates to highlight the positive performance of both (Well, guys, I see that you have understood this important linguistic function, as Dick and Tom have just proved ") with an increase of Dick's self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations in the next performance.

☺ work on him/herself and put his/her ideas into discussion, increase effectiveness in teaching and social skills to:

- manage effectively the emotional component: the teacher who "brings problems to school", and allows these affect his/her relationship with the students makes the same mistake of the householder who comes back home tired and stressed and pours his nervousness over wife and children, with little benefit not only for them, but also for him/herself. Similarly, the teacher who indulges in forms of intolerance forgets that students may have problems, often severe ones, and creating an atmosphere full of warmth and sensitivity can help both to forget them, at least for the time they are together;
- manage conflicts with others by means of "negotiation" techniques: how many times, in order to avoid or solve a conflict, it would be enough 1) to apply the old saying "count to three ..." 2) Once calm, use kindness rather than aggression 3) "negotiate" a solution acceptable to both sides, where neither should "lose the face"!
- avoid the trap of conditioning from the " first negative impression," ominous phenomenon that can cause a chain reaction of the type: "I've disliked you by instinct, you feel it and enter into the defensive, probably reacting with a similar attitude; so I confirm my first impression and my dislike transpires, you send an even more negative feedback ... "how many times have we told our best friend:" I could not stand you!" "that friend is there, but how many have we lost?"

In a teacher-student relationship, the mechanism is even more perverse: first contact, we get a negative impression, we differentiate, even unknowingly, our treatment towards him, we receive an inadequate response from our student (rebellion, rejection ...), we confirm our first, negative impression, with further enlargement of the "gap" and a negative evaluation (What about responsibility? Who is the educator?)

- develop empathic sense: the ability to get into " other people's shoes" may be object of learning, not just innate gift! It would be enough to think a little more often to the sensations the person you love most can feel if subject to depreciation or forms of humiliation; even better, remember the forms of censorship suffered directly and their effects on the building of our self-esteem; recall, instead, people who have been able, at the right time, to say the right words or make those right gestures each of us bears carved in the memory for a lifetime;
- never forget we have to do with boys (whose dizzying growth rate does not coincide with ours, often quite static for years) in conditions of dependency ("I always hold the knife by the handle!"). Take advantage of this condition to give vent to frustrations and problems unfortunately happens very often in a school in which, " once closed the door of the class, "the teacher does what he/she wants!
- never forget our adolescent needs, our inner conflicts, the storms and fury of our youth, removed and buried under a deep layer of indifference, often disguised as wisdom; the decrease of self-esteem we, in turn, experienced and the wounds received from "authoritative adults", which, at 40 or 50 are often still alive, maybe on a subconscious level!

Coping

(face and solve problems)

All in life must cope with painful or joyful events: what differentiates one person from another is the way he/she faces them, which in turn depends on how the subject sees himself and reality, which is not an external static entity, but is defined by the perceiver. Coping is made by the answers-thoughts, feelings, actions-that a person uses to cope with the problematic situations he/she encounters.

School, in charge with family to deal with the psychological well-being of young people, despite its operating slowness, has realized the extent of the problem caused by the increasing difficulty of adolescents to face and effectively solve school life and relational problems and has for some time laid an emphasis on "prevention rather than cure", inviting school stakeholders to transpose and implement a series of conceptual models and practices coming from the most advanced academic research. Two constructs relating the ability to cope effectively with problems seem particularly significant:

Stress (1)

We define stress as a natural biological reaction to an effort, whose seat is in the middle of the brain (hypothalamus). This concept was developed in the early '900, but it took 30 years before science recognized that it is the brain that controls, among others, stress reactions:

The stress system is stimulated by cholinergic and serotonergic neurotransmitters and inhibited by other neurotransmitters

- **Via Chemicals:** hypothalamus → CRH → hypophysis → adrenal cortex → production of cortisol (central hormone produced by circadian rhythm: it increases in the morning and gives you the strength to take initiatives and decreases in the course of the day)
- **Via the nervous system:** hypothalamus → direct connection via the spinal cord → medulla of the adrenal glands → immediate production of reactions (fear, shock, etc.). → Release of epinephrine, norepinephrine, catecholamines (stimulants).

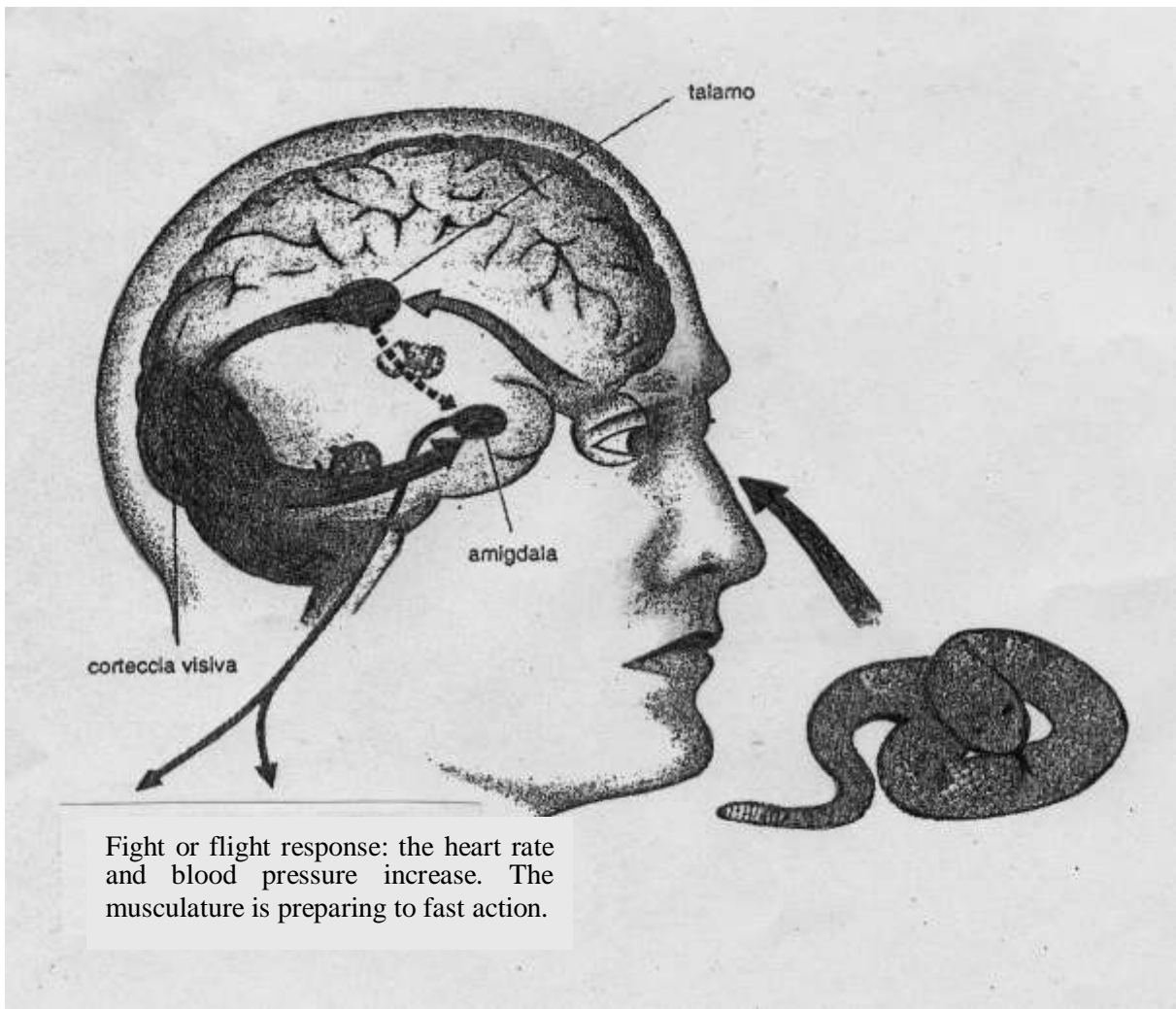
and another 30 years for emotions to move from the heart to the brain, establishing a close relationship between emotional and cognitive circuits.

Hence the overthrow of the mistaken idea that there is a sort of "hierarchy" of organs and functions. Everything is interrelated and, although there are critical or dominant areas for the performance of certain functions (cognitive, motor, emotional), their proper implementation requires the activation of neurocircuits that interconnect areas very different from each other, since nervous transmission influences and is also influenced by other systems that involve the endocrine glands and the immune system. Therefore a kind of "psychobiology of emotions" might be envisaged, developed in a journey that took us from Papez, to the limbic system, to the amygdala.

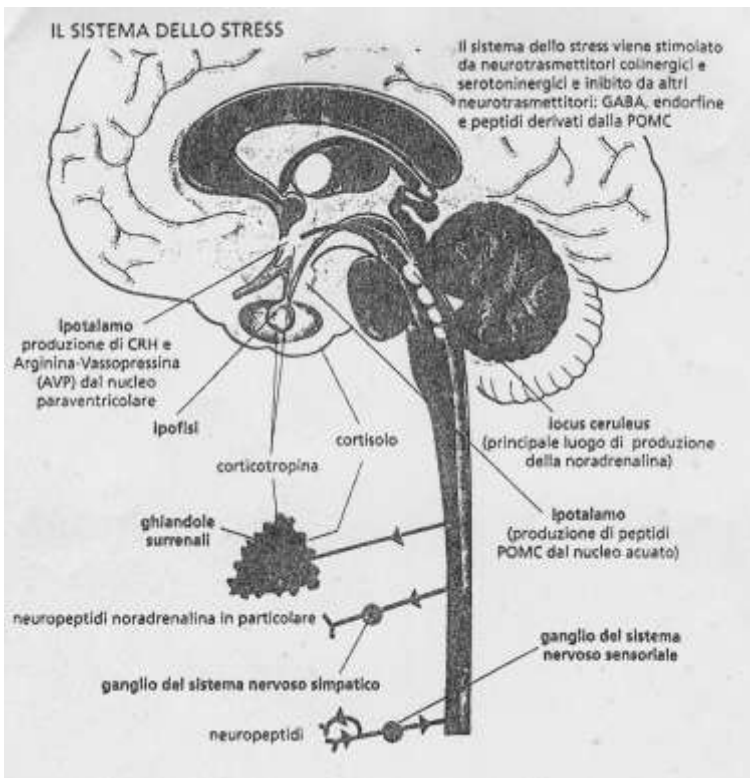
1) lecture by Prof. Bottaccioli, Professor of Psychoneuroimmunology at the Catholic University of Rome, as a part of the "Health promoting school" project.

The importance of this gland located behind the eye, which activates emotional centers and is connected with the axis of stress through
a long route → eye the optic nerve → thalamus → visual cortex- is not in the child, who cannot filter the meaning and rationalize the stimulus
or **a short route** → eye → optic nerve → thalamus → amygdala (which allows immediate reaction in case of sudden source of stress),

is clear from the picture that follows.

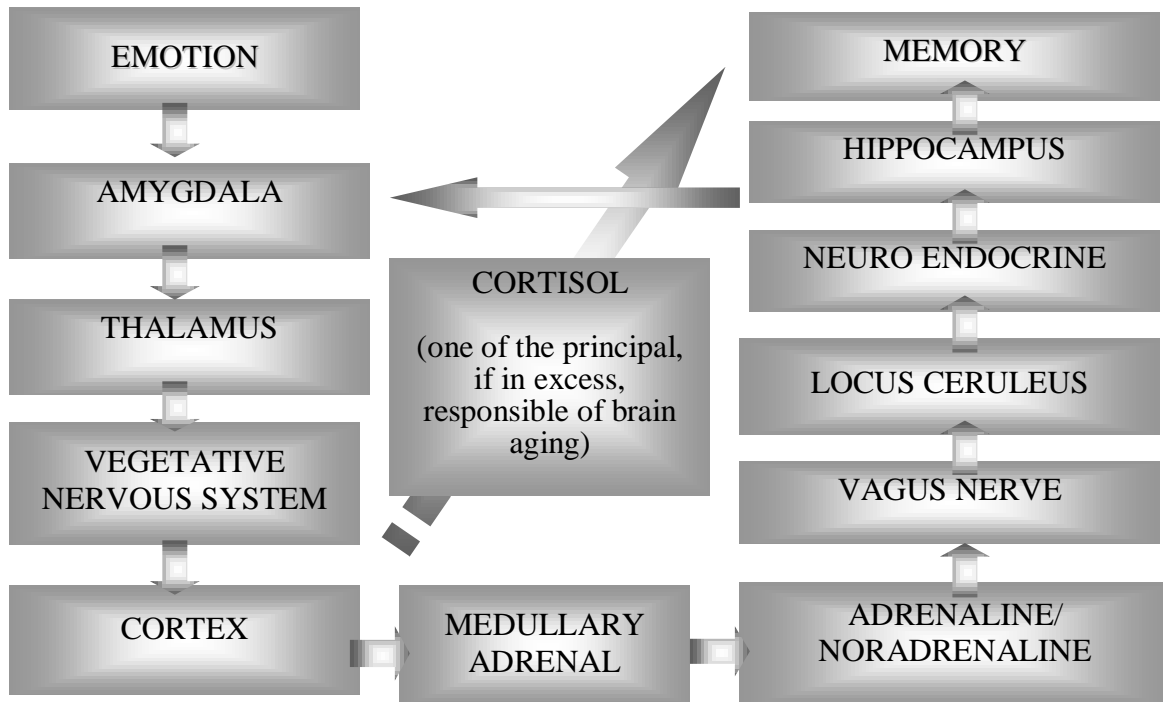


Fight or flight response: the heart rate and blood pressure increase. The musculature is preparing to fast action.

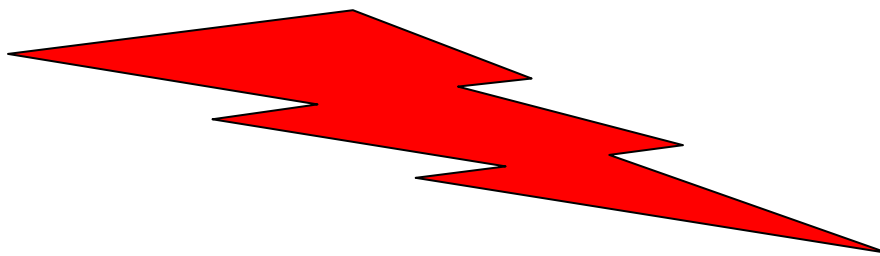


A visual signal from the retina is sent first to the thalamus, where it is translated into the language of the brain. Much of the message is then routed to the visual cortex, which processes it and evaluates it in order to understand its meaning and produce an appropriate response; if the response is emotional, a signal is sent to the amygdala to activate the emotional centers. A smaller portion of the original signal, however, goes directly from the thalamus to the amygdala, along a shorter route of transmission, thus allowing a faster response (though less precise). Thus, the amygdala can trigger an emotional response even before the cortical centers have fully understood what is happening.

A series of experimental studies shows that the emotional arousal, mediated by the amygdala, influences the formation of explicit memory, then **learning is strongly influenced by emotions**, according to a process that is graphically illustrate:



This shows that there are separate cognitive-emotional circuits and that we must learn to activate the system of stress, because stress hormones are beneficial to learning but-attention-



prolonged stress or trauma damage the storage systems and the brain itself, especially in the two critical periods shown in the table that follows, the third of which occupies the evolutionary phase (9-18) in which the interaction teenager-school is particularly significant.

Brain development during childhood and adolescence
 (From "Italian Treaty of psychiatry," "The biological basis of psychiatry" - Prof.Pancheri, 1999)

	DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRAIN	EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT
0 –3 years Critical period	Increase in synapse Increase in the nonspecific complexity of the neural network	Development of the elementary instinctual system and attachment-loss program (mother-child)	High density of learning Start language conceptualization Distinction self / non-self

3-9 years Stabilization	First phase of stabilization Synapses constant Receptors constant	Outside world as seen through the eyes of patterns of attachment-loss	Systematic learning Perfecting of language Social development Programming of short term behavior
9-15 years (18) Critical period	II critical period Simplifying of neural network Synapses and receptors decreased	Separation stress (parents) Attachment stress (first love)	Complex aimed behaviors Planning of long-term behavior
Over 15 (18) years Stabilization	Second phase of stabilization Synapses constant Receptors constant	Patterns of emotional reaction stabilized	Cognitive patterns stabilized

In the first critical period stress is centered on parents, in the second on the outside. In both the brain is very sensitive to stressful elements and, in particular, to traumas, which can determine a permanent alteration of the stress system.

The second childhood: stress and worries

The second childhood (3-7 years) is a stage of "gaining experience" characterized by the game, by which the child develops muscles, exercise them, gets self-control of the motor system and knows the world through sensory experience.

Self-centeredness is still the dominant trait. The child, in this particular phase of his life will have to deal with experiences that will lead to the attainment of autonomy, as a transition from total dependence to relative dependence (learn how to be alone), to the conquest of identity as structuring of the self, to the development of skills.

The main stressors as predictors of psychological symptoms in relation to this age are those attributable to the family and the school: the separation from the family, the new physical and social environment, the sharing of emotions with others, the respect for social rules and regulations, self-centeredness, requests higher than abilities (affective, emotional, behavioral, educational, family disharmony, difficulty in communicating).

The main indicators of stress in childhood are

- Easy crying
- Screams
- Physical and verbal aggressiveness
- Apprehension
- Poor attention and concentration
- Insecurity
- Lack of personal and affective autonomy

- Insulation
- Tiredness for too much TV
- Tiredness for too many extra-school commitments
- Anger
- Bullying/taunting
- Rhythm sleep / wake cycle not regular
- Difficulty of feeding

Adolescence: stress and worries

Adolescence is the period of adulthood in which the individual is confronted with a series of difficulties and challenges typical of the growth process, which cause stress. There are, firstly, the tasks almost all the children of this age face, such as the development of the identity, the achievement of independence from the family, while remaining united to it, the inclusion in the peer group, the transition from childhood to adulthood, characterized by cognitive development and physical and hormonal changes that affect the image of self, which in turn goes to affect self-esteem, self-efficacy, privacy and anxiety, the adjustment to the role society expects in respect of peers and members of the opposite sex, the completion of the education process and the choice of a career (by: E.Frydenberg, 1997).

The most predictive stressors of psychological symptoms are the ones

- ☹️ due to the family for children between 12 and 14 (pressure and family expectations, poor health of family members, family disharmony, parental abuse, low level of education),
- ☹️ due to peers for children between 15 and 17 (Confrontations and problems with friends, love disillusionment),
- ☹️ due to school for teenagers between 18 and 20 (poor school performance, limited employment opportunities) (Compas, Phares, Ledoux, 1989).

Young people concerns can be divided into three categories:

Of success: improvements in physical appearance and self-esteem, academic performance, success in examinations, finding a job, meeting with a suitable partner for marriage.

Of relationship: relationships within the family, among peers, with significant adults

Of altruism: the problem of world poverty, gender equality (E.Frydenberg, 1997).

The main indicators of stress in adolescence are:

Home	School	Community
Anxiety	Bullying	Alcohol addiction
Need to please	Antisocial behavior	Tobacco
Conflicts with brothers/sisters	Attention research	dependence
Confrontations	Confusion in	Drug addiction
Sleep disorders	problem-solving	Promiscuity
Disorders of the skin	Difficulties in	Apathy
Eating Disorders: excessive loss/gain of weight	fulfilling the demands	Indifference
Chronic fatigue	of work	Gang behavior
Verbal aggression	Inability to perform	Vandalism
Irritability / moodiness	new tasks	Violence
Rebellion	School-dropping out	Cruelty
Easy crying	Burnouts due to study	Homelessness
Inability to handle the routine	Isolation / withdrawal	Exaggerations
Boredom / apathy / passivity	Passivity	Theft
Tiredness	Ostentation /boasting	
Unhappiness	Anger	
Procrastination / avoidance	Poor concentration	
Excessive TV viewing		

Coping Strategies (2)

Psychological stress lies neither in the individual nor in the situation he lives, but it depends on their mutual relationship, that is, the way the person evaluates the event and copes with it. It is a constantly dynamic interaction: what a person makes has an impact on the environment which, in turn, exerts its impact on the individual and so forth. The cognitive and behavioral strategies used by each individual to cope with problematic situations in life are related to

individual stable "traits", to constitutional and genetic variables (Theory of the traits) or depend on the context and the changing situation (Theory of Lazarus) . We believe that both components count and exercise an influence on the constitution of these strategies. It is instead important to note that a prevailing pattern centered on the deficit (what I cannot do), was gradually replaced by a model centered on adequacy, personal effectiveness and self-awareness (what I can do). It is therefore not enough to have adequate coping skills, one must above all believe in owning them and develop "positive thinking", personal efficacy and confidence in his/her own ability!

The qualities identified as characterizing stress-resistant and coping effective children fall into three broad factors related to:

😊 individual disposition: extroverted temperament, high self-esteem, internal locus of control (the ones who has an effective way of coping seek to dominate their environment and do not assign blame others for their own failings), optimism and autonomy;

😊 family circumstances: presence of a supportive family environment characterized by warmth, cohesion, shared values, love between parents, relationship with at least one parental figure, order and organization;

😊 support systems: support from the environment offered by a person or by a group that presents positive identification models.

(2) From: E.Frydenberg, Coping with difficulties, 1997.

Coping and family

Family is one of the most significant sources of influence and the most important environment for a teenager. The parental involvement in the education of children provides opportunities for social interaction and is the basis on which the autonomy of the adolescent develops. Which parenting style gives the best result? We illustrate briefly some of socialization techniques used by parents and their effects on the psychosocial development of the child.

😊 **Support technique:** parental behavior confirms the child he/she is accepted, loved and supported in his/her choices and actions.

(Joan lost her father at seven. Curious and "too" lively, she was always scolded and labelled by teachers as "difficult" at school. Her teenage life was characterized by the obsessive and poorly expressed search for attention and approval from others "because I missed the approval of my father," she explains. Joan reports, now an adult who has started a career as a university researcher, that her salvation were the approval and support of her mother, who has always believed in her and has supported her choices, often against the advice of other "influential"adults).

😞 **Coercion technique:** the will of the child and the parent collide and the parent exerts a strong pressure for the son he meets the desires. (Dick has always been an introverted and somewhat scary child. "Overwhelmed" by an educated father with a strong personality, he has always felt destined from childhood to follow his father's footsteps. During his school experience has repeatedly experienced failure because of his low self-esteem, which decreased at every clash with his father, greatly disappointed by his school results. He sought refuge in music and in purely operational occupations for which he turned out to be more and more attracted. After choosing a professional school against the will of his father (his mother appeared non-existent as a support, being in turn dominated by her husband), he was gradually alienated by him and slipped into a depressive state which forced him to interrupt his studies and take them back two years later, graduating at an evening course. Today the is a worker; he has remained shy, fearful and subject to cyclical depression. He has no more relationship with his father).

(Tom, intelligent and ambitious, loves to play the piano, but he is admitted to the Conservatory to study the bassoon, which he does not like, and accepts to please the parents. At school, his performance suffers a downturn, he begins to stutter. His parents do not recognize the symptom of discomfort and argue that at home he does not stutter).



Induction technique: the parent discusses with the child about the probable consequences of his/her actions.

(Pete is a fearful and lazy child. On his first contact with school, due to a strong ear infection and vision problems, he was classified as "uncooperative and stubborn," while he could hardly hear and see. His academic performance has been difficult from the beginning. Pete's salvation was his mother, who guessed his difficulties, and besides of course having a medical treatment, has never failed to lend him her support in terms of appreciation and encouragement, and indeed created a number of situations where he might experience success, especially in sports. She has always openly discussed with him all his problems helping him to "pull out" his difficulties, and think of the most effective ways to overcome them. Pete is now twenty years old, he is a sporty boy, he has found a satisfactory job, especially when compared with its situation and has developed a higher self-esteem, especially if compared with his starting situation).

High levels of support and induction and low levels of coercion are associated with high levels of social competence with cognitive development, moral behavior and self-esteem; conversely, high levels of coercion and low levels of support and induction are associated with social incompetence, learning and behavioral difficulties.

The coping styles of parents have a great deal of influence on their children. The parental and the adolescent coping are significantly correlated. The children observe the actions of significant adults, acquire information and develop expectations, internalizing the coping style of parents and other family members. It is likely that parents who employ, solutions of adaptive coping to problems (as trying to resolve conflicts in a cooperative manner) provide adaptive models to the children. Rigid, passive, pessimistic parents with poor social skills are not able to act as a positive role model, nor are they capable of supporting the adolescent active coping. (Schulman, 1993).

The results of most recent studies indicate that the ideal family is one in which:



Communication is positive and effective.



Adolescents receive strong support from the parents and are free to express feelings and opinions.



The problems are discussed and the conflicts expressed, conflicts and family plans are negotiated.



There is cooperation and trust between parents and adolescents.



Parents are free to express feelings and opinions, as well as concern about the possible consequences of a behavior.

From family to school: coping and social support

In the school environment, one of the most important supportive relationship is with peers and classmates. There is evidence about the fact that students who receive social support at school have more successful results than those who do not make use of it. However, there is a series of obstacles that can inhibit peer support outside the school environment, such as:



Deficit of social skills

("I'm not popular among my friends." "They never invite me: I'm afraid I am not up to them." "I invited them to my house several times, but have always found excuses: what is wrong with me?").



Deficit of competitiveness

("They all have a girlfriend, not me: I look like a nerd." "They all go on a motorbike, my parents did not buy one. Can you think of going to a date by bus?". "They wear makeup and go to the disco: I cannot dance and when I do so I look like a sack of potatoes").



Family conflict

("They know my family problems and avoid me." "I invited them often, but with one excuse or the other have never accepted: is that due to the fact that mom and quarrel all the time, even in the presence of others?").

Insulation is one of the prime factors responsible for many forms of youth depression, hence the need to encourage young people to dating, even outside school hours, or to create opportunities for this to happen



By creating a cooperative and not competitive atmosphere in the classroom.



By proposing "peer tutoring" activities (persuade someone who has developed certain skills to share them with the friend in need) and encouraging this practice in the afternoon school spaces or at home.



By paying close attention to the dynamics of formation of groups within the class: discourage cohesive groups in opposition to each other, cohesive groups with the exclusion of "the odd one", many fragmented small groups with conflicting dynamics.



By insisting on re-grouping according to different dynamics: examination of the positive new aspects of people we are not used to take into account, change of the "point of view": "put yourself in someone else's shoes" and try to understand what he/she can think and feel, enhancement of supportive relationship, "be supportive to each other", "defend mate from abuse", "recognize mate as alter-ego."



By discouraging attitudes of derision or marginalization of the mate in trouble, the "too good" or the "nerd."

There are various classifications on the coping strategies most commonly used by teenagers and adults. Erica Frydenberg, based on extensive surveys of thousands of people, has developed a measuring instrument "Adolescent Coping Scale" and identified the most commonly used strategy, dividing them into:

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

- **Attention to the solution of the problem:** I'll try to solve the problem by giving the best of my ability
- **Work hard and succeed**
- **Attention to the positive aspects:** I think positively and I look for positive aspects
- **Search for relaxing distractions:** doing sports, listening to music, reading a book, playing an instrument, watching TV, going out with friends, etc.).
- **Social action:** I join other people who have the same problem
- **Research of social support:** I talk about my problem with other people hoping them to help me
- **Search for professional help:** I turn to qualified individuals who can help me (as a teacher, a job counselor, a doctor, a social worker)
- **Search for belonging:** I worry more about what other people think and try to improve my relationship with them
- **Invest in close friends:** I spend more time with my friend/s
- **Search for spiritual support:** I turn to God or to my patron saint to receive inspiration and moral support.

UNPRODUCTIVE STRATEGIES

- **Lack of coping:** I do not have the means to deal with the situation
- **Rejection of the problem:** I do not know the problem
- **Avoidance of the problem or procrastination:** I avoid the problem until I can or delay its solution
- **Illusory thought:** I hope everything goes well (but I'm not active for this to happen).
- **Pay attention to the negative aspects:** I think pessimistically and I anticipate more or less negative outcomes
- **Research of social support:** I talk a lot of my problem with other people hoping they find a solution
- **Reduction of stress:** I drink, eat and smoke to get a bit out of it, I watch TV for hours, I do relaxing activities for hours and I'm not active for the solution of the problem
- **Closing in themselves:** I avoid others and avoid that they are aware of my problem
- **Concern:** I worry about what will happen
- **Searching for spiritual support:** I turn to God or to my patron saint and I do not do anything to solve the problem.

Classification provided by Italian researchers (3)

Effective strategies

- ↻ Think about different solutions: how to get more ideas?
- ↻ Think about what to do at different times (every hour and day are different from each other, as well as the moods: an idea there is not now, may come suddenly in two hours!)
- ↻ Write down all the ideas that come out, especially those -usually really brilliant- usually that come during sleep, remain for a few minutes as we wake up and then fade away.
- ↻ Do not put limits (do not say, "this can not be done") and wonder what we can do.
- ↻ Ask someone you trust ("What would you do in my place?").

↻ Ideas come better if:

- ⇒ you use tricks to find strategies ok
(often our main enemies are we ourselves: who has postponed the beginning of a diet at least one hundred times saying "I'll start tomorrow?"). (Dick, unattentive student can look at the teacher and mentally repeat "I'm attentive, and I'll follow what the teacher says");
- ⇒ you take time to face problems (often the most disastrous decisions are those taken hastily, under the pressure of violent emotions such as anger, annoyance, etc.). "Count to ten" before doing something is a valuable strategy that we often forget to apply);
- ⇒ you think that the problems that plague us happen to everyone ("trouble shared is a problem halved"); it does not solve our problems, but sometimes it helps not to feel alone in coping with them;
- ⇒ we believe that solving a problem gives us greater confidence in our capabilities: training in finding more hypotheses and in being able to choose the best one helps us to become "good problem solvers".

↻ Relax and face problems with calm.

↻ Make physical activity to release tension.

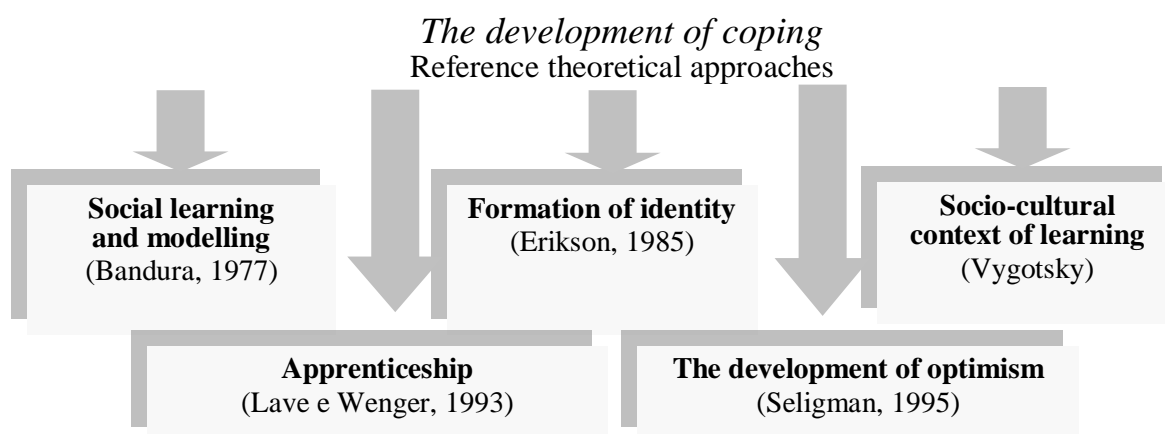
↻ Work hard to find and implement the solution of the problem (Imagine the phases of the implementation: What do I need to realize my idea? What should I do first? Secondly? Thirdly? By what time shall I have to do the first? What about the second? And the third? Try to know what other people deemed OK would do. (Strategy centered on the support of others), talk to them and seek their encouragement. This strategy has advantages (collect appropriate advice, ideas on how to tackle the problem, spend more time with others ...) as well as disadvantages (you have to do a little hard work, you can pick up ideas not fit in your situation, what it is good for one person may not be right for us, you can reinforce the idea that alone you would not be able to solve the problem).

↻ Tell others that you will do that thing (involve others can compel us to do what we have in mind not to "lose face").

↻ Think that we can succeed with our commitment (think positively).

↻ Reward ourselves after the realization (or after each stage) with the gratification we prefer.

(3) Soresi / Nota: Difficulties: no problem! Training for teachers on the development of coping skills.





Learning "by doing" is an essential part of social practice: learning to implement coping is both learn to "speak", and enact productive and adaptive social practices. Teaching coping means teaching skills vital to enhance psychosocial competence. When young people are offered the opportunity to expand their repertoire of coping, they become capable of managing life circumstances in ways that promote their health and psychological well-being. The three most important components of the coping process are:

The development of optimism. Optimism is "an attitude of mind," it is to keep being excited, hopeful and confident. It leads to deal with the events anticipating the most positive consequences and to be successful; it helps to improve the quality of life and health. Conversely, pessimism is dwelling on causes and anticipating the worst consequences of any incident: it leads to depression, resignation, to be less successful and negatively affects health.


Seligman's recipe to grow optimistic people (1995) consists of a number of strategies:


Encourage overestimation of abilities: depressed young people are merciless judges of their abilities, while non-depressed ones are generally considered much smarter than others will judge them to be: this overestimation seems to be working in their favor.

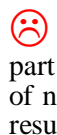
 "I have to act Hamlet's monologue in front of the whole school, I do not have a very good diction and arms become as lead as I speak. I will make a bad impression "


 "I have to act Hamlet's monologue in front of the whole school, I do not have a very good diction, but no one will notice because I will be able to act with a fantastic mimic!").

Help to develop mastery of the action, that is, to cope with situations where they can control the outcome:

 "I do not know how the math test will go because I have no idea of the problems the teacher is going to include ... why should I commit myself? I will fail anyway "

 The maths teacher selects some problems and, after having explained and reinforced them with examples and exercises, develops a test that contains the type of exercises completed and informs the students. The student will consider the outcome of the test controllable, success will depend on his/her positive engagement in revising the exercises made, will tend to intensify the efforts, to remain involved and feel positive outcome expectancies.

 Dick feel as uncontrollable the activity of "role playing" in which he will have to simulate the part of candidate at a job interview. It is likely, having never done it, that he will anticipate every form of negative arousal (anxiety, palpitations, sweating, etc.) and of negative performance, with the likely result to avoid the task.

 The teacher: "Children, it is very important to be prepared for an event that you will be soon likely to face. Now I will give you some interview templates that shape a successful interview. Examine them. Next time Tom will be engaged in a simulation: he will show Dick (incentive to the role of tutor) how to prepare for the beginning of a job interview. Tom will feel the activity controllable because he will be able to master its content simulate it several times by himself or with a friend. He is likely to perform the task with some confidence to develop the skills needed.

Help people develop positive feelings about themselves

😊 The head teacher will get a much more consistent affective and moral commitment (loyalty and identification with the educational institution and optimal fulfillment of commitments) by his/her employees if he/she won't periodically miss highlighting their efforts and appreciating their professionalism and that his/her employees are likely to increase motivation and self-efficacy.

😊 In the same way, he/she will get an even greater commitment in really committed teachers if he/she will detect and sanction professional approximate, rampant or "all smoke and no fire," behaviors which too often find space in the school environment.

Help enhance emotional intelligence

We know that Q.I. explains only 20% of the factors that determine success in life; a variety of other factors associated with emotional intelligence explains most of the positive transitions of the individual in the course of life: self-awareness, impulse control, perseverance, commitment, self-motivation, empathy, social expressiveness. We are not born with predetermined emotional intelligence, which can be grown and strengthened: educators are required more' "emotional acculturation" to prevent depression and promote physical and mental health (Goleman, 1995).

The development of a sense of humor. The value of humor and laughter as healing factors are now documented by many authors. Laughter can counteract anxiety, depression and release tension. There are conscious and unconscious sources of pleasure in jokes and comedy, which allow us to vent repressed ideas and emotions (Freud, 1981):

- Humor can reduce the physiological arousal (anxiety, sweating, panic, etc..) and alter individual perception thereof, so that the arousal is not perceived negatively.
- Gives energy because it helps release tension.
- Allows you to deal with taboo subjects lightly.
- Can create a climate of greater confidence in any environment.
- Increases storage capacity if compared with more traditional teaching techniques because it conveys the message in a pleasant and easy to remember way.
- It can reveal a powerful communication tool.
- Has "osmotic" effect and its therapeutic effects are particularly exploited in group situations.

Cartoons, animation, video clips and stage performances provide opportunities for learning and are useful to teach coping skills. Humor is usually conveyed by language: it is through the use of particular linguistic devices, such as metaphor, that we communicate our experience and we learn how to manage events.

The use of metaphor. Metaphor is a linguistic device that consists in "giving something a name associated with something else" (Søyland, 1994).

Very ancient expedient, it has been widely overlooked as a means of knowledge and vehicle for change until recent times, when people start to give it invaluable value for the development of coping skills. The representations of stress in terms of "weight on one's shoulders" and coping in terms of "every cloud has a silver lining" are examples of how stress and coping are lived and represented, both at conscious and unconscious level. It is difficult to determine whether metaphors act as means of change by themselves, but they are an important vehicle for facilitating change. They give a person a chance to make concrete what is conceptually complex and abstract. The mere act of concreteness may have cathartic function, or as a means of communication, provoke the social support sought. Here are some of the metaphors used by teenagers to describe their mode of coping:

Animals: "He's as serious as an owl" (Lucia, 15, of her Philosophy teacher), "If you provoke me, I pull out the claws like a tiger" (Loretta, 16, commenting on the betrayal of her boyfriend with her best friend)," I'm curious like a monkey "(Alice, 19 years).

Water: "I let myself go with the flow," "I gasp, how to get out of this?" (Julia, 15, about her emotional problems), "To go up again You should touch the bottom" (Lara, 17, after the separation from her boyfriend).

Fight: "If the way gets tough, the tough gets her way; it is then that the way gets tougher and tougher and the tough has to get her way even more" (Laura, 16, holds her motto stuck to her diary and uses it whenever the circumstances are a challenge, drawing a kind of cathartic effect and a prompt to action).

Body: "I feel a social handicapped" (Mark, 17 years old, gifted teenager not understood and excluded by the environment), "I like to deal with the problems face to face", "I keep the situation in my hand."

Items: "I prefer to see the glass half full rather than half empty" (Ramona, 19, commenting on her enthusiastic university choice, not shared by her father), "I see myself overwhelmed by a mountain of earth, with me desperately digging with a shovel "(Bruno, 14 years old, about his relational and school problems).

Social skills

Among the definitions of social skills, one of the most comprehensive (Chadsey-Rusch) speaks of "learned behaviors", not "innate predispositions" but consequence of learning processes determined by the educational experiences lived: as you learn to read and write, therefore, you would also have to learn to be with others. Each of us will generally use their social skills in order to achieve the objectives, thus transforming the relational contexts in problem-solving situations. The quality and quantity of accomplishments will affect the self-assessment of the skills acquired and the quality and quantity of future interactions that will be activated (social reinforcement). Those who know how to define and recognize situations, identify the right behaviors to be activated and evaluate their effectiveness based on the feedback coming from the others, will sail through such situations. The acceptability of the behavior of a person would be determined by rules, whose compliance with would allow to predict the "effects" that these will have on other people.

Those who possess social skills, in other words, have learned when to speak, when not to speak, what to say, to whom, when, where and how. This enables them to "elicit positive responses in others and avoid negative feedback", the development of social skills actually requires the ability to make predictions on the quality and quantity of behavioral repertoires people expect from us; a socially skilled person is one that is able to listen and be silent when the other speaks, does not interrupt making constant references to him/herself, avoids making too personal and intimate demands if the conversation occurs between superficial acquaintances, and so on. Social behaviors are "context dependent and vary when the context changes": social competence requires the ability to differentiate the behavior in relation to contexts and tasks, to "where", "with whom" and "when" . People with disabilities tend to have a certain rigidity that leads them deal in much the same way with different people. Not to be able to communicate, or communicate badly is a real disability that anticipates failure and unhappiness, as has been pointed out by the theorists of "emotional intelligence" (Brockert, Braten, '97 - Goleman, '95, '98).

School and social skills

School curricula traditionally deal with "cognitive" learning massively, actually neglecting the development and enhancement of social skills, the lack of which now seems correlated not only with failure and early school leaving, but also with borderline antisocial behavior, alcoholism and personality disorders. The presence of Social Skills Training in common school curricula seems to be realized with difficulty due to some biases such as the belief that academic and social learning are two different things and that the teacher's role should be limited, on the one hand, to potentiate school learning and, on the other, to the simple

"control" of social behavior (discipline); a " medical model" prevails, in which pupils with social difficulties are often considered "deviant", "sick" in need of specific curative health interventions, which should take up the case and "return it" to the school without problems, so that school can do its "educational job". When it is not possible to delegate the problem to the social-health system, there is an attempt at separating the problematic child from the rest of the group, organizing various forms of "support," often with the inclusion into groups formed by peers with similar difficulties, in which teaching social skills is particularly ineffective, as "skills" learned in these contexts may not be transferred to integrated environments, more complex and heterogeneous. With regard to the type of social skills, the most important ones in school are considered those related to academic success, such as follow the rules, reply upon request and respond in a relevant way, interact with teachers and peers especially on issues associated with school work; the increase in skills that foster the relationship with peers, how to converse, to initiate and maintain valid interactions, be assertive, seem to be underestimated. In other words, interventions aimed at the reduction of inappropriate behavior through behavior control procedures are emphasized, rather than those aimed at the strengthening of pro-social behaviors and their generalization in the classroom, which instead make the basis of the " social competence".

The skills considered necessary to a good scholastic adaptation are, according to Walker, 28, which can be grouped into five broad categories: related to class life (listen to the teacher, follow instructions, rules, seek assistance for their needs); basic interaction (use an appropriate tone of voice, initiate interactions, listen, respond, speak in an appropriate manner, take turns, ask questions, keep conversations); get along with others (make positive statement at the right time, share own things with others, comply with the game rules, help others, touch others adequately); make friends (care physical appearance, smile, compliment, invite others, call them by name); coping (negotiate, express emotions and feelings, adequately address the others' aggression, manage failure, say no). Here's a detailed set of relationships that can occur at school: Walker, Irvin and Noel (1992)

Adaptive behaviours	students / students	Unadaptive behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☺ Cooperate with classmates ☺ Support mates (help, encourage, defend from bullying) ☺ Keep one's opinion respecting the others' ☺ Recognize one's own strengths but also one's own limits. ☺ Keep calm ☺ Reach one's own goals ☺ Act independently ☺ Say positive things about others' behaviours ☺ Tag along with mates ☺ Organize forms of tutoring (invite a mate in difficulty to do homework, praise the shy and the insecure highlighting his/her abilities in some areas). ☺ Negotiate effective solutions in conflicts with mates/teachers 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☹ Disturb the activities of the group ☹ Attack others trying to get what you want with arrogance ☹ Tease mates for their physical or behavioral difficulties ☹ Boast too much ☹ Interrupt others preventing them to expose their ideas ☹ Keep calm for a short time ☹ Reach few goals ☹ Suffer passively the influence of others ☹ Ask for help continuously ☹ Attack in an indirect way. ☹ Discredit and devalue mates and their ideas using phrases such as: "You understand nothing". "Shut up". ☹ Aggregate only some mates isolating the others ☹ Create problems and conflicts between mates and teachers

students / teachers

- ☺ Follow the rules
- ☺ Call for assistance
- ☺ Work autonomously
- ☺ Cope with different tasks
- ☺ Control anger
- ☺ Respond adequately to teachers' corrections
- ☺ Listen to the teacher carefully
- ☺ Perform requests promptly

- ☹ Spoil objects and materials
- ☹ Compete ignoring rules
- ☹ Take things belonging to others
- ☹ Have outbursts of anger
- ☹ Address aggressiveness towards others.
- ☹ Provoke the teacher
- ☹ Ignore the teacher
- ☹ Say bad words/make gestures
- ☹ Disturb

teachers / teachers

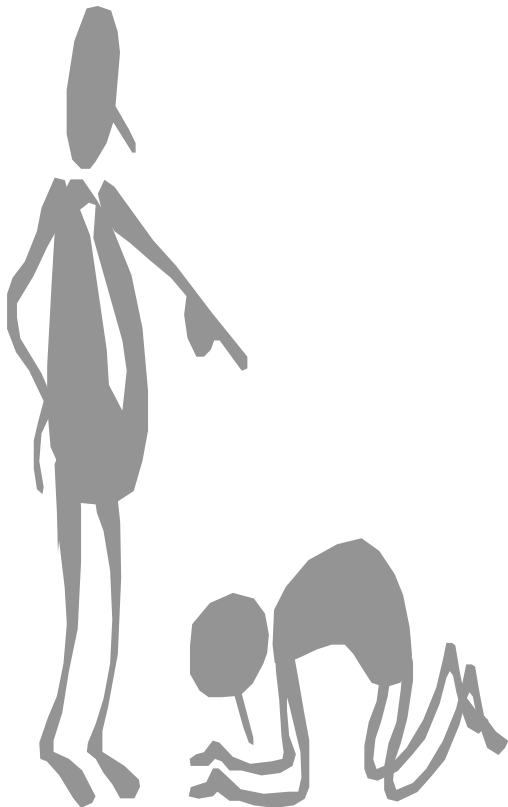
- ☺ Follow the rules
- ☺ Compete respecting the rules (assert themselves without the need to discredit the other)
- ☺ Change our behaviour if we are told it is wrong
- ☺ Cooperate with colleagues, be willing to make one's experiences known and to learn about the others'
- ☺ Support colleagues and recognize their merits
- ☺ Be able to listen
- ☺ Keep one's opinions in an assertive way
- ☺ Check aggressive reactions
- ☺ Say positive things about others' behaviours
- ☺ Make explicit and transparent observations on the others' behaviour
- ☺ Mediate conflicts

- ☺ Express constructive criticism

- ☹ Ignore rules
- ☹ Compete ignoring rules (report gossip to superiors, suggest the presence of misbehaviour).
- ☹ Persist in one's behaviour even if we are told it is wrong
- ☹ act individualistically or accept collective decisions and then not apply them
- ☹ Act so as to show off one's skills at the expense of a colleague's.
- ☹ speak constantly of oneself, one's own problems, family, health
- ☹ Keep one's own views aggressively: it is always the other that does not understand
- ☹ Boast continuously about one's own competence and the achievements of own students
- ☹ Disqualify a colleague in his/her absence
- ☹ Disqualify a colleague in an indirect way (heavy irony, half-sentences, glances ...)
- ☹ sow discord putting a colleague against another.
- ☹ Express manipulative criticism

AGGRESSIVE, PASSIVE, ASSERTIVE REACTIONS

AGGRESSIVE REACTIONS



Behaviors that have the aim of causing damage to persons motivated to avoid such behavior (not masochistic). (Baron & Richardson).

- Expression of thoughts and emotions on the basis of one's own point of view.
- "Short-term" actions (the negative consequences of the behavior are not considered).
- Struggle for power.
- Direct attack to the receiver, violent and offensive reactions.
- Indirect attack to the person:
 - handling,
 - devaluative behaviors,
 - rational and cold aggression,
 - aggression by "not doing",
 - displaced aggression.

Most common consequences from the perspective of the issuer:

- increased self-esteem at the expense of others',
- uncontrolled expression of emotions,
- contempt of others,
- choice for others,
- achievement of objectives at the expense of others;

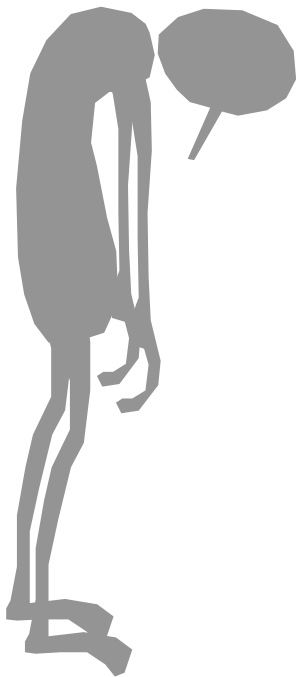
from the point of view of the receiver:

- feeling of humiliation, injury,
- feeling of distrust,
- feeling of frustration,
- failure to achieve the objective,
- avoidance and marginalization of the aggressive.

Lack of contribution to the activation of solution strategies of problematic situations because

- his/her behavior make him/her less efficient, make him/her lose sight of goals, stimulate in the others attitudes of avoidance of the task.

PASSIVE REACTIONS



Behaviors that show the shift of commitment and attention from one's own goals and needs to the needs and expectations of others, until reaching the cancellation of the self

- Inability to express opinions or needs.
- Renouncing conduct with:
 - difficulty in recognizing and affirming one's own rights;
 - apparent indifference.
- Use of indirect methods of communication, hesitant, with messages such as "my opinions are not important, others' are better than mine."
- Inspiration to external models
- Life in function of the others, agreeing to their demands and needs.
- Attempt to obtain the consent of others for fear of rejection or negative judgment:
 - inhibition of emotions to block reactions of anxiety, discomfort, feelings of guilt;
 - avoidance of conflicts;
 - frequent somatization due to the repression of emotions.

Most common consequences from the perspective of the issuer:

- self-denial,
- feelings of inhibition, injury, anxiety;
- delegation to others of own decisions;
- consent for others to choose in one's place;
- failure to achieve the objectives;
- external locus of control (tendency to attribute difficulties and success to external causes);

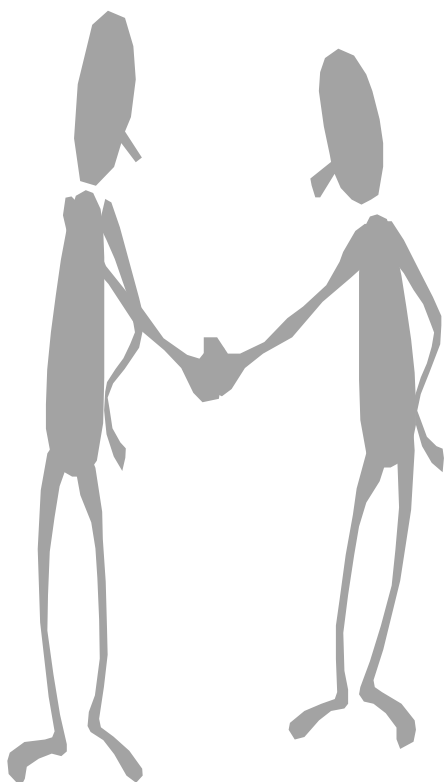
from the point of view of the receiver:

- feeling of guilt or irritation;
- low estimate of the issuer,
- achievement of the objective at the expense of the issuer.

Lack of contribution to the activation of solution strategies of problematic situations because

this kind of interaction allows the others, without substantial efforts, to activate prevarication and manipulation of various kinds and intensity.

ASSERTIVE REACTIONS



"Assertiveness", recent synonymous of "social skills", defines the ability to operate in a relational context and to react to stimuli from the environment in such a way as to make very likely the appearance of positive reactions in others.

- Expression of feelings, needs, and opinions in an honest, direct and socially appropriate way, without doing violence to others but not allowing them even to be aggressive and manipulative against oneself.
- Positive self-image, lack of inhibitions likely to prevent the activation of social skills.
- Appropriate expression of own views without overpowering and offending the rights and sensibility of others.
- Evaluation of short-and long-term effects on self and others.
- Ability to promote among receivers
 - acceptance rather than rejection;
 - collaboration rather than competition;
 - a positive change of behavior.
- Expression of positive feelings (joy, satisfaction, affection).
- Expression of negative feelings and opinions contrary to others maintaining positive relationships with them.
- Maintain self-esteem (not denigrate or autodevalue) even in the presence of failures

Most common consequences from the perspective of the issuer:

- Feelings of self-esteem.
- Expression of feeling and experience in a socially appropriate way.
- Choice for oneself without delegation to others.
- Possible achievement of the objective.

from the point of view of the receiver:

- Clear confrontation, acceptance, cooperation.
- Possibility of free expression of what is felt and experienced.
- Possible achievement of the objective.

Some examples of assertive behaviors

People implementing assertive behavior, finally, are ready to change their opinion, do not claim that others behave as it pleases them, respect them, are not possessive towards them, do not judge them. The use of this style allows to establish positive relationships with others, to manage problematic situations (coping), in order to meet their own and the others' needs. There are situations that put a strain on our assertiveness: the following are examples of possible answers, taking a cue from which everyone will be able to practice, verify the validity of the proposed strategies and suggest new ones, based on their own experience.

Express disapproval, discomfort if faced with inappropriate behavior (specifying which, in order to allow the other to become aware of the unpleasant consequences that some of his behaviors produce) and the behavior that you would like to be implemented:

* A colleague is criticizing another one (very frequent situation) and asks for our opinion, some may experience discomfort and do not want to be involved in the speech. You could then express your disappointment, saying:



" I do not like to talk about others in their absence, I'd love you to avoid involving me in these discussions"

Express desires and make requests: assertive people avoid making demands, for fear of encountering a refusal or annoying; they often think that others must figure out by themselves what you need without having to explicitly express it. Instead, the express clear requests helps others to understand what you want and permits to achieve your goals.

* A teacher would like to address a maths topic he/she considers very important. He/she knows that a colleague is very familiar with this topic and has structured a very effective teaching unit. On meeting him/her:



I would like to deal with this topic, I know you are very competent in this and have structured an effective teaching unit: I would like to ask you to come and make this lesson to my students.

* You know a colleague does not deal with a maths topic you consider very important in his/her class. You should point this out but you also know that by speaking clearly about the thing you risk spoiling you relationship with the colleague, since people rarely accept suggestions. On meeting him/her:



I would like to deal with this topic in my class, I think it is very important, but I do not have a clear idea about how to structure a teaching unit on it. Will you help me? We might then implement the unit in our classes and compare its impact on our students!

* The "boss" has just reproached you for your work. You reply:



I think some of his criticisms are true, but I would have preferred that would make them more gently.

Emphasize the positive aspects: aggressive people tend to use only negative expressions, hoping to get an increase in productivity from others; instead, they get an increase of frustration. A vicious circle thus forms: the more students (or colleagues) feel frustrated, the less they work, the less they produce, the more they are attacked. Emphasize the positive aspects of others, their successes, their efforts, compliment them serves to increase their productivity and create a positive not frustrating environment, where it is pleasant to stay. Demonstrate sincere appreciation for the work of others or for their opinions give importance and attention to the efforts and achievements of colleagues and co-workers increases the ability to create positive and productive relationships.

* A student has played a task in a better way than the last one. The teacher:

😊 Bravo! The work you've done indicates a significant improvement in your performance.

* A student who rarely asks the teacher explanations, approaches the teacher to ask a question related to the lesson. The teacher wants to emphasize the importance of this behavior and says:

😊 I am very pleased that you ask me to explain when things are not clear!

* The class has kept the attention for the whole explanation, taking notes and asking questions. The teacher is very happy with this behavior and says:

😊 I'm very happy of what you have done: you took notes and asked questions on the topic explained. It was a pleasure to teach!

* One student, who frequently turns around and disturbs others, is doing silently the exercise you gave him. You want to emphasize this positive behavior, so you say:

😊 I see you are doing the exercise on your own and you're making an effort. Bravo!

* A colleague during a meeting underlines the success of a student with difficulties, after the others have listed failures and problems; you feel it is important to begin from what a person can do in order to proceed in good teaching and say:

😊 I consider what the colleague said very important: to emphasize a student's skills allows us to define with greater precision what we can do for him!

Make criticisms and observations. There are two types of criticism

CONSTRUCTIVE

They contain information that can be useful, promote dialogue and exchange of views.

- 😊 They express specific criticisms and give instructions on how or what others should do: "It is wrong to do this because " The next time you should do ... "
- 😊 They criticize facts: "Today during the lesson you had books that had nothing to do with my subject on your desk and have read material that I had not given to you."
- 😊 They avoid the use of offending labels, stereotypes and clichés
- 😊 They remain in the theme focusing the attention on one problem at a time.
- 😊 They make use of meta-language and non-verbal aspects of assertive behavior relaxed, non-threatening facial expressions, tone of voice firm but not high, "reassuring." physical proximity
- 😊 They are not made in public.

MANIPULATIVE

They contain information that is not useful for correcting behavior and tend to make the other feel guilty or inferior

- ☹️ they express general criticisms: "You've worked bad!"
- ☹️ they criticize the person, "You are untidy and careless!"
- ☹️ they make use of labels, stereotypes and clichés and offend the other: "Where do you come from?" "You're too young, what can you understand!"
- ☹️ they are misplaced and list a number of things that do not go, judge the personality or the life of a person.
- ☹️ they make use of aggressive meta-language and non-verbal aspects.
- ☹️ they make use of shouting, pointed fingers, menacing facial expressions, gestures, "threatening" physical proximity
- ☹️ they are made in public.

Defend oneself from the aggression or the insistence of others: when you are verbally attacked by the others the most common reactions are: respond to the aggression by attacking in turn or suppress anger or the sense of humiliation you feel, but then grumbling about what you would have liked to say and do and has not said or done. Assertive behavior is based on not doing violence to others, but not even permit that others are aggressive and manipulative towards you.

* During break in the classroom, Tom turns to Dick with a "Oh, nerd ... in the afternoon we go to play football ... you come too, right? Imagine ... you'll be the first to arrive, as always"



Caio pretends not to notice, remains serious and calm and walks away. In a second time, he approaches Tom and tells him: "When you act like this bothers me and I feel hurt by that. I would like you didn't call me nerd and tease me; in addition, I never arrive to training before the others.

* Harry's father has been stopped in the street by a member of a religious association that asks to talk about his views on religion.



Harry's smiles, looks the other person in the eyes and says, "I understand your request, this really is a topic of great interest, but I do not have the habit of talking about this with the first person I meet. Thank you anyway for asking. At the insistence of the other who wants to deal with extreme urgency of the state of his soul, he says: "Thank you again, but I repeat that I do not have the habit of talking about these issues with the first person I meet ("broken record" technique). Now, if you'll excuse me, I would have a lot to do. "

* Among teachers: "I read your report. It amazes me that, with your skills, you have written such trivial things. "



"I'm sorry that you have not appreciated it. If you have suggestions for me to make it less "trivial", I will definitely take them into account! "

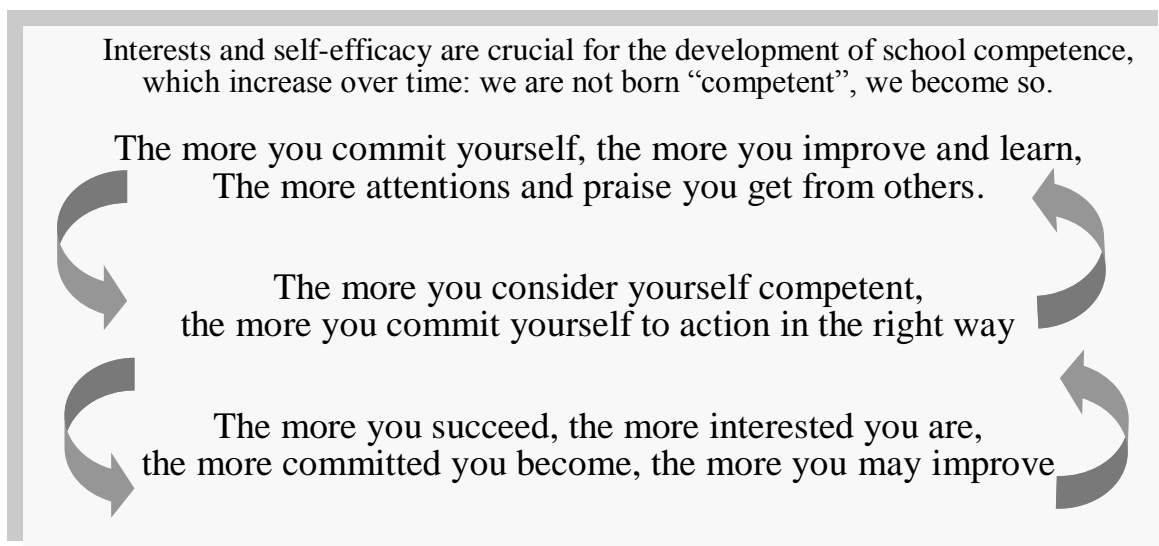
Decision making

What has been written so far clearly highlights how the ability to make effective choices is linked to a number of factors closely related between them.

The analysis of the components such as those considered so far, from self-efficacy to coping, from the ability in managing social relations to assertive behaviour, highlights how decision-making can develop in the presence of the gradual, simultaneous development of all these components and cannot be limited to "extemporaneous" and merely "informative" activities that characterize "guidance" in today's schools. Guidance, let's repeat it means to enable indecisive students to benefit from a "training" able to cause:

- an increase in the level of confidence in themselves;
- an increase in the ability to face and solve problems (problem solving);
- the development of the the ability to introduce oneself, start and maintain satisfactory social relationships, negotiate successful solutions to conflicts;
- the increase of decision-making skills.

How is an effective school-professional choice made? Let's try to outline a path: what drives a person to choose is interest, which is formed over time by being engaged in activities and having succeeded, received praise and appreciation for how they have been carried out. This leads, as we have seen, to an increase of self-efficacy, which is the belief of being able to learn what it needs to succeed well in certain types of studies, in some work, which facilitates the development and consolidation of interests in activities in which we believe to be more successful.



Underlying all of this are **values**, what is important for the person, what we expect to be able to meet through an activity

Use one’s abilities in the best way	Work for the others’ sake	Work with others
Work independently	Be creative	Earn well and have security
Manage others’ work	Reach good results	Have prestige

Values that develop as the person grows thanks to the experiences he/she does; are influenced by what the environment in which he/she lives/works considers important; are due to the knowledge and skills acquired. In short, in order to promote effective school-professional choices we need to ask ourselves:

- ① What are my interests?
- ② What are my beliefs of self-efficacy?
- ③ Am I convinced that I could attend the study/do the work I am interested?
- ④ What are my true abilities?
- ⑤ What values and aspects of study/work are important to me?
- ⑥ How much are my chances of completing what I would choose?
- ⑦ How many chances do I have of completing what I would like to choose?

An important factor in making educational and professional choices are reflections on the skills, ability, feelings, ideas, plans that have to do with one’s future.

OK Thoughts	Not OK thoughts
Realistic thoughts (based on documented information).	Unrealistic thoughts (based on hearsay, unrealistic fantasies, not referred to documented information).
Positive thoughts Optimism, active and supportive thoughts, investigating more proposals or solutions, seek mediation and compromise.	Negative thoughts Pessimism, catastrophic thoughts, fixation on a single alternative "All or nothing".

Another important factor is the dimension decision-indecision.

Determined people generally show high scores of decision-making (active engagement, attention, precision), have good self-knowledge and knowledge of the the school situation (expectations/goals), have internal locus of control (the decision-making responsibility is placed within themselves: what I'll do depends on me) and good self-esteem; they may require further help in the implementation phase of the choices (determined people with difficulty in the implementation phase); may tend to choose the first options available to avoid the stress caused by external pressures (determined people with an attempt to avoid conflicts); can have high rates of anxiety, low self-esteem, average values in self-knowledge, in the locus of control and in the ability to exercise control over events (worried determined people).

Uncertain people generally have moderate values for anxiety, locus of control and self-esteem, they have little clarity on their own interests and lack of self-knowledge, have difficulty making decisions and show tendency to postponement, have the presence of attention problems, negative self-talk and confused reasoning, perceived sense of inadequacy to the choices, may have a tendency not to decide because of the number of options considered (many interests and abilities) and external pressures, especially for high levels of expected return (not decided multipotential).

Hesitant people generally have moderate values for anxiety, locus of control and self-esteem, have little clarity on their own interests and lack of self-knowledge, have difficulty in making decisions and show tendency to postponement, have attention problems, negative self-talk and confused reasoning, perceived sense of inadequacy for choices, may have a tendency not to decide because of the high number of options considered (many interests and abilities) and of external pressures, especially for high expected performance levels (multipotential hesitant people).

As for the solution of problems, decision-making strategies can be classified as:

UNPRO DUCTIVE STRATEGIES

- ☹ think negatively, to how unlucky you are, what you cannot do...
- ☹ so it's useless, what matters is only luck ... or recommendations" (external locus of control);
- ☹ worry about your future, for not having a clear idea, not really knowing what your interests are, your efficacy beliefs, aspirations, values, skills;
- ☹ blame yourself for not being able to have clear ideas;
- ☹ fatalistically expect something to happen, that a "stroke of luck" gives guidance on the choice to be made;
- ☹ ignore the problem and postpone continually the search for information

PRODUCTIVE STRATEGIES

- ☹️ spend more time with friends and avoid the topic
- ☹️ release tension in different ways: get numb, drink, smoke, stay out late at night, have fun "forcibly"
- ☹️ isolate yourself
- 😊 think positively, be convinced to be able to make effective choices, rely on your own abilities (internal locus of control) and interests. Carefully evaluate your values and the priority aspects that you wish to take into account;
- 😊 work hard to solve problems, collect information on schools, universities and professions, to make order among the information you possess;
- 😊 look for the things people considered OK would do, consult them, ask them how they chose, the procedures followed, the strategies activated;
- 😊 relax and take things calmly, small steps, do not want to do everything at once;
- 😊 physical activity to relieve tension, "feel well in your body."

To gather information on educational/professional choices you should:

- 😊 Ask questions about the characteristics of a certain course of study / work to:
 - Parents
 - Teachers
 - People who
 - follow that course of study
 - carry out that work
 - Guidance professionals at
 - University
 - Chambers of Commerce
 - Provincial Offices / Training Centres
 - Consultants for the development of youth entrepreneurship
 - Surf the Internet
 - Enter your Curriculum in databases of sites on the Internet
 - Go to your school, talk with teachers, students and the secretarial staff
 - Read schools / colleges / regional training courses information brochures
 - View CDs, DVDs and more
 - Observe people who
 - follow a course of study
 - carry out the work you are interested
 - Visit High Schools / Universities
 - Attend guidance courses at the universities
 - Visit workplaces
 - Attend Stages, do trial periods
 - Follow television programs about school and professional choices.

ASK YOURSELF:

- How many years of
 - school
 - training
 are necessary?
- Which training profile do you get with that type of study?
- How much is it required on the market?
- What skills are needed?
- Which interests does that type of studies, that work meet?
- Which efficacy beliefs are necessary?
- What values are satisfied?
- How far is the place of study / work far from home?
- How many hours of study / work does it require?
- How much can you earn with that work?
- Which career prospects does it offer?

To make an effective choice it is important to **set a professional goal**, list your interests, efficacy beliefs, skills, values, then list all the professional options and choose the ones that allow you to meet the desired objective. Once all the options that do not appear to meet the professional objective stated, compare the professional options. To make this comparison it may be useful to employ the expected utility model (Edwards, Gati, 86)

Grid for the calculation of the expected utility

Professional options	I Aspect		II Aspect		III Aspect		Total
	Utility	Probability	Utility	Probability	Utility	Probability	
A							
B							
C							

Instructions for filling

List in the left column the options (professions) able to satisfy the objective.

② Write at the top, ordering them from the most to the least important the aspects the person considers to be essential in an ideal profession (eg. chance of a good career, psychological well-being, distance from place of residence, desired salary, opportunity to travel, etc. .)

③ With "Utility" we mean how important it is for the person that the work meets the indicated aspect. Assign the utility a value 0-10

④ With "Probability" we mean how likely it is, objectively, that that work meets the indicated aspect. Assign the probability a value 0-1

⑤ Example: Option = Upper school teacher Aspect1 = Psychological well-being in the job. A person who, despite being convinced that the psychological well-being in the relationship with students is essential to perform well in the profession indicated, recognizes not to be able to have a good relationship with adolescents will attach a high value to utility (9-10) and a low value to probability (0.1), so the probability that the chosen aspect is realized with that profession is very low.

⑥ Multiply the utility value for the probability for each aspect, and sum the products obtained for all the aspects indicated. Be sure to perform the operations in horizontal succession and for each option

⑦ Compare your scores for the various options: the highest should give the most advantageous option

A trivial example: the choice of a car

Options	I Aspect Cost: not more than € 25.000			II Aspect Consumption: no more than 1 lt per 10 km			III Aspect Speed: over 200 km/h			Total
	Utility	x	Probability	Utility	x	Probability	Utility	x	Probability	
Ferrari	10	x	0 = 0	9	x	0.2 = 1.8	7	x	1 = 10	11.8
500 FIAT	10	x	1 = 10	9	x	1 = 9	7	x	0 = 0	19
1600 GOLF	10	x	0.9 = 9	9	x	0.8 = 7.2	7	x	0.6 = 4.2	20.4

The most advantageous choice for a person with these requirements will be likely to be the third. The example reported only three aspects and three options, but you can add others, which allow you to define more precisely the most useful choice to be made. It is important, to use this model, to have already identified a limited number of options (not more than 5-6) because in the presence of a longer list, the calculation and the comparison could become more difficult.

Once you have made your selection, you need to gather any other missing information:

- Location of the school / faculty / work.
- The materials of the 1st upper year / college / required tasks.
- Extracurricular Activities in the Educational Offer Plan / courses and other activities that could be done to achieve the chosen profession.
- When to enroll to chosen upper school/ faculty.
- Go to enroll with parents and / or friends
- Find out about the books to buy, the date of the beginning of classes, hours of attendance, needed material to take with you.
- Inquire on the timetables of public transport, and other costs of subscriptions to get to the chosen venue
- Investigate the possibility to "try" the work during the summer.

communicate to others what you have decided:

- ☺ Tell the school / the university faculty / the profession you thought to, indicating how you have come to this decision (through the analysis of your characteristics, interests, self-efficacy beliefs, skills and values, the characteristics of the course of study , the university, the job);
- ☺ justify your choice (option that meets interests, self-efficacy beliefs, values more than others);
- ☺ listen carefully to the views of the people you consider important to communicate your decision (parents, teachers, friends, partners)

In the presence of replies showing lack of satisfaction for the communicated choice:

- ☺ listen to what the other person says
- ☺ take the positive aspects of his/her speech
- ☺ in case of proposal of other options
 - consider the positive aspects and discuss it with the other
 - highlight the contrast with your own choice
- ☺ review the steps that have led you to make the first choice in the light of the suggestions received
- ☺ refer the suggestions to your own situation, interests and motivations: remember and remind others that the educational and career choices are personal and that what is worth for one person may not be so for another
- ☺
- ☺ riportare i suggerimenti alla propria realtà, interessi e motivazioni: ricordarsi e ricordare agli altri che le scelte scolastiche e professionali sono personali e che ciò che è valido per una persona può non esserlo altrettanto per un'altra;
- ☺ thank you for the suggestion given.

For further details, graphs, questionnaires and materials consult the source: Soresi/Nota, *Interessi e scelte*, GIUNTI 2000.