Working In Foster Care:

Children Out-of-Placement Measures and Care

20th September 2022

Foster Care in Portugal:

Promotion and Protection System

The Promotion and Protection System in Portugal
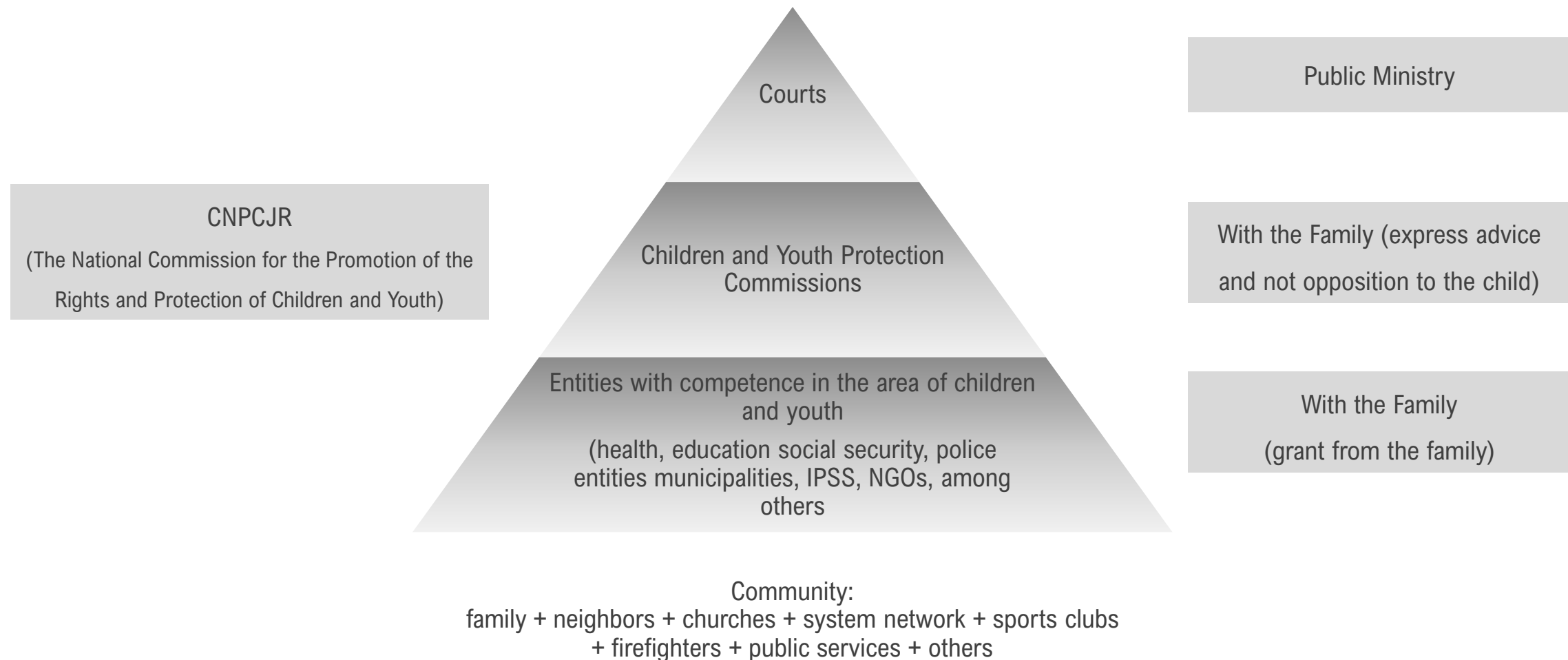
Subsidiary Intervention in Danger

Pyramid (top to bottom):
- Courts
- Children and Youth Protection Commissions
- Entities with competence in the area of children and youth
  (health, education social security, police entities municipalities, IPSS, NGOs, among others)

Left boxes:

CNPCJR
(The National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Youth)

Right boxes:

Public Ministry

With the Family (express advice and not opposition to the child)

With the Family
(grant from the family)

Below pyramid:

Community:
family + neighbors + churches + system network + sports clubs
+ firefighters + public services + others

Fig. 1 - Subsidiarity Pyramid of Intervention

○ Co-responsibility of all social actors in this system - "It takes a whole village to take care of its children".

○ Protection of Children and Young People - not as a sectoral area, but as a transversal area to all those working with children and/or their families.

Primary and Secondary Prevention

Tertiary Prevention and Intervention

From a Universal Prevention perspective, all public entities, private and non-governmental organizations, provide sufficient support at early stages to reduce and fight, effectively, the risk factors, avoiding situations of danger or maltreatment, preventing the need for restorative interventions.

These tertiary prevention interventions fall under the three levels of the previous pyramid according to the principle of subsidiarity.

When a danger situation emerges, whether due to vulnerability, fragilities or real inability of families to take care of their children, with security, affection and educational capacity (which translate into risk factors), it is essential that all levels are involved and capable to act promptly and effectively in the protection of these children, removing the danger, ensuring their safety, promoting recovery from the consequences and the well-being of the child.
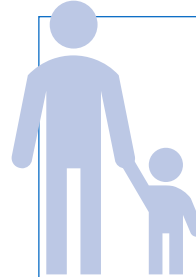
Instituto de Segurança Social, IP. (2011).

The Promotion and Protection Measures in Portugal

(Law no. 26/2018 of July 5th, which alters the original Law – Law no. 147/99, of September 1st)
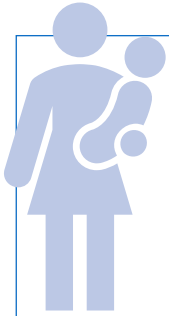
Support to the parents

- Provision of psychological, educational, and social support to the child and the family, and economic assistance, when necessary. May include parental education.

Support to another relative

- Placement of the child in the guardianship of a family member with whom he/she lives or is trusted to (e.g., adult siblings, grandparents…). May include parental education.
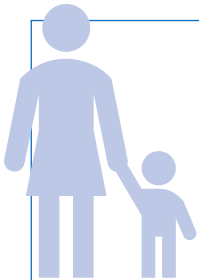
Confided to a trusted person

- Placement of the child in the care of a person who, not belonging to the child's family, has established a relationship of reciprocal affection with he/she (e.g., godmother/godfather, family friend, neighbor…).
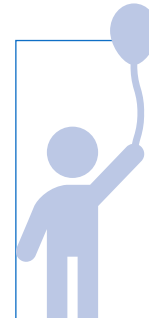
Support for independent living

- Consists in providing economic support, psychological, educational, and social follow-up to young people (with 15 years or older), giving the conditions that will enable them to live by themselves and progressively acquire autonomy of life. When suitable, this measure may be applied to young mothers under the age of 15.
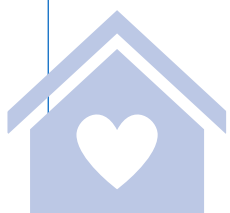
Residential care

- Placement of the child in the care of an entity that has adequate and qualified facilities, equipment, and permanent human resources, that satisfies the child's physical, psychological, emotional, and social needs, as well as the effective exercise of his/her rights, promoting the integration in a safe familiar and social context, education, well-being, and integral development.
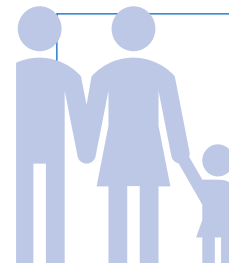
Confided to person selected for adoption, foster family or institution with a view to current or future adoption

- Applied exclusively by Portuguese Law Courts. Consists in the placement of the child under the guardianship of a selected candidate for adoption by Social Security organism; or the placement of the child in a foster family or an institution to adoption.

69.727 Children with a Promotion and Protection Process in 2021

Support to another relative
8,6%

Confided to a trusted person
1,1%

Support to the parents
85%

Support for independent living
0,4%

Foster Care
0,3%

Residential Care
4,5%

Retrieved from National Commission for the Promotion of Rights and the Protection of Children
and Young People's annual report of CPCJ activity.
Portuguese: CNPDPCJ (2022). Relatório Anual de Avaliação da Atividade das CPCJ 2021.

What situations lead to the process of out-of-home placement?

General situations that lead to a process or a promotion/protection measure:

○ Exposure to Domestic Violence.

○ Negligence, lack of supervision, or monitoring of the child.

○ School absenteeism.

○ Temporary absence of family support.

Situations that lead to the foster care placement of a child:

❑ Negligence, lack of supervision, or monitoring of the child (27%).

❑ Negligence regarding the health of the child (11%).

❑ Sexual abuse (7%).

What is Foster Care in Portugal?

Foster Care is an alternative out-of-home placement measure, intending to provide a safe, caring, affectionate and stable family environment to children and youth in danger situations, to guarantee the child's well-being and development.

- It's a temporary measure, and intends the transition to the child's:
  - Return to biological family (FB) / family of origin (FO).
  - Adoption.
  - Or life autonomy when the previous options are not available.

Managed by several institutions such as…

Instituto de Segurança Social – ISS, I.P. (Portuguese Social Security Institute)

Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa – SCML (the Holy House of Mercy of Lisbon)

Other Private Social Solidarity Institutions with an established protocol with the Social Security Institute

Legal provisions that establish and regulate foster care in Portugal:

Portuguese Law for Protection of Children and Youth in Danger (Law no. 26/2018 of July 5th, which alters the original Law – Law no. 147/99, of September 1st)

Decree-Law no. 139/2019 *(Implementation of Foster Care)*

Decree order no. 278-A/2020 *(Foster Families – application, selection, and evaluation)*

Children in Foster Care: Statistics in Portugal.

6706 children are in an out-of-home placement situation

5739 children in residential homes (85.6%)

765 children in other responses, such as shelter homes, residential centers, life autonomy apartments (11.4%)

202 children in foster families (3%)
Increase of 6% comparing with 2019

The first days of a Foster Child/Teen:

Characteristics of Children and Youth to consider

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Exposure to Trauma

Most children in foster care tend to have been exposed to more challenging, difficult, and dangerous situations when compared to children outside of these settings. **Also, most children in foster care have already been through the child welfare system as a result of dangerous situations with their biological/natural family.

Children who are constantly exposed to dangerous situations	"Toxic stress".
⬇	⬇
Are constantly on alert and worried that their needs will not be met, so…	Results from the constant state of alert due to the situations of mistreatment, neglect and abuse, such as…
⬇	⬇
Their brain and body don´t develop in the same way as other children.	Physical / psychological maltreatment, substance abuse by parents, sexual abuse, institutionalization…
⬇	⬇
Tend to focus on the danger around and how to cope with fear and uncertainty in the environment.	Situations that cause fear and distress in the child.

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Exposure to "Toxic" Stress: Consequences

The fear and constant state of alertness can lead children to adopt one or several survival reactions:

(Townsend, 2019)

Freeze	Flight	Fight	Submit

❑ Exhibit a state of confusion, anxiety, and aloofness and do not respond to what is asked of them.

❑ Attentive to the signs of their surroundings, and look for ways to escape.

❑ Feel shame, fear of failure, and rejection.

❑ Restless, noisy, hypervigilant, and run away from adults (e.g., hiding under the table).

❑ Have difficulty focusing and following instructions.

❑ Need to find a safe place.

❑ They feel alone and worthless

❑ Tend to be intransigent, unable to follow rules, lie, or blame others.

❑ Need to control and make the situation predictable.

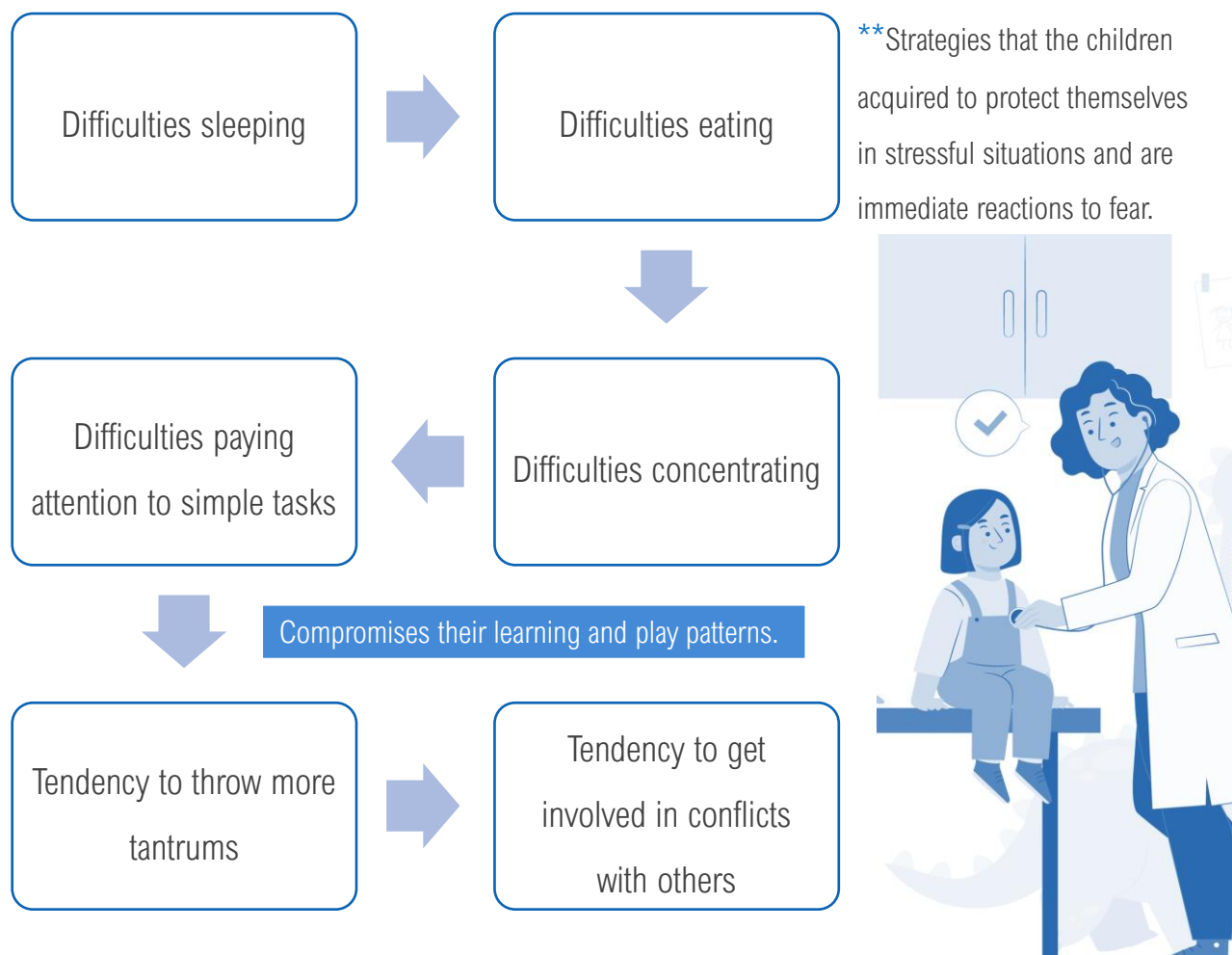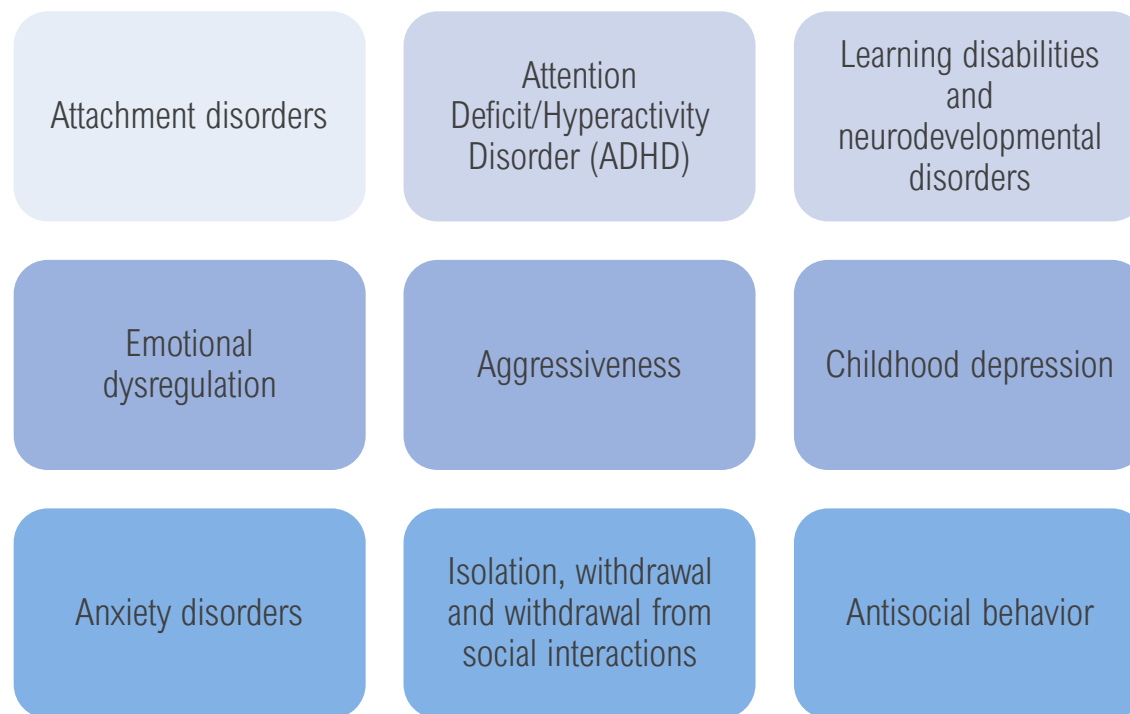❑ Feel that by "attacking" they can defend themselves and survive danger.

❑ Passive, with a sad posture, avoiding or withdrawing from interactions.

❑ Need to not draw attention to themselves and be almost "invisible."

❑ Feel guilty, ready to give up, and hopeless about the future.

Exposure to "Toxic" Stress: Developmental consequences

Exposure to stress and trauma resulting from these situations, and from feeling constantly frightened, can lead to the child having:

Difficulties sleeping

Difficulties eating

Difficulties concentrating

Difficulties paying attention to simple tasks

Compromises their learning and play patterns.

Tendency to throw more tantrums

Tendency to get involved in conflicts with others

**Strategies that the children acquired to protect themselves in stressful situations and are immediate reactions to fear.

Additionally, they may develop more severe deficits and disorders such as:

Attachment disorders

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Learning disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders

Emotional dysregulation

Aggressiveness

Childhood depression

Anxiety disorders

Isolation, withdrawal and withdrawal from social interactions

Antisocial behavior

(American Academy of Pediatrics, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption & Jockey Being Family, 2019; Kelly, 2017).

Working as a Professional in Foster Care:

The importance of communication in Foster Care

The importance of Communication in Foster Care

(Hall & Slembrouck, 2009)

In foster care, you need to work as a team, both with the foster family and sometimes with the biological family of the child.

Foster families, have relevant information to share.

Professionals have more information regarding the child and provide support to the families and children/youth.

**When biological parents, foster families, children, and workers can be open with each other, the potential for misunderstandings is often avoided.

Professionals need to receive feedback from parents on a consistent basis.

The biological family, foster family, and children feel more satisfied and acknowledged, so they are more willing to communicate.

Just as good communication is important for maintaining healthy working relationships, it's also essential for meeting the needs of children in care.

Therapy vector created by storyset - www.freepik.com
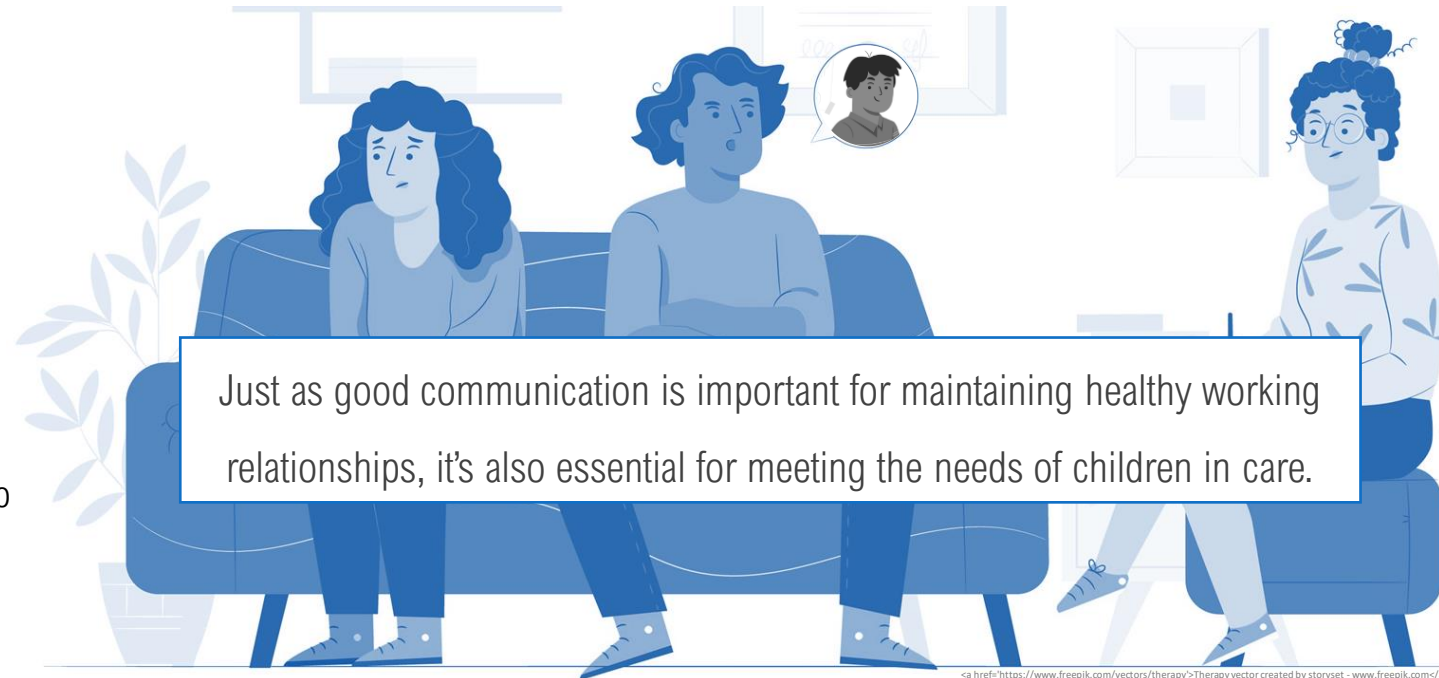
Competencies in Communication: Families

Some considerations and suggestions for communicating with families in child/youth support services:

Asymmetric Interactions

(Hall & Slembrouck, 2009)

- Professionals tend to dominate interactions in these contexts.
- They should be open to debate, not just asking questions and getting answers.
- Avoid a posture of superiority.

Providing advice

- It tends to be a point of tension in the relationship.
- The problem and the solutions must be discussed together. Avoid blaming and ignoring the family.

Shared perspectives

- Reaching agreement with the family can create conflicts.
- Question and consider the family's perspective before discussing the problem.

Discouraging undesired options

- It may be necessary to reformulate the family's perspective.
- Negotiate "restricted" aspects and options and discourage undesired options.

Dealing with sensitive topics

- Sensitive topics are always difficult to address.
- Distancing and indirect questioning.
- De-personalize the topic.

Thank you for your attention!

Dėkojame už jūsų dėmesį

Dziękuję za uwagę

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