

# RESILIENCE: FROM INSPIRATION TO ACTION

LIFE STORIES, REFLECTIONS, EXPERIENCES

Foreword by Dr. Boris Cyrulnik



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International Catholic Child Bureau

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## FOREWORD

It all began with a vague idea: when children are damaged by serious aggression or adverse circumstances, in most cases this has negative consequences for their development, which is understandable. Nevertheless, some children, against all the odds, struggle, suffer and somehow manage to retain high levels of development.

In 1946, when John Bowlby made that remark to René Spitz, who together with Anna Freud was taking care of hundreds of small children whose families had been killed in the London bombings, he was told that he should first of all care for children who were doing badly, which made sense... yet at the same time, this mysterious idea warranted further reflection: how did children continue to develop, while war, orphanhood and emotional deprivation should, logically, have finished them all off?

The word “resilience” has been used for a long time. It comes from the Latin “re-silire” that gives us the words “recover”, “rebound”, “be resilient”. Commonly used in English, it means “bouncing back”. The term was used in metallurgy to calculate the capacity of a material to resist before breaking. André Maurois used the word as a metaphor when speaking of Georges Sand, as did Paul Claudel when he referred to the reaction of US bankers during the 1929 crash. Solnit and other psychiatrists have also given this meaning to the word, expanding its initial metallurgical use to create a psychological metaphor describing how these children manage to resist and continue developing. Indeed, Emmy Werner is recognised as the mother of this metaphor, which is fitting, as her work illustrated the idea so well. In 1955 she started a study of a large group of children born on an island in Hawaiï. Later in that study she focused on a group of 201 children born in high risk families (poverty, conflictual relations, mental illness, alcohol abuse...). This study lasted about thirty years. The findings showed that approximately one-third of the children at high risk had succeeded in building a positive life: over the years they had displayed resilience and had grown into mature adults. The other children born in high risk families had developed a variety of serious problems in their childhood and youth. “These children have something to teach us”, claimed Michael Rutter. With this statement, he overturned a prevailing belief: we must care for the children that go wrong, of course, but we can also wonder by what mystery some children who have suffered, have held up and continued developing harmoniously.

Whenever a metaphor appears which expands the original meaning of a word to give it a new meaning, it is the marker of a change in mentality. Caring for damaged children by treating them and bringing them back to their previous state, is called “healing”. Caring for children whose development has been altered by an unfortunate event in their existence or by adverse environments, by helping them back on the road to development, without this implying a return to their previous state, is called “resilience”. Children retain in their bodies, brains and life stories, the neurological and emotional tracks of past misfortunes and difficult representations of themselves. But they can also experience increasingly harmonious development. This neo-developmental process is called “resilience”. The idea is accurate, now all we need to do is to turn it into a concept.

Agronomists have said for a long time that land is “resilient” when, following a natural disaster (fire or flood), life reappears. However, the fauna and flora are not the same as before. In 1970, I had the opportunity to witness the Cape Sicié fire on the Var coast.

The mountain was red with the blazing pine trees. The black sky and the sea, covered with ashes, gave off a tragic yet wonderful atmosphere. For three years we saw nothing but the crooked fingers of charred tree trunks. Then, the cysts healed and pink and white flowers began to bloom. The oaks grew taller as they were no longer in the shadow of the pine trees. Small birds quickly adopted this new habitat and large eagles circled since they could better see small game running through the bushes. Life had reappeared, beautiful and harmonious, but it was not the same pursuit of life under the pine trees that existed before the fire. I know of no more beautiful metaphor for resilience.

What remains now is to develop a philosophical and scientific concept.

When the word “evolution” appeared, it was also a metaphor which at first described a sequence of events (ex-volvere). It referred to changes in military terms, of moving through the ranks, of showing what could be done on the battlefield. The word gained its scientific meaning in the 19th century thanks to a geologist named Lyell and a biologist named Darwin, after which it came to mean “the gradual transformation of a living species, moving towards the establishment of another species”. Indeed, resilience belongs to this evolutionary philosophy: it describes new development occurring after a first evolution has been hampered by a traumatic event or by an adverse environment. It is therefore not surprising that the concept of resilience causes the same conflicts as that of evolution. This dynamic epistemology enables us to conceive of a very different world from that described by fixed epistemology. When nothing moves, the scholar ends up with a stable worldview, a tranquilising certainty. But do you know any world that does not move? The universe continues to rotate and dilate, a person ages from birth onwards, social groups continue to adapt to technical pressures and philosophical debates. And it is within this constantly moving context, that all living beings must pass through continual transformations. The concept of “evolution” is a diverse, yet coordinated phenomena: the evolution of an organism cannot occur outside of its ecological and socio-cultural context. The new resilient evolution cannot occur outside of the family, society and collective stories.

The only way to coordinate this diverse concept is to practice thinking in terms of systems: in the respiratory system, oxygen flies through the air, it passes through the solid wall of the lungs and is transported by the vehicle of red blood cells floating in liquid plasma. All subsystems are different in nature, but the way they work together enables us to understand how we breathe.

In the same way as we describe the evolution of organisms, climate change, social evolution or changing attitudes, we can also describe the resilience of individuals, institutions, social groups and stories. Nobody is able to learn everything, we must learn to work in teams, which is not suitable for everyone despite the evidence shown by significant bodies of research.

This handbook is a good example of this new epistemological attitude, it describes facing unavoidable suffering in human life, confronting it and then recovering positive development, where possible.

## FOREWORD

I congratulate the International Catholic Child Bureau and the Research Unit on Resilience of the Sacred Heart Catholic University in Milan, led by professor Cristina Castelli, who have worked together to bring us this fundamental reflection. For us, educators, psychologists, doctors and sociologists, resilience offers practical consequences. Psycho-educational workshops are another way of educating and helping.

There is still a lot to accomplish, but what a fantastic task.

**Doctor Boris CYRULNIK**  
Director of Teaching  
University of Toulon-Var, France

## INTRODUCTION

We hope that this handbook lives up to the high expectations of those living through difficult realities, as well as those seeking concrete support for their work with children.

Today, globalisation is more prevalent than ever, and rather than promoting the development of human beings and the greater integration of peoples, it has instead brought with it increased identity issues and contradictions. This has in turn led to a kind of polarisation among the most sceptic in society, between rigid fundamentalism on the one hand and relativism on the other, which brings with it a plethora of negative consequences, including wars, violence, poverty and marginalisation. Within the situation, resilience could serve as a “compass” to guide the work of people who care for children living in situations of vulnerability.

Resilience has probably existed since the appearance of humans on Earth. Some would even say since the appearance of life on earth. However, scientific interest in resilience only dates back to the 2nd half of the 20th century. In the field of childcare, psychologist Emmy Werner and her colleagues’ longitudinal study on the development of a group of children on the island of Kauai (Hawaii) which lasted for over thirty years, clearly highlighted children’s capacity for growth in the face of great difficulties. We call this resilience.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Emmy Werner had herself been a refugee, arriving in the United States after escaping Nazism in Germany, her country of origin. She had rebuilt her own life after this dramatic event. However, at the start of her research, even she did not predict the resilience of children born in highly difficult conditions in Hawaii. Indeed, observing their development, she was “pleasantly surprised” by some of their life stories, in the words of Argentine psychologist Ramon Lascano. From the moment of this discovery, she began to pay more attention with her team to the aspects of the children’s lives that had made such development possible. Thus, the study of resilience is not based on a strictly theoretical approach, but on observations about life made by open-minded researchers.

Since Werner’s study into resilience, there have been hundreds more, nevertheless, resilience is still first and foremost a fact of life and needs to be understood as such, as a preliminary source of information, a preliminary guide on how to move forwards. Understanding resilience requires great deal of attention to life in all its forms and expressions, a challenge that goes beyond purely scientific research frameworks. It offers many nuanced insights that science often corroborates afterwards. Any discoveries, must however be described with caution as making generalisations in the human sciences is always risky (even when they are supported by statistics!).

When we take these elements into account, we are able to understand that resilience training is not delivered like a geometry class, or via the “simple” transmission of knowledge from one who knows to one who does not know. Nor is resilience to be found within a manual of procedures or intervention techniques.

This handbook aims at gradually familiarising the reader with the complex reality of resilience. It combines life experiences and reflections, and enhances them with multiple examples and testimonials. Thus, by changing our outlook on life, drawing on a number of examples, such as the practical assisted resilience exercises for educational workshops

suggested in this handbook, we can all enrich our own practice.

Our goal is to build an effective support structure that offers safe environments, means of expression and instruments tailored to children's needs, in the knowledge that "a notebook, a pen, a student and a teacher can change the world" (Malala, Nobel Peace Prize, 2014).

**Cristina Castelli and Stefan Vanistendael**

**Objective:** To learn about and understand the importance of changing our perspective on children experiencing vulnerable situations, as a necessary pre-existing element for the implementation of resilience processes.

*"How many ready-made diagnoses make us ill, reducing and removing all hope! And that same fixed judgment also reduces the richness of reality, of human beings who should at the very least astonish us, if not leave us in complete awe."*

Alexandre Jollien, *Le métier d'homme*, p. 32

*"There was once a city where all the inhabitants were blindfolded. One day, a foreign prince who was crossing the country arrived with his courtiers at the foot of the city ramparts. The inhabitants soon heard tales of an amazing animal that the prince rode upon. It was an elephant. But there were no elephants in their country and they did not know what elephants were.*

*The city folk decided to send six people to touch the animal, and to describe it to all the others.*

*Upon their return, the six were welcomed by the people, who were impatient to know what an elephant might look like.*

- Well, said the first man, an elephant is like a big, rough fan. He had touched the elephant's ears.*
- Absolutely not, said the second. It's like a pair of long bones. He had touched its tusks.*
- Not at all, said the third, it looks like a thick rope. He had touched the trunk.*
- You don't know anything, said the fourth, it is as powerful and solid as a tree trunk. He had touched the elephant's legs.*
- I don't know what you mean, said the fifth, an elephant is like a wall that breathes. He had touched its sides.*
- That's not true, cried the sixth, an elephant is like a long piece of string. He had touched the tail.*

*The six inhabitants began to argue, each refusing to listen to the description of the other five. The other people became impatient, not knowing which one was right.*

*Disturbed by the noise, the prince came to see what was happening.*

## MODULE 1: A CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

- *Sire, said an old man, we sent these men to discover your elephant and each has told us something different. We do not know what to think.*

*The prince listened as the six described the elephant again.*

*After a silence, the prince said:*

- *What all these men say is right and true, but each has only touched one part of the animal, and therefore only knows part of the truth. As long as each thinks that he is the only one who is right, you will not know the whole truth. Do the different colours of the kaleidoscope not join together to form one beautiful picture?*

*The prince then described the elephant by collecting together the six descriptions. And the townspeople finally knew what the extraordinary animal looked like."*

Tale inspired by *L'alphabet de la sagesse*, Johanna Marin Coles and Lydia Marin Ross

### GROUP REFLECTION

After reading the story, reflect upon the following:

- What does the story teach us?
- In what way could this learning be applied to a support relationship?

The experience of focusing on only part of the truth has long characterised approaches and methods of care for children in vulnerable situations. Thus, in many orphanages, the support staff have tended to see young orphans as "unfortunate" children, destined to remain in this condition throughout their lives.

Children have not been viewed as whole beings, but rather as merely vulnerable, as a result of their experiences. This lack of projection and of a sense of hope for a change in life circumstances has led support staff to reduce care work to mere assistance, depriving children of the stimulation and support needed to promote and strengthen their resources and talents. Meanwhile, in the medical community, the evaluation of children's health has been reduced to measuring the extent of the damage suffered due to experienced events. The life story of Alexandre Jollien, a philosopher with a severe cerebral-motor disability since birth, and the author of numerous books including *Le métier d'homme*, reveals the way in which this limited viewpoint continues to prevail even today, focusing only on the vulnerable and fragile aspects of a person. Jollien describes the extent of the suffering that this can cause.

*"I am abnormal. It has been said about me enough times. I have felt it. Those eye movements that examine every inch of my being have taught me this: those eyes fixed on mine, then moving down my body, until they find the proof that they are looking for, "he is disabled". That journey of the eyes, an insistent quest for the Achilles heel, the weakness... What most people see is my strange gestures, slow speech, ungainly movements. Whatever lies behind that, they ignore. They fix their gazes on my spasms, fixed expression, loss of balance, and judge me quickly without appeal: this is a moron. It's hard to change that first impression, and it's painful to see myself reduced without being able to explain myself. Dialogue is impossible because what a moron says must be moronic. And so the circle closes, contact becomes impossible. One term for my defects: "cerebral palsy", is enough to describe my whole person. That term is a heavy rope used to tie up an individual. The term becomes larger than the reality it purports to describe. When my neighbour disappears under the label of depression, when another person no longer appears to be anything more than a diabetic, widower or "black man", this reduction meted out in the gaze of others weighs us down, bruises our personalities and opens up long-buried wounds.*

*The worst part is that I have long believed that these labels are true, that the equation disabled = unhappy is an established, proven and undeniable law. Even my doctor assured me that I could not, for example, access mainstream education. The label, scientifically proven, could not be peeled off.*

*How many ready-made diagnoses make us ill, reducing and removing all hope! That same fixed judgment also reduces the richness of reality, of human beings who should at the very least astonish us, if not leave us in complete awe. Daily experience has sometimes delightfully ruined these established truths. The paralysed person who everyone has (pre)judged as unhappy lifts the mood of those who surround them, while the intellectual elite, destined for sumptuous careers, flounders in a terrible malaise.*

*I believe that human beings are astonishingly complex. Do we really identify as being "depressed", "blond", "flat footed", "black", "selfish"? Do these labels really help us to understand the mystery that inhabits each individual? I instead see danger there. I am of course not implying that all judgment should be prohibited, but rather that to avoid injury caused by hasty considerations, we should at least force ourselves to look more closely, differently... and with a great deal of care.*

*Behind the label is a being, a rich, unique and irreducible personality, who the weight of prejudice eventually covers up with a layer of categories. This varnish excludes a simple and innocent approach. The wheelchair, the white cane is what meets the eye. And yet who is using the wheelchair or handling the cane with such virtuosity? Can we see them, do we want to see them? And why should such equipment necessarily be a sign of unhappiness? We must beware of generalities and consider the individual in their whole truth (always denser than what is visible), for it is these external signs that prohibit us from imagining a blind man... as happy."*

Alexandre Jollien, *Le métier d'homme*, p. 31-34



**GROUP REFLECTION**

After reading the story, reflect upon the following:

- What elements for reflection emerge from Alexandre Jollien’s writing?
- How does he define other peoples’ view of him? What are the consequences of this?
- What does he suggest we do to avoid these consequences ?

Alexander Jollien suggests looking more closely, differently at people like him, who live in difficult situations because “[b]ehind the label lurks a being, a rich, unique and irreducible personality, which the weight of prejudice eventually covers up with a layer of categories”. The writer invites us to change our point of view, to broaden our perspective in order to discover whole human beings.

**How do we change our perspective?**

Why do some children exposed to certain difficulties in their everyday life experience fewer problems than others? What can we learn from these children who show “resilience”, and could this help to prevent and intervene in other children’s situations? Can we find areas of strength within troubled children which they could use to build or rebuild their lives?

These questions imply a **change of perspective**. Instead of only studying weaknesses, shortcomings and ways to compensate for them, we first look for strengths and how to utilise them.

Instead of diagnosing problems and offering ready-made solutions, **we diagnose the needs and strengths of individuals, their families and communities, and we try to mobilise these strengths to see whether they enable these individuals, families and communities to find solutions**. Just as Alexander suggested.

To use a metaphor: it is not enough to apply a bandage to a wound. It is the healthy part of the body surrounding the wound that will allow it to actually heal. We must therefore strengthen the body to help the healing process.

Changing our perspective on people, on life, is a key challenge if we want resilience to inspire our work. How can we broaden our vision, so that we not only look for problems but also discover the resources of a person, a family? As situations between issues and cultures can be so different, there is probably no one procedure that can be used to engage with positive potential in a problematic situation. The magic solution does not exist. However, below we offer some practical suggestions. Try them if they seem appropriate, and always with caution. Perhaps you can think of some more.

First and foremost, bear in mind that:

- In many situations it is fundamental to first establish a **positive relationship** with the accompanied person (or family), including a minimum level of trust. It is difficult to imagine accompanying someone without this minimum trust on both sides.
- The supporter must really believe in the search for positive elements, which needs a very open mind, and even implies being willing to **explore** elements that may appear on the surface to be negative, to be risky rather than protective – while at the same time remaining highly realistic.

**1. Learning from solutions discovered by the very people we are trying to support**

A street educator in India told us: before I begin supporting children in a new neighbourhood, I want to know as much as possible about their problems and the solutions they themselves have found, because in the absence of professional support, they have no choice, they have to find solutions to everyday problems. These solutions may be illegal, even violent, but they may also require a great deal of intelligence and practical ability. How do I build upon these qualities, direct them towards positive goals enabling them to live legally and without violence, to develop a lifestyle that can stand the test of time?

**2. The 50/50 method – from a diagnosis of problems to a diagnosis of problems and resources**

*“Instead of only reporting the problems found within a child or a family, I make an effort to devote only half of my report to problems and the other half to resources and positive elements (50/50), and this enables me to build something positive, to initiate growth. If I don’t do this I stay purely focused on reparation, which may be very useful but is insufficient for resilience, which also implies growth”.* This idea comes from a social worker in France, but physiotherapists sometimes spontaneously work in this direction, concentrating on the healthy part of the body to support a part which is not working so well.

**3. A cross-cutting analysis of strengths, weaknesses, risks and opportunities**

Often we analyse these four elements in columns, with one column for each aspect. Such an analysis can be useful. However, this method sometimes lacks subtlety when applied to resilience. By crossing the columns we are forced to open our eyes and to consider possibilities that we had not originally seen:

	Strength	Weakness
Risk	A survivor to very serious difficulties but who becomes arrogant and incapable of deep relationships	
Opportunity		A blind person who becomes a highly sensitive physiotherapist

Let's ask ourselves the question: can we really love a perfect person? Or is it that we admire them? One of the foundations - among others - of love between two people often consists of mutually recognised and respected vulnerabilities and weaknesses.

### 4. The questions "how?" and "why?"

Here it is useful to consider the experience of a social worker from Argentina, when faced with a gang of kids who were committing highly violent acts of theft. When she asked them how they had organised the thefts, she began to perceive the considerable intelligence of these children. Given the violence and the real danger of being killed, these children calmed their nerves by performing small rituals before going on the attack - a form of emotional intelligence! The question "why?" enabled the support worker to discover that these children took risks with their lives in order to feed their families. Violence and illegality were hiding high-level ethics (taking risks with their lives so that others might live). This discovery by the social worker of course inspires a different approach than the simple confinement of these children.

### 5. Questioning, exploring a variety of activities

A social worker in Africa discovered a child prisoner who was all alone without a family, and she offered the child a variety of activities to try (drawing, games...). This enabled her to discover the child's artistic talents, which in turn allowed her to start making slow and shaky progress with him. First of all, he developed his talent for drawing. Then came an interest in batik. From there he came upon the idea of opening a small batik shop when he got out of prison. This led to him developing a real life plan, motivating the child and giving meaning to his life. To realise his dream of opening a store, the child had to learn new skills. On leaving prison, he was able to realise his dream and he made a steady income.

In Module 7 of this Handbook (see p. 82), we will present a number of **educational activities** that aim at allowing the child to talk about the different parts of themselves in order to give back to them their own unique story in all its fullness.

#### TO SUMMARISE

##### Putting the sun back in its place...

The change of perspective suggested by resilience may seem simple and trivial. In fact, this change of outlook is difficult and at the same time fundamental. At the origin of many forward-thinking discoveries made by humanity in any field including the sciences, lies above all a change of perspective, a change of outlook. Discoveries such as the fact that the earth revolves around the sun, the theory of relativity, the number zero, penicillin, Velcro, frames for glasses, or the position of women and children in a given society; the list is endless. One child psychiatrist confirmed the need for this change when working on resilience: a resilience approach is fundamental for them but very difficult, because they have been trained to diagnose problems and offer their expert solution, not to detect and mobilise the positive potential of children and their families, which could rebuild lives.

**Objective:** To clarify the concept of resilience and link it with its concrete applications.

*"When a grain of sand penetrates into the oyster and attacked it, the oyster must protect itself. Such a defensive reaction generates a strong, brilliant and precious jewel: the pearl."*

Boris Cyrulnik, *Un merveilleux malheur*, p. 187

There are numerous grains of sand that have smuggled their way into the lives of children with whom we come into daily contact through our work. The injuries caused may appear insurmountable at first because there has been too much suffering.

In this handbook we tell the stories of people who have been confronted with large, cumbersome "grains" which they have managed to cope with surprisingly well, sometimes even converting them into precious pearls. The precious nature of these pearls is related to the resources that have supported this metamorphosis, which have enabled people not only to "resist" the difficulties of the experience but to emerge victorious by developing a positive spirit, just like the oyster's secret, transforming the experience into "wonderful pain" (Cyrulnik, 1999).

Resilience is precisely this ability in a human being, to cope with difficult life experiences and emerge victorious. This ability is not exactly bouncing back nor a complete recovery, nor a return to a previous state before the injury. This is an opening up towards new growth, a new stage of life in which the scar of the wound is still present, but is integrated into this new life at a deeper level.

The findings of scientists like Emmy Werner about children who managed to grow and develop positively despite their initial vulnerability, has led to questions about contributing factors. Anthony (1974) used a now famous metaphor involving three dolls made of different materials: glass, plastic and steel. The three dolls are hit with a hammer using the same intensity. Obviously, the effects of the blow are different on each of the dolls. The glass doll will break into pieces; the plastic doll will be left with a permanent scar while the steel doll comes to no harm. But are there children made of steel, invulnerable to the blows of life? The answer is clearly no!

Negative life events hit each individual, leaving wounds that heal differently according to the affected person.

Michel Manciaux, Emeritus Professor of Social Paediatrics, has taken the metaphor of the three dolls and given it a more complex interpretation. If we cause a doll to fall over, it will break more or less easily:

- Depending on the nature of the ground: whether it is cement or sand;
- Depending on the intensity of the fall: whether the doll slides or is thrown to the ground;
- According to the material from which it is made: whether glass, plastic or wood.

These three factors influence the impact of hard knocks on a child's life, the type of ground where the child falls, i.e. the **family, social and cultural context** that surrounds them; the type of fall, that is to say the **difficult experiences** the child undergoes, and the strength of the material from which it is made, related to the child's **internal resources** that make them more or less exposed to the difficulties of life. By looking beyond vulnerability and considering the various aspects that come into play in determining child development in vulnerable contexts, we have been able to establish hypotheses which introduce the concept of resilience.

### What is resilience?

Before the 1990s, the word resilience was rarely used. In French and Spanish, it was only used in engineering terms to define the ability of a material to recover its original shape after being bent out of shape under pressure. In English, on the other hand, the term has also been applied for a long time to human qualities that enable an individual to face and overcome the shocks and pressures that life presents them.

In this handbook we will refer to the term resilience in its broadest sense, as a human quality.

The "correct" definition of resilience is widely debated because it is primarily a human reality that lies deep within the roots of life. Any definition therefore remains somewhat artificial. Firstly, we will illustrate resilience by describing the life stories of Anne Frank and Helen Keller. Their stories explain the concept of resilience better than any definition or theory.

### Anne Frank and the writing

Anne Frank was a young Jewish girl who was living in the Netherlands at the outbreak of the Second World War. Nazi Germany invaded her country and occupied Amsterdam, her city. The Nazis started persecuting the Jews more and more, and so Anne, her parents, her sister and four others went into hiding in the secret annex of an office building. They could literally never leave the annex, not even at night. They depended for their food and other needs on the secret help of a few true friends outside. Anne Frank was thirteen years old when this happened. This confinement in a small space, without the possibility of going

outside, was added to the other deprivations of war. Anne Frank lived for more than two years in these extreme conditions and achieved remarkable development, as we can read in her diary.

Towards the end of the war, the secret police discovered Anne and her companions and they were sent to concentration camps. Only Anne's father survived.

The diary was discovered by chance. After the war, it was translated and published in dozens of languages. It illustrates, unwittingly, a set of aspects that resilience researchers would later study in more depth, such as the importance of trusting relationships and of an open and alive faith in God. We do not know what would have happened if Anne had survived the war. But she developed unbelievably well for some two years in extremely difficult conditions.

### Helen Keller and the love of a mother

*"There was a time when I only knew that a hopeless abyss and darkness covered the face of things: then came the love that freed my soul. There was a time when I did not know hope and joy. There was a time when I was angry; I struggled against the wall that held me. Now I am joyful in the awareness of being able to think, act, and be closer to heaven. My life was without past or future: death, the pessimist would say, was, "an end to ardently be wished for". But a little word fell from the fingers of a hand that held mine to bridge the void and my heart jumped in ecstasy to feel alive."*

These are the words of Helen Keller, a girl born in Tuscumbia (USA) in 1880 who had lost her sight and hearing at 20 months, following a serious illness. The love of her mother, who fought against the scepticism that would have condemned Helen to a life of silence and darkness, and the support of her teacher Anne Sullivan, an extraordinary example of a tutor of resilience, enabled Helen to learn to communicate, write and speak. Helen developed an amazing talent that allowed her to become a successful writer and speaker. In 1903, Helen released her autobiography *The story of my life*; the first of a series of texts written by her. After graduating in law, Helen took on many causes for the rights of people with disabilities and many other social issues such as women's suffrage.

Anne Frank and Helen Keller were perhaps unusually gifted girls. But other, less gifted children are also resilient. Let us not forget that resilience lives very often discreetly within "ordinary" people who are not famous.

From the examples of their life stories, we can develop a pragmatic definition of human resilience, without intellectual or scientific pretensions, but which nevertheless allows us to understand a little more about our subject:

**Resilience is the ability of an individual or a group to develop positively in the presence of very great difficulties.**

This is exactly what happened to Anne and Helen, who managed to cope with adverse life conditions by drawing on their own resources.

Our definition is consistent with a number of scientific texts, and is an evolving definition through our ongoing work with people on the ground from different cultures and with different issues. There is in fact no universally-accepted definition of resilience.

## MODULE 2: RESILIENCE

Resilience can manifest itself in different ways. The German researcher Friedrich Lösel, for example, has identified the following aspects:

- *Positive outcomes despite high risks*, for example by overcoming an accumulation of factors related to stress and strain, as in the case of street children who later become educators for other street children;
- *Maintaining skills during danger*. Anne Frank is perhaps the best example of this, she experienced balanced growth for more than two years in extremely difficult circumstances;
- *Recovering from trauma and going on to succeed*. One example would be Oksana Baiul, female figure skating gold medal winner at the 1994 Winter Olympics in Norway. At age two, she was abandoned by her father and at thirteen, she lost her mother, but she later blossomed in her adoptive family.

From a purely practical point of view, what interests us is not the definition of resilience but an idea of what we can do to develop and stimulate it. That is why this handbook focuses on areas that can provide us with “building blocks” that will help us develop resilience.

### TO SUMMARISE

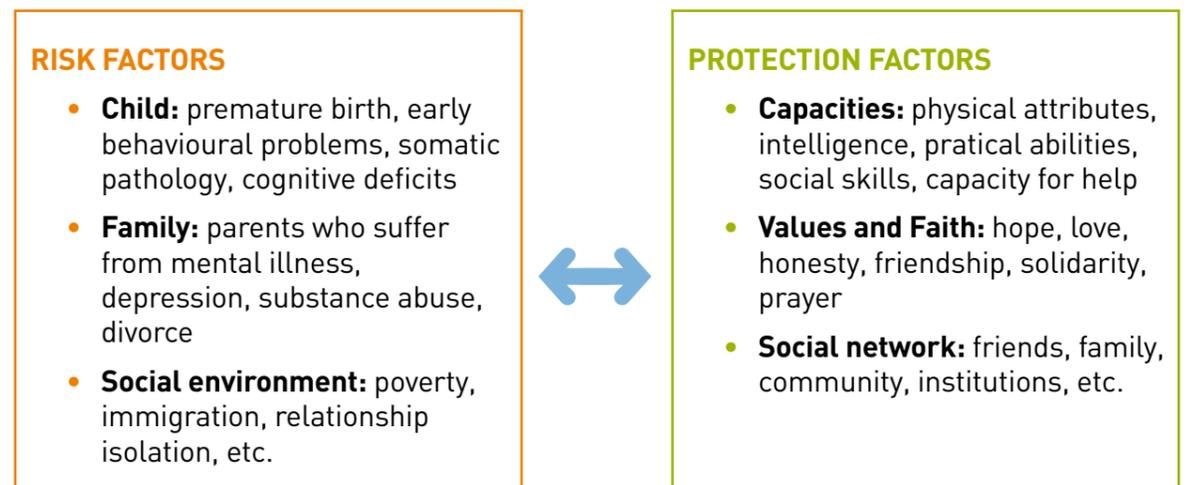
- **Multitude of references:** it is impossible to master all the research and thinking on the subject.  
→ No universally accepted definition.
- **Human Reality:** resilience is not observable in itself but its consequences are recognisable from experiences of life: life journeys that surprise us in a positive way.
- **Difficulty of offering a definition:** we need a pragmatic definition, along with life stories. A person is not resilient but can show resilience.

### The main characteristics of resilience

#### 1. It is not a fixed quality, but a process:

- Non linear, variable, with ups and downs, never absolute;
- Often unconscious;
- Observable in the long term;
- The underlying trend over time is upward-moving;

- Born out of a dynamic balance between **risk factors** - events, conditions or experiences that increase the likelihood of a negative outcome for the child - and **protective factors** - the child’s characteristics, family or social context that reduce the negative impact of adversity on the child’s development. Risk and protective factors are never absolute: each individual has risk factors and protective factors that can change during the course of their life. Understanding the nature of risk and protective factors as perceived individually by a child can help to promote their resilience process. The aim is to reduce the impact of risk factors and strengthen protective factors. That is why we talk about a dynamic balance which can be modified by the actions of a tutor of resilience. Indeed, the tutor of resilience, as we will discuss later in Module 4 (see p. 34), represents a key protective factor for the child, in terms of supporting and enhancing their resilience process. The diagram below shows examples of risk and protective factors:



*“However, the reader must not misunderstand my words. I clearly do not think that “stable” balance means “motionless” balance. Reason would then lead us to the conclusion that the most stable balance possible is death! In the context of resilience, stable balance can only be dynamic. Because risk is inherent in life, and overprotection can destroy long-term resilience, sometimes more surely than violence, although in a less visible and less offensive way for society... In fact, a good education should foster the continuous movement of this balance between risk and protection, opening up the child to new experiences (risks), but in a safe environment and taking into account their limitations (protection). Children will gradually increase their ability to defend themselves and build their life in variable circumstances, whether positive or negative (resilience).”*

Stefan Vanistendael, Jacques Lecomte,  
*Le bonheur est toujours possible – Construire la résilience*, p. 198

### GROUP REFLECTION

- **Brainstorm adjectives / qualifiers / nouns linked to resilience:**

resistance, construction, transformation, reparation, great difficulties, endurance, variables, never absolute, ethical (positive development), length of time, context, community, process...

If time: organise, prioritise, categorise the terms.

- **Find a culturally appropriate image that could symbolise resilience.**

- **Find examples of resilience journeys in daily life.**

A first-hand story could be a good approach (possibly bring someone to visit the group and tell their story).

- **Collectively define resilience, suggest enriching the definition given** linking it to a precise context, precise situation, etc..

**2. Resilience goes beyond the concepts of resistance, recovery, or reparation.** It is the capacity for growth, and consists of two components:

- resistance to destruction, that is to say the ability of the individual to protect their integrity when subjected to severe pressure;
- beyond simple resistance, the ability to build a rich life in the presence of difficult circumstances. Sometimes this will occur “in spite of” the circumstances; and sometimes “thanks to” them, when difficulties stimulate awareness and mobilise hidden resources; often it will be a mixture of both.

**3. Resilience is not a theoretical concept but a reality of life.**

**4. Resilience is a positive, surprising development.** The word “positive” implies a notion of good and bad, and in this sense resilience includes an ethical dimension.

### Concepts linked to resilience

- **Major difficulties / trauma:** The term “major difficulties” is preferable to “trauma” because the word “trauma” is very restrictive. The inspiration of resilience can also help many non-traumatised people. Why deprive them of this inspiration, this support?
- **Capacity:** The word “capacity” does not pose a problem in and of itself, but we must clarify its meaning, because the word “capacity” is often seen as fixed (we either know how to do something or we do not). It is therefore important to clarify that resilience is a variable capacity and not absolute; it is built over a lifetime.
- **Bouncing back:** “bouncing back” is not appropriate to define resilience as the word is associated with physical resilience, where an object goes back into shape / or assumes an earlier position. For a child who has experienced abuse, for example, it is impossible to go back to a time before the abuse, but the child can grow into a new stage of life. Human resilience is a form of growth, more complex than the physical phenomenon of bouncing back.
- **Strength:** The term “strength” is not appropriate because it is too restrictive. The combined strengths and weaknesses of the person are considered together leading to self-acceptance as part of the process of resilience.

### Teaching tips

It is helpful to find a solid example of a life story that clarifies the point we wish to explain, such as the diary of Anne Frank, the life of Nelson Mandela, the life of Michelle Bachelet, Alexandre Jollien, etc. This life story, familiar to many people, acts as an anchor, and enables a kind of **identification** to occur.

This does not prevent each module in this handbook from being enriched through other examples, if possible from the experience of those involved in the workshops, or sometimes stories from other places to show the participants that they share certain life experiences with others. Using examples of well-known people (locally or further afield) can facilitate communication, but in this case, we must clarify that resilience is also, and above all experienced quietly by thousands of ordinary people who are not famous, people we meet in our everyday life.

It is useful to create a small collection of life stories or episodes to illustrate different resilience messages.

## MODULE 3: FACILITATING PROCESSES TO BUILD RESILIENCE

**Objective:** To implement resilience. How to support the construction and development of resilience?

Are there any factors that can contribute to the construction of individual resilience? Why do some people manage to rebuild their life and not others? How can we initiate a process of resilience?

To answer these questions we will analyse the story of Patrick, a former child soldier in Uganda.

Patrick is now 28 years old. At age 11, he was kidnapped by rebels from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and compelled by force to join their army. This is how he recounts the most terrifying moments of his childhood:

*"I was forced to kill many people, including children, and it was very hard for me..."*

*I was terrified and at the same time, I was overwhelmed by a deep sense of guilt because of all those people I had killed unjustly... Every night I asked God for forgiveness for the evil I was doing with my hands."*

One day, Patrick heard a message on the radio to children who, like him, had been abducted and recruited by the rebels:

*"Come home, we'll look after you, we'll help you find your families, your parents."*

This promise of a place to go for support, but especially for acceptance and forgiveness for the atrocities committed, remained engraved in Patrick's memory and became a ray of hope for him.

*"I thought about it for several days, because those words were always present in my mind, and one day I decided, all by myself, to run away and go back home."*

Patrick says he managed to escape, relying only on his own strength. However, he recognises the fundamental role that faith played in this decision:

*"The reason I managed to run away, was because God gave me the strength and the courage to rebel". "Faith in God, he says, gave me the strength to make sense of what happened to me."* This statement is of key importance because it has enabled him to revisit the experience in a different light and to consider it now as a formative experience since it taught him to be brave, to get out by himself and to concentrate on the good side of things, even where they were not at all obvious. Patrick acknowledges that he has discovered a fundamental resource, optimism, which constantly pushes him to seek the bright side.

Finally, the young man recognises the fundamental role of the people who supported him throughout his "journey to rebirth", to use his words.

*"Firstly, my family: my mother, my father and my brothers and sisters, and finally my two wives, who have always accepted me as I am."*

Patrick lost his first wife during an air attack and he later married a woman from his tribe who had also been kidnapped by rebels when she was still a child.

*"We are alike, she and me, and that's because we have so much in common that we can talk about and discuss everything."*

*Then there's my second family, that is to say, my community, my village... we all know each other and we help each other in difficult times. In the evening we all meet around a fire and we talk about our day, our experiences, like a real family... I do not know what I would have done without them... they provide me with support. I participate a lot in the life of my village, including helping to organise a lot of festivals there. I also got to know many people in the centre<sup>1</sup> where I was welcomed and they helped me to stand up again before I came home.*

*Not to mention the Comboni Brothers<sup>2</sup> and other associations that helped me pay for my studies to become a teacher, and the Church, which helped me to grow in my faith in God."*

Patrick says he is "finally happy". He currently lives with his wife and two children; he has a house and land which he cultivates. He works as a school teacher and dreams of starting a small business to sell the products he grows on his land. His greatest wish is that his children will enjoy studying as much as him, go to university and find a good job.

For Patrick, his best achievements are his family, his home, his work and his studies. *"I have all this despite the negative experience that I lived through."*<sup>3</sup>

### GROUP REFLECTION

- What difficulties did Patrick face?
- What resources came into play and supported Patrick when he faced up to his difficulties, enabling him to initiate a resilience process?

1 - Patrick is referring to one of the many emergency centres for child soldiers who have fled the rebel army.

2 - The Association of Comboni Missionaries in Gulu (Uganda) was founded to assist the many people with AIDS in the country. Its many initiatives include a programme of study grants for marginalised children.

3 - Interview carried out as part of the doctoral thesis in psychology of Dr. Marta Landoni, entitled *Resilienza nei giovani adulti. L'influenza dei fattori culturali*.

**Elements to build resilience**

In Patrick’s story we can identify three types of resources that correspond to three distinct areas: “I have”, “I can” and “I am”.

In the table below we find some examples of these resources.

<b>I HAVE</b>	Parents Family Friends Teachers / support workers Religious / community leaders	<b>I BUILD</b>	Trust Love Feeling of belonging
<b>I CAN</b>	School Activities	<b>I BUILD</b>	Skills Initiative Confidence
<b>I AM</b>	Values Beliefs Emotions	<b>I BUILD</b>	Self esteem Life goals Identity

“**I HAVE**” refers to external resources, that is to say, the significant figures that help a child to develop a sense of belonging to a group, and instil trust and love. In Patrick’s case, several actors helped sustain him on his resilience journey: firstly, his family and his two wives, who accept him as he is; despite the “mistakes” that he has committed and which according to him, he has a duty to atone for. Especially his second wife, who feels guilty of having made the same mistakes when she was very young and is therefore able to understand him more than anyone else in the world. Also involved are his home community, who Patrick considers to be his second family due to their shared knowledge and constant sharing of personal experiences “around the fire”; and the people who provided emergency support and helped him to stand up again before he faced the return home; the Association of Comboni Samaritans of Gulu, who offered him a scholarship; and finally, the ecclesiastical community that has allowed him to grow in his faith in God and which was a fundamental resource for him, as we shall see.

→ **Elements of “I HAVE” to build resilience:** Informal support networks (family and friendships) based on relationships of unconditional - or at least very deep - acceptance of the child by at least one adult. This acceptance is probably the basis on which everything else will be built.

Sometimes, situations of extreme stress in children **destroy confidence and in the self and others**. This can happen when a child is exposed to extreme threats and dangers and lacks the protection of adult figures. This awakens negative emotions in the child such as fear, anxiety, helplessness and despair. In these cases, it is essential to help the child regain confidence in others so that they can then rely on their own external resources (see module 5, p. 47).

Teaching activities: Module 7 – Worksheets 2, 3, 6

“**I CAN**” refers to the abilities and skills that a child acquires, learns and develops in different contexts. This expertise enables them to build a sense of self-confidence and develop their initiative. Patrick acknowledges that the reason he managed to break free and run away was only thanks to his courage, as he could only rely on his own strength. In addition, his academic ability enabled him to achieve a major goal: economic independence through his work.

→ **Elements of “I CAN” to build resilience:** social skills and abilities as well as a sense of control to some extent over the events of life and to solve problems.

It is for this reason that in emergency situations, **school** is considered to be a priority requirement because it can restore a sense of confidence and normality to children’s lives. Indeed, it offers the child the opportunity to build positive relationships with peers and teachers and offers life skills and fundamental knowledge to build self-esteem. Similarly, recreational activities are fundamental as they offer **spaces specifically designed for children** where they can express themselves and face pain and loss in a group context which gives them a sense of security.

Teaching activities: Module 7 – Worksheet 1 – Activities 1.1 and 1.2

Finally, “**I AM**” refers to the set of values, personal beliefs and feelings that a child internalises and which represent for them the stable benchmarks of their inner world. These elements contribute to identity-building, reinforcing pride and defining objectives. Yet, it is these very resources that have been most affected by Patrick’s traumatic experiences. For him, the most negative aspect of the experience is the many senseless murders he committed, because they gave him an extremely negative image of himself that contrasted sharply with his values. To atone for this intense feeling of guilt that afflicted him, Patrick used a fundamental resource for him: his faith in God. Indeed, he says, “*every night, I asked God for forgiveness for the evil I was doing with my hands*”. Faith gave him the strength and courage to flee the violence. The message he heard on the radio is another factor that Patrick considered decisive for his journey to “rebirth”; a message to all the children who, like him, had been abducted and forcibly recruited by the rebels, “*If you come home, we’ll look after you, we’ll help you find your families, your parents*”. This message, which allowed him to imagine a picture of himself as innocent and to consider himself as deserving of the care and support of the whole community, somehow washed away the mistakes that had so affected his being and identity.

→ **Elements of “I AM” to build resilience:** A positive and realistic image of the self and finding sense, logical coherence. This latter aspect may be linked to spiritual life and religion.

Sometimes the terror felt during the experience or traumatic event can overwhelm a child and eventually break down their **identity**. **Traumatic emotions** such as fear, anxiety and guilt can take over, and this sense of **powerlessness**, if prolonged, could destroy the image children have of themselves. In addition, the lack of hope and feelings of distress may limit the child's ability to dream and to plan for a positive future without danger. It is therefore essential to encourage the child to rebuild a positive self-image and to accompany the process of assigning logic and meaning to their life experiences. It is precisely thanks to his faith in God that Patrick found the strength to make sense of the events he had experienced and to revisit his experience in a different light, enabling him to assign them a formative value since they taught him to be brave, to get out all on his own and to be optimistic, even in the most difficult situations.

Teaching activities: Module 7 – Worksheet 1 - Activities 1.3 and 1.5

### Practicing resilience: the casita, a method to put resilience into practice

Several methods can be used to summarise a number of protective factors contributing to resilience. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. We are not dealing with absolute truths or ideologies.

In this section we will talk about the casita, a small house, which can be used to represent some general protective factors, by using the rooms of a house. We find these rooms - these protective factors - in many different situations and cultures. These rooms provide general guidance on possible areas of focus for the implementation of resilience, but without entering into detail. The first step is to become aware of the rooms in the casita, which offer us some potential areas of intervention to support resilience. A diagram of the casita can help initially, but ultimately it is better to redesign the house according to the experiences of those involved.

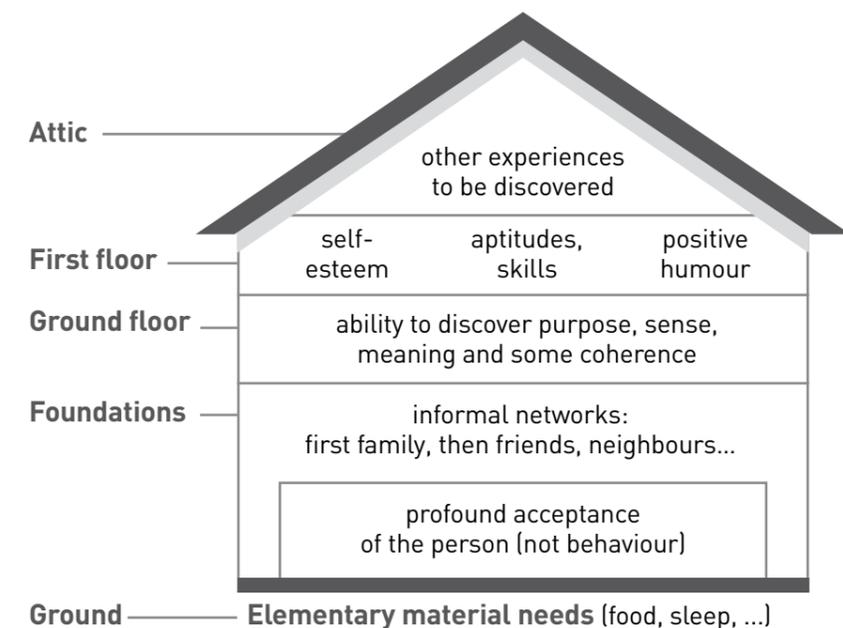
In a second stage, it is important to specify - often case by case - what we can concretely do in each room, so as to make the different protective factors more concrete. We could describe this as putting furniture in the house. During this second stage, we make links between the general rooms in the casita on the one hand, and the concrete and often individual real life situations, on the other.

### The casita method: what is it?

The *casita* method was introduced by the International Catholic Child Bureau (*Bureau international catholique de l'enfance* - BICE) during a training session in Chile in 1995 and since that time it has spread - often spontaneously - among a wide variety of actors in this field across several countries and continents. The method represents protective factors that can be found in many different situations and cultures. Each factor is represented by a room.

At first, this method was used as a **means of communication**, a way to visually present protective factors. Then, the *casita* began to be used as a **working tool**, adaptable to a variety of needs. For example:

- To structure conversations (therapeutic or not);
- To help formulate a strategy for institutional functioning;
- To reflect on the activities of a project;
- To help think about a problem in a specific context (street children or disabled, adopted, abused children, etc.)



Model of the casita - Stefan Vanistendael - BICE

### Some advantages of the casita

- The *casita* method is a **"holistic" tool**: allowing us to take into account complex, multidimensional realities, it situates the child in their context (in their entourage, informal contact networks such as family, neighbours, friends, etc.) and enables us to diagnose problems and resources for each area (in each "room"), while at the same time remaining simple, understandable and accessible.

## MODULE 3: FACILITATING PROCESSES TO BUILD RESILIENCE

- The image of the house creates an **emotional connection** for many people, beyond mere intellectual understanding, which helps to anchor the concept in a concrete human reality.
- **Openness and flexibility:** this is a model that can be used to guide an interview, a process of reflection with great openness and flexibility, and can be adapted to many situations.
- The *casita* allows for the integration of **two contradictory constraints** in the thinking and practice of many practitioners: firstly, the search for general elements that could be valid in many different situations, and on the other hand, the fact that every person and every situation may be different. The rooms in the *casita* represent the general elements, while what is actually done inside a room represents the uniqueness of each situation. All this in a single model.
- The *casita* can be applied in various fields and professions concerned with resilience: from interviews with psychologists, to doctors, judges, teachers, social workers, or even to evaluate the functioning of an institution.

### GROUP REFLECTION

The *casita* can help to find the answer to the question: what can we build together, with the constraints and resources we have?

- **What are the different rooms in the house?**

This helps to clarify and discover the different areas where we can envisage an intervention. Which rooms do we choose and why?

- **What can we do in each of the rooms?**

Link between the general rooms in the *casita* and concrete, real situations, often individual.

We can clarify this:

- Either by asking a **series of questions**, for each room  
Examples for self-acceptance: Who do you turn to when you have a serious problem? With whom do you feel at ease in the house? Who can really help you when you are in difficulty?
- Or by formulating a **series of life rules** (at least a few elements), but this is more rare.  
Example for acceptance: "I have the right to make mistakes, because I can learn from them." (Formula established by pupils and teachers in a primary school in the Netherlands).

- **What does your *casita* look like?**

Ownership of the method and design of individual *casita*, from own experiences. Examples of *casita* from workshops can be found next page.

### Teaching tips

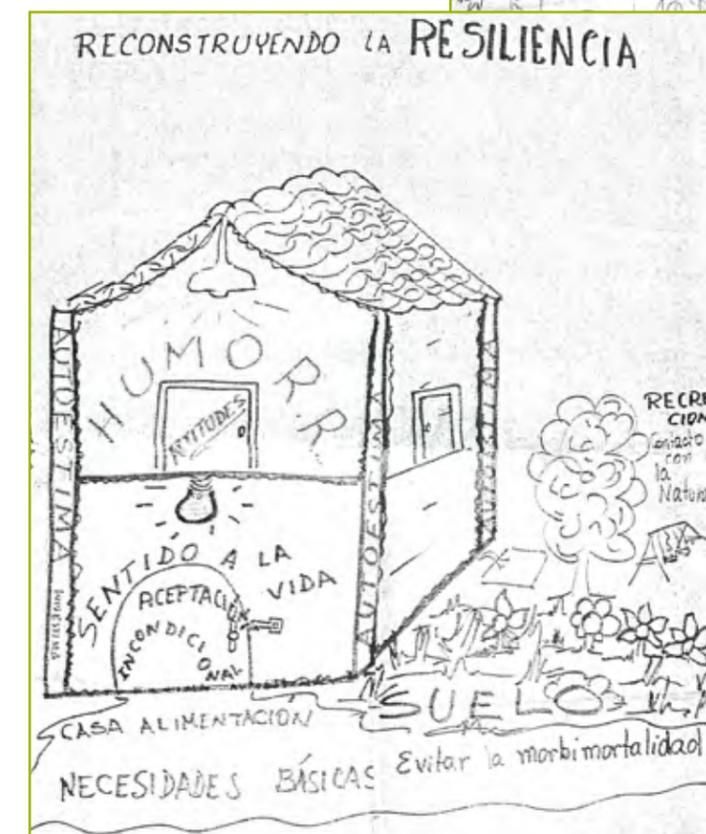
**The architecture of the house is not fixed;** it can be modified according to people's experiences. For example: we add a garden if contact with nature is essential for the children we are working with; the rooms can be situated in different ways in the *casita* to express different priorities.

This exercise can be **done individually or in groups**, a *casita* designed by a group will reflect the experiences of all the group members.

In conclusion, the *casita*, utilized wisely, probably has the potential to be a useful and flexible tool, without much danger. We do not employ it to construct ideologies, and much less absolute truths.

### Examples of casitas

Both drawings below have been realized by childcare professionals during a training session in Ecuador in 1997.



▲ Point of interest: representation of a whole village and not just one house. It shows the importance of the community.

► Point of interest: the addition of a garden and of a door with a key, representing the challenge of making a vital link with the child, as well as the rearrangement of certain priorities with greater importance placed on self-esteem and humour.

## MODULE 4: TUTORS OF RESILIENCE

**Objective:** To define the role and functions of tutors of resilience.

*"I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support."*

Anne Frank, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, first page of her diary

On 17 October 1957, the Royal Academy of Stockholm awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature to Albert Camus (1913-1960) *"for his important literary production, which illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times"*.

The letter Camus sent on this occasion to his teacher, Mr. Germain, is one of the finest eulogies in the teaching profession.

It also tells us about resilience, without using the word.

Here are some facts to better situate this letter:

- Albert Camus was not even one year old when his father died on 11 October 1914, following an injury on the battlefield in the First World War.
- His mother was a poor widow, and mother to two sons. She was partially deaf and could not read or write.
- Camus' teacher, Mr. Germain, gave him free lessons and helped him to find a scholarship.
- As a child, Camus grew up poor and working class. When he was admitted to high school, where he discovered more affluent children, he was ashamed of his poverty and his family. Nevertheless, he remained faithful all his life to his roots, to his background which had its own rules, and to a set of strong values.
- As a young man, he was treated for tuberculosis.

November 19, 1957

*"Dear Mr Germain,*

*I let the commotion around me these days subside a little, before speaking to you from the bottom of my heart.*

*I have just been given far too great an honour, one I neither sought nor solicited. But when I heard the news, my first thought, after my mother, was of you.*

*Without you, without the affectionate hand you extended to the small poor child that I was, without your teaching and example, none of all this would have happened.*

*I don't make too much of this sort of honour. But at least it gives me the opportunity to tell you what you have been and still are for me, and to assure you that your efforts, your work, and the generous heart you put into it still live in one of your little schoolboys who, despite the years, has never stopped being your grateful pupil. I embrace you with all my heart."*

Albert Camus

This extraordinary story contains the same complexity and depth as we find in the concept of a tutor of resilience. The image of the outstretched hand is symbolic of the first fundamental aspect: being available to provide support and care to children who, because of the situations they have suffered, often feel, as Camus describes himself, like a "small poor child", unhappy, on the borders of society and, therefore, not worthy of receiving this support.

The image of the hand is characterised by the adjective "affectionate", which introduces the second aspect that Camus repeatedly refers to in his letter: the emotional component, the "generous heart", an essential aspect. The efforts made, the teaching given, the role model offered, the work undertaken with the "small poor child", all enabled the teacher to play a fundamental role in his life, one that would cause Albert to be infinitely grateful to him, and to always carry him in his heart.

These reflections introduce the idea of tutors of resilience, which will be discussed throughout this module, during which we will try to identify the aspects and actions that allow childcare workers to assume the role of tutor of resilience with the children they support. The letter from Camus tells us the first great truth: it is not enough to *make* a tutor of resilience, it is necessary to *be* a tutor of resilience.

### **The resilience actor**

One of the most harmful aspects of a traumatic experience, such as war or violence in its various forms, is the impact that this experience has on a child's trust in others. As discussed in the next module on child victims of sexual abuse (see p. 47), the loss of confidence in the other makes it even more difficult for a child to establish meaningful relationships.

How can we change the image that a child has of adults as perpetrators of violence and wickedness? The answer to this is given by a girl who experienced sexual abuse at the hands of a family member. This is the way she talks about how she managed to move out of the shadows and open up to the outside world: "I started to feel a little better the day I met someone who really believed in me, a woman from my community; this meeting was fundamental"<sup>4</sup>.

The ability to initiate genuine relationships based on respect, dignity and acceptance of the individual as they are, represents for the suffering child a starting point for a possible enabling them to eventually open up to others.

We can therefore define "a resilience actor" as any person who expresses or shows a real interest in the child, and who becomes for that child a valuable source of care and support. This may be another child, an adult, an older person, a teacher, a religious leader, a reference adult or just a chance meeting, which, without even knowing it, speaks and acts spontaneously from a resilience standpoint.

*Such is the case of Manal, a 9 year-old Syrian girl who fled her country with her family and now lives in a makeshift dwelling near Bebnine, Lebanon. Manal does not attend school or participate in any of the psycho-educational activities offered by the Community Centre in her neighbourhood. Her parents think that it is totally useless to try to integrate into the local community as they plan to return home to Syria one day. Moreover, Manal's mother keeps telling her that Lebanese people are bad because they despise the Syrians and try by all means to make them uncomfortable. So the little girl spends all her time at home, taking care of her little brother Faisal, who is 8 years old.*

*One day Manal's father asks her to run an errand in Bebnine. Manal therefore heads out towards the city centre. As she walks along the road, her mother's words echo in her head and become so menacing that Manal starts walking more quickly, head down, with only one wish, to return home as soon as possible. As she is walking on the far side of the road, a football lands unexpectedly in front of her, rolls right up to her feet and off to one side. Manal looks up, looks around and sees a few metres from her, on the other side of the road, a group of children who ask her in Arabic to throw their ball back. Manal is very frightened and her first instinct is to escape, to get away as quickly as possible from these Lebanese children who almost knocked her over with their ball. At the same time, she wants to take her courage in both hands and throw the ball over the fence of the Community Centre to give it back to the children playing there. She eventually does this and then she immediately returns to her journey, quickly, quickly, head down.*

*Then a little girl who witnessed the scene approaches her. She looks younger than Manal and holds in her hand a little flower that she has picked. She offers the flower to Manal and, smiling, she says in a small voice the word "thank you!", and after this she turns around and runs over to her older brother, one of the football players. Manal, motionless, looks at the little flower, unable to say anything to the little girl. She then resumes her journey to the city centre. This gesture represents a turning point for Manal. On her return home, she tells her parents what happened to her and convinces them to go with her to the Community Centre to thank the girl for her gesture, a gesture that meant so much to her. She returns to the Centre with her mother, who is able to obtain more information on an integration project supported by the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs, which provides extracurricular activities with a group of Syrian and Lebanese children. Thus Manal begins to attend the community centre.*

As told to Francesca Giordano

The chance meeting with the girl represented a turning point for Manal and her family in their process of adaptation to their new reality. They moved from a position of total closure to gradual participation in community life. The little girl with the flower with her pure gesture of appreciation and gratitude was therefore a fundamental resilience actor for Manal and her family, an actor who enabled them to abandon their "lives on standby" position, waiting to return home to Syria, and to resume the course of their lives in their new reality in Lebanon.

The workshop entitled "the two-sided medal" (module 7, worksheet 2, activity 2.4, p. 92), that Manal attended a few months after meeting the girl with the flower, has a special meaning. This is when Manal told her story, just after she was asked why she had drawn a daisy on the part of the medal symbolising support received.

We will now consider what it means to be a "tutor of resilience" and examine ways in which it is possible to intentionally lead an educational activity which promotes and supports resilience processes for injured children.

### **What is a tutor of resilience?**

The simplest way to define a "tutor of resilience" is as a person who offers a child **SUPPORT AND PROTECTION**, who helps them to get on with their life.

- **SUPPORTING** a child means to act as a **secure base**, to have the capacity to support the child in difficult times and help them to develop their autonomy and self-determination.
- **PROTECTING** a child means to be a **protective shield**, that is to say, an instrument through which the child can defend themselves against internal and external threats. Protecting does not mean eliminating the threat but rather providing the child with the skills and competencies necessary for them to confront and overcome it.

## MODULE 4: TUTORS OF RESILIENCE

- The term “TUTOR OF RESILIENCE” refers to the aim of the educational process itself, that is to say, promoting the resilient recovery of a child’s life course, a journey that has been interrupted or diverted following an experience of suffering.

### What does a tutor of resilience do?

There is no single method or single strategy to support and protect children in vulnerable situations. The aim of this chapter is not to illustrate a list of standard actions to support children, but rather to present **ideas for reflection**, allowing the reader to *direct their supportive and protective educational activities taking into account the individuality and uniqueness of the person they are supporting, and the social context in which they exist*.

It is important to remember that anyone can play the role of tutor of resilience from the moment a person becomes trustworthy to the child because they **recognise and accommodate the child’s needs and respond appropriately**, and/or **strengthen the context in which the child lives**. This can be achieved through the enhancement of social support and the sense of belonging to one or more groups (family, peer group, school, etc.).

Let us now analyse two activities, described above.

### Recognising, accommodating and responding to an individual’s needs

*One day, Monkey saw Little Fish in the water. Unaware that Little Fish loved the water and he could swim, Monkey decided to fish him out to prevent him from drowning. But once out of the water, Little Fish died. Monkey then began to weep with despair because, he said, “I only wanted to save him”.*

#### GROUP REFLECTION

- What lessons can be learned from this story?
- In what way can they be applied in daily educational practice?

The story of Monkey and Little Fish makes us reflect on the importance of **recognising** the needs of the individual. To do this, we need to put our own point of view to one side (Monkey acts according to his own point of view when he decides to intervene) in order to adopt the point of view of the person we wish to support.

- Let’s reflect now on the needs that you have observed in the children and families that you have met in your work:

What are these needs? How have you identified them?

Once these needs have been recognised, it is essential to know how to **hold** them. A tutor of resilience must hold what the child communicates at the same time as interacting (in the here and now), with all the emotional charge which the child carries.

Indeed, children may often have experienced fear, terror and horror, and these experiences are now etched into their inner world. In particular, the following may be observed:

- **Emotions and/or memories** related to traumatic experiences, returning to the child’s memory, whether or not they want them, in the form of nightmares, flashbacks, games and/or drawings.
- **Loss of control over emotions**, to the extent that the intensity of the tangle of negative emotions related to experiences is such that the child feels totally annihilated. They then feel as though they are losing control of reality and are completely under the control of the events.

What can a tutor of resilience do to **respond** to the needs of the child and help them regain control of their emotions, so that they no longer feel terrorised by them?

First of all, it is essential to offer the child a **setting** where they can express and talk about the painful events they have experienced; a **safe, structured space** that allows the child to disclose emotions and feelings related to their history, their life, in a gradual and protected way; a **“container”**, strong enough to include the “emotional storm” that has turned their inner world upside down. As we shall see at the end of this module, it is essential that the tutor of resilience begins with a thorough self-reflection, for increased awareness of their own limitations: “*To what extent am I able to hold the suffering of this child?*”, in order to avoid their own need for self-defence becoming an obstacle to the child’s free expression.

#### Teaching activity: Module 7 –Worksheet 5 - Activity 5.1 “Timeline”

We are sometimes faced with children who do not want to talk about their experiences, who appear to have lost their ability to share their feelings and experiences, because they fear that their story will bring the horror back to the surface and thus force them to relive the terror experienced during the traumatic event. This often occurs with children who have an avoidance or flight response, even within social relationships: they hide, isolate themselves with their pain, and generally refuse any external help, which they consider to be an intrusion. These children do not seem to want to invest in life, in social relationships, and live their everyday life with a great deal of passivity, crushed by the pain that they are trying in vain to escape.

5 - Module 7 contains a series of activities, divided into thematic worksheets that can accompany the actions of tutors of resilience. Throughout this handbook, educational activities are described in workshops to accompany the implementation of the theoretical content presented.

## MODULE 4: TUTORS OF RESILIENCE

Working with these children should focus on five key objectives:

### 1. Restoring the children a sense of security and predictability of events so that:

- They begin to see the positive aspects of what is happening with sufficient **self-assurance** of their own ability to solve most of their life problems.
- They begin to develop a sense of **self-sufficiency** that allows them to imagine and plan ways to solve different problems, and to have aspirations in life, even in the face of events that could seem insurmountable.

To achieve these two objectives, it is essential to provide the child with *familiar spaces they can identify with*, and which act as landmarks for them. They must be given a *routine* that can create a rhythm for everyday life and restore a sense of predictability of events. Rules are also important because they reassure the child to the extent that they set clear and shared limits on external reality.

Teaching activities: Module 7 – Worksheet – Activity 2.3 “Rules yes, rules no”

### 2. Encourage the child to implement a process to restore hope for the future:

- The child rediscovers self confidence and begins to believe in the possibility of a **better future**.
- The possibility of starting to **dream**: the child can imagine a world where they begin to trust others, a world where they can begin to live and play.

Teaching activities: Module 7 – Worksheet 1 – Activity 1.3 “The cupboard of dreams”

### 3. Encourage the child to engage in social relationships based on trust:

- The child begins to have confidence in those around them: friends, teachers, etc.
- Promote new meetings for the child to establish new bonds of trust.
- Build and strengthen the sense of belonging to a group; a group that the child sees as significant and where they feel supported and protected.

Teaching activities: Module 7 – Worksheet 2 and Worksheet 6 – Activity 6.1 “The little pink mouse”

### 4. Support children’s ability to actively project themselves into the future:

- Ability to **project themselves into the future**: the child is able to imagine a world where they are no longer a victim but an actor.
- The child begins to imagine their future: What kind of work will I do? Where will I live? What will my family be like?

Teaching activities: Module 7 – Worksheet 1 – Activity 1.5 “The box of wishes”

### 5. Ability to express emotions and experiences:

- The child acquires the ability to **identify** and **recognise** emotions instead of avoiding them.
- The child is able to **express** their emotions in language more familiar to them.
- Achieving the first two objectives enables the child to exercise control over their emotions and to feel less overwhelmed.

Teaching activities : Module 7 – Worksheet 4

#### TO SUMMARISE

The role of a tutor of resilience as part of a direct relationship with a child supposes that the tutor understands the following:

- “I am aware that the child is communicating with me.”
- “I recognise and hold what the child communicates with me.”
- “I encourage the child’s self expression”: with children who have lost the capacity to express themselves, it is important to understand their emotions and encourage expression.

#### *From the individual to the group: strengthening external resources*

A psycho-social intervention is intended, by its very nature, for a **group** of children living in vulnerable conditions.

Why might the group represent a resource?

Human beings are “social beings” who are born, live and thrive through continuous interaction with their external environment. The group represents an ever-present social experience for humans. Especially for a child, the group is a *place of protection and support*. Indeed, within the group, the child finds an opportunity to test themselves through their constant relationship with others.

The protective aspect of the group is fundamental in what is known as the “**identification process**”. The child has a sense of belonging in the group and the group becomes for them an essential part of their being and their identity. When faced with traumatic experiences that not only undermine the image of the individual as an active subject of their own life, but also highlight their fragility and helplessness, it is essential to return a positive self-image to the child, an image that restores self-confidence and enables the child to build a strong identity. In this context, membership of a group is an important reference point in rebuilding the identity of the child.

The main groups in a child’s growth journey are:

### 1. The family

The protective strength of the family stems from several factors: the quality of relationships between its members, the stability of the family structure and the support provided to the child. The formation of a stable and long-lasting emotional connection between the child and one or more caregivers plays a fundamental role in the development of the child’s identity.

In general, we could say that resilient families have the following characteristics:

- **Stability, cohesion and support among family members** during difficult times. The child sees their family as a resource on which they can rely, on which they can count;
- **Good communication skills and sharing of feelings** with family members. The capacity of a child to open up and confide in someone, makes their thoughts, experiences, beliefs, sadness, fear and anger all seem less frightening emotions and therefore easier to confront and resolve;
- **Flexibility and adaptability to change.** Negative or traumatic life experiences cause families to face significant challenges that the individual or the family unit must face with a spirit of openness to change and negotiation;
- **Ability to develop and maintain social support networks.** In difficult situations, or when facing everyday challenges, nuclear family social support networks are a fundamental and indispensable resource;
- **Beliefs and values which are shared, common and stable.** The strength of the family value system gives the child a sense of *security and stability* that enables them to confront not only unexpected changes in their external reality, but also situations of fragility or vulnerability related to unfavourable life conditions. Practising rituals and ceremonies is a common way of implementing family beliefs.

Teaching activities: Module 7 – Worksheet 3

### 2. Friends

Resilience is closely linked to a feeling of belonging to a social and relational network where the child can find the support they need. Indeed, being recognised by someone and being important to them, and the feeling of having someone to count on, enables the child to build a sense of inner security.

During adolescence, the peer group plays a fundamental role in the process of emancipation from the family, and in the construction of an adult identity, because the adolescent finds new reference models within the group that help in their development process. The peer group fulfils three essential functions, namely:

- an **INSTRUMENTAL** function, for assistance and support, to fulfil tasks and relieve the challenges of daily life that the adolescent shares with their peers.
- an **INFORMATIVE** function, to the extent that the group transmits information and guides the progress / performance of daily activities.
- an **EMOTIONAL** function, insofar as the group offers the adolescent emotional comfort, which tends to be sought from a friend of a similar age rather than from adults.

Teaching activities: Module 7 – Worksheet 2 - Activity 2.4  
“The two sides of the coin”

### 3. School

The learning process which begins at school, in most cases enables the child to develop skills that can strengthen their internal resources. The experience of success at school forms the basis of a sense of **self-sufficiency**, which helps improve the child’s adjustment to school and, more generally, their **socialisation**. In addition, school children discover their personal talents, which reinforce their **self-esteem**.

Teachers and other professionals working in schools can play the role of tutors of resilience, particularly for children who come from difficult family backgrounds, insofar as this can be a **significant meeting** that offers the child another reference figure with whom they can identify, an alternative to the failed models present in their family.

Teaching activities: Module 7 – Worksheet 1 - Activity 1.1  
“Five fingers, five talents”

We can therefore say that the group plays a key protective role and that it should be considered as a key player when developing interventions and actions to build resilience.

For example, the protective role played by the group is particularly evident when the population has fallen victim to a natural disaster. How to cope with disasters and the proof of this shown by community solidarity helps to develop what is known as **collective resilience**. In particular, the four factors listed below are regarded as being essential for this process:

- mutual support;
- an awareness that the group members support each other to confront crises together;
- collective participation;
- the optimism of the group.

Giuseppe Russo is a resident of L'Aquila and father of a family who were the victims of the severe earthquake which took place on April 6, 2009 and which completely destroyed their home. Following the earthquake, Giuseppe joined the Citizens' Committee set up by the diocesan Caritas and the municipality of L'Aquila. Through his testimony, he shows us how important it is to strengthen social relationships, a strategy he has himself adopted to cope with the tragedy of the earthquake:

*"Anything that disrupts our lives scares us, namely the absence of a person who is dear to us. What can we do when this happens? **We cling to each other, to the members of our family, we gather our strength and we try to hold on, together.** Some people stay silent, others evoke memories, and others are still trying to hold on before they can move forward. The disruptions caused by the earthquake have been so great that we also say that it was a psychological earthquake. Today, we are seeing changes in the way we live and in our habits, there are places that we no longer recognise. People's anger and discouragement have intensified with one another, many have closed themselves off, while some others scream and protest, but only a very few are at peace with themselves and try to respond by becoming proactive, to be heard by those who decide our common future.*

*In the Centre, I listen to the voices of people suffering difficulties, difficulties related to age among other things, and their stories offer me new ways of thinking; the sounds of children sometimes interrupt these stories and take me to a totally different reality, their vivacity makes us stronger and encourages us to move forward. We then decide to roll up our sleeves and work, work so that they have something stable for the future. We decide to make things happen, to wake up those who are sleeping, to become, **active citizens together.** Even today I do not know if my reaction to that night is a kind of madness or a feeling of being alive, this willingness I feel to be part of something."*

### GROUP REFLECTION

- What are the main threats that characterise the experience told in this life story?
- What resources has Giuseppe used to enable him to face up to the earthquake, both natural and psychological, and their consequences?

### **Please remember**

Every protection factor (individual or collective) has the possibility of being perverted and turning into a factor of risk for a child. Practitioners should not be afraid, but neither should they be naive.

For example, when looking for tutors of resilience it is important to know, as will be seen in Module 5 (see p. 47), that most child abuse is carried out within intimate relationships, often within the family, and often by people who in theory could be tutors of resilience. This kind of unpleasant situation is also often found in educational institutions, schools, colleges and elsewhere.

We must also recognise that individual protection measures (*I am* and *I can*) could become distorted. For example, too much self-esteem can make a person too arrogant; humour must remain constructive to avoid injuring others; sectarian faith can very easily turn against life itself...

### **The resilience of practitioners**

A tutor of resilience is always exposed to new challenges related to the complexity of the contexts in which they may be called upon to intervene. Thus, the satisfaction that a tutor might feel for their work may run alongside feelings of stress, tension, anxiety, helplessness, frustration and anger. This experience is sometimes the cause of burnout syndrome, which can lead to psychosomatic or psychological symptoms, impeding any progress made by a tutor of resilience.

To prevent this emotional exhaustion, it is essential that the tutor adopts preventive measures in their daily work such as:

#### **1. Recognising, respecting and not exceeding their limits:**

- Avoiding guilt when their work does not yield the expected results.
- Avoiding feelings of omnipotence in relation to the work undertaken.
- When a tutor of resilience realises that they can no longer receive and respond appropriately to the needs of the child, they should ask for help from a colleague to avoid causing resistance which could hinder the child's free expression.

### 2. Recognising the fundamental role of the team of care workers, who it is important to be able to trust. To do this will require:

- Providing group activities such as exercises to strengthen the team (*team building*), so as to strengthen the atmosphere of trust and acceptance between the different group members. These are indispensable conditions, not only so that each team member can feel more comfortable when opening up to another team member about his experience, especially if it is a negative experience, but also to strengthen bonds within the group and reduce feelings of loneliness when dealing with problems.
- Planning spaces for weekly reflection. That is to say, moments devoted to the discussion and analysis of difficulties encountered in the various cases being supported. Sharing and discussing personal concerns within the group facilitates the decision-making process.
- Taking time off to enjoy the beauty of life: leisure, entertainment, relaxation, meditation, outings with friends, get togethers with family or other significant supporters.

#### TO SUMMARISE

In conclusion, we have identified the main characteristics needed to be a tutor of resilience, who should:

- Show empathy and affection.
- Concentrate on the individual's positive traits and resources without forgetting their problems.
- Patiently listen and hold the needs of the child.
- Offer a safe and structured space where the child can express themselves and speak freely or, if they wish, remain silent.
- Work to value the groups the child belongs to and reinforce their protective potential.
- Work within a team, never alone, where they can confide and share the doubts and difficulties they have encountered in their daily work.
- Be worthy of the child's trust.

## MODULE 5: TRACES OF RESILIENCE IN CHILD VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND MISTREATMENT

**Objective:** To examine the specific effects and resilience process for child victims of abuse and maltreatment and to explore educational practices to support resilience.

*Only love and respect, only care for the other who really believes in you can enable you to wash your mirror and give you back another image of yourself.*

Vinka Jackson

Below is an interview with Vinka Jackson, psychologist and author, conducted by the *Centre for Studies and Support for Children and Women*<sup>6</sup>. In her autobiography, *Agua Fresca en los Espejos* (Fresh Water on Mirrors), Vinka tells her own story, the story of a young girl who was the victim of sexual abuse at the hands of her father, and the resilience journey that enabled her to confront and overcome her suffering. Today, Vinka is an advocate for children's rights and works with child victims of abuse and mistreatment.

**- In the first pages of your book, you say that the abuse first took place when you were 4 years old. Can a child at this age, be aware of what is happening to them?**

*"At the age of 4, a child is not aware of what is happening. All I have are memories. It is only later, in light of the experience, that you understand that the events were abusive."*

**- At what age does a child begin to be aware of what is happening to them?**

*"Without any information, not before puberty or even adolescence, because it is extremely difficult to be aware of something that you have not been prepared for, that no one has ever taught you anything about, either the words for it or the means to defend yourself. A child can neither describe nor consider as abuse something that an adult did to them if no one ever has told them that these behaviours are wrong."*

**- At a certain point, you say that you only discovered words like "abuse" at the age of 8. Is that when children begin to learn and understand what is happening to them?**

*"Children's language does not include words such as rape, abuse, or incest. At 8, a child does not understand what that is. That comes later. In my case, I started to understand at the age of 14. It was not until then that the word incest had a meaning for me. I think that if a child is not made aware of the issue by their family, they do not have the key to unlock*

<sup>6</sup> - [www.resiliencia.cl](http://www.resiliencia.cl). The CEANIM (*Centro de Estudios y atención del niño y la mujer*), run by Prof. Maria Angelica Kotliarenko, was the first centre in Chile to focus on the concept of resilience, at the individual, family and community levels. Vinka collaborates with the CEANIM on projects for child victims of sexual abuse and mistreatment. This interview was held after the publication of her book *Agua fresca en los espejos* (Fresh Water on Mirrors).

## MODULE 5: TRACES OF RESILIENCE IN CHILD VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND MISTREATMENT

*their experience, they have no means of understanding that what is happening is not right. At a young age, the child only understands things through their feelings. Only when the child has learned to say “no”, will they, perhaps, detect through their feelings the negative side of these abusive relationships with adults.”*

### **- Do all children who have experienced abuse try to become invisible, as you did? Is this a defence mechanism?**

*“I don’t like generalisations, but I know many children who have experienced abuse and who are trying to somehow avoid opportunities that could lead to further abuse or mistreatment, in the hope of escaping contact with their adult abuser. That is why we observe a tendency for loneliness and isolation in children who have been abused.”*

### **- So these could be signs that something is seriously wrong, that adults should pay special attention to?**

*“Absolutely. Any change in the usual behaviour of a child must be taken into account. Parents have a special bond with their children and if they are vigilant, they can detect the slightest change in their routine. A parent knows the habits of their child, knows what they like to eat, what they dream about, their games, how they study, and any changes in this routine may be a telltale sign that something is wrong, indicating that something disturbing is happening. In these cases, the child has not necessarily been the victim of abuse, there may be other reasons behind their discomfort.”*

### **- Could a lack of interest shown by adults towards children who have experienced abuse aggravate their situation?**

*“In cases of abuse, there is always a victim, an abuser and a number of bystanders who may or may not be aware of what is going on, but who are obviously not as vigilant as they should be. This is the reason why the abuse has been possible. (...) I do not believe that a child can assess with absolute accuracy the adults around them, but most of the time they are able to understand whether they can trust someone or not. From the moment a child meets an adult who explicitly explains that they are willing to help them unconditionally, the child knows they have found a channel through which they can communicate.”*

### **- Do children have the capacity and means to end the abuse themselves by confronting the abuser?**

*“There are children who manage to do that, but in most cases it is someone from outside who discovers that the child has been abused. Growing up, we may acquire the strength to say “no”, or “enough”, but when it comes to smaller children, experience teaches us that it is almost always an adult who discovers and reveals the abuse.”*

### **- A child is therefore unable to stop the abuse?**

*“They are only a child, it’s a lot to expect of them. An adolescent may have more opportunities to seek help, to free themselves by talking about it, but it is difficult for a small child - who most of the time does not know the names for various parts of their body - to manage that. The lack of precision in vocabulary and expression is one of the obstacles encountered when filing a complaint for abuse because it is the credibility of the child that is in question if they are not able to clearly say what has happened to them.”*

### **- In your book, you use the word ‘pillaging’ to describe what you have experienced. Can we get ourselves back after being stripped of everything, when we know that what has been taken is lost forever?**

*“Some people do not return. There are children, both girls and boys, who have died because of violence, others have contracted sexually transmitted diseases. The wounds can be irreversible, and that must be said. (...) In other cases, the body demonstrates an extraordinary capacity for self healing and the soul also does its part; but adults and children also have memories held in the body that need more time to fully synchronise with the rest of the healing process. The challenge is to coexist alongside this memory. There are things that you never forget, sensations that come to the surface without you having been aware of them or wanted them, and you learn to confront this reality in different ways. Time is a great healer.”*

### **- Is self-destructive behaviour common among children who have experienced abuse?**

*“Statistics and experience tell us that from a young age to adulthood the percentage of suicidal behaviour in children is extremely high: between 50 and 70% of victims try at least once to commit suicide as a solution to their problems. This is often the outcome of depression. At a certain point, the victim of abuse can see no other way out of their desperate situation, and putting an end to their life seems like the only possible solution to end something that hurts them too much, that exhausts them.*

*Personally, I find it really difficult to talk about these things, nevertheless I do so in the hope that it could be useful to someone who is living in the same hell that I was, but it is really difficult. The sensation of no longer being able to carry the weight of the secret and the desperation that can cause leads you to think that death is the only possible way out. That is why it is absolutely essential to be able to entrust your secret to someone else, to tell the truth and feel protected. Today, after all these years, I see things from another perspective. Today I love life, I love what it offers me, I love being alive so much that I could never again think of that as a solution.”*



## MODULE 5: TRACES OF RESILIENCE IN CHILD VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND MISTREATMENT

### - In your book, you clearly say that you wanted an explanation from your father. Are all abuse victims seeking an explanation, do they need this explanation?

“All a child needs is the certainty that they will not have to relive the same experience again. I think that there is no explanation for abuse. In my case, I was looking for one because I wanted to make sense of the impossible, to find some inner order. All painful situations that we have to face throughout our lives push us to ask the question “why?”. We do it when we learn of someone’s death or when we suffer a significant loss. We ask ourselves the question by instinct, even if we know in advance that we do not necessarily have any answers.”

### - Is this part of the healing process?

“I think the question “why” has played a key role in my recovery. It was at that point that I realised I would have to face the road alone, because my father’s answers had brought me nothing. What really counted in my situation was the feeling of being able to ask, to face up to things and speak out with less fear. Whether or not I will arrive at some kind of explanation for my suffering, is another thing altogether. But one thing is certain, we all try, both as individuals and as a society to make sense of the things we live through.”

### - You are a living example of resilience. Do all people have the ability for that?

“It’s a real mystery, but personally I think we are all born with the ability. Our body is the first to be resilient: we cut ourselves and the wound heals, what more striking example is there? The question is how to strengthen resilience. If the victim of abuse cannot rely on any external support, it will be difficult in my opinion for them to properly develop their potential because affection, encouragement towards self-esteem, recognition of talents - one or ten, it doesn’t matter -, strengthening self-confidence and autonomy are crucial for the child, as well as the availability of support and care.”

### - You talk about healing. Is it really possible to heal?

“Yes, we can heal. It implies going through huge challenges, but healing is possible. Thus, the earlier children begin their therapeutic journey, the better. The easier the access to treatment, the greater the likelihood that adolescents and adults can live as normal a life as possible, like other people. It is not always possible for us to access treatment by ourselves, although I know some people who have got there through the affection and love of others, sources of resilience. Motherhood also can play an important role, because having children poses major challenges and reinforces our will to heal and to feel good.”

### - By publishing your book you are sharing your story and opening yourself up to the outside world. Did you feel that it was necessary, for your family and friends?

“I think it is good to put the truth on the table because it is an essential component in any process of reparation and healing. And this is true for everyone, not just for older victims. Lying and concealment help no one, and we cannot thrive in such conditions. Only by making the truth known, even though it may be painful, can we heal and move forward. Of course, everyone chooses when and how to tell their truth. Many people get to adulthood without talking and others never will. It is a highly personal choice, but I am deeply convinced that in the face of the overwhelming silence of abuse, it is always a gift to let our voices speak out, no matter how long it may take.

The publication of the book was a lengthy ordeal. I had already spoken openly about my story, but one day my oldest daughter told me that if by making it public I could help even one single person, it was worth it to do so. I already knew that it could be useful because I myself was helped by other women’s stories. Their voices, their stories can encourage and support other women who have not yet spoken, and society as a whole. (...)

The best way to contribute to the development of a better country without abuse of any kind, is to talk and discuss these issues in order to understand the significance of the damage we must face up to when a child is sexually abused and that we must do everything in our power to prevent and eradicate this abuse. To learn how to take care of ourselves. This is what is happening today in Chile, where we are seeing a growth in awareness due to the choice of many people to reveal and share their experiences, and we must thank them for that.”

### GROUP REFLECTION

Reflect on what this interview highlights regarding:

- The characteristics of the suffering of child sexual abuse victims.
- The way in which individuals express their own suffering.
- The role of the tutor of resilience in relation to childhood abuse victims.
- The definition of educational interventions whose objective is to support child victims of abuse.

### The suffering of child victims of sexual abuse and violence

“Attila the Hun was there. That’s one of my first feelings when I think of my childhood. A real barbarian invasion, inside and outside of the house; inside and outside of my body. My whole identity.”

Vinka Jackson uses these words to try and describe the impact caused by the profound suffering in her childhood. In the above interview, she describes various aspects related to the specific characteristics of the suffering experienced by child victims of sexual abuse and violence:

- “[...] A child does not have the key to unlock their experience, they have no means of understanding that what is happening is not right. At that age, the child only understands things through their feelings. (...) It is extremely difficult to be aware of something that you have not been prepared for, that no one has ever taught you anything about, either the words for it or the means to defend yourself. A child can neither describe nor consider as an abuse something that an adult did to them if no one has ever told them that these behaviours are wrong.” One aspect of the suffering of child abuse victims is the **inability to make sense of the experience**. Often the perpetrator of the abuse falsifies

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the experience in the child's eyes by making it appear to be "attention, a special gesture of love for a special child, which must remain a secret between you and me." This distorted image of the abusive act contrasts with the extremely negative and harmful sensations experienced by the child. This contrast causes the child to feel a huge sense of confusion and disarray. The child's inability to recognise and clearly understand the harmfulness of the acts experienced, added to the secrecy imposed by the abuser, represent an obstacle to talking about the experience suffered. *"Only when the child has learned to say 'no', will they, perhaps, detect through their feelings the negative side of these abusive relationships with adults"* says Vinka, highlighting the fundamental role of adults to help a child give meaning to their experience.

- *"Only love and respect, only care for the other who really believes in you can enable you to wash your mirror and give you back another image of yourself."* The image of "washing the mirror" refers to feelings of guilt and shame that children have to face in relation to what is happening, to the image they have of themselves, a "dirty and unclean" self-image. The difficulty in understanding the experience often causes the child to shift the blame onto themselves for the abuse suffered, rather than the aggressor or situations that caused the abuse. Children believe that if they have been attacked, it is because they behaved badly, or because they deserved it. Moreover, this sense of shame is often linked to self-apportioning blame because they failed to prevent the abuse.

*Such is the case of 12 year-old Antonio. When asked to represent his family, he began by drawing his mother, sister and himself, with precise traits; then he started to draw his father, his head, his body and legs, then he rubbed it out and started again, adding a series of scribbles between his legs. He was pressing so heavily with the pencil that he made a hole in the paper. The teacher said to him: "it seems to me that there is something troubling you". His head lowered, and with a broken voice, Antonio replied while biting his finger: "yes, dad did... no, no, nothing!" "Are you ashamed? Is something making you feel ashamed? Maybe if we talk about it, you won't feel so bad." Antonio, with his head still lowered and without looking at his therapist, said: "He took his trousers down and he wanted me... he wanted me to touch him." "Your dad wanted you to do things that you didn't like at all? You have done really well telling me that, even if it was difficult, and now together we will make sure that it never happens again."*

The case of Antonio shows that for the child, **feelings of guilt and shame** are barriers to communicating the experience.

- *"In cases of abuse, there is always a victim, an abuser and a number of bystanders who may or may not be aware of what is going on, but are obviously not as vigilant as they should be."* Indeed, one of the main consequences of sexual abuse in children is the loss of trust in others and the constant feeling of being in danger and having no one who can protect you. As in the case of *Nina, a girl of 12 who was removed from her family after telling her teacher that her mother's partner had touched her. Nina has repeatedly said that her greatest suffering arose from the fact that she could not tolerate that her mother did not believe her when she confided in her. This injury is evident in all the daily activities in Nina's life. She keeps asking adults "Do you believe me?" and "How can a mother not believe her daughter?"*

This loss of confidence in the ability of others to protect and assist and the difficulties faced in talking about the experience often cause children to become isolated in their pain. But, as Vinka said, *"it is almost always an adult who discovers and reveals abuse"*. The role of adults in revealing violence is fundamental because it is only in very rare cases that the child manages to communicate what has happened to the outside world. It is also essential to **learn to listen and understand the signs and messages that children send us**:

- Most of the time these children are angry against themselves and against the world, frustrated in their need to be recognised and loved by their family, driven by an uncontrollable impulse to vent **their rage on others**, to avoid having to relive feelings of fragility and helplessness. Such is the case of *Carlo, a boy of 13, who deals with his father's violent episodes against his mother, his brothers and himself by adopting offensive and violent behaviours against everyone: he attacks his peers and teachers, breaks everything he finds in his path, and constantly challenges his teachers.*
- Other children **flee from contact with the outside world**, a world they consider to be hostile and incomprehensible, taking refuge in an imaginary world, a place where they can find, in appearance at least, a break from the suffering that is inside them. *"These children seek solitude and isolation"*, says Vinka. Children who may be passive or depressed strive to be invisible in their group and take on responsibility for the violence suffered. Children like *Sara, a 12 year-old girl who was abandoned a long time ago by her parents, too busy with their personal conflicts to look after her. Today, Sara lives in a care home but says that she does not know why she is there and is convinced that it is her fault that she is living away from her family. She tends to isolate herself and says she often feels like crying, sometimes for no reason.*
- Similarly, it is not uncommon for children who have experienced abuse to have **sexualised behaviour** or inappropriate sexual interest for their age (excessive masturbation, wanting to touch the genitals of friends, sexual games, etc.). These behaviours have been shown to the child as being expressions of affection or as showing interest in others, so they tend to repeat the behaviours with people who are dear to them. As in the case of 8 year-old *Daniela, who asked Maria, her best friend, to touch her genitals. Maria is frightened and does not want to see Daniela, who does not understand the reaction of her friend and feels deeply hurt.*
- In other cases, when the pain becomes unbearable, the child may adopt a **self-destructive behaviour**: *"victims of abuse can see no other way out of their desperate situation, putting an end to their life seems like the only possible solution to end something that hurts too much, that exhausts them"*, says Vinka.
- In general, **a sudden change in behaviour and in the daily habits of the child can indicate that something is wrong**:

*"Any change in the usual behaviour of a child must be taken into account. Parents have a special bond with their children and if they are vigilant, they can detect the slightest change in their routine. A parent knows the habits of their child, knows what they like to eat, what they dream about, their games, how they study, and any change in this routine*

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*may be a telltale sign that something is wrong, indicating that something disturbing is happening. In these cases, the child is not necessarily a victim of abuse, and there may be other reasons behind their discomfort.”*

- In most cases, these **children find it difficult to ask for help**, but they are desperate to avoid contact with others, because they do not want to be betrayed or injured again by someone who, on the contrary, should have taken care of them. At the same time, they want to overcome the pain that has gripped them and find the serenity that every child deserves.

The suffering caused by abuse and violence leads to consequences at both the family and community levels, including:

- **Poor social relationships**

Child victims of sexual abuse are often seen as ill, difficult or disturbed children, and this labelling leads to negative and disempowering self-perception. Indeed, in many societies, the stigmatisation of child victims of sexual abuse is not uncommon.

- **Cross-generational transmission of abuse**

If child victims of sexual abuse do not receive the assistance they need, they could have a greater risk of facing difficulties in developing appropriate sexual behaviour and healthy sexual relationships. They could commit abuses against other children and could even become abusers themselves.

### **Educational activities to support resilience for child victims of sexual abuse and violence**

The fact that resilience is not a permanent personality trait, but rather a process which can be enhanced through positive experiences or encounters, enables us to consider interventions to strengthen the child's recovery capabilities so that they can face traumatic experiences appropriately. How can we promote a process of resilience with child victims of abuse and mistreatment?

On this issue Vinka responds as follows:

*“It’s a real mystery, but personally I think we are all born with the ability. Our body is the first to be resilient: we cut ourselves and the wound heals, what more striking example is there? The question is how to strengthen resilience. If the victim of abuse cannot rely on any external support, it will be difficult in my opinion for them to properly develop their potential because affection, encouragement for self-esteem, recognition of talents, -*

*whether one or ten, it doesn’t matter -, strengthening self-confidence and autonomy are crucial for the child, as well as the availability of support and care.”*

- The first fundamental aspect of starting a process of resilience is the initial meaningful encounter with **resilience actors**, who, through their affection and care, can return to the child trust for others and the feeling of being loved and protected by someone. Incidentally, Vinka says: *“(…) It is not always possible for us to do this by ourselves, although I know some people who have got there through the affection and love of others, which have become a source of resilience.”* The actions of a **tutor of resilience** are essential, that is to say, educational support to strengthen the child's self-esteem and self-confidence and to promote the recognition of their talents, while ensuring constant presence and availability offering affection and support, *“from the moment a child meets an adult who explicitly explains that they are willing to help them unconditionally, the child knows they have found a channel through which they can communicate.”* Credibility and stability are essential features of these supportive relationships, in contrast to the unpredictable and chaotic nature of other relationships experienced by the child.
- Vinka underlines just how fundamental it is that **support from tutors of resilience** is implemented as quickly as possible, *“the easier the access to treatment, the greater the likelihood that adolescents and adults can live as normal a life as possible, like other people.”*

Moreover, in order to address the problem of sexual abuse and violence against children we must be able to carry out **interventions involving the whole community**:

*“The best way to contribute to the development of a better country without abuse of any kind, is to talk and discuss these issues in order to understand the significance of the damage we must face up to when a child is sexually abused and that we must do everything in our power to prevent and eradicate this abuse. To learn how to take care of ourselves. This is what is happening today in Chile, where we are seeing a growth in awareness due to the choice of many people to reveal and share their experiences, and we must thank them for that.”*

Regarding the characteristics of educational actions to support child victims of abuse, Vinka highlights two aspects:

*“I think there is no explanation for abuse. In my case, I was looking for one because I had to make sense of the impossible, to find some inner order. (...) What really counted in my situation was the feeling of being able to ask, to face things and speak out with less fear. Whether or not I will arrive at some kind of explanation for my suffering, is another thing altogether. But one thing is certain, we all try, both as individuals and as a society to make sense of the things we live through.”*

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Vinka stresses the importance of **making sense of the experience**, to overcome the confusion and disarray caused by the experience of abuse. It is a need that the individual feels deep within themselves, the need to seek and find order, a sense of their own history. The opportunity to talk about their life and what they have lived through, in which the negative experience of abuse is part of memories and past events. This contributes to building a strong, rather than fragmented identity. The role of the tutor, which is fundamental, is precisely to support and promote this reconstruction. The ability to **share someone else's experiences**, which form part of their life story, is another important aspect of this process:

*"That is why it is absolutely essential to confide the secret to someone, to tell the truth and feel protected. I think it is good to put the truth on the table because it is an essential component, essential to any process of reparation and healing. And this is true for everyone, not just for older victims. Lying and concealment help no one, and we cannot thrive in such conditions. Only by making the truth known, even though it may be painful, can we heal and move forward. Of course, everyone chooses when and how to tell this truth. Many people get to adulthood without talking and others never will. It is a highly personal choice, but I am deeply convinced that in the face of the overwhelming silence of abuse, it is always a gift to let our voices speak out, no matter how long it may take."*

Given the difficulties that children have in sharing their experiences and life stories, **expressive workshops** provide a safe and structured framework that can facilitate the sharing of words, experiences and painful memories.

Teaching activities: Module 7 – Worksheet 5

The following are three examples of *In the Storm* workshops (activity 5.2, p. 102) carried out with Maria, Vera and Lara in an Italian care home for girls who are victims of abuse and mistreatment.

Analysing these workshops will enable us to gain a more complete picture of resilience assisted activities which give a voice to children. We asked the children to indicate in the clouds aspects which were in their opinion the most threatening dangers they faced, and then to indicate in the sections of an umbrella the resources that helped them confront these threats.



► Maria is a girl of 12, who came to the care home when she was 8, after telling her grandmother that her father was sexually abusing her. Her mother, who is in a situation of strong submission vis-à-vis her husband, has always ignored the violence suffered by her daughter, in an effort not to admit what was happening.

At first, Maria refused to participate in the activity. However, a few days later, while a teacher was helping her to do her history homework, Maria expressed interest in participating, provided she could do it alone, in her room.

Maria began by drawing the umbrella, because, she explained, she was sure of the things and people that protected her and kept her safe in difficult times: firstly, her *mother*, to whom she feels deeply connected and defines as her reason for being; then her *grandmother*, who gave her the opportunity to escape the hell of abuse; then *God*, to whom she confides her fears and calls for help when she feels alone; *Rita*, her tutor who accompanies her in her daily school activities, and finally, her *support worker* in the care home, who takes care of her every day, sharing her joys and helping her through difficult moments.

Maria found it more difficult to indicate what frightens her, the threats, and became confused. After a few minutes, she wrote five elements in one go: first dad, that is to say the person who abused her but who she never talks about, she only says *"for me, it's like he is dead"*; the memory of the abuse then pushed her to write violence and rapists. She then wrote loneliness, and said she often feels alone in the care home, even when she is surrounded by many people. Finally, she wrote hits for the blows her father said he would give her if she told the truth.



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threatening. Similarly, increased knowledge of the child's inner experiences of their risk and protection allows the support worker to fulfil the role of tutor of resilience more consciously and effectively.

### The girls' approach to the proposed workshop

Responding to the workshop offered was not an easy task as it required a reflection on aspects of personal life which could be especially painful. The girls responded in different ways to the proposal. Lara's passion for drawing took over and, deeply motivated, she immediately agreed to participate in the activity. The framework of this graphic workshop facilitated her reflection on some salient aspects of her interior world. But for her, just like Maria, the presence and care offered by the support worker during the course of the activity was essential, especially when revisiting painful aspects of her past. Maria and Vera, meanwhile, needed more time to address the activity. What initially appeared to be denial, was actually an expression of their need for time to be respected so that they could make the decision to participate in the activity, because they did not feel ready yet. Assistance from the support worker gave Maria the strength to face the workshop.

### The nature of the risk factors and protective factors listed

- The "clouds" in the three drawings all contain **fears of loneliness**. Children who have suffered abuse and violence were left alone with their *rapist* (see Maria's drawing), and have therefore experienced a sense of helplessness and the inability to defend themselves. This experience remains etched in their minds and deprives them of an inner assurance that is essential to be able to flourish and forge their identity. However, this loneliness expressed by the three girls could also indicate emotional isolation where the young victims are seeking shelter, especially in cases where the violence was perpetrated by people they care about. When it is the parents who perpetrate the violence, when they should instead be protecting and defending their child, feelings of fragility and loneliness can reach extreme levels. Sometimes a mother's silence and an atmosphere of 'family honour', combine to increase the child's suffering, who struggles to accept such behaviour from their mother. In Vera's case, the girl felt deeply betrayed by her mother who did not believe her when she told her about the abuse suffered at the hands of her partner. This betrayal drove Vera to divest of relationships with others; indeed, she indicated initially that **she can only count on herself and God**. As for Maria, she feels a deep sense of loneliness: "*Although here in the care home I am surrounded by many people, I often feel very lonely*". She cannot open up to the other children in the home, or share with them her thoughts and fears, and so she feels lonely and isolated in her suffering.
- The **dark** is another common element drawn in the clouds by the three girls. What does darkness mean to them? The unknown, the unknowable and therefore anything that cannot be understood. Like the sexual abuse which they experienced, which they did not understand but had to endure. Thus, Lara does not understand why her father

sometimes ceases to be a protective figure, taking on the appearance of an evil ogre who injures and hurts her, turning him into the "*threat*" that the young girl indicates in the cloud.

- One of the most striking aspects of the protective factors is the inclusion of the parental figure responsible for the abuse and / or mistreatment. The mother figure is always the first to be included there, despite the fact that the evidence shows that they failed to protect their child. The question that comes immediately and inevitably to mind is: "Why do these girls include their mother among their protective factors?" Children need parental figures that care for and protect them. And even when this is not the case, the urgent need to preserve **the positive image of a caring parent** prevails over and above the actual failure of that parent. Imagination plays a fundamental role in children's lives and it is not uncommon for imagination to become more "truthful" and more "credible" than the actual lived experience itself.
- It is interesting to consider the girls' arguments for including in the umbrella figures which are external to the family such as support workers, psychologists and teachers. The protective action of these adults has been described as: "*help to get out of the hell of abuse*", "*everyday support*", "*care*", "*help and sharing every day*". Thus, the presence at the child's side of a **figure that supports them every day** proves to be essential for them. A figure that helps them move away from that terrifying sense of fragility and loneliness related to the violence suffered: "*The most important thing for me was meeting someone who believed in me. It was from that moment on that I began to feel better*" (Discussion with a group of young victims, Pondicherry, India).
- **Faith**, as a protective factor, is present in two cases. It is interesting to note why this value was indicated as protective. Both Maria and Vera recognise in God the role of a reliable guardian for their "secrets" and "fears". Moreover, God is for them a constant presence who they can ask for help when needed. This shows, on the one hand, the girls' need to **entrust their experiences** to someone who, in their opinion, is reliable, and ready to welcome them, and on the other hand, the importance of the value of faith as a **stable and constant reference point** on which we can count even in difficult times.
- Finally, it is worth noting that in all three cases, protective factors are discussed and illustrated much more thoroughly than risk factors, which are often mentioned rapidly. Indeed, **it is very difficult** for a child who has experienced abuse to **relive memories of painful experiences**, suffering, and ambiguous feelings of guilt and shame. However, as noted earlier, it is also a fundamental step for young victims, to make sense of their lived experience, and to break free from the tangle of emotions and memories that invade their spirit, and without which they cannot do anything about the experience. Again, we stress the role of the tutor of resilience, which is not limited to presenting the workshop but also accompanying the child throughout the process of rebuilding their past, by receiving and holding negative experiences.

### Educational practices for supporting resilience

1. The diversity of the girls' responses highlights an initial fundamental aspect: it is not possible to define common rules or good practice for the implementation of an educational activity to support child victims of abuse and mistreatment. Each child has different needs and different requirements. Therefore, it is essential to **be in harmony with the child**, that is to say being capable of listening and accommodating their needs and requirements in an active and caring manner. It is important to remember that the less children are used to finding a ready pair of "ears" to listen to their needs, the less they are able to express these needs clearly. Children may then use other forms of nonverbal communication, such as aggressive behaviour, isolation, gambling or even drawings they decide to show or offer to their support worker, entrusting them with a part of their self, their inner world. It is up to adults to decipher children's messages with patience and tenacity, observing their behaviour and respecting their silence, but above all, accepting them unconditionally, as they are.
2. This illustrates, once again, the importance of building a **positive relationship** with the child that enables them to regain trust in others and to experience a sense of inner security once more. Restoring confidence in others involves a process that can be time consuming and not always linear. **Patience** and **consistency** are two essential components of any attempt to connect with the child in order to become a figure of important emotional reference. Sometimes, the small daily experiences of support matter most, such as, in the case of Maria with the help she got for her history paper. It is this support, received to face up to the small and large challenges of life, which motivates the child to include in their umbrella alternative adult figures to their parents. These children have a great need for role models. Vera's strong attachment to her support worker Irene, who she places in the umbrella, is one example of this.
3. In the three drawings, the presence of parental figures in the umbrella highlights the **inevitability of the need to work with families**. How does this work with abusive families? Firstly, we must get them out of the isolation in which they often tend to be locked. It is therefore extremely important to create a support network which provides for interventions at the social, educational, psychological and legal levels. The objective of support work with parents is to lead them to *realise their responsibilities, to understand that they have hurt their child, that they have been paralysed by past and present experiences of conflict and dissatisfaction, and finally, to encourage them to agree to get help to find more satisfactory ways of relating to others*. Here the significant challenge is to successfully establish a trusting relationship with the father and/or mother that enables them to confide in the support worker and to be helped by them, without fearing prejudice or negative intentions. This is a fundamental requirement for action to support parents. In most cases, they are indeed people who have suffered enormously, and therefore have difficulty trusting others. In cases where the suffering of parents is so profound that it represents an obstacle to the management of their child's needs, and an obstacle to their willingness to change to become "good" parents, it is necessary to place the child in a foster family or, in the most serious cases, in an adoptive family. The child will be able to experiment with new attachment

relationships "to compensate", which will enable them to restore this fundamental sense of inner security that will lead them to say: "I also have value to others and so I am worthy of a family that loves me".

4. The support worker has a **key role in assigning meaning to experiences**, so as not to leave the child to the mercy of the pain and suffering caused by negative memories that continue to threaten their life and mind. Children's willingness to get help is a factor to be taken into account. Thus, when participating in the workshop, Maria and Lara felt the need to have someone close to them and to build a relationship of trust, while Vera needed a space alone. Vera's need may indicate a fear that her support worker may judge her, and reflects her difficulty to place trust in and rely on another person; a typical behaviour of child victims of abuse and mistreatment, particularly if the violence is perpetrated within the family.

# MODULE 6: TRACES OF RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES

**Objective:** To illustrate resilience via life stories, narratives and first-hand accounts.

The testimonies and stories written by those who have overcome their pain and situations of extreme vulnerability, reveal the nature of resilience more than any other writing on the subject. This module was born out of the idea that knowledge of these stories enables the reader to get closer to the real, everyday dimension of resilience, to fully grasp the fragility and vulnerability of these people and to gain insight into the resources and strengths that allowed them to transform and reorganise their lives positively. These strengths and resources will leave you surprised, even amazed, to discover just how extraordinary human resilience can be.

## Life stories bearing witness to resilience

### Resilience and disability – Fabio's story

#### The accident

*On Monday, May 11, 1992 my life changed in an instant. On a lovely sunny afternoon, I was riding along quietly on my racing bike, to Cesena, where I was to meet my friend Federico. (...) I was riding slowly, absorbed in my thoughts, when suddenly, while trying to tighten a nut from the front wheel I inadvertently put my hand between the spokes, blocking the bicycle.*

*I fell and banged my head on the asphalt. Then I felt the whole weight of my body on my neck; I tried immediately to get up because I was in the middle of the road and I was afraid of being hit by a car. But I tried in vain, my joints were refusing to obey me. My first thought was for the "Nove Colli" bike race that I had been preparing for, scheduled for May 24. But after a while, I realised that the race did not matter now because it dawned on me that something serious had happened to me. (...)*

#### The return home

*I finally got out of hospital on May 15, 1993. I was now a quadriplegic, my bodily functions were deeply altered and a throbbing pain invaded my whole body, with no drug able to relieve it. Many thoughts raced through my head; I still did not know if and how I would get back even the most basic functions. I delegated everything to other people. I no longer had any initiative. I was completely passive. My brother Rino had to think about everything for me.*

*I had lost my identity; I was unable to feel affection for my family, I had no interest in my friends. In the evening I went to bed hoping I would not wake up. My family was already in a desperate situation: Loris, my older brother is blind and dad is hemiplegic and aphasic. Mum had died some years earlier.*

*Desperately, I thought: "We are never going to get over this". (...) As time passed, I realised that it was highly unlikely that my condition would improve.*

*The final blow came in January 1993 when a medical specialist from a Swiss clinic invited me to consider returning home after 6 months of hospitalisation: I was now going to need an electric wheelchair and a device to help me feed myself and use the computer. My hopes of recovering the use of my arm and being released from the pain vanished forever. Once alone in my room, my sister and I burst into tears, overwhelmed and full of rage.*

#### Loss of intimacy

*Having to show my naked body to so many people, these people who had nothing to do with me, was really humiliating. At those times I didn't want to exist any longer, I wanted to die. Even now, after all these years (too many years), the discomfort is still tangible. Sometimes my daily routine gives the impression that all is well; in reality it is not. We never get used to such things. My body was changing (...) when I looked in the mirror, I felt a deep sense of anger. Today, with the passing of time, the mirror is no longer a problem (...) my "new" body and my wheelchair are now an integral part of my life.*

#### Dependence

*The thing that weighs on me most is my total dependence on others. While mental autonomy depends only on the person, the physical self is subordinate to the help of others, to technology and computer resources. My body and intimacy belong, now and forever, to others, but my spirit, my soul, my feelings belong only to me and I share only what I choose. It was not easy initially to separate my body from my mind.*

*I believe that human beings have an incredible ability to adapt to the harshest, most cruel events in life. I am convinced that the human mind has enormous potential, but only a fraction of it is used. I am not referring to "magic" or "supernatural" potential, but rather the kind that is much more concrete, which allows us to face real life, which is sometimes very hard.*

*When the "test" appears, it is very likely that a person who "took care of their spirit" will manage to cope better, to be stronger, without being completely crushed. By contrast, a person who never stopped to reflect on life will most likely have more trouble.*

#### The reorganisation of life

*(...) I began immediately to think about how to "reorganise my life". I began to look for help outside and I made contact with a social worker. (...) After a few experiences, which were not entirely positive in October 1995, I met Gabriella, a retired nurse. She is still with me today, and I wish her good health, because she deserves it and because the bond that unites us is no longer about mere support. Gabriella is now part of my family, to the point that I regard her as a mother.*

*In October 1993, I met Mila and asked her to come and help me with my day care. (...) Mila stayed with me until July 1998 when health concerns and family demands forced her to leave. The separation was very difficult for us, because Mila had become like a sister to me, and my brother Loris and I were like her brothers.*

## MODULE 6: TRACES OF RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES

### Recovery symptoms

*During the Summer of 1993, a young man named Paolo who was going through a difficult time, began to come two afternoons a week to help me with the housework. This encounter was very important for both of us: we spent hours telling each other our life experiences. That is how we became friends and our friendship continues today. Forever.*

*We engaged in deep discussions, asking each other "What is the meaning of life?" "Why must we suffer so much?" "Why are so many other people healthy?" "Why me?"*

### High philosophy!

*Paolo always managed to find an answer, while I had none. There is no doubt that he helped me a lot psychologically.*

*At the same time, (...) I began to look for a means of transport (...). I was devastated and humiliated by the pain of not being able to drive my car. (...) I was angry about my fate. (...) A few days ago I bought a minivan where I can sit with my wheelchair next to the driver's seat, and I am waiting for the day when I can drive it myself.*

*In December 1993 I accepted a conscientious objector as a support worker. It is not easy to interact every day, for six hours, with a stranger. The first experience was not positive, and this failure can be attributed in part to my refusal to accept the young objector, and in part to his lack of experience. It seemed to me to be the most difficult thing in the world to maintain a relationship, communicate with a stranger, an outsider, even though he was there to help me. I was obliged to talk, to share, to listen, even when I did not feel like it. Things began to improve after that, I began to accept him, and then the help of other objectors. The arrival of Lorenzo an objector and physiotherapist, represented a turning point in my life. Thanks to him, I started to gradually recover my self esteem and my abilities.*

*That year was a very difficult year, but I was getting physiotherapy at home with Lorenzo without having to go to the hospital, and the friendship that was born between us helped me solve many problems.*

### Recovery and autonomy

*Regaining my self esteem, being able to experience feelings towards my loved ones, my friends, is the most important thing that has happened to me in recent years. Before I spoke impersonally: "they say", "it feels", "you see" "you suffer", etc. Today "I say", "I feel", "I see", "I suffer"; Fabio speaks for himself. This was a very important turning point in my life, for it was then that I understood what had happened to me, I became aware of the reality in which I lived. I began to get to know myself better, to better understand all aspects of my life, of my being as a person.*

*I do not really accept my disability or my pain, but I have learned, with great effort, to live with them. I hope that I have reached a "new equilibrium", a balance between these painful experiences and some really beautiful and pleasant moments. It has not been easy. Many people have helped me on this journey. Firstly, my family, and then all the people I have met over the years, all my new friends.*

*It is said that where there is a will there is a way. That's not true. Many people who have the misfortune to suffer an accident, illness, depression, etc. are unable to cope. They are so crushed by the weight of the test, which may be too big for them. Those who recover are not better than the others. Do not give them a medal. In the "school of life", some make it, and others do not, but we must not blame anyone. I know people with disability who are cut off from the world, confined to their homes and experiencing depression, a more serious problem, much more serious than their disability.*

*There is no doubt that for these people, and for many others, the road can unfortunately be very long! Luckily, this was not the case for me. During the Summer of 1999, I started extensive building work to get rid of all my architectural barriers. A few years earlier, someone had suggested this to me, but I did not even consider their idea because at that time my head was... elsewhere. I was crushed under the weight of despair and anguish, the house did not interest me and I did not even see the architectural barriers they were talking about. (...) Today, I have achieved a great deal of autonomy, because using a single remote control I can open doors, windows and shutters, turn on the lights, TV and stereo, adjust the temperature of the heating, etc.*

### Others

*People came and went with the seasons, at any time they pleased, just as had been the case during my hospitalisation. This certainly had many advantages but the disadvantages were also numerous. My psychological situation was serious: I could only see the bad side of things; I thought my life was a useless ordeal; I was convinced that I no longer had any reason to live.*

*But, on the other hand, I was obliged to rely on so many people to stay alive that I had no space left for myself (...) With the help of Lorenzo, I began to impose limits and schedules, starting with my family. I wanted to be the one to decide if, where and when to receive them. Some people, who had initially been around a lot gradually disappeared, and frankly I didn't mind because then I did not have to send them away. Seeing that the visits became fewer and fewer, Rino and Donata began to fear that I would lock myself away inside my solitude. They made their concerns known to Lorenzo, who immediately reassured them and told them that I needed space and time to be alone with myself.*

*I liked to read, listen to music, take refuge in my thoughts, reflect on what had happened to me, what I was going through, what I would do. "What is the future for me? Will it always be so bad? Will I ever have any pleasant moments, moments of joy?" "I cannot believe my bad luck. In five years of cycling I only fell once, and I was going slowly. A single fall that was fatal to me, while others have much more disastrous accidents than mine and suffer no damage at all".*

### Friendship

*I am pleased to say that I have many friends (around ten), who I have met along the way. I think few people can count on many friends, in the deepest sense of the word. I started going out with these people, to the cinema, restaurants, etc. At first, I did it reluctantly, I let myself be convinced, but over time I also began to suggest outings, evenings together. We have created a nice group of people who like to share not only the simple and normal things of life, but also strong feelings such as joy and pain.*

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*It's beautiful to think that we all met in different circumstances and in different ways, and in turn became friends with each other. I carry deep in my heart some indelible memories of lovely evenings spent in their company. In particular, the night we celebrated my 38th birthday. (...) There were about thirty of us. (...) We started to talk nonsense, to tell jokes and laughter rang out on all sides. At the end of dinner, when I gave the customary speech, my joy gave way to deep emotions: "There is no doubt that if we remain united and compact - to the extent that this is consistent with work and family and the personal commitments of all of you - this group can do great things, leave a mark on this life. And then my suffering will not have been useless". The applause was mixed with tears of emotion.*

### *The meaning of life*

*Today, with the passage of time and in spite of everything, I can say: "Life is worth living" and I find myself daring to think, "What if tomorrow's medicine and science discover a drug that could relieve my pain?" Meanwhile, I use two "therapies" that can sometimes help my mood: chromotherapy and smile therapy. Colours act, even subconsciously, on people's moods: blue and green are the most soothing colours, yellow and beige are the warmest. In terms of smiling, I made my own the words of Mantak Chia, who said in his book "Tao Yoga": "It must have happened to you that you are walking down the street, nervous, sullen or surly for a number of different reasons. (...) Then you look up and someone smiles at you and without you realising it, you smile back. In a split second your bad mood is gone... You have realised that things will change, that everything will be fine. A sincere smile hides enormous strength... it is a sign... a smile transmits energy, heats and cures, just like music. Smiling and health are closely linked. Few people know the importance and strength of the smile or the virtues of a smile addressed to our internal organs and nervous system". So I started to smile again, from within the very depths of my being, and sometimes I think, "Whatever happens, the sun always rises... it is still there, even during the long, grey days of Winter.*

Elena Malaguti, *Educarsi alla resilienza*, p. 136-145

The resilience process undertaken by Fabio featured a fundamental turning point: the recognition and duality of the two components of the self, that is to say, the body and mind. His story highlights aspects of suffering that relate to one and/or the other, and that intersect to determine his suffering, which begins with a physical trauma and later becomes a psychic trauma. The body and mind came together on his journey to rebirth, creating the conditions, at least in part, for him to regain his lost physical autonomy. On this journey, Fabio also found the strength to look beyond his experiences of despair related to his condition, to meet and to renew his relationships with others, and even to recognise that the human mind has the extraordinary potential "to allow us to face real life, which is sometimes very hard".

### GROUP REFLECTION

Re-read Fabio's story, paying particular attention to the following aspects:

- The suffering in his body and mind resulting from the accident.
- The stages which marked his personal resilience journey.
- The resources which, according to Fabio, helped him on his journey.
- His changing point of view regarding his condition. How can we encourage people with disability to adopt new perspectives?

### Resilience and mistreatment in the family – Maria's story

*As a family we were different and therefore culturally "bad" and so we were treated differently. (...)*

*My father was an alcoholic, and when he was not working he was drunk, and when he was drunk, my mother was angry. Luckily, my mother did not drink. I remember one day, going to the kitchen, I saw her picking up bottles scattered everywhere and running after him. There was blood everywhere...*

*I do not know how my father managed to die of natural causes, but he did. I was in elementary school when my mother was admitted to a psychiatric hospital for severe depression...*

*As for us, we would walk around the sugar cane fields, go down to the sea or climb in the hills, it didn't matter, as long as we didn't have to see our mother running after our father.*

*Six of the seven children born and raised in that house are relatively healthy and lead an almost normal life. However, one of my older sisters had serious drug problems and today she lives on the street, but we continue to love her, to pray for her and to be there when she calls...*

*We children would do anything not to be punished, that's what I did: I worked and worked at home, I did and redid things until they were perfect, otherwise I was beaten with a belt.*

*And that's what made the difference for me. I do not want to say that it was a wonderful experience, but it is true that I have learned what it means to "look on the bright side of life". When I face a difficult task, I always say "how do I resolve this?", and never "this is too hard for me, I give up".*

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*For me the most important thing was to have loving people to count on throughout my life. Most of the time these people were not my parents, because they were too busy with their personal affairs.*

*The first and most important person on whom I could count as a child was my grandmother, my maternal grandmother. Her name was Kahaunaele. She lived 100 metres from our house, and it was really nice to have her so close. She was a wonderful person, a silent woman... I do not remember the tone of her voice but I know she had an amazing heart.*

*We were part of a group called "those children"... that is to say the kind of children about whom parents say "I don't want you to play with those children". We were the kind of children that nobody wants to be around...*

*As far as I can remember, my grandmother was the only person who ever brushed my hair. Grandma had a wooden leg. When she was a little girl a car ran over her foot and it got infected, the infection spread, gained ground, and they had to cut off her leg just below the knee.*

*She would put six pairs of socks on her stump, to make a kind of hollow where she then inserted her wooden leg. I remember when she went to bed, she removed her leg and her socks and lined them all up on the edge of the bed.*

*We spent a lot of time with her. One night I woke up crying because I had had a nightmare. I was very scared and wanted someone to comfort me. I can still see her crawling down the hallway to come and reassure me. When she saw that I was better, she returned to her room the same way she had come.*

*That is a memory of care, affection and support that nothing and no one can ever take away from me.*

*It was school that made the difference in my life story. At sixteen, while I was studying, I got pregnant...*

*One teacher said, "the programs have changed, the system has evolved, and I want to give you all an example of transformation through this girl".*

*I returned to school which helped me to regain my confidence, broaden my vision and get out, even though child abuse, alcoholism and addiction were all around me.*

*It was then that I made a commitment to myself to never get engaged or get married to someone who drinks. I have witnessed the devastation caused by alcohol. Alcohol has destroyed my family. I saw my father become completely incontinent and vomit all day long...*

*I vowed to do everything in my power to prevent this from being repeated in my own life. I made a choice. I do not want my children to have to face the same thing. And I have been able to keep my promise.*

As told to the Centro de Estudios y Atención del Niño y la Mujer, Chile

In her account, Maria highlights the different resources that helped her overcome the situation of extreme vulnerability in which she found herself. These resources correspond to the three areas of "I have", "I can" and "I am" presented in Module 3 (see p. 26).

Firstly, her grandmother (I have). She appears, with her watchful presence, to be a true tutor of resilience, able to welcome and listen to Maria's needs and to rush to help in difficult times. In a word, able to be there, to be available when needed, *"That is a memory of care, affection and support that nothing and no one can ever take away from me"*.

Secondly, the school (I can), which was a fundamental resource for Maria throughout her journey to growth, *"it was school that made the difference in my life story"*. The skills and lessons Maria received at school, which led her to be a good student, have enabled her to acquire a sense of self esteem and security, and thanks to this, she has been able to release herself from her condition of vulnerable child and continue to move forward on her journey to growth.

Finally, having witnessed the lethal effects of alcoholism on her parents and, indirectly, on herself and her siblings, Maria made a "choice" (I am) which represented a firm foundation on which to build her future: the will to not expose her life and that of her children to that same threat. And Maria has managed to keep that promise.

It is interesting to note how Maria's resilience has transformed the "grain of sand" given to her by her family circumstances, into a precious pearl. The young girl in fact recognises that this experience has given her an inner confidence and a spirit of initiative that allow her to face life with gusto.

*"And that's what made the difference for me. I do not want to say that it was a wonderful experience, but it is true that I have learned what it means to "look on the bright side of life". When I face a difficult task, I always say "how do I resolve this?", and never "this is too hard for me, I give up."*

### GROUP REFLECTION

- Re-read Maria's story, paying particular attention to the characteristics of her "little grain of sand" and the path she took to transform it into a "precious pearl".
- On the basis of this reflection, in small groups devise an educational intervention plan to care for children in a vulnerable family situation, clearly describing the educational activities aimed at strengthening the three types of resources: I have, I can and I am.

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### Resilience and migration – interview with Ahad Khan

This text is taken from Marta Landoni's doctoral thesis on developmental psychology, entitled *Resilienza nei Giovani Adulti. L'influenza dei fattori culturali* (Resilience in young adults. The influence of cultural factors).

#### Let's get to know each other... What's your name? How old are you?

*My name is Ahad Khan, I'm 18 and I am currently working in a French restaurant in Milan as a cooking assistant.*

#### That sounds good... and now can I ask you to tell me a personal experience that you consider negative or difficult...

*The journey to get this far has been difficult...*

#### Tell me about it...

*I was 16 when I arrived in Italy. I thought that in Italy my life would be better than in Bangladesh and so I decided to come here to find work.*

#### And how did you get to Italy?

*I travelled through many countries. First I went to Calcutta, then I crossed Pakistan and several other countries and finally I took a boat that brought me here.*

#### But how did you travel?

*By car, by train, sometimes I walked...*

#### Did the experience weigh you down? Did you feel as though you were in a difficult situation?

*Yes, it was very hard... once I thought I was going to die...*

#### Do you remember your feelings at that time? Did you want to tell me about them?

*I was afraid, very afraid of dying, of not lasting the night, but I also felt hope and courage.*

#### Did you have any money when you left?

*My father paid 9000 Euros for the trip... I got here with that money...*

#### You told me that you travelled through Pakistan... and through several other countries... which ones?

*Iran by bus and then Turkey and finally Italy, where I arrived by boat...*

#### And what was the trip like? Tell me about it...

*Awful, I had to endure terrible things...*

#### Why is that ?

*We spent entire days without eating, sometimes two or three days in a row... we had to cross forests and I was very afraid...*

#### Because you were alone? Who else was there? Didn't you know anyone?

*No, I was not alone, there were twelve of us... but I was the youngest.*

#### And no one protected you? Even though you were the youngest in the group?

*No, it was like a mafia...*

#### How did you come into contact with the mafia organisation?

*I couldn't stand it any more... I was saying all the time to my father and my mother that I wanted to leave... I was angry... then I asked my uncle to help me and he said "well... , okay, if you have decided... since you're not going to school anymore and you are not eating...". He knew a Bengali man, he spoke to him and gave him half of the money and my father gave him the other half, and the trip was organised. Before I left, he told me that the trip was going to be easy, I did not know that I was going to spend two or three days without food or that I would have to walk as much as I did.*

#### And during the trip, did you make friends with anyone, and do you still see them?

*I don't know... yes, I met a few people... but then when I arrived in Italy... I don't know where they went...*

#### Even today, do the experiences, the events you went through during your trip come back to you from time to time in your memory?

*One day, I was walking on the ice in Iran... I only had a shirt on... I felt very bad... no jacket... no shoes... I had trouble walking barefoot... One person in the group could no longer walk, he was too tired... I was convinced that the mafia would kill him... I was terrified... at one point one of the mafia guys took out his revolver to kill him, and then I was really scared... Even today, when I am afraid it is this scene that comes to mind.*

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**And now that you're in Italy, do you have nightmares, or in the daytime, do you ever have the feeling that you are reliving this experience? For example, you see something... and it all comes back to the surface?**

*I was in Italy for a week... one day I sat on a bench... I was very sad... and a lady asked me why I was so depressed. I replied that I was only 16 years old, I was undocumented and without work, and that I did not know where to go. She accompanied me to the police station and told me that the police were going to help me, and I started to feel better. I still remember the woman's face, she was the first person who helped me.*

**Once you got to Italy, where did you go?**

*To a small town, at first I did not know where I was, what the name of the city was, then I found out it was Ancona... A white person accompanied me to the station and I called a friend... I lived with him for a week and after that I went to live in a care home where I stayed until I was 18.*

**And now?**

*Now I live with the cook and I pay half the rent.*

**Here in Italy, do you have someone who can help and support you in times of difficulty?**

*My whole family is in Bangladesh... I have some friends here that I can count on.*

**Do you speak to your family from time to time?**

*Yes, often, on the phone...*

**Do you think you will go back there one day?**

*No, I'm here now and I want to stay here, even if at this moment I'm having a tough time... but I do not want to go back, I want to move forward.*

**Would you consider your journey to be a growth experience? And if so, how have you changed?**

*Yes, I have suffered and this suffering is forever etched within me... I think it helped me to become what I am today.*

**So you came through this by yourself... counting only on your own strength?**

*Yes, I did everything alone... I had to fend for myself.*

**You told me you have changed, can you tell me in what way?**

*My way of thinking... I was 16 at the time... the way I talk... the way I do things... everything... even my face has changed...*

**Now, tell me something about your family and the people in it?**

*I have a sister and a brother who are younger than me... over there, I studied... I got to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade... my family is not rich.*

**What is the name of the city where you lived?**

*It's a small town near Dhaka, which is the capital.*

**Okay... and what religion are you? Are you Hindu?**

*No, I'm Muslim.*

**Have you ever thought that your experience could be a sign from Allah?**

*Yes, I always thought so... Allah is always with me... when I have a problem I always think that God will help me... before I left I prayed and my heart was always with God.*

**How do you see your future?**

*I think I'll do something here in Italy... I would like to become a chef, run a restaurant or something like that...*

**Back to the present now, you told me what you do and where you live... but where did you meet your friends from here?**

*I met them in Milan, through a youth project that my support workers told me about... I went there and I met a group of young Italians and we became friends, I also made friends in the community... and then I started working and I've met other people...*

**Have you stayed in touch with your support workers?**

*Yes, yes...*

In Ahad's story, what catches our attention first is the role played by a resilience actor, the Italian woman who saw him sitting sad and alone and decided to help. Ahad did not know her, and yet her face is now etched in his memory because, he says, she was "the first person who helped me".

The journey to Italy was an experience filled with loneliness and a lack of protection: no one was willing to protect him, and even though he was the youngest, he had no-one to rely on, "it was like a mafia", with no-one to help him face his fears, "I was afraid, very afraid of dying, of not lasting the night".

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Ahad repeatedly stresses the fact that he came through this experience alone, that he could only rely on his own strength. In particular, he acknowledges having overcome his fears thanks to hope and courage, which never left him, and his deep faith in God, “*my heart has always been with God*”.

The young man feels different now, the experience has changed him, he is determined to move forward to realise his dream, a dream he has had for a long time of running a restaurant, encouraged by the same hopes and the same courage from his past, and which he is working towards through his apprenticeship.

### GROUP REFLECTION

Re-read Ahad’s story, paying particular attention to the description of the threats that he encountered and the internal and external resources that helped him to face the experience of his migratory journey.

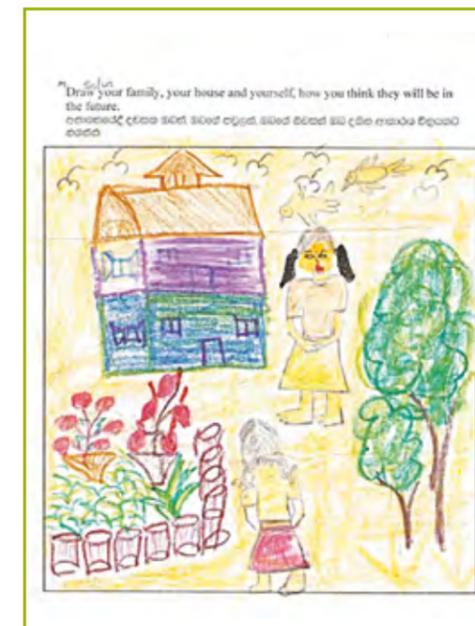
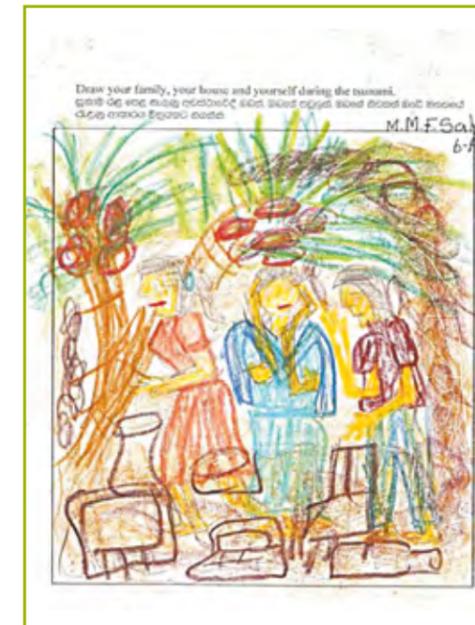
### Resilience and expressive language

#### Resilience and Natural Disasters – drawing Salva’s future

Salva is an 11 year-old girl who lives in a village near Matara, a town located on Sri Lanka’s Southern coast which was hit by a tsunami in 2004. On the morning of the tsunami, her mother had gone shopping as usual at the market in Matara, down by the sea... The tsunami waves did not reach Salva’s village, which is located further inland. However, news of the disaster arrived very quickly. For several days, the little girl, her older sister and their father knew nothing of the whereabouts of the mother, who had not returned... On the third day her body was recovered, brought to shore by the destructive waves. After the tragedy and for several months, Salva refused to go to school. She rarely spoke, ate very little and preferred to be alone, locked inside her pain. Her family and teachers were concerned for Salva because she seemed to be avoiding contact with the outside world.

However, thanks to the patience and persistence of her teachers, who refused to give in and continued to be available to help despite many setbacks, and also thanks to the great love of her father and sister, Salva gradually emerged from her isolation and felt that she was ready to be helped and to face the deep pain she had experienced.

As part of a psychosocial intervention conducted four years after the tsunami by the Resilience Research Unit of the Catholic University of Milan, an art workshop was offered to primary school children in the city of Matara. In particular, the workshop asked the children to draw their family and their home before and after the tsunami, and finally, to draw their house the way that they would like it to be.



### Salva’s drawings

In the first picture the little girl has drawn a memory from her childhood: her mother, broom in hand, is in the front garden, and she and her sister are studying. In the second drawing, Salva illustrates the immense suffering represented by waiting for news of her mother. Her father is depicted trying to comfort her, while her sister is moving, indicating her desire to go in search of her mother. Salva was able to represent the suffering in her picture: her position, holding her temples with both hands, is reminiscent of Edvard Munch’s famous painting “The Scream”, and her face efficiently transmits her emotional state, which we can discern from the horizontal line representing her mouth. The surrounding landscape, a collection of shapes and scattered objects at the bottom of the page, also appears to be a representative element showing the little girl’s internal chaos.

But we should pay attention above all to Salva’s third drawing. One key detail stands out: all the elements are represented twice: birds, swallows, trees, flower pots and people. Her experience of solitude and abandonment following the death of her mother, has given way to an image of a world of “twos”, where the eyes of her sister, represented just in front of her, will always be watching over her. Salva therefore imagines a positive future where nothing and no one will be alone.

## MODULE 6: TRACES OF RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES

### Resilience and migration – The ocean's hands

On 3 October 2013, a Libyan ship carrying more than 500 migrants ran aground a few miles from the port of Lampedusa, killing 366 people. Twenty migrants were reported missing and 155, including 42 children, managed to get to safety. That night, many boats set sail to go to rescue the shipwrecked people.

The coffins of the victims remained on the island for several days, and as they had not been sealed properly, the acrid smell of bodies began to spread. Sadness, confusion and anger at not being able to prevent such a tragedy gradually overcame the locals.

The story we present below was written and illustrated a few days after the shipwreck by Vanessa, a 9 year-old girl, as part of a recreational activity offered by the local association "il giglio marino", organised by psychologist Caterina Famularo.

### "The ocean's hands"

*There was once an enormous ocean on which a lonely boat was sailing in the middle of a storm.*

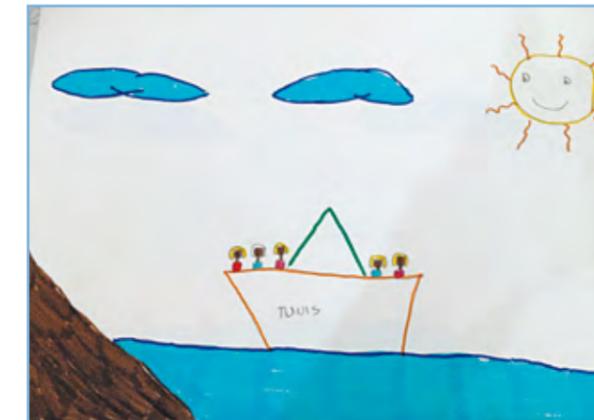


*The ocean wanted to help. It asked the clouds to give space for the sun to come out and it asked the sky to make the winds blow.*



*The sea moved closer to the boat and saw that there were people on board. It asked them why they were there, and they told it their stories and confided that they wanted to get to the shore.*

*The ocean then spoke to Lampedusa, a magnificent sunny island, inhabited by people who were ready to help and receive the people on the boat.*



*With the help of the sea, the shipwrecked people managed to get to the island, where they were welcomed by the coastguard who helped them to safety.*



*The migrants realised that the ocean and the people of Lampedusa had helped them and so they thanked them every day. And the ocean and the island replied that they didn't need to worry because they would always be there to help them.*

To face up to the suffering of all the inhabitants of Lampedusa, and in particular its children during the days that followed the tragedy of the shipwreck, Vanessa created and illustrated a story of resilience in which a message of hope is transmitted with strength and conviction.

## MODULE 6: TRACES OF RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES

### Resilience and detention – Adele's river of life

Adele is a young 23-year-old Italian woman who suffers from addiction and is being held in a Milan prison. She is the mother of a little 8-year-old boy who is in the custody of his grandmother (Adele's mother). For several months the young woman has been suffering from a marked depressive state: she spends most of her time in her cell and has adopted extremely aggressive behaviour towards her cellmates and the prison staff, which in turn means that she has been repeatedly subjected to punitive measures.

Adele's support workers are very worried about her because she seems to want to stay locked in anger inside her pain, and to not let anyone near her. They have asked her to participate in the program "Resilience Behind Bars", a psychosocial intervention led by the Resilience Research Unit of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan.

To the surprise of her support workers, Adele agrees to participate in the activity. However, her presence is sporadic and, at least initially, she merely attends the meetings, without participating in the workshop activities.

The welcome from the other inmates, and the offer of a space where she can confide her thoughts and fears, encourage her to participate more and more often and more actively.

The latest workshop offered is entitled "The River of Life", presented below. This is a collage activity that allows everyone to explore their own life and then integrate the experiences, both positive and negative, in a unique way. The objective is to promote an integrated and coherent representation of the individual's own life story. The person is therefore asked to draw a river, which represents their life, and then indicate negative memories on one of the banks and on the other, positive memories.



Adele decides to start with good memories and glues a photo of hands clasped together holding rose petals. This representation refers to the figure of her mother, who has tried to reach out to her and give her advice, but Adele has never listened or accepted this help. The rules and motherly advice therefore appear as the "silence of the word", a phrase she finds in a newspaper and decides to include in her artwork. She then shows her love for her partner Aziz and her son Murad,

"which in Arabic means desire", she explains. Adele also explains the image of the globe: "I had a negative world; now I want to discover the other side... I have hope for the future". She then explains that the choice of the image of the world in a backpack is related to

adolescence, when the street was her school, which enabled her to learn several languages. Finally, among the positive memories, she says being a mother. "Because, she exclaims, we only have one mother!"

Adele then turns to negative memories, illustrated on the lower part of the sheet. The lemon refers to her at 14 years of age, the age when she began to use heroin. She then recounts how she went on to use alcohol.

Finally, she says that these two things can be overcome if one has the courage to face the challenges. Among the negative elements, Adele also includes adrenaline because "it makes me take risks"; pathology "because I suffer from a personality disorder"; loneliness "because I often feel like a fish out of water".

The choice of the image of the post box and the phrase written beside it "My son is not a parcel", refers to the many moves that her son had to undergo during the period when she was in care or in prison. Each move caused him enormous suffering. "Now he is with his grandmother, and he is well!" She says in conclusion.

Finally, Adele indicates other experiences that have characterised her past: anger against the many hardships she has faced, fear and the urge to steal (for which she was imprisoned), suffering and melancholy, which are always present within her.

The "Resilience Behind Bars" project included several activities, but Adele says that her favourite was the "river of life", "Because that's me there... all my life is in there", she says, not without emotion, looking at her sheet.

Traumatic experiences and multiple suffering, such as those that Adele has experienced, may lead the individual to develop a fragmentary self-representation, characterised only by negative experiences, with destructive forces overshadowing positive memories. Through this activity, Adele was able to recover an integrated and coherent representation of her life story, a necessary condition to develop resilient processes in the present and in the future, despite her traumatic past.

### GROUP REFLECTION

Subdivide the group into three sub-groups and ask each one to consider a different expressive workshop. Invite each sub-group to:

- Reflect on the aim of the workshop and the expected results.
- Reflect on the different aspects of the suffering experienced, and the resources used to face up to them.
- Present your reflections to the rest of the group.
- Try to invent a workshop using another kind of expressive language to promote resilience processes with vulnerable children.

# MODULE 7: ASSISTED RESILIENCE PRACTICE: EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

**Objective:** To illustrate educational activities aimed at strengthening resilience processes in field work, and to evaluate the results of this training.

This chapter aims at describing creative workshops based on educational psychology<sup>7</sup>. The **purpose of these interventions** is to *strengthen internal resources* (self-esteem, identity...), *value the group; support family cohesion; support the process of emotion recognition and the sharing of traumatic experiences*.

Different kinds of expressive language can be used in the workshops: drawing, theatre, music, etc. The objective is to explore the different potential of these languages.

The importance of the use of these forms of expression with children in vulnerable situations can be explained by several factors:

- They are **universally shared**, because they go beyond words;
- They offer a window into the child's **inner world**, to the extent that they allow the child to externalise aspects of life that can be painful, in a gradual and safe way;
- They allow the child to **give shape and meaning** to traumatic / painful experiences. They are a means of communication through which the child can express pain, loss, feelings, perceptions, thoughts and memories linked to a traumatic event. Indeed, as we have seen, the ability to assign shape and meaning to painful experiences is fundamental as this gives the child a sense of agency and control contrasting with the impotence and passivity that characterise the trauma (sexual abuse, violence, war, natural disasters, ...).

This chapter also offers a lively cross-cutting course from two “*silent books*” produced by Dina Dasoki and Veronica Hurtubia, members of the Resilience Research Unit, part of the Masters in “Relationships of Support in Development and Cooperation Contexts” at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, under the direction of Professor Cristina Castelli.

We have included two stories that cover topics related to diversity, hospitality and integration, which are illustrated only with images (see worksheet 6 – “*Silent books*”, p. 105). These cross-cutting issues are relevant across different intervention contexts, and are fundamental to take into consideration when forming an effective, cohesive and resilient working group.

<sup>7</sup> - Extracts from the document *Tutori di resilienza. Guida orientativa per interventi psico-educativi*, written by the Resilience Research Unit of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, under the direction of Professor Cristina Castelli.

Finally, this chapter offers evaluation sheets for training courses based on this handbook. These sheets can assess:

- The quality and effectiveness of the training;
- The understanding and level of learning gained applying the resilience approach in the educational activities;
- The field application of knowledge learned.

## Worksheet 1: Strengthening internal resources

### Activity 1.1: Five fingers, five qualities

#### Theme

Internal resources: *I can*.

#### Aim of the activity

To recognise qualities and talents, as observed by another person.

#### Expected results

Consciousness raising about our own talents.

#### Age range

8-13 years old

#### Length

60 minutes

#### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside, with tables and chairs.

#### Materials

- white paper
- felt tip pens
- coloured pencils, black pencils
- erasers
- sharpener

## MODULE 7: ASSISTED RESILIENCE PRACTICE: EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

### Working groups

Groups of 5 children

### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- ask the children what the terms talents / qualities mean to them;
- form groups of 5 children and have them sit in a circle around a table;
- ask all participants to draw the outline of their hand on the paper and write their name on the back;
- invite the children to draw or write one of their talents / qualities on the thumb;
- ask the children to pass their sheet to a child seated on their right;
- ask everyone to draw or write on another finger of the other child's hand a talent / quality that they think that child has;
- repeat this until each child once again has the sheet with their hand drawn on it, and can read what their friends think of them;
- to conclude the activity, lead a discussion with the children about their talents / qualities. The drawings of hands can be displayed in a prominent place.

### Notes and suggestions

Allow the children to work autonomously, while checking from time to time to see whether the group is working along the right lines. Make positive comments.

### Activity 1.2: That's me

#### Theme

Internal resources: *I can*.

#### Aim of the activity

To strengthen children's self-esteem via recognition of their talents and what is good about them.

#### Expected results

To give the child the opportunity to recognise and reflect on their qualities, emotions, characteristics, etc.

#### Age range

6-10 years old

#### Length

90 minutes

### Space

A lot of space, inside or outside, with tables and chairs.

### Materials

- paper plates
- paints
- paint brushes
- wool
- crepe paper
- vinyl adhesive
- plasticine
- elastic bands
- stapler
- scissors



### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- arrange the materials on the tables;
- distribute a paper plate to all the children, ask them to draw a mask on the plate to represent their moods, feelings, thoughts, or any other elements they identify with, using the equipment available to them;
- attach an elastic band to each plate so that the children can wear the mask;
- ask each child to put on their mask and then mime something that they like to do or do well. The other children have to guess what it is.

### Notes and suggestions

Do not give too much advice, let the children freely express their creativity. If the group is too big, split it into sub-groups for the part with the mime.

### Activity 1.3: The cupboard of dreams

#### Theme

Internal resources: *I am*.

#### Aim of the activity

To give children the opportunity to dream, inherent in their nature but often tested by experiences of suffering.

#### Expected results

Detachment from a situation of vulnerability / insecurity.  
Ability to access an image of happiness.

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### Age range

6-13 years old

### Length

90 minutes

### Space

A lot of space, inside or outside, with tables and chairs.

### Materials

- cardboard boxes/shoe boxes
- paints and paintbrushes
- scissors and sellotape
- white/coloured paper
- pencils and/or pens
- string



### Working groups

This activity can be done individually or in small groups (maximum 5 children per group).

### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- brainstorming on the nature and importance of dreams;
- divide the children into small groups and make them work individually;
- give each child or group of children a cardboard box and ask them to build their own “cabinet of dreams” by cutting the lid of the box in half to make doors and then gluing them to the rest of the box;
- ask the children to colour and decorate their wardrobes as they please;
- give each child one or two sheets of paper and ask them to draw or write their dreams; they can also decorate the sheet;
- invite the children to fold the sheets and to put away their dreams inside the cabinets; if the work was done in small groups, each child will store their dreams in the group’s cabinet;
- ask the children to close the doors of the cabinet with string.

### Notes and suggestions

- For smaller children, the teachers/support workers could help to make the cabinet, which could be important to avoid frustration.
- Keep the cabinets so that the children can store other dreams there later.

### Activity 1.4: Important moments in life

#### Theme

Internal resources: *I am.*

#### Aim of the activity

To promote the strengthening of identity through the identification of real or symbolic significant places.

#### Expected results

To visualise and identify real or symbolic places in our own life.

#### Age range

6-13 years old

#### Length

120 minutes

#### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside.

#### Materials

- white paper A4 or A3
- felt tip pens
- coloured pencils
- pencil sharpener
- crepe paper
- glue
- sellotape

#### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- ask each child to identify and draw on A3 or A4 paper the four most important places for them;
- the child will then associate each location chosen with a person and a moment / memory linked to this place and will write them down;
- at the end of the activity, ask the children to form a circle, and those who wish can explain and share their designs with the others.

#### Notes and suggestions

An alternative for older children might be to use photographs of the most important places for them rather than drawing them.

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### Activity 1.5: The treasure box of desires

#### Theme

Internal resources: *I am.*

#### Aim of the activity

To develop children's capacity to project themselves into a positive future.

#### Expected results

Detachment from a situation of vulnerability/risk.  
Capacity to project oneself into a positive future.

#### Age range

6-13 years old

#### Length

30 minutes

#### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside.

#### Materials

- cardboard or metal box
- white paper A4
- different coloured felt tip pens
- coloured pencils
- pencil sharpener
- crepe paper
- glue
- sellotape
- coloured string or ribbon
- stereo



#### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- prior preparation: it is advisable to cover the box;
- the activity is explained to children by presenting the treasure box of desires, a trunk for containing a treasure: their desires;
- ask each child to think about their wishes for the future;
- then invite the children to draw or write their wishes on the sheet that was distributed to them;

- Once the drawing / writing is finished, ask the child to roll up their paper as if it were a scroll and to tie it with string; then ask each child to drop their paper into the treasure box, which will be placed in the centre of the space where the activity took place;
- after placing their paper in the box, the children form a circle around it and listen together to a song chosen by the teacher or support worker, on the theme of the importance of desires.

#### Notes and suggestions

An alternative for older children could be to ask them to choose a photograph or a newspaper picture that evokes their desires for the future and then discuss in groups.

### Worksheet 2 : Valuing the group

### Activity 2.1: Eyes blindfolded and feet tied together

#### Theme

Group work, collaboration and rules.

#### Aim of the activity

To promote collaboration between equals, through recognition and understanding of the needs of others.

#### Expected results

To resolve a problematic situation by means of close collaboration between group members.

#### Age range

6-13 years old

#### Length

Variable, depending on the number of children and the amount of times that they would like to play.

#### Space

Lots of space, outside.

#### Materials

- scarves or pieces of material
- recycled materials to create obstacles

### Working groups

Two teams

### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- prepare an obstacle course, which is more or less difficult depending on the age of the children;
- get into teams;
- form two sub-groups within each team: some children with their feet bound and some blindfolded;
- define the purpose of the game: to get to the finishing line as quickly as possible;
- the team members stand in two single files: on the right, blindfolded children who are unable see the obstacle course and are obliged to move by being guided by the voices of their comrades on the left who have their feet bound and are forced to move by hopping along beside their classmates who have been blindfolded;
- start a relay race;
- the children should face the obstacle course in pairs to help each other and cover the distance to the finish line as quickly as possible;
- once a couple has completed their journey, the following couple can leave, and so on;
- the winning team is the one that reaches the finishing line the quickest;
- at the end of the game, highlight the concept of empathy and collaboration.

### Notes and suggestions

This is a game involving movement that enables children to let off steam. It is useful to repeat the game by reversing the roles: the children who were blindfolded have their feet bound and vice versa.

### Activity 2.2: Move as one single body

#### Theme

Group work, collaboration and rules.

#### Aim of the activity

To encourage observation and collaboration skills between two people and then within the whole group.

#### Expected results

Increase capacity for concentration and motor coordination in synchronicity with the group.

### Age range

7-13 years old

### Length

30-40 minutes

### Space

Lots of space, preferably outside to enable the children to move around freely.

### Working groups

The work will be initially carried out in teams of two couples. These groups will then join together into small groups of 4, and then 8, until the whole initial group is together again.

### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- the couples stand in rows on one side of the room (the starting point); each couple chooses a movement and both must try to synchronise their movements while looking at each other without talking;
- once the couple has managed to coordinate their movements, to increase the difficulty level children are invited to join together to form groups of 4, then 8, until the original group is recreated; the goal is to get to the other side of the room.
- at the end of the exercise, ask the children to share their feelings and the difficulties they encountered.

### Notes and suggestions

The facilitator may ask the couples to invent movement sequences to take full advantage of the space available, or give them indications of movements to perform: they could for example ask the couples to lift their arms and then lower them, to remain motionless, to turn around and around, bend one leg, and so on.

### Activity 2.3: Rules yes, rules no

#### Theme

Forming the group.

#### Aim of the activity

To negotiate clear and shared rules aimed at structuring a framework for group work.

#### Expected results

The group itself identifies the rules for its work.

Awareness-raising about mutual respect and respect for the places where we live.

Understanding of the meaning and importance of rules.

Definition of clear and shared limits of a working framework.

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### Age range

6-13 years old

### Length

90 minutes

### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside with tables and chairs.

### Materials

- white or coloured paper
- 2 boards
- felt tip pens and coloured pencils
- erasers

### Working groups

Small groups (maximum 5 children per group)

### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- brainstorming on the most important rules within a group (class);
- ask the children to sit in a circle, explain that to function well a group needs specific rules;
- write a provisional list on the board of the points that emerged from the discussion;
- from all the rules that have emerged from the discussion, choose 10;
- in small groups, draw each of the selected rules;
- create a poster showcasing the work of all the sub-groups.

### Notes and suggestions

- establish clear rules shared by all;
- reiterate the importance of also respecting rules in other activities.

### Activity 2.4: The two-sided medal

#### Theme

External resources: *I have*.

#### Aim of the activity

To introduce the concepts of helping behaviour and social skills.

### Expected results

To strengthen the value of everyday helping behaviour within the group.

### Age range

6-13 years old

### Length

90 minutes

### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside, with tables and chairs.

### Materials

- white paper, A4 size
- felt tip pens
- coloured ribbon
- coloured pencils

### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- brainstorming on the concept of helping behaviour with concrete / daily examples;
- make a medal by cutting a circle out of the A4 sheet;
- ask each child to draw on one side of the medal an episode where they helped someone and on the other side an episode where someone helped them;
- ask the children to apply colourful ribbon to the medal and then hang the medal around their necks;
- set up sub-groups of 3 - 5 children;
- ask each group to randomly choose a drawing from among those made by the members of their group;
- the chosen drawing is then represented by the entire group in a sketch presented in plenary; it is also possible to comment on the drawings with the children.

### Notes and suggestions

Ask the children if they felt happier when they helped someone or when they were helped by someone.

Worksheet 3 : Supporting family cohesion

**Activity 3.1: The family's bunch of grapes**

**Theme**

Family identity and sense of belonging.

**Aim of the activity**

To promote the value and the role of family origins, through the development of symbolic thought.

**Expected results**

Reflection on the role of the people who represent the child's family group.

**Age range**

6-13 years old

**Length**

120 minutes

**Space**

Classroom

**Materials**

- paper circles of about 10 cm diameter
- pencils and coloured pencils
- felt tip pens
- string or ribbon
- sellotape or stapler
- erasers
- scissors

**Explanation of the activity and methodology**

- explain the metaphor of using a bunch of grapes to symbolise family, with the grapes representing members of the family;
- ask each child to think about the number of members in their family (extended and nuclear) that they wish to include in their bunch of grapes;
- distribute to the children one circle for each grain in their bunch;
- ask the children to indicate their relationship with the person in each circle and draw a symbol to represent that person;
- after colouring their drawings, the children put them on the table in order to create their "bunch";



- the children then join the circles together using a string or ribbon, or simply stick them together to form the bunch of grapes representing their family;
- at the end of the activity, ask each child to present their family's bunch describing each of its grapes/members.

**Notes and suggestions**

To make the activity more fluid, you can ask the children to draw their bunch directly onto their A4 sheet. This activity can also be conducted within the family.

**Activity 3.2: Helping hands**

**Theme**

Family identity and feeling of belonging.

**Aim of the activity**

To promote the identification of family resources, both internal and external.

**Expected results**

To raise awareness in families about belonging to a social network, where they can find and/or give support.

**Length**

60 minutes

**Space**

Lots of space, inside or outside, with tables and chairs.

**Materials**

- white or coloured paper
- coloured pencils
- felt tip pens
- stapler
- scissors

**Working groups**

Family groups

**Explanation of the activity and methodology**

- ask each family group to draw the outlines of two hands on a sheet of paper;
- ask each family to represent graphically or verbally, on each finger of one of the hands, a person who could help them if they needed, or a person who helped them in the past;

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- ask each family to represent graphically or verbally, on each finger of the second hand, another episode where they themselves as a family, helped someone in trouble;
- the hands can be coloured and decorated according to each family's choice;
- at the end of the activity, each family presents its "helping hands" to the group, choosing one episode for each hand;
- to conclude, all the representations of "helping hands" are collected together and arranged in a circle to metaphorically represent a real network of support.

### Notes and suggestions

During the activity, it is important to encourage collaboration between parents and their children, to promote unity, especially in difficult moments.

### Activity 3.3: The family crest

#### Theme

Family identity and sense of belonging.

#### Aim of the activity

To value and share the feeling of family importance and identity, in families who have survived a traumatic event.

#### Expected results

To strengthen family identity.

#### Length

120 minutes

#### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside, with tables and chairs.

#### Materials

- paints
- paint brushes
- coloured pencils
- felt tip pens
- erasers
- pencil sharpener
- paper with the outline of a family crest left blank inside

#### Working groups

Family groups

### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- briefly explain the meaning of the crest as a symbol representing a group of people who have a shared history and certain characteristics in common;
- invite each family group to make its crest (or symbol) based on the following guidelines:
  - in the first area (top left) draw an animal symbolising the characteristics that each family believes represent them and which they consider they could use as a resource in difficult times;
  - in the adjacent area (top right) draw a flower, a plant or a tree that represents the origins (roots) of the family and their growth potential;
  - in the third area (bottom left) draw a natural environment (eg, landscape, sea, mountains, lake, waterfall, etc.), a metaphor for family relationships;
  - in the fourth area (bottom right), draw a symbol that expresses the family's hopes for the future;
  - ask each family to choose a word or invent a currency that reflects one of their fundamental values and then write the word / currency in the space provided on the crest for this purpose;
  - at the end of the activity, each family group presents and explains its crest to the others, sharing emotions and memories from their family.

### Notes and suggestions

The activity can also be carried out as part of training for "tutors of resilience"; in this case we would ask participants to represent individually or in groups of 3-4 persons the shield for a tutor of resilience.

Worksheet 4 : Understanding and recognition of feelings

**Activity 4.1: Walk as though you were...**

**Theme**

Feelings.

**Aim of the activity**

To strengthen the capacity to express feelings.

**Expected results**

To discover the importance of the body as an instrument to express feelings.

**Age range**

6-13 years old

**Length**

20 minutes

**Space**

Lots of space, inside or outside.

**Explanation of the activity and methodology**

- the children gather in a circle;
- invite each child to walk according to the received instruction: we start by representing animals (for example: walk as if we were all snakes that glide slowly along the ground, and now we are giraffes with long necks trying to reach that little leaf up there, etc.);
- then we move to human gaits (for example: walk as if we were very, very rushed because our train leaves in 2 minutes; we are walking on the burning sand; we are walking in the rain and we do not have an umbrella, etc.);
- finally, ask the children to represent feelings (for example: walk as if we were sad, worried, happy, excited, scared, anxious, etc.).

**Notes and suggestions**

It is also possible to divide the group into two, and give a different scenario to each sub-group (without the other subgroup hearing) and then ask each sub-group to guess the feeling expressed by the others.

**Activity 4.2: The statue of feelings**

**Theme**

Feelings.

**Aim of the activity**

To learn to express and recognise feelings through bodily expression.

**Expected results**

Discovering the importance of body language to communicate feelings and to express them in a group context.

**Age range**

6-13 years old

**Length**

60 minutes

**Space**

Lots of space, inside or outside.

**Materials**

- small pieces of card with different feelings written on them (happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, disgust, etc.)
- a small box or an envelope in which to place the pieces of card

**Working groups**

Couples

**Explanation of the activity and methodology**

- quick brainstorming about feelings and on how it is possible to express them;
- divide the children into groups of two;
- invite one of the two children from the couple to take one of the small pieces of card out of the small box or bag without telling others the feeling they have drawn out;
- the child who has taken the card begins to “shape” their friend, as if they were a block of clay, to represent the feeling shown on the small card;
- the child sculptors give the small card with the feeling written on it back to the teacher or support worker, who puts it back into the small box or envelope;
- once all the statues are completed, the child sculptors move to one side and try to guess the feeling represented by each statue;
- when all the feelings have been guessed, repeat the activity by reversing the roles, so that “statue” becomes “sculptor” and “sculptor” becomes “statue”.



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### Notes and suggestions

- when the feeling is identified, we can ask the child which element put them on the right track;
- for older children, you can eliminate the small cards and ask them to choose the feeling they want to represent themselves.

### Activity 4.3: Animated feelings

#### Theme

Feelings.

#### Aim of the activity

To reflect on the importance of music to evoke feelings.

#### Expected results

To use bodily movement as a way of expressing feelings and moods, using musical stimuli.

#### Age range

From 6 years old

#### Length

30 minutes

#### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside.

#### Materials

- stereo
- music cd with different excerpts

#### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- ask the children to listen to some music and to pay attention to feelings, thoughts, etc. that the music evokes for them;
- ask the children to let themselves be transported by the music and to move freely;
- facilitate the expression of moods using the body and words that results from listening to music. The facilitator calmly and slowly asks the children to imagine “where are you?”, “who are you with?”, “what’s the weather like?”, “what are you doing?”, “what are you experiencing?”, “what do you want?” etc.;
- at the end of the activity, you can suggest taking a moment to share the experience.

### Notes and suggestions

During the bodily expression, let the children experiment while ensuring that they do not imitate each other. The same activity can be repeated with different pieces of music that are clearly identifiable on an emotional level. In selecting the pieces, it is important to always take into account the cultural context.

## Worksheet 5: Description of traumatic life experiences

### Activity 5.1: The timeline

#### Theme

Working through trauma.

#### Aim of the activity

To explore life story and integrate positive and negative experiences within a single framework of meaning.

#### Expected results

To attribute meaning to negative life experiences.

Raising awareness on the part of the individual of their own life story.

#### Age range

6-14 years old

#### Length

60 minutes

#### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside.

#### Materials

- white sheets of paper A4 (so that each child can draw their own timeline)
- large-format sheet or roll of paper (to collect together all the timelines)
- felt tip pens
- pencils
- crepe paper
- glue
- string or ribbon
- sellotape



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### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- each child draws their own timeline by sticking a piece of string or ribbon onto an A4 sheet to represent their life;
- invite the children to identify at least two bad memories, which will then be each represented by a “small piece of coal” made of black crepe paper placed on the timeline;
- invite the children to identify at least two happy memories, which will each be represented by a sun made of crepe paper placed on the timeline.

### Notes and suggestions

- the activity can be modified by asking the children to make their timeline represent their most recent year of life;
- the different timelines can also be compared and a collective line can then be “drawn”, indicating points in common;
- the teacher can also choose alternative symbols on the basis of the context in which the activity takes place and the culture of reference, these symbols should however have well-defined positive and negative connotations;
- an alternative for older children could be to create the timeline from a photo collage with cut-out pictures, each evoking a positive or negative life memory.

### Activity 5.2: In the storm

#### Theme

Working through trauma.

#### Aim of the activity

To identify and share risk factors and protection factors which the individual sees as being most present in their life.

#### Expected results

Reflection on the threats and difficulties felt by the child and on the resources which enable them to face up to them.

#### Age range

6-13 years old

#### Length

90 minutes

### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside, with chairs and tables.

### Materials

- white sheets of paper
- pencils for drawing
- pencil sharpener
- erasers
- coloured pencils
- felt tip pens

### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- give each child a blank A4 sheet;
- fold the sheets in half;
- ask the children to draw at the top of the sheet the outlines of some atmospheric phenomena such as lightning, heavy clouds, raindrops, etc., and then write inside them the difficulties, fears and problems they see as their greatest threats (risk factors);
- ask the children to draw at the bottom of the sheet a large umbrella and then to write who or what has helped or can help them to face their challenges and fears (protective factors).

### Notes and suggestions

The outlines of the umbrella and rain can also be drawn by the teacher or support worker on small pieces of card that can then be cut out and distributed to the children to use as a stencil to draw the outlines on their own sheets of paper. For younger children, you will need to guide the identification of protective factors from the risk factors listed. It is not advisable to suggest risk and protection factors, as this may influence the child in their choice. It is important that the teacher takes into account that the significance of atmospheric phenomena and the umbrella can vary between countries and cultures. Where necessary, the activity could be entitled “I defend myself”. In these cases, we may ask the child to draw not atmospheric phenomena and an umbrella but a shield. Once the shield has been drawn, the children can write/draw their fears on one side and what protects them on the other side. The rest of the activity can proceed in the same way.

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### Activity 5.3: Lost treasure

#### Theme

Working through trauma.

#### Aim of the activity

To recognise and work through loss.

#### Expected results

Storytelling and sharing experiences linked to mourning and/or loss.

#### Age range

6-13 years old

#### Length

120 minutes

#### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside, with tables and chairs.

#### Materials

- plasticine
- recycled materials
- paper
- box in the shape of a chest

#### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- arrange the materials on the tables;
- ask the children to make or draw something (person, object, place, etc.) that had a special significance for them and that they have lost during their life;
- then ask the children to sit in a circle and give them the opportunity to share with others the experiences and emotions related to the object / person they represented;
- in turn, each child places their object / person in the box shaped like a chest which is situated in the middle of the circle;
- together the children acknowledge all the lost people / objects, and in a ritual accompanied by a song, they place the box in a place that they choose together;
- the teacher or support worker tells the children that when they feel nostalgic, they can go and visit the box.

#### Notes and suggestions

- It is advisable for teachers or support workers to take part in the activity and to also make their lost treasure, while ensuring that they do not influence the children.
- It is important to pay particular attention to the behavioural response of the children in order to detect any difficulties they may have in working through the loss. In order to value the traditions and rituals of each culture, it is advisable to let the group choose how they want to say goodbye to the lost person / object.

### Worksheet 6: Silent books



#### Activity 6.1: Pink like a mouse

Below, we present an example of a workshop that can be used with children aged between 7 and 12 years, based on the story of *The Little Pink Mouse* by Dina Dasoki.

The story is about travelling and encountering diversity, but it also addresses issues such as knowledge of the self, of others and of different worlds. As has been made apparent by the evidence of resilience presented in this handbook, children living in situations of distress often undergo changes and ruptures in their lives that require a constant readjustment to new contexts. It is therefore essential to reflect with them on the meaning of diversity and the enrichment that can be gained through awareness of new realities and meeting new people.

The story is divided into three parts that can be used separately, in specific workshop activities over three days.

## MODULE 7: ASSISTED RESILIENCE PRACTICE: EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

### 1. My world

#### **Theme**

Integration, meeting others.

#### **Aim of the activity**

To guide a process of identification and affirmation of the self and the resources of each person in a group.

#### **Expected results**

To raise awareness about the world and each person's own resources.  
To get to know members of the group better.

#### **Length**

Half a day

#### **Space**

Indoors

#### **Materials**

- white sheets of paper
- coloured pencils
- felt tip pens

#### **Working groups**

The activity is carried out individually.

#### **Explanation of the activity and methodology**

*"There was once a little pink mouse that lived in a world that was all pink. Her house was pink, the trees and flowers were pink, the sky and the earth were also pink. The little mouse enjoyed walking through her world that was all pink and admiring the swallows flying high in the sky and the butterflies playing around the pink flowers. The little mouse was very satisfied with her pink life, but she nevertheless felt, deep within herself, a void that she did not know how to fill."*

- explain to the children that everyone lives in their own space, a space that is composed of people, places and objects that are significant to us;
- give each child a piece of paper and ask them to draw their village, their world, as they perceive it;
- once they have finished their drawings, each child briefly explains them to the group;
- the drawings will then be hung on the wall so that the room becomes a representation of the worlds of all the children.

### 2. The journey

#### **Theme**

Integration, meeting others.

#### **Aim of the activity**

To reflect through play and group discussion on the meaning of journeys and movement, and on the emotional consequences of this at the individual level.

#### **Expected results**

To share individual experiences and discover the meaning of the migratory process.

#### **Length**

One morning

#### **Space**

Indoors

#### **Materials**

- a large sheet of paper with a little pink mouse drawn on it
- white sheets of paper
- small pieces of card
- coloured pencils
- felt tip pens
- scissors
- sellotape

#### **Working groups**

Groups of 3 children

#### **Explanation of the activity and methodology**

*"One fine day, while the little pink mouse was walking along a path at the top of a pink hill, she looked up into the sky and she saw a large, bright yellow sun that pleased her greatly. Resuming her walk, she then discovered that the trail was not pink but yellow, just like the sun. And everything began to change colour. The trees, the flowers, the vast sky were no longer pink but yellow. The little mouse was somewhat intimidated by this new colour, but it nonetheless conveyed warmth and courage. She decided to continue her walk."*

- explain to the children that the little pink mouse must undertake a trip to another city, and must therefore take with her all that might be useful for the journey and to help her settle in after she arrives at her destination; but what should she take?;
- distribute to each group white sheets of paper, small sheets of coloured card and felt tip pens to draw what the little mouse should take in the children's opinion;

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- once the children have finished drawing whatever the little mouse should carry with her, the teacher or support worker will hang on the wall a large sheet of paper with a little pink mouse drawn on it;
- the teacher or support worker explains that each group will, in turn, run over to the sheet of paper and paste their drawings on it, but in order to do that, two children from the group will intertwine their hands to create a small chair on which the third member of the group will sit (like a small sedan) and they will go up together and stick their drawings on the paper with the little mouse drawn on it. Once they have done this, the group will explain their drawing to the other groups;
- the activity ends when all the groups have stuck their drawings on the paper, as the little mouse is now ready for her trip.

### 3. The meeting

#### Theme

Integration, meeting others.

#### Aim of the activity

To raise awareness of meeting and getting to know others by considering self-awareness and our own resources, and the recognition and appreciation of others.

#### Expected results

Integration between group members, mutual understanding and acceptance of others.

#### Length

Half a day

#### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside.

#### Materials

- sheets of card
- crepe paper
- sheets of card and coloured paper
- felt tip pens
- coloured pencils
- scissors
- sellotape
- glue
- a camera

#### Working groups

The activity takes place individually

#### Explanation of the activity and methodology

- the teacher or support worker summarises the story of the little pink mouse to the children, stressing that “our heroine” is now ready to go and meet new people because she has packed her suitcase and has taken with her, a favourite photo frame where she will slide the photos she takes during her trip. This frame is special because it represents the little mouse, in fact it is pink and is decorated with small cheeses;
- the teacher asks the children if they want to accompany the little mouse on her journey. To do this, they will each make a photo frame that represents them;
- once the frames are finished, the class proceeds to the third and final part of the story.

*“Excited and curious, the little mouse continued walking a little further until she met a little yellow bird. The little pink mouse and the little yellow bird looked at each other for a long time. “How strange”, thought the little mouse, “What a funny little bird, it’s a different colour!” The little yellow bird thought exactly the same thing. Eventually the little mouse and the bird became good friends and talked for a long time about their pink and yellow respective countries. Then they decided, by mutual agreement, to hit the road together to discover new worlds and other colours. The little pink mouse could no longer feel the great emptiness deep within herself, because now she had someone to share her new adventures.”*

- at the end of the story, the teacher or support worker invites the children to stand up and walk slowly across the room to meet each other, as the little mouse did;
- when the teacher says “stop”, the children pause and interact with the child they have in front of them or next to them, and say what most strikes them about the other person;
- to conclude this phase of the game, the children should put their frames together in the middle and be photographed together;
- the phase of meeting others and the photographs can be repeated as many times as the teacher or support worker sees necessary.

### Activity 6.2: Blue Like a Penguin

We present below a workshop example that can be implemented with children aged between 7 and 12 years of age, based on the story *Blue Like a Penguin* by Dina Dasoki and Veronica Hurtubia.

The tale is about meeting and greeting, two extremely useful topics to look at, related closely to the phenomenon of migration, described through the knowledge of and integration with others from different “coloured” worlds that the characters encounter throughout their journey. The story is divided into three parts that can be used separately, in specific activities over three days of workshops.

#### 1. On a journey

##### Theme

Meeting others and multi-culturalism.

##### Aim of the activity

To strengthen the sense of cultural identity through meeting in an intercultural context.

##### Expected results

To get to know our own world and resources better, by identifying our own cultural baggage.

##### Length

120 minutes

##### Space

Inside

##### Materials

- white sheets of paper A4 and A3
- coloured pencils and felt tips
- paper plates or white sheets of paper
- crepe paper and tissue paper
- glue
- elastic bands
- stapler
- scissors

### Explanation of the activity and methodology

Before starting to read, the teacher or support worker invites the children to sit in a circle (depending on the number of children, she can decide whether to make one or more circles) and places the story in the middle. The teacher then explains that she will tell a story that is split into three parts and that the first three images correspond to the first meeting.

*“... The little pink mouse and her new friend, the small sun-coloured bird, continued on their adventurous journey together to discover new colours, new smells, new sounds and new flavours.*

*They walked and walked and gradually the sun disappeared behind the horizon. Around them, the landscape began to change, everything suddenly took on the colour of the water and the path beneath their feet vanished, giving way to a slippery sheet of ice which prevented them from continuing on their way. Indeed, they could no longer keep their balance and with every step they had to hold tightly onto each other so as not to fall over! But eventually they still ended up with their legs in the air, spread out on the frozen ground. But what a surprise they got when, lying on their backs because of their fall, they discovered that the sky was full of stars. It was an incredible sight, and something that they had never previously been able to admire! Thousands, no, millions of stars twinkling in a dark, clear sky. The two travellers stood gaping at such a spectacle, without even noticing the cold that surrounded them and the sound of the sea behind them.”*

#### First activity

- Explain to the children that each of us has unique characteristics, qualities and different cultural backgrounds, we take these with us each time we set off: you have to get to know yourself better;
- give each child a paper plate, ask them to customise it by creating, using the equipment at their disposal, a mask that represents their characteristics;
- apply an elastic band to each plate so that the mask can be worn;
- ask each child to put on their mask and then mimic something they like to do or that they are good at. The other children have to guess what it is.

#### Second activity

- The teacher or support worker summarises the idea of travel / a journey, using the metaphor of a footprint as a trace or sign that everyone leaves in each city or country they pass through (during migration or holidays);
- each child is given an A3 sheet and asked to draw on it the outline of both hands / feet;
- inside the outline of one of the hands or feet, each child will draw / write what they have left in their country or city of origin, including both concrete elements (home, school, etc.) and symbolic elements (traditions, celebrations, customs, emotions, etc.);
- inside the perimeter of the other foot / hand, the child will draw / write what they have brought with them to the country or city where they are now located, including concrete elements (clothing, photographs, etc.) and symbolic elements (customs, language, religion, emotional connections, etc.);

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- at the end of the exercise with the two prints/outlines, invite the children to cut and paste them onto a large poster that will contain the whole group's prints, a poster called "our footprints in the world";
- to conclude, we invite the children to reflect on the metaphor "walking in the world", as a means to enable them to both leave a trace/sign of themselves, and to enrich themselves by considering the other children's imprints.

### 2. The welcome

#### **Theme**

Meeting others and multi-culturalism.

#### **Aim of the activity**

Through the game and interaction with the group, to reflect on the meaning of travel and movement, as well as the emotional consequences that may be involved at an individual level.

#### **Expected results**

To share subjective experiences and the significance of the migration process.

#### **Length**

Half a day

#### **Space**

Inside

#### **Materials**

- a large poster with a little pink mouse and a little yellow bird drawn on it
- white sheets of paper
- small pieces of coloured card
- coloured pens
- felt tip pens
- scissors
- sellotape

#### **Working groups**

Groups of 3 children

#### **Explanation of the activity and methodology**

The activity begins with a short summary of the work achieved the previous day. The children are invited to sit in a circle and the teacher or support worker begins to tell the second part of the story, which corresponds to the 3 following images in the *Silent Book*.

*"... While our two friends were taking advantage of the wonderful spectacle, a penguin came swimming by, intrigued by these two somewhat strange presences awkwardly trying to keep their balance on the slippery ice. He stayed there, watching them, and he thought that the two might be hungry. "But who knows where they come from?" he asked himself. "In any case, it would be interesting to get to know them". And so he decided to make himself known by hitting the ice with the fish he had just caught. The little mouse and the little bird turned around and came face to face with the penguin, with his dark blue coat, watching them, half of his body still in the frozen sea water. Soon the three became good friends and ate the whole fish that the penguin had just caught.*

*And when he saw that his new friends from far away could not walk on the ice without ending up on the floor on their backs, the penguin fetched them flippers similar to his. The little mouse and the little bird put them on immediately and the result was surprising: they managed to walk, sure of themselves, no problem."*

#### **First activity**

- The activity begins with a game; the teacher or support worker explains to the children that the two friends were welcomed by the penguin that shared the fish with them and gave them flippers so they could walk; but what else might they need?
- each group is given blank sheets of paper and pens to draw what they think the friends may need to feel at home (at least 5 things);
- meanwhile, the large poster, with the little mouse and bird drawn on it, is mounted on the wall;
- after completing the drawings, each group sticks their drawings onto the large poster, but to do that the group members have to "cross the sea" in a creative way, carrying an object on every trip, which they stick on the poster at the destination. The task also involves one of the group members never touching the "water" (they should therefore be transported by "air");
- the activity ends when the groups have finished sticking their drawings and explained all the things that, according to them, could facilitate the welcome.

#### **Second activity**

- the teacher or support worker resumes the activity with the outlines made from the day before, by inviting the children to complete the drawings;
- in a third outline of their foot / hand, the child writes / draws what they have found in the city or country where they are now located, including concrete elements (clothing, photographs, etc.) and symbolic elements (customs, language, religion, emotional ties, etc.).

### 3. The adventure continues

#### Theme

Meeting others and multi-culturalism.

#### Aim of the activity

To raise awareness of meeting and getting to know others by considering self-awareness and our own resources, and the recognition and appreciation of others.

#### Expected results

Integration between the members of the group, getting to know and accepting others.

#### Length

120 minutes

#### Space

Lots of space, inside or outside

#### Materials

- a sheet of stiff card
- crepe paper and / or coloured sheets
- felt tip pens
- coloured pencils
- scissors
- sellotape
- glue
- a camera

#### Working groups

The activity is carried out individually.

#### Explanation of the activity and methodology

The teacher or support worker summarises the story with the children, highlighting the social skills of the penguin that welcomed our friends, and finishes reading the story:

*"It was time to leave. They still had many worlds to explore. But they were sad to leave their new friend and then little mouse asked penguin if he did not want to leave with her and little bird. The dark blue penguin said he would like nothing better and off he went with his two friends, in search of new adventures."*

- once the story is finished, the children are invited to form small groups and each group continues the story;

- to continue the story each group should: a) develop a new world / new colour where the rest of the story will take place; b) invent a new character who will join the group; c) imagine a new problem that will mark the beginning of a new adventure;
- the story will then be illustrated on an A3 sheet with the participation of all the team members;
- at the end of the activity, each group does a sketch that introduces the new adventure to the others.

### Worksheet 7. Training Evaluations

#### a. Training evaluation

To conclude this training course, we are interested in receiving participants' comments so that we can continue to improve our work.

Gender: .....

Nationality : .....

Profession : .....

#### 1. The material used was:

	Poor	Good	Excellent
Clear			
Complete			
Interesting			
Useful			
Innovative			

#### 2. The content was:

	Poor	Good	Excellent
Clear			
Complete			
Interesting			
Useful			
Innovative			

3. I think that the training will help me in my work with children in the following areas:

	Not much	A fair amount	A lot
a) Interaction and dialogue with the child			
b) Understanding of the child's problems			
c) Strengthening of the child's resources			

4. Answer the following questions by marking with an X the corresponding box containing the score which most closely matches your opinion.

	Score : 1 lowest – 4 highest			
	1	2	3	4
1. I am satisfied with this training course.				
2. I consider that my expectations for the training were met.				
3. I consider that the working methods used (practical and theoretical) enabled the aims of the training to be met.				
4. I consider that the quality of the training was good.				
5. The trainers demonstrated that they had good knowledge of the issues covered.				
6. Participation and interaction were encouraged within the class.				
7. The time available for questions and answers and discussion was sufficient.				
8. I think that the training has enabled me to increase my knowledge of working with children.				
9. I understood the content of the training.				
10. I feel able to apply the learning in my work with children				

5. On which aspects of the training would you like to gain deeper knowledge?

.....

.....

.....

6. Which aspects of the training could be improved in your opinion?

.....

.....

.....

7. Any other comments?

.....

.....

.....

**b. Evaluation of knowledge gained thanks to the content of the training**

The first column in the following table shows commonly-held beliefs about the correct approach to be adopted during educational interventions. These beliefs are not consistent with the concept of resilience. Rephrase these sentences in the second column, from a resilience perspective.

	Reformulation of sentences from a resilience perspective.
Example: The professional must diagnose the child's problem and provide the solution.	The professional will diagnose the problem and the child's resources and consider how using the child's resources could be part of the solution to the problem.
The educational intervention aims to repair the damage suffered by the child.	
Some people are born resilient.	
The support relationship is based on assistance to individuals in vulnerable situations.	
The resilience of an individual stems from their ability to withstand the adversities of life.	
Each individual is born with a "bunch" of resources that are constant throughout their life.	

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	Reformulation of sentences from a resilience perspective.
To heal the pain experienced, we must erase the wounds and forget past suffering.	
To implement an effective support relationship, we need to learn good standardised practices for educational activities to support children who are the victims of difficult experiences.	
To be tutors of resilience, it is necessary to undertake specific studies and obtain a specialised qualification in education.	
A tutor of resilience must assume their role using only their own internal resources and any skills they have acquired.	
The actions of a tutor of resilience should be aimed at strengthening the internal resources of the individual.	

c. Evaluation of how knowledge gained during the training is applied in field work

1. What actions / initiatives have you implemented in your educational work to promote resilience processes?

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. What issues or critical situations have you faced as part of your educational work, what actions have you taken or do you intend to take; and using what resources?

Description of the problem / critical situation	Action taken	Support resources

3. What are the main needs you have identified in children / adults? How are they expressed? What are your responses to this?

Child / adult needs identified	How the need is expressed	Reply given

4. Describe the support network that you use as part of the educational interventions you make. How does collaboration work between the different members?

.....

.....

.....

.....

5. What do you think are the salient features of your character and of your work that enable you to assume the role of tutor of resilience?

.....

.....

.....

.....

## CONCLUSION

*“Unless we look at a person and see the beauty there is in that person, we can contribute nothing to him. One does not help a person by discerning what is wrong, what is ugly, what is distorted. Christ looked at everyone he met, at the prostitute, at the thief, and saw the beauty hidden there. Perhaps it was distorted, perhaps damaged, but it was beauty none the less, and what He did was to call out this beauty. This is what we must learn to do for others. But to achieve this, we must first of all have a pure heart, pure intentions, an open mind, which is not always the case... to be able to listen, watch and see the hidden beauty. Every one of us is made in the image of God, and every one of us is like a damaged icon. But if we were given an icon damaged by time, damaged by circumstances, or desecrated by human hatred, we would treat it with reverence, with tenderness, with broken-heartedness. We would not pay attention primarily to the fact that it is damaged, but to the tragedy of its being damaged.”*

Anthony Bloom

In this quote Anthony Bloom, an atheist doctor who converted to Christianity and became an Orthodox monk, gives - unwittingly - a wonderful definition of resilience: a way to build based on the strengths of each person, the search for beauty in a person and the development of this beauty.

Throughout this handbook we have had the opportunity to admire the extraordinary beauty of “damaged icons”, that is to say people who have faced great challenges in their lives, challenges that made them suffer, but who have faced and overcome them, becoming concrete examples of human resilience.

These stories have led us to conclude that the individual cannot be reduced to the injuries caused by their history; our vision must go beyond that. Indeed, Bloom concludes:

*“We must attach importance to what beauty remains, not what is lost. That is how we must learn to respond to everyone...”*

A resilience approach teaches us to implement this “change in perspective” that allows us to see beyond the vulnerability that afflicts injured people. It is only by starting with this precondition that we can assume the role of tutors of resilience, that is to say, support the individual by promoting and enhancing their beauty and resources, although sometimes they may appear to have been weakened or masked by the suffering the people have experienced.

The concept of resilience has in many ways revolutionised the approach of teachers and support workers in their relationships of care, by overcoming the concept of the assistance-based model that characterised support work with vulnerable children in the past and sometimes continues even today<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, it is also true that we must define the limits of this approach.

8 - See Jollien's life story (module 1).

1. While resilience is a process that is built over time, not all human beings are able to develop resilient responses. In this regard, Fabio's words<sup>9</sup> are of particular significance: *“It is said that where there is a will there is a way. That's not true. Many people who have the misfortune to suffer an accident, illness, depression, etc. are unable to cope. They are so crushed by the weight of the test, which may be too big for them. Those who recover are not better than the others. Do not give them a medal. In the “school of life”, some make it, and others do not, but we must not blame anyone. I know persons with disability who are cut off from the world, confined to their homes and experiencing depression, a more serious problem, much more serious than their disability. There is no doubt that for these people, and for many others, the road can unfortunately be very long!”*
2. Similarly, assuming the role of a tutor of resilience does not mean you become all-powerful. If what Cyrulnik says is true, namely that *“what determines the quality of resilience is the quality of the link that was forged before the trauma and immediately afterwards”*, it is equally true that it is not always possible to provide the assistance that we would like to give or, more accurately, the support we offer does not always achieve the desired results. Thus, the fundamental role of a tutor of resilience in developing resilient responses should not lead us to believe that this action unequivocally leads to positive results in the actions taken to support individuals in vulnerable situations. This idea might, in fact, lead to a strong sense of failure and guilt for tutors of resilience in cases where support relationships fail, and this must be taken into account because these situations do occur. The meaning of an intervention should not be reduced only to its successes.

This last reflection highlights an important point, which opens up new perspectives for the study of resilience and the application of knowledge gained. As noted in this handbook, networking is one of the fundamental principles of actions to care for child victims of sexual abuse and violence: “together we can”. This principle must run through all areas of intervention.

If carried out in isolation, the actions of the care provider, which are aimed at accommodating the child's needs and responding appropriately by valuing their resources, will help support the child in the immediate here and now, but it will be difficult to achieve significant results in the medium and long term. In the case of child victims of abuse, for example, actions to support the child must cut across several aspects of their life, such as medical care, legal guardianship, physical protection, etc. Similarly, supporting a child must be undertaken in parallel with the decided involvement of the whole community to fight against the phenomenon of abuse at the prevention level, cutting across taboos and prejudice against the victims.

9 - See module 6, Resilience and disability.

## CONCLUSION

A resilience approach should use a **multidisciplinary framework** and be implemented by people with rich, deep and varied experience, in order to enable the development of an intervention to support the child which presupposes the involvement of various stakeholders in the field, directly or indirectly related to the child. In this way, networking ensures comprehensive support and promotes the development of resilience processes. We must therefore define future actions which enable us to introduce and implement a resilience model in new fields (medical, legal and social, for example), and to share knowledge through training for other groups of professionals (police, teachers, spiritual leaders, health professionals, etc.), in order to be able to network with clear and shared principles and objectives.

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Below are a number of different texts written about resilience in different languages. Some are scientific texts, others are not. Some deal with resilience in general, others with a particular aspect. Some may not even mention resilience, although they clearly refer to it. They all offer access to resilience or one of its aspects. Most of these texts contain their own bibliography. They offer the opportunity of deepening our knowledge on the subject, from different perspectives and in different languages. We do not claim to offer an exhaustive list of all the works available on resilience.

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# RESILIENCE: FROM INSPIRATION TO ACTION

LIFE STORIES,  
REFLECTIONS,  
EXPERIENCES

Resilience is the ability in every human being to cope with difficult life experiences and emerge victorious. This is an opening up towards new growth, a new stage of life in which the scar of the wound is still present, but is integrated into this new life at a deeper level.

In this handbook, we tell the stories of children and young adults who have been confronted with large, cumbersome “grains” which they have managed to cope with surprisingly well, sometimes even converting them into precious pearls.

In addition, we propose a number of psychopedagogic workshops where tutors of resilience might find the appropriate methods to facilitate children’s resilience process through different kinds of expressive language.



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