

REGULATIVE DIALOGUE – POSITIVE REGULATION

Introduction by Nicoletta

Most of our social relationships in everyday life tend to be based on a tacit contract – how we behave in shop, restaurant, concert, towards older people, people in authority etc. It is culturally determined; and it is established over time.... Tacit means that there is an unspoken agreement about ways to behave towards each other.

In ICDP we aim to establish a **positive tacit contract between adult and child, a contract based on mutual trust and respect**. So, although it is not spoken about, nevertheless, trust and respect are felt both by the adult and child. This positive tacit contract is characterized by emotional closeness, mutual respect, reciprocity in meaningful communication – where adult guides the child's behaviour in a way that becomes meaningful for the child – it becomes a positive learning experience. It is interesting to note that the word "discipline" is taken from the Latin word DISCERE, which mean to learn.. and in context of ICDP, the regulative dialogue indeed leads to learning norms, values, social skills, self-regulation, altruism etc.

For example, teaching a child what is allowed and what is not allowed, can best be achieved when it is not based on power and fear-based imposition, but on shared reflection, in which the two become mutually engaged. If we want to regulate behaviour in a positive way, we need to start with a receptive rather than reactive attitude, attuning to the child so that we send the signal, "ok, I understand you" or "I am trying to understand you" - this is a starting point that can lead to further shared reflexion, and through it the child is learning. In other words, "we connect to redirect".

Each child is unique and our responses will be different, depending on the age of the child, therefore we need to explore different ways of responding until we find what feels like the best way to deal with the particular child – this is why we say that ICDP is an exploration based on reflective processes leading to heightened awareness and enrichment. As a result, we become aware of and learn to control our own behaviour, not to react but to become receptive, attune and respond not from a power base but in a way that is congruent with the child's need. This means, for example, that I ask myself: Do I need to be firm with this child to defuse the difficult situation, or do I need to take the child out of the situation with humour? Do I need to contain the child's state with a firm hug or is there space already for us to calmly reason together, or does the child need a time out and we can reason after a short break?

There are many aspects to the regulative dialogue as there are many aspects of behaviour. This is complex, and to achieve positive ways of regulating a child we need to appropriate all the other key aspects of communication covered by our programme – and this is nicely expressed in the ICDP house which puts the Regulative dialogue as the roof.