

On giving

Introductory text

Parents don't want their children to be selfish. Children like to give, and if they don't do it – it is the reflection of the attitude they learn from grown-ups. When grown-ups say: Be nice, learn to share. Give your sister a half... – they express moral or educational attitude that is related to the regulation of the ego and its need to possess. When they say: You will get a bike if you finish this grade with honors. – giving is conditional – it is related to punishment and reward, and the statement means blackmail.

In this book, this problem is dealt with as the notion of manipulation. It is natural for parents to give presents to their children on certain occasions, on their birthdays, on certain religious holidays or rituals (Christmas, New Year, First Communion, wedding, etc.), but they rarely give presents to their children without a reason. It is true that there are presents given when parents go shopping or run errands with their children who appear with their wishes and requests, but there are various other reasons to buy children things that are sometimes treated as presents.

In most cases parents who are very busy and have good incomes buy their children presents all the time, from games to toys, favourite food, clothes or sports equipment, to books and paid forms of entertainment. This doesn't have to be understood as buying affection or a substitute for neglect – but the fact is that children don't appreciate these presents very much, they don't find them impressive enough to bring inner fulfillment.

Parents should make it a custom to determine a day of the week when each member of their family would give something to another member. That would be the introduction of a giving ritual in which children and other members of a family would be dedicated to one another. Those gifts which don't have any material value, which aren't bought, but have a symbolic value which bring fulfillment due to the whole process, time spent together and the spiritual content – can be a proof of love and a happy family life to children. They start to differentiate them from the usual "regular" material gifts within the scope of ownership. Ownership isn't a replacement for satisfaction and inner fulfillment which develops in giving. "However, since there is no giving without receiving, we close the circle by paying attention to receiving".¹ It is harder to receive than it is to give.

In order to clarify what this giving-receiving ritual among the members of a family means, we will describe an example.

In the morning we briefly announce the Giving Day which will be carried out as a joint conversation at the table (without TV, mobile phones, the Internet) within half an hour to an hour in the evening. Each member says what he/she has prepared for the others. Let's say there are five members in the family: mother, father, grandmother, two children (Iva and Neven). One person starts (mother): First I give my gratitude to grandma for taking care of the house the whole day, so I have brought her something she wants to read from the library... I will lend my camera to Iva so that she can take pictures of her class on the school trip on Sunday or before. I give an old poem to Neven: "A crow cawed, in the field jumped, there came a blackbird and bit off the crow's nose." I will let father watch the match on TV tonight... Father says: I wanted to give your mum a night out, I have bought concert tickets, and after that we are going to the theatre cafe. I accept her gift – watching a game –with gratitude, but I will do it tomorrow. I have fixed Iva's bicycle, which I promised a long time ago, and I have brought grandma greetings from her friend in Australia, I finally have her email address. I am taking Neven to the zoo on Saturday, anyone can join us., etc. It's the children's turn. One child will sing a song to a person who is in a bad mood, one will help with the chores, one will tell about a pleasant experience, etc.

Scenario / ideas for a workshop

1. Gifts you have received from your children 15 min

If you have already met the parents, ask them to bring a gift from their child which touched them particularly (or to recall that event and describe the gift).

Several questions are asked: What does this gift mean to you? What do you give your children and when, do you only give them something on special occasions (birthday, success at school, etc.). All the participants talk.

2. Writing a thank-you letter 20 min

Each parent gets a blank sheet of paper. After we have asked them to close their eyes and think of one of their parents they would like to write a letter to – we leave them to visualize that person (it can also be one of their grandparents) and think about what he/she has done for them, which they have never acknowledged or expressed their gratitude for. Then they should open their eyes and try to think of a few sentences which they would write to that person now, without great introductions, as a gift-letter which they would send by mail because they haven't paid attention to them for a long time. If you are writing to a person that isn't alive any more, you



can put the letter under their picture which you may have framed on your desk. If you don't have that – this will be a reminder to you to have that person's photo framed. If some parents want to read aloud what they have written, give them the opportunity.

2.B Reading and analysing a literary text 20 min

If the hosts find this activity inappropriate – considering they know their group – they can distribute a nice short literary text they will surely find, which deals with the relationship between parents and children. Each parent will get a copy. Parents read the text individually and comment on it in pairs (with a parent they don't know very well), but not only in the sense that they like it or not, but they should talk about the character of such writing.

3. Talk about giving as a family ritual 20 min

What do they think about this idea, what would they like to comment – how do their children receive birthday presents when they are from their peers, relatives, how do they "use" them, etc. Here you should explain the giving ritual with the help of the introductory text and the example given there.

4. Cheerful game for the end 10 min

At the end of the workshop you can play a game which requires a little imagination and a sense of humor and play. One member of the group begins: I got a gift from Mrs. Ljiljana (the person on the left) - it was a day off... Mrs. Ljiljana says: No, I gave you a trip to Istanbul. From Ivanka's mother I got an invitation to the ball at the court of the Queen of the Netherlands. Ivanka's mother says: Unfortunately, I didn't give you that but I would like to give you a painting by Ivan Generalić. Do you know what I got from Mr. Nakić? An oar.etc.

5. Greeting in a circle 5 min

If you would like to connect the parents in a circle – tell them that their left hand (palm turned upwards) is the one that receives, and their right hand (palm turned downwards) is the one that gives – so they should hold hands that way and send in their minds a nice word/thought to everybody in the circle (with their eyes closed). A squeeze of hands means that everyone has sent their thoughts.