

The right to give: The contextual work with siblings in placement

By Haxhe, S. & de Saint Georges, M.C.

The importance of siblings in the social-emotional development has been demonstrated in many clinical and research papers. It has also been demonstrated that the sibling bond constitute a potential source of support and reliability. For example, studies have demonstrated that sibling relationships may have a protective effect throughout life (Cicirelli, 1995) and serve as a moderating factor between stressful life events and psychological symptoms (Gass, Jenkins & Dunn, 2007; Feinberg & al, 2013).

The sibling bond has also been studied in the specific context of placement, foster care and adoption, more and more over the past fifteen years. Hegar (2005) made an overview of international research dealing with the effects of joint placement, evaluated according to various criteria. When the criterion for evaluation is the sustainability of the placement, the studies done in the United States (Staff & Fein, 1992), the Netherlands (Boer & al., 1994), and England (Holloway, 1997; Rushton & al., 2001) show that joint placements of siblings have not only no more disruptions that the placements of only children, but even tend to be more stable in time. When the criterion is the psycho-emotional development of the child (evaluated by the Child Behavior checklist of Achenbach, 1991), it appears that children placed with siblings have fewer emotional and behavioural problems (Smith, 1998) that those placed alone, which is also underlined by the study of Boer & al. (1994).

Unfortunately, in most of the European countries, when children are placed in institutional care, economic and administrative constraints impose a separation of the siblings. Thus, not only do children have to deal with the traumatic experience of being separated from their parents but they also have to deal with the separation from their siblings. The placement of siblings in a same institution or foster care offers a unique opportunity to reinforce their relationship, which may represent a solid source of trustworthiness, reliability and security.

Through a case study, we will show how the emphasis placed on what is given and received between siblings is likely to increase not only their relational trust but also their sense of personal value, as the need for giving is crucial for each human being (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1984; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). We will also show that destructive entitlement and the effect of revolving slate within the sibling group, instead of being a failure of joint placement, is a precious lever to work on experiences of injustice.

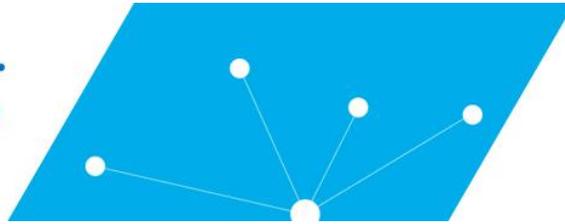
Finally, we will present two research projects on this matter, launched at the University of Liège.

Keywords: sibling placement, contextual work, give and take, destructive entitlement.

Type: case study and research applications.

We are submitting an abstract with a paper to follow, soon submitted in a belgian journal (french).

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