

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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PARENTING

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The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified existing challenges to a social role – parenting – considered by many to be merely a source of happiness and emotional well-being, but which is also a source of stressful demands.

When an imbalance occurs between these demands and the resources available – because the former are more numerous or have a greater impact –, it results in parental burnout (PB) syndrome. PB is a mental health disorder characterised by a state of exhaustion and a feeling of saturation in relation to the parental role, with loss of pleasure in the children’s company and emotional distancing from them, in contrast to the feelings and states experienced before.

The lockdown imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis lead to the emergence and amplification of previous, potentially stressful parental circumstances and to a reduction in the resources available for parents to deal with them, thereby increasing the risk of developing PB. These impositions generate such demands as balancing work – which in many cases is now performed at home – and the increase in domestic chores and childcare tasks, including the need to ensure school activities at home. For many, there was the additional pressure of loss of income due to lay-offs, unemployment or the threat of dismissal.

In crisis situations resulting from health emergencies, with the closing of nurseries, kindergartens and schools, violence against children tends to increase, and so does their vulnerability. Therefore, part of the response must be to prevent stress and PB with measures aimed at reducing specific risk factors and increasing the availability of resources, while turning the pandemic crisis into an opportunity to strengthen parent-children relationships.

One of the answers is to create and/or provide resources promoting positive parenting, as part of a blame-free social discourse that values parenting and avoids the exclusive focus on duties and on an unrealistic “ideal” of parent that has little to do with the values of each family. To listen to parents and understand how they would like these resources to be provided is therefore crucial.

It is also important to raise awareness among parents (both individually and as a couple) with regard to self-care and among men in particular with a view to a more active role in parenting.

Faced with a particularly unpredictable pandemic like the present one, it is urgent that we organise ourselves as a society in order to promote and protect the rights of children and young people by supporting positive parenting – reminding ourselves that parenting cannot be closed down or quarantined.