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A Book for Parents On Education and Upbringing of Children

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About education and its purposes

Why is it important for our children to study and become well-educated?

The simplest answer is: in order to live well, choose a profession, know how to develop as a personality, be respected by other citizens and be able to try their luck around the world.

Education helps people to think better, take care of themselves, their health and prosperity; make decisions, be independent and choose what is best for them.

In the **strategy for development of secondary education in Bulgaria** is written that its main purposes are:

- to mould Bulgarian citizens as free, moral and enterprising personalities with a good fund of general knowledge, abiding laws, other people's rights, language, religion, culture, knowing and respecting national and universal values;
- to develop people's intellectual capacity and communicative skills as well as their individuality and independence
- to form physically and mentally healthy personalities, ready to take social responsibilities;
- to form national self-awareness, patriotism and raise concern about global problems of human mankind;

- to form interests and needs for study, education and self-improvement during the course of their life;
- to provide the required level of general education and professional training which allow constant room for education and self-education.

The **main purposes of modern education** are several:

To teach us know and understand the world around us; to possess good enough general knowledge as well as the ability for extensive study of a small number of topics. This also means to be taught in such a way that we could take advantage of the possibilities good education gives us.

To learn how to deal with all kinds of situations.

To learn to live well and together with other people – in the family, in the neighbourhood, in the society, by trying to understand them and respect their independence;

To learn how to work with other people and to handle conflict situations together in the spirit of mutual respect, agreement and peace.

To learn to be true to our nature, take care of ourselves and think about our future, to do the best about developing our personality as well as to be able to act more independently, soberly and in a more responsible way.

What should young people know and be able to do today?

They should be able to manage the available resources as well as the ones they could acquire.

a/ To know how to plan their actions in order to fulfil their aims;

b/ Money – to be able to plan their budget and keep track of expenses so as to achieve their aims.

c/ Materials and equipment – to be able to acquire, store, distribute and use effectively the materials they have for carrying out their activity.

d/ People – to know how to appreciate people’s skills and if leading them to be able to give them work, assess the results and communicate effectively with them in the process.

To be able to work with other people:

a/ To be able to work well in a team – as a member to contribute to the successful completion of a certain task.

b/ To be able to transfer their knowledge and skills to the others.

c/ When necessary to be the leader and to convince the others that something is right, to be able to assert their opinion.

d/ To be able to negotiate - to clinch deals and protect their interests in these negotiations.

e/ to work well with different from them – men and women, from various ethnic groups.

To be able to find and use the information they need:

a/ To be able to find it and choose the parts that are useful

b/ To systematize the information and to know how to pass it on.

c/ To be computer- literate in order to process the collected information.

To be able to understand different systems, which become more varied and numerous in the modern world and our life and well-being depend on them: production systems (companies, factories, enterprises), public systems and different organizations.

a/ To be familiar with the way these systems function and to know how to work and act in each of them – as a worker, citizen, member of a political party or a non-governmental organization.

b/ To be able to observe and manage the systems where he works or participates.

To be able to use different technologies in the field where they work:

To choose certain technologies, know how systems operate, keep them in good condition and fix them when necessary, to be computer-literate.

In order to do all these things the young person should be able to do several basic things:

- *To read, write, calculate, listen carefully and speak convincingly.*
- *To think creatively, make decisions and give reasons for them, solve problems;*
- *To be responsible, honest, to possess self-examination and self-government abilities.*

What are the important things that happen to the education nowadays?

Unlike in the past, when people used to spend only a few years at school, today we study all our lives – the world is changing so fast that the knowledge acquired at school is not enough after several years.

This means that people need to have spent a lot of years at school (to have at least secondary education) in order to continue their studies.

If people lack enough years at school, they often will not be allowed to join qualification courses or sometimes will not be able to understand the core of the matters they study.

If people have only primary education or several more years just spent at school it will be very difficult for them to cope with their lives in the future:

Most of the well-paid human activities will be inaccessible.

These people will be able to do (from time to time) only jobs which involve hard labour or ones which are never chosen by educated people.

The lower the education, the smaller salary people will get. This way they will condemn to a life of poverty not only themselves but also their families and children.

In order to make the current situation clear, let's specify that only 10 percent of the Roma people continue their education at secondary schools compared to Western Europe where 90 percent of the young people go to high school or vocational schools and nearly half of them go to university afterwards.

To sum up, nowadays to have basic education does not mean learning to read and write but to remain at school until you become of age so as to be able to find a suitable job and to continue studying for the rest of your life.

Nowadays the education systems in developed countries aim to provide equal opportunities for everybody. In the past it was normal for children whose parents were poor, immigrants or from minority groups to not be admitted to school or to go there only until they learn to read and write at an elementary level.

Nowadays the main principle of the educational policies of all countries in the European Union is giving **equal chances to all children** – regardless of their social background, sex, wealth. This way everybody can get good education, outdo their parents, find a place in society.

Equal chances, especially for children coming from poorer, minority groups or living in worse conditions, are achieved by giving them special opportunities for getting money (in the form of scholarships) while they are studying and in some cases also clothes and food. Far more important is the special methodical help such children receive in order to become better students and to be able to catch up with their peers coming from better-off families.

Nowadays it is really important for the teacher as well for the society that all children become good, successful students, to make progress and not be forced to leave it early and to look for hard, low-paid jobs. Modern society, the Bulgarian one in particular where the birth rate is getting lower (for only ten years the number of first-grade students has dropped from 120 thousands to 60 thousands per year), really needs well-educated young people.

This is so because **computers are becoming an important part of our lives**. Through them we collect the whole information and data about us – people, about the world around us. Everybody uses computers – people who work for social services and in Labour Offices, the municipality as well as in companies, shops, factories, even in music industry, fine arts, etc. If a child is computer-illiterate it

will be able to find only low-paid, menial jobs, will feel isolated from the society and condemned to poverty.

Computers and the ability to speak foreign languages will help young people to live well everywhere and to settle down as citizens of united Europe.

Another important thing we should know about modern education is the fact that to a great extent it **gives young people the opportunity to find a suitable job through vocational schools.** As society is getting more complex, the number of demands on different professions is getting higher and consequently people need more time to qualify. Not long ago it was believed that as long as people were able to read and write, they could do different jobs.

Nowadays each profession requires long, extensive period of studying and usually only four or even eight years (the time needed to finish basic education) are not enough to find a proper job or choose a profession. Something more – after finishing secondary or vocational school young people should continue studying in some form or another all life long, attending various courses in order to keep up with the new requirements regarding his position and to be aware of the new opportunities that arise.

We all see how numerous are the unemployed in the modern society and how difficult it is to find a job. We must realize that well-educated, ready to go to another course people will always find jobs much easier than the others who are illiterate or barely literate. For them the only alternatives will remain the social benefits or really low-paid and unappealing jobs.

Educational legislation – what should we know

First of all **we have the right** of education – we and also our children. In Law on Education is clearly stated “Citizens exercise their right to education in the system of public education regardless of their age.”

School gives us knowledge about the world and the people, teaches us how to live, work and be successful.

Studying a certain religion is not compulsory though. If we want our children to learn more about Christianity or Islam or to practise the religion and live according to its rules, we should send them to Sunday school in a church or mosque.

In Law on Education as well as in the Constitution is stated that “pupils exercise their right to free education in state or municipal schools by not paying fees for the subjects they study within the framework of state educational requirements. They can also use the school equipment for developing their interests and skills free of charge. They have to pay when sitting entrance exams after the seventh grade or after finishing basic education in state or municipal schools.”

Unfortunately free education does not mean free course books, it doesn't include all other expenses for our child – for notebooks, clothes, food during school time, for workshops and courses at the youth centres as well as for camps during the holidays.

It is quite hard but if we want our children to be good people and keep up with other children we have to provide all these things – from our income or social benefits. We should also try to find out more about the programs supporting students available in our town or neighbourhood.

School education is compulsory till reaching the age of 16 for all citizens of Republic of Bulgaria. This means we are obliged to send our children to school. And because children often prefer to spend their time playing games it is also our duty to make sure they go regularly and make progress.

It is often the case that some children do not speak Bulgarian very well. In order to be on the same footing as other children, they need a year preparation before they start school. They can go to preparatory groups at kindergartens or preparatory classes at schools.

The education and upbringing of children and pupils in the system of public education is held in Bulgarian language.

Children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian (mother tongue is the language the child uses at home with the family) can study Roma language at municipal schools as an extra subject as long as the parents express a preference and there is a group of 12 children. The school has to provide a Roma language teacher.

At a very early age the child starts attending a kindergarten - the place for the youngest.

There are brought up and taught children from the age of 3 till they start school. There are several types of kindergartens – full-day, half-day, weekly and for children with special needs or chronic diseases. We should also know that half-day, preparatory or seasonal groups for preschool children can be organized at kindergartens or schools.

If we want our children to attend kindergarten we should submit an application to the head teacher (director) and to enclose a copy of the birth certificate and medical documents issued by the health services.

As parents and guardians we pay for the time our children spend at kindergarten according the Law for local taxes and fees. This means that the fees should not be the same in different towns and villages. The preparatory groups at kindergarten or school (the year before the children start school) are free of charge.

If for some reason our children have to be absent for some time, we should not be worried, they can stop attending and then go back at any time as long as we have informed the teachers in advance. We do not pay for the periods when the child is absent.

This is not the case with preschool groups where absences are not allowed unless for good reasons.

If we want our children to have extra activities at kindergarten – e.g. foreign languages or dancing with the help of another teacher, we will have to pay an additional fee.

General and vocational school education

General education provides children with the necessary knowledge and an opportunity to continue their studies at a higher level – to become university students.

Vocational education, which children can get at respective specialized schools, gives them the chance to learn a profession as well.

From another aspect education could also be divided into primary and secondary. Primary education has got two stages – basic (from 1st till 4th grade) and middle (from 5th till 8th grade inclusive). It can be received at primary and secondary schools, art schools, vocational schools, sports schools and special schools. They issue certificates for finished primary education.

Secondary education is a four-year course of studying after the pupils have finished primary school. It can be received at high schools, secondary schools, specialized high schools, vocational schools or high schools; sports schools, art schools and special schools.

Remember that “pupils till the age of 16, who live in a town or a village where there is not a school, should be provided with free transport or a boarding type of education at a school in the nearest town / village in the same area.

Children become first–grade pupils at the age of 7 (they should become of this age during the calendar year). They can also start school at the age of 6 if their parents / guardian think that they are physically and mentally ready.

You can choose the school for your child.

Pupils who have finished the first educational stage (1st – 4th grade) continue studying in 5th grade.

They can receive their education at different schools. If they want to go to a specialized school (art or sports one) they should possess the required qualities and pass an entrance examination.

Pupils who have finished 7th or 8th grade can get a profession at vocational schools as well as at special classes for vocational education formed at primary, secondary and specialized schools.

If you want your children to attend a state or municipal sports school, this can happen after 6th, 7th or 8th grade after their abilities have been checked.

The same goes for art and sports classes formed at state and municipal schools where pupils can join at different stages of the primary education after their abilities have been checked.

If you want to move your child to another school from 5th to 8th grade you have to find out what the requirements of the school are. The change can happen during the school year but not later than 30 school days before each term finishes. In order to perform the procedure you need a special document (transfer certificate) issued by the head teacher of the previous school.

A finished class from the second stage of the primary education is attested by a student assessment book.

If your children want to apply for a sports or vocational school, a certificate certifying a finished grade is issued after 6th, 7th or 8th grade for the purpose. They can join the school after passing entrance examinations or a check of their abilities.

Every student who has finished 8th grade receives a **primary education certificate**.

After finishing primary education, your children can continue their education in the 9th grade at secondary schools, high schools, vocational schools, art schools, special schools or in classes for getting a professional qualification at secondary schools and high schools.

After 7th grade your children can continue their studies in specialized schools, vocational high schools, art schools, sports schools or in special classes formed at secondary schools as well as in high schools or classes for getting a professional qualification at secondary schools and high schools.

If your children have special educational needs and have finished 8th grade but have not acquired the required knowledge for good reasons, they can continue their studies in 9th grade in schools which organize vocational education for getting a first grade professional qualification.

Students can be admitted into 8th or 9th class in state or municipal schools, high schools, specialized schools and special classes in secondary schools, special art or sports classes in secondary schools after sitting certain exams.

After finishing 12th grade pupils take state school-leaving examinations. Every student who has passed them successfully receives a secondary education diploma. Pupils sit two state school-leaving examinations, one of them in Bulgarian language and literature and the second - in one of the curriculum subjects, chosen by the student. If they want, students can sit one more exam in a subject chosen by them.

In cases when students have failed their school-leaving examinations, they receive a certificate for finished secondary education but they can not go to university and continue their studies.

Finished vocational education (in a vocational school or high school) is certified with a secondary education diploma, certificate for finished secondary education or a certificate for professional qualification.

Special schools for pupils with hearing or sight impairments

These schools are for visually or hearing impaired students from 1st to 12th grade and children spend there the whole school week.

Special school for pupils with mental retardation

These schools are designed to help and are usually half-boarding or boarding ones. Vocational education can be organized for those who are interested in studying for a profession or in getting a first grade professional qualification.

Special reform schools for children who have broken the laws

These are boarding schools for pupils with antisocial behaviour from 1st to 12th grade. Vocational education can be organized.

Social boarding schools – for pupils from 1st to 8th grade who are deprived of a normal home life, parental care and control and who have broken (or are likely to break) the laws. Vocational education can be organized.

For people who do time in prison education is organized at prison schools or reform school. These types of schools provide the possibility to receive primary, secondary or vocational education.

Night schools

They educate people who are at least 16 years old and do not attend a normal school. You can send your children to a night school even if they are below the age of 16 in case they have important family or other social reasons. To certify this you need a document issued by the competent authorities and showing that it is not suitable for the child to attend a normal school. At night schools people can receive primary or secondary education and / or professional qualification.

How is the school education organized?

Let's recollect some details.

School education is organized in successive grades and depending on the number of pupils the grades are divided into classes which are designated with the initial letters of the Bulgarian alphabet.

The number of student in a class is specified by the minister of education and science and is different for different grades.

Time for studying is organized in school years, school terms, school weeks, school days and school hours.

During the school year the pupils have Christmas, spring (Easter), summer holidays as well as a few days between terms. First grade pupils also have some extra free days for recreation during the first term.

The school year starts no earlier than 15th September and continues 12 months but school lessons last no more than 38 and no less than 31 school weeks, divided into two school terms.

The school week has 5 school days – from Monday to Friday.

Duration of holidays with the exception of the summer one as well as the free days for first grade pupils are fixed by the minister of education and science before the beginning of the school year.

The number of compulsory school hours can not exceed:

- twenty-two school hours – in 1st and 2nd grade
- twenty-five school hours – in 3rd and 4th grade
- thirty school hours – in 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and grade
- thirty-two school hours – in 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade
- thirty-two school hours – at night schools

School days can be organized as half-days or full-days and include from 4 to 7 compulsory school hours.

Half-day type can be organized in two shifts – morning and afternoon.

Full-day type of organization is available for pupils from 1st to 8th grade at parents' request and when the studying conditions allow it. In this case compulsory school hours are combined with different forms of self-preparation, interest-based and recreation activities. Children spend the whole day at school and are under constant cares and control.

School hour duration:

- thirty minutes – in preparatory class

- thirty-five minutes – in 1st and 2nd grade
- forty minutes – in 3rd and 4th grade
- forty-five minutes – in 5th – 12th grade (during the day)
- forty minutes – at night schools

Breaks between classes last as least 10 minutes and no more than 30 minutes.

First grade pupils can study only in the morning.

The material covered at school can be divided into several parts – compulsory, extra compulsory, free (chosen by the students).

Compulsory – includes the subjects on the curriculum the children study depending on the school and the grade they are in. These subjects are identical and compulsory for all pupils from the same grade in the whole country.

Extra compulsory – provides children with extra knowledge according to their interests and personal skills and the possibilities the school can provide. For example in some schools children can attend a maths group and solve more difficult problems than their peers.

Free (chosen by the students)

Provides education in subject which are not on the curriculum – e.g. in civic education, theatre, etc. and takes place outside the compulsory school lessons.

Apart from compulsory education the school is obliged to organize **extracurricular activities outside the school hours** and to provide teaching and development of students' specific interests and needs in the field of art, science, technology and sport. As parents you have the right to ask for such activities which will help your child to grow up in a better way, to learn useful information and to find pleasure.

Professional preparation at vocational schools and high schools is also general, branch or specific for each profession. General compulsory vocational preparation

in a certain speciality is the same in all vocational schools in the country and includes theoretical as well as practical education.

Branch professional education is compulsory and one and the same for all professions from the same field. It takes into consideration the specific features of each profession and includes theoretical as well as practical education.

Specific professional preparation is compulsory and connected with the respective profession. It includes theoretical as well as practical education.

Students also have compulsory foreign language preparation which provides them with specific words and terms used when practising certain profession.

The whole information about the subjects, number of lessons; about when and how long you study certain subjects is given in **the National curriculum**. Every school uses it as a basis for their own curriculum and divides the subjects, extra compulsory and free lessons for the whole educational period according to pupils' interests and the possibilities of the school.

It is also important to be familiar with the **ways used for assessing our children at school**.

They are the same for pupils and teachers in the whole country, which informs us that when our children do well at school, they receive good grades for the effort – i.e. their work is marked fairly.

Pupils' knowledge and skills are assessed by on-going and progress checks (tests) as well as examinations.

In order to check how much they have learned, pupils have to answer questions connected with the lessons they study, do tests and submit different projects. On-going assessment is done regularly by the teachers, throughout the first and the second term, using different ways of checking and marking chosen by them. The timetable of the important tests is approved by the head teacher of the school.

Pupils' knowledge and skills are marked with the following grades - excellent (6), very good (5), good (4), pass (3) and poor (2).

Progress, end-of-term and end-of-year grades of the pupils from 1st to 8th grade are written in the **student assessment book and in the register of the class**. End-of-year grades of the pupils from 1st to 12th grade are written in the ledger and end-of-term and end-of-year grades of the pupils from 9th to 12th grade – in the personal file of the student.

End-of-term and end-of-year grades of the pupils admitted to new schools after finishing 7th grade are written in the personal file of the students.

In order to finish a grade, pupils need to have **at least a pass end-of-year grade** in all subjects (compulsory, extra compulsory, free).

Pupils who have received a poor end-of-year grade in any subject (compulsory, extra compulsory, free) have to take a supplementary exam in the subject which can be sat no more than twice a year. Regular sessions for these exams are held after the school year finishes in June or July and from 1 to 13 September, by order of the head teacher, but not later than 10 October.

Pupils who have not sat these exams within the allotted period of time due to medical problems (certified with a medical document) can sit the exam on another date in the additional session, by order of the head teacher, but not later than 10 October.

Pupils who have failed or not sat a supplementary exam in any subject (compulsory, extra compulsory, free) have **to repeat the respective grade**.

Last year pupils who have failed or not sat a supplementary exam in any subject (compulsory, extra compulsory, free) during the regular or additional exam sessions do not repeat the grade but can sit the exam during the next exam sessions.

Pupils with special educational needs who have not learned the minimum general knowledge for a grade, stage or degree of education for good reasons do not repeat the grade.

First grade pupils who do not learn well the school material do not repeat the grade. Their teachers give them additional individual classes during the school year and the holidays. This education is suggested by the teachers and is organized with the help of experts – psychologists, speech therapists.

For pupils threatened with dropping out, the school, with the help of regional inspectorates on education and in collaboration with the municipality, school boards and other organizations creates additional educational opportunities by organizing and holding:

- individual programs for better education;
- extra work with the pupils during the school year and the holidays;
- extracurricular and extra-school activities, suitable for the educational needs and interests of the pupils;
- consultations and vocational education guidance, suitable for the age and interests of the pupils.

What are the documents that our children receive for finished grade, for an educational degree and professional qualification?

In the **certificate for finished preparatory group or class** is given information about the development of the child and whether he/she is ready to start school.

In the **certificate for finished first grade** is given a general mark for the year in words about the result of the education in all subjects.

In the **certificate for finished basic education** are written the end-of-year marks for 4th grade in all compulsory, extra compulsory and free subjects which are on the curriculum of the school.

In the **certificate for finished grade** are written the end-of-year marks in all subjects on the curriculum.

In the **secondary education diploma** are written the number of school hours - day and night form of education and the marks in all compulsory, extra compulsory, free as well as specific subjects on the curriculum. The marks of the school-leaving examinations are also given.

In the **certificate for finished secondary education** are written the number of school hours - day and night form of education and the marks in all compulsory, extra compulsory, free as well as specific subjects on the curriculum.

In the **certificate for professional qualification** are written the number of school hours - day and night form of education and the marks in all compulsory, extra compulsory, free as well as specific subjects on the curriculum. The marks of the examinations for obtaining a professional qualification are also given.

In the certificate for vocational education are written the number of school hours - day and night form of education and the marks in all compulsory professional as well as free subjects on the curriculum. The marks of the examinations for obtaining a qualification in part of the profession, for updating and expanding the professional qualification are also given.

In **qualification certificate** is written the qualification obtained, which allows the person to practise the profession in question.

What is the role of the teachers, their rights and duties at school?

Kindergarten teachers are responsible for upbringing and education of children and **school teachers** teach different subjects, check and assess pupils' knowledge and abilities, cooperate in their complete integration in the learning and social environment.

At schools also work **educators** who organize educational activities with the schoolchildren outside the compulsory school hours.

In our country in order to become a teacher or educator people must have a university degree.

Teachers or educators can not be persons who:

- * are sentenced to imprisonment and have a valid sentence for premeditated crime;
- * are not allowed to practice their profession;
- * suffer from diseases which endanger children's life or health;

We should remember that we all – parents, children and the whole community should **show our respect and deference to the teachers**, and especially we as parents should support and assist their work.

Teachers have the right to:

- be members of a professional teachers' organizations;
- give their opinion and make suggestions about the activities in the kindergarten or school directed to the administrative body in the system of public education;
- choose course books and supplementary materials.

Teachers are obliged to:

- perform conscientiously their duties, which are defined in special documents from the Ministry of Education and Science;
- protect the health and life of pupils and children during school classes and other activities organized by them, the school or kindergarten.

Teachers can not violate the rights of children and pupils, humiliate them or use any form of physical or mental violence against them.

Teachers do not have the right to suspend pupils from school classes, extracurricular or extra-school activities.

We should also remember that teachers cannot perform educational services to pupils who study or will sit an exam in the school where they teach.

Teachers do not have the right to use their mobile phones during school hours.

What are the right and responsibilities of our children in kindergarten and school?

Children in kindergarten are taught and brought up in conditions which guarantee:

- equal possibilities for physical, spiritual and social development;
- their rights, freedom and security;
- respect of their dignity and love towards them;
- to bring them up in a spirit of understanding, peace and tolerance;
- their familiarization with national traditions and cultural values.

Pupils participate as partners in school education and play active role in achieving the aims of the educational process.

They have the right to:

- choose the school as well as the free subjects and activities on the curriculum;
- take part in the extracurricular and extra-school activities organized by the school;
- receive information from the teachers on topics connected with their education ;
- receive information and consultations from teachers and other officials on their professional orientation and development;
- receive consultations from teachers when organizing their self-preparation
- receive individual help from teachers according to their specific needs;
- be directed, encouraged and assisted in order to develop their talents, mental and physical abilities;
- be protected by the school, regional inspectorate responsible for education, Ministry of Education and Science in case their dignity has not been respected or their rights have been violated;
- give opinions or suggestions to the head teacher of the school in relation to the organization of school activities;

- use for free the school facilities during school hours as well as during the rest of the time for developing their interests and ability in an order fixed by the head teacher;
- be stimulated with moral prizes for high achievements in school, extracurricular and extra-school activities;
- get a scholarship;
- participate in meeting of the pedagogic council where results of education are discussed, when pupils are punished or given prizes.

Pupils have no right to:

- be absent from school hours without a good reason;
- participate in gambling, to smoke, to use drugs and alcohol;
- become members of political parties and organization till the age of 18;
- to disrespect the authority and dignity of the teacher with their behaviour;
- to impede the proper performance of the duties of the teachers;
- humiliate their classmates, to use physical or mental violence against them;
- carry any types of weapon and endanger other pupils' life and health;
- use mobile phones during school hours.

Pupils are obliged to:

- perform their duties – to study and follow school rules and order;
- carry their ID cards at school and outside it.

We do not always control and pay enough attention whether **pupils attend classes regularly** but they are very important so that the student receives good grades and does not have serious problems at school.

We should know that:

When the pupils are absent from school for good reasons, they should present a medical document, a document from the sports club they belong to or a letter written by their parents / guardian.

An absence from school without a good reason is considered as an **absence without a reason**.

If the pupils is late up to 15 minutes for three school hours without a good reason they also get one **absence** of the same type.

In cases where a pupil, attending a day or night school, cannot receive an end-of-term or and-of-year mark due to a lot of absences, the head teacher (after a suggestion from the school board) defines with a written order the terms and sequence for assessing the knowledge and skills for completing the school term / year.

If a pupil has a lot of absences without a good reason the class tutor has to inform the parent in writing.

When pupils do not perform their duties they receive the **following punishments**:

- a reprimand
- a warning for moving to another school
- moving to another school by the end of the school year
- change in the form of education - from a day to an individual one for pupils who are at least 16 years old.

Punishments are imposed by the head teacher with a written order after a suggestion from the class tutor or the school board.

When a “moving” punishment is imposed the class tutor is obliged to inform the parents / guardian of the pupil as well as the Department of Social Relief in the area about the committed offence.

When a punishment is imposed, the pupils have the right to be informed and consulted by a representative of the Department of Social Relief in order to protect their rights and interests.

When imposing a punishment, the head teacher is obliged to hear out the pupil and to check carefully the facts and circumstances connected with the offence.

Moving to another school or a change in the form of education - from a day to an individual one are drastic measures taken in cases of serious offence. The school board discusses the report submitted by the class tutor about the committed offence and hears out the pupil or another pupil or teacher chosen by them. A parent or guardian of the pupil can be present at the meeting.

As parents we are obliged to:

- Express an interest in the development of our children and their achievements and behaviour at school.
- Receive information from our children and their teachers about the things that happen at school.
- Help our children.

It is important for us to know how the complicated educational system works, how orders are given, who is responsible for what at school and in the education as a system, who we can ask for assistance in a difficult situation.

The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the management of education which develops and carries out the national policy in this sphere. It is led by a minister of education and controls the activity of all types of kindergartens and schools.

In the regional centres education is managed by **regional inspectorates of education** which control kindergartens and schools in the region. They also make sure that state, municipal and private kindergartens enforce and comply with the laws and regulations. In many cases we can ask them for help or advice.

In school the most important figure is the **head teacher** who:

- organizes, controls and is responsible for the whole activity in the school
- makes sure that the staff enforces and follow the laws
- provides safe conditions for upbringing, education and work

- is in charge of the financial issues of the school
- employs and dismisses teachers and educators
- gives prizes and imposes punishments on pupils, teachers and other members of staff
- organizes the enrolment of children and pupils as well as the education according to the laws
- signs and stamps documents for moving of pupils, for a finished class, for educational degree, for acquired professional qualification

Pedagogic councils also have a very big role. It includes deputy head teachers, teachers, educators and other specialists involved in the education. The chairman of the school board and a medical person who is in charge of the school or kindergarten can also become members and have the right to vote.

The school board discusses and deals with issues like:

- a plan for the development of the school
- introduces regulations connected with the school activities and the curriculum
- discusses and takes decisions connection with the results of the education
- defines the procedure of enrolling students
- makes suggestions to the head teacher about awarding students or imposing punishments like “moving to another school by the end of the school year” and “a change in the form of education - from a day to an individual one for pupils who are at least 16 years old”
- chooses a uniform, school symbols and rituals - at the suggestion of the school board.

Decisions taken by the school board can be cancelled by the board itself with a majority vote (2/3 of the votes of the members present) or by the head of the regional inspectorate of education.

The role of the **school board** is very important for the development of the school. In the last years the tradition is reviving and through them parents and public figures participate in the management of schools with financial assistance, voluntary work or expert opinion. The roots of contemporary **school boards** can be found back in the Renaissance. At that time they were voluntary associations of local notables aiming to encourage and assist education and culture. The citizens of the town or village appointed a committee of wealthy and active people called a board. It raised money, managed the way it was spent, controlled the work of the teachers, or in other words was responsible for the organization and maintenance of the school. The members of this board had the following rights: to observe lessons, to employ teachers and assigned their salary, to check what students had learned by the end of the year. They sent the brightest pupils to a higher school in another town or country.

Nowadays **school boards**:

- discuss and make suggestions about the development of the school or about solving current problems at school, kindergartens or administrative staff
- help to provide additional financial and material resources for schools or kindergartens and control the way they are used
- assist with the provision and maintenance of the necessary equipment and facilities of the school, kindergarten or administrative staff
- take part when the school board chooses the course books which are going to be used and if possible purchase them
- assist with the organizing of school canteen, provision of transport and the solving of other social or everyday problems of children, pupils, teachers at school, kindergarten or administrative staff
- assist with the creation and implementation of education programmes dealing with the problems of children and pupils

- assist school and municipal authorities with the realization of compulsory school education
- assist with the realization of extracurricular and extra school activities, relaxation, tourism and sport with the children and pupils
- help to involve the parents in the organization of the free time of children and pupils
- suggest measures which will improve the activity of kindergartens, schools or administrative staff
- try to involve the public in assisting kindergartens, schools or administrative staff
- inform the authorities about violations in the system of public education
- organize and assist in training parents how to deal with problems connected with their children's education and development
- help the school to react against drug addiction and other negative influences on children and pupils
- assist financially children and pupils from low-income families
- cooperate with committees which fight against antisocial behaviour of adolescents

As you can see, **every issue which concerns the school concerns the school board as well**. In order to work well in has to include a big number of parents.

By law **school boards are independent voluntary formations** which assist the educational process and the financial well-being of schools.

Members of the school board are parents, teachers, cultural and public figures, businessmen who are not indifferent to education and want to assist with school development.

School boards are established as part of schools, kindergartens and administrative staff. In towns / villages with a small number of schools, kindergartens and administrative staff, town or village boards can be established.

How can we establish a school board?

School boards can be established as legal entities after a registration following the Law on People and Family. A constituent assembly of parents, teachers, public figures, summoned by a special committee selects with a majority vote the school board.

The head teacher or another representative of the school can become a member of the school board.

The constituent assembly defines the number of board members.

The school board is chosen for a period of two years.

The school board holds regular meetings at least four times a year. Extraordinary meetings are convened after a chairman's decision or at the request of at least one third of the board members.

The meetings are regular when more than half of the board members are present.

Decisions are taken with a majority vote by the members present.

The school board:

- has its own charter;
- chooses a chairman, leadership members and a cashier;
- takes decisions on issues related to their objectives;
- reports its activities once a year in front of the assembly;
- takes decisions about fundraising and spending of the board's financial resources.

School board members have the following rights and duties:

- take part in the work of the school board
- to freely express their opinion on issues within the competence of the board and the school activities
- To cooperate actively and make contributions in order to accomplish the aims of school board within their abilities.

The property of the school board consists of money, belongings, real estate, securities, and the income comes from voluntary fees given by the board members, rents, real estate, interests, donations from legal entities and people, etc.

Financial resources of the school board are spend for realization of its aims and tasks.

About education, minorities and discrimination

In 1960, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) adopted **The Convention against discrimination in education**, which acknowledges the right of minorities to carry out their own educational activities. This includes having their schools and teaching in their own language. This right depend on “the educational policy of each country” and the general right to education of minorities has to help different minority groups to “understand the culture and language of the society as a whole and to participate in its activities”

In regions where a considerable number of the population speaks the language of the minority, children have to be given the chance to be thought in their mother tongue or at least to learn their native language. None of these rights though restricts the power of the state to demand that they study the official language and to cover certain basic educational requirements. Countries also have to guarantee that state educational systems encourage the study of history, customs and culture of minorities.

It is important to know that in our democratic society exists a special Law for protection against Discrimination, an act which provides us with equality in the face of law, similar opportunities for taking part in the life of the society and effective protection against discrimination.

Discrimination is every unfavourable attitude towards a person because of his / her sex, race, nationality, ethnic background, citizenship, beliefs, political affiliations, age, marital status or financial status.

Discrimination is direct when people treat us - due to one of the factors mentioned – in a different way from other people (e.g. they do not serve me in a restaurant or they do not want to employ me because I am a Roma person)

Harassment due to the mentioned factors, inciting discrimination or racial segregation (e.g. dividing children from different ethnic groups in different schools) are also considered as discriminatory actions.

In Bulgaria exists a ban on discrimination and it concerns all people so that our rights and freedoms are protected.

This ban on discrimination goes for school relations as well. **Racial segregation** the issuing of a document, any action or lack of action which leads to forced separation of people on ground of their race, ethnic background or skin colour.

According to the law the Minister of Education and Science and the local self-governing authorities take measures so that not to allow racial segregation at educational institutions.

The head teacher of the school is obliged to take effective measures in order to prevent any form of discrimination coming from staff (teachers and other members) or pupils. If the head teacher receives a complaint from a pupil who claims to have been harassed by a staff member or a pupil, he / she has to investigate and take the necessary steps in order to stop the harassment as well as to take disciplinary actions.

Educational institutions take measures in order to provide disabled people with equal opportunities to exercise their right to education effectively, unless in cases when the expenses are too high and will put the institution in a difficult situation.

If **your child thinks that his/her rights have been violated** the head teacher is obliged to inform him / her what is done in order to stop this happening.

Teachers are also responsible for not allowing **actions of discrimination** among students and therefore should not by any means discriminate any of the pupils themselves.

You have the right to insist that the school of your child provides special programmes for fighting discrimination, teaching children in the spirit of mutual understanding, tolerance and respect of others rights and differences.

How do out children develop at school?

Primary school

Children become pupils at the age of seven. Starting school and the new way of life are the major events which influence their development.

This is one of **the most important periods of their lives**.

That is why we have to understand children and help them to adapt to the new world opening in front of them. They will feel and grow better if at home and at school the atmosphere and relationships are positive.

In this period children start to realize who they are, where exactly in the world they are, which group they belong to, who their parents are, what skills and abilities they possess and what their place in society is. At this age children begin to set and solve tasks, starts learning how to handle difficult situations, prepare themselves and work as well as to appreciate these new qualities they possess.

Children begin to **evaluate their behaviour and the way others behave**.

Therefore we need to realize that they watch us carefully, judge our actions and learn from us. For this reason it is important what we teach them to do, what example we set to them. We should also spend time with the children, doing things together, explaining and showing, telling them about the people and the world around us. We should not leave them encountering difficult problems and trying to find answers to different question or deal with problems alone.

During these first years **it is normal for children to have some difficulties at school**, especially for Roma children because very often they do not have learning habits and conditions and as parents we do not show enough interest in what happens with them at school.

This is the time when children develop learning habits and ways of dealing with problems at school. If we do not help them and do not express interest in them and the problems they encounter, they will not have support at school and will probably not be able to overcome their problems, will lose the desire to learn and start falling behind. Studying will stop being pleasant and turn into something hard and unpleasant.

That is why we have to meet teachers, talk about our children and try to find out which subjects they are better at, encourage them and help them (if they are good at sports, singing, doing sums or are really skilful). Children must believe in their abilities, which will help them make good progress, become more confident and be respected by other children.

Children are entering a new world which is not very clear even to us. They have their rights and duties, have to obey the requirements, to learn about discipline and order. If we want our children to be successful and receive good education, we have to help them a lot during these first years at school.

Children have to **develop the ability to work with other children**, help them and receive help, be part of the class and feel at ease with them. If they want to succeed in the future, they have to know how to work and behave with other people.

During these first years **we have to help our children to learn how to behave at school and outside school**. The world today is made of rules and if people do not follow them, they cannot be successful. For Roma children it is sometimes rather difficult to learn these rules because they come from a world with completely different rules and relationships.

We should remember another important thing – these first years at school are the time when **children pass from the world of games to the world of studying** and realize that games are really great and important while studying is not always pleasant. We should provide our children with opportunities for playing but also make sure they spend enough time studying. And in order to do this, we have to be familiar with the things they study at school and tasks they have to complete. Helping children to study effectively, to carry out tasks, to become disciplined will help them in the long-term because after some years, when they continue their studies in a different town or country, their habits will be formed.

Let us remember what we were like at their age – still children who quickly get to like something but also quickly get bored with it, not always consistent and trying hard. Children are not adults yet, they still find it difficult to put everything in order in this new world. Children remember what is interesting for them, their memory is not very strong, they think like children and are not always able to see the connection between two events, to identify the causes for something. We should not forget that children express their feelings openly, find it difficult to control themselves and suppress their anger, they also feel pain, cry and shortly afterwards are happy again because of something different.

All the same, children today, no matter how imperfectly, can think, use words correctly, make direct and indirect connections between objects and events. Pupils not only from 3rd - 4th grade but even from 1st grade can summarise, point out the most important ideas, draw conclusions.

At this age they begin to develop new qualities – concentration, the ability to organize things, plan their work, obedience and the ability to take responsibilities. Children begin to **make friends**, spend a lot of time with their classmates and peers and start to realize what friendship is.

Our little and not long ago helpless children **begin to think a lot**, and most importantly they do not think only about themselves and their needs, but also about

other people's thoughts, feelings or intentions. At the age of 6 children can distinguish their thoughts from other person's thoughts; around the age of 8 they can imagine that the other person can imagine their own thoughts and around the age of 10 they are able to imagine the thoughts of somebody else.

At this age children begin to **form an idea about their relationships with people and about relationships between people**. They find out more about friendship and its requirements (honesty, faithfulness), about laws and justice as well as certain duties that ensue from these relationships.

At school and outside it at this age children begin to learn the rules of social behaviour – initially they do this mechanically or by imitation and after some time they react more flexibly depending on the circumstances.

Children at this age still watch the world with the genuine interest of explorers, they start to estimate and order events, people, norms of behaviour. That is why it is necessary to help them with this activity, to be there and show support, to give them the opportunity to share, to explain what they find difficult to understand.

It is a good idea to do the following things which help children to develop:

- involve children in some family activities, their discussion, planning and sharing the results; to talk about division of work and responsibilities in the family, its history and the personal history of its members; to tell them about us, our jobs, the responsibilities we have in the family and our profession. We should encourage children to talk about things which have happened at school or about their friends, listen carefully and help them understand things. We also need to have conversations about everything our children find interesting and challenging;
- children have to invite friends at home when it is possible and to have constant contact with their peers – friends, classmates, our friends' or relatives' children;

- discuss the things happening at school – parents meetings, school events, successes and failures and also assist with the preparation for school;
- introduce children to the world of our community – tell them about the neighbours, our family tree, the history of the place where we live, discuss important events, get to know the place where we live by showing them the most important sights and landmarks and at the same time to warn them about the hidden dangers of the surroundings.

The most important aim of the upbringing of children is to give them the opportunity to control their behaviour by reminding and discussing the possible consequences of their actions. The best parents in this respect are those who discuss children's actions and encourage the positive ones and not those parents who make their children do different things without any explanation. Despite the fact that around 3rd grade children become more and more independent, the opinions expressed by their parents and teachers are really important for them.

We have to perform three activities regarding our children:

- **To be familiar with their skills and abilities,** their achievements and to believe in their future;
- **to build our relationships with them on warmth and love;**
- **and the most important – to communicate with them all the time;**

At these age children begin to attach more importance to their relationships with classmates, they are more interested in their friends' opinion and seek recognition in their eyes.

As parents we should encourage their contacts with peers because through this communication they retain qualities necessary for team work, such as cooperation, competition, understanding, sympathy. That is why the role of friendship and lasting relationships with their peers is so important for our children.

At this age children form their first lasting relationships, but of course during primary school period their concept about the nature of friendship changes considerably.

Children's idea of friendship has got four stages:

- till the age of seven children play mostly with other children from the neighbourhood, without caring very much whether they have the same interests;
- from 7 to 9 children begin to understand the idea of mutual interests, to understand the feelings of others, friendships transforms into something responsible;
- from 9 to 12 friends are considered as people who help each other and can evaluate their actions;
- during the fourth stage – 11-12 years old – friendships is regarded as a long and stable relationship: children can treat it from the position of a third side.

We should not forget that even a single friend often makes children less lonely and help them overcome the teasing and bullying of the others.

Groups that children at this age form normally consist of only boys or only girls.

At the beginning children usually have no idea about the effect their actions can have on other people. Very often they do things not because they have thought them over but simply because they copy other people. Children cannot make accurate judgements, they just define things as good or bad, they see the world in black and white colours. Often children first react and then think, they have no inhibitions which influence their behaviour.

At this age **children can already think about the consequences of their actions and to feel responsible for them.** That is why we should discuss together situations and events from their life and the choices they can make, give them the chance to foresee the consequences of their actions. We should also help them

understand the causes for one action or another. Thus we actually help them cope with problems in a better way, become more independent and responsible.

Secondary school period

The time from 11 to 14 years (5th to 8th grade) is a transition period from childhood to adolescence. Our children change significantly not only physically but also in the way they think and behave.

On one hand, **they are still children but they also want very much to resemble, be and feel like adults.** They find it easier to understand how the world works, how specific relationships are, they start to evaluate their actions and things other people do. Children want to be independent, but they still cannot control their actions very well.

Children **learn more about the necessary rules of behaviour at school** and outside it and quickly turn into members of society, into small adults.

We should remember that this process is a difficult one - children have neither developed habits nor firm values which can define their behaviour.

This is the period when children open towards the world. On one hand, they become more and more interested in themselves, in the things that happen “inside them”, in their own feelings and experiences. On the other hand, they begin to show interest in the opposite sex and friendly relationships become more important.

At this age conflicts between parents and children are quite common. Adolescents do not want to be treated as children but they are still not members of the “adult group”. Children at this age often complain: “Stop telling me what to do”, “I’ll do what I want”, “I’m not a child anymore”.

Children need to find their place in this new world so they seek our attention and try to attract it.

A lot of children still **behave according to the “obedience – punishment” formula**. They do what they are told because otherwise they will be punished. They try to satisfy their needs and do not care much about the needs of the others. Some children try to behave in the way the adults ask them to, e.g. they follow their advice and instructions. Children gradually start to take seriously their duties and perform them not only because they will be punished but because they see this is the way it has to be in a world where everyone has duties.

Children or adolescents **are particularly sensitive at this age**. We can hurt their feelings very easily, they often get offended by the way teachers, parents, relatives or friends treat them. Slowly they start to self-evaluate their behaviour and skills. They also begin to understand the true meaning of terms like diligence, persistence, hard work – abilities they need at school. They start to form their own ideas about other qualities as well. They can also realize the meaning of traits like independence, responsibility, ambition and start to show them.

That is why we **need to trust adolescents, be on friendly terms with them, talk about their lives**, about the things that happen at school or outside it.

We are the people who have to help them evaluate their behaviour and everything that happens around them. Often adolescents cannot understand the world around them and think that whatever they do, it is always a result of their actions. In cases of failure they tend to take the blame and when successful they usually overestimate themselves.

We should remember that this school stage (4th – 8th grade) is something new and complicated for our children - with many teachers, higher requirements – and very often we as parents do not possess the necessary knowledge to help them. In such situations children should feel our interest in the things they do, our attitude to the learning process as well as our support.

High school

In contemporary society the adolescence lasts almost a decade – it is the period between childhood and adulthood (maturity). In this respect we should say that the social status of Roma adolescents is changing – more and more of them continue their studies in high schools or vocational schools.

At this age young people become more active members of the society. However, there is a contradiction between the way they perceive themselves and the way they want other people to perceive them. Young people still do not accept society completely, they see it as something alien which imposes restrictions on them. They find it difficult to understand that they are also a part of it and should follow its rules.

Adolescents at this age are relatively isolated. On one hand, they are different and separated from younger pupils, their brothers or sisters, but they are still not part of the adult's world. As parents we should help them become familiar with our world – talk to them about public order, rules of behaviour and the need to follow them; to talk about their own future and place in this world, their expectations and the opportunities they have as future members of society.

We know from experience that at this age young people are mainly consumers and it is not easy to satisfy their growing needs. We should talk to them when they choose what to buy, which need is more important because they do not have money for everything. Adolescent are **more concerned about their appearance**, and society and the world around them with all the goods and aggressive commercials for them make them pay even more attention to the way they look. We should teach them how to accept the fact that their peers have different appearances and that this is something natural, but also to pay attention to people's characters, their qualities.

At this age **the logical thinking** of adolescents is developing more and more, they start looking for the causes of events and try to decide whether something could happen, they think about the consequences of their and other people's actions.

They think more seriously about the different reasons causing a problem and the possible ways of solving it. This way they take independent decisions, estimate their chances of success.

At this age adolescents start treating their parents and different institutions more critically.

Their growing needs cannot always be satisfied within the family. If studying at this age, they are often more literate than their Roma parents and they compare themselves with adolescents from other ethnic groups who are better off and live in better conditions. We should help them understand that they are growing up in difficult circumstances, that as parents we experience a lot of problems and also that they should be proud of their origin, culture and families.

The more they learn about their origin and background, the more they appreciate their society and culture. They will also communicate with the others in a better way and will find their place in society more successfully.

We should encourage young people to develop their own opinion about the things happening around them which will help them deal more easily with problems.

At this age adolescents' thinking goes beyond the boundaries of narrow interests and they begin to show interest in more serious problems which are important in the world of adults. Adolescents who have decided to continue their studies **display a growing interest in moral, social and political issues.** They try to understand the way society is organized, what are its moral norms, what is good and bad in relationships between people. They also try to analyse the occurring problems and to find themselves in these new situations, to connect past and future – what type of people they were and the type they would like to become. We can help them in this process by discussing together events and situations important for them.

Another interesting feature is the fact that **adolescents feel like they perform in front of an audience,** as though somebody constantly watches them. This shows

how important for them is the opinion of others, especially of their family and close friends.

We should also remember that at this age adolescents seem and to a certain extent are selfish, thinking mainly about their own feeling and unable to distinguish and detect other people's emotions. Very often they regard their feeling as unique, convinced that nobody else can feel in the same way. As parents we have to provide them with enough opportunities to express their feelings as well as to accept the emotions of other people. This will help them overcome the sense of uniqueness and realize how they are different and similar to the others.

What is important for young people at this specific age?

They have to become independent of their parents and other adults and to develop as personalities with their own beliefs, understanding and opinions which will distinguish them from the others.

Very often adolescents use conflicts and rebellion in order to achieve their independence and think that people from their family do not pay enough attention to them and do not care about their interests. As parents we should show interest in their problems and the conflicts they are involved in as well as in their interests in different situations.

Adolescents' independence can be seen in their ability to think and control their behaviour. This means that they have left the world of childhood, and have become people who can take responsibilities not only as family members but also as members of our society.

At this age their **peers' influence** is very strong. Adolescents spend most of their time with their peers who play a major role in the development of their habits and behaviour. Young people begin to look for true friends not just for a big number of friends. Meeting peers is a way of finding entertainment, a possibility to make friendships, even for intimacy and sexual contacts. Adolescents are usually

interested in peers with similar values and background, with common educational interests and aims.

The development of a value system is also important at this age. Young people learn what is allowed and what is forbidden in our society, taking into consideration possible punishments and sanctions. They show more interest in the feelings of others and try to put themselves in the place of other people in certain situations.

We should remember that this is an age full of dangers for the adolescents. They have got high self-esteem and want to try and do a lot of things but they still have very little practical experience and tend to take different types of risks.

Risk-taking is often considered as a way of showing attitude towards the problems of personal development (sedentary life, poor nutrition, smoking), background problems (use of drugs, participation in different forms of adolescent crime), school problems (playing truant, using drugs at school).

There are a lot of risk factors: genetic, social (connected with poverty, discrimination, breaking the law), personal (low self-esteem and life chances), behaviour-based (bad grades, use of alcohol and drugs).

In order to protect them from the risks mentioned, we should spend enough time with them, discuss their problems, encourage them to do well at school and to show interest in their achievements, create a positive family life, talk about their health and about the traditional way of life connected with the ethnic origin.

Some adolescents at this age display unacceptable behaviour which does not follow the rules. More precisely, boys demonstrate antisocial behaviour and with girls it takes the form of depression.

There could be different reasons – bad family background, low popularity among peers, bad grades at school (mostly about girls) or the fact that they do not like their physical appearance.

As parent we should not only show interest and concern but also help our children deal with problems, build successful behaviour strategies, recognize important things in their lives.

The rights of our children

What is the definition for a child? In most of the cases the answer is that a child is a baby or an adolescent who has not come of age yet. In many societies it is considered that children belong to the family. While they are still babies, the family feels that they should feed and take care of them, give them directions and be responsible for their upbringing. Later on, the child is expected to take certain duties, like going to school and helping the adults at home. In some societies adolescents are treated as adults and they are expected to work and even join the army. However, they do not provide for themselves until they come of age and become full members of society.

Childhood is the most sensitive part of the life of every human being. During this period people grow up, receive education and adjust to life itself. They also form their personalities. Children compose about 50% of the world's population and they are the most vulnerable part of it. In fact they are fully dependent on adults and very often are forced to grant their wishes and do things which will harm their development.

That is why in contemporary world countries have accepted a special universal law for children which contains and protects their rights.

These rights are recognized for children all over the world in an international law called **The Convention on the Rights of the Child**. It was adopted by The United Nations in 1989 and so far has been signed by almost two hundred states, i.e. nearly all the states in the world.

The convention declares the **every human being below the age of 18 could be considered a child**. This means that every person of the kind can exercise the rights listed in the convention.

Children become adults when they come of age. In different countries it happens at a different age (in Bulgaria it is at the age of 18). Until they reach the age, children receive certain rights, which are also different depending on the state. For example the age when people can get married in Austria is 16 for women and 19 for men, in Malta it is 16 for both sexes; in Romania it is 18 for men and 16 for women, in Bulgaria it is 18 for both sexes.

We should know that **most of the children's rights guaranteed by the convention are inviolable**.

All children's rights are **equally important**. The right for relaxation and playing games is as important as the right to life, survival and development because rest, leisure and cultural activities as also important for children's survival and growing up.

All children's rights are interconnected. The freedom of expression (children can freely express their thoughts and talk about the things that interest and excite them) cannot be complete if the right to education has been violated. The right to health and health service is closely connected with the right to social security, including national insurance. Therefore children's rights written in this law should be considered as a whole group of rights which only together provide the opportunity for full development of the child.

This law contains not only the main rights (the right to have a family, right to education, to protection, to health care), but also some concrete rights under specific conditions (children separated from their parents, neglected or abused children; adopted children; refugees children; handicapped children; exploited children; children in armed conflicts; children who have broken the law, etc.)

In this law children **are recognized as full members of human family**. They need a natural background for growing up and the family is considered the main group which has to receive the necessary protection and help.

The convention does not mention the duties of children, which does not mean that such duties do not exist but the compilers of the convention think that duties are usually known and children have to perform them - something which cannot be said about their rights which are often violated. Unlike adults, children have little chance of protecting their rights and therefore they need special protection from the law.

Every child has the **right to life, which means not only to live but also to develop as a member of society**. Life does not mean only physical existence. Children have the right to develop as members of society and according to The Convention, every state is obliged to provide to a maximum degree their survival and development.

Every child has the **right to be given a name** and therefore should be registered straight after the birth. There are several registration systems: medical, which is done right after the birth by hospital staff - they write down the full name; religious, by christening and registration of the name in the church lists; civil registration of the name by authorized local authorities at the municipality.

Every child **has the right to know their parents**. This problem arises mainly in cases when a child has been abandoned by its parents, when it is born outside marriage or when the parents get divorced. The state is obliged to protect children's identity, their nationality, name and family relationships.

Every child **has the right to keep in touch with both parents** in case it has been separated from one of them.

Every child **has the right to freedom of expression and access to suitable information**.

Every child **has the right to freedom of opinion, conscience and religion.** According to the convention we as parents and guardians are obliged to help and guide children to exercise this right in a way matching their development and abilities.

Like adults, children also **have the right to freedom of association, assembly and freedom from interference in privacy.**

When the child is able to form its own views, its **right to express them should be guaranteed.** Children have the right to express freely their views on all issues concerning them and we should treat them with respect matching their age and maturity. In reality this right is often violated because of subjectivity. Children often restrain from expressing their view because they might be misunderstood or even punished.

We have already discussed why education is so important in the life of every person and especially child only trough it children can develop their personality, talents and spiritual and physical skills. According to the Convention every child has **the right to education.** It should prepare children for a responsible life in a free society it has to be done in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, friendship of all people and respect to natural environment.

The convention states that **primary education should be compulsory and free for everybody.** Educational process should be held in a way respecting children's dignity, excluding physical punishment. This matter is exceptionally important – over the world there are thousands millions of children who do not attend school and in Bulgaria only almost 100 000 children below the age of 16 do not go to school and they are mainly from Roma origin. This means that these children will never become full members of society, find well-paid jobs, start a family without having financial restrictions and bring up and educate their children.

The Convention decrees that the media should spread suitable information which is beneficial to children and also that children's books should be published and

distributed. On the other hand, by law **children should be protected from information which is harmful for their development – involving violence or sex.**

In order to grow up unrestricted children have the **right to rest and leisure, play games and take part in cultural and artistic activities.** According to this law we have the right to demand from local authorities to provide conditions for developing children's skills at youth clubs and centres for work with children by participating in different workshops, becoming members of groups and musical bands or choirs.

It is important to know that children **have the right to expression, e.g. to express freely their views on issues concerning them.** To explain what exactly this means we should take into consideration their age. In fact this means that children should be given the chance to speak in cases of legal and administrative procedures which concern them. This right, of course, should be given them at school but also in the family, when questions concerning the children are solved.

In the convention are listed many concrete **social and economic rights.** We should bear in mind that in order to provide these rights in practice, the state has to be quite rich. The economic situation in many countries restricts the provision of these rights. For this reason, in the Convention is written that **states will take measure to provide these children's rights to the maximum possible extent depending on their resources.**

Social and economic rights of children depend on the well-being of their families and for this reason The Convention states that **parents are mainly responsible for the upbringing and development of children.**

It is important to know that The Convention specifies that states are obliged to provide the necessary assistance for performing their duty to bring up their children and to guarantee the development of institutions and children care departments.

Children have the right to the highest standard of medical service available. **Not a single child can be denied access to effective medical care.** Pursuant to this legal act, states have to take measures to reduce the mortality rate in babies and children, fight against diseases and malnourishment and to make sure that mothers receive professional care before and after giving birth.

Every child has **the right to a standard of living** responding to their needs. Children have **the right to be protected from economic exploitation** – they should not work anything dangerous or interfering education or something which could harm their health or development.

These rights apply to all children, regardless their age, sex, ethnic or religious background, the fact that they have been born outside marriage, healthy or handicapped.

Pursuant to The Convention children have to be protected by law from any forms of discrimination or punishments on grounds of status, activities, shared views and beliefs imposed by parents, guardians or other family members.

Every child **has the right to be protected by law from all forms of physical and mental violence, maltreatment, lack of care, dismissive attitude, exploitation and sexual abuse.** This protection should apply for children's relationships with parents, guardians or other people who take care of them as well school teachers.

Children with **physical or mental disabilities need special protection** in order to be given the chance for normal, fulfilling life in the circumstances and also to participate in the life of the community.

States should provide special protection for these children as well as for the people who take care of them. Help should be focused on complete social incorporation and individual development of such children.

Children from ethnic, religious or language minorities have the right to use their own language and culture. This right can be exercised in the community with other members from the same group of population.

As for kidnapping, sale and trade with children for whatever reason, in whatever form, states are obliged to prevent crimes of this kind through taking all possible measures at a national or international level.

Juvenile crime is a very serious problem. Very often adults corrupt children and involve them in criminal activities. Sometimes bad conditions of life of families encourage juvenile criminal behaviour. **That is why juvenile criminals should be treated as victims in the first place.** On the other hand, states really have to fight against crimes committed by children. According to The Convention, **imprisonment of children should be the ultimate sanction.** Not a single child can be sent to prison arbitrarily or illegally. The arrest and the period spent in prison should be the shortest possible. During this period every child has the right to keep in touch with their families, except when the circumstances are extraordinary. Afterwards, the incorporation of the child to society should be of prime importance.

States which have signed the Convention take every necessary measure to assist in the physical and mental recovery and social reintegration of a child who has suffered from lack of care, exploitation or maltreatment, torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or humiliating treatment, punishment or in cases of armed conflicts. This regeneration should happen under favourable conditions which help the improvement of the child's health, self-respect and dignity.

In order to follow the law we should know who is responsible. The states which have signed the Convention are obliged to take all necessary legal, administrative and other measures for exercising the rights written in it. This means that heads of state, governments, national parliaments, local authorities, different ministries and administrations (Ministry of Health, of Social Affairs, of External and Internal Affairs, of Education, of Culture and other structures) take responsibility.

Of course, our responsibility as parents and guardians remains the most important because we communicate with children on a daily basis, guide them and watch their development.

Children themselves should feel responsible for respecting their rights. At school such forms of active children participation in protection of rights are student committees, parliaments and others.

Family

A family is “a basic social group united through bonds of kinship, marriage or adoption and living together in a household. Its functions are the birth and upbringing of children as well as to provide its members with opportunities for development”.

Some of the main principles of settling family relations, according to Family Code, **are respecting personalities within the family and mutual support among its members.**

In the family **children are born and brought up**, it also **provides** opportunities and conditions for full life, based on respect, devotion, friendship and mutual responsibility, care and assistance.

According to Family Code, family relations are settled in accordance with the following principles: protection of marriage and family; equality of the man and the woman; marriage based on free will and stability as a basis of the family; protection of children; equality of all children – legitimate, illegitimate and adopted; respect of personality; care and mutual support among family members.

Main functions of the family unit: giving birth and upbringing of children; providing its members with opportunities for development as well with conditions for performing their professional and social duties; creating relations based on respect, devotion, friendship and mutual responsibility for its development; looking

after and moral and financial assistance of elderly, sick and incapacitated members of family.

According to the law:

Parents are obliged to take care of their children and to prepare them for becoming members of society.

Step mothers or fathers have to provide assistance to the parents with the performance of these duties.

Children are obliged to respect and help their parents as well as their stepparents.

Grandchildren are obliged to respect and help their grandparents.

Grandmothers and grandfathers have the right to personal relations with their grandchildren who have not become of age.

Placing children in families of their relatives or close friends as well as finding them foster families or specialised institutions is performed by the court. Until the court delivers a judgement, municipal social service agencies perform this temporary placement through administrative channels.

Foster families are a married couple or a single person who temporarily takes care of a child.

On order to be adopted, the person has to apply for this before they have reached the age of eighteen. To perform the adoption we need the consent of: the adoptive person; the parents of the person who will be adopted; the spouse of the adoptive person and the person who will be adopted (if there is such a person), and the consent of the person who will be adopted if he/she is above the age of fourteen.

When children are left in Institutional Care and their parents have given their consent or are unknown, the manager of the establishment gives consent for adoption.

The person to be adopted, if at the age from 10 to 14, is given the chance to talk in court, unless enough facts are available that he / she knows the adoptive person as

their parent. The consent of the person who is going to be adopted should be given personally in court.

Our children's safety at home

We live in a world where the lack of physical safety influences the life of many children – sexual and / or physical abuse; hunger, lack of home, physical neglect.

There is a difference between the safety measure you take in order to protect children and their feeling of safety.

Children who feel physically safe are not afraid that they can get hurt. By protecting and showing them how concerned you are in the moments when they are afraid, we teach them to trust us. They start feeling more secure because they know that can rely on us. When children are frightened they do not believe others and tend to close up.

Children should consider their home a safe place, which means they should feel safe with their parents and the other people who live there.

Try to put yourself in the child's position and ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my child think we live in a safe neighbourhood? Why / why not?
- Are there neighbours who the child feel comfortable with and can ask for help if we are not at home?
- How safe is our home?
- Are there places in the house which scare the children?
- How much time do they spend alone at home?
- Do they know what to do, who to call to and where to go in cases of emergency if they are alone at home?
- Do they feel that family members (as well as other people who live in the house or take care for the children outside home) are non-threatening, encouraging and positive people?
- Do they feel comfortable to stay at home alone with their siblings?

- Are they afraid to be alone?
- What are our children's fears?

The more you know about your children's fears the better you will help them to see their home as a safe, warm and relaxing place.

Types of parental behaviour

To be good parents means to look for balance between the control we exercise and the warmth we give our children.

Parental control means to use bans, to restrict the independence of children and to control whether they follow the rules we have imposed.

Parental warmth is expressed through the level of love and approval we show.

Control and warmth are important for the child's development. Forming of habits, learning norms of behaviour and mastering skills also depend on them.

There are several distinguishable **types of parental behaviour**.

Authority type of parental behaviour characterises with the fact that parents insist on controlling their children's behaviour and the same time have a warm relationship with them. They accept the growing independence of their children, communicate with them and discuss rules of behaviour together. They change the requirements to their children in reasonable limits. When under this type of control children find it easy to adapt to changing conditions at school and society, feel confident, have developed self-control and social skills, do well at school and have high self-assessment.

Authoritarian type – parents behave according strict rules and impose them on their children without giving them the chance to take part in the decision – taking in the family. Parents control their children as strictly as possible their children's behaviour and the relations between them are far from warm and loving. Parents give directions and orders and expect obedience. They do not communicate with the children, have exact requirements and do not discuss them. They only allow

insignificant level of independence. Children in such families are introvert, shy, moody, unpretentious, irritable and do not have high expectations; girls are usually passive and dependent during the adolescence; boys can become uncontrollable and aggressive.

Liberal type of behaviour characterises with low control from the parents and warm family relations. Children's behaviour is slightly regulated. Parents express their love, communicate with children, do not impose restrictions - children are given too much freedom and insignificant parental guidance. Children in such families may encounter problems in cases when they have to control their impulses or to postpone pleasure for the moment they finish doing something; they tend to disobey and be aggressive, can react inadequately and impulsively, do not set themselves high goals. In some cases though, children of such parents can become active, decisive and creative personalities.

Indifferent type also characterises with a low level of control but parents do not care to perform their parental functions and do not express attitude towards their own children. The relationship is far from warm, in fact parents neither control their children nor restrict their behaviour. Such parents are busy with their own problems and children grow up without parental care and warmth and often become aggressive, break rules of behaviour and laws.

The best way to bring up children is the combination of control, high requirements and being emotional towards our children.

Sometimes in families exists balance between the behaviour of the father and the mother – fathers are stricter, more controlling and mothers are more caring and more often give their consent.

The main aim of our behaviour is to develop children's independence, their ability to take decisions and control their behaviour in different situations. By constantly imposing our views to the children we make them behave differently at home and when they are not under our control. Parents manage to develop their children's

self-control by gradually involving them when family decisions are discussed and taken or by encouraging cooperation, self-control and sharing responsibility. Children from such families are more responsible and independent when they become adolescents because their parents have discussed different problems with them, given them advice on various issues, prepared them for becoming independent and able to take their own decisions.

Children coming from families with control and warmth, family discussions and communication are characterised with good adaptation to school environment and peers, they are active, independent, initiative, friendly and empathic.

Here are some suggestions about the responsibilities we could give our children regarding their duties in the family:

6–8 year-olds – water the plants, prepare the vegetable for cooking with a suitable knife; prepare food (e.g. sandwiches), put away their clothes; tidy up the garden, do the shopping together with an adult and carry the things bought, walk the dog;

9-10 year-olds – change the bed linen, use the washing machine; do the shopping on their own with a shopping list; iron some things; cook something alone at the weekend; welcome guests; to plan a birthday party and other children holidays; sew a button;

10-11 year-olds – look after their little brothers or sisters; complete tasks involving using the public transport for familiar routes; to pack their luggage; to lay and clean the table; to do the washing up; to be responsible for their hobbies and leisure time activities...

At about the age of 10-12 children are able to do practically everything and we need to show them their personal responsibilities. When they are willing to take certain responsibilities, this could have positive results: their growing up is admitted as well as the fact that they can be useful, they can be praised. If the task has not been fully completed we do not have to tell them off and make them do it because children are aware they have to finish it. We can expect older children to

be more consistent, but what we should point out above all are the efforts and the contribution made and then the quality. It is difficult to choose such tasks which are neither too hard nor too easy but complex enough so that the child feels motivated and has alternative courses of action.

We should respect and appreciate our children

Everybody wants to be respected and appreciated by the others and our children are no exception. If we do not respect and appreciate them they will grow up with the feeling that something is wrong with them. We should not forget that we are the most important people for them and that is why our opinion defines their development.

What children want and need is attention, acceptance and active behaviour from their parents.

Here are some answers given by children to the question "What do you want from your parents?"

- I want my parents to think that I am special;
- I want my parents to be warm and friendly with me – the way they are when somebody phones rings at the door;
- I want my parents to be more concerned about me;
- I want my parents to know "that part of myself which nobody else knows";
- I want to talk to my parents about what is important for me and to know that they appreciate my opinion;
- I want to go to school with children who have similar interests (Children think that their parents can control this fact because they choose the neighbourhood to live in)
- I want to be a part of a happy family;
- I want my parents to be more cheerful;
- I want my parents to know more about the emotion I feel;

▣ I want to live in a peaceful world.

Our children develop properly when they feel:

- *that they are physically safe.* Children who feel this are not afraid of getting hurt or that somebody might harm them. They are confident, extrovert and trust other people. They express their curiosity freely which helps them to learn.
- *emotional security* – children are not afraid or embarrassed. They feel emotionally secure when they know that nobody will snap at them, make them feel bad, tease or insult them. When feeling emotionally secure children learn to be caring and sympathetic.
- *that they know themselves* and develop their individuality. They believe in their own value as human beings. They are convinced that they deserve praise but also find it normal to praise and compliment other people. When sure in themselves, children are open and caring. They take responsibility for their actions and admit them openly.
- *that they belong to and are connected with their families and friends.* When this is the case children feel liked, appreciated and respected. They learn to look for and make lasting friendships, to share and cooperate with others. Thus they understand how important relationships with other people are and to what extent they are dependant on these relationships.
- *gifted* – when small children think they are good at certain things, they want to learn how to do other things. Feeling gifted helps them to be consistent and not give up when things become hard. They try, succeed, and feel motivated to try out new things. They start to set themselves realistic and achievable goals, to take the initiative.
- *they have a goal in live*, when life is meaningful. As they have a direction in life (to study, to be part of a family, to know the world around them),

children not only set goals but also pursue them. When they face difficulties they try to find different solutions. Such children are cheerful, smiling and open to their families, friends and other people.

Words we should know and understand

Violence (abuse, maltreatment) – every adult action or inaction, which leads to violation of children’s rights, connected with their physical, emotional and cognitive (including education) development.

Types:

- **Neglect** – not taking into account physical, emotional or cognitive needs of children;
- **Physical violence** – often connected with the child’s discipline and negative reactions in response to child’s behaviour.
- **Sexual abuse** – every act from an adult directed at gratification of their sexual needs and excitement and neglecting the child’s needs.
- According to **the Law of Child protection**, protection itself is based on the **following principles**: Respect of children’s personality; bringing children up in family background; taking care of children’s interests in the best possible way, special protection of children in danger or with exceptional talents.

Protection of children is provided by means of:

1. assistance, relief and favours in family background;
2. placement in a family of relatives or close friends;
3. placement in a foster family;
4. placement in a specialised institution;
5. police protection.

According to the Law, an **obligation to cooperate** exists, according to which, a person who knows that a child needs help is obliged to inform the Social Support Agency. The same obligation applies for people who have received such information because of the profession or activity they practise, even if it is connected with official secret.

Protection against violence means that every child has the right to:

- protection against involvement in activities, unfavourable for their moral or educational development;
- protection against methods of physical, mental or any other form of violence which violate their dignity or forms of influence which are against their interests;
- protection against their use for begging, prostitution, distribution of pornographic materials and receiving illegal earnings as well as against sexual abuse;
- protection against involvement in political, religious and trade-union activities.

Sexual abuse of adolescents is defined as “involving of dependent due to their immaturity children and adolescents in sexual activities which they are not able to understand completely and therefore are unable to give their consent for the performance, or which are at variance with social bans regarding family relations.”

When the perpetrator is unknown, we have a case of **rape or sexual abuse**. When it is a close or distant relative – biological or step father, uncle or grandfather; biological or step brother, and very rarely – a mother, we have a case of **incest or sexual abuse in the family**.

Surveys show that a considerable number of these crimes are committed by people who are close to the children – family members, relatives, acquaintances, educators and only about a third – by perfect strangers...

The fact that children are emotionally and financially dependent on the adults close to them is the main reason crimes of this kind often remain unpunished...

There are also cases of concealing sexual abuse when the perpetrator is a perfect stranger. This could be easily achieved by threats or by convincing the victim that nobody will protect him/her even if they report the crime. This is quite realistic because often, in order to avoid the shame of the awful thing which has happened, the family members tend to conceal the crime or to take the law into their own hands.

Helplessness of the victim

When the victims of such crimes are children, they most often are physiologically and mentally immature, inexperienced and not independent, therefore helpless to oppose and to deal with criminal intentions of adults,

Which children are in danger?

- Ignorant, timid children can easily become victims of sexual abuse.
- Children who are often left alone, have no friends and are happy when somebody pays attention to them.
- Sexually ignorant children or those who have wrong ideas about the sexual life of adults.
- Children who do not receive enough pocket money or have very strict parents could be tempted very easily with a promise for money or other treat.
- Children who are taught to be nice, polite, obedient and always to do what they are told also can become victims of sexual abuse.

What are the possible consequences of sexual abuse?

If this is a baby or a small child, sexual abuse often leads to terrible states, late emotional development, regressive behaviour (going back to past behaviour forms like baby talk, bed wetting, fingers sucking, etc.)

Girls at school age react to sexual abuse with timidity, insomnia, depression, loss of appetite or eating too much, self-destructing behaviour, feelings of guilt and shame, low self-esteem, , mistrust of their own feelings, aggression, suicide attempts...

Later on, many women who have been victims of sexual abuse in their childhood show more serious symptoms than in their childhood or adolescence. They tend to be very hesitant and indecisive, find it difficult to take decisions connected with their own families and partners...

Records show that 70% of all adolescent prostitutes and 80% of drug addicted girls have been victims of sexual abuse in their childhood, committed by a family member.

According to statistics 10-20% sexual abuse victims are boys. Their reactions to similar behaviour are rather different. They can range from pleasure, pride and insecurity to shame, frustration, timidity and rage. These mixed feelings are most common for the period of sexual development when the specific physiological changes of boys increase their interest in the sexual life of adults and their desire to express their masculinity.

How do we communicate with our children?

Communication is a process of interaction between people and without it the normal functioning of a family is unthinkable. We spend 7 out every 10 minutes communicating with people and most often it is connected with something we have to do. We talk not only about our experiences, but also about the way we feel, think, and as a result we change our behaviour.

Thus through communication we change our behaviour and ourselves – learn new things, start thinking in a different way, and this goes to a greater extent for children.

They learn from us the main ways of communication and by talking to us build up their characters, develop their thinking, feelings, change their behaviour, acquire new and important values.

This means that their complete development depends on our ability to communicate effectively with them and between us (as children copy all the ways for communication we use in the family).

What is the definition of “good communication”? People who communicate well can express themselves clearly and **use the right words to express their feelings**. For example: “I do not like the fact that you have not tidied up your room!” They do not hide important information from others and admit that it is necessary for them to know enough in order to feel involved.

People who communicate effectively find it easy to clear up misunderstandings, but above all they are very good at **listening**.

The process of communication always has two sides which exchange information. Therefore if we want effective communication, we have to make sure the information goes to both of the sides and we will know how the other side takes the things we have said.

You should demand feedback from your children to make sure they have understood you. In cases of communication where only we talk, give orders, threaten and do not care about the thoughts and feeling of the other side and the way it takes in our words is **one-way communication**.

The opposite case where we not only talk but also listen carefully and share with the other side how we understand its words, how we feel and what we are going to do is the better type called **two-way communication**.

This way we know how our children feel, what they think and intend to do, while they understand what we think about their wishes, actions and how we assess them. Two-way communication is a basis for good relations in the family. Likewise,

teachers who only talk and do not care about children's opinion and feelings are considered poor teachers.

Another thing we should know about communication is that it can be divided into verbal and non-verbal. The way we sit, keep our hands, our gestures, mimic, movements, posture and intonation compose our body language. If through words we get across the meaning of what we want to say to the other person, then through distance, movements, gestures we express our attitude towards the person or to the information we send or receive.

Non-verbal communication comprises a considerable part of the communication process. Words make up only 7%; intonation other sounds – 38% and non-verbal aspect – 55%.

Communication provides opportunities for different things and relations between people.

- **Ritual and exchange**, like initial greetings. For example: “How are you?”, “Fine, thanks. And you?”, “Fine.” Similar phrases are used quite often, no matter how the people involved in the conversation are feeling. Exchange of phrases like that provides certain information and involves minimal personal risk. This type of communication allows us to maintain basic level of contact with others.
- **Giving information** – refers to giving factual information which does not involve revealing personal facts. The communication is useful, often necessary, but involves a certain amount of risk for the person who gives the information.
- **Sharing ideas** – means to present your ideas to other people.
- **Making judgements** – includes taking decisions regarding discussed questions. This involves higher risk. This type of communication is usually expressed with statements like “I think we do not spend enough time with our child.”

- **Revealing values** – means revealing certain values to other people: things which are important for us and influence our thinking.
- **Expressing feelings** – means showing certain emotions a person feels in certain moments. This aspect of communication is very risky, because people express their feelings and takes the risk of being rejected by the others. The advantage is that you can encourage other people to do the same. On the other hand this aspect is extremely useful when communicating with children, because feelings are the shortest way to get to the child's soul.
- **Communication** is ability which depends on three factors:
 - person's self-esteem
 - the ability to listen
 - the ability to deliver information clearly

People with **low self-esteem** may have problems when having a conversation with other people, admitting mistakes or accepting criticism.

People with **high self-esteem** usually have good communication skills as they can spend more time to their interlocutor.

If you have high opinion of yourself as a person, you respect your abilities and skills and feel confident about the things you do.

High self-esteem usually gives you an inner feeling of security which results in confident behaviour.

The ability to deliver information clearly is extremely important for communication. When people deliver vague and incomplete information, those who listen will lose time and energy till they find out the exact meaning. Very often inaccurate information leads to mistakes and misunderstandings which can cost you a lot. People who can communicate effectively learn how to deliver information clearly, simply and completely. You can make sure people understand you by encouraging listeners to ask questions about the information delivered.

Listening is an ability which requires time to learn and practise it. Giving information has no value at all if nobody listens to it and understands it. In many cases the person who talks has to take the whole responsibility about the process of communication. Listeners though, can help him / her to deliver the information more clearly by being attentive and expressing interest. When the listeners understand or do not understand the information, they can show this by nodding or another sign which shows they need explanation.

Although we rarely pay much attention to **body language**, it remains one of the major ways of communicating. Facial expression, for example, can show whether the person is serious or not.

Moreover, body language can show whether certain directions have been understood.

Communication which leads to a result is called **effective communication**.

Not only talking but also listening can be effective.

Effective (active) listening is a reaction to the person who talks and tries to find out what he/she says, feels or does. It is expressed through:

- **Empathy** – Putting yourself in the place of the other person and understanding what he/she says and how he/she feels.
- **Non-verbal behaviour** – Showing understanding through: voice intonation, facial expression, gestures, eye contact, posture;
- **Non-assessing behaviour** – without stopping the person talking, without giving advice or sharing your own feelings in similar situations.

Active listening is difficult because it requires attention and objectivity in situations full with opinions and evaluation. That is why it is necessary to master **techniques for active listening**:

Support – We use it to show interest, to encourage children to continue talking. We should use neutral words and avoid expressing agreement or disagreement with

the things they share. We can give support without words and the final remark could be for example “Can you tell me something more about it?”

Clarification – it helps us to check our understanding and interpretation after receiving the necessary information from the child. We ask questions like “How did you react when this happened?”

Paraphrasing - Means to repeat the words and thoughts of the child with your own words: “What you have told me is...”

Reflecting – It shows that we understand the feelings of children. By expressing them with words we help children clarify these emotions. For example: “You look upset.”

Summary – To present the main thoughts and feeling of the child the way we have understood them. This way we give children the chance to tell us whether we have really got the point as well as to add something they have forgotten. For example: “I think what you actually said is...”

Validation – We validate the value of the information the child has shared with us. For example “It must be really difficult to do this.”

Apart from effective listening, **effective talking** is also very important for mutual understanding. When communicating with children we often use the so called “**You-message**” when we tell the other person “You are ...” This message usually contains evaluation, sometimes accusations. “You-messages” often criticize, humiliate the child, do not give information and provoke only their defensive reaction and cause conflicts. This is so because they are not directed at children’s behaviour in a specific situation, but at a general evaluation of their personality. “I-message” is a main technique of effective talking. It gives children information about us and our thoughts, feelings and dispositions. Unlike “You-message” it does not criticise children but take responsibility and share our feelings and thoughts, the things we want the child to do in a certain situation. “I-message” increases the

possibilities for cooperation and understanding. It is a magical formula for effective communication. People speak in the first person:

I feel... (expresses emotion)

When you ... (concrete child's behaviour)

Because ... (the influence of this behaviour on me)

I would like... (expresses a need, concrete behaviour in a specific occasion)

When we communicate effectively with children, we can control their behaviour and to watch for changes in it because we turn into a source of trust for them. This is so because this type of communication not only requires from children, they are no longer just an object of control and instructions. Children feel like equal partners in the communication process, their opinion is important and taken into consideration and their feelings are understood by the parents. On the other hand we give our children clear and concrete requirements. They understand that we are their friends and we have the same feelings and problems and we are concerned about them.

In order to make communication effective:

Speak clearly. Imagine you are an artist who tries to prevent the pictures from smearing. It is enough to remember that if you want people to understand you well, you should not speak very fast.

Be specific when giving instructions. Say what exactly you need and then help children start completing the task.

Be consistent when giving directions. Plan your communication carefully. The tasks given can be changed only for important reasons, which have to be mentioned. In many cases, change of plans can destroy relations. It is similar to inconsistent requirements and for this reason it should be clarified.

Listen carefully to the feedback other people give you. Provoke a discussion which will help you understand the feelings of your children. You will win their

respect if you ask them often how things are going. This could prevent the occurrence of serious problems.

Communicate regularly. Make sure you are accessible for you children. They should be convinced that somebody takes care of their problems. If they trust you they will share problems with you. You should also make them believe that they will manage to solve the problem. A good word, tap on the shoulder, positive attitude – these things will show that you are satisfied with them.

Trust and openness are vital elements of family relations. People are used to certain stereotypes when they communicate, formed and consolidated mainly during childhood. Some of them could be positive but in most of the cases people are bearers of different types of behaviour, inherited from their families and schools and not effective enough for communication. In real life people are usually afraid to reveal themselves (especially in front of their children) as not to be hurt.

Let us say something about the **difficulties in communication, the so called twelve barriers in communication or the things we should avoid in order to improve the relationship with our children.**

First handicaps refer to the way we react to a problem.

Orders and phrases like “Stop complaining!”; “You must do this.” usually do not have a positive result because we force children to do something without caring about their opinion or wishes.

Warnings and threats: “If you do not finish your chores...” also have a negative impact on communication. We do not have a normal conversation, but impose our opinion and announce the negative consequences which will take place unless things are done the way we want them to be done. We do not take into consideration children’s needs and even if they do what we want, they will feel unhappy and neglected.

Another thing we should not do is **tell children off all the time:** ”You must do this and that.”, “It is your duty to ...” This type of communication does not give

anything to the children (it goes in one ear and out the other), it does not convince them that something really should be done or that they have to behave in a certain manner. Instead, we should talk to them, discuss their behaviour and say why it is suitable in certain situations.

Constantly giving advice or ready decisions is another bad idea. “It is better to finish this, then you will have time for everything”. It is better to look for decisions together. Children will not only feel that we trust them, but will also feel confident because they have decided with our help and it is their decision in fact.

Lecturing and logical argumentation are also bad assistants in communication. “Let’s face the truth, you have only one day to prepare yourself.” It is probably true, but saying it like that, we impose our views and do not give children any choice. It would be better to discuss together what they can do for this day in order to prepare for the coming challenge.

A big part of the barriers in communication are connected with expressing evaluation all the time.

When we **criticise, blame or disapprove of** (e.g. “You are just lazy) or **give labels** (“you behave like a child”) or **constantly try to explain and tell children what is good or wrong** (You just want to get away with it”) we should bear in mind that we not only impose our opinion but we make children assess themselves in a negative way (lazy, irresponsible, unable to do something). What is bad about these constant marks is that they really **begin to come true**. Unconfident children who always listen about their laziness start to treat tasks this way because the most important people for them – their parents- say it is so.

Good communication is based on **emphasising the positive sides**. We should motivate children to do more, develop and to support the efforts they make.

We should not **reject existing problems** or leave children to deal with them alone. **Praises of the type** “You’ll manage, I know you can do it.” **are not very appropriate**. This way we not only leave children to manage with problems on

their own (and sometimes the problems could be too difficult for a child) but also signal that this over trust means little interest and care about their efforts. The same result is present when we draw back or change the subject and the children wants to talk about a certain problem. Thus they remain unaided and not understood and have the feeling that the most important people in their life are not interested enough in them and their problems.

Not much more useful in similar situations is the **constant expression of sympathy, consolation or pity**. “You are not the only one, I had the same problems.” Children have to deal with difficult situations and become more confident in the process. We should not shake their confidence by telling them that we also were not good at maths because this way we demotivate them and actually tell them not to deal with difficulties.

Another very common barrier in communication is the **constant asking of questions and eavesdropping**. “Do you really think it is so difficult? How much time did you spare?” When we do this often, we express our desire for constant, strict control as well show that we do not believe that they can manage without help and that we have to know what exactly they have done in order to tell them how to do it successfully. This way we lessen the possibilities for independence, talk about unimportant details and not about the things they have achieved.

Communication is a process which requires partnership, equality, mutual trust, showing interest, listening to each other and getting on well. Better communication with the children means better development of these relations.

If we do not manage to communicate this way with children, conflicts arise as a result.

Conflicts are one of the biggest problems in relationships between people. They have two sides – can worsen relations but can also build them. It is important to resolve conflicts in the family in time and to protect it from conflicts because they can really destroy it.

What are the important things we should know?

The word conflict comes from Latin – *conflictus* - to strike together - e.g. to try and solve the problem together. In China they have two Chinese characters for Conflict – danger and possibility. There is danger of damaging relations but there is also a chance to handle the situation and improve our relations.

Conflict is a situation of rivalry where each of the sides wants to resume a position incompatible with the one of the other side. People get involved in conflicts because of **different interests, needs or values**.

Let us see what our attitude towards conflict situations is – we enter them with our feelings, perceptions, behave in a certain way and as a result the conflict is solved or becomes more serious. Our dispositions and assumptions about the other side in the conflict tend to be correct. If we do not believe that our children will manage with a certain situation, in a new conflict situation we will be more distrustful and peevish and this will lead to more conflicts with them.

The opposite is also true – if we mean well and try to understand children, even in a conflict situation the chances for dialogue will remain as well the chance to find a solution together. This will strengthen the belief that this is the right way to solve conflict situations.

Certain dispositions and type of behaviour provoke conflicts in some situations while the other type gives the chance to avoid or resolve conflict situations.

We should remember that conflicts usually get worse when:

- we show open hostility or feel threatened in a conflict situation;
- we do not have enough information or misinterpret the intentions of the other side;
- we try to impose our will, values and decisions we believe are right;
- we do not care about the needs of the other side;
- we try to involve other people in the conflict situation;
- we want to find a solution but do not know how.

Conflicts become less serious when:

- think more about how to solve the problem, not how to humiliate each other;
- we try to understand the motives and actions of the other side;
- we avoid threats and physical force;
- we try to find a solution without the help of others;
- we do not try to impose our opinion and values at any price.

Quite often it is really difficult to say why a conflict has arisen. That is why we are usually confused in conflict situations and one of the questions we most often ask ourselves is: ‘How did all this happen?’ It often remains without an answer and if we do not determine the causes of the problem we cannot find a suitable solution. By trying to find the reasons we find out that people constantly misunderstand motives and that there are reasons and reasons – some of them deeper and more serious and others more insignificant. With conflicts the situation is similar.

Some of them are important and affect the nature of our relationship with children and others do not affect our personality as a whole and we just waste energy and time.

In order to decide what measures to take, we have to determine the possible reasons for the conflict and its character.

When in the base if the conflict is **lack of understanding**, we can try to exchange more information about each other but when the reasons lie in **different value systems**, we should not impose ours but try to take into consideration all possible views as children live in a different world and their values are not the same as ours. In cases when the conflict is caused by **different interests**, we can try to share them to satisfy some of them together.

With most conflicts the reasons are quite different. That is why we need to talk and share with the other side otherwise it would be difficult to understand the complicated world of motives, reasons and dispositions.

Above all in every conflict situation we should distinguish three sides – **contents**, e.g. the thing the sides argue about; **procedure** – the way they argue, and **attitude** – what the relations between the sides in the process of the conflict are.

Thus we can divide conflicts into three types – based on contents, procedure or attitude.

It is important that in each situation we reach balance among these three sides, otherwise the problems will remain and it would be difficult to find a solution.

We can find a solution in a conflict with children, but if we try to impose the decision without asking them (e.g. without following the procedure for solving problems together or neglecting their independence and dignity) this solution will not last long.

It is a fact that without good relations and interaction between the sides it is unlikely that they will take any effective measures to solve the problem and even less likely to find a satisfying decision for both sides.

It is important to be able to distinguish and discuss the main **types of behaviour in a conflict situation**.

The first one, often used by parents is **competitive (rivalry) style**. We follow our interests in the conflict and do not take into consideration the interests of the child and use force, if necessary, in order to implement our decisions. When using this style, we can impose our solution to the problem, but it will not be a lasting one and we will make children react against our style of behaviour in similar situations.

The second style is **avoiding**. Although we see serious contradictions, (e.g. in relation to children's behaviour) we pretend that they do not exist and leave things to follow their course. The trouble is that this style cannot solve the problem and the conflict can explode any time (in a certain moment the child can start behaving in a way we do not approve of not only towards the other but towards us as well). Using this style we satisfy neither our interests nor the interests of the children. We can use it when the situation is not important but in most cases adopting it in our

relations with the children means that we do not want to face real problems, do not want to seriously discuss our relationship, do not try to change this unacceptable for us and dangerous for the child's development behaviour.

The third style is **compromising**. When resolving conflicts we make certain concessions to our children and we make them do the same. The negative side of this style is that each side wins and loses something and we do not reach a lasting decision, there is no satisfaction and when solving other problems we start reacting in a similar way. ("You win, but what about me?"; I lose, but are you going to lose something as well?"). We can use this style with situations which are not very important, for achieving a temporary decision, but not as a way of taking final decisions.

Another style when dealing with conflicts is **adaptive**. We neglect our interests in order to satisfy those of our children - grant their wishes, agree with their decisions in certain situations. In the long term, this style takes away our power as parents and leaves the children to grow up without real control. Using it we neither resolve conflicts nor build long lasting relations with our children. By not opposing them we do not prepare them for difficulties in life, where they would rarely encounter similar behaviour.

In another words, our sacrifice almost never is almost never justified. We can use this style in situations when we realise we have made a mistake and give children the chance to share their opinion or in cases when the problem is much more important for the children than for us and we decide to give something up for the sake of peace and good relations.

The last style is **cooperative** – when we try to solve the problem together and take into consideration the interests of both sides. This means to study carefully the conflict situation, our interests and to look for common decision. It is believed that in this process, or the so called negotiating, based on interests, we not only protect the interests of the sides very well but also develop theirs relations. This is the

model for resolving conflicts when the relations are long term ones and we do not want to gain advantage at the expense of the other side but to build family relations and happiness.

Another important thing in conflicts with children is **our ability to analyse them.**

We should give answers to several questions:

What are the most important things happened in connection with this conflict?

What concerns me especially in this conflict situation?

Why is this situation important for me and my family?

What positions have I declared in relation to the children in the conflict?

What are my real interests and needs in this situation?

Which of my most important values or beliefs are affected?

Is my personal dignity affected and how?

We should ask the children the same questions, about their positions, interests, values, beliefs, feelings. It is important to realize how they see us in the situation and what we want them to know about us which will make our relations clearer.

Only clear answers to these questions will give us the chance to form an opinion about the conflict, to think about the interests and positions of our children and will help us to resolve the problem together.

In order to do this we have to follow several steps.

First of all **to define the conflict – the way we see it, to agree about its nature.**

“Well defined problem is half solved problem.” This means to see what the problem is for us and the children and what the sides would like to happen (in case the problem is solved).

Secondly, we have to **analyze the potential reasons which caused the conflict.** “I have six honest men. / They have thought me everything I know. / Their names are: What, Why, When and How, Where and Who.” Our aim is to achieve agreement about why the conflict exists, to find out maximum information about the reasons, list them, arrange them in order of importance and analyze them.

After defining and analyzing the conflict, we can try together to **find possible solutions of the problem** and try to explain what each solution means and to **assess it by the chosen criteria** – mutual interest, the best for the child, how realistic it is.

On this basis we can make a decision about the suggestion chosen by us, as well to **make an action plan** – how to fulfil it, how we are going to follow it, and what will happen if somebody breaks or does not follow the taken decisions.

This is the way to resolve a conflict situation. It is important that we work together all the time, analyse our interests, and share important things, i.e. we not only try to solve the problem but also to develop our family relations.