

## **Towards an Interdisciplinary Understanding of Childhood**

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### **1. Introductory Thoughts**

This book aims to serve as a comprehensive guide for legal professionals engaged in the field of working with children. It assists them in navigating the complexities of children's social and personality development. Designed in collaboration with the Ferenc Mádl Institute of Comparative Law and the Association for Children's Rights, this guide not only provides knowledge on children's social and personality development but is also crafted meticulously to address today's nuanced challenges and evolving landscape concerning children. By equipping lawyers with deeper understanding of children's developmental milestones and psychological needs, this guide aims to enhance law professionals' effectiveness and advocacy on behalf of young clients.

In cooperation of the Ferenc Mádl Institute of Comparative Law and the Association for Children's Rights, we devoted many hours to define the goal and focus of this book's first edition.

We talked to several law professionals, inquiring their needs in the field of their work with children. We obtained insights into the enormous variety of practices and experiences encompassing the lawyers' work. Whether practicing in family law, juvenile justice, education law, or other specialised areas, lawyers often encounter unique legal and ethical considerations when representing children. This book discusses many psychological aspects that need to be considered when making a decision about a child's life. We are pleased to say that our invitation to contribute to this book was accepted by all the neighbouring countries in Central-Europe. Academics from noted universities participated in our endeavour to offer landscapes from developmental psychology.

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Before we delve into the content of our book, we would like to show how profoundly psychology and law intersect in safeguarding and promoting the well-being of children. This collaboration is essential as it integrates insights from both disciplines to address the complex needs of young individuals in legal contexts, ensuring that their rights and development are prioritised. Psychology provides invaluable understanding of a child's development, behaviour, and mental health. Psychologists utilise empirical research and clinical expertise to assess the psychological and emotional well-being of children involved in legal proceedings. They provide assessments that inform decisions about custody, visitation rights, and interventions aimed at supporting the child's adjustment and resilience. Psychologists also offer therapeutic interventions to help children cope with trauma, manage emotions, and navigate the challenges associated with legal processes. Law, on the other hand, establishes the legal framework that protects children's rights and determines their best interests. Legal professionals, including judges, lawyers, and child advocates, rely on psychological assessments and expert testimony to make informed decisions in cases involving child custody, abuse, neglect, and adoption. They interpret and apply laws that ensure children are provided a safe and nurturing environment that is free from harm and conducive to their overall well-being.

In the book, we will explore various theoretical schools within developmental psychology, each offering unique perspectives on the journey from childhood to adulthood. These theories provide frameworks for understanding the complex processes involved in human development, from cognitive and emotional growth to social and moral maturation. One overarching framework that professionals often utilise is the bio-psycho-social approach. This comprehensive model is not new to the field of human studies, including psychology, but it remains fundamental in contemporary practice. The bio-psycho-social approach emphasises the interconnectedness of biological, psychological, and social factors in shaping an individual's development. Biologically, this framework considers genetic predispositions, brain development, physical health, and other physiological processes. Psychologically, it examines cognitive functions, emotional regulation, personality traits, and mental health. Socially, it considers the influence of family, peers, culture, and societal structures. The bio-psycho-social approach ensures that no facet of a child's development is overlooked. By integrating insights from various domains, professionals can provide more comprehensive and effective support. For instance, understanding how a child's anxiety might be linked to both genetic factors and stressful social environments can lead to more targeted and multifaceted interventions. Moreover, this holistic perspective is crucial because it aligns with the understanding that development is a dynamic and interactive process. Children do not grow and develop in isolation; their experiences are continuously shaped by the interplay of their biological makeup, psychological state, and social context.

In summary, the bio-psycho-social approach provides a valuable meta-framework for professionals working with children. It underscores the importance of addressing the whole child, ensuring that interventions are well-rounded and considerate of all

factors influencing development. This approach promotes a more nuanced and effective understanding of how to support children in their journey towards adulthood, acknowledging their complex and multifaceted nature as developing human beings.

In the last few years, thanks to the Ferenc Mádl Institute of Comparative Law and the Association for Children's Rights, two international conferences were held in 2022 and 2023 in Hungary devoted to the main and most urgent issues in the field of children's rights and children's well-being. We enjoyed the attendance of many law theorists, practitioners, and other child professionals who gathered and shared knowledge and experience on interdisciplinary thinking about children's life today.

One most noted child professional who participated in the Children's Rights Days in Hungary in 2023 is Dr Beáta Pászthy. She is a paediatrician, child psychiatrist, family psychotherapist, and associate professor of the 1st Department of Paediatrics, and she was awarded the Prima Prize in the Hungarian Science category in 2021. She often refers to the bio-psycho-social well-being in her statements:

A nation's development, its community mentality, its ability to unite, its present and, above all, its future, are determined by how it treats the most downtrodden, the most underserved, and among them most of all children. In welfare societies with declining populations, the HEALTH of children and the growing generation is particularly important, which does not mean the absence of disease, but physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. I think the Hungarian language expresses this complexity in the most beautiful way. In this sense, authentic and coherent programs aimed at the health and well-being of children carry unquestionable positive content, encourage the unity of society, direct attention to the future, and even their short-term results directly improve the individual and social feeling of well-being. In the long term, they improve the health indicators of the society from child to adult, reduce the occurrence of self-destructive behaviors, the number of unproductive life years spent in illness, and significantly increase the nation's competitiveness. Society's investment in children's ENTIRE is the surest investment in the future. Children's HEALTH is therefore the most important strategic issue for the consumer societies<sup>1</sup>.

Professionals who work with children, particularly in fields such as education, social work, and healthcare, frequently encounter the necessity of adopting this holistic view. They recognise that children must be seen and healed in a manner that addresses all aspects of their being. This means considering the child's physical health, mental well-being, emotional needs, and social environment. As read above, the term "*bio-psycho-social*" inherently suggests an interdisciplinary framework, a key concept central to our working group. This interdisciplinarity was a guiding principle in designing the book's structure and main messages. While the term "interdisciplinary" is often associated with academic settings, its application extends beyond universities and research institutions. In practical settings, such as healthcare, social services, and education, interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial for addressing the complex needs of individuals and communities. Professionals from different

1 Pászthy, 2019.

backgrounds work together to develop comprehensive strategies and interventions, ensuring that all relevant aspects of a problem are considered. This holistic perspective is essential for addressing the complex and interconnected factors that influence the growth and well-being of individuals, particularly children, as they navigate their developmental pathways. Through an interdisciplinary approach integrating psychological understanding with legal protections and advocacy, professionals from both disciplines can collaborate effectively to safeguard children's rights, promote their development, and ensure they grow up in environments that nurture their potential and well-being. This can not only strengthen legal decision-making but also enhance the support systems available to children and families, fostering healthier and more resilient communities overall.

The collaboration between psychology and law is particularly crucial in cases where the child's welfare is at stake. For instance, in cases of abuse or neglect, psychologists may evaluate the impact on the child's development and recommend appropriate interventions to safeguard their welfare. Legal professionals use this psychological insight to advocate for protective measures and ensure the child's safety through legal proceedings. Furthermore, psychology and law work together to advocate for policies and practices that promote children's rights and well-being on a broader scale. This includes advocating for laws that protect children from exploitation, ensuring access to mental health services, and promoting educational opportunities that support their development.

Cases of child maltreatment, current youth mental health issues, and even children's everyday life in educational settings all need an interdisciplinary lens to fully address their complexity and provide effective solutions.

In many countries increasing focus on child abuse led to remarkable changes in recent years. Child protection laws, medical guidelines provide effective means for child protection services. Sound knowledge of the clinical manifestations, the parties involved, and the legal situation are required in order to provide effective child protection interventions.<sup>2</sup>

In cases of child maltreatment, an interdisciplinary approach is crucial for comprehensively understanding and addressing the issue. Medical professionals, psychologists, and counsellors play a vital role in assessing the physical and emotional impacts of maltreatment, offering therapeutic support to help the child process and heal from trauma. Social workers evaluate the child's living conditions and family dynamics, ensuring that the child's environment is safe and supportive. Legal experts navigate the complexities of child protection laws, advocating for child's rights and ensuring that justice is served. This coordinated effort among various professionals ensures that all aspects of the child's well-being are addressed, leading to more effective interventions and long-term support. Current youth mental health issues also demand an interdisciplinary approach. The rising incidence of mental health challenges among young people, such as anxiety, depression, and behavioural disorders, requires the collaboration of mental health professionals, educators, parents, and policymakers. Psychologists and psychiatrists develop and implement therapeutic

interventions tailored to the individual needs of each child. These interventions may include cognitive-behavioural therapy, medication management, and other evidence-based treatments. Educators create inclusive and supportive classroom environments that promote mental well-being and accommodate students' emotional and psychological needs. Parents are integral to this process, offering support at home and working closely with schools and mental health professionals to ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach to their child's well-being. Policymakers advocate for and implement policies that increase access to mental health resources, reduce stigma, and promote mental health awareness within the community. This collective effort helps to create a robust support system for young people, addressing their mental health needs from multiple perspectives and fostering resilience and well-being. In educational settings, an interdisciplinary perspective is equally vital. Teachers, school counsellors, psychologists, and administrators must collaborate to create an environment that supports all aspects of a child's development.

In summary, developing and sustaining partnerships within and across professions that intersect in the lives of children and families are essential in various cases related to children. Interdisciplinary teams try to bridge gaps between child welfare and well-being research, policy, teaching, and service. Achieving a comprehensive understanding of a child's inner and outer circumstances is a complex and challenging task. Understanding the inner world of a child requires sensitivity and expertise to interpret their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours accurately. Psychological assessments, interviews, and observations help in unravelling the underlying issues contributing to the child's difficulties. Equally important is comprehending the outer situation—assessing family dynamics, living conditions, and social environment that may impact the child's development and well-being. Once the diagnosis is established, finding the safest and most effective intervention becomes paramount. This intervention should be tailored to meet the specific needs of the child and their family, considering their unique circumstances and challenges. This involves developing a holistic treatment plan that not only addresses the immediate concerns but also supports long-term healing and growth. Besides the work of psychologists and medical professionals, the role of legal experts is also crucial in advocating for children's best interests in legal proceedings. Ultimately, the goal is to create a supportive and nurturing environment where the child can thrive. This requires a holistic approach that considers all facets of the child's life and engages all relevant stakeholders in collaborative decision-making.

### ***1.1. Key Concepts: Children's Well-Being and Best Interests of the Child***

After establishing our initial thoughts, let us delve into the key concepts that form the foundation of this book. A central concept in discussions about children is their well-being, a term frequently used in children's law, psychology, and protection. We aim to clarify how we define this concept in our book. UNICEF's definition of children's well-being encompasses indicators across six dimensions: material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviour and risks,

and subjective well-being. In recent years, because of the efforts of international organisations and the civil sector, several developed countries have begun adopting a child well-being approach in their policies and services regarding children. This approach parallels the growing understanding of human well-being and reflects the principle, enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Well-being is not solely about avoiding child poverty. Regardless of material circumstances, children can only truly thrive if they are loved and cared for; enjoy good physical and mental health; develop their skills and abilities; live in safe and pleasant homes and environments; and benefit from opportunities for learning, play, leisure, social and cultural life, and personal development. They must also receive information; express their own identity and opinions; participate in decisions that affect their lives; and be protected from violence, neglect, exploitation, and discrimination. Additionally, they should be free from psychological problems and risky behaviour.

An important feature of child well-being is its inclusion of both objectively measurable dimensions, such as income or school performance, and subjective dimensions, such as time spent with friends or opportunities to be creative. Listening to children themselves is crucial for identifying the issues that most affect their well-being at any given time. The relative importance of the different dimensions of child well-being will undoubtedly vary from one age group to another. Moreover, enhancing the well-being of children facing the greatest obstacles will most quickly elevate the well-being of children in the society as a whole.

The multi-dimensional, dynamic nature of child well-being calls for commitment and cooperation from all those responsible for children, including parents and other caregivers, families, the community, the private sector, civil society, government, and professionals responsible for delivering social assistance, education, health, child protection, and other public services. Beyond our individual responsibilities, we can all contribute to the full spectrum of child well-being. Since child well-being is a positive concept that focusses on opportunity rather than deprivation, there is always room for improvement.<sup>3</sup>

In psychology, child well-being encompasses a holistic state of health and development that includes physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions. It is defined by not only the absence of illness or adversity but also the presence of positive experiences and nurturing relationships that promote growth. *Emotional well-being* involves the ability to understand, express, and manage emotions, contributing to resilience and fostering positive self-esteem. *Social well-being* refers to the establishment of healthy relationships with peers, family, and the community, which enhance social skills and create a sense of belonging. *Cognitive well-being* is achieved through opportunities for learning and intellectual growth, encouraging curiosity and active engagement with the world. Spiritual well-being in childhood refers to a child's sense of connection to themselves, others, and the larger world. It encompasses a child's ability to explore and understand existential questions, find meaning and purpose, and foster values that guide their behaviour. Finding *meaning and purpose* in life experiences and understanding one's role in the world as well as

developing personal values and beliefs that influence decisions and behaviour are core components of spiritual well-being. Additionally, children require *safety and stability* to thrive. This entails a secure environment that protects them from harm and provides a consistent context for their development.

### ***1.2. Best Interests of the Child***

The other important concept in our book is the best interests of the child. This term originates from Art. 3 of the UNCRC, which states that ‘In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration’.<sup>2</sup>

The UNCRC includes provisions designed to support a child’s needs for safety; health; family relationships; physical, psychological, and emotional development; identity; freedom of expression; privacy; and agency to form and express their own views. Among these provisions is the well-being of the child. In essence, the best interests of the child are whatever is best for that individual child. The UNCRC explicitly recognises the role of parents and caregivers (including extended family, guardians, and others with legal responsibility) in protecting and promoting the child’s best interests.<sup>4</sup>

Although the UNCRC does not provide a strict definition of the best interests concept, it emphasises the importance of child protection. This concept underscores the idea that children have rights but does not grant them decision-making power. Judicial or administrative authorities in states that have ratified the UNCRC are obligated to consider “the child’s best interests” during all official decision-making processes pertaining to children.

The flexibility of the UNCRC makes the concept adaptable to different situations. However, this broad discretion can also enable decision-makers to impose their own interpretations of the principle, potentially at the child’s expense. The role of psychology is significant in these contexts. Prioritising the best interests of the child as a “primary consideration” acknowledges that these interests must be balanced against other interests.

## **2. Book Content**

The Social and Personality Development of the Child serves as a comprehensive guide tailored for lawyers, intended to be a definitive textbook on children’s development spanning from birth through late adolescence. Each article within the book is designed to be comprehensible on its own, allowing readers to explore specific areas or topics of interest without needing to read the entire volume. However, we emphasise that reading the entire book offers a unique perspective on developmental child psychology. Its diverse content not only covers classical and modern developmental

2 Art. 3.1 of UNCRC.

theories and key debates in developmental psychology but also encourages readers to adopt an integrative approach to contemporary issues such as children's mental health, parenting in the 21st century, and trauma-informed care in child welfare institutions.

Some readers may encounter psychological concepts for the first time. It is important to note that academic and applied child psychology employs specialised terminology, akin to other scientific disciplines. Readers may initially find it challenging to synthesise diverse psychological theories into a cohesive framework. We encourage readers to not be discouraged early on. The investment in reading the entire book is worthwhile, as overlapping discussions and repeated exposure to terms and concepts gradually bring clarity and applicability to everyday practice.

While primarily intended for lawyers, this book may also pique the interest of professionals curious about contemporary issues related to children.

In the pages that follow, we will delve into three distinct parts that structure the book:

*Part one: Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:* This section explores the evolving contexts in which children grow up today, encompassing societal, technological, and cultural influences.

*Part two: Child Development: Social and Emotional Considerations in Personality Development:* This part examines key stages of child development, including insights into social and emotional growth. Topics include trauma and resilience in development, as well as methods for assessing a child's mental health.

*Part three: Future Perspectives: Parenting and Societal Outlook:* The final part provides a forward-looking perspective on parenting practices and societal trends that shape children's futures.

That means that the content is divided into three parts, based on thematic considerations. These sections are designed to provide comprehensive insights into the multifaceted world of child-related issues, offering valuable knowledge and perspectives for both legal professionals and other interested professionals. As mentioned above, our exploration necessarily entails some repetition and overlapping discussion.

### **2.1. Part One: Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The first part starts with a review chapter on children's mental health issues and psychological well-being in our days. Before the reader dives into detailed explanations on developmental stages, it is important to gain an up-to-date picture of the outer and inner contexts of children's life in Central Europe these days. Marina Merkas et al. present a broad overview on this very important area.

As the authors of this chapter note, professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century recognise that children face an unprecedented set of challenges that were unimaginable just a few decades ago. Every day, children encounter increased stress from social pressures, academic demands, and the omnipresent digital environment. The changing dynamics of family life, peer relationships, and cultural influences can pose significant challenges for children's well-being and mental health. Recent studies indicate a significant rise in



mental health issues among children in this era. The authors first define mental health issues; then, they explain how these issues arise and develop, identifying factors that make children vulnerable to developing mental health problems. Third, they provide a detailed overview of the prevalence of the most common mental health issues among children and adolescents. Finally, some strategies are presented that might contribute to the protection and well-being of children in the modern era.

## **2.2. Part Two: Social and Emotional Considerations in Personality Development**

This second and longest part of the book is composed of nine chapters. These texts form the largest section of our book, focussing on social and personality development as the main aspects of human development. Let us pause for a moment and examine these two concepts from a psychological point of view. What is personality, and why do we devote so much attention to social development in childhood?

### *2.2.1. Social Context of Child Development*

The most important aspect of a human being's development is the social context. The process of *socialisation* begins very early in a child's life<sup>3</sup>. It is the process by which children acquire the language and culture of their family and the community into which they are born. Within this community, children learn the language, norms, values, behaviours, expectations and social skills that are appropriate for their "world". Social interactions are an important component of nearly every aspect of our lives. The development of skills necessary to form positive and lasting social interactions begins in infancy and continues to evolve as an individual grows and develops. Skills, such as trust, empathy for others, cooperation, and channelling of emotions (e.g. joy, anger, sadness, and frustration) develop throughout childhood. For most children, the skills needed for social interaction develop naturally. That is, they are acquired through the process of natural interactions within their environment—primarily home and early education settings. They listen, observe, practice, and internalise. By the time children reach adolescence, they begin to test the values and ideas that have shaped their childhood. Friendships and peer groups gain significant importance during adolescence, and social status is related to their conformity to these groups<sup>4</sup>.

*Self-esteem* is considered the most critical skill affecting friendships and other social interactions by the time children reach adolescence. Self-esteem is how we perceive our value to the world and how valuable we think we are to others. Self-esteem affects our trust in others, our relationships, our work—nearly every part of our lives. Positive self-esteem gives us the strength and flexibility to take charge of our lives and grow from our mistakes without the fear of rejection<sup>5</sup>. Individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to persist in the face of failure<sup>6</sup>, while research has revealed that

3 Martindale, Ilan and Schaffer, 2013.

4 Voss, 2020.

5 Orth and Robinson, 2022.

6 Trzesniewski et al., 2006.

low self-esteem can result in long-term poor outcomes, including depression, eating disorders, delinquency, and other adjustment problems. Low self-esteem develops if there is a gap between one's *self-concept* and what he or she believes one "should" be like. *Self-concept*—also referred to as self-identity—is the collection of beliefs one has about him or herself. Self-concept is cognitive and descriptive and reflects our perceptions of our behaviours, abilities, and unique characteristics. It answers the question, "Who am I?". Early on, this view of one's "self" is concrete and descriptive of what the children believe about themselves. Over time, the self-concept changes as children make new discoveries about who they are and what is important to them<sup>7</sup>.

One of the most modern scientific studies on social development can be found in Sue Gerhardt's book *Why Love Matters*<sup>8</sup>, which explains how early social experiences shape our emotional and mental development. It highlights the profound impact of love and nurturing in the future well-being of a person. One of her key messages is that, from an evolutionary perspective, our brain evolves in stages, with the so-called "social brain" developing in the last stage. In everyday speech, we usually refer to "the brain", but this is not quite accurate. We actually have what neuroscientists call a "*triune brain*", or three brains in one. Each of these brains reflects a different stage in our evolution. In the third and final stage, we develop the cerebral cortex in the outer layers of the brain. This is where the *social brain*—the thing that makes humans human—is formed. The social brain is activated when we control our emotions, follow social cues, and experience empathy. It also allows us to go beyond instinctive ways of behaving. A newborn baby's brain has several systems to ensure survival. It has a functioning nervous system that makes it possible for her to breathe, a visual system that lets her track movement, and a core consciousness in the brainstem that enables her to react to sensory stimuli such as temperature. However, the social brain is missing. It only begins developing after the baby is born. After the birth, the baby is an active and interactive agent—an interactive project and not a self-powered one. Various systems in her brain are ready to go, but many more are incomplete and will develop in response to other human inputs. From baby-parent interactions patterns, attachment styles arise and evolve. This means that our earliest experiences are not simply laid down as memories or influences: they are translated into precise physiological patterns of response in the brain that then set the neurological rules for how we deal with our feelings and those of other people for the rest of our lives. It is not nature or nurture, but both. How we are treated as babies and toddlers determines the way in which what we are born with turns into what we are. According to Gerhardt, 'There is nothing automatic about it. The kind of brain that each baby develops is the brain that comes out of his or her particular experiences with people'. This also means that good parenting is not just nice for the baby; it leads to good development of the baby's prefrontal cortex, which in turn enables the growing child to develop self-control and empathy and to feel connected to others. Interaction, it turns out, is the high road from merely human to fully humane.

7 Ibid.

8 Gerhardt, 2015.

### 2.2.2. *Short Notes About Personality*

Personality psychology is the scientific study of individual differences in people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. It explores the patterns and traits that make each person unique, focussing on how these characteristics develop and influence various aspects of life, including behaviour, relationships, and mental health.

Let us see one of the most common definitions of *personality*: The American Psychological Association (APA) defines personality as follows: 'Personality refers to individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. The study of personality focusses on individual differences in particular personality characteristics and how the parts of a person come together as a whole'. This definition emphasises the distinct and consistent patterns in how individuals think, feel, and behave, highlighting the uniqueness of each person's personality. It also underscores the integrative nature of personality, considering how various traits and characteristics combine to form a cohesive personality structure. Based on the APA's considerations, the field of personality psychology studies the nature and definition of personality as well as its development, structure and trait constructs, dynamic processes, variations (with emphasis on enduring and stable individual differences), and maladaptive forms.

Various theories explain the structure and development of personality in different ways, but all agree that personality refers to enduring characteristics and helps determine behaviour that comprises a person's unique adjustment to life. While there is no single agreed-upon definition of personality, it is often thought of as something that arises from within the individual and remains fairly consistent throughout life.

Formation of personality components such as major traits, interests, drives, values, self-concept, abilities, and emotional patterns during childhood involves a complex interplay of genetic, environmental, and social factors. The reader can find detailed texts about these processes in our book, but let us take a glimpse at some of the components, where we can see how socialisation and personality formulation connect with each other. For example, the *emotional regulation* component shows as how children learn to regulate their emotions through their years of socialisation: interactions with caregivers act as a model and teach children coping strategies. Another very important aspect of human personality and emotional life is the *attachment style*: secure attachment to caregivers provides a foundation for healthy emotional development and resilience.

### 2.2.3. *Measuring Personality*

Psychologists measure personality using different primary methods. The main methods involve *projective tests* and *questionnaires*. Projective tests, such as the Rorschach test or the children's apperception test, involve presenting ambiguous stimuli to individuals. The idea is that people project their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences onto these stimuli, revealing underlying personality traits and conflicts. Questionnaires, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory or different inventories applied to children, consist of structured items that assess specific traits

and behaviours. Participants respond to standardised questions, allowing for reliable scoring and comparison across individuals. Both methods provide valuable insights into personality, although they have different strengths and limitations. Projective tests offer depth and qualitative data, while questionnaires provide quantitative measures and ease of administration. Lawyers may encounter the psychological assessment process and its findings in their practice. Therefore, it is essential to understand what occurs during a child's assessment and how to evaluate and utilise a report to support decision-making processes related to children. The chapter presented by Dr Dominik Gołuch (Chapter 2 in Part II) discusses basic issues related to the process of psychological assessment of children and adolescents.

#### *2.2.4. Pathological Ways of Social and Personality Development*

Experts focus on not only the many influences that contribute to normal child development but also various factors that might cause psychological problems during childhood.

Research in applied psychology helps us understand how healthy personality development evolves throughout childhood and by which risk factors a pathological way of development unfolds. When talking about personality pathologies, it is important to understand that based on research, standardised processes and personality assessment methods, we can determine the subclinical and clinical categories of mental health problems. The so-called classification of mental disorders, also known as psychiatric nosology or psychiatric taxonomy, is central to the practice of psychiatry and other mental health professions. Children's classifications systems are part of these nosologies. The two most widely used psychiatric classification systems are the 11<sup>th</sup> Edition of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) produced by the World Health Organization (WHO), and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition (DSM-5), produced by the American Psychiatric Association.

The DSM is the handbook used by healthcare professionals in the United States and much of the world as the authoritative guide for the diagnosis of mental disorders. The DSM contains descriptions, symptoms, and other criteria for diagnosing mental disorders. It provides a common language for clinicians to communicate about their patients and establishes consistent and reliable diagnoses that can be used in research on mental disorders. It also provides a common language for researchers to study the criteria for potential future revisions and to aid in the development of medications and other interventions.

DSM-5 is the latest edition of DSM and includes changes to some key childhood disorders. For example, a diagnosis of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder now requires symptoms to be present prior to the age of 12 years (rather than 7 years, the age of onset in DSM-4).

The other classification system was developed by the WHO in the early 1960s. The WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme became actively engaged in a programme aiming to improve the diagnosis and classification of mental disorders. At

that time, WHO convened a series of meetings to review knowledge, actively involving representatives of different disciplines, various schools of thought in psychiatry, and all parts of the world in the programme. It stimulated and conducted research on criteria for classification and reliability of diagnoses, and it produced and promulgated procedures for joint rating of videotaped interviews and other useful research methods. WHO released the latest version of ICD, ICD-11, which was presented at the World Health Assembly in May 2019 and implemented from 1 January 2022. The recent ICD-11 has met with great interest worldwide. As the most widely used classification system globally that is approved by the WHO, the changes will have direct implications for clinicians and researchers in the field of child psychology.

Note that child and adolescent psychiatry sometimes uses specific manuals in addition to the DSM and ICD. The *Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood* was first published in 1994 by Zero to Three to classify mental health and developmental disorders in the first four years of life. It has been published in nine languages. The Research Diagnostic Criteria-Pre-school Age were developed between 2000 and 2002 by a task force of independent investigators for developing clearly specified diagnostic criteria to facilitate research on psychopathology in this age group. The French Classification of Child and Adolescent Mental Disorders, operational since 1983, is the classification of reference for French child psychiatrists.

#### 2.2.5. Psychological Developmental Theories

Before reading the developmental theories in these chapters, some core supplemental notes from the editor might be useful: it is important to understand that psychological thinking does not mean one clear theory of human beings. The science of psychology experienced sequential eras, each answering the earlier era's questions and critics questioning the earlier theories of human development. Human development is a complex process, and we still do not understand it fully. Psychology has old questions: How does a personality develop? Why does one person get mentally ill while another does not under the same circumstances?

*In the second chapter* of this part of the book (Chapter 3) the reader can become acquainted with one of the oldest debates of developmental psychology, the so-called nature-nurture controversy. Not easy but very worth a read is the chapter by Prof. Dr. Jovan Miric, Ph.D., which discusses classical developmental theories as well as some additions about modern theories. Some of the presented theories focus on the personality as a whole, while others refer to mainly cognitive development, socialisation, etc. In the chapter, you can read about the greatest theorists in developmental psychology—Freud, Erikson, and Piaget—as well as the core concepts and evolution of attachment theories of Bowlby and Ainsworth. The chapter is specially designed for lawyers. To make this serene theoretical text easier to consume, we asked the author to add some research examples of how the nature-environment debate is reflected in concrete personality developmental patterns, such as antisocial behaviour.

*The next chapter* of this part of the book (Chapter 4) presents a profound description of children's development by separated areas. It discusses the stages of social, emotional, and cognitive development, which are three main areas of human development besides physical changes. According to the Author,

“because child psychology is so vast and tries to answer so many questions, researchers and practitioners often separate development into these specific areas. Broadly, these tend to map onto children's physical, cognitive (thinking, learning, memory, etc.), and social/emotional development. Child psychologists attempt to make sense of every aspect of child development, including how children learn, think, interact, and respond emotionally to those around them; make friends; and understand emotions and their own developing personalities, temperaments, and skills”.

The chapter emphasises the first two years of life as a crucial period for cognitive, emotional, and social development. Experiences during this time shape subsequent developmental stages. Positive experiences and a nurturing social environment foster the development of adaptive cognitive schemas, which support balanced social and emotional growth later in life. Conversely, negative experiences and lack of support can lead to schemas that heighten the risk of emotional and social difficulties; hinder the resolution of age-specific challenges; and may increase the likelihood of developing psychopathologies such as anxiety, depression, and personality disorders.

*The longest section of our book* presents a detailed exploration of the four main developmental stages in childhood (Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8). These chapters encompass extensive and diverse knowledge on children's development, drawing from research, applied work, neuroscience, and brain mapping techniques.

Child psychology typically defines several key periods before reaching adulthood at the age of 18 years. Some frameworks refer to the four main stages, while others divide childhood into five stages. The five stages of development in child psychology are newborn, infancy, toddlerhood, preschool age, and school age. For practical purposes, we chose a simplified version of this division in our book. We designate infancy as a separate phase, combine toddlerhood and preschool years into one chapter, and divide school age into two phases: early school age and adolescence.

The stages and corresponding ages (in years) are as follows:

- Infancy (0–1);
- Toddlerhood and preschool age (1.5–6/7);
- Early school age (6/7–11/12);
- Adolescence (12–18).

#### *2.2.6. Trauma and Resilience as Two Important Components of Human Development*

This section of the book delves into two crucial topics: trauma and resilience. Both are inherently part of human development, with negative effects and protective factors playing significant roles in psychological growth. The concept of trauma, as

understood today, is thoroughly examined. Noémi Vigh (Chapter 9) presents a comprehensive overview, offering insights into the basics and relevance of the trauma framework. The focus is on developmental trauma, which has revolutionised our understanding of the symptoms, dynamics, and treatment of mental health issues in both children and adults. Additionally, the chapter explores the connections between trauma, the society, human rights, and the legal system.

Following the discussion on trauma, the next chapter (Chapter 10) provides an overview of the findings from positive psychology, particularly in relation to children's resilience. Positive psychology, which emerged in the late 1990s, aims to shift the focus of psychological research from merely repairing damage to cultivating positive qualities in people and societies. The chapter outlines the historical development of the construct of resilience and elaborates on the contributions of positive psychology to this field. It highlights protective factors and the concept of posttraumatic growth. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of interventions designed to enhance resilience in children and adolescents, along with final remarks.

One major contribution of positive psychology to the field of resilience is the identification and elaboration of protective factors. These conditions or attributes help buffer individuals against the negative effects of stress and adversity. The chapter discusses various protective factors that have been found to be particularly relevant for children, including supportive relationships with family and peers, positive self-esteem, a sense of mastery or competence, and effective coping strategies. By understanding these protective factors, researchers and practitioners can develop targeted interventions to bolster resilience in young people.

A significant portion of the chapter is dedicated to the concept of posttraumatic growth. This concept, which has its roots in positive psychology, refers to positive psychological changes that can occur because of struggling with highly challenging life circumstances. The chapter explores how children and adolescents can experience personal growth and develop new strengths in the aftermath of trauma. It discusses factors that contribute to posttraumatic growth, such as finding meaning in the experience, increasing appreciation for life, and the developing deeper relationships with others.

The chapter concludes with final remarks that underscore the importance of fostering resilience in children and adolescents. It emphasises that building resilience is about not only helping individuals cope with difficulties but also empowering them to thrive and reach their full potential. By integrating the principles of positive psychology into practice, educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers can create supportive environments that nurture the resilience and well-being of the next generation.

### *2.2.7. Spirituality, a Component of Resilience*

The editor of the book finds it essential to add a crucial amendment to these previous chapters. Besides moral development introduced in the chapters, there is one further important field in children's development—spiritual development—which, based on bio-psycho-social and spiritual models, contributes to human wholeness and thriving.

A huge amount of psychological research reveals the role of spirituality in human resilience and well-being. A consensus report prepared by a panel convened by the National Institute for Healthcare Research defined spirituality as behaviours, cognitions, and emotions that arise as part of an individual's search for connection with a divine being, a higher power, or an ultimate truth.<sup>9</sup> So, *spirituality* refers to a broad concept that encompasses a sense of connection to something greater than oneself. It often involves personal growth, meaning making, and the pursuit of inner peace. In psychology, spirituality can be seen as the way individuals seek purpose and fulfilment, which can contribute to overall well-being. It is not confined to organised beliefs and can be expressed through personal practices such as meditation, nature appreciation, or creative expression.<sup>10</sup>

It may be helpful to examine how this intriguing subject has been approached over centuries. Many parents and educators are nowadays voicing their conviction that, in our turbulent society, we must provide youngsters a strong moral sensibility and deep respect for their natural environment. In the fields of counselling and psychotherapy, mechanistic approaches to personality study and treatment are giving way to the notion that human spirituality is an important and inborn characteristic. More and more practitioners are realising that unless we recognise our higher longings, self-fulfilment is likely to remain elusive.

The notion that childhood may harbour special intuitive and spiritual sensitivities has long flourished in Western European traditions. Carl Gustav Jung decisively broke with psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's theory to forge his own systematic explanation of the human psyche. In his system of psychology, spirituality became an important, if not the most important, part of human existence. He introduced a core concept called the "self", which, according to him, is the central archetype in the collective unconscious, embodying the entirety of the psyche and serving as a guiding force towards personal wholeness and individuation. Jung viewed the self as the ultimate goal of psychological development, where an individual achieves a harmonious integration of all aspects of their personality. This process of individuation is a journey towards self-realisation, involving the acknowledgment and integration of one's inner experiences and potentials. The self is thus seen as both the totality of the psyche and the driving force behind an individual's quest for balance and completeness. Through understanding and embracing the self, individuals can achieve a deeper sense of meaning, purpose, and connectedness within their lives.

More recently, interest in spirituality during the early years has emerged from two rather different spheres of psychology. The first comes from therapeutic work with children who are terminally ill or have nearly died as a result of sickness or accident. Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross has been a key pioneer in this domain. Her work led directly into the realm of transcendent experience and the field of psychological research. The second comes from investigators who have reviewed countless reports,

9 George, et al., 2000.

10 Bridged and Moore, 2002.



some by children as young as 2 years, that consistently describe a common series of extraordinary events close to the moment of physical death, called near-death experiences. Kübler-Ross observed, 'I can only say that these (episodes) come from every corner of the world – from religious and non-religious people, believers and non-believers, from every conceivable cultural and ethnic background'.<sup>11</sup>

We have to make a distinction between the terms spirituality and religiousness. The latter may also involve a search for the spiritual, as it is undertaken within a collective (i.e. a church or some other type of religious community) that provides guidance, validation, and support for the methods with which that search is conducted<sup>12</sup>. In summary, both spirituality and religiousness are explored in psychology for their effects on mental health, coping mechanisms, and overall life satisfaction. While *spirituality* refers to a broad concept that encompasses a sense of connection to something greater than oneself, religiousness typically refers to adherence to specific organised beliefs, practices, and rituals associated with a particular faith or religion. It involves community participation, doctrine, and structured forms of worship. In psychology, religiousness is often studied in relation to community support, moral frameworks, and the impact of faith on mental health.<sup>13</sup>

Religious and faith development are described by some notable theorists in psychology. David Elkind's work focusses on the cognitive and emotional development of children in relation to their understanding of religion. He emphasised the role of imagination and how children use symbolic thinking in religious contexts. Elkind noted that as children grow, their capacity to understand abstract religious concepts evolves, moving from concrete representations to more abstract thinking.<sup>14</sup> *James W. Fowler* describes the stages of faith development, outlining a progressive framework from early childhood through adulthood:

- *Stage 1: Intuitive-projective faith* (ages 3–7 years): Children rely on intuition and imagination. Their faith is shaped by stories, images, and symbols.
- *Stage 2: Mythic-literal faith* (ages 7–12 years): Children start to understand religious stories more literally. They begin to distinguish between fantasy and reality but still think in concrete terms.
- *Stage 3: Synthetic-conventional faith* (Adolescence): Adolescents start to see the world from perspectives outside their own and begin to form a more coherent belief system influenced by their peers and authorities.<sup>15</sup>

These theorists collectively highlight that children's faith and religious development involve a gradual and complex process, influenced by their cognitive and emotional growth as well as their social environment. Each stage reflects a deeper and more abstract understanding of faith and religion as children mature.

11 Robinson, 1983.

12 Allport and Ross, 1967.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

### **2.3. Part Three: Future Perspectives: Parenting and Societal Outlook**

In part three of our book, readers will find two significant articles addressing current and future questions related to parenting and societal dynamics.

The first article (Chapter 11) addresses a crucial aspect of children's well-being at the societal level: development of *trauma-informed childcare institutions and educational systems*. Establishing trauma-informed environments represents a significant shift in our approach to prioritising the safety and well-being of children, thus fostering healing, growth, and resilience. The journey towards implementing trauma-informed practices in childcare and education is ongoing across the Central-European Countries. This chapter explores the concept of trauma-informed care in both childcare and education, highlighting the fundamental principles that underpin this approach. It also provides guidelines for creating systems that promote healthy developmental conditions, which are essential for children's daily lives.

The second and final article (Chapter 12) explores the question, *How can the society best support future parents in caring for their children?* Merkas et al. examine the transformations in societal expectations and living conditions over the past 50 years that have influenced perceptions of parenting. They note that the evolving role of mothers as primary caregivers, increased involvement of fathers in family duties and childcare, and impact of digital life are all contributing to a new era of parenting. Today, parents are more likely to seek advice online and look for support from family members or neighbours before consulting professionals. This shift has led to a complex environment where misinformation and public debates about parenting practices are prevalent, making it challenging to navigate the landscape of modern parenting.

## **3. Psychological Development in a Broader Context, And the Changing Image of the Child**

The working definition of childhood in our book refers the period from birth to the age of 18 years. This is an internationally agreed definition of childhood as specified in the UNCRC. This definition encompasses enormous diversity, from small infants to young people. It is not strange to ask the question, What is a child? The answer is by no means as obvious as it may appear in modern societies in which childhood is so powerfully taken for granted. Understanding of what is a child is not fixed. It has differed over historical time and varies from society to society, culture to culture, and time to time. Children are part of families, communities, and nations.

Philippe Aries argued that European childhood is a specific, modern construction dependent on the particular social and historical factors in Europe. Sociologist Chris Jenks aptly described the complex Western discourses around childhood. He commented that ideas about children are so contradictory over time that it is possible to take one adjective to describe childhood and believe it to be true, and then take its opposite and also believe this. Some of the complex Western contemporary

ideas about children are inherited from past philosophical, artistic, and scientific discourses.

The discourse surrounding childhood has evolved significantly over time, with key contributions from philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Each of these thinkers presented a distinct perspective on the nature of children, reflecting broader societal beliefs and shaping contemporary views. *Hobbes* portrayed children as inherently evil, emphasising a Puritan discourse that suggests the need for strict control and guidance. This perspective highlights a view of childhood as a state requiring intervention to prevent moral decay, framing children as beings in need of discipline. In contrast, *Locke* introduced the idea of the child as a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate. According to his theory, children are neither inherently good nor evil but are shaped entirely by their experiences and upbringing. This discourse emphasises the importance of education and the environment in fostering a child's development, suggesting that nurturing and positive influences can lead to moral growth. *Rousseau*, on the other hand, presented a more optimistic view, seeing children as inherently good. This Romantic discourse celebrates the innate potential of children and advocates for a naturalistic approach to upbringing, encouraging freedom and exploration as essential components of healthy development.

These foundational ideas continue to resonate in contemporary debates about childhood, influencing how children are perceived and treated today. The legacy of these discourses informs current discussions about parenting, education, and child welfare, highlighting the enduring impact of historical perspectives on modern practices. Understanding these evolving discourses is crucial for grasping the complexities surrounding childhood in today's society.

The contemporary world is often said to be going through a period of globalisation, and it clearly influences theories and policies on modern childhood. Beliefs and values about childhood are also becoming globalised. Notions of childhood inevitably become part of this process. In 1997, the World Bank published a report on early child development called *Early Child Development: Investing in the Future*. The report aimed to have worldwide significance and be applicable to all children. It divided children under 8 years into four categories: infants (0–1 years), toddlers (1–3 years), pre-schoolers (3–6 years), and young school age children (6–8 years). It then listed the expected developmental stages that every child, regardless of their whereabouts in the world, should be expected to reach. Its recommendations were meant to be universal and based on scientific facts, and the report spelled out standards that children should meet. Not only was a universal image of the child born that time, but the ideal childhood was also standardised and exported globally. If there are universal processes and standardised childhood developmental phases, it is foreseen that the construct of the “problem child” will arise.<sup>16</sup>

Not only has contextual thinking about childhood changed throughout the decades, but psychology itself has also made a huge journey, since child development

16 Woodhead and Montgomery, 2002.

became a topic of interest in psychology. Our current scientific knowledge has travelled far from the beginnings of child psychology. Although we are still in search for many answers regarding human development, a lot of empirical research from the last 150 years supports our knowledge on the complex process from the moment of conception to a child reaching 18 years of age.

In the year 1799, in the rural region of Aveyron, France, a remarkable and mysterious event captured the attention of local villagers. It began with sporadic sightings of a wild, dirty, and naked boy who appeared to be living alone in the nearby dense woods. Upon his capture, it became clear that the boy had been living in the wild for a significant period. He was covered in dirt and scars, likely from his time surviving in the harsh conditions of the forest. The boy, who would later become known as Victor of Aveyron, was unable to speak and exhibited behaviours that suggested he had little to no human contact during his formative years. The case intrigued many, including Dr. Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, a young physician who specialised in the education of the deaf. Dr. Itard saw an opportunity to study Victor and possibly rehabilitate him, hoping to understand more about human development and the impact of social isolation on children. With permission from the authorities, Dr. Itard took Victor under his care and began a rigorous programme aimed at teaching him language, social norms, and basic human behaviours. Over the years, Victor made some progress, learning to understand basic words and perform simple tasks. However, he never fully acquired language or integrated completely into society. Despite the limited success, Victor's case provided valuable insights into child development, the effects of isolation, and the human capacity for learning and adaptation. Victor of Aveyron's story remains a poignant example of the resilience of the human spirit and the profound impact of early social experiences on development.<sup>17</sup>

The study of children as an empirical science was conducted as early as 1840 when Charles Darwin began to form a record of the growth and development of his child. Following Darwin, the study of human childhood became firmly established as a respected subject for scientific scrutiny, detailed description, theorisation, and experimentation.

Now, thanks to modern brain mapping techniques, we know that babies from the very beginning of life are interactive human beings. Each one comes with a genetic blueprint and a unique range of possibilities. Through the mirror neurons in our brain, we are connected to other people from the start of life, already resonating with other people from the very beginning. The active baby seeks out interactions with others. Well-managed babies come to expect a world that is responsive to them to bring intense states back to a state of comfort. This is what we call the competent baby, or the image of the competent infant.

We must note that most of the detailed descriptions of the many stages and transitions that take place in childhood are based on developmental psychology in the context of Western childhoods. On the other hand, much scientific research on

<sup>17</sup> Wikipedia, n.d.

childhood, especially in developmental psychology, has been criticised for presenting its conclusions as universal truths, even though that research was based on children and young people growing up in industrialised societies, especially in Europe and North America. The social constructivist approach emphasises that there is no universalist approach. We must consider that knowledge, beliefs, and understanding about childhood are culturally situated.

Beliefs and debates about how children should develop opened discussions on how to treat and educate them properly. Developmental concepts had a huge impact on how to treat children at home, in schools, or even in hospitals and childcare centres. Developmental concepts have just become a common part of everyday language. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, parenting became an everyday topic. Current research on parent-child characteristics focusses heavily on understanding the dynamics, influences, and outcomes of the relationships between parents and their children in contemporary society. Studies explore how different parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, etc.) impact children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Research often examines the balance between warmth and control in parenting and its effects on children's outcomes. Researchers emphasise the importance of considering cultural variations and socioeconomic factors in understanding parent-child relationships. This includes how cultural beliefs and practices around parenting influence child-rearing practices and child outcomes. Studies explore how digital media use by parents and children affects family dynamics, parent-child interactions, and child development outcomes, including social skills, language development, and behavioural patterns. Current studies also focus on identifying factors that contribute to parental stress, resilience, and coping mechanisms in the face of various challenges, such as economic hardships, divorce, or parenting children with special needs<sup>18</sup>.

Overall, contemporary research on parent-child characteristics aims to provide insights into effective parenting practices, familial relationships, and factors contributing to healthy child development in diverse contexts.

### ***3.1. Towards an Integrated Image of the Child***

Although the definition of children can change across time and place, their presence does not. Childhood is part of the human experience, and children influence our world. Children are fully human, yet they are also developing beings in need of instruction and guidance. They are vulnerable orphans, yet they are also social agents with gifts and strengths that contribute to our world. They are members of the community who are nurtured by adults, and yet they also serve as models for adults.<sup>19</sup>

While psychology provides clear guidance on what constitutes an ideal childhood—love, attachment, and nurturing environments—the reality of addressing individual child cases can be significantly more complex. When a child is already

18 Frosch, Schoppe-Sullivan and O'Banion, 2019.

19 Woodhead and Montgomery, 2002.

facing challenges, finding the best solution becomes difficult, and the clear, idealistic concept of the child's best interest can become complicated. As discussed in the Introductory Thoughts in this chapter, since the rights of children were declared, a legal component of how we think about childhood was added and a new image of children emerged—the child with rights.

While children's rights emphasise the importance of ensuring safety, development, and well-being for every child, psychology offers insights into the emotional, cognitive, and social needs of children. The challenge lies in connecting the ideal legal concepts with the realistic circumstances each child faces. *Can we bridge the gap between ideal and realistic solutions to truly serve a child's best interests? Can we bridge law and psychology to truly serve a child's best interests?*

A key question can be raised about the status of young humanity—their needs, competences, responsibilities, and rights. Put simply, how far are children seen as innocents who need protection, nurture, and training as well as social actors who engage with and contribute to their development and have the right to be heard?<sup>20</sup>

Only an interdisciplinary practice can attend to children's challenges and contributions that can honour their vulnerabilities and strengths as well as emphasise adult duties and responsibilities to children. Quoting from Marina Merkas et al. in this book

“The goal of this interdisciplinary connection is to ensure that children receive the care, support, and protection they need for their optimal development and happiness. This means that legal decisions are not made in isolation but are informed by psychological insights. It acknowledges that the well-being of children goes beyond just meeting their basic needs; it includes their emotional and psychological health, which can significantly impact their future well-being. In conclusion, when psychology and law work together to promote children's well-being, a thorough and child-centred strategy is produced, with legal choices being based on a thorough comprehension of the psychological requirements of children to support their best possible growth and well-being.”

By the end of this book, we hope that readers will be well-acquainted with the major concepts in developmental child psychology presented here. Our goal was not just to present the fundamental models of psychological thinking about childhood. It is important to note that psychological thinking cannot be separated from its cultural and historical contexts. Additionally, we aim to provide insights into children's mental health issues, highlighting mainstream concepts that shape the trajectory of developmental psychology, such as the concepts of trauma and resilience. We also explore the roles of parenting and society, examining how these factors influence child development and well-being.

At the second Children's Rights Days conference in Budapest, a new aspect of the interdisciplinary concept of childhood was briefly introduced to the public by the editor of this book. Because human beings, and especially the child, are a truly remarkable entity, they cannot be treated as being mere objects of a single science or based on one isolated social construct. Only professionals who have participated in interdisciplinary teamwork concerning a child's case can truly appreciate the numerous facets and perspectives that emerge. Each of these professionals, whether having medical, psychological, social, legal, or spiritual backgrounds, contributes their unique viewpoints, illuminating different aspects of the child's complex and integrated being. The integrated image of the child we refer to involves the concept of restoring the child to their whole existence. It is a state the child often recalls and expresses through symbols in psychotherapeutic settings. This holistic aspect is inherent in everyone, including adults, often referred to by various names such as the "inner child" or "archetypal child" within ourselves. Understanding and addressing this integrated nature is crucial in providing comprehensive care and support for the child's development and well-being.

Hans Urs von Balthasar emphasised the importance of recognising and integrating the sacred aspects of early childhood into adulthood. He believed that elements present from the very beginning of our lives hold a profound significance that should not be lost as we grow older. Balthasar's theological perspective suggests that the innocence, wonder, and inherent sacredness of childhood are crucial components that shape our spiritual and moral development throughout life. This view underscores the continuity between the sacredness of childhood and responsibilities of adult life, advocating for an ongoing integration of these early experiences within our mature selves.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, it is the duty and responsibility of anyone who holds these opinions to consider how these definitions apply in children's daily lives and our work.

We hope you enjoy your journey through our book!

21 von Balthasar, 1998.

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