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CHILD AT THE CENTRE OF THE DEBATE

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Child at the centre of the debate Conference Ebook

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“Francês”, The Story Of A Helping Professional Relationship With An Institutionalized Adolescent

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Abstract

This paper aims to reflect on the specificities for developing a Professional Helping Relationship with adolescents, focusing on the praxis and the role of each actor in the process of change.

Considering the life narrative and the relationship built between a professional and an institutionalized adolescent, this paper analyzes the importance of building a secure attachment that fosters a gradual growth, autonomy, trust and empowerment of the adolescent. Further, it emphasizes the relational attitudes that professionals should develop, such as acceptance, respect, congruence, belief in individuals and in their potential for change.

This paper also discusses the extent to which building a professional helping relationship in temporary shelters is a fundamental condition for the construction of necessary and desired changes in adolescents.

Keywords: Helping Relationship; Professional; Adolescence; Secure attachment; relational attitudes

Introduction

The definition of professional helping relationship encompasses contributions of different theoretical perspectives from distinct areas of knowledge, including psychology, sociology and philosophy. One of the most important contributions relates to Rogers (1961/2010) and his humanistic perspective. Underpinned by existentialist conceptions, this perspective emphasizes the importance of human interaction, subjective experience, self-awareness, freedom of choice, responsibility and finding meaning and purpose in life (Guerra & Lima, 2005).

Carl Rogers states that human beings are responsible for their own destiny and actions; they are free to define themselves and make choices; they have the resources to develop and understand themselves; and, in interaction with others, they demonstrate an actual tendency to evolve in their own potential.

In situations of emotional or social vulnerability, a person may need professional help. The helping relationship appears as a psychosocial intervention and includes “a relationship in which at least one of the parties has the intent of promoting the growth, development, maturity, improved functioning, improved coping with life, of the other” (Rogers, 1961/2010, p. 63). This relationship, built up over time, aims above all to create conditions so that the person in need of help is able to change and transform his thoughts and emotions in order to solve one or more problems (Chalifour, 2008; Timóteo, 2010; Simões, Fonseca, & Belo, 2006) and achieve “more appreciation for, more expression of, more functional use of the latent inner resources of the individual.” (Rogers, 1961/2010, p. 63-64).

For Rogers (1961/2010), the helping relationship is collaborative, non-directive and co-constructed based on the recognition of the capabilities that the other has to autonomously overcome his/her own problems and to self-actualize. The “best way to help the other is to believe in him/her as a person, in his/her capacity as a thinking being, with feelings and able to search for and direct his/her own need for change” (Simões et al., 2006, p. 47).

The professional is then a facilitator who is required to be genuine and to show unconditional positive regard and empathy. When developed under these principles, the helping relationship may lead the person to a significant learning, that is “learning which makes a difference – in the individual's behavior, in the course of action he chooses in the future, in his attitudes and in his personality. It

is a pervasive learning which is not just an addition of knowledge, but which interpenetrates with every portion of his existence "(Rogers, 1961/2010, p. 324). When significant learning occurs the person comes to see himself differently, becomes more confident and independent and accepts his feelings more fully. In this sense, the person becomes more flexible, more acceptant of others, more open to the evidence, and more empowered (Chalifour, 2008; Rogers, 1961/2010).

For the development of this relationship, certain conditions need to be met: "regularity of meetings; capacity to control his/her own life in order to effectively move towards the practical resolution of problems; independence (from family control, for example, in emotional terms); capacity to express tensions; stability, particularly of organic nature; intelligence that enables to reflect upon his/her own understanding and to face existential situations" (Timóteo, 2010, p. 38-39).

One of the aspects that distinguish a helping relationship is the asymmetry, given the different roles and functions of the intervener and the person being helped. This asymmetry does not mean that one is more dominant and active, and the other, more fragile and passive (Simões et al., 2006; Soriano, 2005). Indeed, both have significant and complementary roles in this relationship: the person who helps, facilitates the development of self-concept so that normal growth can proceed and the person who is helped, has in himself the inner force driving this relationship. Despite this interdependence, as stated Coimbra de Matos (2004), the responsibility is primarily on the side of the professional. This by no means implies that the professional should take part, impose decisions or decide by the person (Santos, 2004). Instead, the professional should be attentive and available to communicate and encourage the person to assume responsibility for the process of change and decisions to be taken.

Communication is one of the key factors for establishing and developing a helping relationship. According to Salomé (1995), the quality of communication depends on the capacities of individuals to listen, understand, talk and let others talk.

While listening, professionals must receive and learn to accept what is told. This does not mean having to approve, but implies the acceptance of the other regardless of encountering certain issues that are not consistent with their ethical or moral values. It implies, therefore, "detachment" (coming off from oneself) and "intentionality" (making oneself available). This requires "proximity and

distance” (Salomé, 1995, p. 41). Proximity refers to the need for the relationship to be empathetic; distance is justified by the fact that what is revealed belongs to who communicates and the professional must avoid comments and judgments. As stated by Capul and Lemay (2003), it is fundamental for the professional to continually take a double look, so that he not only listens to the other, but also he listens to himself and he thinks about himself in the relationship with the person who is helping.

Understanding involves the ability to comprehend the message in the variety of languages used by the person. Apart from verbal communication, the professional must be sensitive to the way the person presents oneself and poses questions, as well as the body expressions used. According to Coimbra de Matos, the helping professional is a “face specialist” (2007, p. 121).

Only after listening and understanding what has been heard the professional should talk, always respecting the message and the linguistic code of the person. Often, the professional is guilty of “not listening to the other” (Salomé, 1995, p. 46), because the messages the other transmits are too coded or because the professional does not respect the time and the availability of the other.

Finally, letting the other talk should not be confused with an unspoken message, but rather with respect for the territory and the communicational time of the person, as well as with the possibility of using other languages that facilitate the process of building the helping relationship (Salomé, 1995).

After this brief background, the case of Francês will be presented, followed by a reflection on the specificities of developing a professional helping relationship with adolescents.

Francês, A Life Story

Francês was born in 1992, being the youngest of four children. Due to the death of his mother and the resignation of his father from parental duties and responsibilities, he was handed to the care of his paternal grandparents. Due to their advanced age, caring for the grandchildren was not an easy task. Francês was the one that created more difficulties, namely through constant oppositional and defiant behaviors.

At the age of eight, Francês lost the sight of one eye during a game with sticks with his older brother. This event represented a key moment in the relationship with this brother, with whom he developed a troubled relationship from then on, fueling feelings of anger and a sense of revenge.

Around the age of ten, Francês began to be accompanied by the Commission for the Protection of Children and Young People (CPCJ), after the school has denounced the case by school absenteeism. At that time, and following the intervention of the CPCJ, he started psychological follow-up and, later, at the age of fourteen, the support also has included pedopsychiatric follow-up. These supports were brief, as a consequence of the improvements evidenced in the school context. This development was sporadic, however, with the subsequent aggravation of his problems: school investment became less and less and behavioral problems worsened, with thefts of colleagues' belongings and school materials. At home, similar episodes were repeated with grandparents. In addition, Francês spent more and more time on the street, without any supervision or defined limits, and the caretakers did not know where their grandson was or what he was doing. It was in this moment that he started smoking.

Francês had no friends at school and at home the relationship with his family was poor. The older sister, who was his main affective reference, had emigrated, keeping only occasional telephone contacts and visits on festive events. The only relationship that the teenager considered positive at this stage of his life was with an adult, a homeless man who was sleeping in an abandoned old factory near his home. Francês spent a lot of time in his friend's company, particularly during the period when he should be in school, helping the man in the task of removing copper from the building for later sale, buying him some food and even making some meals together in a space created for this purpose inside the building.

His grandparents began to demonstrate inability to cope, with repeated behaviors characterized by constant discussion and challenge, by active refusal to comply with family rules and by disregarding his mistakes, misbehaviors, school failure and absenteeism. The grandparents' sense of helplessness led them to ask for help, resulting in the possibility of institutional sheltering. Before entering into the institution, Francês stated that he wanted to keep living with his grandparents, whom he liked and felt good with. Nevertheless, he recognized that he often did not behave properly, acting contrary to what was asked of him or expected from him.

The Institutional Sheltering

Francês entered into a Temporary Shelter Center at 15 years of age. His adaptation was swift and he rapidly understood the dynamics of the institution and related positively with all adults and peers. His life project was developed

together with professionals and focused on the return to the family and on the attendance of a Professional Course, which would give him the equivalence to 9th grade.

At the time of his institutionalization, he attended 6th grade. As the school year was ending, the decision was to continue in the same school, even knowing in advance that Francês was negatively viewed by teachers, staff and his peers, particularly his classmates. Although he finished the year without significant improvements, especially in regard to the acquisition of knowledge, Francês concluded the 6th grade and this success was justified by some improvements in attendance and mainly by the school intention to free itself and free the student, so that he could start a professional training course.

Despite the positive relationship with the adults of the institution, Francês did not develop any relation of proximity that allowed him to have an emotionally meaningful figure of reference in an adult. The teenager identified the relationships he had developed as positive. However, these were not strong and genuine enough to create the necessary trust environment for the change to occur. Lies and mistrusts were thus common features in his interaction and communication, particularly with the professionals that were closer to him. In fact, this pattern was already identified by his grandparents and brothers. During the meetings with professionals, they reported the difficulties in communicating with and trusting Francês and they recognized that sometimes they ended up being unfair to him. They described him as a young man closed off, silent and gloomy.

It should also be noted that the only relationship that Francês described as positive was, in fact, very fragile. He has never expressed willingness to look for the friend who lived in the abandoned factory, although, sometimes he referred to this friend when telling his past adventures to his new colleagues. By thinking that such hesitation was due to the fear that professionals would repeat the same prejudice he had previously heard in other contexts (due to his friend being homeless and much older) the team decided to visit this man in the place where he lived. He received the team in a friendly way, but described a different scenario from the one that Francês referred to. This man told the team about the teenager and demonstrated that he knew some things about his life. However, he also told them that he did not spend as much time with him as they thought. Although he sympathized with him, they did not have a close relationship. Moreover, he referred to feeling sorry for Francês, because he was always alone

and appeared to be a sad boy.

Although, with the entry into CAT, Francês ceased to be as quiet and gloomy as he was at home - this factor was also highlighted by the family that found him different and better on weekends he spent with them - the pattern of his relationships did not change: mistrust, lies, self-closure, as well as the pursuit of personal benefits. As a matter of principle, Francês protected his colleagues of the institution when there was a problem, although he would also report inappropriate behaviors (e.g., absenteeism and thefts among colleagues), if he saw any personal benefit there.

It is important to point out that for many young people, the institutionalization is interpreted as a punishment. This is not far from the truth, since they are separated from their contexts, their families, their roots and their identity references. The cases of young people facing entry into an institution viewed as a positive factor are very rare. This notion, of being a punishment or a direct consequence of negative attitudes or behaviors, prevails (regardless of the family history). This is the starting point for change.

At the beginning of the next school year, Francês was able to enroll in a Professional Course in the area in which he had demonstrated motivation from the day he joined the institution. The admission to this specific course was not easy, because there were only a few spots for many candidates, but he was able to get in. After two months of training, the teenager was practically failing due to lack of attendance. However, he was given a new opportunity to initiate this training in a responsible way, after he assumed a commitment to change, with the class director. During a meeting with the professional in charge of his education and with the class director, Francês committed himself not to miss school and to seriously invest in the course. He did not comply with the agreement and was invited by the school to withdraw.

Faced with the fact that he did not invest in a project he had aspired, Francês did not take responsibility for his actions, as usual, arguing that "this was not what I wanted", "it was very difficult", "we never did anything practical, we just watched others do it". This posture allowed the team to foresee the difficult work to motivate and commit Francês with a life project.

After some time in the institution, a daily occupation plan was defined with Francês, which consisted of small repair tasks, defined according to his interests and oriented towards the acquisition of autonomy skills (cleaning, housekeeping, cooking and laundry). The deprivation of some privileges previously conquered

was also set (including authorized exits and greater autonomy in managing his free time); on the grounds that, until then, he had not been able to properly manage his time. It was only from here that the teenager showed interest in entering a new course. The team sought to promote his enthusiasm, but was aware that his motivation was mainly related with the possibility of having a less institution-centered routine with more autonomy to manage his time and less effective supervision. This view was explained to him. If he could not find motivation in training, as an important part of pursuing his life project, but just as a way for spending more time on the street, he could hardly succeed. Francês had a very positive speech about his new life project and stated his will to change.

After a month and a half, Francês joined training in pastry and bakery. He started the training attending classes regularly and with a tight supervision of the team. However, this initial mood lasted just over a month, after when he started to miss classes. During the period of two months he left the institution daily at 8:00 am and returned at 8 pm, without anyone knowing where he was or what he did during the day.

Shortly thereafter, it was decided to take Francês out of the course, which in practical terms he no longer attended. It was also decided, together with the family and CPCJ, that henceforth he would spend the time at the institution involved in daily tasks, according to a plan of occupation, as if it was a job.

Building And Developing A Helping Relationship

The initial phase of this process was not easy. Francês lost autonomy in the management of his time and felt diminished. Unlike other colleagues, especially those close to his age and with whom he had greater affinities, he was very much controlled by adults of the institution. Also, despite not having a formative occupation, he had less free time. Necessarily, this change produced effects and Francês' reaction was evident.

At this stage, the differentiated role assumed by a professional was crucial. Through daily monitoring, this professional sought to develop with the teenager a privileged relationship of closeness, empathy and mutual respect.

During the period when he was with the institution with a daily plan of activities, Francês fulfilled his tasks. It was a plan that included practical activities, namely carpentry and bricolage, household, scholar and also recreation tasks. This plan had an educational character and intended also to meet his main interests.

Although Francês's posture was negative in general, the zeal, rigor, and competence with which he performed his tasks were valued. The most positive aspects of the work performed, the knowledge and skills gradually acquired were valued. Similarly, difficulties, weaknesses and even the lack of motivation in tasks were worked with the teenager in a positive perspective, always emphasizing his qualities and potential, identified first by the professional and progressively by him, in a clear process of self-knowledge and self-valorization. The intervention was towards the development of his capacity to change and act according to his own circumstances, positive or negative, mobilizing his knowledge, skills and aspirations, without neglecting his doubts, difficulties and fears.

This process was long and never linear. Several times Francês demonstrated an attitude of refusal, saying "no one can tell me what to do!". Faced with this declaration, the professional developed a feedback about the real dimension of what Francês had stated. Namely, according to the existentialist perspective, for the only reason we are alive and we can choose our own steps, we have the responsibility to always do the best we can. This is the immeasurable responsibility, to ourselves and others, of deciding our own way. Therefore, the greatest proof of independence (i.e., of being in charge of ourselves) is to give the best of ourselves. This message was emphasized with Francês in the institutional daily life, through different strategies and discourses and in various contexts, especially when engaged in tasks and in individualized spaces. The aim was to help the teenager to recognize his qualities and capacities, as well as to discover the inherent responsibility of decision-making, characteristic of the growing process. This work allowed greater complicity and emotional closeness, as Francês was able to establish with the professional a more genuine and honest communication, opening doors to a quality relationship and to the support that could be provided to him.

During this time, he began to show no interest in sleeping at his grandparents' house during the weekends, as usually happened, in order to stay more time at the institution. This lack of interest did not represent a detachment in the relationship with them, but rather the awareness that he could find, in other contexts, affectively richer and more emotionally satisfying relationships.

Indeed, after the work developed in the institutional context of proximity and investment in him and in his abilities and skills, Francês showed positive developments in self-esteem, particularly evident in his communication about

what he was capable to do. He also showed changes with regard to: self-image – demonstrating a greater care for his appearance and personal hygiene; the responsibility assumed in carrying out his tasks and activities, inside and outside the institution; the management of his free time. The professional of the helping relationship was always present in this process, taking an attentive posture, and, whenever necessary, of comfort and encouragement. However, the professional also gave him space, respecting and encouraging his progressive autonomy and individualization, without distancing himself from the young man.

After a difficult period – when he was faced with the new school failure, his dropout attitude towards challenges and with changes in his life that included staying all day in the institution and the close supervision of an adult - the relationship has evolved, namely in terms of confidence. Feeling that the professional was close and unconditionally accepted and believed in him – in his competences and potential for change and growth – Francês began to accept and believe more in himself and in others. This relational experience of closeness and trust enabled Francês to experience a new and safer relational pattern, guided by affectivity, but also by limits. This change extended to other relationships, visible in the greater emotional (not just instrumental) proximity to others, and by the use of positive strategies in the interaction with others.

Francês started dating a girl. He negotiated a schedule within his plan of activities, so that he could date. However, this was rarely complied and soon the teenager began to spend the night at his girlfriend's house. Professionals' warnings against this behavior had no effect. He was dazzled by his first love and had the support of his girlfriend's parents.

This apparent setback was, however, seen by Francês as a step forward in his life. To demonstrate this to the professional, he complied with most of the tasks that had been outlined at the time of his withdrawal from school, trying to demonstrate that this love relationship was not an escape from his responsibilities, but an evolution in his life. This love relationship, the influence of the girlfriend and the acceptance of her parents had positive aspects. In view of the new situation, and together with his girlfriend's parents, his grandparents and the CPCJ, it was decided that Francês would stay at his girlfriend's house three times a week. This agreement was followed by a specific work with the teenager on issues of sexuality and intimacy.

Very soon positive changes were verified. Under pressure from his girlfriend, Francês stopped smoking hashish. In his own words: "she said: that shit or me,

choose! I had no doubts." He continued complying with his tasks at the institution and his relationships, both with colleagues and with adults, kept up the positive evolution. When he was at his girlfriend's house, he contributed to the improvement of the living space (e.g., repairing windows, blinds and furniture), as a way of repaying the affection he received and the acceptance he felt there. Not long after, Francês changed his residence to his girlfriend's house. The CPCJ was informed and agreed with this change and the Temporary Shelter Center remained as an effective support for him, a resource center with the doors open in case something was wrong.

Shortly thereafter, Francês referred to not feeling well to live and eat in a house, without contributing economically. Supported by the institution resources, he started an active job search. He responded to various job advertisements in tourism and construction, and went to some interviews. A restaurant in the city center called him for an interview for the position of kitchen helper. With anxiety he said: "What I'm I going to say? I do not know how to cook! They will soon realize. I do not know if I'll go to the interview". With the support of the helping professional, he realized that he had months of training in the same tasks that would be requested in this job, because every day he helped in preparing lunch and in organizing and cleaning the kitchen of the institution.

On the day of the interview, Francês, accompanied by the professional, arrived ten minutes before the scheduled time. After thirty minutes he left the interview with a big smile - "I did it! I begin tomorrow". He described that further to usual questions, the employer requested him to peel and chop an onion, and to peel and cut a potato into sticks. The teenager was very familiar with these tasks and he passed this test with distinction, beginning his professional career.

For three months he scrupulously fulfilled his contract of six days of work per week and ten hours per day. He did not miss a single day. However, the employer only paid the first month. Francês got discouraged and asked for help to solve the situation. This was not immediately given, encouraging him to autonomously manage the problem. However, after three months without receiving the salary, the helping professional involved in the situation had a hard conversation with the employer, informing him that the teenager was not alone. Francês received the unpaid salaries, but was fired. After this episode, he started a new search for work, but got discouraged after three months without results.

Meantime, his sister who lived outside the country invited him to spend Christmas with her. Francês answered that he would love to go, but with his

girlfriend. With his sister approval, the teenager and the girlfriend departed for two weeks. During the check in at the airport a new learning occurred. He was underage – was still seventeen years old – and so, he could not board without his parents' permission. He did not know what to do. His father, as usual, was absent and his legal representative (in this case the professional of the institution) could not take responsibility, since the guardianship was not delivered to the institution (but only the custody). The professional sent the official document of the court with the authorization of Francês' trip. This document was sufficient to allow the board. Francês went on his first trip by plane, without, however, knowing what was reserved for him.

He returned, as he said, a different person: more objective and with well-defined goals. He expressed the will to join his sister, work and build a future in the country she lived in. His girlfriend was included in his plan, but she rejected the possibility of leaving her family and her country. However, she encouraged him to go and pursue his happiness, as she would do too. Once again, Francês sought support and comfort from the helping professional and decided to keep his new goals. After obtaining permission from the CPCJ, he said goodbye to his girlfriend and left, in mid-January, ending the institutional sheltering.

During the first two months he stayed at his sister's house and started working with his brother-in-law. He phoned the helping professional, his figure of reference, twice a week. He said he was good and committed to be happy. In the third month, Francês got a job more suited to his interests, which he learned and performed, with pleasure.

He returned to Portugal at the end of the summer, on vacation, to visit his family and friends. He went to the former girlfriend's house to tell her parents the news of the new country and thank them for their affection. Francês requested that the former girlfriend, now in a new relationship, to always consider him a good friend. He also confessed to her that their relationship was one of the best things that ever happened in his life.

Every time he returns to Portugal, he visits his ex-girlfriend and her parents, the institution, his grandparents and his siblings. The telephone minimizes distances and Francês maintains regular contact with Portugal.

Discussion

Being the helping relationship an "implicit shared relationship of intimacy" (Coimbra Matos, 2004, p. 29), the professional must know and take into account

the personal characteristics and the developmental stage of the person who is helped. Based on the narrative of the life story and the relationship built between the helping professional and Francês, this discussion will reflect on the specificities of developing a professional helping relationship with teenagers in institutional shelters.

The Request For Help

The helping relationship can be requested by adolescents, but in most cases it is determined by services, such as the Family and Children Court, or by their legal guardians, parents or, if institutionalized teenagers, by the case manager / guardian professional. In such cases, part of the initial work is to inform the adolescents about the reasons that led to their referral and provide them the opportunity to tell their version of the story (Coutinho, 2006).

The intervention takes place when the adolescent, the family or professionals perceive and recognize that something is not right (that is usually evident by nonverbal behaviors).

Challenges Of An Intervention In The Day-To-Day Life Of An Institution

When it takes place in a Temporary Center Shelter, the helping relationship occurs and develops in the context of this shelter's day-to-day life.

According to Pais (2002), the day-to-day life includes routines and breaks, making it relevant to know and understand what is routine, repetitive and regular actions, but also the disruptions in what is regular, that is, the unexpected.

In this case, the helping professional was very attentive to everyday life experiences of Francês in the institution and sought to understand his reality in the different dimensions – school, family, social relations and others – in order to realize how Francês thought, felt and acted towards the institutional and relational dynamics and the unexpected challenges.

In this sense, the professional assumed, according to Pais (2002), the posture of a traveler researcher, since he did not limit his knowledge about the reality of Francês to what had been shown to him. The professional tried to go further, showing curiosity and interest in knowing his reality, as it was presented in the “here and now”, walking through different paths, some already expected, others totally unexpected and invisible. By adopting a posture of active listener and giving voice to Francês, the professional understood his problems, needs, desires and potentialities. They defined together small steps and realistic, clear and specific goals of change (Soriano, 2005). In articulation with the CPCJ and other

professionals (i.e., from school and training institutions), with his family and later with the family of his girlfriend, the professional sought to “Get educated in the everyday event” (Capul, & Lemay, 2003, p. 95), taking advantage of all the opportunities provided by the different contexts where Francês lived.

This was the context in which the relationship developed and strengthened, the need for institutionalization decreased and gradual changes occurred.

Building An Attachment Relationship

Considering the specificities of the institutional sheltering, the proximity and affinity between the helping professional and the adolescent should be desirable and inevitable. Nevertheless, for adolescents who have experienced relationships of insecure attachment or abandonment, building a meaningful and trusting relationship can be very difficult, as evidenced by Francês’ story. Therefore, the beginning of a helping relationship is often challenging. In these cases, it is particularly important for the professional to be attentive and sensitive to behaviors of weak attachment and to show himself as an affective and trustworthy figure, whom the adolescent can turn to, whenever he needs help. This paper described several situations in which the helping professional has been a protective figure, such as the support provided to Francês to solve the problem with the employer and the intervention to ensure that the commitments were honored.

The sharing of daily life over a long period of time, during an important and necessarily memorable stage in the life of Francês, enabled the development of essential ties to the establishment and strengthening of the helping relationship and which lasted beyond the sheltering time. The comfort and reciprocity achieved in the relationship allowed Francês to establish a secure relationship with the professional, that was essential to start his journey towards greater empowerment, responsibility and autonomy. It should be noted, however, that this was a winding path with advances and setbacks, which required the professional to show frustration tolerance, perseverance and belief in the teenager. These characteristics were fundamental to support Francês "in his condition of a thinking being, with feelings and able to seek and direct his own need for change" (Simões et al., 2006, p. 47).

The Role Of The Professional And The Adolescent

The quality of the meeting depends, to a large extent on the professional’s acceptance of the person being helped. This implies that the professional, more

than physically present, is emotionally involved, showing maximum attention, respect, and unconditional positive regard for the person, listening with empathy and supporting him/her to enhance his/her sense of security (Simões et al., 2006; Rogers, 1961/2010).

By being honest, genuine and sensitive with Francês, and by being entirely with him, the helping professional promoted within the relationship, "the necessary conditions for the emergence of inner truth" (Amaral Dias, 1988, p. 133). For Francês, and for young people in general, being "momentarily submerged by an emotional relation far beyond the verbal level, encourages them to reorganize themselves, as they find an adult sufficiently secure and empathetic (but distanced from their drama) who can report what has been experienced, make sense of the unintelligible and so structure a universe that became cataclysmic" (Capul & Lemay, 2003, p. 101).

The Francês' capacity of acceptance was visible throughout the process, since the professional believed in his intrinsic value, even when the teenager showed less adjusted behaviors - challenging and lying or when he gave up or did not meet the tasks and commitments. In these cases, the helping professional classified his behaviors and set limits, acting as a representative of the law (Capul & Lemay, 2003). The definition of limits proved constructive for Francês and helped him to know himself – as a person within a group / community / society - with rights, but also with duties and responsibilities. By being more aware of himself and others, he was able to act in a more adjusted and healthy way in the relationship with others. He was also able to build a path that was more in line with his interests and more realistic to his capabilities and limitations.

Rassial (as cited in Coutinho, 2006) stressed the need for the professional to constantly question the position he is occupying in the transfer: adult, master or accomplice. When taking the position of an adult, the professional can be rejected, by the similarity with the parents' speech and attitude; on the other hand, the professional should not take the position of an accomplice, since the adolescent is looking for a master that clarifies his uncertainties, doubts and questions. The professional "should be able to answer these issues so that new meanings can be found" by the adolescent (Rassial, 1999, as cited in Coutinho, 2006, p. 50). In the story of Francês, the professional mainly adopted the role of a master, although at a certain time, he had to take the position of an adult, when he had to classify behaviors and impose limits and rules, essential for the

teenager to organize himself.

The investment of the person being helped is equally important, because he/she is the protagonist of the his/her own process of change and who will outline the way forward (Simões et al., 2006). Francês was always involved in the development of his life project and, at the end of the helping process, he was able to autonomously define the course of his life, which he pursued with determination, tenacity and responsibility.

The helping process occurs in the interface between the characteristics and motivation of the person being helped and the qualities, know-how and investment of the helper. That is, "the relationship and involvement between the individual and the professional is what enables the creation and re-creation of the true individual: free, spontaneous and happy" (Coimbra Matos, 2004, p. 28).

Intervention Strategies

The intervention with adolescents is complex and challenging (Bunge, Scandar, Musich, & Carrea, 2015). Often they resist. Thus, in addition to the relational qualities previously explained, the intervention must include humor, be playful, dynamic, creative. Hence, it is important to use different strategies, such as dialogue and leisure, artistic and musical activities. In the case of Francês, the strategies used included the involvement in tasks in the institution's day-to-day life and related to his personal and professional autonomy.

Dialogue - mediated or not by music and other activities - is the primary strategy for working with adolescents and was the most used with Francês. Nevertheless, adolescents quite often have difficulty communicating and expressing themselves orally, which can trigger or fuel conflicts with others. With this in mind, the helping professional – in addition to seeking to understand the meanings of Francês' experiences – tried to adjust his language to the young man's, to his circumstances, to the time and the developmental tasks he encountered. The professional made an effort to transmit clear and accurate messages, namely related to sexuality and intimacy, so that Francês clearly understood the content. The availability of the professional to listen, without judgment, to the doubts and concerns of the teenager, and the maturity to accept and hold his incomprehension, opposition and emotion were fundamental to this process.

It is clear, therefore, that Francês valued the professional who: listened to him, respecting his opinions; sought to maintain a distance, respecting his space;

chose private spaces for the intervention, ensuring confidentiality; sat beside him, even without words, showing an availability and complicity.

Collaboration With Families: A Possible And Necessary Alliance?

To understand the person, the professional has to consider the reality of his life, which includes family, friends and the community, among others (Capul & Lemay, 2003). Regardless of whether the family asks for help or not, family should be, wherever possible, involved, in the intervention. In the case of Francês, his family had an impact in decisions taken during intervention.

Working with families, although important, can hinder the intervention with the adolescent, particularly if a tight connection among families and professionals is established. Within this context, Coutinho (2006) asserts that this is a controversial and problematic issue. In Francês, the family was involved from the beginning. Throughout the process, the family proved to be committed to his life project and available to be a part of it. His grandparents pledged to welcome him at weekends and his sister, with whom Francês had a special relationship, gave him the opportunity to access a new reality, under her protection.

Guided by the professional, family members and other meaningful people can be effective therapeutic elements (Kazdin & Weisz, 2010, cited in Bunge et al., 2015), as Francês' sister.

Conclusion

Within a Temporary Shelter, the professional shares with adolescents key properties of human relationships: coexistence, closeness, affections. Like any other human being, these adolescents feel the need for affection and to be seen, heard, respected, valued, loved. They feel the need to have someone available to themselves, in whom they can trust and with whom they can share experiences and think - about themselves, about others, about life - and define paths.

Indeed, the helping relationship appears to be a particularly rich and relevant possibility for psychosocial intervention. This relationship focuses on the person being helped and is based on the belief that he/she has all the capabilities and resources to overcome adversities and to self-actualize.

Based on these principles, the helping professional should not, at any time, doubt the capabilities of the adolescents, regardless of the suffering and behaviors that they can show. Although a more directive attitude may be necessary in some moments and circumstances, the professional must look at these adolescents as individuals with potentialities and facilitate their empowerment and autonomy to

reflect about themselves and define a life project, by implying adolescents in their own helping process (Soriano, 2005).

It is in this dynamic of mutual exchange of experiences and feelings (with a deep respect for each other) that they develop the ties and the complicity necessary for change to happen.

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