NINTH VOLUME:
DIALOGUE WITH PARENTS

Presentation:

All parents have to deal with a certain amount of worries whilst helping their children grow up. However, sometimes when babies do not sleep or eat, when children are rebellious and become uncontrollable, when they become uninterested and demotivated students, or aggressive adolescents or with eating disorders...at that point frustration and tension within the couple are aggravated, even despair can come to surface.

In these cases, when a child's or an adolescent's uneasiness gets to the point of not being containable and understandable by parents, anxiety becomes intolerable, and the family looks for external help. The ninth volume of the series proposes a psychoanalytical perspective to the parents in order to observe their children's growth, with the aim to understand problems and difficulties, so that they can become more competent at confronting them. Sometimes, the parents find themselves confronting very difficult circumstances.

Already before birth traumatic events can happen, and that complicates the beginning of life: illnesses in the family, moves to other countries, economic difficulties, conflicts in the couple; external factors can make life tiring for the parents when trying to find resources to understand, make sense of and answer their children's behaviour patterns. The parents, if we are to use Bion's own words, are the best colleagues for the psychoanalyst and are the real protagonists of these pages, where the various authors show how the dialogue with a psychoanalyst can help them to think about and interpret the various and different, apparently incomprehensible, ways, in which misunderstandings and conflicts are represented.

The volume is also aimed at various professionals: psychologists, paediatricians, psychiatrists, teachers and social workers; these professionals can find useful stimulus to work with couples of parents who experience difficulties trying to understand their own children. The issues of change and understanding can be made easier by the good observation capabilities of the therapist and his/her ability to capture the flux of conscious and unconscious communications, important clues for getting to the meaning of behaviour and to the actual symptoms.

The various chapters of the volume propose reflections on how a psychoanalytical intervention can help the parents of the children during the different phases of childhood. The first chapter describes the origins of the first interactions between parents and child in the intrauterine life and how this influences the initial relationship between the child and the external world, particularly with the mother's breast. This chapter mostly discusses the balances between hereditary influences and environmental influences; demonstrating how the dichotomy between heritage and environment is forced and simplistic; how from the very beginning the embryo - and then the foetus - are subjected to various stimulus. Therefore, since the origins, the child is moulded by the meeting/interaction between nature and environment.

The author wonder about the mother's influence on the future baby, seeing that the environment that the foetus encounters is always and primarily represented and mediated by the mother's body. The first years are fundamental for stabilizing a good bond between child and parents, and because of this, the smaller a child is, the bigger the possibility of introducing a positive change in the critical area of his/her development.

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The second chapter illustrates a brief intervention model based on a consultation with the parents together with the under five-year-old child. The third chapter is also directed to parents of small children, but offers specifically an intervention model to the sort of environment where there is a real risk for parents of not being capable of fulfilling their role anymore. The fourth chapter concerns the main the principal intervention models of psychoanalytic work for parents: the parents consultation; the work with the parents in support of their child psychotherapy; the intervention with the couple in support of their parental function; the intervention developed on an individual basis on one parent who agrees to work on him/herself. The fifth chapter describes the work with parents as a couple.

Despite the actual help is required for the child, at times the problem derives from difficulties within the couple. A psychoanalytical view on such problems can be very useful, because a major opening up to recognition of difficulties of the relationship in itself often allows the addressing of new developments. Finally, we confront the job of the psychoanalyst with the adolescents' parents. The ability to create an alliance with the adolescent's parents is of equal importance to relating well to the parents of a child, but it is definitely harder and failure often happens.

The model we present can be defined as 'indirect psychotherapy', because it exclusively uses collaboration with the parents; it is a therapy model discovered by the author, and has been experimented over a long period of time. Therefore, the common denominator of these works is the desire to demonstrate that through the relationship with a psychoanalyst, the parental couple can find meaning and intervene early in order to help the potential of their own children and of their own family to open up to life.

The goal of this volume, as of the whole series, is to help parents to interpret and understand their own child and adapt to his/her own needs, favouring in him/her, at the same time, the necessary process of separation and individuation.

Emanuela Quagliata.