

Fact Sheet N° 2

A global policy for children and the family

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES IN DIFFICULTY AS A MEANS OF PREVENTION OF THE CHILD'S SEPARATION FROM THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN

The maintenance of the child in his/her family of origin should be treated as a priority whenever possible. It is in the family where the best conditions are found for the optimal upbringing of the child, where they are best for attachment to one or two key stable people who ensure his/her security. No part of the family should be considered incapable, by definition, of taking the child into its care (because of sickness, a social characteristic, belonging to an ethnic minority ...).

When risk factors potentially dangerous for the child are detected in a family, since we know from experience that they can lead to situations of abandonment, mistreatment or serious neglect, it is important to develop **psychosocial family support services** that can encourage other protective factors in the child, the family and the environment, in such a way that they manage to compensate for, or eliminate the risk factors.

Target

It entails strengthening the family's *autonomy (children and adults) as a social group, and increasing the resources and the strengths they have at their disposal, as well as the capacity to protect its members*. This methodology embodies a basis for preventive action that rotates around two poles: the internal preparation of the family and of each of its members (empowerment) and the external support (social support).

Methods and techniques of social work

Social work with families should facilitate *the internal family relationships and at the same time promote the integration of the family in its community*. In the field of family social work the method used is fundamental. For family work various techniques should be used to complement each other, with the individuals and the family group, that vary during the process of supportive action in

response to the needs and objectives of each family and each situation.

In certain circumstances it is necessary *to interview the family in the professional's workplace*. In other cases the *home visit* can serve as a form of support and assistance. The home visit makes it possible to get to know the family in its environment, allows contact with family members and people who live alongside the family who are not available for interview elsewhere and fosters the professional's link up with the network of services and family social support in the locality where the family lives. *Family groups have also proved very useful. They bring together families with similar living patterns. The experiences of some serve as a reference for others. Common topics of interest to all of them are discussed. They unite various families, strengthening them in the exercise of citizenship.*

A *contract or agreement* with the family should set out the objectives to be achieved

in the development of the family and the timeframes foreseen for the evaluation of it. It is important for the self-sufficiency of the family group.

The social protagonists

The attitude of the social worker vis-à-vis of the family is a relevant factor for the success of the work. The capacity for self-analysis and for listening on the part of the social worker is a valuable asset in the work. The link between the professional and the family, when it is built on a relationship of respect and of confidence, will facilitate the development of the assistance. The family should, little by little and through contacts with the professional, begin to feel itself welcome, understood, in a way that contributes whenever possible to the process of help.

In work with families it is important to recognize *the value of teamwork* that encourages different points of view about the family, linking up the action of the social, psychological, health and legal services, which shapes a fuller picture of the situations and of the eventual processes.

Development of the process

The team will decide the *sequence of the work process* in meetings to study the cases, as well as specific techniques that better respond to the strategic targets set.

The *time spent doing follow-up work* with a family is undetermined and varies according to the circumstances. The specific objectives that will also depend on each family and the circumstances of its development and interaction will be built in each case around the general aim of keeping the child in the bosom of his/her family.

The need to separate the child from his/her family of origin

In some cases, preventive measures are not successful and the best interests of the child require that a decision of separation be taken. Such a decision supposes that guarantees be applied. In particular, it is necessary that all possible preventive measures be tried before taking the decision. The child's separation from his/her parents is a measure of last resort. This decision must be taken as far as possible with the participation of the child and his/her parents. This measure must be defined through concrete steps and with a determined timeframe for the work with both the child and the family, in order to assess as soon as possible the chances of reintegration of the child in the family or, if not possible, to develop an alternative permanent life plan for the child. The possibility to challenge the decision before a tribunal must also be made available.

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For more information:

ISS, *A Global Policy for the Protection of Children Deprived of Parental Care*, Geneva, 2005, 11 pp.

http://www.iss-ssi.org/Resource_Centre/Tronc_DI/documents/CRCDiscussionDayAglobalPolicyISS05.pdf.

ATD Fourth World, *How Poverty Separates Parents and Children: a Challenge to Human Rights*, 2004, 148 pp. http://www.atd-quartmonde.org/intern/docu_intern/howpov.pdf

MARSH P., TRISELIOTIS J. (ed.), *Prevention and Reunification in Child Care*, London, Batsford, 1993, 220 pp.

We are interested in your opinion! To tell us your experiences, ask us your questions about the themes addressed in this file, or to send us your suggestions for changes, don't hesitate to write to us at irc-cir@iss-ssi.org. We also invite you to share this file with other interested persons in your country. Thanks in advance!

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