



10 rules



**on child abuse
and negligence**



PEARLS
FOR CHILDREN



The contents of this document are taken from the guide created by Fondazione Cesvi with psychologists of the Associazione Bambini nel Tempo (Children in Time Association) for the programme of prevention and opposition to child abuse and negligence in Italy started by Cesvi in 2017.

PEARLS for children is a European project opposing and preventing child abuse financed by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020) of the European Union.

The project implemented in Italy, Lithuania and Poland aims at **increasing the technical skills** of professionals in the medical-health and educational sectors of social services and law enforcement agencies **on child abuse and negligence**. In addition, **it aims to set up and strengthen the co-operation and co-ordination network between the different public and private social players** concerned with minors and child abuse in the country which will lead to the definition of best practices and a common local action strategy.

Implementing partners:



Financed by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020) of the European Union

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The guide proposed here can be considered and presented as an essential tool in the prevention of psychic distress in the child and adult. It is based on the considerations of doctors and psychologists who work with children in difficulty and offers very important advice in clear, simple language, easy to understand by all parents and educators involved in the difficult yet stimulating task of promoting the healthy growth of children, returning to their real (and curable) origin the disorders that too many paediatricians and child neuropsychiatrists now worsen with the ill-advised and pseudoscientific use of the most dangerous psychotropic drugs.

Seen from another viewpoint, the guide centred on the protection of the child in difficulty is also, and above all, a formidable tool in the prevention of adult psychic disorders. Everything that isn't neurological, and so organically determined, depends on situations where the child wasn't protected and is described very well here.

Neuroses, personality disorders and most psychotic disorders in the adult can be avoided by parents and educators able to think of the future simply following the indications of this guide. They, and their children in particular, are the ones on whom the consequences of those disorders will fall.

Prof. Luigi Cancrini,
Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist

Every living being needs a welcoming, predictable, constant and consistent world for its development. However, these features must be neither absolute nor rigid. This means that, in the parent-child relationship, it's a good idea for them never to be excessive or absent (we present some extremes (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 in our guide).

In addition to these, there are toxic experiences for children that parents should avoid completely (7, 8, 9 and 10).

#1

Neglecting his/her needs, dressing him/her inappropriately for the time of year (too light in winter or well-covered in summer), leaving him/her at home on his/her own for a long time, not washing him/her, not giving him/her enough food, not taking him/her to school regularly, not taking him/her to the doctor when ill, not listening to him/her and not taking account of the feelings, ideas and preferences expressed.

The effects of chronic negligence can show with a delay in achieving the main growth stages (the child doesn't sit after 6 months of age, doesn't walk after 12 months, doesn't speak after 3 years etc.), with

learning disorders or excessive seeking of affection and attention from strangers (and the resulting risk of exposure to other abuses) with excess independence, great insularity and distrust of others.

A neglected child is like a plant that isn't given enough water. It grows but in an awkward and suffering way.

Always think of your child as a person with feelings, thoughts, abilities and needs.

A person worthy of respect, to listen to and understand.



#2

Taking excessive care of him/her, continually taking him/her to the doctor or different doctors to compare diagnoses, medicalising his/her development, not allowing him/her to do the things that other children do because he/she may become ill, not giving him/her food normally found in our diet (e.g. meat, eggs, flour, milk, etc.) because these things may harm him/her, protecting him/her from all frustrations, attributing feelings, ideas and preferences that he/she hasn't expressed, and feeding him/her excessively.

The effects of overcare can be: development of anxiety linked to his/her physical health, difficulty in socialisation, difficulty in separation, poor

school attendance which may even lead to abandoning education, difficulty in expressing his/her needs and wishes, and depressive states.

A child given too much care constantly feels that he/she is fragile and incapable.

Ask your child what's important for him/her, invite him/her to say how he/she feels, and ask what his/her preferences are and comply with them, preventing your parental anxiety from blocking him/her..



#3

Humiliating him/her, denigrating him/her, repeatedly and telling a child that he/she is stupid, ugly, doesn't know how to do anything, that we don't love him/her, and threatening to abandon him/her if he/she doesn't behave as we want.

The effects of psychological abuse show in continuous self-depreciation (I can't do it, I'm stupid, I'll never be able etc.), anxiety,

learning disorders, hyperactivity, psychosomatic symptoms like bed-wetting, stammering, and persistent and invasive tics.

A psychologically abused child doesn't have any self-esteem, is fragile and constantly feels inadequate and discouraged.

Stress your child's qualities to him/her, admire them, valorise them and pay him/her the compliments he/she deserves.



#4

Demanding excessive performances, thinking and wanting the child to always be the best at school, in sport or anything else he/she does.

The effects of excessive performance demands are shown with a constant state of anxiety for the child as he/she tries to satisfy his/her parents' expectations. There may be continuous, sudden changes of mood linked to how much he/

she feels they have the approval, or not, of his/her mother and father. He/she may become hyper-competitive or, on the contrary, avoid any type of comparison because he/she is afraid of a failure.

A child who is asked for excessive performance is one who doesn't feel loved for who he/she is but for what he/she does.

Always ask yourself what you can do for your child instead of demanding that he/she does something for you.



#5

Treating the child as though he/she were younger than they are (infantilise) - giving a bottle to a child who already goes to school, washing and dressing him/her when he/she is already able to do this by him/herself, not explaining anything about events, even serious ones (deaths, illnesses, crises and separations) surrounding him/her.

The effects of infantilisation may be a feeling of inadequacy and hyper-dependence in the

adult, problems of academic performance and socialisation disorders.

A child treated as though he/she is younger develops an image of a dangerous outside world that he/she feels they are unable to deal with and wants to stay away from.

Remember that your child develops his/her idea of him/herself and the world according to how you behave with him/her rather than what you say to him/her.



#6

Interacting with a child as if he/she was older than he/she is (adultise) - expecting a child to behave like a little adult, looking after him/herself, adults who are ill or younger brothers and sisters, having him/her to see risky places and people not suitable for his/her age (gambling dens or places where people go who misuse alcohol or take drugs).

The effects of adultisation are the loss of the ability to trust others and the development of anxiety to control adults and the surrounding environment, seen

as not very suitable. The anxiety may also be seen through somatic symptoms such as bed-wetting, tics and stammering.

A child treated as an adult loses his/her childish parts too soon, doesn't develop imagination and play, and takes on responsibilities that are too much for them.

Stop and think - were you also given too much responsibility as a child? Try to recall how your parents treated you. You may realise that the behaviour that made you suffer most is the same you're repeating with your children.



#7

Involving him/her in the arguments with your partner, asking the child which of his/her parents is right, discrediting the other parent, negatively noting any feature of the child similar to that of the other parent, preventing him/her from spending time with/loving the other parent threatening desertion and/or punishments.

The effects of triangulation in the parents may be the child's excessive insularity and difficulty in expressing his/her

needs (like an attempt to avoid the triangulation). In addition, the child may develop low self-esteem and constant control anxiety.

A child who is excessively involved in the conflict between his/her parents is a child who feels invisible and internally torn. He/she may take sides totally with one of the parents to alleviate his/her internal conflict.

Protect your child from discussions and rows with your partner, ensure that he/she is not involved at any level. There's a 'sacred' boundary between questions that only concern adults (the couple) and those concerning the children (parenting).



#8

Exposing him/her to scenes of physical or verbal violence, beating up the other parent, humiliating him/her, threatening him/her before the child or when the child is nearby, or in a way in which the child perceives the effect, also later (because the signs remain).

The effects of witnessed violence are linked to how traumatic the situation was and are displayed with

anxiety, a constant feeling of danger, hyperactivity, learning disorders, impotence and a guilty feeling.

A child who lives in a violent environment has to protect him/herself and tries to protect the parent who is the victim of violence. Therefore, he/she doesn't have enough energy to dedicate to his/her development.

Remember that, if you expose your child to violent scenes, he/she will suffer a trauma similar to that of direct violence he/she undergoes.



#9

Using physical violence against him/her, beating him/her, pulling his/her hair, throwing things at him/her, kicking, punching and pushing him/her, using a belt or whip on him/her, burning him/her with cigarettes, and shaking a young baby to make it stop crying.

In addition to the physical damage (fractures, bruises, hair torn out, marks of beating with a belt, etc.), **the effects of physical violence** are the development

of aggression, hyperactivity, the feeling of humiliation and self-devaluation, delays and disorders in the development stages (language, movement etc.), and learning disorders.

A child who is beaten thinks that he/she lives in a hostile world that he/she has to defend him/herself from.

Understanding and listening must be your 'weapons' as a parent, and not aggression. Violence leads to violent children. Anger feeds more anger and generates fear.



#10

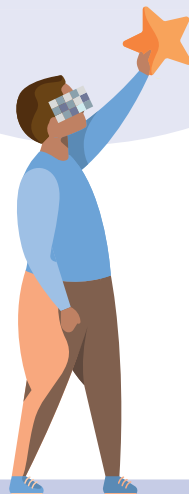
Having sexual contacts with him/her. Touching a child's genitals to arouse him/her and be sexually aroused, have a child touch your genitals, have sexual relations with him/her, have him/her watch sexual acts between adults and get him/her to see pornographic material.

For a child the **effects of sexual abuse** are linked to the traumatic experience and may be various and have various forms - guilty and anxious feelings, shame, impotence, passivity, changes in eating habits (anorexia and

bulimia), a fall in scholastic achievement, learning disorders, sleep disorders, depression, nightmares, seductive and sexualised attitude to adults and peers, and compulsive masturbation.

A child who was sexually abused loses trust in the people who should protect and look after him/her as an adult and his/her sexuality develops traumatically.

Don't forget that children have their own sexuality which has nothing to do with that of 'grown-ups'. A sexual contact of any type and level with an adult always has a traumatic effect on the child.



The most common consequences

In general, all forms of abuse have negative consequences on children, which may be displayed similarly and, fundamentally, are shown in the development of feelings and behaviour featuring:

#A

Anger

The child sees the world as a hostile environment to defend him/herself from with aggression, destructiveness, hyperactivity and violence.

#B

Fear

The child sees the world as a hostile environment to defend him/herself from with passivity, 'withdrawal' and submission because he/she feels vulnerable and impotent.

#C

Isolation

The child sees the world as a hostile environment to withdraw from by daydreaming and trying to be as 'absent', invisible as possible.

#D

Instability

The child sees the world as unstable where "you never know whether something good or bad will arrive". As a result, he/she displays sudden changes of mood or scholastic achievement.

#E

Self-devaluation

The child continues to say to him/herself "I'm stupid, I'm incapable, I can't ...", "the world doesn't love me ...", "it's my fault..." producing an image of him/herself of an inadequate person and loser.

In most cases, consistent delays or disorders in psychomotor development, language, sphincter control, logic and thought abilities, eating and the sleeping-waking pattern arise from these experiences.

If you realise you are behaving in one or more of the 10 ways described above with your children, don't be afraid of contacting a professional to ask for help.



There are many supporting professionals you can contact – social workers, psychologists, experts in family relationships and abuse, or self-help groups.

Cesvi's commitment in Italy



Cesvi is an independent, secular organisation which has worked in about 20 countries around the world for more than 35 years. It supports the most vulnerable populations in the promotion of human rights, the achievement of their aspirations and sustainable development.

The Fondazione Cesvi started a programme on the prevention and fight against abuse which aims to increase the ability to prevent, recognise and respond to cases of child abuse and negligence using innovative intervention methods and secondary preventive action with a view to early intervention and valorisation of the community.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a rapid change in the context children and families live in. The closure of schools and daytime services, social distancing and the restrictions on movement have interrupted the routine and social support for children, creating new stress factors for both them and parents, which may lead to new cases of abuse or social exclusion.

The main action taken in 2020 was:

#1

Creation of spaces where vulnerable children and adolescents can talk. Psychological support desk in schools (NA), and workshops on recognition of emotions and the valorisation of resources for young people.

#2

Parenting support. Remote parenting support aimed at promoting positive attitudes and practices in the parent-child educational relationship; psychological and pedagogic consultancy desks and also conflict mediation desks (BA/NA).

#3

Specific training for professionals. Experimental course 'Plural masculinity – from stereotypes to the freedom to be yourself' promoted with the aim of preventing and opposing gender and peer violence intended for staff and followed by workshops for young people; 'Resilience tutors' training course (BA); training courses on topics connected to non-violent education and conflict management; studies on peer violence and bullying (BG).

#4

Information and awareness-raising meetings aimed at the public with experts in topics linked to the fight against child abuse.

The project PEARLS for children was started in October 2020. It extends the work of prevention and opposition to abuse at European level, involving Italy, Lithuania and Poland.



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For further information, see
the Contacts page on our website
www.pearlsforchildren.eu