

Supporting communities to keep children safe

The project Co-Happiness: Happy and Safe in the Community aims to promote prevention and raise awareness on issues having to do with child abuse and maltreatment. Partners from six European countries (The Netherlands, Portugal, Finland, Greece, Italy and Romania) gather their efforts together to discuss and review the causes of child abuse and maltreatment and develop innovative methodology and strategies to fight and prevent this phenomenon.

Through variety of activities and outputs, educators and professionals working in this field will be provided with opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills to tackle these issues effectively. The project will also reach children 6-9 years old and teach them how to recognize situations of child abuse or maltreatment and how to talk about this if it happens.

Recently the partners have performed a research to identify existing good practices to prevent child abuse and maltreatment through social capital and collective efficacy approaches in their countries. Hereunder we offer you highlights from the partners' researches. The full version of the report is available on www.co-happiness.eu.

Handle with care

When children are confronted with incidents of domestic violence and/or child abuse, the police is often quick at the scene. Help and assistance is started after an incident, but it takes a lot of time to get help running. Sometimes the first assistance starts months after the incident. Yet children who are victim or have witnessed the violence are influenced by the violence right away and need support immediately. Augeo (an organization specialized in the prevention of domestic violence and child abuse) runs the pilot "Handle with care" in several municipalities in the Netherlands. The aim of the pilot is to organize support for children who are victim or witness of domestic violence within 24 hours. The action taken is that the moment the police comes to the house for domestic violence, the police officer immediately reports to the school(s) of the child(ren) that something has happened, but not the exact occasion. They do that by sending the message "Handle with care", the name and the birth date of the child. This enables teachers to support the child, for example by allowing them to take their cuddle bear or by giving them a second chance at failed exams.

(Good practice from The Netherlands)



Encourage me to be strong

The aim of the project is to prevent and reduce abuse and maltreatment of children and ask the parents: what would we see if we stopped for a moment to look at ourselves with the eyes of our children? Do we hear gentle and encouraging words, would we see smiling eyes? Would we feel safe and loved? In cooperation with the member associations, partners and the basic services of municipalities, the awareness of children and parents about children's rights is increased, positive educational culture is strengthened, and parents are offered support and guidance for the use of positive educational tools.

(Good practice from Finland)

Smile of the Child

Children who are at immediate risk of abuse and victims of any form of violence have specific needs and intervention by experts is needed. Smile of the Child includes the Direct Intervention Services, addressing to children who are at immediate risk of abuse or maltreatment. The primary objective is to safely transfer the child to a safe place, escorted by a social worker or a psychologist, with the vehicles of the immediate Intervention of the Organization and the cooperation with other organizations, in order to find a solution. The cases of children at risk are identified through the National Line for Children SOS 1056; the calls can be made by the general public, organizations, services and the children themselves.

(Good practice from Greece)

Giovanni

Giovanni (name invented) confesses to the expert that he continuously attends the intimate relationship between mother and father. He also says he can't go to school because his father forces him to go and retrieve old iron in the countryside. In this regard, the protection services called "day care center" and "home visiting" intervene. The minor is placed in the community, where a path of development of social- psycho-affective and emotional skills is initiated. The mother shows no interest in the precarious situation of her son and how they live. A path of parenting aimed at becoming aware of being a mother-woman is set up for her. The father is accompanied on a path of parenting at the social service with a job grant so that he can start building or achieving economic autonomy. The family goes for 2 years to a day care center and after two years, the family is reunited. It continues to be followed by the social service and supported by a pedagogist and a psychologist.

(Good practice from Italy)

The underwear rule

The “ONE in Five” campaign came about because, in range, one in five children is a victim of violence or sexual abuse, either more directly or indirectly. Based on this campaign, the Council of Europe has developed a resource that is now often used in schools in Portugal - “The underwear rule”, better known as “Kiko e a Mão” (in English, Kiko and the Hand) (Moita, 2016). The goal is to help parents in a simple way explain what parts of the body are forbidden to touch and, if that happens, how children should act. Why parents? The background research for “The underwear rule” initiative demonstrates that parents and caregivers should be aware of the importance of talking about sexual abuse with children in order to prevent such situations from happening (Brown, n.d.).

(Good practice from Portugal)

Appreciative Parenting HoltIS Association - Romania

The main purpose of the Appreciative Parenting program developed by HoltIS Association is to increase school attendance and strengthen parent-school relationships, but also, to raise awareness about abuse and the effects of abuse on victims and perpetrators. This Handbook and Curricula for parents focuses on “appreciative parenting” methods to find out the parents perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, challenges and desires by improving and strengthening the relationships between parents and their children.

The program is structured on helping the parent find the tools necessary to cope with stress and daily activities, childhood legacies (trauma, irrational beliefs, etc.), raise awareness about the development of the child, develop communication skills, awareness about abuse and its effect of the child and the family, and alternative methods to facilitate the development of the child.

(Good practice from Romania)

