

Psychopedagogical Guide of *Famílium*

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Let's enjoy diversity!

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Free download of the pdf version of the guide at www.familium.cat

PSYCHOPEDAGOGICAL GUIDE GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Famílium, as the title suggests, explores the concept of the family. Defining family is complex, and currently there is no consensus on delimiting the concept. Experts provide multiple definitions depending on the area of intervention. What is indisputable, however, is that the family, like any social institution, tends to adapt to the society to which it belongs.

Today, we find many different types of families. The book presents some of the more frequent types: adoptive, single parent, numerous, gay, lesbian, foster family, group home, reconstituted, extended, traditional, and multicultural.

From a legal perspective, foster families, but not group homes, are viewed as families. We strongly believe, however, that children living in group homes belong in the book. Based on the definition of the family proposed by Giorgio Nardone, they clearly have a place: "The family is the system of fundamentally affective relationships, present in all cultures, to which a human being belongs for a long period of time, and not at any particular time, but during the most important developmental stages: neonatal, childhood and adolescence."

Familium helps children recognize and identify the basic characteristics of different family types. The book also addresses other issues including abandonment and neglect, assisted reproduction, homosexuality, immigration, death, and divorce. This guide provides suggestions on how best to explore these issues.

Familium serves as a teaching resource that aims to help educate children in the value of tolerance toward family diversity. The word "tolerance" is defined by the *Spanish Royal Academy Dictionary* as, "the ability to listen and accept others by appreciating the value of different ways of understanding life." That is, although children and adults may feel more affinity for a particular lifestyle or specific type of family, we must strive to respect other family types.

Our ultimate goal is to strengthen the value of tolerance, and to facilitate the discovery of what different types of families have in common, which means internalizing and integrating this broader concept of "family".

TEACHING GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Familium will let you have fun with your children, while showing them a new social reality where adults play a guiding role. Learning about the different types of families through this puzzle book will facilitate the children's understanding of this new reality, and leave a lasting imprint. As with any story, reading with your child will also enhance other educational goals: reinforcing values, promoting attentive listening, sharing educational activities with the adults in the family, or initiating and reinforcing reading.

The family performs a critical role as educator. The parents' attitude toward certain issues is an essential factor in the vision that the child will have as an adult. Children's innate curiosity makes the parents' task easier. Parents or guardians should adapt to the child's interests without anticipating questions the child did not ask.

Moreover, getting acquainted with the different families that come to life in the pages of *Familium* provides adults with a great opportunity to review their own beliefs, fears, and prejudices regarding new types of families.

Thus, *Familium* aims to facilitate the education of children in the values of tolerance and respect. This will help them become more considerate and better adjusted.

LET'S TALK HOW?

The book touches on a number of sensitive issues such as death, homosexuality, divorce, sexuality, reproduction, adoption, foster care, gender equality, disability, and immigration. There is no single best way to talk about these issues. When we discuss them with our children concerns often arise over "What should we say?" However, the more relevant questions are "How do we talk about these issues?" and "When should we?"

The information provided should be consistent with the degree of maturity of the child. We must use a language they can understand, and answer as simply and concretely as possible so that the ideas can be integrated into the mental framework of the child.

WHEN?

The individual development of each child needs to be respected. Therefore, we must wait until the child is interested in these issues, and starts asking questions. An easy way to get children thinking is to pay attention to the questions they ask.

A girl who has experienced the death of a loved one will not ask the same questions as a girl who has no direct experience with death. Similarly, the attitude of a boy who has lived in a situation of helplessness will differ from one who has always had the affective bonds with his parents and family.

GUIDELINES ON THE ISSUES

DIVORCE

Divorce, as such, does not harm the emotional development of a child.

Recommendations to avoid a bad divorce

Problems arise when dealing with a "bad divorce." These problems can be avoided by conveying to children, from an early age, that parents are both parents and a couple. When they divorce, they stop being a couple, but they never stop being parents. Separating these concepts is no easy task: the boundaries between "being together as parents," and "being together as a couple" can be easily confused. Being aware of this distinction, however, can facilitate our role as parents after a divorce. Moreover, to help the child manage this situation, one should have an open and clear mind about what is happening, and encourage the child to ask questions, and to express her feelings. Parents should maintain a good relationship and open dialogue. If this does not happen, the child will be in the middle of an (explicit or implicit) war, in which no matter which house he is in, he will always be in enemy territory.

Custody and family mediation

Currently, the law protects joint custody. Research finds it is beneficial for the child to be in close contact with both parents. This helps prevent parental alienation syndrome. However, joint custody will only benefit the child if there is dialogue and goodwill between the parents. When the discord between parents is great or when one parent is abusive or neglectful, sole custody is the best option. The benefits of joint custody for infants are also not clear. Therefore, when difficulties arise, it is advisable to use mediation and parental education services to minimize damage and enhance the child's welfare.

Removing the stigma of divorce

Divorce can have positive consequences for children. Research has showed that it is better for the stability of a child to have happy parents who are separated, than quarrelsome parents who live together without a loving relationship. Children will understand, adapt, and even manage it. Eventually, it becomes another experience that helps them grow as a person.

Recommended children's books: *Sara's Parents Separate*, Christian Lamblin; *My Complicated Family*, Pascale Francotte; *No és culpa teva*, Maria Adele Caravaglia, and *Mi familia ha cambiado: de 8 años en adelante*, Berthold Berg and Madden Joe.

**Le divorce expliqué à nos enfants*, Patricia Lucas and Stéphane Leroy.

IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

Migration is a phenomenon intrinsic to our nature. It has existed throughout our history, and has been present in all societies.

The reasons people migrate differ. Someone who voluntarily chooses to emigrate is not the same as someone who feels forced to leave their homeland due to political or economic circumstances.

Recently, the issue of immigration has gained importance due to the influence of the media and political action, among other reasons.

Let's foster integration

Multiculturalism can sometimes lead to conflicts. Tensions may arise between different cultures that share a particular area. It is, therefore, essential that children learn to respect cultures different from their own. People with different habits, or ways of dressing and eating, should not be seen as attacking local customs. Controversial topics such as wearing a headscarf in class, celebrating particular traditions, or not consuming certain foods have often been misunderstood. They have not been given the importance they deserve, nor treated seriously enough. These different practices often form a key part of a person's identity and cultural heritage, and people should not be forced to give them up.

Inclusion: Towards a multicultural society

Beyond integration, we must bear in mind inclusion. With integration, only the newcomers must adapt; with inclusion, both immigrants and the host society must change. Inclusion encourages the development of a more open and modern society; a society that can maintain its own character, while getting enriched through contact with other cultures. Using *Familium* to talk about these issues with children can be a natural and playful way to introduce the concept of cultural differences and the required tolerance.

Let us end misinformation: Let's encourage the understanding of the other

Moreover, we should focus not only on our differences, but also on our similarities (as neighbors, classmates, etc.). We and our children benefit from information that promotes the understanding of others, and reduces prejudices. When addressing this issue, it is important, both at home and school, to discuss other cultures not only theoretically, but also emotionally to eliminate fear, rejection and xenophobia. By informing ourselves, and then educating our children, we enrich ourselves socially and personally.

Recommended children's books: *El gat de Tigali*, Didier Daenickx; *La niña invisible*, José Luis García and Miguel Ángel Pacheco; *Uno y siete*, Gianni Rodari and Beatrice Alemagna, and the puzzle book collection *Quiquey Mumbi*, Cruz Blanco.

DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

When children lose a loved one, they have to go through a mourning process that lasts a certain amount of time. A child's grieving process is not short, but incorporates new factors as the child develops and matures. Adults need to relax and respect the process -- a process that the children must go through themselves. In many occasions, extended family or other people who are very close to the child will ensure that the child does not feel helpless and can make it through the grieving process. Most children develop normally when they receive support and have their feelings validated.

The mourning process usually lasts between one and two years, during which a sensation of loneliness predominates. This can be difficult to mitigate. Bowlby defines **four phases of grief**:

- Phase 1. Shock and numbness. At first, children deny the loss and refuse to accept it. This phase is characterized by feelings of despair and anger. Children, throughout the grieving process, may relapse to this phase.
- Phase 2. Yearning and searching. During this stage, children feel the loss acutely. They experience anxiety, longing, and recurring thoughts about their lost loved one.
- Phase 3. Despair and disorganization. During this phase, the child begins to confront the reality of the loss. The child may seem apathetic and uprooted. Insomnia, weight loss, and grief may appear when remembering the person who was lost.

- Phase 4. Reorganization and recovery. In this stage, the intense pain begins to recede, and they feel that they are gradually getting their life back. They can now remember their lost loved ones with a mixture of joy and sadness.

For the family, death also implies a reorganization: a redistribution of roles and the creation of a new sense of belonging to the new family reality.

Parents, or the family members responsible for the children, should be aware of what constitutes a normal reaction of children when they are dealing with death, and which reactions indicate that the child is having difficulties coping with the situation.

Normal reactions of children coping with loss

The reactions depend on the child's developmental stage and on the attitudes of the adults.

From the age of six, the child is able to understand death and its consequences. At nine years old, the child already has a concept of death very similar to that of an adult. This does not mean, however, that they are prepared to deal with it, and adults have to help them manage it. A common response for children is to show denial or guilt. They do not accept that the person has died, and they may appear happy or mad. If this occurs, the adult must not be angry with them, but should help them by giving the child permission to mourn the loss: "There is no need to be sad in front of people, but if you want you can share your pain with me." Other common reactions include idealizing the deceased, and looking for him or her around the house. When this happens, we should let them look for the loved one. It can even comfort the child to let them know we sometimes want to look for them too.

Recommendations for adults

Once the critical hours have passed, one should explain the news of the death and how it happened as soon as possible: "A very sad thing has happened. Your father has died, and will no longer be with us. We loved him very much, and we will miss him very much." If the death is a suicide, there is no use in hiding it. One should clarify any doubts the child may have, and explain what suicide is.

We should not isolate children from reality, but rather encourage them to express their feelings, and let them participate in the farewell rituals. It is important to reassure them, and answer their questions. Common fears are: "Have I caused the death?" "Will it happen to me?" and "Who will take care of me?"

In all cases, we must keep physically and emotionally close to the child.

Warning Signs

One should consult a professional, if they observe the following warning signs: crying and tantrums that last for a long time, childish behavior for long periods, exaggerated imitation of

the deceased person, apathy or no interest in friends, fear of being alone, nightmares, insomnia, frequent physical discomfort, and failure in school.

Recommended children's books: *La mort d'en Tim*, Elzbieta; *Guess How Much I Love You*, Sam McBratney; *Així és la vida*, Ana Luisa Ramírez; *Far Away from the River*, Armin Beuscher, and *Grand-père est mort*, Dominique de Saint Mars.

SEXUALITY AND REPRODUCTION

Sexuality does not only refer to our bodies and how they work, but also to our gender and gender identity (how we feel being a man or a woman), to our sexual orientation, and to our values about life and love. We must take all these aspects into account when talking with our children.

Talking about sexuality with children helps them cope with their emotions, and withstand peer pressure. If the family is open about discussing these issues when children are young, they will ask their parents about a doubt or a problem when they are older.

Talking about sexuality is not always easy. Many parents, even the most "modern," fear not having the right answers. However, one should not avoid the topic, or hide one's feelings.

Children, basically, just want to know if it is normal. They do not expect a technical definition, but a clear answer to satisfy their curiosity. We can take advantage of certain moments to talk about sexuality, for example, when a person they know is pregnant, or when a television commercial with sexual content appears.

Recommendations for adults: Dismantling myths about children's sexuality

- Children are also sexual beings.
- Providing sexual information to children does not mean that we are encouraging them to have sexual relations, rather it should be understood as a form of protection.
- We should not assume anything: the fact that children ask questions, does not mean that they are thinking about doing it.
- It is better to have a positive attitude, and not focus only on negative aspects, such as sexually transmitted diseases.
- One should discuss sexual behaviors using correct names, avoiding euphemisms.
- It is natural that a boy masturbates. It is part of the discovery process of himself and of his own body. Therefore, it should not be given great importance. Of course, it is necessary to teach him that he must not do it in public.

- Often children worry because they have unfamiliar thoughts and sexual fantasies. A way to help them is to make them understand that thinking of something does not mean it will come true.

Reproduction

At eight years of age, children begin to approach puberty. It is now time to introduce the issues of menstruation, ejaculation, and reproduction.

One must tell the truth about reproduction, adapting the response to the child's age.

One should also talk to children about methods of assisted reproduction. They should know that some couples decide to use this method when conception is not possible naturally (either because of infertility or because they are having trouble conceiving), and that some women choose to use this method when they do not want the direct participation of a man in the conception (single mothers, lesbian mothers, etc.). When we talk about this issue with a child conceived using assisted reproduction, we should not hide it, rather we should emphasize the love and desire behind the parent's choice to have the child.

The most common assisted reproductive techniques are:

- Artificial insemination: A simple technique that involves introducing semen in the uterine cavity at the time of ovulation to achieve pregnancy.

- In vitro fertilization: A technique that involves fertilizing the egg outside the uterus in a laboratory. First, hormones are given to stimulate the generation of eggs. Second, an ovarian puncture is made to extract the egg. Third, fertilization occurs in the laboratory. Finally, the embryo transfer takes place, which consists of depositing the embryo (the fertilized egg that has successfully evolved) into the uterus. Since pregnancy does not always occur after implantation of the embryo, the remaining embryos are frozen for subsequent use until pregnancy occurs.

- Intracytoplasmic sperm injection: A variation of in vitro fertilization that consists in directly introducing one spermatozoid into each egg.

- Maturation in vitro: This is a new technique to get eggs, where hormone therapy is not used or the dose is very low. Therefore, the extracted eggs have to remain in the culture for a longer time until the insemination is able to take place.

Recommended children's books: *Aquesta ets tu i aquest sóc jo*, Doris Dübel, and three stories by Robie H. Harris entitled *It's Not the Stork!*; *It's Perfectly Normal*, and *It's So Amazing!*

HOMOSEXUALITY

When the moment arrives, one should explain to the child that people with a homosexual orientation are attracted to people of the same sex, both in the sexual aspect, and in the affective or emotional aspect.

Let us end the prejudice towards homosexuality.

- It is important to highlight the emotional aspect of homosexual relationships, since the term homosexual places the emphasis on the purely sexual connotation.
- When talking about gay or lesbian parents, one should emphasize that children with two fathers or two mothers have no greater affective disorders than children with heterosexual parents. It is the quality of family relationships that really matters.
- The sexual orientation of parents does not affect the sexual orientation of the children.
- We can emphasize the positive aspects. For instance, in these families the division of labor at home is not as influenced by gender roles, which increases tolerance regarding gender equality.

Recommended children's books: *M'ho va dir la lluna*, M. Àngels Gil and Mabel Piérola; *Mames meves*, Vanessa Soodeen; *King and King*, Linda Haan and Stern Nijland, and *Ens agra-dem*, Juanolo.

ADOPTION

In the adoption process, there is the legal adoption and the affective adoption. Once the first has taken place, then comes second.

What is affective adoption?

Affective adoption is a bi-directional process: parents need to adopt the child, and the child needs to adopt the parents. For parents this can be a difficult process. It requires revising their expectations once the adoption becomes reality, and sometimes involves coping with a grieving process triggered by their inability to have a child. For the adopted children, it is even more difficult: they did not choose to be part of the process, and they also suffer the stigma of having been abandoned or neglected. Therefore, the affective adoption process takes time.

Another concern is that adopted children may have difficulties establishing affective bonds, a situation that can influence the adoption process. Despite this, we can facilitate this process by helping with the emotional healing, and, in the short term, being patient with and flexible toward the emotional needs of the adopted child.

Resilience

Once the affective adoption has occurred, the child will be more resilient. That is to say, that despite having experienced a traumatic situation, the child will manage to recover, and become a healthy person capable of establishing ties with the adoptive family and his or her environment.

FOSTER CARE

The government cares for children that are going through a difficult situation when their families cannot take care of them. During this time, these children need a family to provide them with an environment where they can grow and develop. These families are the host families.

Things to remember

In foster care there are two important factors: its temporary nature, and the visits to the biological parents.

The temporary nature of foster care should never be ignored. However, these relationships can persist over time, and their quality can be very significant in the emotional life of the child.

Children may have ambivalent feelings and contradictory behaviors about visits to their biological parents. It is essential to help them in these situations, but without talking about the biological parents in a derogatory or condescending way.

Schools, also, play an important role in the adaptation process of these children. Teachers can help children adjust to the school environment, and develop the social skills that may have been affected. Coordination between the family, the school, and the professionals involved is essential for the proper development of a child in a foster situation.

Recommended children's books: To address the issue of adoption in general we recommend *Anem a buscar l'Arana*, Lourdes Alsius; *Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born*, Jamie Lee Curtis; *La història de l'Ernest*, Mercè Company, and *Mi maravillosa historia de adopció*n, Amelia Rodríguez; to approach the issue of foster care, see *Busco una mare!*, Gemma Lienas and Rebeca Luciani, and *L'acolliment de la Maria: un conte per llegir amb tota la família*, Meritxell Margarit; on the issue of racial and ethnical differences, we recommend two story books by David Mckee, *Tusk Tusk* and *Elmer*.

DISABILITIES

It is fairly common, nowadays, for children (inside or outside of school) to have friends with a disability.

Accept and normalize disability

Disability is not something to be overcome, but something to be accepted. Children also should be educated in the values of accepting differences in this area. We need to make children aware that everyone has their own limitations and difficulties in life. We all have particular characteristics that make us unique, but we also share many things with other people. Some people do better in one area—for example, academia or the arts—and others, in other areas—for example, sports or social relations. The most important thing is that everyone develops their full potential, and respects the rhythms that we all have. A stimulating environment and good interpersonal relationships will have a positive influence in the development of children with disabilities.

Disability as a source of social enrichment

Let us value what people with disabilities can show us and provide to the project of an evolving society. We should understand disability as a way to enrich ourselves, creating a more plural world where each one of us makes our own personal contribution.

Recommended children's books: *El cassó del Gerard*, Isabelle Carrier; *Què li passa a aquest nen?: una guia per a conèixer els nens amb discapacitat*, Àngels Ponce and Miguel Gallardo, and two story books by Verena Ballhaus and Franz-Joseph Huainigg, *Ens entenem a cegues* and *Parlem amb les mans*.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

CURRICULAR GOALS

Familium can be used with primary school children to work on the skills and goals related to the following areas:

- Language
- Education for the development of the individual and of the community.

First and middle cycle

Familium helps children achieve various language skills. It supports the learning and consolidation of reading and writing skills.

The activities included in the puzzle book engage the active participation of the students, encouraging interaction, attentive listening, and speech.

The content is emotional in nature, which allows the teacher to help the students formulate and express ideas, opinions, and feelings, thus developing their thinking.

It includes exercises to link and integrate the concepts used.

Also, there are places in the book where children can write and draw. This promotes active participation, and the use of their creative and expressive abilities.

By drawing a picture of their own families, the children can project their own experiences (both relational and affective). The exercise helps the children integrate new concepts with their own personal perspective.

Using the puzzle book, students, while describing their type of family, work on reading, reading comprehension, and writing. *Familium* reflects the social reality, and draws it closer to the world of children. The different stories are easily identifiable by the students, and they help them see written language as a means to understand others and themselves.

The book helps children explore new issues, and it encourages reflection. At the same time, it stimulates the capacity for abstraction and reasoning when drawing conclusions.

Upper cycle

Teachers can use the activities in this guide to help students develop their civic and community skills.

Familium presents different types of families, and addresses issues such as death, homosexuality, divorce, sexuality, reproduction, adoption, foster care, gender equality, disability, immigration, and emotional development. The puzzle book serves as a first contact for addressing these issues. It aims to work on the emotional and behavioral aspects to help students better adapt as individuals to a pluralistic society, and to develop their emotional intelligence.

The guide also includes complementary activities to work on the following:

- Accept and manage emotions.
- Develop feelings of empathy and respect for others, regardless of how different they may be from us.
- Accept cultural diversity as a source of personal enrichment.
- Develop positive attitudes to overcome prejudice.
- Learn to listen to others, and learn to present their views with respect.

Teachers can find more information on these issues in the section "Let's talk...How?" in this guide.

AGES OF APPLICATION

The book is designed for use with children from six to twelve years of age. The complexity of the text is suitable for younger children; while the versatility of the puzzle book, allows the teacher to use it with older children. Therefore, the educators' role will consist in adapting the use to the different age groups and the different levels of mental and emotional maturity. For example, when used with six year olds, the teacher will have to provide extensive help, since the text is written in block letters.

HOW TO USE *FAMILIUM*

The activities in *Familium* should take place in groups that are not too large (up to fifteen people). Teachers should encourage participation and cooperation. Depending on the age, the teacher will increase or decrease the level of complexity, and pose questions involving greater or lesser degree of abstraction. Before considering the objectives of the exercise and adapting to the expectations of the students, the teacher should analyze what are his own expectations, and what issues may be more difficult to address.

The basic attitudes of tolerance and respect should be reinforced at all times. At the same time, the teacher must protect disadvantaged students, and promote respect for the privacy of the personal history of each child. Although the teacher should encourage the participation of all, participation should be voluntary. Because of the emotional content of the activity, the teacher should be flexible with students who are reluctant and show defensive attitudes. If a child is firmly opposed to participating in the activity, he should be allowed to stay in the background. Yet, the teacher must ensure that he or she does not obstruct the class activity.

First and middle cycle

In these grades, the puzzle book can be used during four or five sessions. This is only approximate since the teacher should adapt the time according to the characteristics of each group of students, and the pace at which they work.

To explore *Familium*, we can follow different steps.

Before diving into the book, the teacher should ask students to try to explain what a family is. The teacher should help the students by asking the following question: "Who are the members of a family?" The answers can be written on the blackboard or some other visual support.

Then the children can start doing the activities from the book, following the initial instructions provided by the teacher. The children should read the text first, and then look for the drawing that corresponds to the text. Students can mark their answers inside the book flap, where they have to connect the face of each child to his or her name. When everyone has finished, the children will look at the results with the teacher. At this point, the teacher may want to assign the children an activity to do at home with the family. We recommend the following:

Dear parents,

This week we are studying different types of families. To support the children with this assignment, you can, as a family, help them answer the following questions:

- *Who are the members of your family?*
- *Do you think all families are formed by the same members?*
- *Are all families formed in the same way?*
- *What types of families do you know which are different from your family?*
- *Do you think it is important who the members of a family are?*

The next day, the children can share their answers, and the teacher can explain the different types of families which are described at the end of the book. Every character will be matched to his or her type of family.

Each student can draw a picture of his or her own family. The students should then try to identify their own type of family, describing the main aspects of the family (food, habits, etc.).

The last day, the teacher can post all the pictures on the wall, and ask the initial question again: "What is a family?" The answers can be written on the blackboard. The students can share what they have learnt. The teacher can finish the activity, and clarify any doubts. The teacher can ask students to exchange impressions, and can provide a space for expressing emotions. Some students may want to tell their personal experience. The teacher can help by asking questions such as "What did you like the most?" "What bothered you the most?" "How do you feel now?" "Are you worried about something?"... The main goal is that, by the end of the activity, children understand clearly that there is not just one type of family.

Upper cycle

In the upper cycle, the story can be read in one class session. First, the teacher can ask the students: "Who are the members of a family?" and "Do you know types of families different from your own?" The students can then match each text to the corresponding drawing. The students will mark the answers on the book flap, matching each character to his or her name. When all the answers have been marked, the students will share their answers, explore the different types of families, and identify the type of family of each child in the book. The teacher should provide time to discuss the various issues, and to hear the different opinions. We recommend that the teacher use the following complementary activities in subsequent sessions to address issues raised by the book.

Other complementary activities

Activity 1. Types of families

Goal: Learn to argue a position; identify different attitudes of discrimination; and encourage the development of a respectful attitude towards the different types of families.

Guidance: After having explored the types of families, students can answer the question: *Do you think it matters who are the members of a family? How do people react towards the different types of families?*

Students can be divided into small groups. Each group will have to present and defend their answers, receiving feedback from other students and the teacher.

Activity 2. Create a family

(Adapted from *Juegos de interacción para niños y preadolescentes: sentimientos, familia y amigos* by Klaus Vopel).

Goal: Become aware of the type of family we would like to have; and explore the different aspects of relational dynamics.

Guidance: Students have 15 minutes to create a "family" with other classmates. Students decide which classmates will be the members of their family, and the role that each one will play. Next, they sit down, and have fifteen minutes to answer the following questions:

- How did you get together?
- Who chose you?
- Have you been rejected by someone?
- Are you happy with your family?
- Why did you choose certain students for certain roles?
- What type of family are you?

Students who are not members of any family should get together and exchange views on how they feel, and on whether they like not being part of any family.

As a last step, the students can share their answers with the whole class.

Activity 3. Erroneous beliefs, assumptions and stereotypes

Goal: Question erroneous beliefs; understand that erroneous beliefs affect emotions; and identify stereotypes and prejudices.

Guidance: A belief is what one thinks is true. In this activity, students learn to question their beliefs, and to identify which ones are more appropriate. At the same time, they learn how beliefs influence their emotions and their behaviors.

Students form small groups to explore all the beliefs they have on a particular issue. This activity can be used to explore any of the concepts examined in the book. Then, the teacher chooses an appropriate belief and an inappropriate belief, explaining both on the board. For example:

- The family of immigrants

Fact

The new neighbors are immigrants.

Appropriate belief: They are people with their own particular flaws and virtues. Emotion: Curiosity. Reaction: Get to know them.

Inappropriate belief: All immigrants steal. Emotion: Fear, Hostility. Reaction: Reject them, Avoid them.

- Single parent family

Fact

Talk with a kid that has no father.

Appropriate belief: He is a kid like any other. Emotion: Curiosity. Reaction: Talk to him as an equal.

Inappropriate belief: He is lonelier than other kids, and he is not as well cared for as others. Emotion: Pity, Uneasiness. Reaction: Not talking to him.

The teacher then explains to students what are erroneous assumptions. For example, an assumption that we have been able to demonstrate is that "there is a force of gravity." However, there are other assumptions that we may consider to be true, but that we have not been able to demonstrate. For example, "children that have bad grades are not very smart" (learning difficulties are not linked to a lower intellectual ability).

When a large group of people share a number of assumptions, stereotypes are created.

At this point, the teacher can ask the students to form small groups, and make a list of stereotypes that they have heard at home or outside the home. For example, "all immigrants steal"; "all children who cry are weak", etc.

The groups can then share their list with the class. The teacher will ask the students to challenge some stereotypes, and to discuss the dangers of generalizations: "Does the person

who says that all immigrants steal, know all the immigrants?" "A child who sometimes cries, will he always be weak in all situations?" "Is expressing emotions a sign of weakness?"

OTHER AREAS OF APPLICATION

Familium can easily be adapted to clinical and early childhood contexts. It can be a useful tool for clinical psychologists, for teams who care for children and adolescents (Equip d'Atenció a la Infància i Adolescència, EAIA), or for adoption and foster care services, among others.

RECOMMENDED READING

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ASSOCIATIONS AND RELEVANT WEB SITES AT: www.familium.cat

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