

PEDAGOGICAL INPUT

for the adventure of family life



46_Accept and name feelings

Do you sometimes just feel good and then feel insecure again? Are you sometimes plagued by fears and then have full confidence in life again? Our feelings are quite different. Some are pleasant, others quite unpleasant. Most people only want to feel enjoyment and think if difficult feelings are ignored, they will go away. But that's not the case. Even with children, we do not want to perceive, acknowledge and recognise all feelings. We then downplay: "It's not that bad." "It doesn't hurt that much." "Don't be so upset about it." "Now stop crying."

Suppressed unpleasant feelings are shifted into the unconscious.

If we only want to feel joy, excitement and love, then it means we reject half of our inner life, half of ourselves. Children do the same when they realise some of their feelings – fear, sadness, anger, frustration – are not allowed. They know exactly what the parents want to see and what not. But that doesn't do them any good, because they learn to reject a part of their being.

If we do not want to accept grief, fear, loneliness, jealousy and anger in ourselves and suppress them, then these feelings remain in us and work in our unconscious. You can't just dissolve them. Repressed anger grows into rage. Repressed fear turns into panic. Constant self-denial can lead to depression. A lot of physical pain is also due to unconscious feelings that have never been processed, which can then trigger constant tension, nervousness or fears, for example. Children need our help to process their difficult feelings!

Children can still express their feelings well directly.

They have no problem showing their sadness, anger, or frustration. Many adults can hardly stand it and want a happy child again quickly. Then it is played down: "It's not that bad!," or distracted: "Would you like an ice cream?," or reprimanded: "Now stop it! That's enough!" But that doesn't help the children, because left alone with their feelings, they don't learn to deal with and process them.

What they need now is adults who are aware of their feelings, help to name them and *be* with the children and these feelings, who show genuine interest: "I see you are very angry/sad/frustrated/lonely/anxious. What makes you so angry/sad/frustrated/lonely/anxious? Tell me about it?" And then you listen with interest! You don't have to *do* anything. It's enough just to *listen, just be there, give space for the feeling*, being interested in the child's inner world. You don't have to do anything else. In this way, the child learns several things at the same time: "One can talk about anger, sadness, fear. My parents listen to me, so it's OK to have those feelings. I am not alone with my difficult feelings. I'm not wrong because of how I feel." In this way the child is seen, with what is inside it. When people feel seen, they relax. There is hardly a greater gift. You can already give an infant words for his feelings: "Ah, that seems to be scaring you right now?" And then you just pick it up so it can be cuddled and calmed down.

Accepting feelings strengthens the relationship with oneself and others.

The more we accept children's feelings without pushing them away, the better they learn to deal with them constructively and accept themselves as they are. If people can accept their feelings benevolently, they can do the same with other people. This strengthens relationships because everyone feels recognised and taken seriously for who they are.

Text: Astrid Egger | www.familie.it