e-YoUTH!

PR02: E-YOUTH METHODOLOGY:
SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

A project by

support GIRONA

INDEX

This manual has been written by the European partners that have collaborated to develop the E–YOUTH project. Pressing on the following images, you can read more about the mission, goals and social projects that the different organisations are carrying out in their countries.

Discover how we support people with disabilities!

Introduction

An overview: Hard times, new challenges and possible futures

Do you support youngsters with Complex Needs? If this is the case... Welcome! In this book, you will find guidelines to support the youngsters that need advice and understanding. If you accept my recommendations, I can guide you. But, keep in mind that I cannot resolve your problems. I cannot say you what decision is better to support the young people that require attention. However, I will guide your reflections, encouraging you to explore your resources and to rethink your professional strategies.

Our societies are facing new challenges. Many of these are related to the population's well-being and mental health and others are relative to the social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups. After the pandemic, our lives staggered and, unfortunately, also our emotional balance. The social barriers (such as discrimination), that many citizens tried to overcome or at least dodge, became harder to cope with... Young people are one of the groups more affected.

Many times, young people rely on their parents or more generally, on their families. And not just economically. Moreover, most of them need support to make important decisions such as, what studies they could carry out or where they could work. Everyone at some point looks for help and guidance in their environment to resolve doubts and concerns that are distressing. In consequence, given this parallelism with our own lives, we have to understand that young people need our support. And, obviously, they also need to find help and understanding in their social circles.

However, each person, and taking into account human complexity, is different and has distinct needs. This means that, as professionals, we should design a Support Plan according to the strengths, problems, and personal circumstances of those youngsters who hope to find the help that they need. Surely, after reading these few paragraphs, you are thinking: <<Perfect! But... How can we make a personalised plan? What should I do, then?!>>.

Normally, when people go to our organizations looking for support, we explain to them the services that we could provide them. Services that, often, require them to adapt their routines, wishes, and, even, Life Projects to not very flexible procedures. This fact generates them frustration, anxiety, and demotivation. Feelings that, without doubt, hinder our interventions and threaten the success of our efforts. This situation is, probably, more difficult when young people who require our support and attention don't present a clear diagnosis. Or their characteristics and behavioural problems don't fit into the available services.

Therefore, if we pretend to provide support to young people who experiencing a wide range of problems and difficulties, we should identify what they really need, and, inevitably, we will know about their preferences, priorities, projects, and goals. This argument points out that, perhaps, we should design, collaboratively, Support Plans understanding that the attended people are protagonists and authors of their own lives... of their own stories. At this point, surely, the reader will remember essential concepts such as, for example, the Co-Production Approach that encourages professionals and "services users" to cooperate, agreeing side by side with the already mentioned Support Plans. Then, we understand the services, provided by our organisations, as realities that professionals, youngsters with Complex Needs, and their families and the community have to build to strengthen their ties. In any case, and throughout this project, we will not contemplate our support services as something rigid and depersonalized, where the individuals are, only, recipients of recommendations.

In the following chapters of this handbook, you will discover how to identify the Complex Needs that the youngsters have. Further, to explore this concept, that you shouldn't confuse with, for instance, special needs or other similar terms, you will have a Guide. However, previously, we have to describe to you what we understand by Complex Needs.

Complex needs... complex lives: Beyond the Maslow's Pyramid

The Complex Needs describe the challenging situations that certain vulnerable groups face to reach their goals.

Many youngsters have problems to satisfy their needs and achieve their objectives. Probably, they have not acquired sufficient knowledge nor the necessary skills to create good action plans. Or, perhaps, they don't have sufficient resources or social support to put into practice them. Even, under certain circumstances, the expectations that they have about their strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities could be non-realistic. In such situations, young people will experience frustration and other negative emotions. And, sooner or later, this frustration (and the related moods) will lead them to powerlessness and, in some cases, to aggressive reactions.

Moreover, some youngsters could think that they don't control their own lives or their future. They could believe that their environment, mainly their families or those professionals who support them, determines their quotidian reality (their lives, successes, and failures) without taking into account their needs, desires, and objectives. These beliefs and thoughts disempower those youngsters who need to make important decisions or manage vital transitions such as, for example, access to the labour market. How will they resolve their problems, if they consider that their opinion and efforts doesn't matter? How will they learn from their mistakes, if they think that their lives, including their failures and hits, depend on other people?
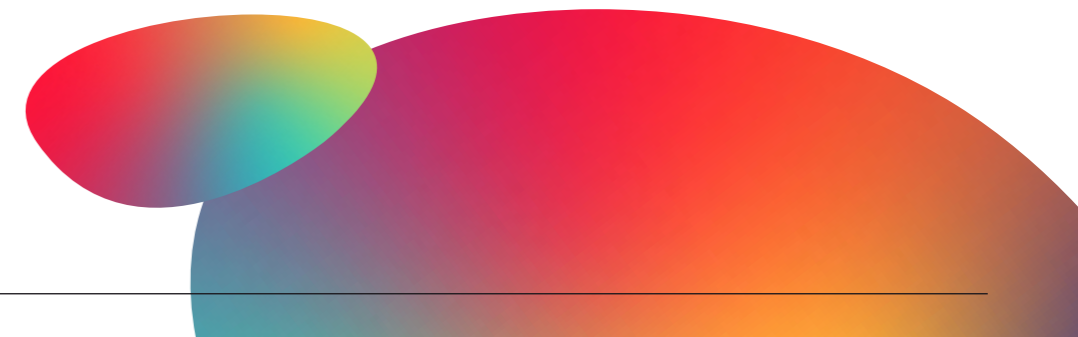
We need to be aware that, depending on the control that the youngsters perceive over their situation, they will face their difficulties from one or another perspective... In consequence, according to the beliefs that the individuals have internalized during their development (socialization processes), they will show certain coping strategies to overcome their problems. And, at the same time, such beliefs will influence how they react after making an erroneous choice.

We will find young people that often analyse their problems and conflicts before making a decision. However, others will prefer to avoid addressing their difficulties or looking for peaceful solutions to their conflicts. Even, many youngsters could react impulsively without thinking about how their acts will affect their environment or their own interests. For this reason, given the wide variety of coping styles, we will have to focus our attention on how the attended people often face their circumstances. As we have underlined previously, youngsters' acts will be influenced by their resources, skills, and for their beliefs.

On the other hand, you should not forget that, based on their lives, young people will try to foresee what their future can offer them: successes or failures? These anticipations will influence how they interpret and try to resolve their problems and how they contemplate their skills and value their resources.

The described concept of **Complex Needs** alludes to a **dynamic process; the interactions of young people with their social environment and with themselves.** Throughout this process, people try to satisfy their needs and carry out their *Life Projects*. In any case, we will have to support young people with different *Complex Needs* that define their circumstances. You should interpret them as personal positions from the youngsters facing problems and conflicts, making decisions and trying to make sense of their lives.

A few words about our philosophy and aims

Below, we have described the different aspects or dimensions of the *Complex Needs*. As you will see, we have explained them under different *Intervention Points* to emphasize that these pages have been written from a practical perspective. In fact, after assessing the youngsters' circumstances, you as well as the rest of the professionals should plan specific interventions aimed to manage all these aspects of the *Complex Needs*. For example, if young people don't have sufficient resources to reach their goals and they underestimate their skills, you have to find how to approach this situation providing them the support that they need.

Throughout the chapters of this manual, we will describe the lack and difficulties that young people often have to face. After all, their *Complex Needs* are strongly related to these circumstances. Nevertheless, we will not interpret these situations as unsolvable problems. On the contrary, we understand each of these troubles and conflicts as learning opportunities that allow both youngsters and professionals to identify their weaknesses and strengths and find out how to develop their skills improving, meaningfully, their position to address similar challenges. All of us learn to resolve problems and conflicts while trying to find a solution, we have to manage risks, make decisions, and put into practice our plans. Our experiences –above all, the consequences derived from our acts- are a source of knowledge and important learnings. Although young people can learn to overcome their difficulties by observing how their loved ones and reference figures approach their troubles, they also need to learn from their mistakes, successes, and failures.

Be that as it may, before going into detail, we should clarify that the *Complex Needs* are a concept which refers to the personal and social resources of young people. This term also contemplates how youngsters manage and resolve their problems and how they interpret their mistakes, failures and successes and what they expect of their future. Although such resources, coping styles and expectations will be interpreted as components of the youngsters' *Complex Needs*, given their impact on the everyday decisions and experiences of vulnerable groups, we shouldn't forget that these converge influencing and, even, determining their degree of autonomy. Through an example, this explanation will be more understandable. Imagine that the youngsters don't have sufficient personal resources; this means that they don't have the necessary skills to reach their life goals. At the same time, they tend to impose their interests and preferences on their family and friends when they have a conflict with them and, moreover, they often interpret their failures from a not very optimistic perspective. The described circumstances illustrate what we mean by *Complex Needs* and why we affirm that such contingencies affect to youngsters' autonomy.

In parallel to the project development and after finishing this, we will develop a game to analyse people's *Complex Needs*. This game will be also inspired on the Scales of Needs, aimed to assess qualitative and quantitatively service users' needs, conceived and developed in Support-Girona, by Ferran Blanco Ros and Sergi Martínez Blanco. In any case, this objective reflects the impact and changes that the project is producing in the professionals' routines even during its development. We have considered necessary to refer to this complementary initiative, given that this demonstrates that the methodology is completely coherent with the practices, methods and goals of our organisations improving the quality of the support that we provide and promoting the creation of new approaches. In this line, beyond the organisations involved in the E-YOUTH Methodology, we are sure that the guidelines gathered in the following chapters will be fully implementable in other cultural and organisational contexts.

First intervention point: What resources do young people have to resolve their problems and conflicts?

Even, the most vulnerable youngsters have resources. But, sometimes, they need to learn how to use them. Or they need support to identify, increase, and know how to take advantage of such resources.

On the contrary, some people (including professionals) think, erroneously, that these teenagers and young adults don't have the skills, talents, knowledge, or sufficient social support to live their own lives with independence. And, therefore, they have an image of total vulnerability regarding the capacity of these youngsters to make their own decisions... to live their own lives. Frequently, they believe that these youngsters will not be able to improve their situation or resolve their problems. If we pretend to support young people, we need to knock down these stereotypes and false beliefs, deleting them off the map at a stroke.

Perhaps, in their current situation, young people don't have the sufficient skills and social support to approach, successfully, their problems, but this doesn't mean that they cannot develop new abilities, acquire new knowledge, or establish ties with their environment. In fact, we should contemplate the learning potential as a powerful resource that allows people to develop their talents and find, in their mistakes and failures, a source of motivation and overcoming. In any case, as professionals, your role consists of making this possible guiding and helping them to face their difficulties.

Another issue that we need to clarify is related to: What is a resource? It is not an easy question given that different individuals will provide distinct examples. For practical purposes, **we will consider as a resource the values and beliefs, skills, knowledge and learnings, tools, social bonds or circles of support that, depending on how the youngsters use these, help them to reach their goals and, therefore, satisfy their needs**. Take into account that this definition underlines that when we provide support to young people with *Complex Needs*, we should know:

- What resources do they think they have

- Why they have pointed out some resources, forgetting others that, according to our inquiries and observations, they have

- How they use their tools, skills, and allies, join or separately

- If they know to use their resources or have problems to put them into practice successfully

- If they tend to overestimate or underestimate them.

The youngsters need to take into account that, if they are not careful, they can lose some of their resources. For example, if they make decisions without considering the interests or emotions of their friends, they could lose the trust that they have deposited in them. Or, on the contrary, they can forfeit the right to do (realize a road trip) or have something (the family car) if they, given their impulsiveness or for any other motive, break the rules or an agreement with their parents. In any case, we should keep in mind that the resources that people have, above all the social support that they are receiving, depend on their attitudes and behaviour. For this reason, it is very important to make it clear to young people that, although now they can have sufficient resources to achieve their objectives, all that could change in the future. Therefore, it is recommended that youngsters count on strategies to know how to act to recover their resources and to develop new skills. Be that as it may, the resources are not inexhaustible.

Beyond promoting their sense of responsibility, **we should explain to them that the resources will not be useful and be not available in all the situations that they face daily**. This means that, despite the youngsters having tools and receiving support from, for instance, their parents to resolve some of their problems and conflicts, they will find difficulties that they will not approach successfully without acquiring new skills or knowledge. So young people will need to learn to detect when they have to gather more resources before putting their plans into action and how to find new allies to cope with the setbacks.

> What do we need to help the youngsters? Mmm... This is a difficult question, right?
>
> We need to know what resources we have to promote their autonomy. Think about what tools and skills you have to guide and support them! And... Ask yourself if you know how to use all your resources. Moreover, keep in mind that we often tend to overstimate or understimate them, so... try to be realistic.

Second intervention point: How do the youngsters face their problems and conflicts?

At one time or another, any person can have problems and difficulties or conflicts with their environment. These troubles can be different. Although, most of them are related to the social circumstances that surround people: to their economic resources, family relationships, belonging to a discriminated group, and cultural background. For example, imagine that a group of young foreigners pretend to study psychology at the university, but, their marks are not sufficiently good to ensure them access given their difficulties in understanding the language spoken in their village... How would they describe this situation? What would they do to overcome this setback? In any case, a remarkable idea is that the tricky situations that the youngsters frequently face have social roots and, therefore, emerge in their daily interactions with their surroundings. For these reasons, it is very important to analyse the relationships that the youngsters establish with their family, friends, and neighbours and how they manage the misunderstandings and tensions that could appear.

Beyond psychological or sociological considerations, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* underlines that the disabilities –label that includes mental health and behavioural problems- are the product of socially unfair situations and not very inclusive communities.

On the other hand, you and the rest of the professionals should analyse, not only the social causes of the youngsters' troubles, but also how they manage their conflicts and how they try to resolve their problems. One fundamental aspect of any intervention should be that the youngsters with behavioural problems can develop skills and learn strategies to face adaptively, difficult moments.

The science has demonstrated to us that even the structure of our brains –and, in consequence, our minds- can be shaped by adopting new habits and routines. In other words, interiorising habits (behavioural patterns), the young people with *Complex Needs* will be able to shape their minds –their thoughts and feelings- that, after all, are the origin of their decisions. This explains why we need to know how the youngsters address their difficulties. Many of their problems are caused by the manner in which they approach their circumstances and try to manage their negative emotions, mainly the frustration that experience after not reaching their objectives.

Before identifying the strategies that young people use to face their problems, we need to clarify what are the *Coping Styles*.

People learn how to manage their troubles and conflicts since their childhood. Although there is not only one way to learn how to address stressful situations, above all they learn through the observation and the knockoff. The youngsters observe how meaningful persons react to face their problems and the setbacks that have truncated their plans. Well... What happens when the behaviours that they observe are socially problematic or uncivil? Beyond that, what happens when they have difficulties regulating their feelings and making decisions impulsively, forgetting all that they have learned?

The **Coping Styles** are **habits or behaviours that people have learned throughout the time. And these can be adaptive or maladaptive.** As we have explained above, these habits can be understood as strategies that the attended youngsters use to manage daily situations and their quotidian lives.
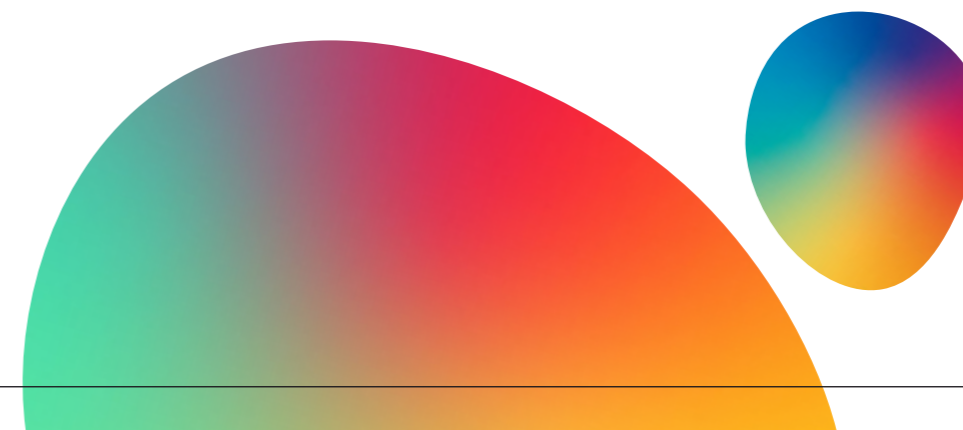
Often, you will find youngsters who, apparently, think that impulsiveness is their main –and, in many cases, unique– resource to face their problems. They don't know what other strategies they could use. Or, perhaps, they could not learn how to react in difficult moments. **In any case, we have to keep in mind that:**

Most of the conflicting behaviours that we would like to prevent are habits learned at early ages. For this reason, we should include a section –or, at least, a few observations- detailing how the attended youngsters often adopt new habits, based on how they have learned the problematic behaviours. For instance, do they need to observe in which ways other individuals resolve their problems? Or, perhaps, do they need to make mistakes before becoming aware of their weaknesses and real situations? Regarding that, we could describe what coping strategies, given the youngsters' needs, preferences, and skills, they could learn. **It is very important to specify, step by step, what learning processes are more recommendable in each case.**

If we pretend to adapt the *Support Plans* to the young people's circumstances, we need to know what pedagogical strategies are more effective for each of them. Then, we conclude that we can show to youngsters how to change their maladaptive habits and reactions analysing in what ways they tend to learn new things.

Many times, youngsters already know how to address their troubles and conflicts. But, as often they don't know how to regulate their emotions, they need to learn to control their impulses and, thus, be able to implement adaptive strategies. Therefore, **we should ascertain if the attended youngsters need to learn new coping strategies to resolve their problems or, rather, they have to find out how to manage their feelings to, carry out these adaptive behaviours until interiorising them as habits.**

We have to take into account that, sometimes, the conflicting behaviours and, even, violent reactions have, as the main reason, emotional ups, and downs. Above all, difficult to manage them and recover the balance. In fact, the frustration –frequently, accompanied by impulsiveness- and the fear cause such reactions. For this, we recommend including in any *Support Plan* specific information about how young people regulate their emotions and feelings and tackle their psychological imbalances. This information will be very useful to understand their *Coping Style*.

At this point, after all these clarifications and tips, we can identify how the youngsters tend to face their problems and resolve their conflicts. This means that we are in a position to collect information about their *Coping Styles*, considering that these are strongly related to the self-concept of each person and in-fluence the plans that young people design and put into practice[1].

[1] It is necessary to underline that the action plans and the *Coping Style* are different things. While the *Coping Styles* describe how people react, habitually, when they have difficulties or problems, each of their plans refers to specific steps that people take to achieve one or more objectives and, thus, satisfy concrete needs.

You should resolve 2 issues regarding to the *Coping Styles*:

How do young people try to face and resolve their difficulties, problems, and conflicts?

How do they tend to manage the emotions, feelings, and thoughts derived from –or that have caused- these problematic situations?

Think about… What strategies do you know to support the youngsters to face their problems? How will you help them manage their emotional ups and downs? Like a professional, you have *Coping Styles* to adress the most complex situations.

Third intervention point: How do young people understand their successes and failures

All the youngsters have their own history. They can make mistakes and, even, fail in some of their purposes. Nevertheless, not all their experiences have to be negative. Also, they can reach most of their goals and have been able to enjoy of their achievements. In any case, the most important is to know how they interpret their livings beyond the mere facts.

When we try to help young people with *Complex Needs*, we should take into account that their *Life Stories* are narrations that they have elaborated focusing their attention on concrete aspects of their behaviour, of their social environment or their circumstances. Then, as we have suggested in another chapter of this manual, the youngsters are authors of their own lives and, also, of the stories that they weave from their experiences. This entails that they often make sense to the facts that define their quotidian reality. If we don't understand this aspect relative to how people understand –and build- their biographies, we will have many difficulties to analyse why most of the attended youngsters have conflicts with their environment and feel many negative emotions without apparent reasons.

For example, although the youngsters reach their objectives, they could interpret their achievements as a demonstration that they depend on their families and friends –or professionals of support- to carry out their purposes and vital projects. Therefore, from this point of view, the youngsters would experience their successes as proof of their lack of resources and strengths and of their dependence. In consequence, they could suffer emotional discomfort, frustration and other overwhelming feelings.

Sometimes, we will find young people that, given their internal conflicts and to how they often interpret the others' actions, tend to understand any advice or help as a threat to their self-esteem. And if they think that something puts their self-esteem at risk, they will try to protect themselves from that threat even resorting to the violence. In fact, in these cases, they will not accept the support that we pretend to provide them… They need our support, but they are interpreting erroneously our attempts to guide them. **Therefore, in any *Support Plan*, we recommend including detailed information about:**

- How the youngsters tend to interpret their experiences, including the apparently positive livings. As we have already commented, **we should clarify how they understand the support that we are offering them.**

- On the other hand, we recommend exploring, and specifying, why they interpret from a concrete perspective their experiences and the events that have marked their lives. Normally, in their past, we find the roots of their mental schemes.

- Also, we should write some clear guidelines to teach them **how to interpret their experiences without forgetting important positives aspects** as, for instance, the skills that they have shown after facing a problem or the support that their family has provided them.

Moreover, we have to take into account that the mental schemes from which the youngsters interpret their experiences and plan how to resolve their problems are habits. These habits are crucial to understand how the world works and to know how to face their circumstances and the consequences of their decisions. Breaking down some false beliefs, people with intellectual disabilities or mental health problems also need to understand what is happening around them. Then, for example, if the youngsters -with or without disabilities- start to think that their successes are result of the help provided by their families, but the failures are consequence of their weaknesses, sooner or later, this though will become mental scheme or thinking pattern that will make sense, in this case, very depressing to their livings.

Keeping in mind the above and the relevance of the learning processes together with the social influences, we should ask ourselves: Are there individuals (family members, friends…) with the same mental schemes around the attended youngsters? If this is the case, we need to identify who is a reference person and a role model for young person. Surely, we will have to take into account their relationship in our *Support Plan*.

As conclusion, **people need to understand their experiences (successes, mistakes and failures) and how these have led them to their current situation**. They need to know the specific causes and triggers that have generated their problems and conflicts. For example, why have they lost their job? Or, why could not they overcome an important exam? Without information about the causes that explain these situations, it is difficult that they learn from their livings, design plans to reach their goals and put into practice them regardless of their resources and *Coping Style*.

Therefore, youngsters should look for the causes that make sense to their past and present. After all, they have to know what circumstances are favourable to their interests and what other aspects require their attention to overcome or, even, prevent possible difficulties and setbacks.

If you pretend to support and guide to youngsters with *Complex Needs*, you need to shed light on the following issues:

- **Where do people look for the causes of their successes, mistakes and failures?** In other words, do they tend to explain their livings alluding to their knowledge, skills and strengths? Or, on the contrary, do they often focus their attention on external circumstances as the difficulty of the task or on their social barriers?

- **Do they think that their skills, strengths and circumstances could change? Or, do they think that these cannot be modified?**

When you try to support a youngster, but you don't achieve to help him/her, how do you interpret your difficulties, mistakes… and failures? How do you understand your professional successes? Keep in mind… the support that you provide depends on the conclusions that you draw from your experiences.

Conflicts: From their roots to their impact

4.1 A spiral of emotions

Most youngsters have **difficulties understanding and managing their own emotions**. They don't know how to identify their feelings nor how to face their emotional ups and downs. This is one of the reasons that explains why they have so many conflicts with their parents, friends, or with anyone who doesn't share their opinion. Without a doubt, youngsters need to learn to control their impulsiveness[2] and this is impossible if no one has shown them how to manage their frustration, fears, and anger.

At this point, we have to clarify that when we talk about emotional management, we are not suggesting that young people should repress or disguise what they feel. On the contrary, **they should face their emotions and learn how to channel all their energies through action plans**. In fact, one of our first interventions should clarify that they should not ignore or stifle their feelings because, if they repress them, these will grow and become ungovernable.

> The conflicts are part of our lives. But, the youngsters need to learn how to resolve them...

Beyond that, some youngsters try to justify their violent or uncivil reactions by resorting to their negative emotions. However, as professionals, we should explain to them that their anger or sadness doesn't entitle them to harm others. Rather, their behavioural problems demonstrate to them that they need to learn to manage their outbursts. In any case, our first interventions should tear down the following beliefs:

- **Only they feel negative emotions.** Really all people (including their parents and loved ones) sometimes experience frustration, fear, disappointment, etc.

- **Negative emotions and feelings justify their aggressiveness. Even the youngsters could think that impulsive and violent reactions are inevitable or necessary.** We have to remember that although all people experience these same emotions, most don't act with violence because they have learned to manage their reactions. Therefore, there are non-violent alternatives to face their emotional ups and downs.

- **They don't have reasons to feel culpability, repentance and remorse before the consequences derived from their aggressiveness... from their impulsive and selfish decisions. In fact, people around them should understand their reactions without get sad or angry given that they have the right to react in a violent way.** In practice, young people need to understand that their decisions and acts have consequences. And, between these, we frequently find the same emotions that they don't want to feel.

As professionals, we need to identify the emotions and feelings that the youngsters experience. But, above all, we should figure out how they act when they are under a heavy emotional pressure. For this reason, in a previous chapter, we have given importance to knowing how people face their problems and, also, their psychological ups and downs. Nevertheless, if we pretend to help young people prevent and manage conflicts, we need to contemplate other relevant aspects of their daily life disputes.
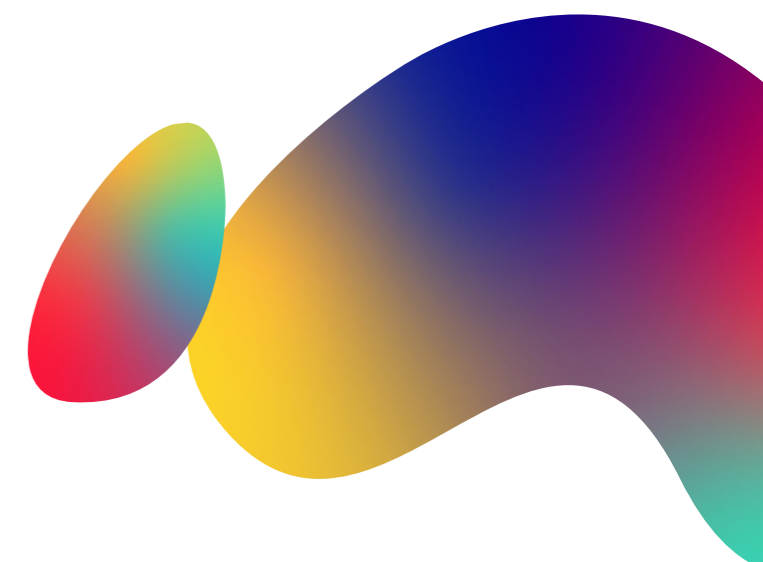
4.2 How to assess daily life disputes? A game of needs and objectives

The youngsters often have conflicts with their families and with the professionals who try to support them. Also, they can discuss with their friends and neighbours for different motives. As professionals, we can find an enormous variety of persons involved in these daily life disagreements. For this reason, **it is very important to identify the protagonists of a dispute before carrying out any other intervention**. If we ignore who participates in a concrete conflict, surely we will be overlooking actors that are essential to reach a solution. Moreover, if we don't know all the parties involved in a dispute, we will not be able to analyse their needs, objectives, and interests. Therefore, our efforts —and the resources used– will not make sense.

Once we have figured out who participates in a conflict, we can identify what needs and objectives they want to reach. But, although we sometimes perform this task following our professional intuition or common sense, hardly ever we employ a systematic method. And, despite our experience helps us to make good decisions, we have developed below a method to, at least, carry out the conflict assessment considering that, beyond knowing the protagonists of a dispute, we need to identify what is at stake:

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[2] As professionals, you should not focus your attention only on the behaviour and attitudes of the young people. It is crucial to keep in mind that, in the conflicts, their families, communities, and their supporters are involved and act with similar impulsiveness, often imposing rigid norms and their priorities. This makes it necessary to consider the different persons and groups and that participate in the dispute.

First, we should identify the needs that the youngsters and their opponents try to satisfy and what objectives they would like to reach. To figure out that, we can interview them face to face or by resorting to the new technologies. We recommend realising individual interviews to avoid undue influences or other undesirable setbacks.

It is very important to distinguish between the needs and the objectives that people pretend to achieve. While we can consider the needs as a broad set of psychological and/or social states in which the individuals require something, the objectives refer, mainly, to concrete goals. For example, youngsters can need friends and be respected as well as their parents. However, the firsts have, as objectives, to strengthen ties with their classmates and maybe commit a theft to gain the respect of their peers. And their parents prefer to build healthy relationships with their coworkers and resolve complex labour problems to earn their recognition. As we can see, people can have the same needs, but these could materialise into different aims.

After identifying the different needs and goals at stake, and breaking them down in separate lists, the youngsters and their "opponents" should put them in order. This means that we have to help them to order, from most important to least, their respective needs and objectives.

On the other hand, and as a logical step, before supporting the youngsters and their "opponents" to resolve their conflict, we have to analyse the collected information. We need to identify the needs and objectives that are, at least *a priori*, incompatible. But, also, we should determine if the different protagonists share needs and have common goals. In fact, and based on previous clarifications, the parties involved in the dispute can have the same needs but different objectives, and/or distinct lacks although they share their aims.

If we have detected the points of friction and the possible consensus, we will be able to outline a *Map of the Conflict*. This map will show why the youngsters have a concrete conflict with their loved ones and/or with their community. Above all, this map allows us to know what changes we have to promote to help the involved parties to resolve the dispute.

Moreover, in our assessment, we should point out what type of conflict the youngsters face. This means that it is necessary to indicate if the conflict is limited to frictions between needs, to incompatible objectives or, on the contrary, if this encompasses both lacks and goals. After all, only by clarifying what is at stake, we will know how to design an action plan to address the dispute. In fact, we need to keep in mind that conflicts evolve throughout time and, for this reason, the Map of the Conflict will change according to the decisions and actions of the parties and, also, our interventions. So, we will parse out the dispute and realise data until this is resolved (recommendation: ask, at least, every 2 weeks if the conflict, concretely the incompatible needs and aims, has changed). Therefore, a conflict that, initially, consists only of incompatible goals, could evolve towards a dispute that also involves fundamental needs.

Below, you will find a sketch about how the *Map of Conflict* should be[3]:

[3] In the following *Map of the Conflict*, both the young people and their opponents should identify, describe and analyse their needs and objectives and if these goals motivate the conflict or, on the contrary, can be considered a point from which to reach an agreement. At this point, they can put them in order according to their relevance. Moreover, the involved parties should point out, crossing the white circles, how the conflict between specific objective and needs has affected them emotionally (we have used the Likert Scale).
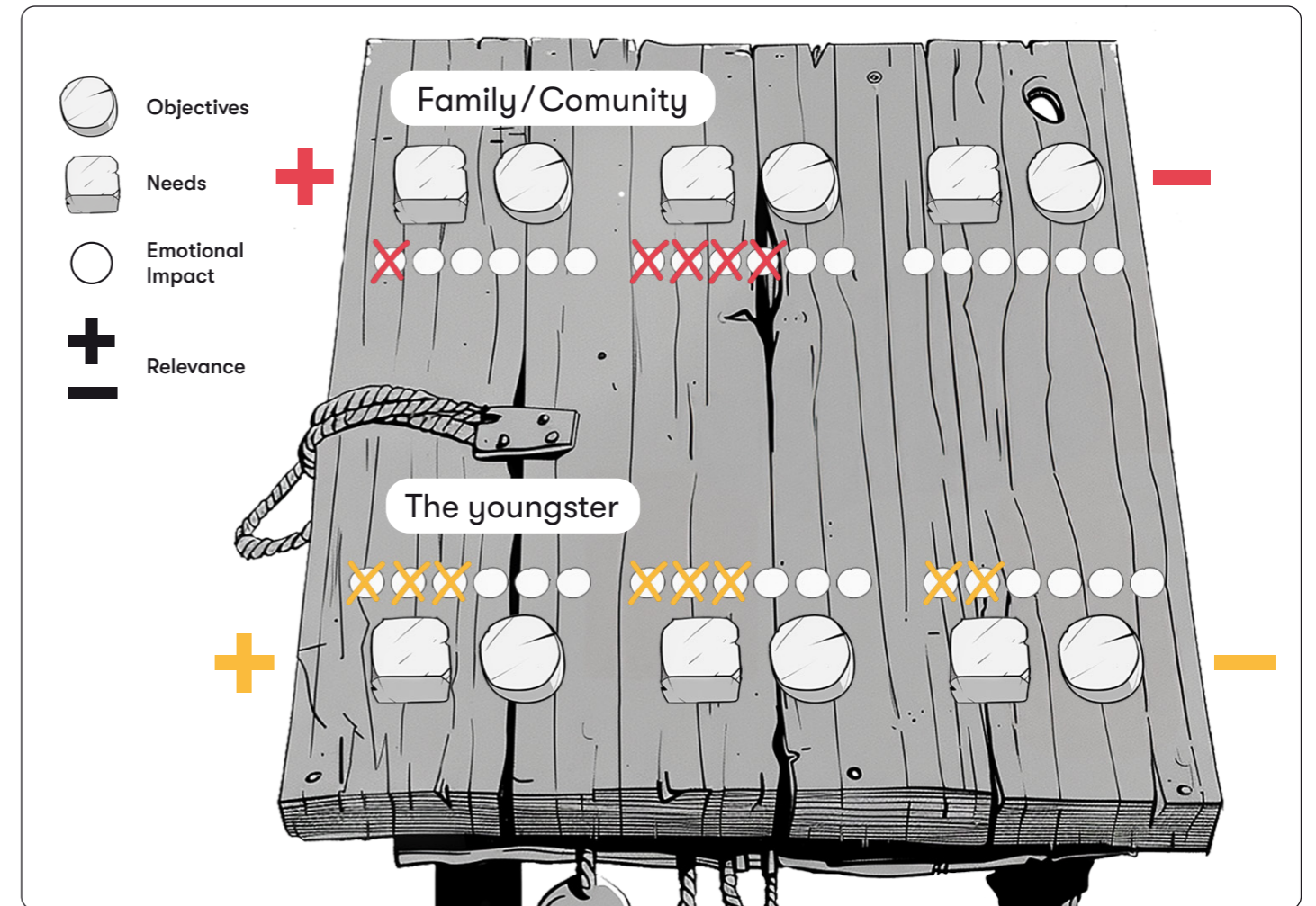
4.3 Conflict management

To resolve any conflict, we need a plan based on a thorough analyse of the parties' **needs and objectives**. We have to keep in mind that, if we don't count with sufficient information about the involved actors or their claims, our interventions, although well-intentioned, could worsen the situation. Even, these could deteriorate the bonds between the youngsters and their "opponents". So, we should check if we have a clear image of the conflict or, on the contrary, after the data collection, still we have doubts. Obviously, social relationships are complex and it is normal to find light and shade in a troubled situation. Nevertheless, under no circumstances, we should address a dispute without designing an action plan. But... what parts should this action plan be beyond the assessment?

First Phase

After the first individual meetings with the different parties involved in the conflict, the professionals should have elaborated the *Map of Conflict*. Therefore, they should have analysed the parties' discourses carefully, identifying what needs and goals are incompatible and, also, those issues that can facilitate an agreement. With the problematic situation already mapped, the professionals can organise a second round of individual meetings.

In these meetings, we should reach **4 objectives:**

- Raise awareness about the causes and consequences of the dispute and the conflicting issues derived from it.

- Promote that young persons with *Complex Needs* recognise, think, and accept the causes and social and emotional consequences related to the conflict.

- Develop a support bond based on reciprocal respect and confidence.

- Teach people with *Complex Needs* how to manage their negative feelings, frustration, and impulsiveness using, for example, mindfulness and interiorising other coping styles.

Given that young people don't often analyse the problems and conflicts that they have with their environment, it is recommended to provide them with guidelines and tips to teach them to carry out this necessary assessment. Sometimes, we find that their family members and the professionals that should help them to make decisions don't realise a systematic analysis with the appropriate frequency. For this reason, at the beginning of these individual meetings, the professionals can use the *Map of the Conflict* to plan and articulate their interventions.

First of all, both the young people and their opponents need to explore the dispute's dimensions and relevant aspects, studying the *Map of the Conflict*. This means that they have to find out why they are dealing with a specific problematic situation. So, helped by the professionals, the young people (and in their respective meetings the other involved actors) will analyse the others' needs and objectives, seeing if those are incompatible or, on the contrary, are points of agreement from which they can address and probably resolve the conflict. We should take into account that knowing the circumstances where the conflict appears is crucial. When (and under what circumstances) do these objectives and needs are incompatible or generate a problem? We shouldn't forget that, perhaps, the trouble is related to how people try to reach their goals or how interpret them. Be that as it may, the professionals guide both people with *Complex Needs* and their opponents throughout the *Map of the Conflict*, deepening in why concrete needs and objectives are incompatible; are those irreconcilable?

Beyond that, the professionals should find out how the conflict (throughout the course of the dispute) affects emotionally and socially to the different parties. Therefore, young people and their opponents will have to explain what emotions and feelings they experience in relation to the conflict and how the dispute influences the relationship with the other involved actors: distorting the image that they had formed of the rest of the participants or, for example, clouding their daily interactions, affecting, as consequence, to the rest of quotidian life areas. In any case, and although the professionals have to collect all the necessary information, the people with *Complex Needs* and their opponents should indicate from 1 to 6 how intense the emotional experience derived from the dispute and, according to their perceptions, what they believe about how the rest of actors are living this conflict in emotional terms.

During these individual meetings, it is recommended that people identify and describe in detail, appealing to some illustrative examples, how they react in the middle of the dispute. This means that the support professionals, responsible for managing this problem-solving process, should help the youngsters to analyse how they act when they have a problem or face a challenge and, also, how they try to regulate their frustration. From their answers, we will be able to design a training plan addressed to teach them techniques such as, for example, the mindfulness or problem-solving approaches and, therefore, to promote their strengths.

The youngsters need to develop some social and emotional skills to be capable of negotiating without impulsive reactions or, even, without aggressiveness, blinded by the anger. In fact, if we ask them what they think about the others' feelings is to generates empathy from one side to the other.

Second Phase

Before organising the group meeting, both people with *Complex Needs* and their opponents should develop crucial skills and attitudes such as, for example, active listening, critical thinking and their emotional management, and problem-resolving strategies. We have to keep in mind that, for months or even years, they have reacted, fundamentally, with impulsiveness and aggressiveness (mainly, psychological) product of their difficulties in regulating their emotional ups and downs and stressing feelings. Sooner or later, these repetitive acts can form habits that hinder resolving their problems and conflicts. For this reason, and according to the guidelines that the professionals have provided in the individual meetings, the involved parties should change their behavioural habits. This means that it's recommended to ensure that they learn how to address their problems from other perspectives and use strategies less harmful.

Given the difficulties that the youngsters have in following instructions, guidelines, and pedagogical plans too much complex, the professionals should create and adapt little exercises to their level of development (please, take into account that a very important goal is the personalisation of the support services). This involves that if some youngsters with *Complex Needs* hate to carry out meditation, yoga, or relaxation exercises, they could focus their attention on the body movement while practicing sport or/and the environment, becoming aware of their real circumstances instead of thinking only about their negative experiences, how their parents act or in their lacks. After all, these exercises pretend to promote that young people learn to refocus and expand their attention and not ignore relevant aspects of their lives. We have to consider that, frequently, their attention is biased, focusing on negative aspects of their experiences and interpreting these lives from a catastrophic viewpoint.

Moreover, and complementarily to the activities aimed at managing the negative emotions, frustration, and impulsiveness, the professionals can provide them clear recommendations about how to face their troubles using, for example, tools from the therapy based on problem-solving strategies. Therefore, the support professionals should explain to them how to:

- Analyse the problem or conflict with relative objectivity. Normally, people tend to think, first, about how the situation affects them and, after, sometimes, they reflect on the consequences to the rest of the involved parties. But, this mental tendency facilitates that the youngsters (and also their opponents) focus their attention only on their needs, interests, and emotions, ignoring the situation of people around them. For this reason, it is essential that to combat this mental habit and, as a consequence, egocentric attitudes, the professionals guide the conflict assessment beginning with the consequences that the dispute has had on their opponents.

- Moreover, the conflict assessment should not contemplate only what people have lost or what they have not achieved. In these cases, they can interpret the conflict in terms of profits and losses. And this implies that if their opponents gain, then they lose something. Likewise, if people only weigh up how the dispute has changed their lives, generating emotional ups and downs and undesirable experiences, they can interpret the conflict in terms of damages. As a consequence, the involved parties —not only the youngsters- can opt for victimhood, demonising their opponents and denying any possible solution. To prevent these setbacks and disagreements, people should think about the situation from a cooperative viewpoint: they have a common problem and need to find, and collaborate, on a solution, focusing attention on the potential benefits of this alliance and understanding the losses as, just, temporal results.

Analysed the conflict, people with *Complex Needs* should learn to explore (through the imagination and using written/oral descriptions and schemes) the possible scenarios that they will have to face if they decide, finally, understand the dispute from the victimhood and demonization of their opponents or, instead, in terms of profits and losses. Before or after that, they should also weigh up what scenarios they will have to address if, on the contrary, they decide to interpret the dispute as a common problem whose solution consists of attempts of collaboration between the involved parties.

Finally, both people with *Complex Needs* and their opponents have to learn to identify and, also, generate possible solutions; and alternatives to their problems. In fact, the professionals can consider these alternatives as possible agreements or, at least, as guidelines to find a solution, reinforcing the social bond between the parties. Therefore, during the interventions, the support professionals have to redirect the attention of people from the problem, considering their negative and positive consequences, to the possible solutions based on cooperation (we will always prioritise the existing healthy relationships with the environment).

People with *Complex Needs* and their opponents should carry out these little exercises, at least, during 2 weeks before the group meeting and during the deliberation process to interiorise these need activities as habits (this requires time, patience, and perseverance). To reach these learning objectives and, therefore, develop these skills, the professionals have to provide support and counselling throughout the process, gathering their difficulties, preferences, and opinions. Moreover, we recommend that they write or record a diary of activities where they can explain how these activities have influenced their *coping strategies*.

Third Phase

In this part of the process, the youngsters with *Complex Needs* and their opponents should reach an agreement[4]. For this reason, it is essential to explore, at the beginning of this group meeting, if the involved parties are ready to collaborate or, on the contrary, they are still anchored in non-collaborative positions. This means that the professionals have to check if they, even after the previous work, understand the dispute in terms of gains and losses and/or if their negative feelings muddy the relationship with the others, hindering them analyse the conflict with sufficient objectivity to look for possible solutions. In any case, and to weigh up the changes experienced by the parties, the professionals should expose, briefly, the points of possible agreement and those other aspects of the situation that generate problems, misunderstandings, and emotional discomfort.

Describing the situation, according to the conflict assessment carried out by the support professionals and the involved parties, the youngsters and their opponents will be able to express their doubts, thoughts, and worries in relation to this assessment. And, in fact, they can suggest including relevant data derived from processing the conflict, taking into account, also, the others' needs, objectives, and emotions. After all, the participants in the conflicts should have developed skills and attitudes relative to empathy, critical and creative thinking, and emotional management.

Normally, after expressing and listening to the respective reflections about the conflict and its consequences, the parties can experience a wide range of emotions; some of them negative. To prevent these ups and downs from influencing too much their decisions and reactions (the emotional catharsis, sometimes, has this result), the professionals should guide them while they put into practice the exercises practiced during the previous phases of this process (exercises related mainly to emotional management and conflict resolution). This means that, before exploring in groups the possible solutions of the dispute, both the youngsters and their opponents have to focus their attention on the future possible scenarios and benefits, that they will obtain if they manage their impulsiveness and frustration and resolve their conflicts. The involved parties should have learned how to guide their attention toward positive and optimistic thoughts, avoiding that their minds turn only around negative feelings. Given that without imagining possible future scenarios it is very difficult to redirect the attention, the professionals can encourage them, providing clear guidelines, to think in these desirable scenarios where the conflict has been resolved and both the youngsters and their opponents enjoy of the benefits derived from this peaceful situation.

When the involved parties point out that they have recovered the calm and, therefore, the emotional balance (so they are able to react with more self-control), the professionals will indicate to them that, in order, they can present the possible solutions and alternatives found to resolve the dispute. As a norm, the moderators of this process should clarify that, under any circumstance, all the parties have to listen to those who are speaking without interruptions or disrespect. The professionals should take note of all the proposals and look for common points from which the parties can build an agreement. At this point, and after summarizing the possible solutions mentioned by the youngsters or their opponents, the professionals give them, again, a voice so they can explore the different alternatives expressed.

Considering the people's needs and objectives, and keeping in mind how the points of disagreement affect both young people and their opponents, the professionals will recommend thinking about whether the solutions described can really resolve the disagreements and how these can change the emotions associated with the conflict, promoting through this reflective exercise positive thoughts and attitudes with regard to adopt a collaborative approach.

Finally, the parties (helped and guided by the professional) will design an agreement where they establish their respective responsibilities, rights, duties, and the norms that will define their relationship. Also, it is recommendable to contemplate in this agreement a section where the conflict's protagonists explain how they will prevent, reduce, or face future setbacks, misunderstandings, and problems (describing and agreeing on how to compensate for the damage caused). After all, the social relationships are complex and the conflicts are part of our lives. We cannot deny this reality. Be that as it may, the professionals should keep in mind that the involved parties will not solve the conflict immediately after this meeting in a miraculous way. On the contrary, this group meeting will allow them to design an action plan that establishes how the youngsters and, also, their opponents should act to ensure that they work together, guaranteeing cooperation and reciprocal respect, to reach their respective goals and satisfy their needs. Moreover, in this agreement, the parties have to clarify why the bond with the others is relevant and, in social terms, useful.

We have to underline that this agreement should be based on the alternative identified and addressed by the parties, choosing especially those that are shared by the most of conflict's protagonists.

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[4] We should take into account that this process will be carried out based on, only in part, the principles of the mediation, where the expert will facilitate the communication between the parties so they can reach satisfactory solutions for all those involved in the conflict.

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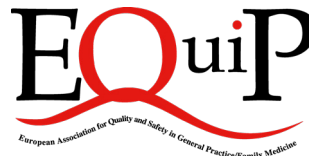
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