

To my children

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I BAMBINI RACCONTANO

Interpretazione dei racconti infantili



Foreword

The use of children's stories has long been present in psychoanalysis (Freud A., 1972).¹ In addition, good parents often like to read or tell their little ones stories and fairy tales at many moments of daily life, such as, for example, during meals, in order to help the little ones eat sitting and quietly at the table, without having to chase them around the house, plate in hand. Fairy tales and stories are also frequently used on long car journeys, as they are a good way of combating boredom, tiredness and impatience of the little ones; or in the evening, to help children drift off to a restful sleep a more peaceful manner, banishing fears and nightmares at night. Stories, tales and fairy tales are also a great way of creating greater complicity and understanding between parents and children. Good teachers also use fairy tales and stories to improve the cultural and linguistic knowledge of their pupils.

The fairy tales, tales and stories, both read and told, are usually drawn from the extensive literature for children and young people. Only in some cases are they invented on the spot, by parents and teachers rich in imagination and storytelling skills.

The most interesting fairy tales, which usually begin with: 'Once upon a time', are often full of action and twists. They are

¹ Freud A. (1972), *The psychoanalytic treatment of children*, Turin, Boringhieri.

also made more appealing by including events that provoke fears and thrills, with the aim of attracting the attention of children, and then leading them, even after many hardships, to the inevitable happy ending, summed up by the usual phrase: 'And they lived happily ever after'.

However, it is rare for parents, family members or teachers themselves to ask children to invent and construct stories themselves in an absolutely free way, without any didactic purpose

We think, however, that listening to or reading and then interpreting children's stories can be very important for several reasons:

- Meanwhile, their words can allow us to enter, as if on tiptoe, into their inner world, in order to discover what lives and stirs in their psyche
- Their stories will help us to understand how each of them lives and moves in their living environment.
- We can also easily understand whether their intimate life is full of serenity and joy or, conversely, whether it is pervaded by anxieties, sadness and suffering, which children cannot communicate directly
- Their stories give us the opportunity to know what the hopes and desires of the children in our care are; what fears unsettle their inner world; what provokes and stimulates their enthusiasm or pessimism; what their most pressing needs and necessities are; but also how much traumatic events that

their ego was unable to manage and dominate have affected their psyche (Smirnoff V., 1974, p. 58)²

- From their words we can correctly and easily assess how helpful psychotherapeutic treatments we have undertaken have been

No less important is the therapeutic purpose: through stories, children have the opportunity to free their souls from the worries, anxieties, fears or aggression that often grip and agitate their psyches.

This is possible because storytelling becomes a tool that enables a profound dialogue between the adults using this methodology and the child. It is also possible to enter more easily into contact with the child's unconscious, which is still in close contact with the conscious part (Klein M., 1950, p. 23).³ This dialogue can easily create a deep and intimate relationship that offers the child the security, serenity and well-being he or she seeks. By making the adult share his worries, fears and sufferings, he can find in them a safe, stable and affectionate point of reference in which to place his trust and find support and understanding.

The stories you will find in this book were mostly written or dictated by children we had the opportunity to follow. They are therefore stories produced by individuals who had some disorder in their mental or intellectual development. For this reason, with rare exceptions, they cannot be representative of children who fall into what we call the 'normal range'.

² Smirnoff V. (1974), *La psicoanalisi infantile*, Rome, Armando Armando editore, p. 58).

³ Klein M. (1950), *The Psychoanalysis of Children*, Florence, G. Martinelli Editore, p. 23.

Except for the titles of the stories, which were inserted by us, we have tried to report the children's sentences as they dictated or wrote them. Only in some cases, to make the speech clearer, have we added some missing or explanatory words in brackets.

When there were free drawings made by the children, we inserted them and briefly commented on them, in order to add or complete the information in the stories.

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1 METHODOLOGY

1.1 THE MEETING

The first phase certainly concerns the meeting with the child. Whatever the child's problem to be known, examined or helped, through therapeutic talks, this is certainly the most important moment. Whoever comes to us, whether for genetic or organic problems, or for family or environmental problems, is a suffering child.

Even if we do not yet know the causes of the suffering and the wounds in the soul of the child is in our presence, his suffering and wounds are unquestionable and always deserve the utmost respect and due acceptance and understanding. For this reason, every act we perform with regard to him or her must not be separated from disposing ourselves towards him or her with the utmost respect and delicacy.

For this reason, while our motivation to help the child, using the methodology of free storytelling, is absolutely legitimate, we also have a duty to his or her sensitivity and needs at all times. For this reason, if we realise that he or she offers real resistance or worse, outright opposition to our request, we have a duty to respect both, possibly using alternative means of investigation or other therapeutic approaches. In all likelihood, our respecting the moment will create an easier bond with us, so that, at a later stage, he will be happy to manifest his thoughts and emotions to us using storytelling.

We must also add something more: in the event that the child does not comply with our request, not only must we not insist on it, but, to prevent him from feeling guilty, we must manage not to show any disappointment or regret for his choice.

If he or she is in a neuropsychiatric or psychology ward or office, in order for him or her to feel that the operator is closer to him or her and to his or her wishes, and thus accept the requests made by the latter, one of the techniques that we recommend is to the child to play freely, in a room full of toys, with the company of a particularly helpful assistant, for as long as it takes to gather from his or her parents and caregivers all the information useful for an accurate anamnesis.

Letting him play freely for some time, without asking him anything, has two purposes: the first is to prevent our little patient from hearing information from his family; information that is sometimes very delicate, so it might upset him; the second purpose is to get him to start this experience in the most pleasant and appealing way possible. If the child finds it difficult to detach himself from his parents, we will have one of them or another family member accompany him to the playroom.

1.2 THE STORY

After the child has made his free drawing, we will ask him to construct a story. Here too, we will give them complete freedom to organise and present it using the free drawing they have just made as a starting point, or to depart from it by inventing something different and original.

Using this methodology, we will find that some children, in order to continue to give vent to their emotions and thoughts that are prevalent at that moment, will use the drawing they have just produced. In practice, instead of pencils and colours, they will use words and sentences to express their thoughts and emotions. Others, on the other hand, regardless of what they drew a moment earlier, will produce different themes.

The richness of the stories, and also their length, vary greatly. For some children, storytelling is very easy and pleasant, so much so that sometimes their unbridled and fervid imagination is so bursting that, tired of copying the river of words flowing from their mouths, they have to stop. Others, on the other hand, find it very difficult to let go in to an almost unknown person their thoughts and, above all, their mood of the moment.

1.3 STIMULUS QUESTIONS

To invite the child to tell a story, we recommend using the phrase with which all fairy tales usually begin: 'Once upon a time...'. If any child, although not refusing to tell something, remains puzzled and does not follow up on this initial stimulus, we can help them with some more specific questions. For example: 'Which character or object would you like to talk about? Are you thinking of a big person? A child? An animal? A house? A toy? You choose what you want to talk about.'

Also during the telling of the story, all questions are allowed that can serve to better clarify what the child has in mind and would like to express. Similarly, all enquiries are useful if they are aimed at enriching or deepening the topics dealt with, when this can be useful in letting us share in his or her inner life.

For this reason, once the child has chosen the main character to start talking about, if this appears ill-defined, we will help the child to make it more concrete, by means of additional prompts. For example, we may ask the name, gender, age and other characteristics of this character. Similarly, we can ask him whether this person, of whom he speaks, lives alone or has a family; but also how this family is made up, where he lives, what

characteristics the house where he lives has, and so on. We can do the same with the secondary characters.

To help him expand his story, so that deeper content emerges, we can use additional '*stimulus questions*', such as: "What happened one day?" "And then...? And afterwards...?"

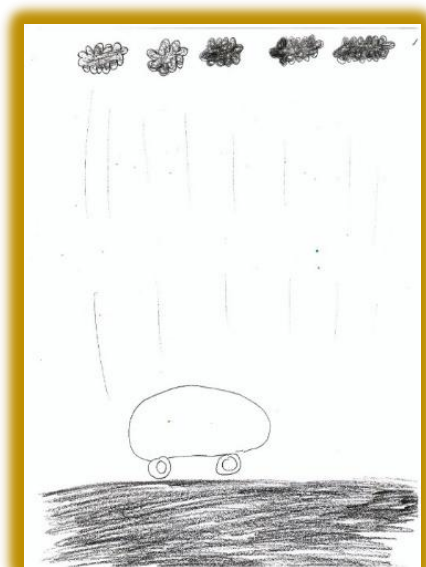


Figure 1

We have an example of this in Mark's account (figure 1)⁴

⁴ All the names of the young patients have been changed. When deemed necessary, the names of the characters in the stories told have also been changed, while the titles of the stories are from the author.

A new machine

Once upon a time there was a car

D. What was this car like?

A. It was new and had just come out of the dealership. It was big.

D. Whose was it?

R. It belonged to an ordinary person.

D. What did this machine do? What happened to it?

R. She went out. It was raining. There was a man driving and he went home; because it was raining. And then, of course, he went out with the new car.

D. Was he happy?

R. He bought it: he wanted it for so long.

D. Who was this person?

R. He was married and had a wife and children.

D. Did he get along well with his wife and children?

R. Yes, they got along well.

D. Did you go out with your children? And where did they go?

R. At a family dinner, the serious kind. Unlike his father, my father forces me, he doesn't make me choose to go or not. They go to the dinner and there are friends there.

D. And what were these friends like?

R. *They were good, they ate a lot,*

D. Who were they?

R. *A family, with husband and wife. A recently married couple. The children befriended the couple. They made a game. With the car you can go many places. We drove around and then came home.*

Although various prompts are allowed, it is best to leave the child complete freedom in choosing the theme of the story, the characteristics of the various characters and all the details he or she wishes to include, without ever criticising the content of the story.

Therefore, we have a duty to accept all the words and phrases he says, any grammatical and syntactical errors, and all the arguments he wants to expound, even if we might not agree with them and would like to criticise and condemn them harshly. For example, when vulgar, aggressive words, clear contradictions, errors in grammar or diction and so on are present. Similarly, we will leave him free to give the story the conclusion he likes best at that particular moment in his life

1.4 THE INTERPRETATION OF STORIES

Since interpreting means giving clarity and meaning to what is, at least apparently, unclear and makes no sense, all interpretation is subject to possible error. However, in order to diminish the possibility, which nevertheless remains ever-present, of giving meanings that differ significantly from reality, we have a duty to use certain indispensable tools.

The first and most important of these tools is to try to link the content of the story to the subject's living environment.

Consequently, we must know, as much as possible and as well as possible, the relational world in which the child moves and interacts: his family, the school environment, the social, play or sports activities in which he is engaged or which he attends and so on.

To get closer to its more intimate reality, we can, moreover, be helped by other personality tests. For example, the following tests can give us valuable indications: the tree test⁵, the house test⁶, the family test⁷, the human figure test⁸, the C.A.T. (Children's Apperception test)⁹, the T.A.D. (Test of anxiety and depression in childhood and adolescence)¹⁰, the DÜSS fairy tales¹¹, Von Staabs G.'s sceno-test¹². Similarly, observations made

⁵ Crotti E. (2006), *E tu che albero sei*, Milan, Mondadori.

⁶ Crotti E. Magni A. (2006), *Come interpretare gli scarabocchi*, Milano Edizioni Red, p. 111- 131.

⁷ Corman L., (1976), *The drawing of the family: tests for children*, Turin, Boringhieri.

⁸ Oliviero Ferraris A., (1973), *Il significato del disegno infantile*, Turin, Boringhieri, p. 93-98

⁹ Bellak L. (1957), *C.A.T. -Children's Apperception test*, Florence, Giunti O. S.

¹⁰ Newcomer P. (1995), *T.A.D-Test of anxiety and depression in childhood and adolescence*, Trento, Erickson.

¹¹ DÜSS L. (1957), *Fables of the DÜSS*, Florence, Giunti Psychometrics.

¹² Von Staabs G., *Lo sceno test*, Florence, Edizioni O/S

during free or guided play sessions and episodes reported by the child's family and teachers are valuable.

We also recommend never considering interpretations as definitive, but to leave them open to possible subsequent verification and correction; when other data collected will allow us to revise and reconsider the interpretation we initially gave to the story.

The temptation to expose the contents of the child's stories and our interpretations of them to his or her parents, family members or teachers is understandable. However, under no circumstances should we give in to this temptation, as this behaviour could be experienced by the child as a betrayal of the trust he or she had placed in us.

Regarding the use of interpretations in dialogue with the child, we think that this use should be done very carefully and only by therapists who are experts in child psychological dynamics. It is very risky to communicate to the child, in an explicit way, his unconfessed needs and desires. This communication could aggravate his inner problems.

On the other hand, the simple act of communicating one's thoughts and emotions to a person, who makes an effort to be close, to listen, to participate in the experiences and motions of a child's intimate life, is already in itself an important therapeutic moment¹³ which helps to improve the child's psychological status. In fact, being able to manifest one's thoughts and emotions, in a condition of close and profound relationship, allows the child's imaginary ego to connect with joy and gratitude to

¹³ Longobardo C., Negro A., Pagani S., Quaglia R. (2008), *Il disegno infantile*, Novara, De Agostini, p. 57.

external reality, putting the inner world back in contact with the outer one with confidence. As Klein M. (1969, p. 32) says¹⁴ *'Gratitude is closely connected with generosity. Inner wealth comes from the fact that one has assimilated the good object and can share its gifts with others. This makes possible the introjection of a friendlier outside world, a feeling of enrichment ensues, and if generosity is often not appreciated enough, the capacity to give does not diminish because of this'*.

This will only happen, however, if there is someone next to him or her who is able to empathically accept what the child is trying to communicate at that moment without ever letting our judgements and opinions on what he or she is reporting leak out.¹⁵

1.5 ANNOTATIONS

1.5.1 Physical and psychological modalities

In order to assess each tale correctly, it is good to take note of the ways, both physical and psychological, in which the child arranges and accompanies his or her words. For example, it will be useful to record whether, while talking, he makes gestures with his fingers or body; whether he uses one or more objects to tell the story; and, finally, what the child's facial expressions are during the various phases of the story.

1.5.2 Waste and resistance

It is good to record the possible presence in the child of a *clear refusal or resistance* to sharing the therapist's thoughts,

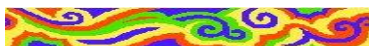
¹⁴ Klein M. (1969), *Envy and Gratitude*, Florence, G. Martinelli Editore, p. 32.

¹⁵ Freud A. (1972), *The psychoanalytic treatment of children*, Turin, Boringhieri, p. 30.

feelings and emotions. A clear refusal is easy to understand, more difficult to quantify and interpret resistance in opening up to an almost unknown adult. In order to understand these difficulties of the child, we must necessarily make use of other elements: such as the child's body posture, facial expressions, the intensity and intonation of the voice, the use of particular interjections. Sometimes, as Pearson (1974 p. 94) says, it is neither rejection nor resistance but simply distrust of a stranger.¹⁶

1.5.3 The age of the characters

The child, spontaneously, or at the request of the therapist and examiner, easily agrees to assign his or her characters a certain age. This may indicate: the age the subject is; the age he or she would like to be; or the age of the peers with whom he or she identifies and with whom he or she would like to socialise. In some cases we may be able to detect the emotional and affective maturity of the subject from the age of the character with whom he identifies



An example of a character with whom the child identifies himself, who is older than his own age, is found in Mary. This child, almost six years old, lived in a family in which there were frequent and intense conflicts between the parents. The child suffered from psychological disturbances of medium severity, manifested in various fears: of the death of her father or mother; of insects; of school; and of the dark. In addition, frequent crying fits were reported by the parents; rejection from school; separation anxiety; difficulty in leaving home; considerable

¹⁶ Pearson Gerald H. J., (1974), *Handbook of child and adolescent psychoanalysis*, Turin, Boringhieri. P. 94.

susceptibility to reprimands and her own mistakes; persistence of childish habits and nervous hunger.



Figure 2

Pizza with friends

Once upon a time there was a young girl of eighteen and one day she went home to eat pizza with friends, but she was not happy because she thought her friends were making a mess at home. So, she ate, but she was not happy. She looked at her watch and said: "It is seven o'clock in the evening, everybody get out of my house". The friends, some stayed, some left and so she felt a little lonely and said: "But anyway they had to leave sooner or later, because it was almost midnight".

Later her mother came home and found the whole mess and said: "What happened to this house?" She wanted to look for a clock and then asked who had bought her the pizza. The mother said: "You suspect me of something!" But the girl continued to pretend nothing happened, because she hid everything from her mother. The mother wanted to uncover this mystery and became furious and said: "Now I will take this girl's car away from her, as punishment!" However, the mother found her secret.

In this story, the protagonist with whom little Maria identifies is eighteen years old. The girl invites her friends home for pizza. Since she does not trust her mother, she does not confide *in her mother (but the girl continued to pretend nothing was wrong, because she hid everything from her mother)*. However, Maria, despite her dream of being old enough to invite her friends over to eat a pizza at home, as she saw grown-up girls do and certainly not little girls like her, is unable to hide her relational difficulties (*...but she was not happy because she thought that her friends were making a mess at home. So, she ate but was not happy*). These difficulties are so intense that she is driven to send guests away from the house because *they 'created disorder for him'*

Note, in the account, some inconsistencies about the time: *'It's seven o'clock in the evening, everybody leave my house'* and immediately afterwards: *'But they had to leave sooner or later anyway, because it was almost midnight'*

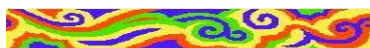
The drawing she produced, (Figure 2) is not connected to the story, however it can give us some indications of her inner experiences. The arms, which are the main elements of

communication, since they allow contact and a direct relationship with the outside world,¹⁷ are barely hinted at in this drawing of hers. This suggests to us that the child had difficulties precisely in communication, something we had also noticed in the story. The little girl, moreover, as if trying to protect herself and her living environment, needs to place a rainbow above the scene, a sign of hope, protection and joy.

1.5.4 Richness or poverty of content

From the contents of the stories we can draw many indications about the subject's problems: are they very rich or excessively limited? Do they refer to fairy tales or subjects that the child knows well, or are they original

Very poor and trivial stories are produced by very young children or by subjects with intellectual deficits. Subjects in both categories usually only manage to put together very simple words and images from everyday routine life.



One example among many can be found in Chiara, a 46-year-old married woman with a good educational background, who suffered from an early onset dementia syndrome that severely limited her intellectual abilities

¹⁷ Crotti E., Magni A. (2006), *How to interpret doodles*, Como, Edizioni Red, p. 89.



Figure 3



Figure 4

A little girl

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who wanted to play with her little brothers and sisters on shapes. The little girl was very happy to be able to play with her little brothers and cousins. And then mummy made them a snack and they all had a snack. Then mummy took her to bed, because it was nap time and she had sweet dreams.

As one can easily see, this tale is too simple for a forty-six year old, married woman with a diploma¹⁸. Her words clearly highlight the poverty of her inner world, devastated by her early dementia. The drawings (Figures 3- 4) also confirm the limitations present in this patient's ideational processes: the house, trees, flowers and human beings are all drawn in a child-like manner, with schematic, poor and banal strokes.

1.5.5 The length of the story

We have noted how the length of a narrative is not always related to the severity of the psychological pathology, nor to symptoms that are attributed to particular children, such as, for example, the considerable closure that is normally ascribed to individuals with autistic disorders.

In fact, some of these, if the pathology is not very serious and if, having trust in the therapist, at that moment they feel like it, desire it and enjoy it, are able to produce very long and rich stories ; although, as we shall see, these stories have particular characteristics.

¹⁸ Goodenough F. (1926), *Measurement of intelligence by drawing*, Chicago, World Book Company.



We have an example of this in the 'Tragic Mermaid Story' dictated by Francis, a child with autistic disorders.

The tragic story of the mermaid

They beat the mermaid, even stone and hammer blows. She wakes up. A small person gives her another blow and hits her again. It draws blood from her. He hits her again and again blood comes out. He throws a horse at her, which hurts the mermaid, as it crushes her. The car also crushes her.

D. "What did the siren do wrong?"

R. *Nothing*

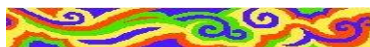
They still fight inside the car. He hits her in the head again with the dagger. He saws her. The siren moves badly, she screams and cries. She walks badly: she is lame. They give her another blow and kill her. She is dead, but they continue to beat the mermaid. The mermaid is alive again, she wants to escape and they chase her and drill her. She runs away very fast. She tries to free herself but can't. Someone paints her face with a brush. She cannot walk, she sticks her tail into a car. The others run away. She pulls everything behind her to get into the car. No one frees her. She shouts: HELP!!!

She has freed herself, but she is wounded and something else comes at her. Someone ties

her up, she cannot free herself, she is wounded, full of blood. She had done nothing (wrong): they are to blame. The mermaid takes the dinghy. The dinghy chases her and she gets inside and the dinghy hurts her. She climbs the stairs with her tail. The mermaid drives the car. Everyone runs away.

They made up with the mermaid: they are together. She has crashed the car and the others help her. A spring comes at her. Someone threw it at her. They shot her with cannons and killed her. She died! But then she got up and hurt the thieves: she took revenge. She picked up a stone and took her revenge. Again the little mermaid died, but she got up and fought against those who wanted to harm her. And he who wanted to harm her dies, but he gets up again immediately. The little mermaid picked up a stone and hit him. He falls to the ground unconscious. The mermaid remains closed and is dead.

The story of the mermaid, which we have recorded and report in full, was certainly taken from a film seen by the child. However, the modifications that the child makes to it and the underlining and repetition of crude and violent scenes, describe to us a considerably disturbed inner world in which tension, aggression and violence predominate.



In contrast, another child, with psychological disorders that we judged not to be particularly serious, did not like to express

his thoughts, so much so that one of the rare stories he agreed to dictate was very short.

A computer named Luigi

Once upon a time there was a computer that played alone and was always like this playing. He was a good computer called Luigi.

This short story highlights the loneliness of this child. He identifies with his computer (*which he played alone and was always like this playing*). Unfortunately, in this case, the child's loneliness and lack of dialogue was shared by the whole family. In this one, both the child's parents and brother mostly used their free time playing and entertaining themselves with various computers and other electronic media, while communication between them was minimal

1.5.5.1 Short stories

A very short story can indicate the presence of difficulties in communication. Difficulties often present in very shy, closed or depressed children, who are afraid of revealing themselves or who are afraid of suffering excessively by reliving, through words, difficult or traumatic events and realities. Ultimately, these minors fear that expressing their thoughts, bringing out their deepest fears, emotions and disappointments experienced by them may accentuate anxiety and suffering in them. For this reason, as if it were one of the many duties they have to perform to please adults, they only tell the essential elements of a story, but have no desire to open up more.

In other cases, the brevity of the story is the result of aggressive desires and considerable distrust of adult figures. Very short stories are also produced by children who are not used to dialogue and using their imaginative abilities. This may occur,

as in the case just described, due to excessive use of video games or other electronic tools, which tend to limit abstraction capacities.

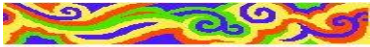


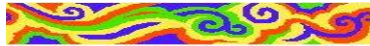
Figure 5

A child accompanied to school

Once upon a time there was a little boy, he took him to school and then his daddy picked him up and took him home. End of story.

The very short story of Dario, an eleven-year-old boy, is probably due to the considerable shyness from which he suffered, a shyness that prevented him from exposing himself excessively to the operators he had recently met.

If, in addition to the story, we examine the tree drawn by the boy himself (figure 5), we notice that it has roots with threadlike traits. This detail suggests to us the presence in the child a sentimental soul, eager for affection and tenderness, which he needed in order to obtain the security he lacked.¹⁹ The presence of a thin, stylised foliage confirms his difficulties in socialising. The flowers in the hair confirm tender and sentimental aspects present in his personality



Another very short story concerns a watch.

¹⁹ Crotti Evi (2006), *E tu che albero sei*, Milan, Mondadori, p. 57.

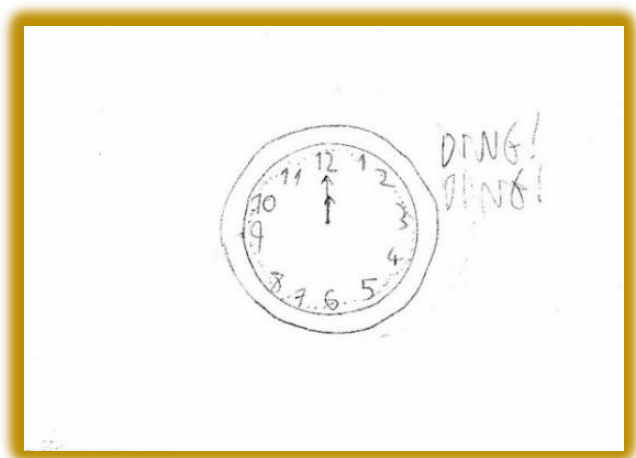
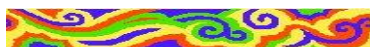


Figure 6

A watch

Once upon a time there was a clock in his house. It was midnight and everyone fell asleep. Figure 6.



A short story by Lorenzo (figure7).



Figure 7

A forest

Once upon a time there was a forest, with mushrooms, grass, people. There were children, lots of them, playing chasing each other. At some point they went home, there was dinner and they went to sleep



Figure 8

The Ogre of the Seven Leagues

The ogre is flying. There is cloud and rain.

In cases like these Francesco's account only serves to describe the child's drawing. Figure 8.

1.5.5.2 Long stories

When we are in the presence of long stories, which do not seem to have an end, we could be in the presence of subjects who feel a very strong need to free themselves and vent, through the words and descriptions in their stories, the desires, needs but also the anxieties, fears and anxieties of their soul. However, in other cases, on the contrary, this behaviour could be implemented by the child as a subtle form of defence: a way of saying a lot without, in reality, saying anything.



This was not the case for Francesco a child with autistic disorders, who is the same author of the very short story published above, at a time in his therapy when he had improved considerably. The child, imagining himself an author of screenplays for films, liked to write on the computer or dictate very long stories like this one

Film title: **"Golgostero goes to the North Pole".²⁰**

One day this gentleman wanted to go to a café to buy a granita, but then he saw a carabinieri who wouldn't let him through and he waited a long time for him to let him through. Then one day he saw a red thing fall from the sky, a little red paper. A little sparrow had dropped it and he picked it up and read all that was written on it: 'To enter the bar, you must have the keys, otherwise you can't get in'. So he got the keys and entered the bar. In the bar there were many good things to drink and he drank almost everything, but then he got a very bad stomach ache, and he went out of the bar and saw some news in a newspaper, where it said: 'To get rid of your stomach ache you have to go to the bathroom'. So he went to the bathroom, sat down for a while and got over it. Then, the next day, he decided to leave and so he went to the North Pole. Then he saw polar bears, deer and a snowcat, who were staring at him from afar. He

²⁰ The title, of what should be a film script, was given by the child himself.

then tried almost to run away, but the cat stared at him fixedly, because it wanted him to stand still. And then he tried again to escape, and succeeded. The snowcat came slowly up to catch him, but he made an incredible run, jumped into the water and the snowcat could no longer see him and ran away.

When he came out of the water he felt cold and wanted to look for a house, but could not find one. At one point he saw a gentleman with a boat in the distance, approached him and asked: "Look, sir, could you tell me where I can find a house?" And the gentleman answered: "Go straight ahead; when you see a marked sign, you will find the house on the right. So he walked for a long, long time, at a certain point he saw a beautiful house in the distance, he knocked and someone opened and said: "Who are you? What do you want?" "Please," he answered, "I would like to enter the room, for I have not had a house for a long time. The man said to him, "But for a very long time?" And he answered yes. At this point he made him sit down. When he entered he saw a beautiful house, all shiny, with a kitchen, a living room and three bathrooms. At one point he saw some stairs, where there was a room above. So he went up, and when he went up he saw, next to the bed, a beautiful radiator, but it was turned off. He saw how beautiful it (the room) was, so he undressed and lay down.

The story continues in the next session...

While he (Golgostero) slept, he dreamt of many drinks and many good things to eat, but then, when he finished dreaming of all these things to eat, he dreamt of a cream cake with eggs, cheese and strawberries inside. The dream lasted almost a long time! As he finished the dream he woke up and said, "What did I dream?" He thought, he thought, he kept thinking, but then he said to himself: "Miiih? I dreamt a beautiful cake," but he remembered. In the meantime, the gentleman he had knocked on the door had arrived and said: "I have prepared chicken with potatoes for you; do you want to come and eat it?" He replied: "Yes, I want to come. Meanwhile, first he washed his hands and then he went. He saw this chicken with potatoes, beautiful! And he ate it all up. So he got a very bad stomachache. Then he said, 'Excuse me,' went into the bathroom and vomited on the sink. Then the man came in and said: "Why did you vomit on the sink?" He replied, "Because I couldn't take it any more." And the gentleman replied, "Ah! Because you couldn't take it any more?" So then he kicked him out and said, "If you feel like eating go somewhere else, not in this house anymore!" So the gentleman closed the door and he stood outside looking for something to eat, but then he heard some sound of some magic: it was a piece of

paper written with things to eat on it: "If you are hungry you will find a restaurant on the left". And so he went. There were people dancing, playing music and he went in and saw lots of good pizzas, so he decided to get one. He then took two pizzas, went outside and took them with him. He later arrived at another house, knocked on the door, a gentleman opened it and said: "Who are you? What do you want?" "I'm a guy who has pizzas, can I eat them at your place?" "What are you doing with these pizzas?" He thought and said, "I have an idea, I'll give one pizza to you and I'll eat the other one." "But I know you," replied the gentleman, "I remember when you saw me in the boat and asked me for directions."

Francis, at this point, switches from the third to the first person.

I replied: 'When? Ah, yes, yes I remember, I remember when you told me that that sign said where to find a house'. The man replied: 'Ah, yes, yes... I remember it perfectly'. And I replied: 'Since you remember now, you have one pizza and I'll have the other one'.

So, I tried to give him that pizza and the gentleman said no! Then I insisted a lot, but the gentleman won by saying no. So then the gentleman closed the door. There was a dog and I said, "Here, do you want the pizza?" But the dog didn't want it. So then I left on my own. I saw a tag, I tried to put that pizza down next to

the tag, but I didn't put it down, so I put the other pizza down and left to find another quiet house. So then I saw another house from afar and I thought: "Miiih, what a nice house!", but then when I got even closer, I said: "But this house is old". I tried to go inside and I saw dirt on the floor and from a distance I saw a table and I also saw a broom to clean everything. Then, when I picked up the broom, I saw a kitten, I stepped back and said to the kitten: "Get out!" First I said it softly, then loudly, and so he came out. So I took the broom and cleaned everything up. I threw the dirt out in the country.

I fixed all the things. Then, when I had fixed all the things, I tried to sit down. As soon as I sat down on the chair, this chair broke and I fell on the floor. Then I got up, sat down on another chair and I didn't fall down any more. Then, as I was opening the pizza, a bat came and landed on the table. I heard a noise that it was eating the pizza. I looked at it and said, "Listen, bat, get away!" He wouldn't listen and ate almost all of it (the pizza). I tried to get the bat off the table. He was still eating the pizza. I was still trying to get him off, and he almost bit my hand. But as luck would have it, I couldn't get the bat off. I tried many times but then it bit my finger. I tried for many times and finally took my finger out of his mouth. I remembered to tell him in that loud way: "Go away!" And he went away. And I was left with just a little bit of pizza, I was almost eating it, but there was a little

mouse and I squashed it away hard with the pizza. I looked for something to clean the pizza, (dirty from the mouse) I found it, but it wasn't the right one, because it was a cardboard box. But then from a distance I saw a rag, I got a ladder, climbed up and took the rag and cleaned the whole pizza. I got off the ladder, picked up the ladder and put it down and walked over to that chair that wasn't broken, sat down and ate it.

It seems that Francis, in this long story, wanted to convey to the therapist and those listening attentively to his words, many of his difficulties and fears but also the desires and needs of his soul.

- Meanwhile, the fear of being sick from food. This fear had perhaps stemmed from the words and considerations of his parents who, having accepted the intake of certain foods as the cause of his autism, forbade him to eat them (*He saw this chicken with potatoes, beautiful! And he ate it all. So he got a very bad stomachache*).
- Fear of animals. In this case of the 'snowcat' (*So he almost tried to run away but the cat stared at him fixedly because he wanted it to stay still*).
- The desire for a clean, warm and cosy home (*I would like to enter the room because I haven't had a home for a long time*).
- The desire for good and delicious food (*While he slept he dreamt of so many drinks and so many good things to eat*).

- The fear of not being accepted, as had probably happened to him several times (*So then he kicked him out and said: "If you feel like eating, go somewhere else, not in this house!"*).
- Unexpectedly, for a subject with autism spectrum disorder, the desire and need to share something with others is evident and very intense: in this case, a pizza, first with a person and then with a dog (*I got an idea, one pizza I give to you and the other I eat*). But neither one nor the other accepted his gift, with the consequent disappointment (*So, I tried to give him that pizza and the gentleman said no! Then I insisted a lot, but the gentleman won by saying no. So then the gentleman closed the door*). Probably in this refusal on the part of others to accept one of his gifts, there is an echo of the frustrations felt by him and by many other children with autism spectrum disorder or even with other various difficulties, when they try, with a lot of effort, to make friends and relate to other peers and find, instead, in these, attitudes of rejection or, worse, phrases and behaviour of derision
- The disappointment of finding a house, only to discover that it was old and dirty. This may refer to never having been able to find an environment suited to his needs (*But this house is old. I tried to get in and saw dirt on the floor*). Despite this he tries to clean it and adapt it to his needs (*So I took the broom and cleaned everything - everything. The dirt I threw away in the country*).

- And finally, more misfortunes and inconveniences: the broken chair; the bat that wants to eat his pizza; him chasing away the mouse with the pizza, which gets dirty and there are difficulties in cleaning it. All these mishaps probably refer to the integration and socialisation problems present in individuals with autism spectrum disorder

In this long, suffering tale, there is all the anguish of children with these disorders. Children often seen as those who cannot fit in and relate well with others, even though, as we have just read in Francis' story, many times it is others who have difficulty in understanding and accepting them.

1.6 USE OF FAIRY TALES AND FAMILIAR THEMES

The stories we invite may contain, in part or in full, not only the product of the children's imagination, but also stories, fairy tales and themes known to them from school, family or friends. Sometimes these are stories read by themselves or their parents. In other cases, the content the children report is taken from watching some film or cartoon (Figure 9). In addition, in our hyper-technological society, children's stories are increasingly influenced by the stories in video games that have become widespread in all families and social strata since the 1980s. These games bring into children's minds and imaginations stories and characters, some positive and some clearly negative, that we find in their stories.

Sometimes the adventures in video games are faithfully reported, in other cases they are instead transformed, altered and interpreted by the child's inner needs. For these reasons we can only derive indications of the inner experiences of the

child under investigation from the type of video game chosen in the story and the modifications he or she has made to it.



Figure9 - An emblematic drawing of how the family today is often conditioned and squeezed like a spider's web by electronic devices. In this drawing all the members of the family are in front of the TV. Each of them holding the remote control or the inseparable mobile phone.

It is therefore nothing strange that a child reports what he/she has seen or heard, if this occurs during the first encounters and, therefore, only at the beginning of a therapeutic relationship. At this stage the child may not yet have discovered the pleasure and the possibility of creating, by inventing them, stories of his or her own, born from his or her own imagination. At the beginning of therapy, this behaviour of the minor may simply be a cautious way of gradually starting a dialogue relationship with a newly met person, such as a therapist or a teacher.

Usually, however, the children themselves, over time, tend to modify, even if only partially, the contents of what they read, see or hear because, almost always, an inner need emerges to communicate something more intimate and personal to a person they feel is a friend. Therefore, if this behaviour persists, one has to ask oneself whether our relationship with the child is evolving in a positive way or has remained at a superficial stage. In this case, it is essential to question one's approach to the child and try to improve it.

If we exclude this possibility, the other possible motivation could lie in the psyche of our little user. It may be the case that a very closed and mistrustful child avoids, even if put fully at ease, communicating his or her emotions and feelings even after months.

These behaviours, which can be present in subjects who possess a very rigid personality and little trust in others, could be overcome by implementing a much freer, accepting and joyful relationship, such as the one present in the Free Self-Directed Play technique²¹. In this type of play, the understanding that can be established between the adult and the child more easily becomes deep and full, since the latter is welcomed into the games and activities in a condition of maximum freedom

In the more frequent case where the child, driven by his inner impulses, modifies a known story, we should try to discover and understand both the quantity and the quality of the modifications he has made. These changes will be invaluable in understanding the inner world of the child with whom we have embarked on a therapeutic journey.

²¹ Tribulato E. (2013), *Autism and self-managed free play*, Milan, Franco Angeli.

Changes may concern:

- ***The characters in the story.*** Sometimes the child alters the characteristics of the various characters, giving them a different sex, age or personality traits from those described by the author. Other times he inserts fictional characters or even puts himself as the main character.
- ***The plot of the story.*** Alterations and modifications may also affect the structure of the story itself, which may be disrupted, sweetened or made more aggressive, tragic, anxious and restless by the child.
- ***The ending of the story.*** The words that conclude the story can also be changed in a positive or negative sense. For example, by inserting a tragic ending instead of a happy one or vice versa.

Although the causes of these changes may be due to difficulties in understanding what has been read, seen or heard, in many cases the alterations in the plot of the story, in the characteristics of the characters, as well as in the setting in which they move, are due to the emergence of personal inner needs.

It is his or her personal family and social reality, it is his or her emotions, anxieties, fears, desires and aspirations that often make their way and impose themselves on the child's mind and imagination, stimulating him or her to make changes to the original text of the story. Ultimately, very often the changes manifest or interpret the child's needs, wishes, shortcomings or difficulties.

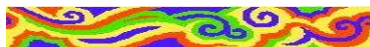




Figure 10

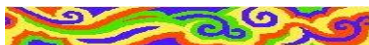
An example of the above can be found in Salvatore, which tells an adventure based on a famous video game character: Super Mario.

A video game

Once upon a time there was Mario, who is a monster. He was in the video game, then he came out, climbed up a rope balancing and there was a shark underneath, who wanted to eat him, but he made a magic sphere, threw it at him and he was saved.

The child narrates very well the adventure of Super Mario climbing up the rope while there is a crocodile underneath, however, strangely, he describes it as a monster (*Once upon a time, Mario is a monster*). It is this personal element that may

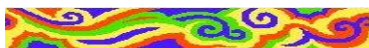
be of interest to us and may give us interpretative input. Figure 10.



Minions rob Banks

Once upon a time there was a group of Minions who robbed banks to make money. They did a lot of missions and murdered a lot of people, stole cars. Then the cops came and shot them. But they called the helicopter and escaped.

Giuseppe, an eleven-year-old boy, who presented with depressive symptoms, anxiety, and was troubled by intense, numerous phobias and nightmares, fairly faithfully recounts the themes of the video games he used, but dwells on the aggressive and violent themes. His account should make us reflect on the consequences that can arise when, as in Giuseppe's case, minors are left to play violent and aggressive video games.



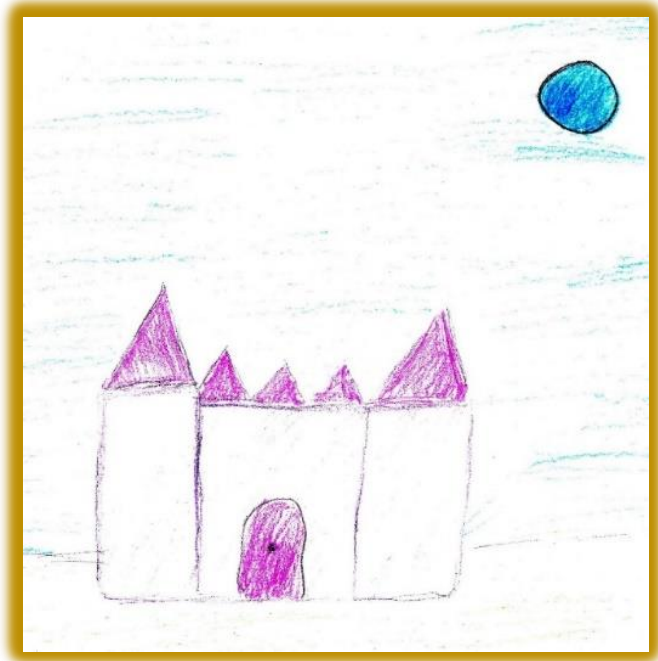


Figure 11

Cinderella revisited

Once upon a time there was a castle in the plains, with a warm climate, and the inhabitants were a little girl named Sara, who stayed in the castle with her stepmother who was married to her father. The father was not in the castle, because he was dead, but there were two sisters and the stepmother who treated her badly, making her do many things. And the cat was bad too. Sara talked to the animals. One day a letter arrived at home, an invitation to a wedding. But the stepmother did not want it.

She ordered lots of work around the house so that she couldn't go. She was making a dress with the help of animals. She enters a room, sees a dress and puts it on, which they had made for her, from a set of her sisters' clothes. The sisters tear it and then she cries. A fairy comes and casts a spell on her with the carriage, the dress... she goes to the party and dances with the prince. The stepsisters are envious and the stepmother is intrigued. She loses the slipper, in the meantime the prince makes her wear it. The stepsisters, however, have Sara try it on and they get married.

Luisa's tale contains the contents of the Cinderella fairytale, albeit in a non-linear and harmonious manner. In the drawing that accompanies the tale (Figure 11), numerous spires are evident in the castle, with which the child wanted to emphasise the stepmother's aggressiveness towards Cinderella. Note also the use of cold, sad colours, both for the castle and the sun

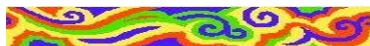




Figure .12

An example of a less faithfully reported fairy tale is the one proposed by Federica, an eight-year-old girl.

La vispa Teresa

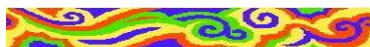
Vispa Teresa was standing in the grass and came across a butterfly; sneaking up to catch it. Without realising it, the butterfly caught it quickly, taking it by the wings: how bad it was!

The butterfly, in despair, asked if he would let her fly. In despair, Teresa, the little sly one, freed it by placing it on a flower. The little butterfly forgave her and they were friends forever.

If we compare this text to the original nursery rhyme by Luigi Sailer, we notice several differences. A nickname is added to little Teresa: *furbacchietta*, not present in the original. This nickname is probably the one her parents or some other adult had given Federica because of some mischievous behaviour on her part. Similarly, the hint that the child inserts about forgiveness and a future friendship reveals a personal need of her own (*Sorry Teresa, the little rascal, had freed her by placing her on a flower. The little butterfly forgave her and they were friends forever*)

It is as if Federica were saying to herself: 'When, as often happens to me, I make another person hurt or angry, if I then regret it, I can very well re-establish the relationship and rebuild the friendship or love that has been put in crisis'.

Note in the drawing (figure12), the difficulty, still present in the child, of performing the subject in profile

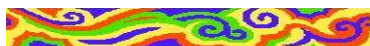


A son called Jesus

Once upon a time there were two peasants who lived in a cave, because they had no house, because they were poor. When it rained they were happy, so they ripened fruit. One day soldiers came and killed her husband: they crucified him, because they are wicked. The girl

wept, she did not leave the house any more, and she had a son named Jesus. And they lived happily ever after. Joseph died. Jesus was also put on the cross. The mother wept and the world never heard of them again, except in church.

In this case, the story of the life of Jesus and his family is greatly altered by the pessimism and sadness that pervades the soul of this child. He describes a world in which there is no positive element: a world of poverty (*two peasants who lived in a cave because they did not have a house, because they were poor*); an evil world (*they put him on the cross because they are evil*); a world in which death is always looming (*they killed her husband - Jesus put him on the cross too*); a world in which sorrow predominates (*Mama weeps*). Finally, there is an intimate pessimistic view in the child's psyche about people's sensitivity to serious events, when he states that the memory of those dramatic events will not be preserved in the future but will be lost (*one no longer hears about them, except in church*).



Martina, a six-year-old girl, also offers us an example of a story that has been greatly modified from the original.



Figure 13

Little Red Riding Hood

Once upon a time there was a little girl who went every day to her grandmother. One day Grandma said to her: "Little Red Riding Hood, go to your aunt, who has to give you pasta for the dog: pasta with sauce". Little Red Riding Hood said: "Granny, I will go immediately and come back". And Granny said: "First shut the dog up, or it will run away". Little Red Riding Hood immediately ran to her aunt, without closing the gate. The dog, when she was already at her aunt's, came out of the gate and ate three sheep, which also belonged to Little Red Riding Hood. It was like she had a zoo. When the dog finished, he took off running. There was a bad wolf in the street, which is why Grandma

wanted Little Red Riding Hood to close the gate. The little dog thought it was another dog and the wolf ate him in one bite. Little Red Riding Hood, when she came back, put the dough to the little dog and said: 'Where has Bolly gone? Screaming and running, Little Red Riding Hood went to her grandmother and said, "Grandmother, where did the little dog go?" "Why didn't you close the fence?" said Grandmother. "Why didn't you listen to me? You should have listened to me, because there is a wolf in these woods. It may not have eaten him, because the dog was very good at running."

Little Red Riding Hood immediately put on her hood and went looking for the little dog, but did not see him. Running and crying he went to his grandmother: "Grandmother, I didn't find the little dog!" Grandma with a sorry face said, "That means he ate it. Let's go to the market right away and buy a new doggie" "Alright, Grandma". "I saw a dog going that way: it was Bolly. The wolf had only eaten the three sheep. (Bolly) was on the other side of the woods and hadn't seen him". When Daddy came back from work, he made a cage out of wood and put the little dog's things in it. So the little dog could run and play in the open air. Little Red Riding Hood learned to always close the fence.

The child substantially modifies the classic fairy tale of 'Little Red Riding Hood', inserting several new elements that come

not only from her real experiences but also, and above all, from her own fears and inner problems.

There are many changed elements in this tale: for example, there is no Red Riding Hood's mother asking the little girl to go to her grandmother, but it is the grandmother who asks the little girl to go to her aunt. Furthermore, the 'big bad wolf' does not eat the grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood, but takes out his hunger and aggression on the sheep and the little dog. Contradictions are also present. While she initially says that the sheep were eaten by the dog (*The dog, when she was already at her aunt's, came out of the gate and ate three sheep*). Later, she states that the three sheep were eaten by the wolf (*The wolf only ate the three sheep*).

It should be noted, however, that when grandmother seeks a solution for her granddaughter, deciding to buy another small dog, Martina's inner need becomes predominant, so that she substantially alters the narrative, so much so that she alters what she had said a moment earlier in order to save the small dog (*The wolf had only eaten the three sheep. (Bolly) was on the other side of the forest and had not seen him*). The drawing (Figure 13) also does not seem connected to the original story.



Another highly modified story is brought to us by Federico.

Pinocchio?

Once upon a time there were two gentlemen: husband and wife. While they were walking in their town, called Panzipo, their wife was due to give birth. So they went to the house

to get the car and then went to the hospital. The birth went well, it was a boy and they named him Emmanuel. They cared for him and when he grew up they had to leave. They went to a small village. There they found a home, the child was given a school and everything went well. One day, while his father was taking him to school, Emmanuele did not enter and went to a theatre. A puppeteer was there and asked him if he could watch the show. He told him no, because he had to buy a ticket. So Emmanuele went to buy the ticket, which cost five euros and he had no money. He sold all his school things to get the money and bought his ticket. At the end of the show the puppeteer took the puppet with him.

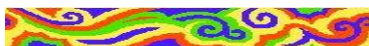
Emmanuel did not know that he was bad and they went to his castle, made all of fire. The puppeteer made him work all the time and one day, while he was picking fruit, he met a fox and a cat. He asked them for help to escape and they made him do a puzzle and when he completed it, the puppeteer arrived. So he ran away, because he realised they were bad guys, but the cat and the fox were faster. They caught him and tortured him a lot and brought him back to the puppeteer. A family gave him another job: to guard their garden, but at night he wanted to run away. The family's dogs followed him. They caught him and took him back to the family. He defended himself and said he wanted to run away because he had been

terrified by the puppeteer. Then they took him back to the house, the parents asked him what happened and he told a lie.

In this greatly altered narrative, the child inserts many violent and aggressive elements, linked to his personal history.

1.7 LINK OR NOT TO THE DESIGN

If it is clear that the child links the drawing to the story, it is good to examine whether there are important elements and motives in the story that can give us further information.



An example of linking drawing to storytelling we have from Alessio, a six-year-old boy.

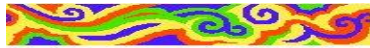


Figure 14

A wrecking ball

The ball falls to the ground, breaks the branch, falls on the pebble and shatters it into a thousand pieces. The ball breaks the pebble and makes a very deep hole in the ground.

Alessio, after drawing a tree and a wrecking ball (figure 14), comments on what he has drawn. As is evident, it would be impossible to understand not only the content of the drawing but also the child's emotions, in this case destructive and violent, without the concise but illuminating account that he gives immediately afterwards.



Another example is offered by Ivan, an eight-year-old boy. Figure 15.



Figure 15

A difficult relationship with plants

A lady brought water for the plants. She cared a lot about the plants. She saw them dried out. She armed herself with a watering can and tried to revive them. The plants did not recover. The lady dried out and wanted to buy more flowers. She bought geraniums. They had always been beautiful. She liked them very much. They wanted sun, not water. She put them in the sun and watered them sparingly, as the florist said. This lady wore glasses. As soon as she entered the shop she saw the opposite: even the geraniums were mouldy. She bought fruit trees that gave food.

When, on the other hand, the story does not relate to the design at all, the motivations may be different:

- This choice may manifest a need to defend, by avoiding expressing them verbally, certain realities, thoughts or emotions present, even if not explicitly, in the design;
- the child may have considerable emotional urges that stimulate him to narrate, using various means, what is stirring, at that time or period of his life, in his soul
- the subject, out of fear or shyness, may have wanted to offer us a drawing with stereotypical

features, so as to carefully avoid relevant communicative elements.

1.8 THE STRUCTURE OF THE STORY

The ability to organise and structure words, sentences and events in a linear, coherent and organic manner, respecting a logical and temporal order, is influenced by numerous conditions:

- The age of the child.
- His logical and intellectual abilities.
- The cultural and social conditions present in his family.
- His language skills.
- The presence or absence of psychological disorders and the severity of these.

With regard to the latter component, a few examples can better illustrate the type of storytelling or drawing that children can express depending on their psychic condition and thus on the possibility they have of managing and organising their thoughts, being able to control their emotions.

1.8.1 Clear and coherent narratives

Thomas, an eight-year-old boy, gives us an example of a fairly well-organised and structured story.



Figure 16

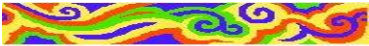
A football match

Once upon a time there was a football match and they played Juventus against Real Madrid. Juve scored a super backhand goal, Real scored another goal afterwards. They were even until Isco scored the second goal. Immediately afterwards Higuain went into the shooting area, but failed, Ronaldo got the ball and scored the third goal. Time passed and it was always 1:3 until, in the last minutes, Ronaldo scored the fourth goal. Finally, Real Madrid won the Champions Cup.

As can be seen, both the drawing (Figure 16) and the narrative are organised in a clear and linear manner. However,

drawing and story do not describe the same events. Whereas in the drawing he depicts a football match between him and a little girl. Naturally, it is he who wins. In the score, or rather grade, he gets a 10+ while his little girl gets a 4 and fails. On the other hand, the story describes, in great detail, a football match between Juventus and Real Madrid, with the victory of the latter team.

We might wonder why he did not describe the competition with his little companion that he had just drawn. The reason is simple to understand: that competition was not about football but about school activities, in which he gets, or hopes to get, a better grade than his probably unloved little companion!



The same can be found in Serena, a nine-year-old girl



Figure 17

A small beach

Once upon a time there was a beach, which was small. There were children there with their parents, playing. Then the children ate, but before eating they took a bath. Afterwards they bathed again. There were two children: a boy and a girl. And then they went home. The next day they came back and did something new: instead of eating food brought from home, they went to eat at a restaurant.

Both the drawing (Figure 17) and the narrative are well organised and clear. We can then deduce that the child's mild psychological problems have not severely affected her ability to handle memories, thoughts and ideas.

1.8.2 Unclear or inconsistent narratives

On the other hand, there are stories in which there are elements that are unclear, incomprehensible or inconsistent with each other.

Alterations in the narrative are present whenever the child's psychic pathology is particularly prominent. In these cases there is often difficulty, if not outright inability, to construct well-structured, complete and, above all, coherent and well-connected sentences.

These alterations are especially present in individuals with severe autistic disorders. In their stories we can find strange and unusual connections between words and sentences in their speech. In the most severe cases, these children can only write

or dictate repetitive words and phrases, without any connection between them, except only by assonance.

This is due to the numerous fears and intense states of anxiety that oppress and unsettle the minds of these minors who, constantly living in a state of considerable fear, suspicion, apprehension and alertness, if not complete mental confusion, have considerable difficulty in controlling their inner emotions and external reality, so as to give words, feelings and life events their proper weight and meaning. Moreover, unable to put their thoughts in order, their sentences are constructed in a convoluted and broken manner, so that their stories are sometimes incomprehensible.

This confused and disorganised state may be very brief or it may persist over time, resulting in a more or less severe deconstruction of consciousness itself.²²

The interpretation of these stories and drawings becomes even more difficult. However, both their words and drawings are equally valuable to us, as they can give us insight into: the severity of the pathology at a given moment; its evolution over time; but also what drives and emotions are prevalent in the subject's psyche at that time.

Let's look at some examples:



Luca, a child in a foster family, presented numerous symptoms of psychological distress due to serious problems in his family of origin: disorders in time orientation; difficulties in

²² Galimberti U. (2006), *Dictionary of Psychology*, Rome, Gruppo editoriale L'Espresso, Vol. 1, p, 498.

language and communication; behavioural disorders with hyperactivity and deficits in attention skills.

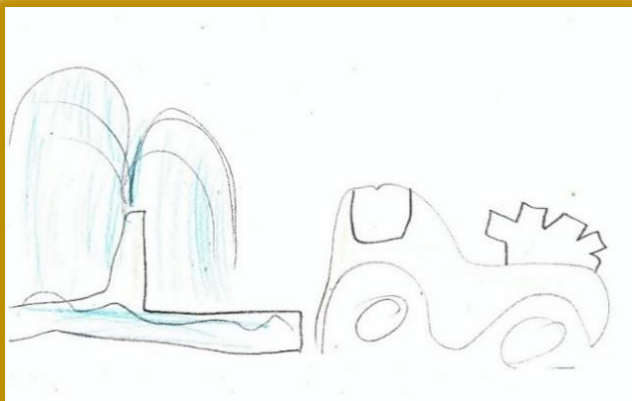


Figure 18

A fountain from which gushed gold

Once upon a time there was a fountain that made gold. One day the whole sea turned gold and fell on the city. All the people were happy, then they turned bad, stole the gold and ran away to Paris. In Paris they stole all the coins, a truck. Then they ran away to Rome, stole a truck, ran away, went to Milan and stole gold coins. They stole a truck of 1,000 metres and 1,688 coins. These people were five adult males: Gianluca, Marco, Filippo, Luca and Alberto.

D. Were they married?

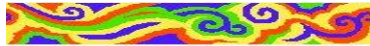
R. They were not married

D. Why were they stealing?

R. They were stealing because they were thieves. Then they went to Palermo, stole a truck and another 1688 coins. The police didn't catch them because they were always running away.

In Luca's story, although the plot is quite comprehensible, we can note not only a certain repetitiveness in the content but, above all, the lack of adherence to reality is evident (*Once upon a time there was a fountain that made gold- They stole a 1,000 metre truck*).

Even the drawing (figure 18), although very clear on the left-hand side of the sheet, is poorly understood on the right-hand side. We can also see that the colour of the water in the fountain from which, according to him, gold was supposed to flow, is not quite the yellow colour one would expect



Filippo, an eleven-year-old boy who had lived in an institution from the age of two until his adoption when he was six years old, despite the therapies he had undergone, presented serious psychological problems that manifested themselves in partial detachment from reality, behavioural disorders, school delay, nocturnal enuresis, fears and poor attention span; his self-esteem was also greatly reduced.

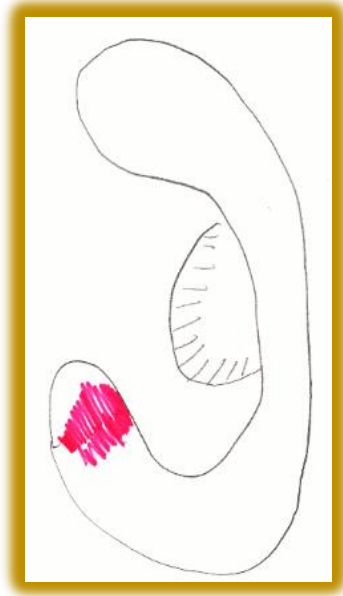
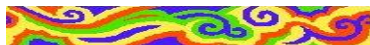


Figure 19

An ear with hair

Once upon a time there was an ear with hair, then it died, it got hurt, because a dog bit it.

Drawings (Figure 19) and stories about a single facial detail are rare. In this case, the child tells of an ear that, attacked by a dog bite, dies. Usually, children tend to see the uniqueness of the human person: both in drawings and in stories. This type of tale and drawing confirms the seriousness of Philip's pathology.

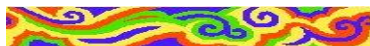


A spoilt woman

Once upon a time, there was a spoilt woman called Giuseppina and she lived in Casapia. She was spoiled because she said she once went around with her friends and beat little girls. Then her sister Flaviella used to say bad words and her father didn't say anything to her, because he was uncaring and people protested one day, because they wanted to kick the whole family out of town. Then there was a womanizer. Then one day there was a very affectionate person called Nino, he would go out of his way. And when this Giusy's friends were there, they would beat up her boyfriend. Then Nino intervened and beat up Giusy and her friend.

It is evident that Gabriel, a young man suffering from autism spectrum disorder, has difficulty putting his thoughts in order. His sentences are unclear and incorrectly constructed (*She was spoiled because she said she once went around with her friends and beat little girls*). Furthermore, in some sections her speech breaks off or does not come to any logical conclusion (*Then there was a womanizer. Then one day there was a very affectionate person called Nino, he was doing his own thing*)

Nevertheless, his words are important to us, as they make us understand, in addition to the seriousness of his pathology, his intense need to criticise all the people in his neighbourhood who, in his opinion, behaved badly. A suspicious and judgmental view of the environment around him.

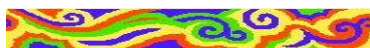


This other story that we are proposing to you, full of remarkable and numerous inconsistencies, originates from the very troubled mind of Mario, a four-and-a-half year old child, who manifested particularly severe symptoms: he licked everything and said strange phrases, such as being a dog. He also presented many fantasies with aggressive and sexual content; he suffered from night terrors and complained of a regression in sphincter control.

The doctor sunbathed

Once upon a time there was a doctor who sunbathed, then went home with his friend Francesco. Together they walked the dog, then they went to Grandma's, who says she's going to Mum's, but she doesn't want to go. My friend Francesco is good but he's sick; Grandma is good too. Dad is bad because he hits the doctor and I cry. Grandma defends me. Grandpa is bad, because he hits the head. Grandma slaps daddy and mummy, because they hit the doctor and they apologise.

In spite of all its inconsistencies, it is easy to discern in this account, on the part of the child, a very aggressive and violent view of the people who related to him.



David and the dog

It was David who was being naughty and a dog threw a hook in his eye. He was hurt and a lot of blood came out. His belly was broken. His mum died and he was happy and went off dancing.

Even in the account of Riccardo, an eight-year-old boy with autistic disorders, it is not difficult to discern, in addition to inconsistencies, an aggressive view of him by the world around him. Even the bond with his mother appears from his words as absolutely non-existent (*His mother died and he is happy and went dancing*).

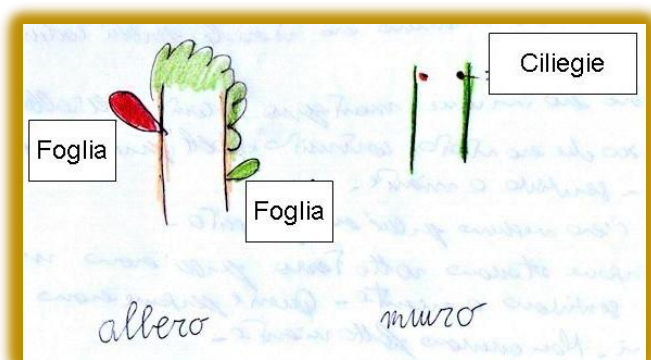
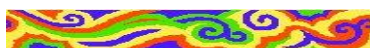


Figure 20

Davide, a thirty-eight-year-old man, also with autism spectrum disorder, recounted:

Davide - First story

The tree and the wall

Once upon a time there was a tree and a wall. The tree had leaves, it was planted underground. Farmers had planted it. It made flowers; there were people who had planted the tree and made the wall.

D. Why did they build the wall?

R. People had made the wall to make the tree beautiful. They were masons.

One day the tree was no longer there and had withered and thrown off its leaves. The people were sad because the tree was no longer there, while the wall was still there.

If we try to interpret this strange and unusual tale of David, we realise that there are some interesting elements that allow us to discover the emotions, thoughts and feelings present in some individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

- ❖ The first element is symbolised by the tree planted underground. This condition of the tree being under the ground makes one think of what happens when children establish an extreme autistic type of closure. Of course this tree is at first vital and full of flowers, but then it dies. Which is then the condition in which the child finds itself when it remains in a condition of autism: a social and relational death.
- ❖ The second element is the wall built by people (*to make the tree beautiful*), then put there as if to protect it from negative elements. This condition closely resembles what happens to

children with autistic disorders, in whom their ego (the well-spirited tree that made flowers) gradually tends to decay and die, while the defences that had been erected (the wall) remain firmly in place.

- ❖ The third element is equally interesting: sadness (*The people were sad because the tree was no longer there*). This sadness is basically that which we find in the parents and the people who relate to these children, but it is also that which we find in the child himself who discovers himself isolated and excluded from civil society and from that psychological condition that provides human beings with development, growth, vitality and joy.

The tree drawn by David has no roots (Figure 20), so it has no stability and could fall at any moment. This suggests to us the presence in this man of considerable instability and emotional fragility. The foliage, which is very small, indicates us his considerable difficulty in integrating himself into the social sphere. The drawing of the wall, from which cherries grow, confirms the presence of considerable confusion in the young man's mind.

Davide - Second story

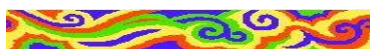
A tree in the sky

Once upon a time there was a tree, with seedlings and flowers; it stood in the sky,

because it was in bloom. It stood underground, and then always underground there were flowers and daisies. One day it happened that the tree withered and then it was no longer there, because it had withered away, as the branches were falling off. Along with the tree there were other flowering trees, which had also withered, and then it happened that the tree was no more. And that was it!

On the level of thought, these two tales of David certainly reveal the lack of coherence in his mind: the tree and the wall in the first tale are in the ground, while in the second tale the tree is in the sky because it has blossomed, while the wall is in the ground along with the flowers and daisies! Not to mention the presence of a wall with cherries, which then withers away!

In both stories, the presence of autistic closure is evident: the wall, the tree, the flowers and the daisies that lie underground. Equally evident and prominent is the sadness: it is autumn, it is cold, there are no people or animals; everything, although initially beautiful and vital, because it is full of flowers, soon afterwards withers, becomes dry, until it disappears.



Another example of an inconsistent narrative is found in Giulia, an almost five-year-old girl.

Giulia - First story

A dog goes to watch the game

One day the dog had gone to watch a game, but one stopped him. The seal was at the sea and the rabbit was in the woods. The rabbit went to look for the seal and said: 'You had gone to Gioia'. He replies: 'You had gone to Glue'. One day the dog goes to watch the game. His father told him not to go. One day the bear's friend went to the game, but left him behind. One mother had a baby girl, she was all grown up, she gave him a bath. Another mum put her to bed. She was always asleep.

The same child gave another even more confused and poorly organised account.

Giulia - Second story

A silver boat

One day a scooter went with his silver boat and embarked. After a ride he returned home and went back to play with the little bells. But one day the evil crystal hat sailed to Los Angeles. He waved his orb and sailed until they embarked. There was one small problem: the snow was too strong. He decided to make it disappear by diving into the sea. He played a precious guitar. And the snow kept falling. He played loudly. He tried and tried and the snow disappeared. The poor hat disappeared and the bells rang.



Yet another incoherent tale we recorded from Vincenzo, seven-year-old boy with autistic disorder. The confused inner reality in his mind was also transferred to his drawings.

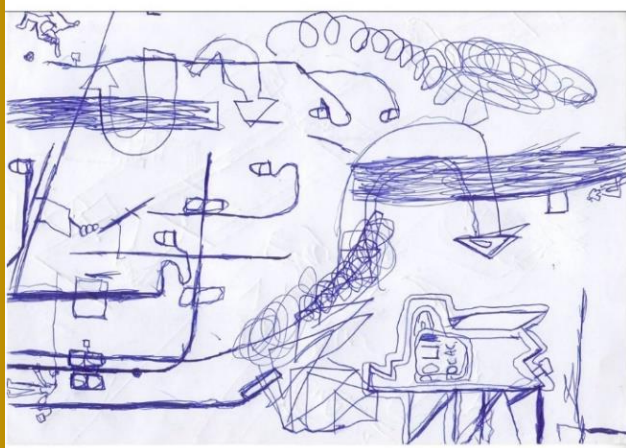


Figure 21

A pole in Messina Centro

Once upon a time there was a pole. It stood in Messina Centro. A gentleman had put it up. The pole was tall, with a small bulb. Near the pole it happened that (someone) kicked the pole and it did not fall down. The same month that the world was born, the pole was born. He started firing bombs at the pole, but it remained intact. The pole could see everything that was going on. People passing by saw it as beautiful and wanted to draw it.

This child, suffering from autism spectrum disorder, confusingly describes the story of a pole (*Near the pole it happened that (someone) kicked the pole and it did not fall down. The same month that the world was born the pole was born. He started firing bombs at the pole, but it remained intact. The post saw everything that was happening*)

This child, who was fascinated by the poles, also expresses in the drawing the emotions and thoughts present in his mind at the time, but he does so in a confused and repetitive manner: so many poles, bent in various ways, so many arrows. It should be noted that while in the story there are people kicking the pole or shooting bowler hats at it, in the drawing (Figure 21) these people are absent, perhaps because of the distrust he felt towards them.

1.8.3 Evolution over time

When children are helped with interventions that manage to bring them greater psychic well-being, for example when their living environment is modified to make it more attentive and close to their needs, or even when individual, family or couple psychotherapy is carried out, these very disturbed minors manage to recover good efficiency at an emotional and therefore mental level. This enables them to control and coordinate their thoughts and ideas much better. On the other hand, when for various reasons the minors' living environment deteriorates or when they are forced to undergo trauma or excessive stress, the words and phrases of their stories and the images in the drawings they make clearly show a worsening of their psychological condition.

Ultimately, we can have improvements or even considerable deteriorations over time, which are reflected in their stories and drawings.



Alberto - First story

An example of improvement in the psychic condition we have in Alberto, a seven-year-old boy with Asperger's syndrome.

A horse called Ferrari

Once upon a time there was a cowboy who wanted a nice horse. The seller had a free horse and he liked it: it was his. He saw it and took it. It was a red horse, named Ferrari. He decided to enter a riding competition and participated. He rode and won. And everyone was happy and there was a shower of towels and the horse did a dance.

Alberto - Second story

Another inconsistent account by the same child:

Pinocchio and the bellyache

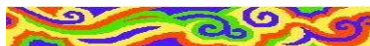
There was Pinocchio who climbed the tree, picked more apples with a basket. He ate them, burst out and was no longer Geppetto's son; he was angry and threw it away. Pinocchio was sad because he slept outside his house, alone. The next day Geppetto fed him. Pinocchio's belly was as big as a balloon; he got a bellyache. He wanted a bath.

Alberto - Third story

However, the same child, at a time when his psychological condition had improved and he was therefore more serene and relaxed, not least because he had just returned from his summer holidays, dictated this much more linear and coherent account.

Marco and his first day at school

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Marco. It was his first day at school. He started maths first. He was smart, good and knew multiplication tables. He sent a message to his friend Luigi to tell him: "The holidays are over". The teacher was about to start maths. How to do the 120. "Simple" said Marco, "1 hundred, 2 tens and 0 units". Marco was super happy that he deserved that nine. He told his mum and dad and they all hugged him and said, "You did great".



Communication and language skills are closely linked to inner serenity and thus to the presence or absence of anxieties and fears. We have an example of this in the two stories by Donato, a nine-year-old boy with Asperger's syndrome.



*Figure22 - Donato surrounds his puppet, to whom he gives the name Apollo, with scribbles and dots, we do not know whether with the intention of protecting him or hitting him. Note that this very simple and poor puppet lacks arms, which may indicate the child's fear of meeting others and the world outside him.*²³

²³ Crotti E. Magni A. (2006), *Come interpretare gli scarabocchi*, Milano Edizioni Red, p. 75.

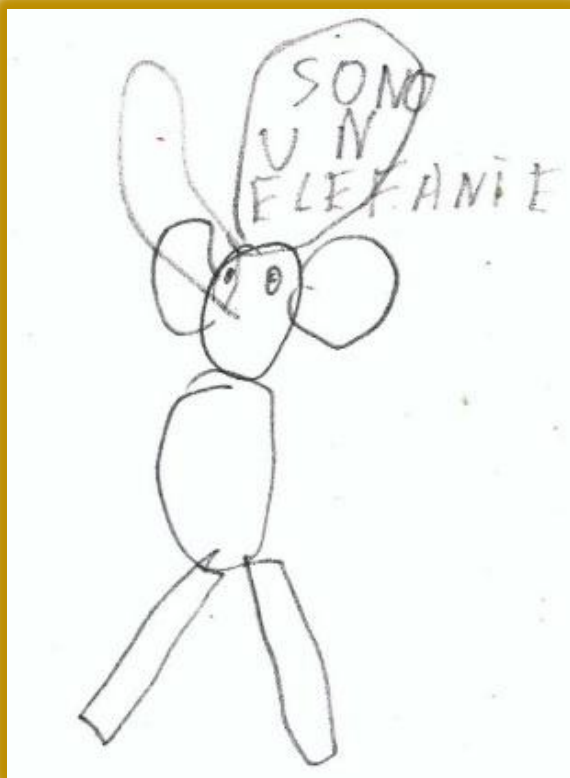


Figure 23

Donato - First story

The elephant and the parrot. (Figure 23).

Once upon a time there was an elephant who had been abandoned by a young boy. He was without parents and decided to go to a master who was not there. His name was Bernardo. "This house is really in a mess," thought the little elephant. Bernardo was on the hunt,

but the little elephant did not know it; he went to look and walked and did not find him. He comes back and does not find him. "Who knows where he is? He is hunting. We'd better go back," said the little elephant. The parents were not there. The little elephant goes all over the city again, but finds no one. He goes home, waits, but Bernardo does not return. The little elephant is getting bored. He hears the clock but Bernardo does not come back. "How long will he be?" He goes again to check all over town. He goes to where they sell elephants and they ask him if he wants to be bought to make a drum skin.

Little elephant: "Isn't my father there?"

Salesman: "Where is he?"

Little elephant: "I don't know!"

Salesman: "Then you must be sold because you have no parents; you will be forced..."

Little elephant: "'When am I coming home?" (He wants to come back, poor thing!).

While he waits, a parrot asks him: "Why are you here?"

Elefantino: "My parents wanted to sell me".

Parrot: "I am intelligent".

Little elephant: "Why?"

Parrot: "Why do they have to sell you".

Little elephant: "I want to leave, I don't like it".

Parrot: 'He is handsome'.

Little elephant: "No, shut up, you ugly parrot, or I'll whip you; I've told you a billion times! Will you shut up?"

Parrot: "I can't".

Little elephant: "Can I come out?"

Parrot: "You have to go there. If you want to leave, ask the judge. We have to train you".

Little elephant: "When am I going home?".

Parrot: "Never again, because there is a bar".

Little elephant: "But my father is waiting for me!"

Parrot: "Why didn't you say so before? We have to train you and take you to the zoo'.

Little elephant: "What does that mean?"

Parrot: "We must whip you and send you to the circus. But since you are an elephant, why are you here? You cannot escape. Handcuffs and away forever. We'll plug your mouth so you can't talk anymore".

Little elephant: "I want to go, you meathhead! Why can't I go?"

Parrot: 'There is the signal'.

Little elephant: "He's not here. How I long to go home! What shall we do?"

Parrot: "We will not feed you and since you are an ugly elephant, we will have to train you",

Little elephant: "What am I going to do? I must go home, I must drink'.

Parrot: "Then drink the soup".

Little elephant: "I don't drink soup".

Parrot: "What about water?

Little elephant: 'It's my favourite food'.

Parrot: "It's not food, it's drink".

Little elephant: "Why aren't there any people?".

Parrot: "They were taken away and this is the tragedy".

Little elephant: "When will I be back?".

Parrot: "All the people and children are gone".

Little elephant: "Why?

Parrot: "If you ask the police, you'll know. Do you know what's here? It catches animals and you'll be sent there. It's true, we don't joke. We can't joke. If you want, you'll go to jail. There's a man there, and the police have the

handcuffs to arrest you. You better hide. Serious consequences'.

Little elephant: "What are we going to do?

Parrot: "Run away. You'll have to wait for him to arrest you'.

The story continues at length but with the same characteristics.

As can be clearly seen from this account, when the anxiety was considerable, the child's language appeared broken, frantic, confused and very repetitive.

Donato - Second story

In contrast, the structure of the story appears different a year later, when Donato's psychological condition had clearly improved. The theme that the child develops is very grim and full of fear and aggression. Some repetitions are still present but the overall improvement of his psychological condition allows him to organise a much more agile, comprehensible, coherent and linear narrative.

The scary ghost

Once upon a time there was a ghost who was very scary and every night he came to scare people. These people could not sleep and had bad nightmares. They would think about what to do with this ghost: should they kill it or send it away? Then in the morning people go to talk to the judge and ask him to make the ghost stay away and make people quiet. And he says:

'OK, I will send him away and that way he will never come back'. And finally the people can sleep in peace. But the postman rings one night and says that this ghost will never go away again. One day they hear the creaking; then they hear the rustling of the wind and feel many thunderstorms. At one point the ghost comes and goes over the stairs and the people hear footsteps and are frightened and hide under their beds in terror. Then the ghost knocks and the people are shaking with fear. He enters and gives a very frightening laugh. Then he hears the noises under the bed, comes and opens the door and takes the people by the neck and makes them choke. Then he takes them away, takes a knife with his hand and sticks it inside the people's heads.

Then he attacks the heads on the wall with nails and a hammer. After a while the ghost goes off into the village to scare other people. Then he knocks on the door and sees that there is no one there, so he leaves and sees someone approaching, like a dark shadow, and he is frightened, but there is no more time to escape and so the ghost, in terror, tries to run away, but his legs are weak and he cannot escape. The shadow approaches, takes him with him and locks him in a trunk with a padlock. Then the ghost can no longer free himself, but he wants to get out because he is suffocating, because he cannot breathe inside the trunk. So he manages to free himself and goes to that devil's

house and puts a knife inside a letter with writing on it. Then he leaves and goes back to his house, but he cannot open the door, because it is locked. At a certain point a storm begins with thunderstorms and lightning destroying trees, which are then set on fire, but he can't get in and doesn't know what to do. He slams the door a hundred times but cannot open it. But then he gets the idea to break through the glass so he can get inside the house. Then he goes to sleep, but he sees someone in the distance through the window, so he hides under the bed, because it could also be a monstrous creature. So he seals all the windows and closes all the shutters with a padlock, so he can't get in. He puts the nails in and then seals everything with a hammer. Now he is safe. Then the monster comes again, but he can't get in. Then he leaves after a while and says: "Good thing he left". Then he goes to sleep. Then in the morning he has breakfast and notices something is gone: his heads have disappeared. So he immediately runs to see where they are, but can't find them. So he has breakfast and then goes somewhere.



The same path of improvement in the management of ideas and thoughts, whereby the child goes from one severely deficient mental situation to another, in which he is able to order his ideas in a more linear and coherent manner, is found in Francesco, another child with autism spectrum disorder.

Initially, when his inner world was severely disturbed, his ability to organise his thoughts was minimal.²⁴

Francis - First story

Paolone

the one

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa

a long day

ago I thought z

that someone like us

called the

their world

polo you are a

ugly and evil

a slacker

a cheater

an ugly

coward of

clumsy

impastore.

²⁴ In these three stories, we have tried to maintain the same font size used by the child and the same layout on the page.

Comedy

Teadraleritornell

Or writing.

In a later period, as his inner experiences improved, the sentences became better organised and structured, but they reported, without much imagination, certain episodes from films he often saw and reviewed on TV.

Francis - Second story

Pina, Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD
THAT

SOLD FRUIT IN THE FOREST WHERE HIS

GRANDMOTHER NAMED PINA.

TOTO' WAS A PRINCPE AND HIS FATHER WAS A DUKE

THEN PAOLO VILLAGGIO COULD NOT GET OUT OF THE

DOOR BUT CAME OUT OF THE BONNET.

WENT TO THE OFFICE TO COME IN AND DO HIS

CHORES AND THEN HE SAW SUPERMAN AND TURNED INTO
SUPERMAN.

THEN HE SEES THAT THERE IS A BEAR IN THE LIFT AND HE
GETS SCARED THEN THE BEAR GRABS HIM WITH ALL HIS
STRENGTH HE CLOSES THE LIFT AND RIPS HIS CLOTHES OFF AND
THEN HE COMES OUT WITH HIS CLOTHES ALL TORN UP

The same child, three years later, at a time when his inner world had acquired greater serenity, was able to construct stories like this one:

Francis - Third story

Desire for a home

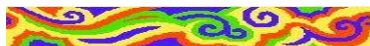
I was close by and as I heard that whistle, that sound coming from afar, which sounded as if someone was calling me, I turned my head but I didn't see it, so I looked for the house and found it; and I wanted to go in but in the middle there was a very big tree trunk, all full of snow. I tried to take it out with all my strength, but I could not, so I took a small tree, but a little high. I tried to take the tree out but it was too much effort, so I threw that tree down and approached again to take it out with all my strength, but this time I was almost succeeding, whereas at first I was not succeeding. Then I succeeded but I was falling down. I held on and something was coming over my head; I moved and it came at me; I held it still because it was almost catching me in the butt. But then I held it still and I saw that there was a gully underneath and I threw it down and then I went up and I saw that it was closed and I opened it and I saw that dirt had fallen off the bed as well. I also saw some mess, so I jumped in the dirt. I saw something to clean it all up and passed the brush. Later, when I finished, I realised it was a brush; I went and put it down and got hungry.

1.8.3.1 The repetition of themes

In some children we find stories with themes that are repeated over time. This repetitiveness of themes may be due to the constant presence of the same emotions and thoughts in the subject, which have become crystallised in the psyche.

1.8.3.2 Verbal stereotypies

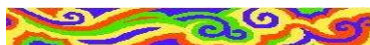
In these cases we are not faced with the same themes but there is, in some stories, a constant presence of words and phrases that are repeated excessively. As is well known, stereotypies are more present in individuals with autistic disorders and psychotic regressions. However, they can also occur in other psychic disorders, whenever anxiety and inner tension are considerable.



We have an example of verbal stereotypy in this story by Michele, a seven-year-old boy with high-functioning autism

In search of treasure

A boy named Charles who searched for treasure, three steps down, two steps left, four steps straight up, two steps left, two steps straight up, one step left. Three steps straight up, three steps right, nine steps straight down, six steps left, two steps straight down, two steps left, one step down, one step straight up, five steps straight up, three steps straight up, two steps straight down, one step straight down, four steps straight up.



Fourteen-year-old Fabrizio, at a stage of his recovery from the psychotic regression from which he had suffered, also presented similarly stereotypical punishment-based content in his stories.

Luisa, a naughty child

Once upon a time there was a little girl, Luisa; she was cute, a bit of a brat: she threw things on the ground. She had a daddy who beat her when she threw things on the ground and she cried. So the little girl said: 'I won't do it any more'. And the daddy: 'If you do it again I'll beat you up. Then they made up and went home. Here was the mummy who was a bit nasty, because she gave her a beating. The girl said: 'I won't do it again'. They made up and hugged each other. In this house there was another sister; they also beat us, because she was naughty, because she threw things on the floor. Her parents were angry with her and beat her up. And she said: 'I won't do it any more'.

1.9 MORALISING TALES

Moralising stories are those in which the child stigmatises behaviour that he or she considers reprehensible. In these cases, children, having introjected adult family and social norms and rules, apply them to various hypothetical situations or to real events of which they have become aware.

Often, these moralising tales conceal realities that have directly affected the children: jealousies towards some brother or sister or aggressive behaviour suffered by classmates. In

some cases, it is merely a way, considered just and legitimate, of venting repressed resentments towards someone.

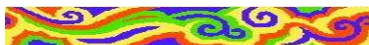


Figure 24

Only an ant cries for his death

Once upon a time there was a gentleman who smoked a lot; they hospitalised him, he had a heart attack and died. He had no family; nobody cried for him, only an ant.

This short story by Roberto is poignant, despite its simplicity: a man who smoked a lot (figure 24) dies, alone. No one mourns for him except a small, insignificant ant. There is certainly a moral judgement in this conclusion. It is as if the child were saying to himself and to us who read his story: 'This man's death and his loneliness are the fault of his smoking habit'.

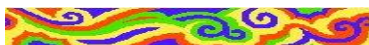




Figure 25

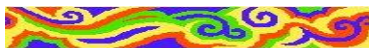
A generous cat

Once upon a time there was a cat (figure 25) called Nino and he was on the street. He was orange in colour.

Nino found a fish, but another cat comes along who wanted to take the fish from him. Nino thus eats half the fish and the other left it for the other cat.

Nino went to the back of the restaurant and waited for them to throw out the rubbish and shared the food with the other cats. Afterwards he went to his adorable shelter.

In this story, Michael admires the cat's willingness to participate in the needs of others and to share its possessions with others.



A vain dinosaur

Once upon a time there was a boastful dinosaur who always boasted that he was strong, very tall and very fast. One day a spider issued him a challenge saying who could jump the highest and the dinosaur accepted. The spider jumped very high while the dinosaur jumped very little, fell to the ground and broke in two, so he could no longer boast.

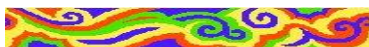




Figure 26

Sharks and the submarine

Once upon a time there were sharks that wanted to eat the submarine. The gentleman with the boat killed the sharks and freed the ones in the submarine and afterwards he wanted money. But the gentlemen in the submarine did not want to give the money. And one day, while they were in the submarine, more sharks were attacking them, but the gentleman in the boat did not want to save them and they died.

John recounts an incident in which there is what he considers to be just retaliation. The sailors of a submarine (figure 26), freed from sharks by a gentleman with a boat, did not want to reciprocate the services they were offered. Therefore, the gentleman in the boat did not help them and they died (*while they were in the submarine, other sharks were attacking them, but*

the gentleman in the boat did not want to save them and they died).

It is easy for the child to refer to experiences they have had with their family members or peers. It is as if he is saying: 'If others do not reciprocate the help and kindness I have shown towards them, they may as well die! I will remain indifferent to their eventual misfortunes and will not lift a finger to help them'.

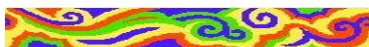


Figure 27

A strange exchange

Once upon a time there was a princess who had seen her sister's hands and saw that she had beautiful nails. So the princess decided to grow them, but she was unsuccessful and tried every which way, until the princess decided to go to a witch.

The princess was at the witch's. The princess asked the witch: "Witch, could you grow my nails?" Then the witch said, "In exchange for what?" (the witch wanted) her voice. So the princess gave her (her voice) and then returned home with her nails. But she did not want to tell her family that she had given her voice to a witch. One day her sisters saw her nails and had a doubt, but then they found out and told their parents, and then they grounded her. Then they went to the witch and got their voices back. The princess said it was better to have the voice than to have nails.

In the female imagination there is often a princess. In this case, Katia tells of a princess she describes as 'very vain', who exchanges her voice with a witch in exchange for very beautiful nails (figure 27).

It is difficult to imagine this hypothetical, strange exchange, if one does not take into account the severe anxiety that frequently accompanies children with psychological disorders. In the atmosphere of immaturity, insecurity, restlessness, anxiety, fear and disesteem, in which these minors often live, even this strange and peculiar exchange may seem fair. They often need

to possess something pleasing to admire and have admired on their bodies, in order to receive the indispensable gratification that can enable them to endure the suffering caused by the psychological problems from which they suffer.

On the other hand, since in these psychological situations communication with others is usually considerably difficult and therefore brings little gratification, the exchange for something, such as in this case beautiful nails, which serve to improve one's aesthetic image, may appear important.

It is also interesting to examine in the story what kind of interest induces the princess to make that strange exchange: the comparison with her own sister. It is not uncommon that the choices of children, but also of us adults, choices often judged to be ill-advised, if not downright improvident, are triggered by feelings of envy towards other people, when they have something that, at that moment, we do not possess: for example, a splendid car, a designer dress, a magnificent villa. In these situations some people would be willing to do anything to possess what they envy others.

Ultimately, that princess, of whom Katia speaks, was not so much vain as psychologically childish and, therefore, abnormally envious of her sister.





Figure 28

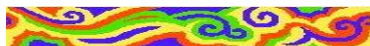
A disobedient boy

Once upon a time there was a boy who was on a camping trip, in which they went on river excursions. One day, during one of these excursions, the boy strayed from the group, did not follow the instructor's directions, changed course and ran into some rapids. Although there was a sign telling him not to cross the border, he did not care and, by the time he got close to the valley, he found himself under water. He returned to the campsite all wet and only took the reprimands. He thought he had made a mistake and that he should listen to what they (the instructors) had said

The story and the accompanying drawing (Figure 28), clearly show us the low self-esteem that Maximus had, as he tended not to obey and not to accept his parents' advice. For these reasons, he judged himself as a child who always made mistakes; who never changed the behaviour that his parents and adults in general did not like and that made them despair.

This child's drawings were always very well cared for, but were never coloured. The absence of colour makes us think that his inner life was frequently pervaded by considerable sadness, due to the relational difficulties he encountered in his relationships with his family members and to a lack of self-esteem.

This second account by the same child confirms his inner experiences.



You have to listen to the advice of the leaders

Once upon a time there was a scout camp where it was decided to go fishing for the day. As soon as they arrived at the lake, the leaders started giving out some bait that was to be used, but not forbidding the use of other bait. So the squadrons did as the leaders had said, but one "squadron" decided not to follow the leaders' advice and, instead of fishing with a line in his hand and fake bait, he fished with a worm and a rod. Time passed quickly and it was time for lunch. When the whistle blew, everyone brought what they had caught. All the squadrons brought many fish, but the squadron that did not decide on the tips did not bring any

fish and they were left empty-handed for the day.

1.10 COPROLALIC TALES

In some cases we find in the stories the presence of words or phrases with obscene and/or vulgar content. This is a compulsive behaviour that is present in subjects with major psychological problems: Tourette syndrome, autism, severe psycho-affective disorders. In these persons, the use of vulgar words or drawings stems from the need to express and manifest, by means of such words, one's serious inner discomfort. The terms used often concern excrement, sexuality and genital organs. In other cases, they associate the people they address with animals considered ugly, slimy or dirty, such as snakes, pigs, rats or cockroaches.

We must, however, distinguish such behaviour from that frequently used in our modern western society, in which the use of vulgar words and gestures is unfortunately widely accepted by many educators and parents. The mass media - books, newspapers, films, TV series, video games, entertainment programmes - contribute greatly to this use.

These particular modes of expression are more frequent in adolescence and their incidence tends to decrease over the years. Often, this vulgar slang is used for the pleasure of imitating the more rambunctious classmates, radio presenters or actors in the films and TV shows seen.

For this reason, when we are in the presence of subjects who do not present any other particular symptoms, vulgar or obscene words, drawings and expressions have no diagnostic value, at least as far as psychic reality is concerned.



An example of coprolalia can be found in Katia. A nine year old girl, who presented with significant psycho-affective disorders manifested by verbal and behavioural mannerisms, closeness and shyness, fears and phobias, the presence of infantile behaviour, nightmares and anananchasms. The child, who tended to use coprolalic terms during the period in which her psychic pathology was more severe and her psychic suffering was considerable, following the gradual but rapid improvement of her psychological condition, despite the fact that there was no censure by the practitioners who followed her, she stopped using that type of expression.



Figure 29

Katia - First story

Real or fake poo?

Once upon a time Erika ordered fake poo from Amazon. They sent it to her home and when she opened the parcel it was real poo. Erika didn't know it was real, so she started playing with it and when she put it down she realised it was (real) poo.

Katia, in order to make her character look ridiculous, although she knew how to draw well, made the woman's face very ugly and inserted very short arms (figure 29).

Katia - Second story

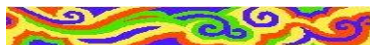
A little girl named Maialona

Once upon a time there was a little girl named Piglet. Her mother saw that she had just woken up and looked like a pee and went to school and everyone called her Stinky Pig. Then she went back to school and everyone called her Onion. She came home and her mum said, 'How did it go Oniony' and she said, 'Fine' and they lived happily ever after.

Katia - Third story

A doctor called Coscarafaggia

Once upon a time there was a doctor called Coscarafaggia and she was 23 years old and she was in love with a doctor called Marco Faccio. One day she asked him to be her boyfriend, and he replied that he was disgusted by cockroaches. Then Coscarafaggia said: 'That has nothing to do with it'. Instead Marco Faccio said: 'It has something to do with it because your name resembles the name of a cockroach'. Then she was very sad and lived happily ever after with her friend Toposcar.

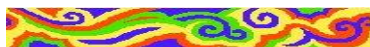


Even ten-year-old Francesco, who suffered from autism spectrum disorder, when his inner world was still severely disturbed and his ability to organise his thoughts was minimal, tended to frequently use coprolalic phrases and expressions. The use of these terms disappeared as his inner experiences improved.

Mum and Dad

The mother: to cry, to be a grandmother, a monster, a beast, a snake that sucks.

Daddy: He poops all over himself, he's ugly and pissy, and poop and pee come out in his ass.



Riccardo, a seven-year-old child with autism spectrum disorder, used vulgar words during his most severe period. These words disappeared as his mental pathology improved. These three stories are his.

Riccardo - First story

Two mothers

He is a child who was born with a body like this and his name is Memme and he cheers for Juventus. He's missing a leg. His mother plays with him. He has two mums: one is called Cacca and one is called Memme.

Riccardo - Second story

Mother laughs in front of her dead son

A child has broken two arms and his feet are small. He is without companions. The house is broken. The ambulance takes him to hospital. The child's name is Luca and he poops all over himself. Luca died; he was crazy, they take him to the cemetery. The mother arrives and goes: "Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" (laughs), Little children come to look at Luke and they were sad because they had blood that could come out of him.

Riccardo - Third story



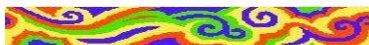
Figure 30

The sea broke

Once upon a time the sea was broken because there were so many fish. There was a giant baby who was hurt by the jellyfish and blood came out. The child cried, then he peed on the sea. Then he went underwater and the whale came and ate him. In the whale's mouth the baby was sick, because the whale chewed him. Then he spat it out. The baby had blood coming out of his whole body and he died.

In order to give an idea of the danger of his imaginary sea that had broken, the child, in the drawing accompanying the

story (figure 30), makes the sea very large by placing a small ship on top of the waves



Deborah also used coprolalic terms in her stories.

Baby and baby - sitter

There was a baby-sitter calling a little girl to play. This little girl pooped outside the toilet. But then she died, because she had detached her spine and had surgery. But the first word she said was 'poo'.

In all these tales, the authors' severe psychological disorders are evident not only from the use of coprolalic words and images, but also from the presence of truculent images and for the unconnected if not totally disconnected contents.

All these children, when their inner experiences normalised, stopped using such vulgar expressions.

The same considerations made about the use of vulgar words can apply to drawings. In these, the presence of, for example, genitals is rare in normal children, whereas it may be present in subjects with major psychological disorders.

1.11 THE CONCLUSION OF THE STORIES

The final part of a story is important, as it allows us to understand the child's attitude towards reality inside and outside him. Painful and tragic words and phrases, such as the death of one or more characters, can highlight a sad, difficult or aggressive inner world or living environment. Conversely, words of hope, such as the classic sentence at the conclusion of many

fairy tales: 'And they lived happily ever after', can instead suggest that in the child's soul, despite personal, family, school or relational problems, there are still signs of hope in the future and elements of openness to life and to others.

However, this is not always the case. In some cases, the happy ending only serves to protect oneself from fearful or unpleasant situations by means of reassuring words.

1.11.1 Tales with happy endings

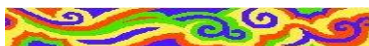


Figure 31

The ruined rainbow

There was a rainbow and it shone so brightly. Once there were children who went to

see it and, at sunset, they went home. They went because it shone and they played under it.

The other morning it started raining and the children were worried because the rainbow had disappeared. They went to see it one more time and said, "Where is the rainbow?" And they realised that the rain had ruined it. These children were sad because they could no longer play in the light of the rainbow. So they went to their mother and said, "Mother, why is the rainbow ruined?" And Mummy replied, "Because the rain washed it away". The children were worried but the next morning the rainbow had reappeared and the children were happy that it had returned. The rain had not washed it away, it just hadn't shown up.

They were so happy that they called their mother and played, and they realised that you don't have to cry about something, because it comes right away.

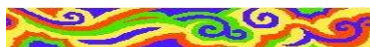
In this story by Martina, a six-year-old girl, the vital drive towards joy, present in the DNA of every child, is highlighted. It is wonderful to live and play in the bright light of this inner joy, and then return full of positive energy to life as usual. This happens in spite of the pessimistic attitude of the mother, who suffered from depression (*Mama why is the rainbow ruined?" And the mother replied: "Because the rain washed it away*). Fortunately, after the initial worries, the rainbow returned.

As if to say that the positive and joyful elements of life come knocking again in the child's soul. This allows her to give the tale

a conclusion full of optimism (*They were so happy that they called their mother and played, and realised that one should not cry over something, which one imagines is lost, because it comes right away*). It should be noted that the little girl goes to great lengths to involve and share her mother in the moments of joy she is able to experience.

Sometimes the roles are reversed: it is not the parents who cast out the black shadows from the children's souls but, as in this case, the opposite can happen.

In the drawing that accompanies the story (Figure 31), the rainbow drawn by Martina has a clear predominance of red and yellow colours, indicating the child's need for more vitality, liveliness and joy in her family, in which, on the other hand, there was mainly sadness and apathy, due to her mother's presence of a depressive syndrome.



Daniela, a six-year-old girl, had come to our observation as she was going through a particularly difficult period due to psychological problems manifesting themselves in intense fears, sleep, behaviour and eating disorders. To which were also anxious somatisations.



Figure 32

The sun and flowers

Once upon a time there was a sun, which loved to be near the little flowers, because it gave them a lot of light and made them grow big. At a certain point, however, he checked all the meadows of the world, but found neither little flowers nor seeds and, therefore, the flowers could grow no more. The other nice clouds argued with them and scolded them, and they said that they wanted to do whatever they wanted, since the good clouds were friends of the sun. The bad clouds did this to the sun. The sun was much more powerful than the clouds and so he gathered all the suns of the world and told them to get rid of all the bad clouds. So, three each, they gathered the bad clouds and sent them away, like a ball. So they found a

child with a seed, they planted this seed and it made flowers all over the world. All the flowers of the world were able to have their friends who would be the flowers and the sun. The flowers, as friends talked and discussed until night came. They gathered and decided on their promise: always to play together, never to part. They all lived happily ever after.

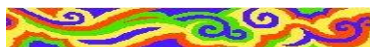
There is in this tale a struggle between the positive elements of life: light, warmth and joy, which are indispensable for the serene growth of children (*Once upon a time there was a sun, which loved to be near the little flowers, because it gave them so much light and made them grow big*) and the sad and painful elements, which instead kill and stifle the desire and the possibility of a serene life and harmonious growth (*At a certain point, however, he checked all the meadows in the world, but found neither little flowers nor seeds and so the flowers could not grow any more. The other nice clouds argued with them and scolded them and they said they wanted to do whatever they wanted, since the good clouds were friends of the sun. The bad clouds did this to the sun*).

Fortunately, also through the support Daniela had at that time from her therapists and parents, who were able to establish a more effective and rewarding relationship with her, the final victory will be of the positive elements of life, which Daniela depicts in the sun, or rather the suns (*The sun was much more powerful than the clouds and so he gathered all the suns in the world and told them to get rid of all the bad clouds*), which eliminate the negative elements of life (*So three each gathered the bad clouds and sent them away, like a ball*).

This allows the rebirth of life and joy (*So they found a child with a seed, planted this seed and it made flowers all over the world*)

In the drawing that accompanies the story (figure 32), the little girl, due to her psychological problems, is depicted in the centre, in the form of a very long flower, to represent her desire to grow quickly, but blue in colour, to indicate the sadness of her life, pervaded at that time by much despondency.

Around the flower that represents her, she draws many red flowers, probably to indicate her desire and need for joy and vivacity, which she hopes she can obtain from a big yellow sun, which expresses vitality and well-being.²⁵



Roberto, a nine-year old boy who had lived in a family with very quarrelsome parents, so much so that they had later separated, presented psychological disorders with nightmares; fear of school; nervousness; aggression towards his mother; and delayed school acquisition.

²⁵ Crotti E., Magni A. (2003), *Colours*, Novara, Edizioni Red!, p. 51.



Figure 33

The elf Giacomino

Once upon a time there was a leprechaun called Jacob, who was naughty: he used to take snacks from the other children at school. When he went home afterwards, he would not eat, but would tell his mother that he had only eaten his.

Mum was tall and fat. Mummy was good: she had six children. There was a short, skinny and good dad. One day Mummy found out that

Giacomino was eating other people's snacks and together with Daddy they decided to ground him. But he slipped and ran away; dad found out and grounded him, not giving him a party and he was happy.

Roberto admits that the leprechaun Giacomino, the character he identifies with, has some less than appropriate behaviour (*he used to take snacks from the other children at school. When he went home he did not want to eat, but told his mother that he had only eaten his*).

These behaviours of his, when they are discovered, cause his parents' irritation, resulting in punishment (*One day Mum found out that Giacomino was eating other people's snacks and together with Dad they decided to ground him*). Giacomino ran away and therefore the punishment he had to undergo became heavier and more severe (*But he overstepped and ran away, dad found out and grounded him: he didn't give him a party and he was happy*).

Seemingly strange is the final note: '*and he was happy*'.

Being content with punishments can be a challenge: 'I am more decisive and stronger than you. Your punishments do not touch me. They do not bend me". But it can also represent a need: 'I did something that should not have been done: it is only fair that I pay'. Children have a very strong sense of justice. Therefore, being discovered and punished by parents who are judged as 'good' can even out their consciences. On the other hand, the lack of just punishment sometimes accentuates guilt.

In the drawing (figure 33), Roberto, due to his liveliness and aggressiveness, is identified and represented as a brat elf. Note his large, open arms, indicating his need to communicate, to

meet and embrace.²⁶ His body, with coloured stripes, refers to his liveliness and restlessness, while his pointed headgear and claw-like hands suggest his aggressive manifestations.



A monster and the stars

Once upon a time there was a monster with stars. He was all white, he saw the moon and turned orange. Then he died, because the moon was so bright and it killed him. The monster was evil and wanted to eat people. He turned the moons into stars, because the stars were his favourite colour. One day the monster met a child and wanted to eat him, but the moon killed him and they lived happily ever after.

Yet another positive ending expressed by Katia in her story. Interesting is the child's mention of the intense moonlight that manages to kill the monster. As if to say that beautiful, bright and tender things are able to defeat all that is ugly and evil.

1.11.2 Painful or tragic conclusions

²⁶ Crotti E. Magni A. (2006), *Come interpretare gli scarabocchi*, Milano Edizioni Red, p. 74.

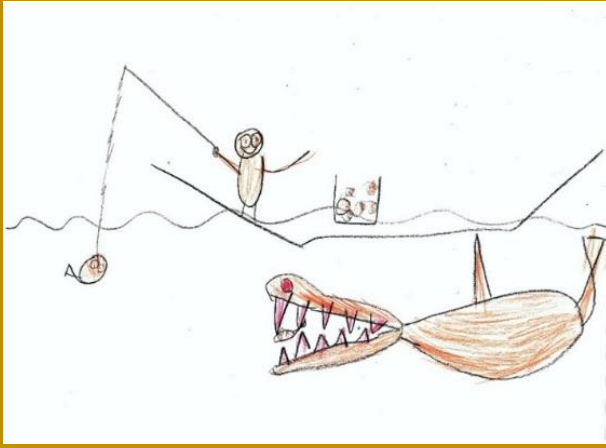


Figure 34

A voracious shark

Once upon a time there was a fisherman who fished every day. One day he happened to catch a shark and the shark ate his arm. From that moment on, he never fished again.

John emphasises the violence of the scene by drawing the shark with enormous dimensions compared to the small, fragile fisherman. The fish's aggressiveness is highlighted by its large, sharp teeth (Figure 34). The entire drawing is coloured brown to indicate the tragic nature of the episode narrated.

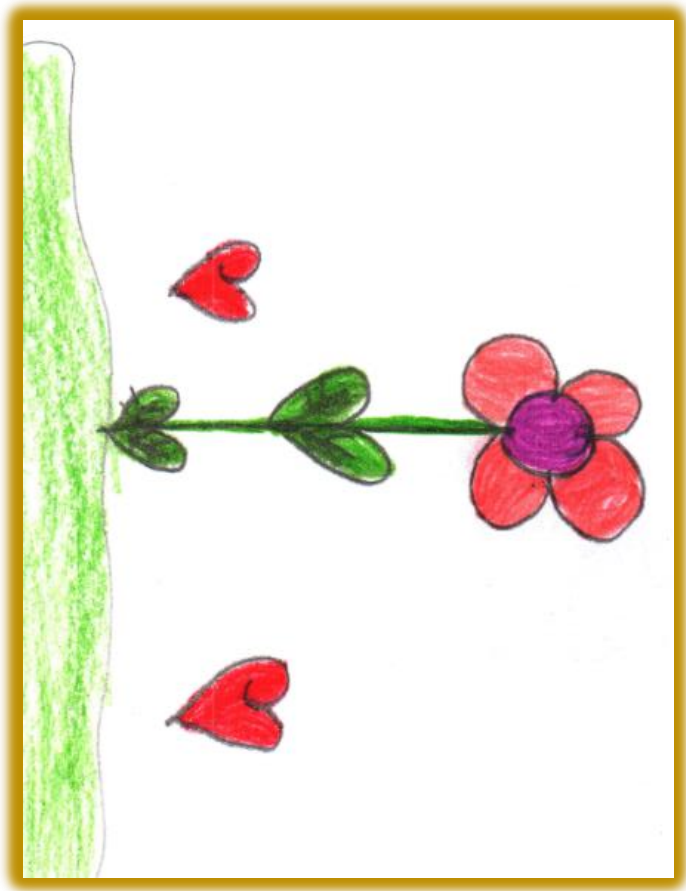


Figure 35

A little flower that walked and talked

Once upon a time there was a little flower that walked and talked. One day the little flower met a little bird and a little butterfly. Then other little friends came: a little caterpillar, a little snail, and a little worm. They talked, they played. One day a little girl saw this flower, picked it up and took it home. She looked after it carefully, putting some water on it, letting it get some air and sunlight. Some days passed and the little flower, what a pity! withered away. So they threw it away and the story of the little flower ended.

Daniela tells the story of a flower that talks, walks, socialises and plays with its little friends (*Once upon a time there was a little flower that walked and talked. One day the little flower met a little bird and a little butterfly. Then other little friends came: a little caterpillar, a little snail, and a little worm. They talked, they played*). This flower, which walks, talks and plays, is brought to a little girl's house but, despite the care she gives it, it withers and dies

It is easy to highlight in this story the pessimistic view Daniela had of life during the period in which she dictated her story and drew her flower.

Notice in the drawing (Figure 35) the two hearts next to the flower and the leaves of the flower that are heart-shaped. It is as if the little girl wanted to communicate to us the scepticism present in her mind at that time, saying to herself and to those observing her drawing: 'It is useless to delude oneself: one can be beautiful and rich in love, one can be surrounded by affection, but life is so cruel that, after a short period of joy, only death awaits us'.

1.12 CHARACTERISTICS AND ROLE OF CHARACTERS

The role the child assigns to the characters and the characteristics he or she attributes to them are important because they signal the image the child has of himself or herself, of peers or of the adults he or she associates with: parents, family members, teachers.

However, this image does not always correspond to reality. (Spiegel J.P., Bell N.W. 1969, P. 67),²⁷ The child's view of others and of the world around him, when the psyche is considerably shaken, can be distorted by particular emotions and feelings: such as fear, anxiety, suspicion, distrust and aggression. This is why we must always be very cautious in judging the people with whom the child interacts, solely from the content of his or her stories.

2 THE THEMES

2.1 EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS

Emotions and feelings are always present in the child's psyche, as in that of adults. Even very young children feel intense desires, possess emotions and feelings.

Childhood emotions frequently manifest themselves excessively because, in early childhood, situations have an all-or-nothing character. Thus, from euphoria one can move on to anguish and then, fairly quickly, return to a situation of normality. Although childhood emotions seem fleeting and superficial, they are instead very profound and are not always

²⁷ Spiegel J.P., Bell N.W. (1969), 'The family of the psychiatric patient' In Aries *Handbook of Psychiatry*, P. 67.

recognisable, especially by those parents and adults who find it difficult to experience relationships with children with empathy.

2.1.1 Seeking warmth, serenity and joy

We all seek environments full of light and warmth. We all seek affection, tenderness and joy. We all seek to live in an environment full of words and behaviour that make us feel good.

This desire is well expressed in the following stories.



Figure 36

Waiting for summer

Once upon a time there was a little girl at home in winter, and she couldn't wait for summer to come, so she was happier, and she was

better off. She wanted to go to sleep; then she woke up and it was summer and she was happy, because everything was fine.

Luisa, a thirteen-year-old girl, waits for the warmth and light of summer to feel good. Also because in summer there is no school and with school there is homework; there are no classmates to tease you; there are no teachers to scold you. Moreover, during the summer, parents are not absent for work and the many occupations of everyday life! In the drawing (figure 36), the child inserts a very large sun, precisely to give the idea of the importance of light and the warmth of the sun.

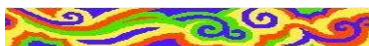


Figure 37

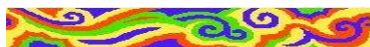
The choice

There was a child who was sometimes in a warm environment, sometimes in a cold environment. But he was not happy about this. One day he made a choice: "I prefer the warmth." He went away to find the warmth and live there for a long time. His choice was right. The cold made him sad. Warmth made him feel strong and happy.

In this story and the accompanying drawing (figure 37), at least apparently, Ivan, an eight-year-old child, discusses with himself a theme that is sometimes discussed among friends: "Is it better to be and live in hot weather, like during the summer, or when it is cold, like in winter?" However, knowing the child, his family, and the other stories he produces, we can interpret this dilemma of Ivan's in a deeper, more intimate and personal way. For the child, living in a warm environment can mean finding himself, at any given moment, invested by parental anxiety, by fears of some illness that may strike the grandparents, by tensions between mum and dad and between them and the grandparents. Living in a cold environment, on the other hand, may indicate the need to protect oneself and distance oneself, at least psychologically, from an environment too full of intense and painful emotions. But this choice would force Ivan to limit his relationships and thus his life. If the interpretation we have given is correct, this child, at that moment, was faced with a choice between closing in on himself, in such a way as to protect himself from the too painful and frequent emotions present in his environment, or letting himself go to these emotions and experiences, at the risk of suffering intensely.

In this story, the choice he makes: '*I prefer the warmth*', may have been possible due to the fact that the parents and

relatives, aided by the therapists, had modified their behaviour, improving their relationship and building an environment around the child that was sufficiently serene and appropriate to his needs. An environment, therefore, allowed Ivan to accept and open up to his living environment



***Happiness is drinking a cup of milk at the
café***

Once upon a time there was a girl who loved to go to the café and have a cup of hot milk. And she liked to drink her hot milk outside. But one day they decided to close the café, and as soon as the girl heard that the café was closed, she was very sad, because it was her favourite café. So she tried to go to the closed bar to get it opened no matter what. Then they wouldn't open it. But then she was in front of a market and saw a bracelet that was a good luck charm, so she bought it and made a wish and wished that the bar would open again, so she could drink her delicious warm milk. The dream came true and so she went every morning to get her hot milk, drinking it outside.

Katia has a wish: to go to her favourite café in the morning and drink a cup of warm milk.

This desire can be interpreted literally, as we all need to start the day with a usual and pleasant event, such as taking a good hot milk or coffee at the bar, which gives us a boost of energy and optimism, enough to face a day of study or work. However,

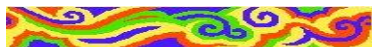
if we try to interpret in a more profound and personal way, this intense need of Katia's, we can think that her need for hot milk refers something much more important. In fact, the greatest and most intense desire the child manifested, when talking to us, was to see her father again, to be with him, to be embraced by him, to be cuddled and protected by him. Unfortunately, all this was denied to Katia, as her mother considered her father, from whom she had been separated for some time, to be a bad person, to be removed not only from her own life but also from her daughter's. She therefore prevented her from seeing her father, who had been separated from her for some time. She therefore prevented her from seeing him, even for a greeting, even for a hug and a kiss. And Katia suffered greatly from this deprivation.

If we consider that sometimes, at the beginning of the separation, the mother allowed the little girl and the father to meet in a café, to spend some time together and at the same time have breakfast, we can easily imagine that that warm milk, which the little girl wanted to drink every morning, takes on a special significance. That warm milk, sipped in that particular café, could have for the little girl the meaning of being able to find herself, at least in fantasy, every morning next to her father.

This interpretation is corroborated by the fact that the girl, in her story, fervently wanted that particular bar, and not another, to reopen (*And so she tried to go to the closed bar to get it to open no matter what*)

2.1.2 Love

This theme is also frequent in children's and adolescents stories.

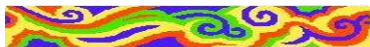


Love for a dying tree

Once upon a time there was a beautiful tree that was about to die because it had no water. One day a farmer saw it withered a bit and put water on it. And so it grew again and bore many fruits: apples

The child identifies himself, and all those who like him suffer the lack of something essential, in a tree that is about to die for lack of water (*There was once a beautiful tree, which was about to die, because it had no water*). Human beings can also die in a psychological sense, when they suffer from emotional deficiencies and are deprived of relationships and care that are essential for their healthy emotional development: such as gentleness and tenderness; demonstrations of affection and love; dialogue and acceptance.

When the farmer gives the dying tree what it needs: water, the plant comes back to life, so much so that it produces fruit (*And so it grew again and bore much fruit: apples*). Similarly, when a child suffering from emotional deficiencies is once again given the attention, care and love he needs, he gradually regains the serenity he had lost and can develop normally, so that he can offer his family and society the fruits of his humanity (*And thus he lived again and bore much fruit: apples*).



Lorenzo, an eight-year-old boy, who complained of psychological disorders that manifested themselves in fears, restlessness, closure, inhibition, irritability and aggressive attitudes towards his sister, recognises, as he should, his parents' love more from their behaviour than from their words.

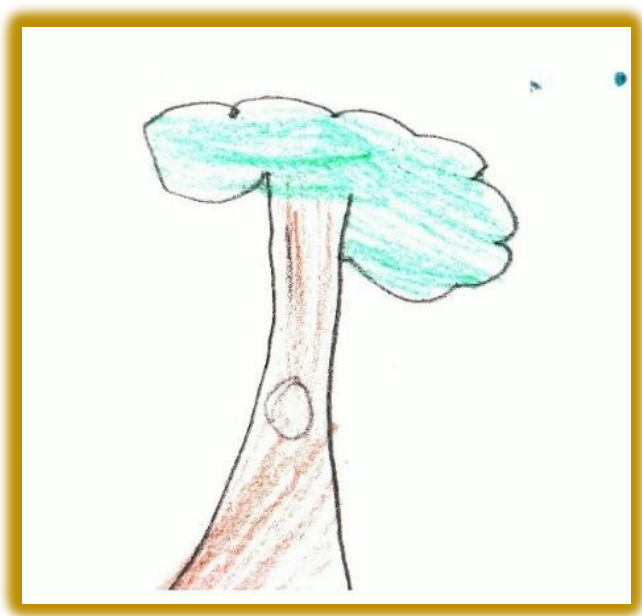


Figure .38

Parental love

One day we were at the sea and I was showing Mum a dive and we were still with the armrests; when I made the dive an armrest broke and after a while they realised. And Dad jumped in with all his clothes and goggles to

*save me and in his pockets he had everything,
even the remote control for the gate.*

In the episode he recounts, he recognises his father's attachment to him when the man, in order to save his son whom he feared might drown, jumps into the sea with all his clothes, his glasses and even the important remote control for the gate of the house (*and Dad jumped in with all his clothes and glasses to save me and in his pockets he had everything, even the remote control for the gate*).

In the drawing of the tree made before the story (Figure 38), the child's psychological problems are evident from the lack of roots, the very flattened crown and the presence of alterations in the trunk. Figure 38

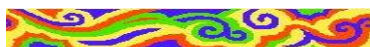


Figure 39

Cettina - First story

A missed hug

Her name is Ines, she is five years old. She wanted to hug her mum and her mum said: "But don't hug me, because I'm taking a shower!". Mummy didn't want to hug her.

Cettina, like all children, values gestures more than words. The child clearly manifests her annoyance towards her mother when the latter makes her lack the loving gesture she expects. In such cases it is not very important for children to have a valid reason: 'I have to go, to work'. "I have to make a phone call". "I'm late for the office". "I'm in a hurry. I can't stay with you". "I have to hurry." Or as in this case: *"But don't hug me, because I'm taking a shower!"*. Figure 39.

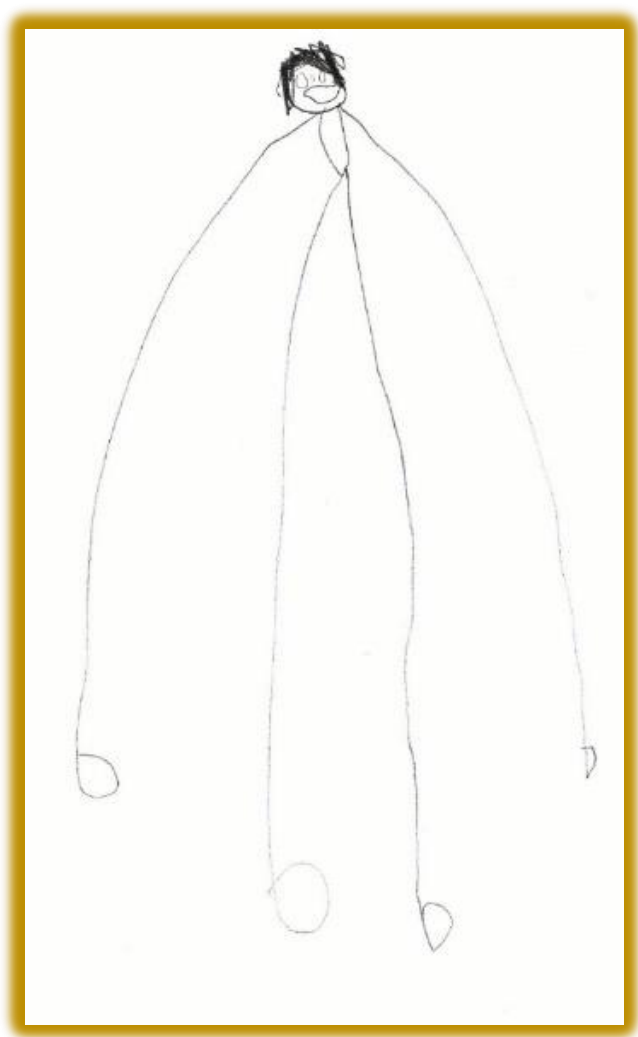


Figure 40

Cettina - Second story

Mum, I love you

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Lorena, she was six years old, played with her friends and was so big. She would take paints and draw. After she finished drawing she took a little toy and wrote: 'I love you' to her mum and her mum said: 'thank you'.

Parental love can be expressed in a very simple way by simply writing 'I love you'. But this is possible and happens if there are relational prerequisites and an understanding of the children's needs. In this case Cettina describes some of them: she had the opportunity to play with her friends; she could draw and colour; she was given the opportunity to develop her personality normally and feel grown-up. Notice in the drawing (figure 40), the considerable disproportion between the little man's limbs and torso, perhaps due to his desire to feel big, when in reality he was only five years old.

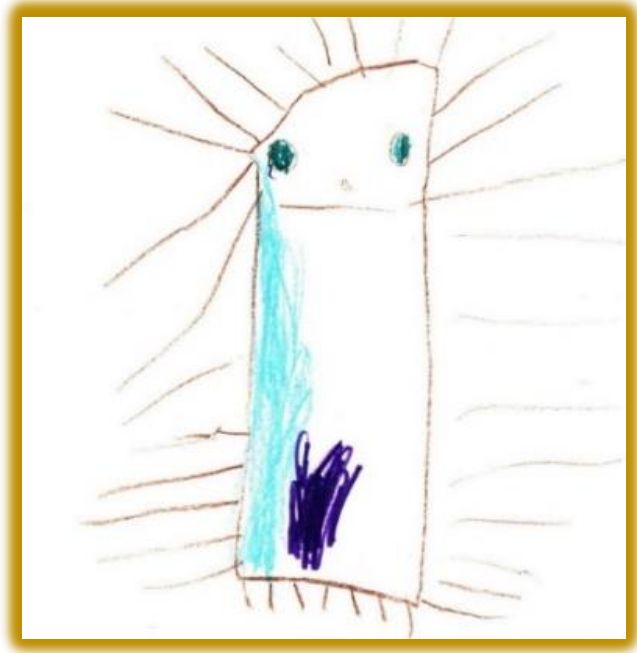


Figure 41

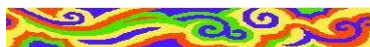
Cettina - Third story

Flowers in the hair

It is a tree. It's outside. A gentleman put it there. The tree talks to his friend Peppe and says, 'Where are you going? And Peppe replies: 'I'm going out to eat. And the tree says: "But you can't go because it's raining! You can't go because it's cold'. And the tree went to sleep. He had good dreams. He thought about getting married to his fiancée. The fiancée had flowers in her hair.

Very tender and poetic is this other story by Cettina. She imagines two trees talking, as two friends might do. They are the talk of grown-ups and certainly not of children (*'Where are you going?' Peppe replies: 'I'm going out to eat'*) and the other retorts (*'But you can't go because it's raining! You can't go because it's cold'*). Just as great are the dreams that the tree has (*He thought about getting married to his fiancée. The fiancée had flowers in her hair*).

It is evident how this five-year-old girl projects her thoughts to an age far beyond her own. Equally evident is her intellectual and affective maturity that allows her to construct short but emotionally very rich and stylistically mature stories. Not so her drawing skills, which clearly manifest her chronological age (Figure 41).



Love for grandparents

A boy named Joseph lived far away from three quarters of his family. He lived alone with father and mother. For Christmas, everyone gave presents. He wrote a letter to his grandparents, wishing them a merry Christmas with the intention that they would see each other soon. There was a strong bond with his grandparents. He received many Christmas presents, but he only wanted the one from his grandparents. Aldo, the postman, brought him a present on his moped. One day he saw him turn up with a truck for a special delivery: it was a huge present from his grandparents: a bicycle. Although his parents did not want to send him to Miami,

where his grandparents lived, he wrote a note to his parents, saying he was going to his grandparents. They accepted him and he returned to his hometown, happy to have seen his grandparents again.

Love for grandparents, if they can relate well to their grandchildren, is very important for children who feel them to be an essential part of the family, from which they cannot do without (A boy named Joseph lived far away from three quarters of the family. He only lived with dad and mum).

In this, as in so many other cases, when the relationship with the parents is not the best, the bond that is established is remarkably strong, so much so that this child said that '*He received many Christmas presents but he only wanted the one from his grandparents*'. His love for these grandparents was so great that he ran away from home to visit them in Miami, America

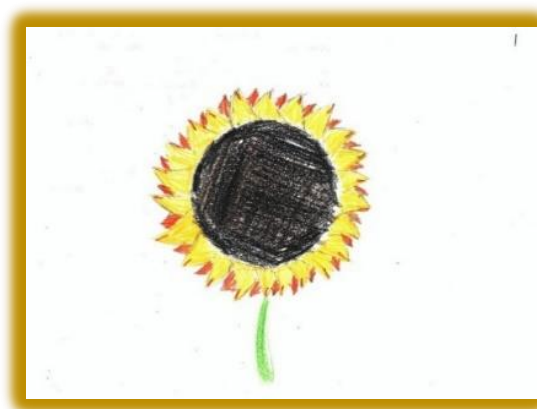


Figure 42

A sunflower to love

Once upon a time there was a sunflower, which was the most beautiful in the world and everyone wanted it; it was in a castle, because once upon a time this sunflower was a person. Then a witch turned it into a sunflower. It was said that whoever could detach this sunflower from the grass, which did not come off easily, was her true love. One day a boy, wanted by the police, wanted to try it. He managed to pull it off and was amazed because, from the centre of this sunflower, a beautiful girl came out, who was a princess. The boy was even more amazed and the girl said to him: "Thank you, you let me out, then you are my true love". He did not know what to reply to her and ran away.

Then the beautiful princess became a sunflower again, because it took the kiss of her true love. Then this boy repented, thinking that he would become a prince and rich, but when he returned from the sunflower he could no longer tear himself away. Then, one day, another boy passed by and when the beautiful princess came out of the sunflower, although he was astonished, he kissed her. She was his true love and they married.

Pina shows that she has clear ideas in the love field. It is not enough to meet an ordinary guy, especially if he does not have a good reputation, to indulge in a love affair. It takes something more and better: it takes real love. Figure 42.

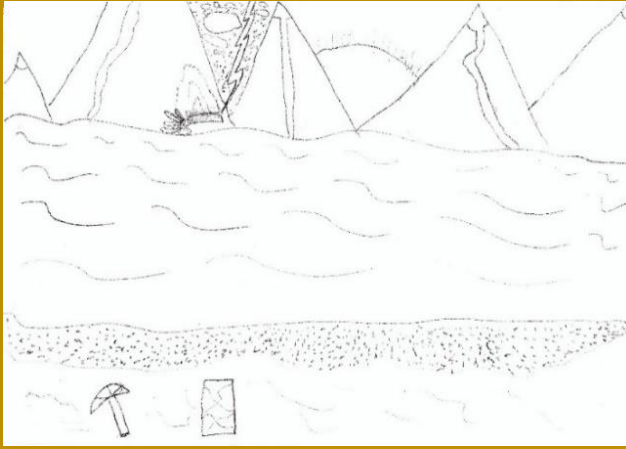


Figure 43

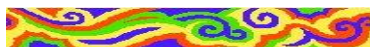
A love by the sea

Once upon a time there was a man and a woman, both young; they were in love. They went to the sea and watched the sunset. He was twenty years old, called Gigi. He had a cat and lived alone. Her name was Sara, she was nineteen, she lived with her parents who were good, but did not understand her so much. She was a bit unhappy.

In this story, 11-year-old Fabrizio highlights the possibility of two young people loving each other and being together to support and help each other, giving each other understanding and love, even though they both complain of problems: the boy

only has the company of a cat and the girl lives with good parents, by whom, however, she is not understood.

The boy's loneliness and sadness is also evident in his drawing, in which colour is absent and the sun is as if hidden by the very sharp mountains (Figure 43), which suggest aggression. Moreover, lightning and thunderstorms are discharged in some of them, as if nature not only did not want to welcome him but also showed feelings of aggression and violence towards him.



Pina was a nine-year-old girl with psycho-affective disorders, manifested by anxious somatisations, fears, intrusive behaviour at play and in relationships with peers, reduced self-esteem, excessive food selectivity, and considerable difficulties in writing and reading.

Pina - First story

Werewolves and vampires

Once upon a time there was a girl named Bella, and her mother sends her to live with her father. At school she meets Edward, handsome, who is behind her desk. She turns around, he looks at her. Her friends tell her that she can never be engaged to Cullen, because he is a vampire. Bella sits with Edward and he tells her to back off. They then get engaged and he tells her he is a vampire. Bella's friend Jacob is a werewolf, and werewolves and vampires don't get along and fight. Then there is a vampire called Victoria, who is evil and wants to kill Bella to make her a vampire. Edward has to leave

and Bella stays with Jacob and wants to go with him on his moped and hurts his head. He, as always, takes off his shirt, because he is a werewolf, and puts it on his forehead. She jumps off a high cliff. Then he meets Victoria: the villain. And then Jacob saves Bella. Edward's sister predicts the future and says Bella would die. Then Alice meets Bella and tells her that Edward wants to kill himself for love.

The narrative that the little girl carries out, very broken and in some places unclear, probably relates a story seen in some film or cartoon. As is evident, the elements that predominate in the tale are violence, death and evilness. It is as if the child had introjected and then expressed, or rather vomited into her tale, a series of elements taken from the horror films she systematically witnessed at night with her sister

Pina -Second story

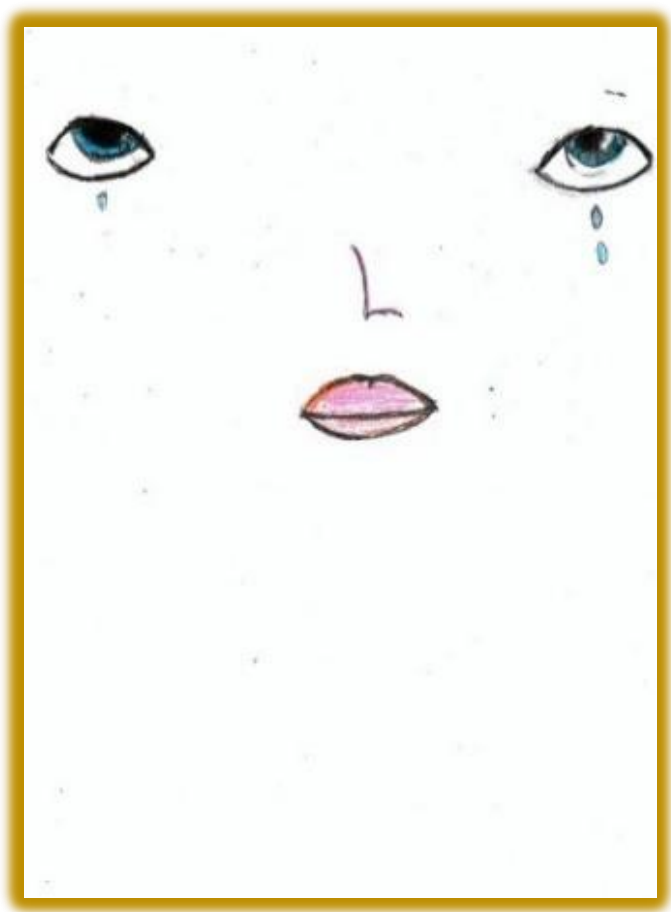


Figure .44

Tears of love

There is a woman crying tears of love, because she loved a person who was fantastic to her. She had never met such a person. One day, when she went out, she saw this person, returned home and started crying. The mother

looked at her strangely, because she did not understand why she was crying. And the daughter told her that she loved this person, but not a love like any other. The mother took her for a fool, because she did not understand what she really had. One day she went out and saw this person again, then she said 'hello' and he asked where a certain street was. She, as an excuse, told him that she also had to go to a certain street. So they started talking and told each other about themselves. Then she came home and locked herself in a room, took a puppet and danced around the house with this puppet. The mother looked at her strangely and told her if she was hungry and the daughter said: 'Mummy, I've completely fallen in love'.

The next day she went to school and saw that the new boy in class was the one she loved. When she came home she saw that he lived near her and then they got to know each other more and more and one day he asked her if she wanted to be his girlfriend. Then she ran away. She went home and screamed with joy. Then she came back down to him and said a big 'yes'.

This story and the accompanying drawing (figure 44), on the theme of love, is by Pina, the same girl who had made the previous story full of aggression and violence. Therapy aimed at the family environment had changed the girl's psyche for the better, giving her greater serenity. In particular Pina's parents had succeeded in modifying their behaviour so as to offer their

daughter a more serene and physiological environment in which she could better develop her personality.

As is easy to see, this story, in addition to having different, much more serene and appropriate content, is clearly more organised in its linguistic structure.

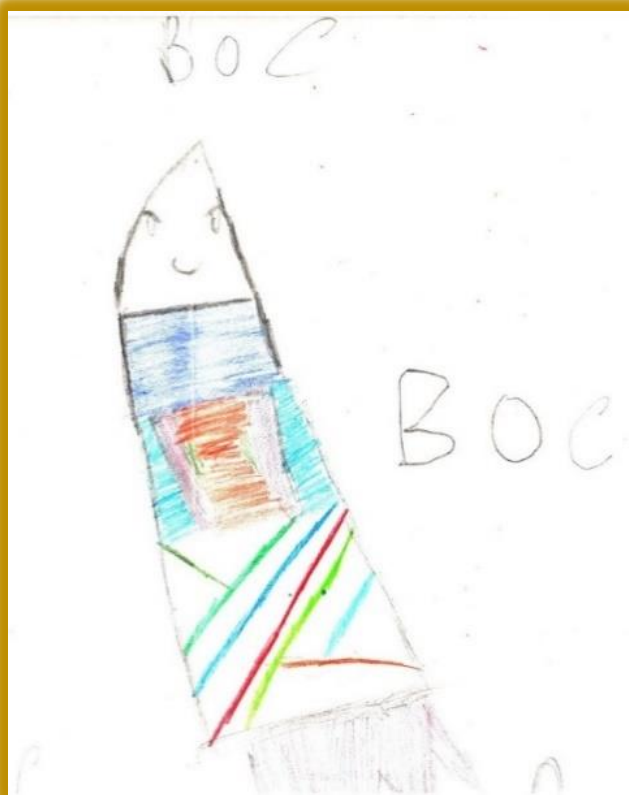
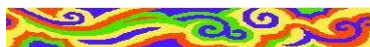
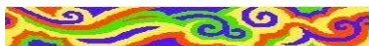


Figure 45

Love for peace

Once upon a time there was a rocket that went off to war and came back in many different colours. Then his friend Ciops said to him: "You are beautiful!". And he told him: "When I went to war I passed by a rainbow and because I was losing my colours, because of the war, it gave me all its colours".

Roberto wants to express in this story, and in the accompanying drawing (figure 45), the love of peace that is inherent in almost all children who fall within the sphere of normality. They would like serenity and peace to be systematically and frequently present around them, in their families.



Love, abandonment, betrayal and reconciliation

There was a little girl who went in search of her little lost dog. The little girl, named Melissa, wanted to find her little dog Buy. When she found her little dog, her mother called Melissa to dinner. It was night, Melissa left the little dog there and he (the little dog), thinking that she didn't want him any more, went far away, to America, where he found another little girl who said: 'What a nice little dog! (The little girl) wanted to take him home. Melissa went looking for it again but, not finding it, asked her mother to buy another one. The little dog, in America, thought of her, but the little girl had fun with the new dog, but then left it in the

woods, where a wolf ate it. But then she went back to fetch him, but her mother called her: "You will look for the little dog tomorrow". The next day the little girl went to school. At the sound of the bell she returned home with her mother and looked again. Melissa heard a sound and thought it was the wolf, but she knew it was just a story. The dog in America returned and asked to be taken back and she accepted and lived happily ever after, never buying another dog.

In this story, Martina, a six-year-old girl, traces very well, using her exquisitely feminine sensitivity, the great theme of the complexity and instability of emotional and love relationships. In these relationships, as we well know, there are sometimes inconsistent and, at times, conflicting feelings: a great love is often replaced by another; a bond begun may be dissolved and abandoned; promised fidelity may be violated by betrayal; a love that seems to have ended may come back to life in the heart of the lover, so that from the break-up of a relationship and from abandonment, a reconciliation may return.

A little girl goes in search of her lost dog Buy. She finds him but then, as soon as her mother calls her, she leaves him, even though it is night, and so somehow abandons him (*There was a little girl who went in search of her lost little dog. The little girl, named Melissa, wanted to find her little dog Buy. When she found her little dog, her mother called Melissa to dinner. It was night, Melissa left the little dog there.*).

The consequences of this act are foreseeable since, if someone is left by the person who is supposed to take care of them, they may rightly assume that they have been abandoned

and rejected, so they are induced to leave, as far away as possible. Not only that. Someone who is abandoned can easily accept, even if reluctantly, the attention and care that another person is willing to give him (*thinking that he no longer wanted him, he went far away, to America where he found another little girl who said: 'What a nice little dog'! (The little girl) wanted to take him home*).

Even the person who interrupted the treatment initially tried to console herself, trying to bond and experience pleasure and joy by establishing another emotional relationship (*Melissa went looking for him again but, not having found him, she asked her mother to buy another one*). And so, although the little dog in America thought of the little girl, she had fun with the new little dog (*The little dog in America thought of her, but the little girl with the new little dog had fun*).

However, even if belatedly, repentance emerges in the girl for the omissions she made (not taking care of the little dog and then not looking for it). She therefore abandons the new puppy, which comes to a tragic end, as it is eaten by *a wolf (but then left in the woods, where a wolf ate it)*

After the abandonments and betrayals, the little girl inserts a happy ending between her and her first love: the dog comes *back from America and asks to be taken back* and the little girl accepts (*The dog in America came back and asked to be taken back and she accepted, living happily ever after without ever buying a dog again*). However, as we have seen, there is no happy ending for the little dog that should have consoled her love needs, because he is eaten by a wolf.

The last words are like a warning that the girl addresses to herself (*and she accepted by living happily ever after without*

ever buying dogs again): that is, do not get carried away by the pleasure of the novelty of a new love and never betray it again.

2.1.3 Friendship

Friends are people who have a bond with each other because of age, work or common interests and problems. Friends are therefore people who like to get together to talk, play and discuss topics of common interest: such as sport, cinema, theatre, music. In friendship relationships there is certainly an emotional and affective charge. For these reasons, respect, sincerity, loyalty and mutual openness are important in these relationships. Even in children, friendship means dialogue, acceptance, mutual help, listening and, above all, play, which is indispensable for developing and maturing all their abilities.

In friendship, there is often an emotional bond, which may be very tenuous and limited in time but which, in some cases, can be very intense, solid and long-lasting. Friendship can also be established with animals, since they too are capable of emotions and feelings and love to relate, through play and specific communication skills, with human beings.

In these stories we will read many types of bonds of friendship.



The author of this story is Lorenzo, an eight-year-old boy who presented with medium-grade psycho-affective disorders. These disorders manifested themselves with important symptoms such as withdrawal, inhibition, numerous and intense fears, restlessness, and easy irritability. Lorenzo had established a difficult and conflictual relationship with his twin sister.

Even with his father, an impulsive man who was easily angered, there was not a good bond.

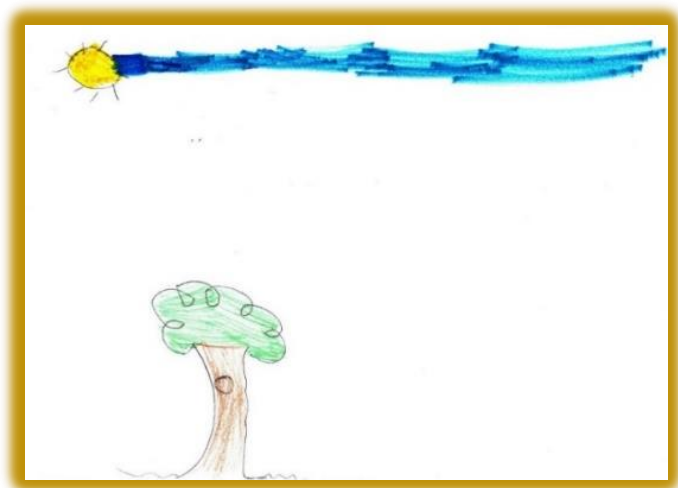


Figure 46

A lonely tree that wants company

Once upon a time there was a tree in a meadow. It was alone, because the other trees had died, because they had not put water in. The tree wanted company and was lonely. One day someone put in a seed and more trees sprang up and the bigger tree looked after them. So they became big trees and were able to play. While they were playing, a bird passed by and greeted them and they responded.

The child identifies with a tree, which stands alone in a meadow. The tree is alone, sad and suffering because the other trees have died for lack of care and only he has resisted (*he was*

alone, because the other trees had died because they had not put water in). The tree hopes to be able to help the other little trees, which have grown up around him, in their growth, so that they can become big and thus be able to play together.

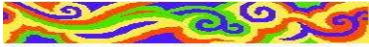
From this account, one can reasonably assume that the child, who suffered from a lack of proper care and loneliness, longs for and waits for one or more little brothers and sisters to care for when they are small, and then, when they are older, to be able to play with them.

The last sentence remains to be examined: *'While they were playing, a bird flew by and greeted them and they responded'*.

Birds, because of the lightness and tenderness they arouse, evoke happiness, joy and freedom. It is as if the child were saying: 'Once I find the friendship and affection of some little brother or sister to play with, I will finally be free and happy as the birds in the sky are'.

The drawing of the tree (figure 46), could represent the same child, bent by suffering, but confident that something around him can improve. Note that the tree is on the left of the sheet and that the trunk is bent to the left. From this it can be deduced that this child still presented an emotional dependence on the past and an attachment to the original environment. The presence of patches on the trunk confirms the presence of unresolved inner issues in Lorenzo. The sun, partly obscured by clouds, confirms that melancholic thoughts and depressive elements were present in this child's psyche and that

the relationship with the father figure was not pleasant and gratifying.²⁸



Emilio, a nine-year-old boy, presented psychological disorders that manifested themselves in a range of symptoms: fear of school and public places, anxious somatisations, sleep disorders with early awakenings, and fear of being alone in the room. He also needed someone to sleep with him at night. Furthermore, quarrels with his sister were easy and frequent.



Figure 47

²⁸ Crotti E., Magni A. (2003), *Colours*, Novara, Edizioni Red!, p. 51

The gardener

Once upon a time there was a meadow cultivated by a gardener. Some people went to observe. The people said they did not like the way he cultivated. The gardener was displeased and said he had a friend who could help him. After a day, people came by again to see and said: "What a beautiful garden!" His friend thanked him and he was very happy that he had built a beautiful garden.

Children know that in order to build a pleasant and reassuring environment around them, as a beautiful garden can be, it is necessary to have friends. Friendship is capable of instilling in the soul of every child, especially if suffering, the joy and serenity necessary for their well-being and their affective-relational development.

Emilio includes in the drawing (figure 47) all the elements that could make the garden beautiful, which, in this case, symbolises his life. therefore draws trees, flowers, insects, birds and the sun. However, note the colour of the sun, which is not as clear and bright as one would expect, and the presence of clouds in the sky. These two elements sadden and disturb the otherwise pleasant atmosphere.

Reading the story, it is easy to notice the difficulty, present in this nine-year-old child, in organising and structuring sentences (*People said they did not like the way he cultivated. The gardener was sorry and therefore that he had a friend could help him*) (*He thanked his friend*). The cause of these anomalies is related to the considerable inner restlessness in his mind.



Dèsirée, an eight-year-old girl, presented a delay in learning to read and write, difficulties in integrating with peers, a tendency towards closure and loneliness, and a fear of leaving her home and family.



Figure 48

Three friends

Once upon a time there were three little girls named Camilla and Francesca, and they were playing at picking flowers; then a friend of hers named Laura came along. Francesca says: "Do you want to pick flowers with us?". And Laura says, 'Yes'. And they start picking flowers. Then Camilla says: "They gave me three invitations to a party and you can come if you want". And they say: "We come, we come!".

Later they went to the party and then they had taken a wrong turn leading to the circus, so her friend Laura said: 'Don't worry, I'll take you to the party, when it's over we'll go to the cinema'. The friends went to the cinema and sat down and watched a movie. Then they did not go home. Her friend says: "Shall we go to the zoo?". And they: "Yes". They went to the zoo to see the lion, the monkey and the panda. Then it got dark and Francesca says: "Let's go home". They went home, their mother asks where they went and they answer: 'To the cinema, to the zoo'. And then they went to sleep.

It is as if the little girl, in this story, had collected all her dreams and desires: to spend a happy day with the company and affection of her friends; to play with them at picking flowers; to go to a party, to the cinema and finally, to go to the zoo to observe the animals. Dreams and desires certainly related to her age but which, due to her mental condition, she had never been able to fulfil.

The girl draws the three friends with an obvious disproportion between her lower limbs and the rest of her body (Figure 48). Once again her desire clashes with reality. She would like to be grown-up and do grown-up things (represented in the drawing by her and her friends' long legs) unfortunately, not only is she not 'grown-up', but she is not affectively and emotionally grown-up either.

The most obvious demonstration of this is the fact that he drew his own little body and that of his friends very small, almost insignificant, above long legs. The image of her sadness

and restlessness can be seen depicted in the sky, in the form of a series of clouds.

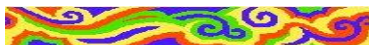


Figure 49

Serena- First story

Two friends

Once upon a time there were two friends, one called Marialuna and the other Giulia. They were eight and nine years old. One day, when they had to go to school, they had to get in at eleven o'clock and so they spent some time

together. The day after school they stayed together again and had fun.

Serenaanother eight-year-old girl, in this story highlights above all the pleasure of being together with a friend, taking advantage of a few hours when there is no class.

It is evident in this drawing (figure 49), compared to that of the little girl we mentioned above, a greater harmony in the bodies drawn, which confirms the greater affective maturity and better psychological condition of Serena, compared to that of Desirée, who was the same age, but had numerous and intense psychological disorders



Figure 50

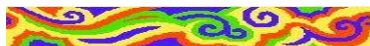
Serena- Second story

The pleasure of shopping

Once upon a time, there were three friends who loved each other. One day they went for ice cream, then they went shopping and bought clothes. Marialuna bought five dresses, three skirts and two t-shirts; I bought five shorts, five t-shirts and two pairs of shoes: Gabriella bought five dresses, one short and three t-shirts. Then they had dinner together and. the next day. put on their new clothes. And above all I was happy with the shorts. One day they went out shopping again and met another boy called Simone, who was very handsome. Two were already in love with him, but he was already engaged. They were happy to have met him and went shopping with him.

Also in this story of Serena's there are several undisputed elements present in the relationships between friends who love each other: the pleasure of having an ice cream; joy of *shopping* in abundance, without creating money problems; dining together; the enjoyment of strutting around in the clothes they had just bought (*the next day they put on new clothes. And especially I was happy in shorts*); then the immediate falling in love with a 'very handsome' but unfortunately *already engaged boy!* Finally, the happiness of shopping with this handsome guy too.

Notice in both drawings (Figures 49 and 50), the all-female attention paid to clothing and clothing details.



Roberta, a seven-year-old girl, was described as an apathetic, closed, irritable, restless child who presented numerous symptoms of psychological distress: anxious somatisations; phobias and childish attitudes and behaviour. In addition, Roberta had difficulty engaging in anything she was asked to do and excessive defensive reactions and fear towards external stimuli

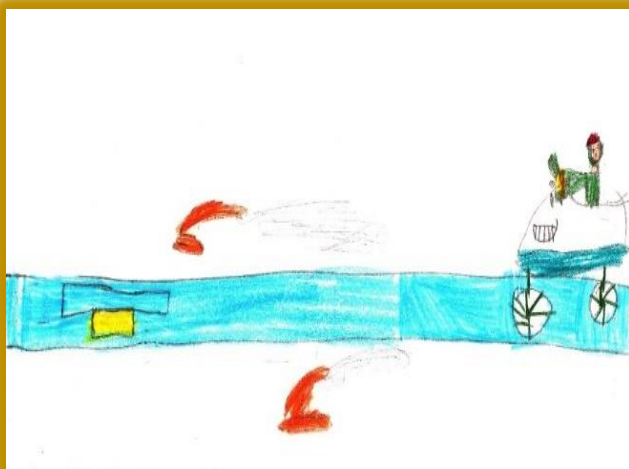


Figure 51

Friendship between a dolphin and a whale

Once upon a time there was a little whale called Joshua, who went around and away from his mother. He was happy and one day he met a little dolphin called Kevin and they started playing hide and seek and fighting. Afterwards mum didn't see them any more and they started looking for them. Later they found them and told them not to go out alone any more. And the dolphin and the whale made friends and stayed in the house together.

The little girl projects her desire for friendship onto animals in order to find someone to play with (*She was happy and one day met a little dolphin named Kevin and they started playing hide and seek and fighting*). Her mother goes to look for her and scolds her for wandering off. The end of the story makes it clear how the need for autonomy counteracts parental warnings and excessive demands for greater caution. This can prevent the possibility of establishing new, valuable friendships.



Figure 52

Joseph - First story

You can be friends even with a dragon

Once upon a time there was a dragon called Fire and a child called Joseph. This dragon lived in a cave, while the child lived in a castle. One day the child went to the cave and saw the

dragon, who was good. They made friends and since other knights did not want him to touch him, the dragon and the knight escaped and lived happily ever after. One day the other knights attacked them, but the dragon breathed fire and killed the knights and destroyed the castle. They both lived happily ever after in the cave.

Boys also tell of friendships, but, as we can read, their tales are quite different from those of girls: they frequently tell of castles, knights, weapons, swords and no-holds-barred fights.

Joseph, a ten-year-old boy, tells of a friendship with a dragon (figure 52). This friendship is not accepted by the other knights. However, this bond is so strong that the dragon and the boy run away together to live happily. And even when the knights attack them, the dragon 'Fire' destroys them, spitting flames from its jaws.

Joseph's psychological disorders are evident in certain elements of the tale. Firstly, it is strange that he, living in an enviable princely dwelling, such as a castle, finds a more serene and happy living environment in a simple and humble cave, hidden away and far from other human beings (*They both lived happily ever after in the cave*)

Joseph's psychic fragility is also evident from the fact that in order to defend himself he needs to seek the help of a dragon, a huge, strong and aggressive being and not another human being (*One day the other knights attacked them, but the dragon breathed fire and killed the knights and destroyed the castle*).

The reason for this lies in the difficulty that children with psychological disorders have when trying to make friends with

their peers, due to their fears and the excessive shyness and closure that is often present in their minds

These children sometimes do not even try to have social relationships and, when they do seek them out, they often fail to manage and maintain them well, due to the difficulties they have in confronting, communicating and playing properly.

Apparently incomprehensible is Joseph's need to destroy the castle. This need can only be explained by the distrust he had for his family and social environment, in which he was uncomfortable due to an over-anxious mother and a problematic grandmother

Joseph - Second story

Impetuous games

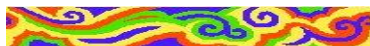
Once upon a time there was a group of three friends playing playstation and swearing. They played various games and threw themselves at each other. One was called Thomas and he would get into the anti-Salvatore lair, while the others, Salvatore and Samuel would throw themselves upstairs. Me, when they would enter the den, I would kick Salvatore to get him out. One day we broke the whole room, Giuseppe's aunt came in, yelled at us and we all went home.

The friendship games of males tend to be aggressive and impetuous, especially if they, like Joseph, have major psychological disorders.

Boars for friends

A couple of parents, who have two still young children, go on a picnic together in the countryside but, while they are eating, they hear boars. To keep them from running away, they give them food and so the boars come closer to them and let them pet them, gaining their trust. At first they let them have their food, but gradually they gave it to them up close. After stroking them, it was almost dark, and they leave, happy to have been stroked. The boars make a den nearby.

This strange friendship with wild boars can perhaps be explained by the fact that Giulio was often the victim of his school-mates' contemptuous behaviour and attitudes because of his unattractive appearance. It is as if Giulio were saying: "If I am excluded and shunned by normal children because I am not as pretty and handsome as them, the only possible friends I could have are animals that look as unpleasant as I do!"



Alessio, a six-year-old boy who came to our attention because of school phobia, transports us in this story to a magical world inhabited by wizards, elves and witches.

The theme of loneliness and the difficulty of having friends is frequent in children's stories. Often we operators tend to link integration and socialisation difficulties, almost exclusively, to children with autism spectrum disorders. In reality, all children who complain of psychological problems have, to varying

degrees, as we have seen in many accounts, difficulties in integration and socialisation, especially with peers.

An elf goes in search of friends

Once upon a time there was an elf who had no friends. One day, in order to get friends, he went to a wizard and asked him if he had a potion to make him many friends, but the wizard told him that he had none and to get this magic potion he had to beat a witch in a castle. The elf went to this castle. Before he reached the witch, he had to climb a hundred stairs. When he reached the top floor, where the witch was, he told her that he wanted to challenge her and the witch said yes. After a while the elf was beaten, and she told him that he would come back much stronger. The elf decided to go home to train. He trained for fifty years, then decided to return to the castle, but to get there, he had to face a poisonous snake and defeated it. And the elf told him if he wanted to help him beat the witch and the snake said yes, so they went on. Then he met a big lake, in which there were no boats. Then the elf saw a horse that could fly and asked him if he could carry them to the end of the lake, to go to the castle. When they arrived, the horse asked him if he could come with the elf and the elf said yes and they went on. Then they came upon a very strong wall and together, all three of them, they wondered how to get over the wall. A rocky man heard him and said: "I can help you". And he destroyed the

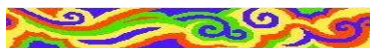
wall. Eventually, the elf asked him if he wanted to go with them and beat the witch and they arrived at the castle and all together managed to beat the witch.

The child, who had considerable difficulty integrating with his peer group, identifies himself as an Elf, a small, hidden creature who nevertheless has a desperate desire and need for friends. To achieve this, the only tool he imagines is that of a magic potion, which should enable him to defeat a witch. Alesio is probably influenced in this choice by the fact that he had an ambivalent relationship with his mother: on the one hand, he sought her cuddles to relax and diminish his inner tension and anxiety, on the other hand, the child showed an aggressive and irritating attitude towards his mother, as he did not feel welcomed and understood by her.

To get to the witch and beat her, he will have to suffer and suffer a lot. After climbing a hundred steps, he is initially beaten by the witch. He will have to train for fifty to have a chance of defeating her. In addition, he will have to overcome a very high wall and will need the help of a snake and a winged horse.

The child is, therefore, aware of his own difficulties and asks for help from two opposing realities: from something ugly, slimy and poisonous, a snake, but also from an exuberant, strong, slender and beautiful being such as a winged horse can be. In short, to beat something treacherous and negative, and thus be able to have many friends, he needs something very foul and aggressive but also something very beautiful and strong.

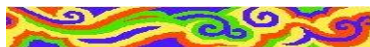
2.1.4 Goodness and generosity



A good child

Once upon a time there was a boy who was ten years old and his name was Pasquale. Walking down the street he met an old man who was a poor man looking for alms. "Hello! I give you some alms". He gave the alms. The old man said, "Thank you for this kindness of yours". Then the child went home and started telling his parents that he had been kind to the poor man and had given him alms. The parents said: "Bravo to our son, who has been so good. Then he met another old man and told him to go home. And then the child said, "Go home and rest". A girl came and said to the little boy, "Shall we play a little ball?" And then the old man saw a girl and a boy playing football and said. "It is true that he is very nice this child!". The end.

Peter, an adopted child, needs to prove to himself, before others, that he is a good and kind child. Being at a pre-adolescent age, he also hopes that his good deeds will help him meet a girl who loves him and whom he can love. The psychological malaise of the child can be glimpsed from the structure of the story: not very linear and with many repetitions.



Filippa, a seven-year-old girl, after her parents' separation, which had been aggravated by slanderous accusations against

her father, had shut herself away in her grief, manifesting fears and strange and unusual behaviour for a child of her age.



Figure 53

A big tree needs care and companionship

Once upon a time there was a big tree, which stood in a garden alone. The tree thought it had no friends, because there was no one there. So we went on a picnic and found the tree, gave it water and ate with it. Then we grew another plant nearby; it was small and then it grew. When we came back it had grown and we saw a flower in each tree. One day a hunter stepped on the flower, picked both flowers and sold them. A policeman bought the flowers to give them to his wife, who was happy.

Let us try to give an interpretation to his story, although the task is not easy.

In separations, very often, the one who is left alone is the father (*Once upon a time there was a big tree, which was in a garden by itself*). The daughter understands that the father is sad because he feels abandoned and feels the need for someone to keep him company and take care of him (*Then we went on a picnic and found the tree, gave him water and ate with him*). The child also imagines that the father needs another son or daughter, to stand beside him, to have, in a stable way, some affection and company (*Then we grew another plant nearby, it was small and then it grew*).

Now, both father and son or daughter have the opportunity to grow and mature (*When we came back it had grown and we saw a flower in each tree*). By growing and maturing, the two trees can offer something good and beautiful to others (*One day a hunter stepped on the flower, picked both flowers and sold them. A policeman bought the flowers to give them to his wife, who was happy*).

Probably the child would like to communicate this concept to us: 'If my father, accused of so many nefarious deeds by his ex-wife, matures and is therefore able to be tender and affectionate, if there is a child or girl next to him who can bring joy to him and to us, my mother will be happy to welcome this man who today keeps away from us all'.

2.1.5 Courage





Figure 54

A brave child

There was once a bomb that exploded in my hands. I wasn't frightened, even though there was blood coming out. I wanted to stay in the square, but a gentleman drove me home. My mother took me to the hospital. They told me I had a foreign body in my eye. I was calm: I am always calm, even when I broke my back from injuries. Nothing scares me.

Nine-year-old Roberto, in recounting his adventure, wants to appear calm, like a little man who is not afraid of anything (*There was once a bomb that exploded in my hands. I was not frightened even though blood was coming out*). And again (*I was calm: I am always calm, even when I broke my back from injuries. Nothing scares me*)

However, this insistence on courage and fearlessness suggests otherwise. In reality, Roberto was a child who had suffered a great deal, both because of his parents' perennial conflict and their separation, which occurred when he was only two years old, and also because of his mother's scarce presence in

his life, so much so that, due to the woman's work, the child stayed at his grandmother's house almost the entire week. These vicissitudes and sufferings had caused him numerous and intense symptoms of psychological distress: nightmares at night, fears, school rejection, difficulty in detaching himself from his mother during the night. In addition, he had mixed feelings of love and hatred towards his mother and father, to the point of having aggressive manifestations towards them.

2.1.6 Fear

Fears and phobias are very common in childhood, since children do not know the characteristics of the reality in which they are embedded and perceive, more than adults, many dangers in their surroundings. Having little experience, they do not yet know who and what they can trust and who and what they should fear instead. On the other hand, fears are also a means of protection against strangers and situations that might entail risks. Added to this is the greater emotionality present in childhood and lower psychological defences capable of counteracting negative emotions.

Among other things, little ones have difficulty distinguishing real, objective fears from false, subjective ones that arise from their minds. This is why these can also be physiologically present in children who fall into the normal range, although they are more present, and above all are much more intense, in children who, for various reasons, suffer from some psychological problem.

To distinguish the physiological fears of childhood from the pathological ones present in psychic disorders, we must take into account: the age of the child; the number of fears; their frequency; their intensity; and, above all, their association with other signs of distress.

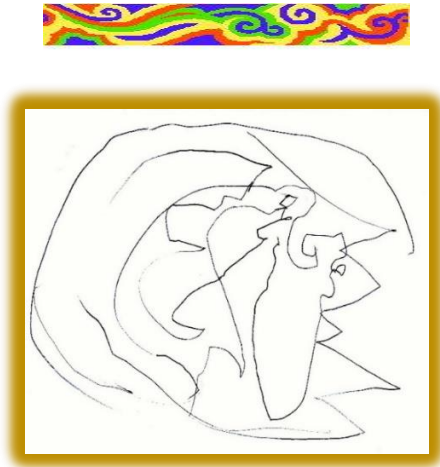


Figure 55

Riccardo - First story

A scary monster

*Once upon a time there was a monster that
was scary and then he ate us.*

Riccardo, a child with autistic spectrum disorder, comments on one of his incomprehensible drawings (figure 55), expressing one of his fears. This child, like all children suffering from autism spectrum disorder, when this symptomatology was severe, felt invaded by fears that he was unable to communicate verbally to his parents. He was only able to do this when he was given the opportunity to draw and comment on the contents of his drawings. These two activities became excellent therapeutic tools for him.

Riccardo - Second story



Figure 56

Two children eaten by a monster

*There was a monster that ate two children
and they died.*

This second drawing by Richard is more understandable (figure 56), but the fear is the same!

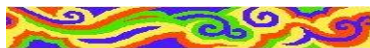




Figure 57

A child who hated the rain

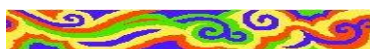
Once upon a time there was a little boy called Gigi, who never wanted it to rain. One day his mother explained to him that sooner or later this natural effect had to happen. If he did not pay attention to it, the rain would only last a very short time. In fact, at that very moment, it started to rain and Gigi started talking to his mother and paid no attention (to the rain). After a short time, the rain disappeared and the rainbow came.

One of the many fears also present in normal children concerns rain and, above all, thunderstorms. Also because, these weather phenomena are accompanied by violent lightning and thunder.

Rain is associated by children, and not only by them, with sadness: not being able to go out, not being able to play

outside. Rain is also associated with the fear, inculcated by parents from a very young age, that getting wet means getting seriously ill, so much so that you could die. Moreover, rain, with its continuous pounding, can be linked by children to the feeling of being struck and attacked by something imponderable.

In Gigi's story, fear disappears when his mother manages to reassure him, telling him that rain is a natural occurrence. On this occasion, the mother's intervention was appropriate and, therefore, decisive. The child understood his mother's message correctly: rain, like all unpleasant things in life, fortunately does not last long, and it is possible that, even after a short time, it is replaced by the rainbow: a sign of hope, joy and protection



Joseph was good

Joseph was good but he had problems and why? Because he was frightened that he would faint and have these problems, i.e. stomach ache, and he was dizzy.

Instead, for Joseph, who recognises himself as a good child, the fear concerns himself and his body. He is afraid of fainting, of being sick, of dying. These fears prevented him from leaving home to go to school or even to play in the streets of the village, with his companions. He feared that being away from his family: grandparents and mother, they could not help him and save him from certain death. However, in the story, child correctly associates this fear with his psychological problems.

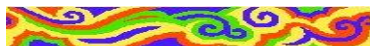


Ivan's fears

My fears are many: fear of the dark, when I am alone, fear of insects, and fear when I am in serious trouble. I used to have other fears, but now they have passed me by and they were the shadows when my parents were fighting. The shadows I see resemble thieves, who exchange weapons and attack me. Sometimes I also see some kind of shadows, hiding behind the curtain.

Ivan lists a number of fears that we can safely describe as 'pathological', both in terms of the number of them and their quality and intensity. These fears stemmed from the presence of frequent and serious conflicts between his parents in his family. The most serious fears were those that manifested themselves by means of dispersive disturbances (*they were the shadows when my parents quarrelled. The shadows I see look like thieves, exchanging weapons and attacking me*).

With this image, the child represents very well the attitude the parents probably had during the quarrels: being against each other armed, hopefully only with words. Words, however, enough to rob the child of the serenity and peace to which he was entitled



Eight-year-old Emilia, who presented with emotional turmoil, lability of attention, separation anxiety, somniloquy and soliloquy, aggression towards objects, behavioural disorders, a tendency towards closure, reduced self-esteem, feelings of guilt and unworthiness and difficulties in her curricular learning, also suffered from numerous intense fears, which she describes very well.

Emilia - First story

Emilia's fears

I am afraid that my parents will abandon me or die, as well as my grandmother and sister. I get very agitated and cannot calm down and at that moment I am afraid of everything. I am afraid that I won't be able to get through this. I have bad feelings: I feel as if I am in a labyrinth, from which I can no longer get out, then this labyrinth becomes covered and I suffocate there. Then I feel like something black is falling on me.

I am afraid because I see bad things. I am afraid that my sister does not love me, as well as my parents and grandparents. I feel alone and I am afraid of everything. I am afraid of what I see, of everything around me. I see ugly things inside me, which I cannot erase: of dead people who want to kill me, who take me. Then I enter a black hole in which I see bad things. I see dead people I don't know, in bad conditions I can't draw. I am afraid, and if I close my eyes it is the same. All this I can't get out of my mind.

Emilia - Second story

Other fears of Emilia

When I slept in my little room I was a bit scared; Mummy told me a story to make me sleep. At night I was awake because I was so afraid to fall asleep. At night, when there are fireworks,

*I am afraid! Then, to make me fall asleep, I am
no longer afraid of the dark.*

Emilia also tells of the fear of falling asleep. This fear is very frequent in children, so much so that many of them are unable to leave their parents' bed, in order to obtain a minimum of security from the presence of mum and dad and their physical contact. Moreover, for some children, falling asleep may mean not being able to effectively control the reality around them and therefore not being able to intervene if, for example, one of their parents is ill. Moreover, for some children, giving in to sleep means risking not being able to defend themselves in case they are attacked by thieves, murderers or other evil people.

Fear of falling asleep can also be due to the fear of not being able to wake up or even of not being able to effectively control the nightmares present in dreams.

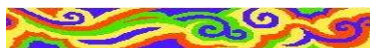




Figure 58

The Scary Cave

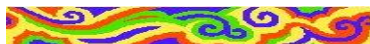
Once upon a time there was a scary cave and it was very scary because bats came out of the cave. Inside there were too many human skeletons, spiders, cobwebs, mice. Humans had been killed by the cobwebs. There were no houses around the cave, which went underground and there was only a hole left and when it rained water and lightning came in.

This image of a scary cave, because it is full of bats, skeletons, cobwebs, mice, water and lightning, was probably taken from images Hector had seen on TV or in some video game.

However, the child brings it back and remembers it because of the fears he himself felt.

Unfortunately, many parents, busy and occupied with a thousand activities, underestimate the influence that terrifying images can have on their children. Images that remain in their minds and hearts and that often continue to disturb them, even after a long time has passed.

Note that the object of fear is drawn with spikes and has been coloured black to give a sense of aggression and terror (Figure 58).



Thomas, an eight-year-old boy, had undergone a radical change before being brought to our observation. Whereas as a small child he had appeared calm, well-mannered, attentive and serene, he had subsequently manifested numerous symptoms of psychic unease: nervousness, motor restlessness, irritability, nervous tics, insecurity, pessimism, ease of crying, fear of many animals but also fear that his mother might die.

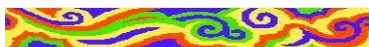
The dangers of the sea

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Antonello and he was eight years old. One summer he went to the sea with four of his other little friends. Of these there was one with whom he got along very well. They went to the sea together and had a swim. His little friend was drowning to bring a small fish to his friend. Fortunately he did not drown, but another friend of his, Providence, did. He called for help, but they thought it was a joke, but his friend

tried to save him and he did not die. The other three friends were about to be devoured by a great chasm. No one rescued them, but they managed to save themselves and from then on they never went to sea again.

It is evident from his story how Thomas, because of his psychological problems, deforms a normal bathing situation (*They went to the sea together and took a swim*) into a dramatic situation, full of danger and risk to the lives of his companions (*His little friend was drowning to bring his friend a fish*); (*But he actually drowned another friend of his: Providence*); (*The other three friends were about to be devoured by a large chasm*).

When we superficially tease a child who manifests fears, which we judge to be absolutely unfounded, we should always bear in mind the terror that can invade an unsettled mind!



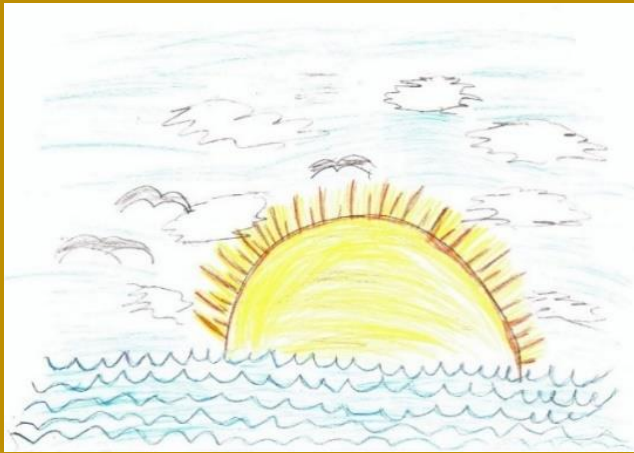


Figure 59

Fear of the tsunami

One day, in the summer, there was a tidal wave, where all the people were quiet, but it happened that the waves started to wet all the people and the beach. People were shouting like crazy. In the afternoon it stopped and all the people were happy to go back to that sea, because they liked it so much.

Simone, who presented psychological problems which manifested themselves with anxiety of separation from the mother figure and anxious somatisations, describes a beautiful summer day (*where all the people were quiet*), which, however, is disturbed by something which he amplifies enormously by calling it a 'tidal wave', which was wetting the beach and the people lying on it (*but it happened that the waves started to wet all the people and the beach, the people were shouting like*

mad). However, the conclusion is positive (*In the afternoon it stopped and all the people were happy to return to that sea, because they liked it so much*).

This amplification of events in a negative sense is often present in children with even non-serious psychological problems, as in Simone's case.



Fear of lightning and thunder

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Alexander, eight years old. For his age it was still too early to be frightened by lightning. When there was lightning, he wanted to fall asleep in bed with his parents, out of fear. One day they went on a school trip to a park, where

it started to rain and then there was lightning, hail and thunder. This child became frightened and went to tell the teacher, but she pretended not to think of it as a stupid fear, without calculating it much.

Alexander told his parents everything, who denounced the teacher for not listening to their son's needs. The mother went to talk to this teacher and clarified the whole matter. The mother dropped the complaint and everything ended well.

Ivan, who clearly identifies himself with the main character, Alexander, begins the story by defending himself of the judgement others might have had of him, because of the fear he had of lightning (*Once upon a time there was a boy named Alexander, eight years old. For his age it was still too early for him not to be afraid of lightning*). Unfortunately, in these situations in which a particularly emotional child is assailed by fears, adults are not always able to reassure the child properly. This is why Alexander appears satisfied that his parents had *denounced the teacher (Alexander told his parents everything and they denounced the teacher for not listening to their son's needs)*. However, this denunciation, which for him had almost been a just revenge and punishment, enabled him later to forgive his teacher (*His mother dropped the denunciation and everything ended for the better*).

2.1.7 Sadness and pessimism

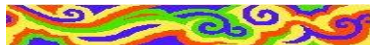




Figure 60

The Jasmine Flower

Once upon a time there was a little flower called Jasmine. One day he did not let any insects approach him: bee, butterfly, because if they sucked his pollen he was afraid he would wither. But one day the little flower woke up and realised that it was getting smaller and smaller, and it said to itself that they had sucked its pollen, and then it said to itself: it is the life of flowers, it may happen this, it may not happen that. And so he withered away. So he learnt that in flowers there is no race to see who is more and who is less. Some flowers wilt before others and he also learnt that flowers

are not there to last longer, but to make a house, a room, a hotel fragrant.

Daniela draws attention to the transience of beauty and life itself when she tells of a little flower that *woke up and realised it was getting smaller and smaller, (the little flower woke up and realised it was getting smaller and smaller)*. The little girl is probably referring to the psychological regression she had undergone

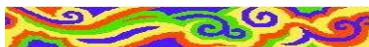
The little flower thought that the cause of this lay with someone: a bee, a butterfly, who had sucked its vital elements (*One day he does not let any insect approach him: bee, butterfly, because if they suck his pollen he is afraid he will wither*). Only later does he fear that there is no real cause (*it is the life of flowers, it may happen this, it may not*). As if to say: 'Our life is at the mercy of fate, so just as the flower after giving its fragrance and beauty to people withers, in the same way we, after giving something to others, die'.

From her words, it is hard not to notice the child's difficulty and consequent sadness in accepting the transience of existence: 'You are young, you are beautiful, you do something with your life, but then you grow old and you die.

As for the causes of the loss of vitality and then the death of the little flower, the drawing (figure 60), seems to contradict the story as the girl does not link the flower's death to insects or the nature of things but to the weather lashing the seedling.

Daniela, in fact, depicts very well the rain falling from a large black cloud on the flower with large drops, and also draws the wind that seems to blow impetuously, so as to damage and mistreat the flower. In essence, at least in the drawing, the girl

fears that the flower's problems, and thus her own problems, basically stem from an adverse and difficult living environment.



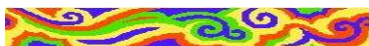
A kicked ball

Once upon a time there was a ball that belonged to all the teams and was not at all happy about being kicked. So one day it burst and nobody could play football. The ball died and was thrown in the rubbish with the coffin. Another ball met the same end.

Death, with its corollary of despair and sadness, is also present in this story. Roberto describes his experiences within his family, school and, in general, the environment he frequented, using the metaphor of a ball. A ball kicked *by everyone (a ball that belonged to all teams)*, as he probably felt: despised and attacked by anyone who wanted to.

In order to avoid this continuous, unbearable suffering, the child sees only one way out: to burst, die and disappear underground (*The balloon died and was thrown in the rubbish, with the coffin*). Only in this way can no one mistreat him any more!

Roberto's story does not stop at his tragic end and goes further, with a sentence imbued with even more black pessimism. The desire to die, to disappear, because everyone kicks you, is not something that only concerns him, this terrible condition can very well happen to other people (*another ball came to the same end as him*).

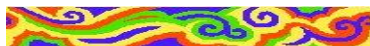


Looking at the sea for courage

Once upon a time there was a girl who was looking at the sea: she was sad and thought that she was fine at that moment there. She was sad, but she didn't even know (why). For her, everything she did was never good. Things were going wrong for him, also because of her. She wanted to be by the sea, just to be well. She got tired. She realised that things could not always go well and that in life one had to fight and move on.

In this account of Luisa, there are two interesting elements. The first concerns the sadness she felt: she cannot understand the causes. The assumption she makes is that she, at least in part, is responsible for it (*things were going wrong for him, also because of her*). However, psychological science tells us that the personal responsibilities of children, compared to those of the adults who should protect and care for them, are always very limited. Nevertheless, when children are very upset, so much so that they cannot live well with themselves and others, guilt still pervades their souls

Luisa struggles to fight her malaise by looking at the sea. It is only by admiring this magnificent spectacle of nature that she is able to find the strength and serenity she needs to continue to fight and face life's difficulties (*she has realised that things cannot always go well and that in life one has to fight and go on*).



Life is a succession of good and bad moments

Once upon a time there was a forest, mountains, sun, blue sky. Bad weather came, it rained, ruined plants, mountains, landslides. Then the rain subsided and the sun came out again!

The state of mind of Patrizia, an adopted child, is different again. She is able to see the events of life objectively, in which there is an alternation of beautiful moments (*Once upon a time there was a forest, mountains, the sun, the blue sky*) and difficult and sad moments (*it started raining, it ruined the plants, mountains, landslides*). These difficult times can fortunately be followed by other beautiful moments (*Then the rain stopped and the sun came out again!*).

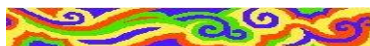




Figure 61

A heart in the sky

Once upon a time there was a heart in the sky. It was big and beautiful and red with love. This heart belonged to a female person, a little girl, who was two years old and named Alessia, who had become engaged to Jesus and had given him her heart. Alessia had a family and her parents were happy that she had become engaged to Jesus. Jesus was happy and his mother Mary and the disciples threw flowers on his heart and he was happy to be with them, he was happy...Her parents were happy that she had become engaged to Jesus.

This ten-year-old girl who, due to serious emotional and educational deficiencies on the part of both parents, lived in a nuns' home, together with a brother and sister, sees only in Jesus, Our Lady and the Saints the possibility of care, love and attention.

Certainly living in an institution of nuns had its influence on the story of the girl who chooses to become engaged to Jesus. However, what struck us in this story is the fact that she identified with a very *young girl: two years old (This heart was of a female, small, who was two years old)* while the girl was ten. It is as if the girl wished to regress to an age when her family still united and somehow quite serene

2.1.8 Loneliness

The theme of loneliness is often present in children's stories; sometimes it is suffered while in other cases this condition is sought and desired, as a way of escape, in the face of the misunderstandings and suffering that life brings them. As can be seen, the stories in which the search for loneliness is present are many and this should make both parents and adults reflect on the difficult condition in which many minors live.

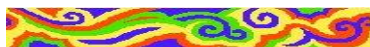


A tank for growing cucumbers

Once upon a time there was a gentleman who had built a house all by himself. He was 36 years old. The furniture (he had built it) all by himself and his name was Gino. He lived alone. He invited a friend of his, called Tutto, to show him the house. He showed him some of the furniture, and then, his friend asked him where he

had the tub and showed it to him. He had grown cucumbers in the tub. All asked him how he did his washing, and he replied that it rained so often in his country that there was no need to wash in the house.

This is a very sad tale by Thomas, pervaded by the burning sense of loneliness but also by destitution. Not only does Gino live alone, not only has he built his own furniture, but he is forced to use his bathtub to grow cucumbers and, if he wants to wash, he has to wait for it to rain (*Everything asked him how he could wash, and he replied that it rained so often in his village that there was no need to wash at home*).

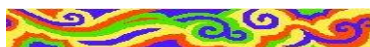


A child who lived alone

Once upon a time in a village far away there was a dog and a little boy who lived alone. One day he left home and, at some point, it began to rain and then the sun came out. He kept walking and found a flower in a tree, which he took to his little house and tended this flower.

In this very tender and delicate tale there is a child who lives alone. He can only express his need for care towards a small flower (*and he found in a tree a flower, which he took to his little house and cared for this flower*). Note the need the child has to remove, out of a sort of modesty, from his mind but also from the minds of those who will read or listen to his story, the impression that he is talking about himself and his needs (*Once upon a time in a village far away*).

Inherent in man is the need and pleasure of caring for a small and graceful being, such as a flower, especially when one is alone. There are many people in this period of history, but also in the past, who try to overcome loneliness by taking care of a living being: a small animal or a plant. This commitment and care is reciprocated by a feeling of profound joy, which emerges in the soul of the person giving this care.



Federica was an eight-year-old girl who showed symptoms of psychological regression: she spoke like a small child; she kept a doll with her that she claimed was her brother; she wanted to sleep in her parents' bed; she chose cartoons suitable for small children. Furthermore, although sphincter control had already taken place around the age of three, when the symptoms of psychological regression began she suffered from secondary daytime and nocturnal enuresis.

As is often the case with most psycho-affective disorders, the range of symptoms present in the child was very broad. In addition to signs of regression, there were difficulties in socialising with the peer group; fears; easy distractibility; slight restlessness and modest behavioural disturbances.



Figure 62

A heart-shaped apple

Once upon a time there was a little worm, who saw a heart-shaped apple. He packed his bags and moved into this apple. He (the worm) had a party, because in this heart-shaped apple there was an office, a laser-game, a disco, an arcade, bowling, skating, bingo for his grandmother, a pizza restaurant and other things.

And so he had this party in all these places and lived happily ever after.

The interpretation of this story is quite simple: Federica would like to be very small (*Once upon a time there was a little worm*), so that she could get away from an environment in which she suffered and hide in a small but loving place: a heart-shaped apple. In reality, the child's reasons for hiding were different: the presence of conflict between her parents and the difficulty she had integrating with her peers and her mother. The latter, an anxious and nervous woman often showed excessively strict and rigid attitudes towards her daughter

The heart-shaped apple that Federica chooses to hide in possesses everything that can please not only the child but also all the people she loves (*there was an office, a laser-game, a discotheque, an arcade, bowling, skating, bingo for her grandmother, a pizza restaurant and more*)

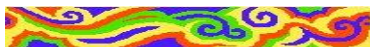


A tree house

Once upon a time there was a little boy who went to his house. The child's name was Philip. He took the seeds home and planted the flowers, then made himself a tree house. Later he saw a puppy dog and brought it into the house. He was happy to take it into the house.

Filippo aspires to something closer to reality: he does not want to be a little worm inside an apple, like Federica, but identifies with a child who tries to create a protected and pleasant environment around him, . That is why he plants flowers, lives

in a tree house and seeks joy and tenderness in a puppy to be cared for, excluding parents, relatives and even other children.



Luisa, a thirteen-year-old girl, came to our observation because of numerous symptoms of psychological distress. She complained of fears and panic attacks; motor restlessness and behavioural disturbances; irritability and depressed mood; headache and a lump in her throat; insomnia and night terrors. In addition, her relationship with her parents, especially her mother, appeared difficult and conflictual.

Luisa - First story

A ship to escape from routine

Once upon a time there was a ship, and in this ship there was a boy who wanted to get away and be better. He went on this ship to see new places and break the routine. And on this ship he saw beautiful places. He had a good time and he had a good time and he wanted it never to end, but then he had to go home with the hope of getting better

Luisa's story takes us back to fantasies and desires frequently present in many children and young people: to escape from a too sad or stressful reality, in which one finds oneself living, in the hope of getting better. Luisa identifies with a boy who escapes from routine by setting sail on a ship (*Once upon a time there was a ship, and in this ship there was a boy who wanted to escape and get better*). The boy wished that this ship could take him far away, in order to see new places and different from the usual ones, in order to recharge his batteries to be able to

cope with the pressing daily difficulties (*He had a good time and wanted it never to end, but then he had to return home in the hope of getting better*).

Luisa - Second story

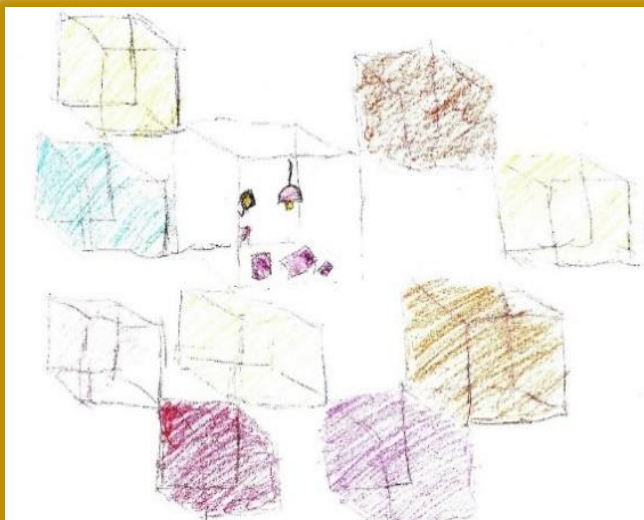


Figure 63

A room like a prison

Once upon a time there was a little girl in a room. This room was in a closed place, like a prison. This little girl stayed in this house. One day she wanted to go out, but she thought there was no way to do so. She was alone. On the one hand she wanted to go out, on the other hand she was serene and comfortable there. She had always been in there. In the end, she couldn't find a way to escape. Some people

go there and stay with her: they are peers. She doesn't understand what was happening, she doesn't know if she enjoys their company. They are good people. These people stay there with her.

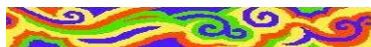
Luisa describes very well what all people feel, whether children or adults, who close themselves off from others. This closure is present to the highest degree in autism spectrum disorder, but we can find it, albeit in a less severe and prolonged manner, in many other mental disorders. Whenever life events become excessively frustrating and traumatic one is led to implement, sometimes voluntarily, other times instinctively, this extreme form of defence (*She wanted to get out on the one hand, on the other hand she was serene and comfortable with it*). The child adds that this closure, this prison in which she lived, was not an occasional occurrence (*she had always been in there*)

In this condition isolation we live in ambivalence: one part of us would like to go out and meet others, because we know that life is made up of encounters and relationships that enrich us. However, the fear of facing precisely these encounters and relationships is always present and forces us to close ourselves off (*Some people go there and stay with her: they are peers. She does not understand what was going on, she does not know if she enjoys their company*)

At the end of this tale there is a note of trust and hope when the girl says that these people who come to her are good people

In the drawing (figure 63), a series of cubes surrounding the little girl's room are evident. These cubes suggest, to the

viewer, the sense of total enclosure from which it is impossible to escape. Moreover, they may suggest that the little girl, within herself, imagines that other people also live as she does: each one locked in its own prison



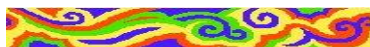
A boy and his computer

Once upon a time there was a ten-year-old boy: tall, he stood in front of the computer, playing poker. Sometimes he won, sometimes he lost. He would accept losing, but then he would win. He lived alone in a big, spacious house in the city. A small house, with animals in the house: four cats and a dog, with whom he had a good relationship. He only gave food and caresses (to these animals). He only devoted himself to the computer. And one day he had a birthday and was given a PC which, connected with his cousin's, was like having two. He received a TV from his uncle. His parents, on the other hand, (gave him) a poker table and a football field where he played alone. At poker he played with friends. Sometimes he won, sometimes he lost.

In this story, Louis describes himself in a house of well-to-do people: a big house, as it was in reality. But from this beautiful house he excludes the people who should be the most important for a child: his parents, grandmother and brother. The only living beings he accepts and with whom he relates well are the four cats and the dog (*a cottage, with animals in the house: four cats and a dog, with whom he had a good relationship*). Apart

from these animals, his interests stop at computers, TV, poker and football. In fact, from his uncle he received a TV as a gift, from his parents a poker table and a football pitch (*in which he played alone*).

Evident in this child's story are the difficulties that parents sometimes have in being really close to their children, so as to offer them the necessary dialogue and the indispensable affective and educational relationships. Unfortunately, these shortcomings and difficulties are increasingly numerous and involve a growing number of families, who are very munificent in offering their little ones objects and tools for play and entertainment, even very expensive ones, while they have considerable difficulty in giving them the really important things they need: a serene presence, effective dialogue, an environment free of constant conflict, and solid and effective educational and training guidance.



The account of Federico, a nine-year-old boy, clearly manifests his psychological experiences, which were particularly tense and disturbed by considerable anxiety, which manifested itself with somatisations at an abdominal level, school phobia, and feeding difficulties. At the origin of his symptoms and of his difficulties in fitting into the social environment outside the family, there were constant disagreements between his parents, in whom neurotic disorders were present that compromised their educational function.

A mad scientist

Once upon a time there was a scientist who was always working and had to invent something. He wrote a lot on the computer, sent messages and did so because he was lonely and had gone mad. One day he created many cities, three cities. One where the gnomes lived, the second (where) the insects lived and in the third the animals. Another day he invented an alien, who destroyed the cities. The first one fell to pieces but the gnomes were saved. In the second, insects and houses were saved; in the third city, half (of the animals) were saved, half were not. Then another scientist, who was not crazy, invented a machine that could rebuild the cities and revive the dead. So they all lived happily ever after.

The child in this story imagines a mad scientist who builds cities and then destroys them. The child seems to link this scientist's malaise, and thus his own, to loneliness (*He did it because he was lonely*). The loneliness of which children with psychological disorders speak is not so much the lack of people around them, but concerns the impossibility of frequent, rich, serene and joyful dialogue with these people.

It is only at the end of the story that the child is able to escape his malaise for a moment, imagining that there is another scientist who rebuilds cities and revives the dead. So that people can live happily ever after.



Federico, a nine-year-old boy with normal intellectual abilities and good school results, presented numerous psychological disorders when he came to our observation: fear of the dark, of the killer doll, of thieves, of the death of his parents and of being alone without any protection. He also presented easy susceptibility, low self-esteem and considerable inner tension.

His parents were busy and committed him to doing his homework from fifteen to nineteen. After homework, the only other activity he was allowed was to watch some TV. No social life. No friends. No play activities with classmates.

A lonely child

Once upon a time there was a little boy called Luigi, who played football. He could play football well. He went to five-a-side football, ate, slept, etc. One day a mouse punctured his ball and he started to cry. Later he bought himself a new one and played football again. Mum had curly black hair and dad had curly black hair. Dad was a doctor and Mom was a doctor. They were good. Dad would get angry if he shouted and Mum would get angry if he didn't study. He was alone and played alone!

Although the narrative is, at least in part, a projection of his unfulfilled desires since, in reality, the child was not enrolled in five-a-side football and had neither the time nor the opportunity to play ball, his words are striking for a series of dull, monochrome elements of people and days that are always the same (*One day a mouse punctured his ball and he started to cry.*

Later he bought a new one and played football again) (His mother had curly black hair and his dad had curly black hair). (Dad was a doctor and Mom was a doctor).

The sense of loneliness is evident in his final sentence (*He was alone and playing alone!*).

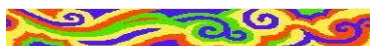


Figure .64

The child who wrote on trees

Once upon a time there was a little boy who went around writing 'hello' on all the trees he came across, because he was lonely and had no friends. What he was doing was a way of making friends with the trees, even though he knew better. One day a woodcutter met him

and with the excuse that he too had to do with trees, gave him some advice. This woodcutter served him as a friend, to confide in and express all that he had inside. So they calmly went through this discussion and this person convinced him that it was wrong, both for him and for the trees. The woodcutter did not stop there, but went to tell all the people he knew to find some friends for the child. So he organised a party and invited all his friends and relatives and made many friends.

This tale is indicative of what children want. They need friends, and if they have difficulty finding them, they even settle for 'tree friends', but it is only when someone helps them find and relate well with flesh-and-blood friends that they are truly happy and satisfied

Notice in the trunk of the tree the presence of eyes and mouth, as if it were a person (Figure 64). Also evident is the presence on the sun, of a large cloud that covers it to a large extent, limiting its ability to provide light, warmth and protection.



We met Luisa, a thirteen-year-old girl, because of her disobedient, impulsive, nervous, irritable and grumpy behaviour, resulting in quarrels, susceptibility and easy loss of control. There were frequent disagreements with Dad and Mum, because of the friendships the girl had, which were clearly disapproved by her parents.

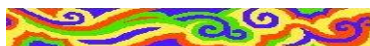
A lonely child

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Michael, who was ten years old. She was an adopted child and she always played alone, because she was a lonely, closed child. She played with dolls, with animals. Her parents were not very good, they were never with her and she did not want to talk to them.

This child loved being alone, even though she wanted a friend. She liked looking at the landscape for the sense of freedom. She did not like mountains, because she got scared. She liked the sea and the sky. They lived in an isolated place. One day she had to look after her younger siblings. One day she went down to the city with her mother and they met a teacher who had realised her potential and advised her parents to send her to school. But they were not well off financially and could not send her. One day he sent her to buy eggs from a man, of whom everyone was afraid. But she gained confidence. Every time she went, (the man) taught her the words. She was happy to go. So the mother decided to send her to school. There was a little girl who behaved badly with her: she was the mayor's daughter. This child's parents always left her alone. The little girl realises that this child was bad, to get attention and they become friends. She then befriends another child. They were her classmates. This child was also naughty. His father had big breeding, but he wanted his son to be a lawyer, but the little girl makes him understand that he has

to do what he likes. He makes friends with another little girl.

In this story, Luisa sees herself as a lonely, closed child, so different from her parents that she thinks and fears that she was adopted (*she was an adopted child as a child and always played alone, because she was a lonely, closed child*). If the mountains frighten her because they are high and oppressive, the sea, the sky and beautiful landscapes soothe her. She does not feel understood by her mother and father and, above all, does not sense in them the openness and dialogue she would like. The little girl, however, understands that school is a place where she can make friends, even if, as is the case in reality, these friendships are possible with children who have similar problems, since the others, the 'normals', often use children with difficulties to give vent to their irritability and aggressiveness (*The little girl understands that the little girl was bad, in order to attract attention and they become friends. She then befriends another child. They were her classmates. This child was also bratty*).



A sad and lonely fish

Once upon a time there was a fish that swam night and day, was sad and lonely and was looking for friends. One day the fish found a crab that was in danger, because there was a moray eel that was eating it. The fish ran towards the moray eel and chased it away. Immediately the crab ran to save the fish. From that day on, the fish was no longer alone because it stayed with the crab.

Q.: "Why was the fish alone?"

A.: *'The fish was only because the parents were always working'.*

Amedeo, who identifies with a sad and lonely fish, manifests his need for an emotional bond with someone, in order to build a relationship of mutual help and support (*The fish ran towards the moray eel and chased it away. Immediately the crab ran to save the fish*). The absence of parents for various reasons, in this case for work, can produce in children a feeling not only of loneliness and sadness but also of insecurity and fear. In Amedeo's case, his fear was that he might be prey to some evil-doer.

2.1.9 Aggression, anger and violence

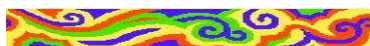
Aggression and the most prominent manifestations of this emotion, which are anger and rage, are often present in animals and humans. Aggressive behaviour is evident at all ages, although there are differences concerning the causes that provoke them, the ease with which they occur and the ways in which these emotions manifest themselves.

The child may show his aggression through certain motor activities: biting, hitting, slapping, kicking and punching, throwing spit at people, animals and objects, or hurling objects at walls or on the ground. If the child has the possibility of language, aggression may be expressed verbally, including through the use of words and phrases that may offend, insult or hurt those in front of them. In some cases, the child achieves the same purpose by ignoring, sometimes for hours and days, the person or persons he or she wants to hurt. In addition to being aggressive towards others (*hetero-aggressiveness*), aggression may also be directed towards oneself (*self-aggressiveness*).

Aggression can *be physiological*, when it is felt or used to defend one's body, life, rights or needs; it can instead be considered *pathological* when aggressive feelings or reactions occur for no apparent reason or when reactions are excessive and out of place, compared to the behaviour of others.

Pathological aggression can arise for various causes: the most common is linked to suffering that the child has suffered in the past or suffers at that particular time in his or her life, for various reasons: illness, physical pain and above all psychological causes. The latter type of suffering can arise from the presence of an excessively anxious, depressed, tense, conflictual, irritable or affectively deficient environment. Ultimately, aggression arises in the child's soul whenever his or her living environment has not been or is not conducive to his or her needs.

This emotion signals not only inner suffering, but also the need for revenge for the anguish suffered, which is momentarily alleviated through aggressive or destructive attitudes, words and behaviour



Examining the personal story of Rocco, a six-year-old boy, we find many elements that allow us to understand the reasons that drove him to create these stories of his, which are as lively and interesting as they are aggressive and violent.

The child's parents often quarrelled even in front of the children. The father had little presence in his life because of work. The mother, a very anxious woman, constantly worried about everything, upset by her own negative emotions and constant conflicts with her husband and son, could not cope with the child's numerous psychological disorders: fear of the dark, of

thieves, of the possible, sudden death of herself or her parents, sleep disturbances and anxious somatisations. These symptoms were also associated with numerous behavioural disorders. In this and similar situations it is easy for a child to project his aggressive and violent impulses onto others.

Rocco - First story

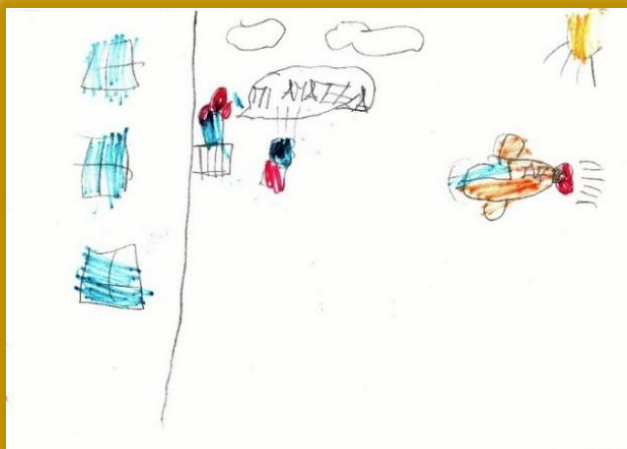


Figure 65

Throwing a plant off the balcony is very dangerous!

Once upon a time there was a moron called Gianmarco. One day his mother told him: 'Don't throw that plant away or else I'll kill you'. He, who was a moron, went to the balcony and threw the plant underneath. He thought: 'Now my mother will kill me'. There was an aeroplane and he said: 'Even worse because the plant can break the aeroplane'. The plane crashed into the building, two thousand people died. The

mother said, "Was the house on fire?" and the child said yes. The mother threw him out of the window.

Rocco - Second story



Figure 66

How difficult it is to go to the bathroom!

Once upon a time there was a Christian Beast. One day he wanted to go to the teacher and asked: "Can I go to the toilet?" And the teacher tells him: "No! Forget it!" And then Cristiano pees his pants. They had to call the fire service and they gave him a fireman's underwear. He was writing a maths assignment and

had to do 1+1; he thinks how much he does and writes 1,000.

So the maths teacher threw him out and broke his head. The teacher called his mum and said, "Write him in another school!" His mum is big and she gave Cristiano a blow by throwing him (out) of the window. Below was an ambulance, they put him there and admitted him to the ER. Everything was broken except his heart. They discharged him in a wheelchair. He went back to school and asked the teacher again if he could go out and the teacher slapped him again and they hospitalised him again. He went back to school again in the wheelchair and again asked to go out, they slammed him against the wall and eventually he died.

Notice in the drawing (figure 66), the two small clouds surrounding the words: that of the child who would like to go to the bathroom is roundish, to indicate the fear present in his soul as he is forced to make his physiological request; on the contrary, the teacher's 'NO!' is huge and is enclosed in a small cloud with many points, to indicate the irritated and shouted tone of the voice.

Rocco - Third story



Figure 67

Stello in front of the director

Once upon a time there was my comrade Stello. He had once done a stupid-stupid thing. We have a balcony at school. He made the teacher come out, took the plants and threw them out. And the teacher scolded him and sent him to the headmaster. Once he acted stupid and the teacher called his mother who was "mis-citing" (beating) him. He came in like a little dog. The headmaster called his mother, who raised her hands (gave him a beating) and he died. They buried him at the school and at the funeral they also called the US authorities.

In the drawing (figure 67), behind the large desk, as if it were a court of law with implacable judges, there is not only the director, but also the child's manic mother and the strict teacher. Poor Stello, in front of these judges, has no chance!

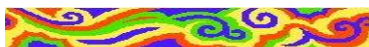


Figure 68

Stello - Fourth story

Stello by the sea

Once upon a time Stello and his mother went to the beach and then Stello asked his mother if he could swim and drowned, because he could not swim. His mother called him: "Come here, you jerk!" And she gave him a timpulata (a slap), and so he died in the sea. His ghost was there; his mum got scared and kicked him. He died again and it was repeated many times.



Rocco - Fifth story

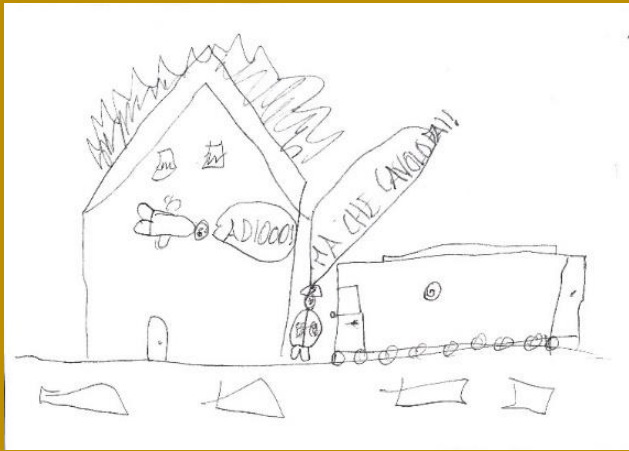


Figure 69

A bad fire

There was a boy named Giacomo, one year old. The mother goes out shopping, the boy lights the cooker and sets the whole house on fire. Then he climbs onto the balcony and jumps off, hurting his brain. The fireman arrives and says: "What the hell are you doing?" He dies. They take him to church and the cemetery. Then his ghost retells the same story two hundred times and then dies forever.

Also in this drawing (figure 69), the child highlights very well both the tragic nature of the scene of Giacomo throwing himself off the balcony, shouting: "Goodbye!", and the aggressiveness present on the part of the adults, in this case the fireman, who shouts at him, in anger: "What the hell are you doing?"

Rocco's stories have some common characteristics:

- his characters are all children, defined as badly as they could be: Rocco gives Cristiano the nicknames 'Beast' and 'Idiot'; Stello's mother calls her son 'cre-tin'; his other companion, Giacomo, is not defined in any particular way, but the fact that he set fire to his house defines him.
- Every character in his stories clashes with adults: Cristiano with the teacher who does not allow him to go to the bathroom and forces him to pee on himself (*"Can I go to the bathroom?" And the teacher tells him: "No! Forget it!" And then Cristiano pees his pants*). Stello has to deal with the teacher, the school headmaster and his mother, who kills him with her beating.
- There is no sign of mercy towards minors. They are treated as badly as they could be. It is as if they deserve insults, refusals to their demands, beatings and even death. Indeed, the author of the story is as if he enjoys the misadventures of these comrades of his.
- All adults: the mother, the teacher, the headmaster, the fireman, are never under indictment. It is always the children themselves who are under indictment, i.e. the victims, because, as is sometimes the case, the child has introjected the adults' aggression and made it its own.
- Finally, it should be noted that the drawings accompanying the stories succeed very well in conveying the emotions of the various characters in the scene. This demonstrates the child's good intellectual abilities

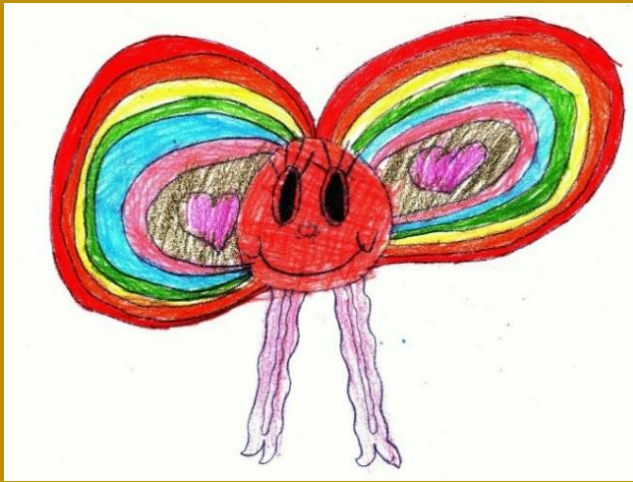
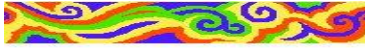


Figure 70

Daniela - First story

The City of Rage

Once upon a time there was a town called 'rage'. It was so called because everyone would not stop fighting. One day a little girl named "Fiorella" went with her mother, Mrs Gelfa, to a shop called "Fiocchi e Fiocchetti" and bought herself a beautiful "Rainbow Flake". When another little girl saw it, she quickly started

pulling it towards her, because she wanted to have it. And so the ribbon tore. The little girl who had bought it took it to repair it. That was the bow of love that Jesus had sent, to change the city of anger into a city where all were good. That flake then repaired itself and spoke and told the little girl if she could take it to the "Park of Anger". The little girl carried it and lifted it up. The flake saying these words turned the city into good "Allâcazam, love be, throughout the city disperse and still away!".

The city became good and kind and the little girl was able to put on the magic ribbon.

But after three days passed, the flake told the little girl that she had to go to the other bad cities to make them good. The little girl realised that the other cities were also in need. So she let him go, saying goodbye. Meaning (suggested by Daniela herself): the little girl realised that she had to share goodness with others.

Daniela, a six-year-old girl, created this story in which the main character, Fiorella, distributes goodness and love in her city, using the *Rainbow Flake* (*That was the flake of love that Jesus sent to change the city of anger into a city where everyone was good*).

But what stimulated this child to construct this tale

To understand the motivations behind Daniela's words, it is necessary to know her story and the emotions she was experiencing at that time in her life.

The child had come to our observation due to the presence of a series of symptoms that began very early. Already at the age of three months she presented eating disorders to which, after the age of four, had been added fears, speech defects, sleep disturbances, anxious somatisations, sudden outbursts of anger, which she manifested both at school and at home, excessive emotionality and intense conflict with her parents. Numerous conduct disorders were also present, with quarrelsomeness, susceptibility, easy loss of control, provocative, hostile and, at times, oppositional behaviour.

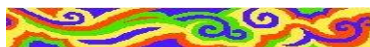
It is only from this suffering story that one can understand her need for peace and love, which, ever since she was a child, she could not find within herself

Daniela - Second story

An always angry leprechaun

Once upon a time there was an elf called 'Little John'. Giovanni was always angry and sulking: he did not want to do anything, not even his homework. Nobody knew why he was angry. But one day the little boy revealed his big secret and said that he was always alone and wanted someone for company. So they moved to where his cousin and grandmother were. But that was not enough for him. So sometimes they told him they would invite his classmates for his birthday and name day, and some little party to play together. From that day on, Giovannino was the happiest child on earth.

Daniela projects onto Giovanni, the character in the story, his anger, his discontent which, in her opinion, were caused by an intense need for company (*But one day the child revealed his big secret and said that he was always alone and wanted someone for company*). Fortunately, the fact that his parents understood, with the help of the therapist, these and other needs of his and took action to meet them, markedly improved his inner life (*From that day on, Giovannino was the happiest child on earth*).



Giliberto, the son of parents who had separated when the child was barely a year old, had lived alternately with his grandparents, his mother and his father. There had been, and still were, many disagreements between those who had cared for him, on how to handle the child's upbringing.

Bullying and help-seeking

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Luigi. This child had trouble being the best in his class. So he wanted to try hard, but the boys wouldn't let him, because they dragged him to do bad things. So one day Luigi got tired and tried to make up for it, but he did not know how to help himself. One day, at the end of school, Luigi looked out of the window of his house and thought about getting a hand from a neighbour named Fred.

So he left the house and tried to approach Fred's door. Luigi was lucky, because Fred was someone who had won the Olympics and was important. Luigi rang the doorbell and Fred opened the door and asked him what he wanted. Luigi wanted some help to avoid mischief.

The next day Luigi's mother left and asked Fred to accompany him to school. Once at school, Luigi said goodbye to Fred and went to the playground. All his classmates were waiting for him outside. He ran away and everyone chased him for bullying, but he set traps he knew at the back of the school.

He ran as fast as he could and went to the back. The boys in the class were few (nine in all); they fell into the traps. One last one remained, who was the most dangerous, so he tried to escape and went inside the school. This boy opened all the classroom doors, so Luigi went to the headmaster and made a sign to this boy, and a few metres away Luigi ducked and the naughty boy crashed.

In this case, the aggression is perpetrated by peers, who also involve the child himself in their misdeeds. The latter, in order to escape from this serious situation, asks a very important friend for help: Fred (*Luigi was lucky, because Fred was a person who had won the Olympics and was important*). He seeks and obtains subsequent help from the highest authority of the same school he attended: the headmistress. Finally, he relies on his willpower, cunning and athletic abilities to fight and struggle against the bullying of his classmates.



Wolves in sheep's clothing

Once upon a time there was a wolf walking around and there was a little lamb. This wolf hid and said to the little lamb: "You are nice and handsome and good to eat!" The little lamb, frightened, went to his parents who then went to ask the wolf for an explanation: he replied that it was not true that he wanted to eat him.

The wolf comes out of the den, goes to the little lamb and says: "Did you tell your parents that I want to eat you?" "Yes says the little lamb". Then the wolf pup comes and tells his father that he cannot eat the little lamb, because otherwise the lamb's parents will come looking for him. So the big wolf doesn't eat it. So the little wolf says to him: 'The little lamb is my friend, if I want I will let you eat it'. One evening the wolf shows up, the little lamb was with its parents. The wolf greets the parents and they greet him back. The parents wanted to know why he had not eaten the little lamb, because the parents were also wolves disguised as lambs. In the end, they all took off their disguises and ate the little lamb.

This is perhaps the most grim and pessimistic tale we have collected from the children we have followed over time. Toni-no's most frequent words are 'wolves, eat, lamb'. These three words colour the whole story with remarkable, incredible violence and anguish.

If we examine the behaviour of the various characters, we realise that they systematically have ambiguous attitudes: at times, they seem to want to protect the small, fragile victim while, at other times, they betray her or are eager to attack her, tear her to pieces or have her mauled.

In Tonino, therefore, we find, along with the fear of extreme violence from those around him, the absence of all hope and trust in others, even in so-called 'friends', who for the child are ready at any moment to betray you. In fact, the wolf *cub* who at first seems to protect the little lamb (*Then the wolf cub arrives and tells his father that he cannot eat the little lamb because otherwise the lamb's parents will come looking for him*), a moment later is ready to feed him to the jaws of the 'big wolf' (*The little lamb is my friend, if I want I'll let you eat him*). This distrust spreads, in a terrible, distressing crescendo, even to one's own parents! (*because the parents were also wolves disguised as lambs. In the end, they all took off their disguises and ate the lamb*).

All this reflects the inner realities of some children who, as a result of the behaviour of those who should care for them, lose all affective reference points and all security and trust in their surroundings.



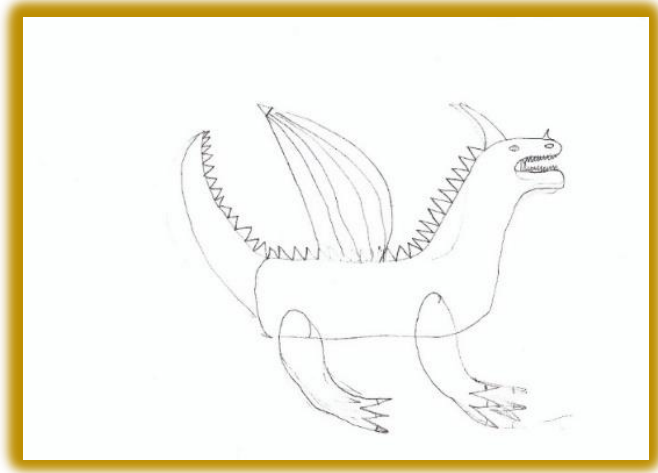


Figure 71

Joseph - First story

Anger and goodness

Once upon a time there was a dragon who lived in a cave, then the king came and wanted to kill him. The dragon breathed fire into him and the king died and the dragon ran away. The dragon, in anger, set fire to the city. Everyone died and he conquered the city. Afterwards he made twenty sons and they were like him: one was good and all the others were bad. The bad ones set fire to the city. The good one helped the inhabitants fight against his brothers. He won the good one and then became the king's pet dragon.

In this tale, the protagonist is a dragon who kills the king. The aggression towards this character hints at the anger,

present in Joseph, towards people who had authoritative roles, such as teachers, of whom he was afraid, or his father, who had always been absent from his life after his birth.

In the second part of the tale, the king, who was supposed to be dead, strangely reappears. The dragon, who had killed the king, also appears. The dragon gives birth to twenty children, only one of whom is good, while all the others are bad and like to set fire to everything they encounter and that is around them (*the city*).

In this second part, the child does everything in his power to make the good part of himself, which is clearly more fragile than the aggressive part, prevail, but which now, as his psychic condition has improved, is able to eliminate the violent components of his ego, so that he can bond affectionately with the authoritative people who are close to him.

In children's stories we often see inconsistencies that amaze us: such as describing a character who was bad and then becomes good and vice versa; or a character who dies, but then, without any explanation, comes back to life and continues to be the protagonist of the story. These inconsistencies are due to the influence of relevant and intense emotional impulses in their minds, often conflicting with each other, which disrupt the normal, linear course of logical thought. Usually, the incongruities are all the more numerous the more disabling and severe the psychic pathology of the child.

Another notation we must make about this type of character: dragons or large prehistoric animals. Many children with problems, especially if they are boys, have a great interest and curiosity in these fantastic and enormous animals, so much so that they know very well not only their names but also their

habits and characteristics. This interest stems from the fact that these enormous and ferocious animals represent very well the immense anger that often broods within their souls. Anger at those who mock them; anger at their parents and relatives by whom they feel their basic needs are not understood; anger at themselves, because they are unable to be and behave as they would like and as adults and the social environment demand.

Identifying with these huge, monstrous animals also means identifying with something very big, while they are affectively and emotionally very small. In the same way, identifying with the strength and ferocity of these animals means being able to fight and overcome the world, judged as evil because it is incapable of satisfying their essential needs.

Joseph - Second story

Containing the aggression of the bearded dragon

Once upon a time there was a child who bought himself a bearded dragon. The child's name was Roberto, the dragon, Fire. He looked after him and was always near him when he played playstation. One day the dragon got big and huge and smashed the house. Then it is decided to tie the dragon up. Then the carabinieri come and want to catch him. So they run away with the whole family, build themselves a much

bigger house. The family consisted of: mum, dad, grandparents and uncles. They lived happily ever after.

In this story, the same child, Roberto, with the improvement of his psychic pathology, manages to understand that it is necessary to be able to contain aggressiveness towards others and towards the world, when it becomes excessive, so much so that it risks destroying the family in which one lives (*One day the dragon becomes big and immense and breaks up the house. Then it is decided to bind the dragon*).

It is only then that he realises that the fierce aggression, represented by the dragon, is not ethically acceptable, so much so that it entails a sanction (*then come the carabinieri who want to catch him*). Before the final note there is a description not of his royal family but of the desired one. He adds, in fact, the figure of his father who, in reality, had never been present in his life, as he had abandoned his wife and young son shortly after their birth

2.1.10 Disaffection and pessimism

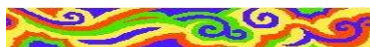
Self-esteem, which can be defined as the evaluation of qualities that the individual perceives as one's own,²⁹ is one of the most important components of the intrapsychic world. It reflects not only the objective view of personal, family and social reality but, above all, tends to reflect the way in which others judge and evaluate us. Possessing low self-esteem means

²⁹ Militeri R., *Child Neuropsychiatry*, Naples, Publisher Idelson Gnocchi, 2004, p. 100.

having negative feelings about one's own qualities, abilities or skills.

When low self-esteem is present, even if it stems from a particular defect in the child, it tends to spread to all aspects of his or her life. This will force the child to tackle the various activities in which he would like to engage: study, work, social relationships, without the necessary inner serenity, with negative consequences on his performance.

The frustrations suffered may also stimulate in the child the need to defend himself against the devaluation operated by the external environment through unstable, aggressive, irritating, choleric and explosive behaviour



In Andrea, a thirteen-year-old boy, while his parents only noticed in him and reported as problems his fears, his difficulties in writing, the considerable anxiety with which he faced every task and his nervousness, we could only see his low self-esteem from his stories.

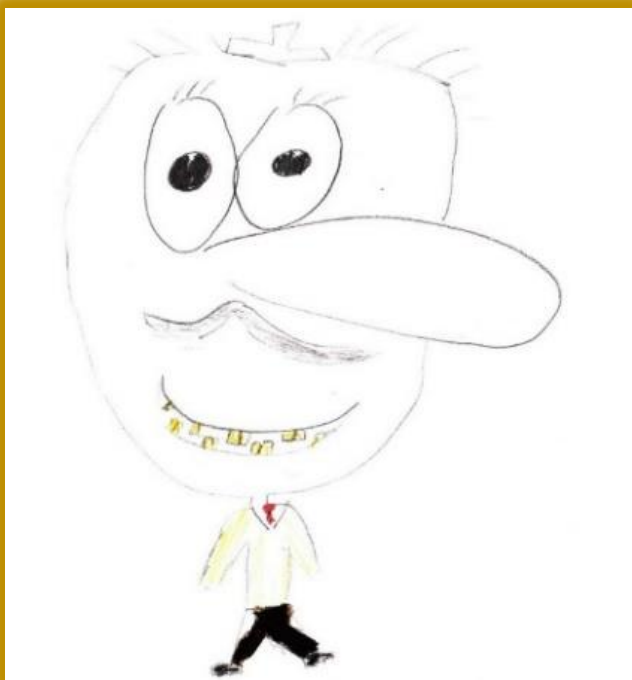


Figure 72

Andrea - First story

A bad boy who wanted to learn to drive.

Once upon a time there was Luigi. Today was the day to get his driving licence. In the driving school everyone laughed at him because he had a moustache and yellow teeth. When he got into the car, the teacher was startled by his ugliness. Luigi was surprised by the teacher's reaction and pressed the accelerator. The teacher told him that he was wrong. Everything

he did he scolded him. He was very confused and then in the end he did not get his licence and his friends made fun of him. He tried again to drive the car well, and succeeded, but he did not realise that a car was coming at him, hit him and died.

In this first story, made at the beginning of his therapeutic journey, the child describes, as best one could, what triggers dislike, what keeps it alive and the consequences it causes. The boy shows how simple diversity can become physical ugliness in the eyes of others and how this very often provokes hilarity and ridicule (*In the driving school everyone laughed at him because he had a moustache and yellow teeth*).

The hilarity and mockery, in turn, provoke a state of frustration in the unfortunate person, which translates into psychological malaise, resulting in an inability to perform well in the activities undertaken (*Luigi was surprised by the teacher's reaction and pressed the accelerator*). In turn, this inability fuels other frustrations: in this case, being failed in driving tests. This is followed by further mockery by his peers for this failure (*in the end he did not get his driving licence and his friends made fun of him*). It should be noted how the negative reactions towards the boy, also suffered by adults, accentuated the minor's problems (*The teacher told him that he was wrong. Every thing he did he scolded him*). Sometimes the feeling of inferiority prevails over all others, to such an extent that children are concerned about gathering evidence of their inferiority. Evidence that can provide them with an explanation and justification for the

aggressive attitude that the environment manifests towards them (Adler A., 1971, p.104).³⁰

Andrea in his account then emphasises how the consequence of the disaffection causes him serious inner discomfort, which, in turn, only worsens the performance (*He was very confused*). The resulting pessimism and state of mind prevent the child's positive reaction in trying in every way to get out of this sad situation from achieving results (*He tried again to drive the car well and succeeded, but did not realise that a car was coming at him, the car hit him and he died*).

These last, tragic words, with which Andrea concludes the story, highlight very well the state of mind of the child with low self-esteem. Being run over and dying are not only the baleful consequences of inner discomfort and consequent confusion, but may also, unfortunately, represent the deepest desire of every child who finds himself in this serious situation of malaise!

In the drawing that accompanies the story (Figure 72), it is easy to notice a very large head to highlight the location of the child's problems: the face in which the yellow teeth and moustache stand out. Andrea, by drawing the remarkably small body, wanted instead to communicate to us his feeling small and insignificant in front of others.

³⁰ Adler A. (1971), *The Nervous Temperament*, Rome, Newton Compton Italiana, p. 104.



Figure 73

Andrea - Second story

Victim of the goddess of ugliness.

"Once upon a time there was a man called Claudio. All the girls liked him. One day, in the sky, the goddess of ugliness saw him and made him ugly, with eyes of different colours. When the girls saw him they fainted from such ugliness. He, discovering the spell, went up to the

sky and asked the goddess the reason for the spell and she replied that no one could be more beautiful than she was, but that what counted was inner beauty and not outer beauty'.

In this second story, Andrea manifests his low self-esteem by focusing it, once again, on physical beauty. In this case it is the envy of others that causes his problems. The child tries to understand the reason for this and blames it no longer on himself but on something outside him: in this case on the goddess of ugliness (*One day, the goddess of ugliness saw him in the sky and made him ugly, with eyes of different colours*).

The consequences due to his aesthetic characteristics can only be disastrous (*When the girls saw him they fainted from such ugliness*)! However, since he thought his problems came from outside, he can try to solve them (*He, discovering the spell, ascended into the sky and asked the goddess why the spell was cast, and she answered that no one could be more beautiful than she*). At the end of the tale, the child tries to accept himself for what he is, putting into the mouth of the jealous goddess herself the words that he must have said to himself so many times to try to diminish the low self-esteem from which he suffered (*that what counted was inner beauty and not outer beauty*).

Andrea - Third story

The different tree

Once upon a time there was a seed, the farmer started to water the seed and, after a while, a beautiful fir tree was born, which was different from the others: with yellow leaves in the shape of a forest tree. The other pine trees

saw him as different and mocked him and he replied that he was different because he was better and asked to be left alone. The poor tree thought about what the other pines were saying and doubted that he was a real pine tree. He discovered that he had been planted there by mistake. Nevertheless, he was happy, because he realised that he was special.

Andrea's improvement is highlighted in this third tale, in which he manages to have a good self-acceptance, so that he is able to compare himself with other peers and react appropriately to their mockery (*The other pines saw him as different and mocked him and he replied that he was different because he was better and asked to be left alone*). And it is always in this last story that the child manages to detach himself from the need to conform to the group, exalting his peculiarities, so much so that in the last sentence Andrea manages judge his diversity not as a limitation or a handicap, but as a value (*However he was happy, because he realised he was special*).



Figure 74

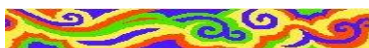
A scary giant

Once upon a time there was a giant who was no one's friend because he was scary. One day he went into town and met some people, who ran away. One day he was on his way to leave, but the bus driver got scared and went on foot. Then there was a boy who could not breathe properly and like him he scared everyone, so the boy and the giant became friends. One day they went to a party and some people

fixed them up: the boy was able to breathe and the giant became a boy.

Being teased, being teased, is not related to a particular deficit or situation. This behaviour, which is very frustrating and painful for those who suffer it, can be provoked by all kinds of differences: skin colour, a different ethnicity, some peculiarity of the face, body, different behaviour, language, and so on.

In this story by Philippa, in the first character, diversity concerns height (*Once upon a time there was a giant who was nobody's friend because he was scary*). In the second character, on the other hand, diversity concerns breathing difficulties, (*Then there was a boy who could not breathe properly*). Philippa notes that, in such cases, one can only be friends with those who suffer the same fate (*and as he was frightening to everyone, so the boy and the giant became friends*), and sees the possibility of being accepted by others only if the 'defect' is corrected (*One day they went to a party and people fixed them: the boy was able to breathe and the giant became a boy*).



Massimo, a 12-year-old boy, presented psychological problems that caused him sadness, irritability, restlessness, behavioural disorders, fears, difficulties in socialising and integrating with peers and frequent clashes with his parents, peers and sister.



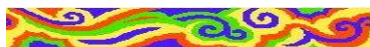
Figure 75

The raft sinks with those who built it

Once upon a time there was a boy who liked to build rafts. One day he woke up and decided to build one, made in his own way. When he made the design, he showed it to a friend who was older than him but who told him that it was no good, because it would sink. He, contrary to what he had heard, built it and put it in the water. The moment he put it in the water, he climbed on top of it and, with an oar, drifted out to sea to prove that he was right. He took a picture of himself walking away, but the moment he did, the raft began to sink and with it the boy. And so the only thing he was left with was the photo he was wrong about.

In our interpretation of this tale, the boy tries to build something with which he can navigate the sea of life (*Once upon a time there was a boy who liked to build rafts. One day he woke up and decided to build one, made in his own way*). However, what he thinks, what he plans, what he dreams, does not meet with the approval of an older friend. (*One day he woke up and decided to build one, made in his own way. When he made the design, he showed it to an older friend who, however, told him that it was no good, because it would sink*). And so the prediction came true (*but soon after he made it the raft began to sink and with it the boy*).

The boy sinking with his raft brings to mind the intense sadness that assails us when something we had imagined, dreamed, planned goes up in smoke.



Roberto presented numerous psychic disorders: verbal and physical aggression, foul language, easy loss of control, provocative and hostile attitudes, but also impulsiveness, nervousness, irritability, surliness. His very altered inner experiences are reflected in his terrifying story.

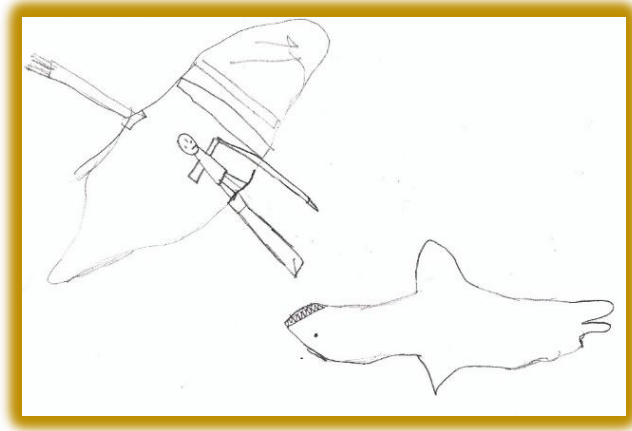


Figure 76

The fisherman

Once upon a time there was a Chubby fisherman, who was fishing; at one point he caught a fish and it was very big, almost two tonnes. He put it on top of the boat and (he) took it home. At home he tied up the boat, but it sank anyway, because it was too heavy. The fisherman was mauled to death by sharks.

The protagonist of this tale is described for his unpleasant physical characteristics (*Once upon a time there was a chubby fisherman*). However, this fisherman seems to have had great luck (*at one point he caught a fish and it was very big, almost two tonnes*). This event is only apparently positive, as it causes two misfortunes: the boat sinks due to the excessive weight of the monstrous fish and the fisherman dies being devoured by sharks.

The pessimistic moral that hovers in this tale is evident: 'The good things we manage to achieve in life do not always bring us pleasure and joy. Instead, it can happen that they are the cause of misfortunes'.

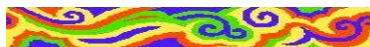


Figure .77

A field of sunflowers

Once upon a time there was a field of sunflowers where my mum and I went to pick them. They were beautiful, it was all blooming and we were chasing each other. And my mum fell and broke the sunflowers and then we went home

What could be more pleasant and relaxing for a mother and child than to play chasing each other through a beautiful field of sunflowers (*They were beautiful, everything was in bloom*

and we were chasing each other). However, alongside so much joy and beauty, to break the spell and joy, there can be negative events: like falling, getting hurt and even crushing the sunflowers, i.e. breaking the enchantment and beauty that is all around us (*and my mum fell and broke the sunflowers and then we went home*)

Just as many peoples of the past were afraid that the gods might be envious and jealous of the joy they experienced and the physical and psychological well-being they possessed, the same way children with psychological problems tend to scara-mantically link positive events with negative ones. As if to say: 'If fate has given you something good, as soon as possible expect it to bring you some negative events'.

2.2 CURES

The story of Pina, a nine-year-old girl, is very interesting for the psychological implications it contains on the subject of care.

Walking plants

Once upon a time there was a girl who bought some poorly cared-for plants. She looked after them very well and they became fantastic plants. One day she put them near the sun and left them there for a day. The next day she saw that they were in a different position, i.e. they had turned towards the shade and she did not understand how they had moved.

One day she went to the florist's and asked how this happened, but the florist did not know how to answer her and said something stupid, namely that the plants wanted shade. But she

said, "But don't they seek the sun?" And he replied that these plants were different from the others.

The next day she put them in the shade, but from outside they came inside. She went to the florist again and said to him: "But do these plants have feet?" And he said to her, 'These plants are rare, they came from Egypt! And so they have feet to go in and out'. She went to a specialist because she did not know how to do it, and he said to leave them in the sun. She put them back in the sun and saw that they turned into a person. That explained how they could move.

The protagonist is a girl who goes to buy some neglected plants (*Once upon a time, there was a girl who bought some neglected plants*). The girl undertakes to provide for their needs, until they become '*fantastic plants*'.

Pina understood very well that all caring behaviour towards others is important. If we think of Pina's parents: the father too busy with his work to be able to relate well with his daughter; the mother, a very anxious and sad woman, who easily went into a rage because she did not feel sufficiently satisfied and fulfilled, we can imagine that the little girl, when she speaks of poorly cared for plants, is referring to her and to people like her who receive very little care from their living environment. In spite of this, the little girl appears optimistic about the result of the care she tries to give (*she cared for them very well and they became fantastic plants*).

However, plants behave strangely: they are in the sun and seek shade, they are in the shade and seek the sun. This strange behaviour brings to mind people with psychological disorders: never being happy with what they have at the time or with what others do for them.

In fact, when the little girl goes to the florist to tell him about the strange behaviour of the plants, he replies that "*these plants were different from the others*". The strange behaviour of the plants continues: '*The next day she put them in the shade, but from outside they came inside*'. The mystery is revealed in the last words of the story: '*She put them back in the sun and saw that they turned into a person. That was how she explained how they could move*'.

The conclusion of the story is very profound: 'When we neglect others, their humanity shrivels and people become like strange vegetables. However, when such suffering people are given proper attention and care, the warmth and affection given to them succeeds in transforming them back into beings rich in humanity.'

2.3 FAMILY RELATIONS

The relationships that children establish with their family members are, from a psychological point of view, certainly the most important. We know that all family members, but especially parents, represent the child's first and principal educational and training environment. They are the first external reality with which the child is confronted but also the most important basis on which his or her personality is formed.

Parents are, in fact, the people who, more than any other, manage to establish a deep and important communicative and

affective dialogue with their children from the very first embrace. It is with the parents that the child establishes an inseparable, special and unique bond; so much so that for young children, dad and mum represent the whole world, in which they have the opportunity to move, so as to develop all their human potential, inherent in their genes.

This world can be a source of protection, security, affection, attention, warmth, tenderness but, if lacking or inadequate, it can be a source of uncertainty, suffering, sadness, anger, confusion and trauma. This is why the role of parents is certainly the most burdensome and delicate but also, without a doubt, the most valuable and important for society.

The psychological well-being of children stems above all from their affective-relational environment. For children, serene, affectionate, respectful and calm relationships between the people closest and dearest to them: parents and family members, are fundamental for their harmonious and serene growth. This type of relationship gives children the physical and emotional security that is indispensable for their physical development but, above all, for the healthy development of their personality.

The development of children in an atmosphere of understanding, cooperation and mutual support is crucial for the formation of a solid personal identity. We know that between a father and a mother there is a mutual interest in bringing up their children together, so when there is a good understanding between father and mother, these parents will be able to work together, supporting each other, so as to collaborate closely in the long, complex endeavour that has, as its objective, the structuring of their children's personalities and their emotional, relational and social development.

When this does not happen, when systematic, continuous conflicts are present between father and mother, not only does mutual cooperation diminish or cease, but often one seeks to disqualify, limit, block the other, belittling the latter's every initiative and every sentence he or she utters, every directive or rule proposed or dictated by the other spouse.

The children involved in these diatribes cannot remain indifferent. Their whole being suffers. Upset by the tension that is created, their normal psychic development is altered, sometimes slightly, but more often severely.

If the conflicts then lead to separation and/or divorce, and if the irritating and aggressive behaviour persists or becomes more pronounced, the harm that children suffer, having to live, among other things, without the support of one of the parents, and with the presence of figures alien to their hearts, their psychological status may worsen.

These affective and emotional disturbances in children, if not quickly and promptly resolved, will tend to persist over time, turning into psychological disorders in adults. These disorders, in turn, will easily be transferred to the new generations, accentuating social discomfort.

For these reasons, in children's stories, family-related themes are usual. In many cases, the child deals clearly and directly with his or her own family or at least with human families. On other occasions, however, he or she uses animal families to conceal more intimate and personal realities, avoiding clear references to his or her own family reality.

Since the stories in this book were mainly produced by children with psychological problems, which often stem from relational and educational deficiencies or difficulties, there are few

stories in which happy family realities are described. Indeed, when these are present, they describe more a desire than a reality. However, as Isaacs S. (1973, p. 86) says, "*The mothers and fathers of children's fiction, for example, are almost always more severe and tyrannical than their real parents, and they scold and punish their children harshly when they are 'naughty'. On the other hand, they are also endlessly tender and affectionate characters, and save their little ones from the danger of fierce lions and tigers, crazy trains, thunderstorms and cloud-bursts*".³¹

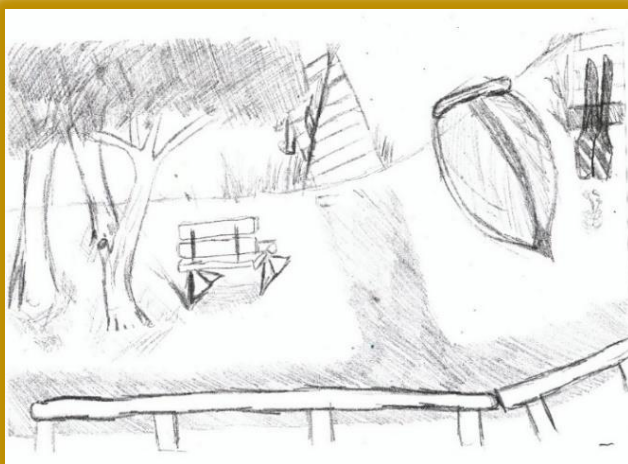
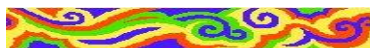


Figure 78

³¹ Isaac S. (1973), *The Psychology of the Child from Birth to Six and Parents and Children*, Rome, Newton, p. 86.

A bike ride

Once upon a time, a father and son were taking a bicycle ride. The father was very attentive to his son, telling him to follow him and not to do his own thing. Meanwhile, one day, while they were strolling along the lake, the child, rather than riding his bike, was curious about the place and therefore stumbled several times and was about to fall. His father called him several times, but he did not listen. The child tried to approach the lake, but his father told him not to go there because he could hurt himself, but the son did not listen. The moment he entered the lake he broke his bike and fell to the ground. He began to cry and his father noticed. So he picked him up and scolded him, though not severely. At that moment the father asked him if he had learnt his lesson and he said yes. From that day on, the son never did it again. They returned home with one less wheel and an injury.

Maximus frequently reported in his stories about his behaviour, which was often at odds with the advice, suggestions or indications of the adults with whom he dealt.

In this case it is the father who gives him advice not to get into trouble and, above all, not to get hurt (*The father was very careful towards his son, telling him to follow him and not to do his own thing*). Also in this story, it is difficult for Maximus to accept the advice and directions so something happens to get him into trouble (*The boy tried to go near the lake, but his father told him not to go there because he could get hurt, but the son*

did not listen to him. The moment he entered the lake he broke his bike and fell to the ground).

When intense inner restlessness is present, there arises, among other symptoms, an instinctive opposition to accepting indications, advice, or worse, orders coming from others, especially from adults and parents. In these cases, the parent-child dialogue does not mature and does not develop properly when parents tend not to examine the reasons for their child's oppositional behaviour but rather think of repressing it, thus accentuating the child's inner unease and, consequently, also his or her oppositional behaviour.

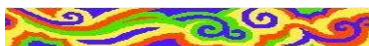


Figure 79

A faulty ATM

One day Mum went to the post office to make the ATM; she put the card in and at the end they did not give her the money, because it was faulty. When she went home she told dad that they hadn't given her the money and dad didn't say anything.

In this familiar account of Lorenzo, more important than the ATM difficulties is the last sentence: '*When she went home she told dad that they had not given her the money and dad said nothing*'. From this sentence it can be deduced that the child's fear was not so much the ATM inconvenience but the possible quarrel between dad and mum that could have arisen from that technical problem.

Conflicts between parents are always experienced very badly by children, both because of the harsh words and tones that are used in these unpleasant situations, which create fear in them, and because the conflicts could lead to a separation, which is felt by children in all its drama, as a disastrous event for the stability and security of their living environment.

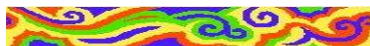


What to put in a flowerpot?

Once upon a time there was a vase on a table in a house with only one room. This vase was placed on the table by Mum. The family consisting of father, mother and son had bought the vase at the market, because they wanted to put flowers inside. One day it happened (that) they competed to choose the

flowers. The dad wanted to put succulents, the mum roses and the son carnations. So they tried to put all three types of flowers, so all three were happy.

Simone joyfully describes how a family should behave in which the bond of love, which unites the various members, manages to overcome and harmonise individual needs (*Dad wanted to put succulents, Mum wanted roses and son wanted carnations. So they tried to put all three types of flowers, so all three were happy*).



Pina, a nine-year-old girl, tells about her family and in particular about her father and cousin Sandra's birthday.

A heart for a father's birthday

Once upon a time there was a family that had two children, the husband and the wife. The first daughter was called Anna and the second daughter Giulia. One day the father's birthday came and the youngest daughter thought of giving him a heart, with a picture of her parents on their wedding day. The father was amazed and delighted. The eldest daughter made him a cake and the father liked it very much and they ate it. Afterwards, the mother called the younger daughter, as always, because she wanted the hot bag, because she felt cold, and the daughter said: 'OK'. The mother thanked her. Then there was the eldest daughter's boyfriend and then they ate baked

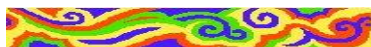
pasta, because their mother only made it at special times. Before this birthday there was cousin Sandra's birthday and the family gave him a jacket and she loved it.

The story has various connotations that go beyond the events. Meanwhile, the child dwells on her behaviour as a 'good daughter', both towards her father (*the youngest daughter thought of giving him a heart with a picture of her parents on their wedding day. The father was amazed and delighted*), as well as towards the mother (*Afterwards the mother called the younger daughter, as always, because she wanted the hot bag, because she felt cold and the daughter said: 'OK'*). It is as if Pina was trying to convince herself, rather than others, that she was a lovable and good daughter, despite the fact that for several years her school performance had been lacking and the psychological problems from which she was suffering caused her parents concern.

A second element to note is Pina's attempt at all costs to construct a happy and united family in the story, using a number of details: her mother bakes pasta; her older sister's boyfriend is also present at lunch; her family is also attentive to others, so much so that, for her cousin's birthday, she had undertaken to give her cousin a welcome present. It is like saying: 'I am a good daughter, but my family is also a good family: everything is fine'.

Children, but also adults, often use self-assurance, which serves to provide and maintain good self-esteem and a normal psychological balance. Festive occasions also have this valuable function: to make each family member feel affectionately united and in solidarity with the others.

However, attentive readers will have noticed a small detail: the girl gives her father a heart containing a wedding photo of him and her mother. A gift that she imagines was very much appreciated. The meaning of this gift, reminding her parents of the joy of their wedding day, could rather be a request for them to do everything possible to avoid the conflicts that were present between them at that time, but also an invitation and an incitement to be affectionately close and united, as they were on that particular, happy day.



My true joy

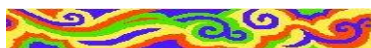
Once upon a time there was a little boy who longed to see the stars. His parents told him that when he was older they would take him to see the stars. And so, when the child got older, he went to the observatory to see the stars and was very excited, because, for the first time, he was doing something he had wanted to do for years. So, sitting in his chair, he put his eyes into the telescope and passed a shooting star close by. The child felt as if something had changed his life.

Then the child went home to his parents and said, 'I have discovered what my true joy is: to be with you'. For they had raised him, loved him, and given him a blanket and food, and so the child went to bed and thought of that star in the sky and had such a beautiful experience.

Beautiful and full of tenderness, this story by Gianluca. Reading it, we immediately wondered why the child discovered love for his parents after having had the opportunity to admire the stars through a telescope. The most immediate answer is that the acceptance of this intense desire of his made a sense of gratitude blossom in the child. Often it is the joy experienced in the relationship that binds people together and makes feelings of love and gratitude blossom and binds the various family members intensely together. It is important to be willing to accommodate the children's requests, when this is financially possible and when these requests are not only legitimate but useful for their growth, such as 'wanting to see the stars'.

This experience is in fact described by the child "*as if something had changed his life*".

These demands, which, as we have said, it is right and sacrosanct to accommodate, are, however, very different from those that not only do not have the capacity to ennoble the souls of minors but, on the contrary, confuse and disfigure them.



Emilia, an eight-year-old girl, also recounts a 'happy' day, despite the fact that her family and personal reality was not 'happy' at all. The little girl came from a family with a very precarious economic situation: her father was unemployed and her mother worked by the hour as a maid. The child was described as sensitive, but nervous, very anxious, apprehensive and, at times, a little sad, as was her mother. She also presented scholastic difficulties and psychological disorders that manifested themselves in emotional disturbances, lability of attention, separation anxiety, somniloquy and soliloquy, aggression towards

objects, behavioural disorders, fears, a tendency to shut down, reduced self-esteem, feelings of guilt and unworthiness.



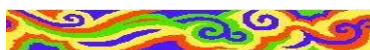
Figure 80

A happy day

Once upon a time there was a house with many flowers, and grass, and many children played outside the house with a ball. These children all played together until they were called by their mother because the pasta was ready. After eating they went to play hide and seek. Mummy bought the children a toy: a puppet, and the children were happy. Daddy came back to eat, played with them, told them a story and the children fell asleep. And when they woke up they went to school. When they got out of school they went to buy some things and came home, because mum had to cook. In the

afternoon they went out together and everyone was happy.

It is easy to understand how such a careful description of a happy day could serve to improve the child's inner world. A world that, in reality, was very sad and full of tension and anxiety. The characteristics of her real world are confirmed by the drawing, in which there is a very small sun at the top; a sun, therefore, incapable of offering warmth, protection and joy, among other things accompanied by two clouds bringing sadness and melancholy. Moreover, the house, which in the interpretation of the child's drawing represents his family, has only very small windows and an equally small door (Figure 80). These details suggest that the family's ability to communicate with the outside world must have been very poor. Furthermore, the red colour that covers the house almost entirely, indicates to us the presence, in that family, of much tension between its members. Finally, the flowers, arranged next to each other in front of the house, seem to have the function of making one imagine and dream of something that was not present in reality: moments of serenity and joy.



Following the separation of her parents, Serena, a nine-year-old girl, had manifested serious problems with her nutrition: for months she had refused to eat enough and then only took milk from the bottle, as if she were a baby. Her eating problems had continued afterwards, so that, until the age of seven, she only accepted foods that were white in colour: chicken, white peaches, dairy products.

When she came to our observation, in addition to food selectivity, the child presented considerable irritability even for

trivial reasons; a tendency to spite her mother; a phobia of insects. In addition, she manifested frequent crying fits, even at school, whenever she thought of her father. The latter, after the separation, had moved to another country, where he had created a new family. The child only had telephone contact with her father. Her relations with her classmates were difficult. She did not feel understood and accepted by them, due to crying fits, which they said were unjustified. Her mother also described her as a child who was always angry at life.

Serena - First story



Figure 81

A house with a round roof

Once upon a time there was a house with a round roof and it was so tall that they had to make it round. When they finished building it they asked: "But why did we make it round?"

And they answered, "Just like that!" In that house lived a family with three daughters: one daughter was twelve, the other nine and the last one four to five months old. The older one played with the little one, One day they decided to renovate the house and so they made a loft in the round attic, where the second daughter went to live. She liked this room, because she could stay there alone in the warmth and do her homework.

Then the sister had a birthday and they decided to have her (celebration) in this very room. They invited all the family members and had a good time. Even dad and mum went up to this attic every now and then to give her a snack. Few friends came up, however, because there were already so many. When the sister was two years old, another little brother was born.

The drawing (figure 81) and the story both reveal Serena's unfulfilled needs and desires. She was an only child, but imagines being part of a large family: with a mother and father present, a sister older than her, so as to share thoughts and experiences, and a younger brother, to experience the joy care and play. The little girl, in the story, identifies herself as the second daughter, aware that she does not have the necessary maturity to be a first-born.

There is an important and unusual element in the design and story: a dome-shaped roof. The child wants it to have this shape, although she is not aware of the significance of this (*When they finished building it, they asked: "But why did we*

make it round?". And they answered: "Like this!"). The interpretation suggested by this particular roof is not difficult: the rounded shape makes us think of the warm, welcoming, tender mother's breast from which she, due to her emotional immaturity, could not detach herself, as we have seen from her story. In fact, in the story, it is there, in a loft built under the round roof that the little girl imagines living and partying with family members but not with her companions. This was because, as she was still affectively immature, she was unable to socialise well and be accepted by her peers.

Serena - Second story

Christmas Eve

Once upon a time there was a family consisting of a mother, father and three children: a boy and two girls. It was Christmas Eve and they went to eat at their grandparents' and then opened their presents. They found many things they liked. Another day the three siblings were playing and their mother said they had to go to school the next day and they went to school and had fun.

The same child also dictated this other story, in which she describes the Christmas holiday, experienced in a warm and cosy family environment. *(It was Christmas Eve and they went to eat at the grandparents' and then opened presents. They found many things they liked).* Also in this story, the family she longed for was made up of a mother, a father and two brothers. A family, therefore, very different from the one in which she was actually forced to live after the separation of her parents, in which there was only one mother!



We had met Giuseppina, just five years old, due to a series of major psychological disorders that had, in part, already been overcome: closedness, shyness, various fears especially of loud noises, difficulties in socialisation and integration, encopresis.



Figure 82

A little house close to the sun

Once upon a time there was a little house and it was near the sun and there was a thunderstorm, the wind and the tree. The tree was frightened by the thunder and then it stopped raining and it was no longer frightened.

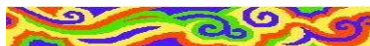
In the little house there was a family. There was a dad, a mum and two children, two girls who played with pencils and coloured drawings and then played with dolls; they were both mums.

Very profound this story by Josephine. If we try to interpret it, we can think of a family full of warmth, light, joy and love (*Once upon a time there was a little house and it was close to the sun*). Unfortunately, however, this family is, for a time, shattered by some crisis: we do not know whether it refers to a loss of the father's job, an illness, or conflicts between the parents (*and there was a storm, the wind and the tree*).

The child identified with the tree, which had many fears, especially of loud noises (*The tree was frightened of thunder*). However, once the negative events ceased and the difficulties were overcome, both she and her whole family returned to peaceful living (*In the little house there was a family. There was a dad, a mum and two children: two girls who played with pencils and coloured drawings and then played with dolls; they were both mums*).

In the drawing (figure 82), the child renders the idea of warmth and sunlight well, drawing it very large. Similarly, by placing a large black cloud above the little house, she makes the seriousness of what had happened in her family very clear.

It is worth highlighting the fiery red colour, with which the child has coloured the little house, to indicate the tension and perhaps even the conflicts and aggression that had disrupted family harmony for some time.



Gianluca, the son of parents who had separated when he was just two years old, presented psychological problems that manifested themselves in various symptoms: irritability; excessive attachment to family figures; fears; psychosomatic disorders; poor ability to maintain attention for long periods of time;

momentary escapes from reality; insufficient self-esteem; feelings of guilt and difficulties at school; especially with regard to understanding and exposing readings.

The egg and the little fish

Once upon a time there was a little fish that came out of the water one night and went into the stars with a gigantic egg and then walked over the trees and threw this egg over the trees. The next day he came back and saw that the egg was no longer there and so he went down to the tree and looked around to see if there were any pieces of the egg and he immediately realised that the bottom piece of the egg was shattered and so he went towards the sea to see if the egg, that is, his little one, had gone into the water. So the little one had been born, because that tree was near the sea. Then he joined him and together they went away into the sea.

The seriousness of Gianluca's psychological problems shines through in this story, in which there are many strange and unusual images: a little fish comes out of the water; it goes into the stars with a gigantic egg; it walks above the trees; in order to give birth to its young it throws the egg above the trees, and so on. The only clear note is the love that this little fish has for its born baby (*Then it joined him and together they went away into the sea*).



Ten-year-old Eva lived in a family with considerable economic and social hardship. The father was in prison and the mother, unable to care for her numerous children, had been forced to place them in various institutions. Eva was also living in a nuns' institution. The young girl had psychological disorders that manifested themselves in depressive symptoms: such as melancholy, sadness and a tendency to shut down. Eva often expressed the need to feel welcome, cuddled and protected to the staff who cared for her.



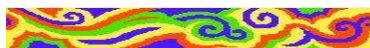
Figure 83

The tree and the squirrels

Once upon a time there was a tree in a forest; it was tall and stood with other trees. The other trees were smaller. One day some squirrels came to visit the trees; they were having

fun. One day they got hurt: another tree fell on the squirrels. They cried and then recovered.

If we interpret this story and the accompanying drawing (Figure 83), we immediately notice certain elements that characterise it: first of all, the tree that Eve draws is not only excessively tall but strangely enough its trunk is coloured black. This tree immediately makes one think of a very important figure for the child: probably her father, whom she knew to be imprisoned in a very sad and painful place, the prison. The other smaller trees, of which the little girl speaks, could be her family members (mother, grandparents, uncles). When she describes the joy of squirrels playing and having fun in the trees, she is probably referring to her and her other numerous siblings, who were happy to live in their family, before something important happened (*One day they got hurt: another tree fell on the squirrels*). It is reasonable to assume that the child is referring to her father's imprisonment and the pain and upheaval this event had caused.



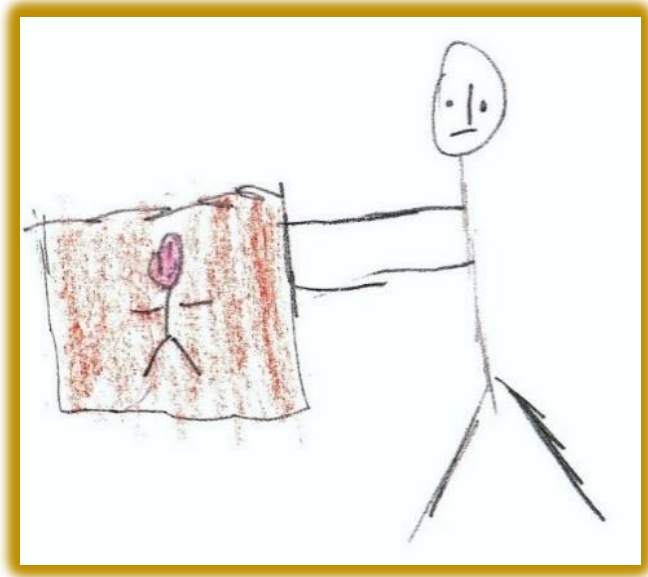


Figure 84

A son sent by parcel post

Once upon a time there was a lady who received a parcel in the mail. "If she does not accept the parcel, she unwraps it and sends it back". The lady opened the parcel and found a pink puppet, who said: 'Good morning, Mum-my'. The lady got scared and fell backwards. In the parcel was an instruction sheet and it said: 'Water. And then a baby grew up. After he put all these things in he turned into a baby and after he came out of the jar he had blue eyes and was a beautiful baby.

The birth of a human being, despite the extensive, albeit confusing, information circulating on the Internet and television screens, is always perceived with special eyes by children. They interpret it in various ways and project onto this very important event their own desires, fears and familiar realities.

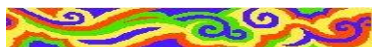
In the days of Amazon, in Roberto's imagination, babies are not brought by the stork, they are not found under the cabbage, they are not bought in the supermarket but sent by parcel post!

Roberto's image of the birth of a child is very special, but it also has profound meanings. The child has understood a fundamental truth: 'A child when it is born is like an object; it only becomes a person if it receives the care of a particularly sweet and affectionate human being, such as a mother can be. There are no other possibilities'. Roberto adds another equally important detail: 'In order for a child, and therefore a human being, to be formed, physical care is not enough, a profound acceptance on the part of the mother is necessary' (*If she does not accept the parcel, she discards it and sends it back*)

He probably refers to the fact that after his birth he had initially been in the care of his mother, but later the woman, due to work, had neglected him, entrusting him to his grandmother for most of the week, only to take him back to the family on Saturdays and Sundays.

This negative judgement of the mother can be found in the drawing (figure 84): the future mother is drawn with just a few essential strokes and what is more, with a perplexed, almost frightened face. Roberto in the drawing does not assign her any feminine or maternal characteristics. As if to say: 'My mother was not a real mother to me'.

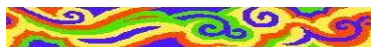
Every time we read stories like these, we are amazed at the ability of children to observe and evaluate the reality around them with perceptive and attentive eyes, and in some cases, justifiably severe, towards those parents or adults who do not behave towards them as they should.



A child in the grave

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Tindara. One day she died, because her parents no longer wanted her. When they put her in the grave she was alive, but because she could not free herself, she died.

In this tale, the little girl expresses in the most grim way her real suffering (*one day she died because her parents no longer wanted her*), but also her most terrible nightmares (*when they put her in the grave she was alive, but because she could not free herself, she died*). At this point it is fair to ask: "What did the little girl want to free herself from?" We can reasonably assume that the little girl is referring to the need to drive away from herself the sadness and suffering that oppresses children rejected by their parents or suffering from emotional deficiencies.



Francesca and self-mutilation

Once upon a time there was a lady called Nicoletta. She liked to go into the garden where there were many flowers. She would pick them and put them in vases. One day she went to a market and bought some shiny shoes with beads, a T-shirt and trousers and then returned home to prepare food. One day her son went to a butcher's shop, got the knife, went into the bathroom and cut his ass. His mother told him to go and buy another kilo of meat and he cut off another piece of his ass and then cut off his arm as well.

In this sombre tale, there is a woman who lives her life, at least apparently, in a cheerful, serene and tranquil manner: she picks the flowers from her garden; she puts them in pots and then goes about her voluptuous spending (*This (lady) liked to go into the garden where there were many flowers. She would pick them and put them in vases. One day she went to a market and bought shiny shoes with beads, a T-shirt and trousers*).

However, this lady does not seem to be at all aware of what is happening in her family, particularly to one of her sons, who is so angry and psychologically disturbed that he self-mutilates (*One day her son went to a butcher's, got the knife, went into the bathroom and cut off his little ass. His mother told him to go and buy another kilo of meat and he cut off the other piece of his ass and then cut off his arm as well*)

Also in this story, the judgement towards parents who do not behave properly is very clear, sharp and severe!

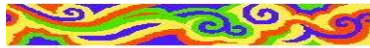


Catherine was the daughter of a single mother who had great difficulty in caring for and looking after this daughter of hers, born when she was only seventeen. This was due to her work that kept her busy for too many hours a day and also during the night.

An 'ugly mother'

Once upon a time there was a carnival party. A very naughty little girl told her mummy that she was 'ugly mummy'. Afterwards, one day, Mummy cried. She said, "Why are you treating me like this?" "Because you slapped me," said the little girl.

In this account, Catherine acknowledges that she is 'a very bad little girl', yet she does not accept the slap from her mother and the accusation she makes against her is perhaps the worst accusation a mother can hear thrown at her: 'Being a bad mother'.



Emilia was an eight-year-old girl who suffered from psychological disorders that manifested themselves in emotional disturbances, lability of attention, separation anxiety, somniloquy and soliloquy, aggression towards objects, behavioural disorders, fears, a tendency to shut down, reduced self-esteem, feelings of guilt and unworthiness.



Figure 85

The tree broken by lightning

Once upon a time there was a tree; it was in the middle of the hills and all the children chased each other around the tree. One day there was a storm and the tree was suddenly broken by lightning and the children could not play. People were frightened when the tree fell. Afterwards the tree returned as before and the children and other people played as they wished and from that day on, people returned happy and contented.

There are realities in life that offer certainty, security and protection, for example, parents who manage to give their children the protection and stability that is essential to their emotional and affective development. This allows children a normal emotional and affective development and, consequently,

allows them to live a serene life (*Once upon a time there was a tree; it was in the middle of the hills and all the children chased each other around the tree*). When these parents, for whatever reason, fail to do this (*One day there was a storm and the tree was suddenly broken by lightning*), the children lose not only security and stability, but also the pleasure and joy of living

Fortunately, if parents return to offer and provide the necessary security, protection and affection, serenity, pleasure and joy also return.

Note that the tree drawn by Emilia has a thin trunk and is therefore fragile (Figure 85). The child round elements with many flowers drawn around the tree, as if trying to protect it, as if to say: 'If people who are important to us are fragile, we must try to protect them as much as possible with displays of affection'.

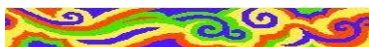


Figure 86

A little girl named Martina

Once upon a time there was a little girl who went to a house in the woods to get some flowers. When the owner of the house saw that the little girl had taken her flowers, he became very angry and threw her out.

The little girl had her umbrella with her, and as soon as it started to rain, the little girl named Martina opened the umbrella. The owner was no longer angry and invited her to his house. The little girl accepted the invitation, but could not get through the flowers. The owner told the little girl to pick all the flowers so that she could pass. However, there was also a tree obstructing the passage. The man then took a knife and gave it to the little girl to cut down the tree. Having cut down the tree, the little girl decided at first to enter the house, but then, as the rain had stopped, she went back to her house singing a little song. When she returned home, her mother asked her where she had been all that time, to which she replied that she was at someone's house. Then the little girl Martina packed her bag and went to school.

From this story we can glean some interesting elements that can help us better understand the experiences of children living with parents who, for various reasons, have little dialogue with their children. In this case, the main reason that prevented the mother from communicating well with her daughter stemmed from the presence, in the woman, of a depressive syndrome from which she had been suffering for some time.

Martina feels sadness around her, represented by the rain. To escape this sadness and to seek some help, warmth and joy, she tries to take something beautiful from life (*she went to a house in the woods to get some flowers*).

Unfortunately, it is as if the adverse fate does not allow her any chance to feel some joy, so much so that, in addition to the rain, she has to suffer the reproaches of the owner (*When the owner of the house saw that the little girl had taken her flowers, he became very angry and threw her out*).

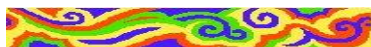
In children who have suffered a lot, there is often the perception that the world in which they live is not only difficult but also unwelcoming, if not downright hostile and mean, so much so that even when others are kind (*The landlord was no longer angry and invited her into his home*), difficulties do not cease to haunt the poor unfortunate (*However, there was also a tree obstructing the passage. The gentleman then took a knife and gave it to the girl to cut down the tree*).

In order to understand why the little girl, after so much effort and commitment, is unable to enter the house to which she was later invited, one has to reflect on the fact that children suffering from major psychological problems, even when they are ready and eager to get close to others, so as to converse and socialise, are often blocked by fear and anxiety. These negative emotions can get the better of them and make many of their desires and needs go unfulfilled (*having cut down the tree, the little girl decided, at first, to enter the house, but then, as the rain had stopped, she went back to her house, singing a little song*).

Martina has no choice but to return home, where a particularly distressed mother awaits her. A mother who, because of

her depression problems, is unable to give her daughter the listening and, above all, the help and support she needs to grow up healthy

The child understands that she can communicate her own experiences, difficulties, desires and needs to this disturbed mother, as this could accentuate the woman's anxieties and other psychological problems. On the other hand, this suffering mother would not be able to offer the necessary help. For this reason, the child preferred to tell her only the essential and superficial elements of her own existence (*and she replied that she was at someone's house. After that, the child Serena packed her bag and went to school*).



Eight-year-old Nicoletta had been given two diagnoses over time: the first one emphasised language disorders: the child had, in fact, lower than normal language development; the second diagnosis highlighted inhibition and performance anxiety, attention difficulties, as a consequence of a specific learning disorder in reading and writing.

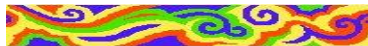
In reality, the basic problem from which the child's psychological suffering had arisen, manifested through the symptoms noted by the specialists, was her difficult relationship with her mother. In fact, the woman tended to easily accuse Nicoletta of any wrongdoing. Therefore, she used to scold her frequently and briskly.

A great desire!



Figure 87

The daughter entrusts her reality and her desires to this drawing (figure 87), in which she places roses full of thorns in the foreground, as if to say: 'My mother is very beautiful but, towards me, she has a prickly and painful behaviour'. Behind the roses with thorns he draws his greatest wish: to be able to relate to a welcoming, sweet and affectionate mother. He represents this wish by drawing mountains in the shape of a soft, warm, welcoming breast.



Michele, an eight-year-old boy suffering from Asperger's syndrome, imagines a life without anyone: without companions, without adults and without his parents. He draws a dolphin and comments on the drawing with this story

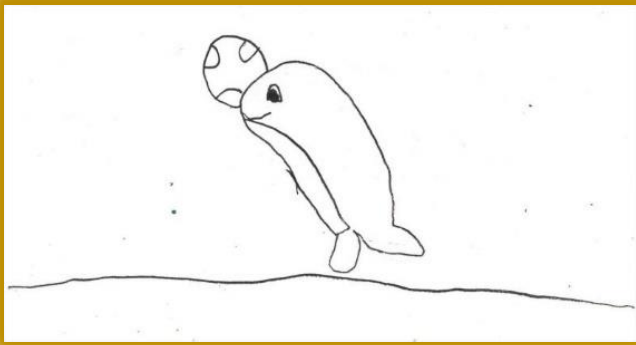


Figure 88

A blue dolphin plays with a ball

A blue dolphin who always plays with the ball. He has fun playing with hoops. He has no instructor, he is in the middle of the sea. He is alone, because he has no one to play with him, but he is happy anyway. The others do not want to play with him, because they think he is very playful. The others are serious. He always plays! If something is stolen from him, he is sad. When he doesn't play he is unhappy. He always wants to be at home. He has no one. Daddy and Mommy are dead. A shark ate them. After they died, he had even more fun, because he was happier.

If we try to interpret this story, we notice a number of very interesting elements that can help us understand what some children with autistic disorders feel in their souls. First of all, there is a great desire for complete freedom: the dolphin, with whom Michele identifies, has no instructor and can therefore

do whatever he wants. Unfortunately, he also has no companions, because they cannot play as he would like. This full freedom he also got from the fact that his parents had died. This misfortune, however, does not cause him any problems; on the contrary, it gives him the opportunity to have even more fun and be happier, because he is completely free

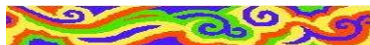


Figure 89

An ugly little house

Once upon a time there was a very ugly little house, because a naughty child had destroyed it all. One night, before some gentlemen moved in, a meteorite fell: this house became beautiful. But they said it wasn't a meteorite, because it had stayed well. Then it had even grown bigger. Then there were four children: two girls and two boys, or rather three boys and three girls because dad and mum were there too. And

the eldest brother wanted to go to the door where it said: 'Do not enter'. They saw a luminous circle, they fought inside the circle and they came to a place like Albatross: there were lions, people fighting; they got scared.

Then they find a dog who says: "Go away, you are from the world of humans, it is dangerous here". The younger sister wants to adopt him, they take the dog and enter another circle, which takes them inside their home. Mum and dad did not know anything. Later, in this house, there was another circle of bad people and the dog who could talk said not to go, but they went anyway and met some Ninja who wanted to roast them and took them to their dimension. The bad people wanted to roast the pig and the children, but the dog told them that there was a magic key in the tree. They entered the door of fire and became Ninja Princes and found the treasure.

In this long story, probably inspired by some video game, the little girl describes a house, which at first was very ugly, but was transformed by a meteorite into a beautiful house (*One night before some gentlemen were moving in, a meteorite fell: this house became beautiful*).

In the rest of the story, there is a succession of imaginary, aggressive and violent characters. It is as if a kaleidoscope of mostly quarrelsome, negative and tragic emotions and feelings alternates in Debora's soul.

If this tale, as it seems, alludes to her family reality, it suggests some interpretations: the first is related to her bad relationship with her brother. The girl, in fact, reports that the little house was ugly '*because a naughty boy had destroyed it all for her*'. That this house is ugly can also be seen through her drawing (Figure 89): there are no windows, there is only a small, hidden opening that allows one to go outside but, as there is no road, the house appears isolated from the social context. Ultimately, the house Debora draws appears uncomfortable, closed and isolated.

If, as the authors of the house test suggest, this may represent her family, Debora's image of her living environment is certainly not a positive one.

There is a note of optimism, however, in Deborah's words when the little girl refers to something falling from the sky that makes her '*beautiful*'. We can therefore think that the little girl holds within herself the hope that her family can become a good family through the work of something magical or miraculous.

It should also be noted that the sentences with which the child describes the events are broken, sometimes incoherent and poorly coordinated. This suggests that in Debora's soul there must be very intense emotions that make it difficult for her to coordinate her thoughts in a logical and linear way. For this reason, the scholastic difficulties the child had were almost certainly to be attributed to her difficulties in managing and living with a convulsive and troubled inner world.

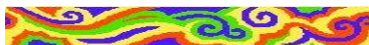




Figure 90

In search of a joyful and serene world

Once upon a time there was a little boy who lived alone in a house in the country. One day he decided to decorate it by putting pots with flowers. He mowed the lawn and saw birds flying in the sky.

One day the local residents went to the child's house, dined there and finally complimented him on the house he had.

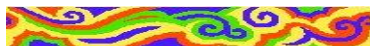
He lived alone, because everyone made fun of him. He went to bed and dreamt of a family: he regretted living alone. He dreamt of a very rich family, consisting of father, mother, brother and sister. He heard a knock and it was a family that wanted to take him in. They were

good, they bought a bit of everything, they were always cheerful.

Ivan, in his search for a serene, peaceful environment, excludes his family of origin, perhaps thinking them incapable of giving him what he needs (*he lived alone in a house in the country*). Initially, the solution he finds is to live alone in a bucolic environment and in a house to be made beautiful and full of flowers. A house, therefore, capable of giving him serenity, peace, welcome and tenderness. He soon realises, however, that an idyllic environment, but one lacking in family warmth, is incomplete; so he inserts a new family, an ideal family, which welcomes him into its bosom, giving him everything his heart had been waiting for: not only the desired toys (*they bought a bit of everything*), but also and above all a benevolent and joyful attitude and behaviour (*they were good; they were always cheerful*): attitudes very different from those of his real family, in which he suffered because of the anxieties present in his father and mother.

The child lists being teased by everyone as the reason for his search for loneliness. In reality, his parents did not have this kind of attitude towards him, but it was his psychological problems that made him vulnerable to his schoolmates.

Notice in the drawing (figure 90), many elements that serve to embellish the house: the columns with flowerpots on top, the roof coloured like a rainbow, the windows in the shape of a butterfly. We note, however, that the sun, which could represent the father, has a sanguine, dirty, almost black colour; therefore, it fails to give that light and warmth that the child expects.



The following story, like so many others, could not be understood without knowing the story of this child and his family.

Gianluca, nine years old, was the son of a woman who had experienced several sentimental situations in her life, always very difficult and complicated. She had been married for the first time to a man by whom she had had a daughter. When she separated from this man, she had cohabited for two years with Gianluca's father, from whom she had separated when the child was only two years old. Immediately afterwards, she had started a relationship with a married man. The relationship had lasted several years. When the woman decided to leave her lover, he started to persecute her, threatening her in various ways. The man's behaviour prompted the woman to decide to move with her son to another region of Italy, thus removing the danger posed by her ex-lover from her. With this decision, however, the son felt forced to stay away from his father, his grandparents, his companions and the home and hometown where he had lived until then.

The child, very resentful of these vicissitudes, in his search for a minimum of inner well-being, felt the need to defend himself and punish those who had done and were doing him harm. As we can see from his story, this need for defence and punishment in his fantasy had taken on dramatic aspects.



Figure 91

The Knight, the Dragon and the Witch

Once upon a time there was a knight who rode his horse very far. One day he came to a point and there he saw a dragon. Slowly approaching the beast, the dragon woke up and rode away. But the knight with his horse chased him and killed him. He killed it because his commander, his king, told him to kill the dragon, because it was a threat to the country.

When he killed the dragon, he took it to the country and placed it before the king. However, the knight did not know that the king was a witch, who put a curse on the knight and turned him into a frog. The frog went to the house of a princess. This girl was the daughter of a king from another country. When he arrived at the

princess' house, she said to him: "But who are you?" The frog answered, "I am the knight, but the witch put a curse on me. The princess understood the problem and so she kissed him, and the knight returned to normal.

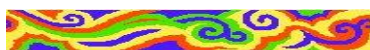
The knight and the princess ran with the guards to the witch and imprisoned her in the dungeon. From that day on, the witch was in the dungeon, so the knight and the king's daughter lived happily ever after.

If we interpret this child's tale in the light of his family and personal history, we understand that he feels an overwhelming need to eliminate, once and for all, the evil being who threatens his and his family's safety: his mother's ex-lover (*There was once a knight who rode his horse far away. One day he came to a point and there he saw a dragon. Slowly approaching the beast, the dragon woke up and rode away. But the knight with his horse chased it and killed it*).

He obeys the dictates of his commander and king who, in this case, is the mother persecuted by a 'bad' man (*He killed him because his commander, his king, told him to kill the dragon because it was a threat to the country*).

However, he is well aware that his problems are not only outside his family, but live next door to him: the biggest problem was his mother who, with her incongruous behaviour, had put him and was systematically putting him in serious trouble. (*When he killed the dragon, he took it to the country and put it before the king. However, the knight did not know that the king was a witch, who put a curse on the knight and turned him into a frog*).

At this point, the solution can only come from outside his family. The solution can only come from a girl, a good princess, the daughter of a real king and not of a witch (*The frog went to the house of a princess. This girl was the daughter of another king from another country. When he arrived at the princess's house, she said to him: "But who are you?" But the frog replied: "I am the knight, but the witch put a curse on me. The princess understood the problem and so she kissed him, and the knight returned to normal*). It is by allying himself with this girl that he can get his mother, the cause of most of his problems, locked up in the dungeon, so that she can no longer harm him (*The knight and the princess ran together with the guards to the witch and imprisoned her in the dungeon. From that day on, the witch was in the dungeon, so the knight and the king's daughter lived happily ever after*).



When a separation occurs, among other problems is sometimes having to leave one's home. We know that the home has considerably more significance for a child than for an adult. This is because the first and fundamental emotional bonds established between him and his environment include not only living beings, but also the objects and spaces in which he took his first steps and where he began to develop his personality.

For many children, being forced into a change of home is a trauma, since it means losing important emotional reference points. This trauma can add to the suffering of feeling that parents, despite the separation, continue to conflict with each other.

But how long are we staying at Grandma's?

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Chiara, nine years old, like me. She had a brother called Manuel, who was eight years old. Her parents were quarrelling, bickering, and so they were separated. Then her mother decided to go to her grandmother's because they were quarrelling. They went to her room to sort things out, and then Chiara said: "But how long are we staying at Grandma's?" And the mother said, "I don't know." After two years, they came home and celebrated with the dog and his friends. And so they lived happily ever after.

Chiara manifests in her account her difficulties in being forced to move away from her home: (And then Chiara said: "*But how long are we staying at grandma's?*") the child also expresses joy, however, when she was able to return home *after two years* (*After two years, they came home and celebrated, together with the dog and his friends. And so they lived happily ever after*).



Figure 92

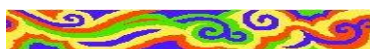
A Christmas without quarrels

*I would like to spend Christmas with Mum,
Dad and me. Happy, without them fighting. I
would like to go out with both of them joking.
Then I'd like to go out with dad and buy pre-
sents. Go out with him to do his things, then go
out with mum to do the shopping.*

A very intense desire to see the parents not only together but in harmony is often linked to the holidays: especially the holiday par excellence, linked to peace, love and serenity: Christmas. There is a great desire and need in the child: *'Then I would like to go out with daddy to buy presents. To go out with him to do his things, then to go out with mum to do the shopping'*. A sentence that basically means: 'I would like so much

for everything to go back to the way it was before. I would like so much to live in a situation of normality, which is the only condition capable of offering me the security and inner joy I seek'.

The drawing (figure 92) is full of elements that make us understand the suffering of this child: the sun, which should represent the father or, in any case, a person who warms, assists and protects, is as if dirty and does not shine at all, and so is the comet. The house or grotto, where Jesus should have been born, appears unbalanced and coloured with quick, nervous strokes. These elements of the drawing confirm the sadness, tension and anxiety present in the child's soul.



We met Marco, an eleven-year-old boy, as he suffered from nightmares, fears, phobias, partial and momentary estrangement from reality, and excessive dependence on the mother figure.

The environment in which he lived was strongly influenced by the characteristics of his parents and their conflicts, caused by jealousy. The father was described by his wife as nervous, touchy, aggressive, while the mother was depicted by her husband as insecure, nervous, very emotional, anxious, apprehensive but, above all, as pathologically jealous. The husband and wife had been in perpetual conflict since the beginning of the marriage, precisely because of the jealous outbursts by the woman.

Marco - First story

No more fighting!

Once upon a time there was a family in which they had not yet decided to have a child. When they did, they decided not to fight any more. But one day they quarrelled and decided to send their son to friends. Later they realised that their son was sick if they quarrelled and decided to talk to him. And after they realised this, they decided not to fight any more and lived happily ever after.

Mark describes a family, which was clearly his family, in which parents who used to quarrel, at the moment they decided to have a child, proposed stop the constant arguing (*Once upon a time there was a family in which they had not yet decided to have a child. When they did, they decided to stop arguing*).

Unfortunately, these parents do not keep the promise they had made to themselves (*but one day they quarrelled and decided to send their son to friends*). The boy inserts a happy ending into the story, which is the fruit of his hope and desire, imagining that the quarrelsome parents, aware of the consequences that those quarrels had on their son's psyche, will finally be able to live in peace and harmony (*they realised that their son was sick if they quarrelled*) (*they decided not to quarrel any more and lived happily ever after*)

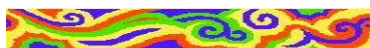
Marco - Second story

The forest destroyed and then rebuilt

Once upon a time there was a very beautiful forest: there were many trees and a lake. One day, no one knows why, the forest caught fire. The people took refuge in a hut.

Thanks to the intervention of the fire brigade, some trees were saved, others were cut down and new trees were planted in their place and, within a year, the forest became beautiful again.

This story was written one year and six months after the start of therapy, following which the relationship between Marco's parents had clearly improved. The child represents his parents' conflict as a fire that burns and destroys everything it encounters (*the forest caught fire*). The boy does not know the reason for this conflict. However, he notices both the destruction and, later, the reconstruction that had taken place (*thanks to the intervention of the fire brigade, some trees were saved and others were cut down and new trees were planted in their place and within a year the forest became beautiful again*).



The comment on the drawing made by Cettina, a seven-year-old girl whose parents often quarrelled, is very explanatory both of her needs, which were not being met, and of the need to escape from the distressing reality in which she was forced to live.



Figure 93

A little boat in the house of the sun

*Once upon a time there was a sun that spoke to the flowers.
He told them beautiful things:*

"What are you doing?"

*"We were playing with the sea and we saw a little boat
thrown out of the sea, then we picked it up and took it home to
repair it. When it was well, we all played together: the sun, the
flowers, the sea and the little boat'.*

*One day the little boat ran away to the sun's house and then
the sun told all his friends: 'The little boat ran away to the sun's
house because he didn't feel well at home'. His friends then also
went to the house of the sun, locked the door, had a party and
they all slept at the house of the sun.*

The interpretation we have given to this story reveals a touching inner reality, together with very deep feelings and thoughts, especially when expounded by a seven-year-old girl.

In the immense sea of life there are some people who sail at ease while there is someone, Cettina, who for various reasons, in this case the conflict between her parents and her mother's personality traits, is so damaged and suffers so much that she feels as if estranged from life and the world (*we have seen a little boat thrown overboard*).

Fortunately, good people (*the flowers*), care for this person hurt by life. The flowers, in fact, tell the sun: '*We saw a little boat thrown out of the sea, then we picked it up and took it home to repair it*'. But the little girl, despite being better off, after what she had suffered in her family, rather than return to confront the serious difficulties in which she had found herself, prefers to flee and take refuge in a warm, bright but unreal world (*One day the little boat ran away to the sun's house and then the sun told all her friends. The little boat ran away to the house of the sun because it was not comfortable at home*).

Of course, in this beautiful, warm but unreal world, the little girl does not want to be alone and takes with her, not her parents, but only those closest to her (*even her friends then went to the house of the sun*), excluding all the rest of the world (*... they locked the door*)!

This tale is certainly much more tragic than it appears at first sight. It is clear from the story that Cettina, although she has improved as a result of psychotherapy, still does not have the confidence necessary to relate to a family, which has been so traumatic for her. For this reason, she prefers to voluntarily

close herself off in her imaginary world and leave everything else out.

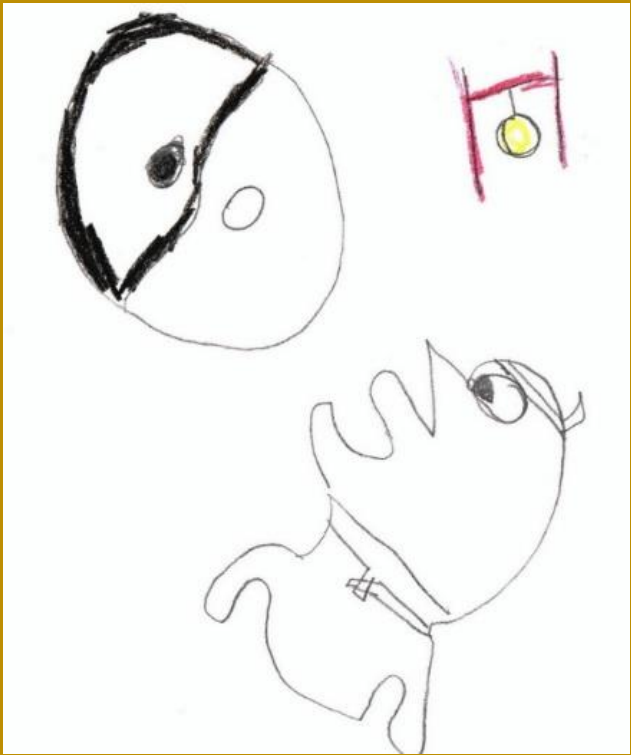
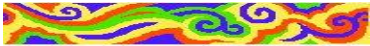


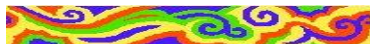
Figure 94

Some of my problems

Some of my problems are: my mum after getting married to her husband, her husband treated me very badly. Then my mum met someone else and they got engaged. This one treats me very well, not like my mum's husband, because the husband insulted my dad and a war happened; then he told my mum he wanted to destroy my communion: no dinner, no presents, nothing.

Giliberto describes what can happen, and unfortunately often does, in families divided and then somehow reconstructed, with the inclusion of new emotional and relational figures. Children's relationships with their new husbands, wives, or partners are often not the best (*the husband insulted my dad and a war broke out, then he told my mum he wanted to destroy my communion: no dinner, no presents, nothing*).

In the drawing that accompanies the story (figure 94), there is a character who looks as if lost at the Yin and Yang symbol, as if wondering whether it is possible to find the harmony represented by this symbol again in his life.



Maria, a five-year-old girl, lived in a family in which a father described as a quiet, intelligent, outgoing, cheerful, sociable, ambitious and somewhat conceited man, who had little relationship with his daughter due to his work commitments, was contrasted by an affectionate, altruistic but very anxious mother, extremely sensitive, sometimes depressed, who had already suffered panic attacks with fainting spells and heart palpitations, sudden and unmotivated fears, for which she underwent psychological and pharmacological therapies.

Moreover, these parents had been living in a state of perpetual conflict for eight years, also due to the difficult relationship with their families of origin.

The parents had requested a visit from their daughter because the child, who had already had a bad time in kindergarten, had been categorically refusing to go to primary school for a few weeks. Not only that, but she manifested excessive susceptibility, with sudden and unmotivated crying fits, she urinated frequently throughout the day and had numerous phobias, especially of insects, along with many other fears: that her parents might die, that they might abandon her, that she herself might die even from minor injuries or illnesses.

Sometimes the child would scold and scold her mother, complaining that she lived in a 'dirty family'. When she saw her parents bickering, she would lock herself in another room and tell them, shouting, to stop attacking each other.

She also wanted to sleep in her parents' bed and had considerable difficulty leaving her home. She complained of being alone, put the dummy in her mouth, both when she cried and when she went to bed. In addition, she experienced throbbing in her arms and various parts of her body and pain in her feet, legs and knees. Finally, she was described by her mother as 'mischievous' about sexual matters.



Figure 95

One is amazed at how a child of just five years old, living at that time in a very tense environment due to the constant and intense quarrels between her parents, was able to describe her story and her personal problems so well with intensely poetic and captivating prose.

Maria - First story

A flower, a diamond, a heart and a lot of stink

Once upon a time there was a family. They had a beautiful house and they had a daughter. The daughter, one fine day, looked at a blue flower and said: 'I want to take it'. She took it and after a few days the little girl grew big. And the flower became big too and inside the flower was a diamond and inside the diamond was the little heart of the little girl that was growing.

The little girl was happy because she had a diamond in the house.

Her mother did not notice and threw the flower away, with the diamond and the heart inside. The daughter looked for the diamond, but could not find it, so she became smaller and smaller, and became a baby, and her mother said, "How can it be that she became a baby?"

This baby girl was talking and asked her mother for the diamond and the mother said it was in the rubbish. She (the baby) picked it up and it was all dirty. Afterwards they cleaned it, but it smelled like fish. And the child came back big, but it still stank.

Maria finds herself living in a wealthy family (*they had a beautiful house*). Everything seems to be going well: the child is of normal intelligence, in fact very lively, has good self-esteem, and wants to grow up quickly (*The daughter looked at a blue flower one fine day and said: 'I want to take it'. She took it and after a few days the child grew big. And the flower also became big and inside the flower was a diamond and inside the diamond was the little heart of the little girl that was growing*).

There is unfortunately a big 'but': the mother, without realising the harm she was doing, puts the child in a very uncomfortable situation. The child probably refers to the considerable conflicts with her husband. (*Her mother did not realise this and threw away the flower with the diamond and heart inside*). The consequence of this behaviour was, unfortunately, the regression of the little girl in certain areas of development (*The*

daughter looked for the diamond but could not find it, so she became smaller and smaller, and became an infant)

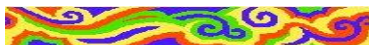
The mother, realising that something serious and important had happened to her daughter, tried to understand why (*and the mother said: "How can it be that she became a baby?"*).

Maria, at this point, makes her considerable discomfort explicitly clear to the woman and demands the serene and peaceful environment that was indispensable to her emotional and affective growth (*This new-born child spoke and asked her mother for the diamond and the mother said it was in the rubbish*). The mother, finally aware that she had made mistakes, tries to deal with and solve the little girl's problems, either by accepting a course of action to help her resolve her conflicts as a couple, or by taking her daughter to a neuropsychiatric centre so that she can be given the help she needs to solve her problems. Fortunately, some of the parents' and the daughter's most serious difficulties improve and the child's psycho-affective development resumes (*She picked it up and it was all dirty. They cleaned it afterwards, but it stank of fish. And the child grew back*).

However, Maria is aware that despite the efforts of her parents and carers, not all her problems have been solved. Something of the traumas she suffered, while witnessing her parents' constant fighting, had remained in her heart, like a scar (*And the child grew up again, but, despite this, remained smelly*).

In the drawing accompanying the story (Figure 95), we can see that she, her mother and a friend of hers are present, but the father is missing. In the sky, the sun does not give off any light and warmth on this scene she depicts, so that the colours

of the house and the three characters are sad and cold, except for the green meadow and the flower that emerges from it.



Maria - Second story

Mary's second story also clearly highlights her most pressing and serious problem: the conflict between her parents.



Figure 96

Litigious princes

Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess who had a fiancé with whom she went for walks in a flowery meadow. One day they decided to marry and had a son, whose name was David. But they quarrelled and wanted to break up.

Davide's mother had already given birth and was very worried because she did not know what to say to her son when he grew up. The parents broke up.

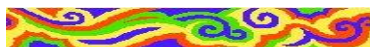
When David grew up he asked: "Don't I have a daddy?" And his mother said, "I'll explain it to you when you get older!" And then later she told him: "We broke up because of (our) families". The child had run away from the family and was looking for his daddy and the mother went to look for him. Later (the mother) found dad and son walking and said: "But what are you doing here?" And she scolded daddy. The mother was desperate. Afterwards they all made up and lived happily ever after."

She once again highlights how in her family there were all the prerequisites for a marriage and a happy life: beauty, wealth, love, an idyllic environment, the birth of a child (*Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess who had a fiancé with whom she went for a walk in a flowery meadow. One day they decided to get married and had a son, whose name was David*).

Unfortunately, these assumptions are not enough (*But they quarrelled and wanted to break up*). At this point, the child's greatest fear is evident: the fear that the separation of her parents would result in her estrangement and the loss of her relationship with her dad (*Later she found dad and son walking around and said: "But what are you doing here?" And scolded the dad*).

In this second story, carried out at a time when the child's fears about the end of her parents' marriage had subsided, the drawing takes on warmer, brighter colours and the princess is as if walking on a rainbow (figure 96).

As can be deduced from these two accounts, the symptoms presented by the child tell us little or nothing about the causes of her problems, nor do they give us any insight into her suffering. These problems, and the suffering that follows from them, become apparent when Maria is given the opportunity to freely express her dreams, desires, emotions and thoughts through the exposition of some freely constructed narrative. Ultimately, it is from the words of their stories that we can truly understand the inner world of children and certainly not from their symptoms.



My family

Dad is normal, quiet, a bit impulsive: when we have to watch the game he doesn't warn Mum but only me. He doesn't phone to make arrangements. Sometimes he gets angry because Mum isn't on time. I often stay with Mum's grandparents: they're nice. Mum is a bit of a liar, she tells a lot of lies and Dad gets angry.

I remember little of when mum and dad were together.

With my sister Francesca I quarrel; she teases me and I beat him up. She sings: "Salvatore is dumb!" Mum then scolds both of us.

I fight with mum about homework, about school, because we help her little. But I set the table and my sister does nothing.

With the comrades it goes very well; we organise games, they don't tease me.

My father's common-law wife is a bit of a nuisance to me: she always argues with Dad, gets angry with me and defends my sister. I almost always go to her. Francesca almost never. Dad gets angry because Francesca almost never goes.

This cross-section of a separated family is very accurate. Salvatore starts by highlighting the fact that the parents continued to quarrel even when separated (*Dad is normal, quiet, a bit impulsive. Sometimes he gets angry because Mum is not punctual. Mum is a bit of a liar: she tells a lot of lies and Dad gets angry*).

He then makes negative judgements about both parents (*He does not phone to agree*) (*Mum is a bit of a liar; she tells a lot of lies and dad gets angry*).

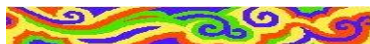
The child and his sister only find an oasis of serenity at his grandparents' and in games with his mates (*I often stay at mum's grandparents', they are nice*). (*With the classmates it's great; we organise games, they don't make fun of me*).

Salvatore then highlights how the suffering he experienced had turned into aggression between siblings (*With my sister I fight; she teases me and I beat him. He sings: 'Salvatore is dumb!'*)

The child then notes the difficult relationship with the custodial parent (*I fight with mum for homework, for school, because we help her little*).

He does not neglect to note his father's difficult relationship with his new partner (*he always quarrels with Dad*).

Finally, the lack of love and attachment towards this cohabitant on the part of both children is evident (*My father's cohabitant is a bit obnoxious to me. She gets angry with me and defends my sister. I almost always go to her. Francesca almost never. Dad gets angry because Francesca almost never goes*).



An unpaid photo

Once upon a time there was a family: the mother was called Giovanna, the father Luigi, the daughter Teresa and the brother Marco. They had gone out to go to the mountains but got burnt because the sun was too strong. So they went to get ice cream.

They met a photographer and offered to take a photo of the whole family. They asked the photographer how much they had to pay for the photo. The photographer asked for a lot, so they took the picture anyway but did not pay for it. The photographer then broke the camera. The family went home and the little boy felt sick and got chicken pox. Everyone started crying. But magically the chickenpox passed and they all lived happily ever after.

This narrative, in which the child enters the real names of all the family members, certainly reveals the environment in which the child lived: an environment with little respect for the rights of others (*The photographer asked for a lot and so they took the picture but did not pay for it. The photographer then broke the camera*). What interests us most is the final part of the story, in which the little girl perceives, in her little brother's illness, almost a divine punishment for her father's behaviour (*The family came home and the little one felt sick and got chicken pox. Everyone started crying*). However, Teresa tried to hide the guilt and thus the imagined, just divine punishment for her father's behaviour (*but by magic the chicken pox passed and they all lived happily ever after*).

Often in the children of individuals with antisocial behaviour, we find the inner conflict between the need to condemn and the need to justify their parents (*The photographer asked a lot*). Also present in these children is the fear that the socially and criminally unlawful behaviour they engage in must result in just punishment for them and the whole family, which cannot be avoided. The depressive symptoms that these children often present are frequently due to feelings of guilt and inner conflicts that are difficult to manage and overcome.

2.3.1 Sibling relations

In these stories we can read about the problems that can occur in a child when the exclusive love he enjoys from his parents and family has to be shared with a new baby brother or sister. This situation is not, as is often thought, a physiological condition. It arises in cases where, for various reasons, the child, who is an only child, already complains of psychological problems that do not allow him to use and enjoy the precious

opportunities that the arrival of a little brother or sister offers him.

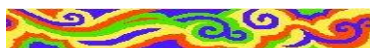
Normally, the possibilities and opportunities a child has when he or she is fortunate enough to spend his or her childhood and adolescence with siblings are numerous.

Having a brother or sister beside you means:

- ❖ Experiencing and learning, in a protected relationship with other minors with whom there is an emotional and blood bond, the possibility of dealing, collaborating, fighting, negotiating.
- ❖ To be able to use competitive stimuli in winning and then maintaining the affection of parents, through the most appropriate behaviour of affection, dialogue and cooperation.
- ❖ Use the joy and pleasure of play, as well as all the motor, intellectual, social and relational experiences present in playful activity, not with strangers but with a brother or sister. With other children, therefore, who share the same values, the same experiences and participate in the same family atmosphere.
- ❖ Having the opportunity to compare experiences, ideas, reflections and thoughts with other minors, different in age and gender but living the same family values, imitating and introjecting, through older siblings, fundamental role models
- ❖ To be able to use and enjoy a reality and a warm and reassuring presence when parents, for various reasons, may be absent or when one of them may pass away. For example, in the event of bereavement or when

family crises occur that may lead to the fracture and estrangement of parents.

- ❖ Parenting can be approached using the valuable educational experiences that can come from a relationship of caring for one or more young children. For Winnicott (1973, p.146): "...any child who has not gone through this experience and who has never seen his mother breast-feeding, washing and caring for a small child is less rich than the child who has witnessed these events".
- ❖ Having the opportunity to practise establishing links with others, so as to prepare oneself for broader social relations.
- ❖ To experience different roles, so as to prepare oneself to live in larger groups. (Winnicott, 1973, p. 148).



In this story, Antonio, a thirteen-year-old boy with psycho-affective disorders that manifested themselves in school lateness, fear of the dark, onychophagia, insecurity, low self-esteem and difficulty in maintaining attention for a prolonged period of time, portrays himself and his life in a nice house, together with his brother, who was a mechanic.

Ambivalent thoughts and emotions

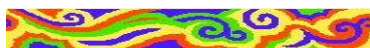
Once upon a time, I don't know, there was a boy called Giovanni: good, kind, studious; he went to work as a mechanic. He liked it because he helped, he fixed. He went every day. He

didn't like school. He had a nice house. He had only one brother and he was older: he was twenty. He was good, kind, like his brother. They got along well. They would invite his friends over, drink, eat. One day his brother left and he was alone, but he was fine because he invited his friends, he did many things.

His life had improved because he was freer, he could do what he wanted. Then his brother came back; they were very happy and went to the cinema, then came home and went to sleep.

We can see that ambivalent feelings are present in this child's words: on the one hand, the various activities he could carry out together with his older brother are recounted (*They invited his friends, they drank, they ate*), on the other hand, the latter's departure, perhaps for work, had not saddened him, because he felt freer and could do what he wanted (*His life had improved because he was freer, he could do what he wanted*). However, with the return of his brother, the joy of being and doing activities together reappeared.

One small detail underlines the pleasure and joy of siblings living together, and that is the fact that, in addition to going to the cinema, they both went to sleep after returning home. As if to say: 'It is nice to do things together, but perhaps it is even nicer to feel close during the night hours, which are when there is more dialogue and communion'.



Emilia, an eight-year-old girl, presented psychological disorders that manifested themselves in emotional disturbances, lability of attention, separation anxiety, somniloquy and soliloquy, aggression towards objects, behavioural disorders, fears, tendency to shut down, reduced self-esteem, feelings of guilt and unworthiness.



Figure 97

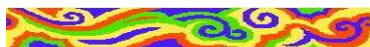
Sibling quarrels

Once upon a time there were two children called Francesco and Maria, and they played football. The better one was Francesco and while they were playing he fell and hurt his head and blood came out. Afterwards they took

him to hospital and he recovered and went home.

Maria was fine and she told her mother that Francesco had fallen down and the mother beat Maria because she had kicked Francesco and (Maria) started crying. Afterwards, Mama forgave her. And when Francisco returned home, Mama punished him, because he was dirty.

Notice in this child's account the behaviour of her mother who first punishes Maria and then Francesco, despite the fact that the latter broke his leg and went to hospital. We actually think that this description is influenced by the child's aggressive feelings towards her brother. Maria was punished for kicking her brother, causing him to fall and injure his head. However, the child, in an attempt to equate her responsibility with that of her brother, does not fail to emphasise that her brother was also punished (*And when Francis came home, Mummy punished him because he was dirty*).



Debora was a seven-year-old girl who presented significant psychological problems that manifested themselves in fears, relational difficulties with the mother figure, peers and her brother, as well as behavioural disorders, anxiety and school

phobia. The child also presented difficulties in learning to read and write.



Figure 98

Sibling quarrels

Once upon a time there were two dogs: a male and a female. The female goes off on the boat. Then her brother arrives and beats him up. Then the female runs off with her boyfriend. The brother comes back and beats up the sister. He throws her off the cliff and the surviving boyfriend runs away. Then they all die and then comes the earthquake.

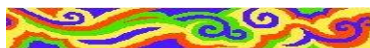
This story indicates very clearly the serious difficulties the girl had in relating to her brother, but not only to him. Debora uses the story of two animals: a male and a female. The female

is bullied by the male, who gives her a beating when she goes on the boat, and continues to give her a beating even when she runs away with her boyfriend. In addition, the brother pushes her into the ravine, killing her.

This account also highlights the serious psychological difficulties present in the child. These are evident in the final sentence: *'Then they all die and then the earthquake comes'*. In this sentence there is all the despair of Debora, who does not see any positive element in life.

The child was forced to endure, in addition to the anguish of her elder brother, who was particularly ill-tempered, the indifference and conflict with her mother, who behaved towards her daughter with detachment and in an excessively normative manner. Finally, she was forced to face humiliation due to her own school difficulties.

Note how the drawing (figure 98), divided into four frames, served the girl as a means of telling her story, as a victim of an aggressive brother, while in the story the characters she uses to talk about her problems with her brother are animals.



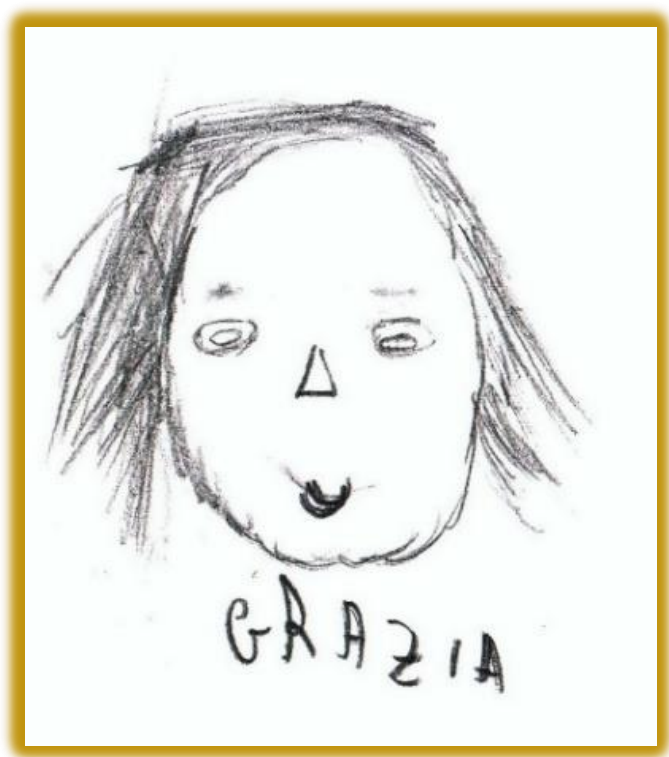


Figure 99

A spy sister

Once upon a time there was Grazia, who was being naughty because she was spying on me. Then Grazia was hit by a car and went to hospital. Her head was a bit gouged, she was almost dying and the doctors shot her directly in the head so she wouldn't suffer. Every night Grazia would leave the cemetery to go get a cappuccino.

Roberto also recounts a less than idyllic relationship between siblings. In this case it is the brother who portrays his sister as a *'brat, because she spies on me'* and therefore believes that she is worthy of all misfortune (*she was hit by a car and went to hospital. His head was a bit gouged, he was almost dying and the doctors shot him directly in the head so that he would not suffer*)

As for the final note: *'Every night Grace would leave the cemetery to fetch a cappuccino'*, the interpretation that these words suggest to us is that the child, having vented his aggression towards his sister with the terrible words and phrases above, imagines something positive and charitable towards the latter at the end of the story.

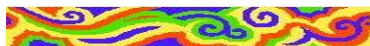


Figure 100

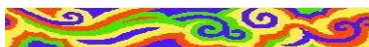
A 'naughty' brother

Once upon a time Francesco, who was eight years old, was very naughty, because he threw the ball into the toilet, disturbed his four-year old brother with beatings, broke toys and wouldn't let him in the bathroom. His mother reported him and he left home. He went to prison for seven years. He got out and did good forever.

Again a difficult relationship between brothers. In this case Rosario complains about his 'bratty' brother Francesco.

The punishment he imagines for this brother is that he be locked up in prison for seven years!

2.3.2 Adoption



The violence Daniela suffered before her adoption is reflected in this story

A heart tired of being beaten



Figure 101

Once upon a time there was a heart who was tired of being beaten by his parents. They beat him for causing trouble. The heart went off and got married and had children: one was called Emanuela and the other was called Marco. After that he had such a nice family, because they got along well and never beat their children, (I don't like it when they beat their children!) And they all lived happily ever after.

Notice how the child emphasises not the pain of the body being beaten by her biological parents, but the pain of the heart (*there was once a heart that was tired of being beaten by its parents*). As if to emphasise that the thing that made her suffer the most, during her early childhood experiences, was the psychological pain rather than the physical pain of being beaten by the people who were supposed to love and protect her.

Daniela, at least in part, justified this violence (*they beat him for causing trouble*).

The child tries to escape the memory of this violent environment by imagining herself getting married and having children and, thus, having a family of her own in which children are not beaten. This family she imagined mirrored, in reality, the adoptive family, where the child now lived (*Afterwards she had such a nice family, because they got along well and never beat their children*)

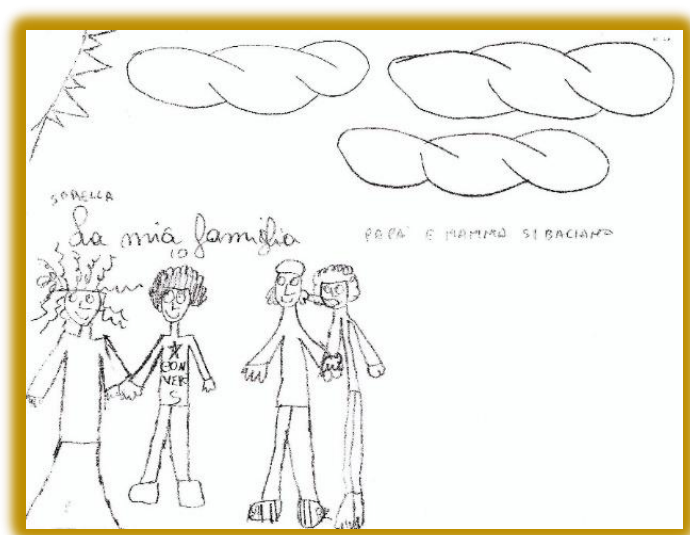
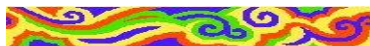
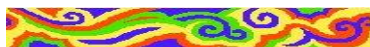


Figure 102

This drawing (figure 102), produced by another child who was adopted together with her sister, depicts her father and adoptive mother kissing, while she and her sister hold hands. We do not know whether the drawing of the adoptive parents

kissing is a criticism of them, but there is no doubt that she still sees this new family as divided in two: on one side the adoptive father and mother, on the other side her and her sister. There is still not the unity that one would expect in a normal family in which the characters are usually placed side by side, if not actually joined to each other by clasping hands.



This drawing and the story that follows, made by an adopted girl, offer us a positive relationship between the adopted girl and her adoptive parents.

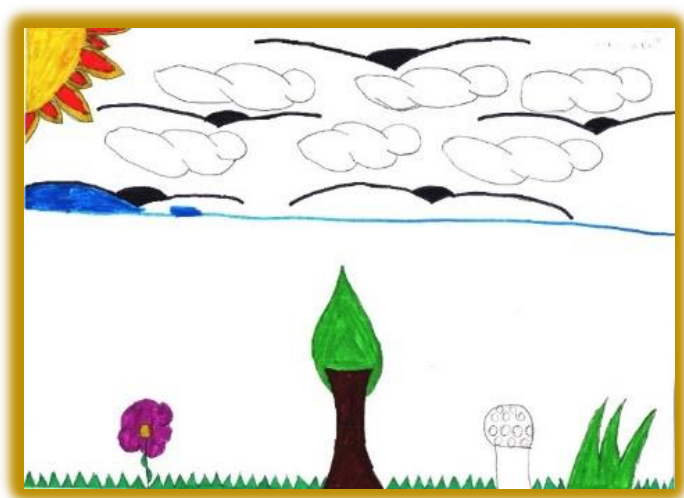


Figure 103

Patrizia - First story

A good gentleman who knows how to forgive

*One day there was a beautiful day, when
there was a beautiful sun shining, with clouds*

all together in the sky. Then there was a tree that bore lots of fruit; grass that grew fast; and there was grass that grew all at once. There were many swallows that were very big, flowers grew and were of many colours.

There was a gentleman who gave a lot of water and all the grasses and trees grew.

Many oranges grew in the tree. Then there was the dog who started stepping on all the grass, he had done his business and ruined all the things. But the man did not reproach him because he was good but the dog was not his. The dog belonged to a little girl who had beaten him up. The master asked her "why?" and she said that she had beaten him because he had ruined the garden. The gentleman scolded the little girl, telling her that the dog could do whatever it wanted. From that day on, the child kept the dog in the house with her.

The drawing made by Patrizia (Figure 103), is as if divided in two by a blue line. In the upper part, the oversized black birds, the excessively sanguine sun and the many clouds suggest the presence of elements of tension and sadness present in her past as a child abandoned in an institution. The lower part, on the other hand, with the tree rising majestically towards the sky, the large flower, the grass and the disproportionate mushroom, hint at her present, which appears substantially better than the past.

It is also clear from the narrative that Patrizia had found, in her adoptive family, perhaps above all in her father, someone

capable of giving her the affection that is indispensable for growing well (*There was a gentleman who gave a lot of water and all the grasses and trees grew*). This gentleman is described as good and capable of understanding aggressive and destructive behaviour (*Then there was the dog who stepped on all the grass, did his business and ruined all the things. But the gentleman did not scold him because he was good*). An adoptive father who was also able to understand the aggressiveness present in the child and her easy irritability (*A little girl had beaten the dog*).

And it is precisely because of this understanding gained that the little girl, in this new family, being more serene and self-confident, is able to modify her reactions, to the extent that she is able to contain her aggression and bring out loving feelings (*from that day on, the little girl kept the dog at home with her*).

Many times we adults tend to suppress children's aggression by responding with more aggression. Nothing could be more wrong. Aggression almost always stems from suffering suffered for a variety of reasons: poor listening, lack of presence, a family environment steeped in conflict, and so on. In these cases, the best therapy, to gradually reduce and then eliminate aggressive behaviour altogether, is to offer the child more listening, a more intimate and warm relationship, and pleasant activities and games to do together.

Patrizia - Second story



Figure 104

A puppy lost and then found

Once upon a time there was a crocodile who had a cub; he had lost him. He thought the other crocodiles had eaten it, but then, searching, searching, he found it and they all lived happily ever after.

In this story by Patrizia, the protagonist is a mother crocodile. A reptile that people are usually afraid of, because it tends to attack other animals and humans. But the little girl notices how, even in this large reptile, so ugly and ferocious, there can be a tender love for her missing son: so much so that she looks for him in fear of his fate, and then, after finding him, they live together '*happily ever after*'.

We wondered about the meaning of this story: does it express the love her adoptive parents had for her? Or does it

express a wish, a hope, that her biological mother might be able to feel the love and care for her that she describes in this crocodile?

Only Patrizia's story can help us understand what the child's thoughts and emotions were at that moment.

From this story, we learn that the child, who had just been born, had been abandoned by her mother, only to be placed in an institution. It was only when she was four and a half years old that she was adopted.

From this we understand that the hypothesis closest to reality must be the second one. Patrizia, like many children in her same condition, preferred to imagine her mother's behaviour not as a guilty abandonment of her daughter, but as a loss and, therefore, as an absolutely involuntary event. Thus, while writing this story, her greatest wish was that her biological mother would still be searching for her missing daughter, and then, having found her, they would live happily together.

One last element remains to be clarified: why had he chosen as the protagonist of his story precisely a crocodile, an aggressive and certainly not beautiful animal, when he could just as well have been talking about one of the many animals close to us and loved by children: a dog, a cat, a horse or a teddy bear? Animals to which we usually attribute positive characteristics

We think that the closest answer to the child's inner reality lies in the characteristics of the reptile: having an unpleasant appearance and being a fierce, aggressive animal. It is as if the child were saying to herself: 'I know that my natural mother was not a beautiful and good woman, but she was a mother and there is no mother who, having lost a daughter, for fear that something bad might happen to her, does not go in search of

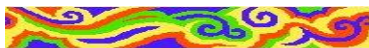
her, and then, having found her, embrace her and live with her forever.

In the drawing there is a warm sun, standing above the clouds, drawn with many points. This sun confirms to us that the child's intimate wish is that her biological mother, even if 'evil' (the points drawn in the sun), will finally come to her to give her that joy and warmth that will serve to banish the sadness that pervades her heart at that moment.

2.3.3 Transfers

Changes of dwelling are experienced differently depending on many factors: the child's fears in the changes; his or her experiences in the previous dwelling; hopes for something more and better in the changes. For these reasons, some children fear moving away from a known and loved home to another home, perhaps more beautiful and larger, but unknown and far from the people and physical surroundings with which they had established a strong emotional bond.

Other children, on the other hand, see the change of home as the hope of being able to live in an environment more favourable and congenial to them.



An example of the difficulty of coping with change is offered by this story by Damiano

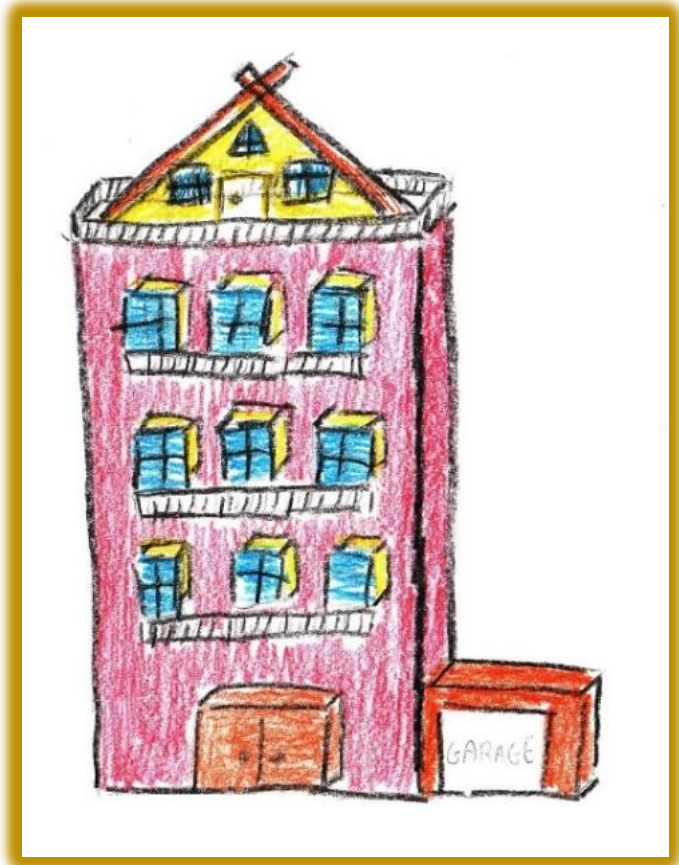


Figure 105

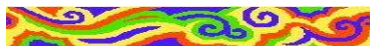
Fear of transfer

Once upon a time there was a family consisting of a mother, a father and a little boy named Marco, who spent a lot of time in his room. His parents told him that they had to move house and this little boy was very sad because

he wanted to stay there. His parents told him that he would continue to see his friends. The day came when they had to go and when they arrived at the new house, there were many toys. It (the house) was big. Marco got used to it after a while, and when he was big he bought the old house.

Note in this story the last sentences. Damien recognises that there are positive realities in the new house (*The day came when they had to go and arrived in the new house, there were lots of toys. (the house) was big*), however the strong bond that existed with the old house they had left, makes him say: '*Marco got used to it after a while, and when he was big he bought the old house*'.

In the drawing (figure 105), there is a garage, a place in the house favoured by boys, since in this room they can invent, build or fix objects or tools. In the drawn house, there is also an attic, a warm and protected place to take refuge in times of tension and sadness



A house in the country.

Once upon a time there was a little boy who had an idea: "Let's go and live in the country." In the city, the house was ugly, he didn't sleep at night. The parents said, "Let's wait until tomorrow." The moving company put everything in boxes and they moved in. The child could run around as he wished and rest in the cool of the trees.

He was happy. His people were happy too. "You had a great idea," they told him. They bought new lamps and clothes, suitable for the countryside. The child changed schools and lived happily in this new home. The child had no siblings but he had friends. His parents were happy about the move and made new friends. They too were more relaxed.

Ivan, like so many children who have suffered for various reasons, searches around him for the causes of his own suffering and finds them in the hectic, sometimes inhuman life of the cities (*In the city the house was ugly, he did not sleep at night*). In contrast, the house in the country, in which he imagines living, has all the requirements to be comfortable (*The child could run around as he wished and rest in the cool of the trees*). This imagined change is happy for both him and his parents, who are able to acquire a good serenity (*He was happy. His parents were also happy. "You had a great idea," they told him. They too were more relaxed*).

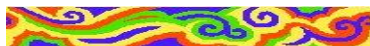




Figure 106

Antonio - First story

Difficult housing changes

Once upon a time there was a guy who wanted to sell his house with the whole garden. He put the ad in the paper, then sold it to a family, because he lived far away and couldn't come. And he went to a better house, which had a pool, trees. In this house there was a mother, father and son and they got along well. One day they killed someone near the house, and they ran away and went to another house, where there was a fireplace and the house was nicer than the previous one and they all got along well.

In Antonio's story there is certainly the hope that the change of home might bring an improvement, compared to the

previous situation (*And he went to a better house, which had a swimming pool, trees. In this house there was mum, dad and son and they got along well*), however, there is also a clear fear in the child's mind that the change might also bring negative situations (*One day they killed someone near the house*).

Antonio, however, at the end of the story, opens his soul to hope, imagining that these negative situations can be dealt with by making further changes, until they find the serenity and peace so longed for (*and they went to another house, where there was a fireplace and the house was nicer than the previous one and they all got along well*).

Antonio - Second story

A bratty son

Once upon a time there was a family consisting of dad, mum and son. Dad and mum were good, the son was naughty, because he liked it and because he was nervous. They lived in a house in beautiful countryside, but it was rented and there were trees, mountains. One day the person who had rented them the house died, so they changed houses, but they did not like it because it was dirty and ugly, so they asked their relatives if they had any houses to rent. Then they rented them the house. They were fine, they bought it.

Antonio recognises that he is bratty and in this he gives himself a share of responsibility (*because he liked it*), he understands very well that as cause of his disturbing behaviour there are also his psychological problems (*because he was nervous*). As can be seen, while children sometimes introject the negative

judgements of parents and adults, they also understand that their problematic behaviour also depends on their psychological condition. Unfortunately, not all parents accept this reality, so much so that many prefer to deny the psychological causes of their children's behavioural disorders, in order to avoid any responsibility on their part and shirk the need to get involved, accepting to modify their educational style or the child's living environment when it is not suitable for the child's normal affective and emotional growth

Also in this story, it is not easy for this family to find a place where they are all comfortable except after various vicissitudes (*One day the person who had rented them the house died, so they moved house, but they were not comfortable because it was dirty and ugly*).

2.4 NEGATIVE CHARACTERS

A werewolf

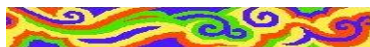
Once upon a time there was a werewolf who went into people's homes and scared them every day. It was the fifth of June and the werewolf came to someone's house. He slowly, slowly climbs the stairs and then steals the person and takes them away. In the morning, people spoke that a monstrous creature had entered someone's house and disturbed them. They spoke to the police and said that they would track down this monstrous creature and they should not worry. They went looking for it at five o'clock in the morning: they see two yellow eyes and a sweatshirt made of black and then later they look and see that it has disappeared.

They say to themselves: "Where is he?". They go down the stairs, look everywhere, but they do not find him. That means he has run off to steal the others. The police hunt for the werewolf and continue their search. They arrive at an address (number) 69, they knock, the person says he heard a strange voice: "You have a very strange voice!" He replies: "Because I have taken my medicine. They come in and it's a woman with such sharp teeth: "Your dress is dirty, you are not a woman!" They undress him and see that he is a werewolf.

The werewolf enters someone's house and steals five people. The police are coming, the werewolf runs away and hides in a hiding place in someone's house and locks the door, seals the windows. The police bang the door but the werewolf knows he is in danger and must flee. It is late, he hides under the bed, the police break down the door, they look all around and see sharp teeth, they realise it is him, he escapes.

Donato, a ten-year-old boy with Asperger's syndrome, constructs this story of the werewolf that frightens and kidnaps people. This tale perhaps reveals some of his fears but, as his inner world has improved, this emotion has such a modest charge of anguish that he is able to deal with it through words. This way of dealing with fears closely resembles what children often do when they are among themselves and tell tales of monsters and werewolves, for the sake of feeling a slight thrill of fear and nothing else.

The narrative, by the way, is well structured, there are few repetitions and alterations. Both elements make us that the child, at the time he dictated his thoughts, was in a certainly not serious psychic situation.



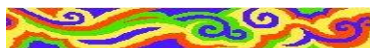
The dog and the thieves

Once upon a time a dog went for a walk and was very happy, but he realised he was not alone and two people got out of a car and wanted to kidnap him, thinking he was a stray dog. The poor dog took a very strong bite out of one of the two thieves. Then he started barking and they (other dogs) came to his rescue, biting the two thieves on the arms and feet. In the end, the master saw the two thieves on the ground and took them to the police, and so the dog and his people lived happily ever after with their master.

Giulio, often the victim of derision by his classmates, identifies himself as a dog who is in danger of being attacked and kidnapped by thieves as he happily walks down his street (*Once upon a time there was a dog taking a walk and he was very happy but he realised that he was not alone and two people got out of a car and wanted to kidnap him*)

His words also express the hidden aspiration to be able to react to abuse, attacking in turn those who, without any reason, want to harm him (*the poor dog gave one of the two thieves a very strong bite*)

In the story, he also expresses the wish that someone, perhaps his parents or teachers, would intervene on his behalf when, as was often the case, his classmates had attitudes of derision towards him (*In the end, the master saw the two thieves on the ground and took them to the police and so the dog and his people lived happily ever after with their master*).



This story, very strange and in some parts contradictory and confusing, was imagined by Mattia, a seven-year-old boy. The child's parents, despite being separated, continued to argue with each other and accused each other of a thousand anguish. Mattia presented psychological disorders that manifested themselves in various symptoms: restlessness, nervousness, oppositional behaviour, sleep disturbances, fears and childish language.

The thief's hands

Once upon a time, a right hand met a left hand, and they clapped hands, because they made friends, then they touched something: objects that were in the sea, because the right hand and the left hand were in a little boat. In the sea were twigs, a stick and a can. After they touched them they felt the objects and from then on they took other objects and touched them.

D. How did the objects end up in the sea?

R. The objects had ended up in the sea, because someone had thrown them, then they found stones and touched them. The stones

had been thrown by the children, the objects had been thrown by the thieves. The thieves had thrown the objects because they had a lot of things they had stolen: some things they kept, others they threw away.

Afterwards the thieves continued to throw other objects into the sea, the hands picked them up and put them in the boat so they could touch them. The hands especially liked to touch the objects, everything that was thrown.

D. Whose hands were these?

R. The hands were nobody's. They were a person's, a thief's, and the hands left the objects in the river, but from that day they left the thief, because they did not want to become thieves. The thief, from the day the hands came off, became good, and the hands also became good.

D. Did the thief have a family?

R. The thief had no one: he was born alone. When he was a thief he was happy, because with his hands he could steal and throw things, but then when his hands came off he was no longer happy.

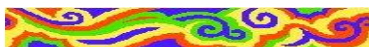
It is as if the emotions due to this child's inner suffering, which are no longer contained and controlled, force his or her mind to focus only on one part of the body: the hands. This tendency is not frequent and is usually linked to the presence of considerable anxiety, which prevents the child suffering from

dwelling on the unity of the human being and not on a particular organ.

This phenomenon resembles what happens in individuals with autistic disorders. These too, due to the presence in their minds of a confused inner world, full of considerable anxiety and numerous phobias, have difficulty seeing the wholeness of objects and people. Williams recounts: *'At the table I was looking at a plate full of colours, a knife and fork clutched in my hands. I looked across the plate full of colours and everything dissolved. A pair of hands disturbed my vision: a silver knife, a silver fork were cutting through my colours. There was a piece of something at the end of the silver fork. It sat there, motionless. My gaze followed that little piece of colour through the fork to a hand. Startled, I let my eyes follow the hand to an arm, joined to a face. Finally, my gaze fell on the eyes, which returned it to me with infinite despair. It was my father.'*³²

There is also another element that this child's pathology has in common with that present in individuals with autism spectrum disorder: the hands, in order to find themselves and a bit of serenity and inner balance, like to touch certain *particular objects* (*The hands liked to touch objects in particular, anything that was thrown*).

The severity of the pathology is finally confirmed by the structure of the narrative, which is hardly linear and coherent.



³² Williams D. (2013), *Nobody in Anywhere*, Rome, Armando Editore, p. 56.

A bank robbery

Once upon a time there were two boys, Franklin and Michel, and they were twenty years old. One day they decided to rob a bank and made a lot of money. An alarm went off and the police arrived. They took a car and drove away. The police chased them but they could not catch them. These two boys went home and had a drink.

John seems to glorify two young negative characters (*Franklin and Michel and they were twenty years old. One day they decided to rob a bank and made a lot of money*). These robbers manage to elude the police and, after returning home, celebrate with a drink.

That children identify with negative characters is not strange, it has always happened in the past. However, in this historical period, this tendency has become more pronounced due to the many cartoons and especially the frequent use of video games, in which negative characters, such as thieves or murderers, are rewarded with a higher score if they manage to achieve certain goals: such as robbing, stealing and killing, while managing to escape from law enforcement

2.5 THE RELATIONSHIP WITH ANIMALS

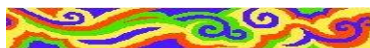
Animals have accompanied man since the dawn of his existence on earth. The relationship with them has always been very close, so much so that they have never just been an essential source of food but have helped man in his work as well as in defence. Animals were and are, especially today, a warm, pleasant companion for adults and an opportunity for children

to play, as they bring pleasant emotions and tender, gentle feelings.

How can one not be softened by stroking or just looking at a tender kitten or a cheerful little dog? How can one not be fascinated by the colourful fish, slowly swimming in the mysterious and fascinating world that is the sea or a simple aquarium?

Because of their intrinsic characteristics or those attributed to them by humans, animals have also become symbols: of courage or aggression; of cunning or haughtiness; of tenderness or cheerfulness; of vivacity or companionship; of fear or strength.

For these reasons, there are many animals in the stories written or told by children.



Rosario, a six-year-old boy, was described by his parents as a 'terrible child', because he was restless, aggressive, spiteful, fearful. In addition, he was very selective in his eating. The child cried whenever he was forcibly dropped off at school. His aggressiveness, it seemed, stemmed from his inability to be understood by his father and mother, as well as by his family and peers, who had considerable difficulty communicating with him in a manner appropriate to his needs.

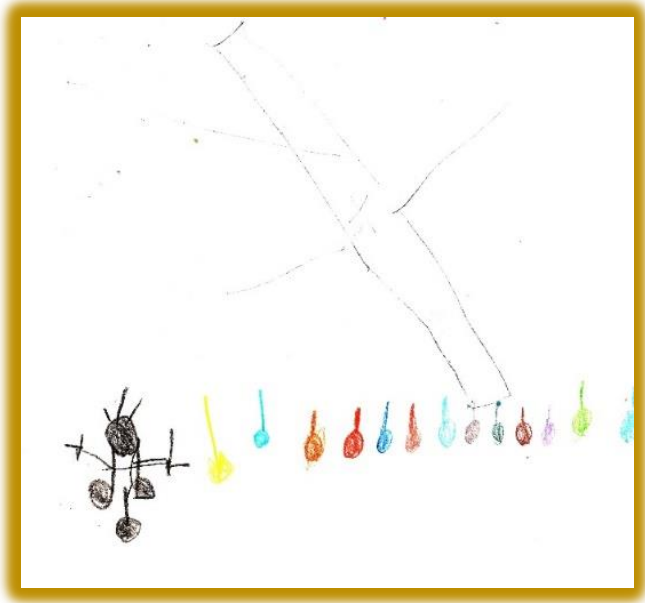


Figure 107

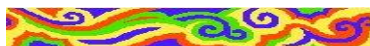
A ferocious crocodile

Once upon a time there was a crocodile who had no name. He went into the sea, met other fish: sharks, dolphins, and some he ate, except sharks and dolphins. The fish ran away, however, because they did not want to be eaten. The crocodile went looking for more fish. He found a fish and ate it, and he was happy. Afterwards he went home. At his home was another crocodile friend of his and together they ate, played and then watched television and then lay down.

In this story, Rosario's inner experiences stimulate him to identify with a ferocious reptile: a crocodile, which spends much of its time going around attacking, killing and eating fish (*It went into the sea, met other fish: sharks, dolphins, and some it ate, except sharks and dolphins*). This crocodile only has one of his fellow crocodiles as a friend (*There was another crocodile friend at his house and together they ate, played and then watched television and then lay down*).

It is as if the child wants to tell us: 'Only with one who has the same psychological and behavioural characteristics as me could I get along'. Note that the child is unable to give this crocodile a name, as if by naming it he is exposing himself too much, making the reader and listener realise that he has identified with this ferocious animal.

In the drawing (Figure 107), executed before the story, he depicts a huge, ill-defined figure that is supposed to represent the crocodile, while the fish are drawn in various colours. Next to the fish, which the crocodile eats, he has drawn a little man, to whom he has not given a clear physiognomy. Looking at the drawing, fear we had was that this ravenous crocodile was not content to just attack and devour fish! It is therefore evident in this tale that it also enjoyed displaying its aggression towards human beings



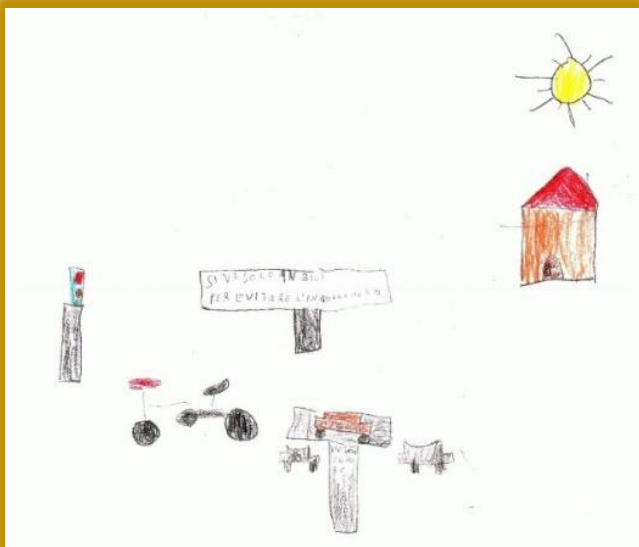


Figure 108

Angelina talks to animals

Once upon a time in a very fantastic country there was a little girl called Angelina. In that country Angelina was very well known, because she could talk to animals. Everyone took her for a fool, because they saw her talking to animals, while others could not. She, with her grandmother, lived in a forest where there were many animals. Her brother was an animal because he suffered in the war where his father was, they turned him into an animal.

Angelina went to the hospital one day to treat a tiger, which was injured by a hunter. When she told the doctor if he could cure the

tiger, the doctor told him how she wanted to cure the tiger. Angelina answered him that she could talk to animals. The doctor did not believe him, as everyone else does.

Angelina, on her way to school, met a lady with a dog, this dog was always angry. When she saw him like that, she told the lady that something was wrong. In fact, Angelina checked the dog and found a thorn under its foot, when she took it out the dog was fine and thankful and finally realised that she could talk to animals.

Another day she and her grandmother were walking through town and met a gentleman with a very large cat. The girl went, because she cares a lot about animals, and immediately told him to take it to the hospital. The doctor treated him and the gentleman thanked Angelina and believed him too. Every day she met gentlemen with animals, treated them and so the whole town believed her. So Angelina was no longer teased and she was happy.

Federico, a nine-year-old boy, presents another animal story. The main character is Angelina, a little girl whom no one believes and whom the others make fun of, because she says she understands the language of animals and claims to be able to cure them. Again, the real family is as if it did not exist. It is evident that the special abilities to understand and care for animals, which Federico attributes to Angelina, are a means of trying to improve the low esteem in which others hold her. In

turn, Federico imagines that friendship with animals can allow him to enjoy the affection he does not find in humans.

The drawing (Figure 108) accompanying this story does not have the theme of Angelina but of ecology. We therefore find the invitation to use bicycles to avoid pollution, and the ban on smoking in buses.



Six Cub Scouts to Save

In the countryside I found wolves. I was big. I went camping with my dogs, to go rifle fishing. At one point I heard howling. I was terrified and wanted to turn back, but I went ahead to see what was there. I found six abandoned wolf cubs: three males and three females. First I wanted to run away, then I went to see. The pups were alive, but the mother was dead. I took them fishing with me. They were afraid because I had the rifle (they thought I had killed the mother). They would catch fish themselves, like bears with salmon. I understand the language of dogs. The puppies asked me their story. I brought them into the family. In the evenings, when we collected wood, we would go hunting. Two showed the forest because they knew it, two others went hunting and came back with a roe deer. They were running like crazy because they had seen a hare. They wanted to go boar hunting.

Giulio, a thirteen-year-old boy with mild mental retardation and psychological disorders, in this story imagines making friends and being able to talk to six wolf cubs he rescued. These animals had great abilities: apart from being able to talk to him, they could not only fish but also hunt deer, hares and wild boar. For all these reasons, the boy imagines them to be part his family

Since Giulio was often teased by his classmates, from whom he could not defend himself, and suffered because of his parents who, having very different psychological characteristics, often quarrelled with each other, we think that the boy in this story tries to live in fantasy a reality much better than the one he was forced to face every day.

For these reasons, he wanted to imagine himself as a brave and paternal character towards the little wolf cubs, who had been orphaned by their mother. At the same time, he represented a strange family, in which only he and the wolf cubs he had saved were present, thus excluding his real family, which, as we have said, was very problematic.

2.6 RELATIONSHIPS WITH THERAPIES

Sometimes we can find in the children's drawings and stories some hint of the therapy they undergo and the specialists with whom they come into contact. In their drawings and comments, sometimes affectionate, other times biting and ironic, the names of the therapists themselves are often present.





Figure109 - Federica

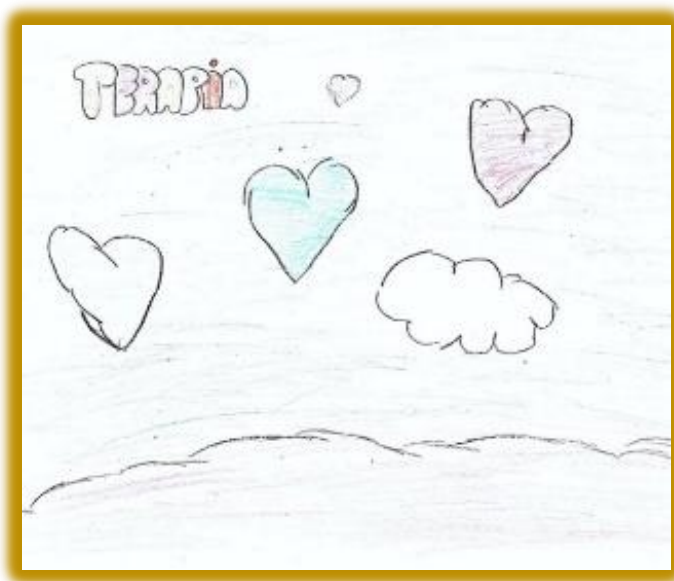


Figure110 - Katia

In some cases, such as the giraffe drawn by Federica (figure 109), these are gifts that are offered to the therapists. In other cases, as in the drawing above (figure 110), through the drawing little Katia gives her assessment of both the purpose and the effectiveness of the therapy.

In this drawing, the little girl, through the four hearts, one for each specialist, sees the therapy as a gesture of love towards her. And it is this love that manages to banish the gloomy clouds. Katia, by means of this drawing, also wants to tell us something more: the therapy has certainly succeeded in chasing away the major suffering (the big clouds at the bottom), however psychological problems still remain in her soul (the small cloud next to the hearts).

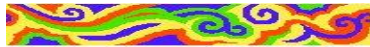


Figure 111

Three specialists for Gianluca

Once upon a time there was a little boy called Gianluca. He was naughty. But he did everything he could to change his character. Every day he tried, but he never succeeded. He was just like that. His parents sent him to a specialist and he (the specialist) told them that within a few days he would change his character. This specialist failed in his undertaking. The same thing was with another one. But this time they went to big, well-known cities. This other one also failed. But he said that Gianluca's willpower was not there.

So they went to someone else, telling Gianluca to go for it. This one succeeded. But the parents, who had at first misjudged the second specialist, because he had said that it took willpower, was what parents wanted to hear, gave the third one nothing, while the second one thanked him. Thus Gianluca changed character.

Ivan instead recounts, in a critical manner towards his parents, the various meetings with the specialists who had tried to cure him. In the meantime, he takes back from his parents the judgement on himself (*Once upon a time there was a little boy named Gianluca. He was discolicious*). He would like to change his 'mischievous' behaviour, but also realises that using his own will he could not succeed in doing so (*But he did everything he could to change his character. Every day he tried but never succeeded. That was just the way he was*).

The opinion of the first specialist is clear: he cannot change his problematic behaviour (*His parents sent him to a specialist and he (the specialist) told them that within a few days he would change his character. This specialist failed in his undertaking*). But the second specialist, from an important city, also

failed (This one also failed. But he said that Gianluca's willpower was not there). The third one succeeds.

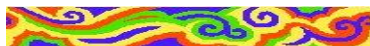
Interesting in this story are the various observations the child makes about himself and his parents. He accepts that he is a mischievous child, accepts the need to change his problematic behaviour, but understands well that this is not solely of his own making. This is what his parents and the second specialist want to believe.

Often, when psychological problems are present, one would like to rely only on the goodwill of the child. Unfortunately, very often, the so-called 'good will of the child' is by no means sufficient when the psychological problems are of a certain gravity. Much more is needed: it is necessary that the environment, in which the child lives, fully adapts to the child's emotional-relational needs and not vice versa.

It is therefore necessary for parents in particular to change the type of relationship they had with their child to a more effective one. Unfortunately, the need for parents and family members to get directly involved in building an appropriate relationship is not always understood and accepted. It is much easier to expect children alone, or with the help of specialists, to commit to positive changes.

The drawing that accompanies the story (figure 111), in which a large black cloud covers much of the light and warmth of the sun, highlights very well the sad, cold and difficult environment in which the child lived. From this it can be understood very well that only when this large black cloud in his

environment³³ disappears, can an improvement in Gianluca's psychic condition be achieved, as it actually was.



³³ Tribulato E. (2017), *The child and the environment*, Messina, Centro Studi Logos.

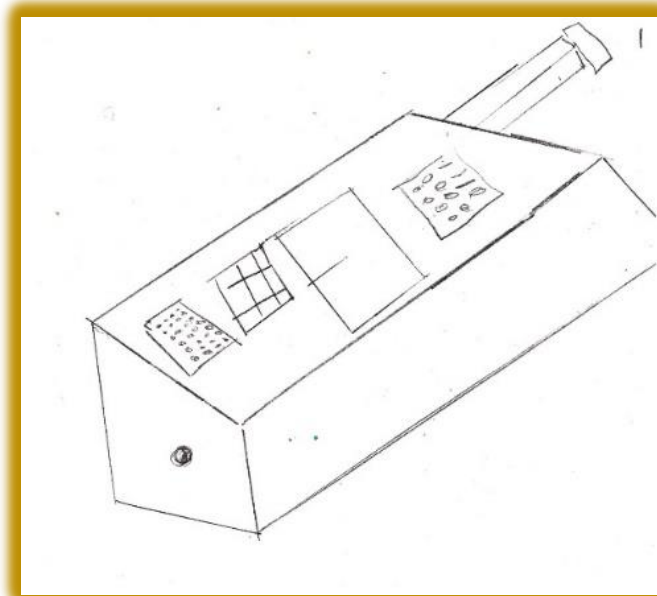


Figure 112

An old doctor as a friend

Once upon a time there was an old mobile phone called Doc. It had trouble turning on because the battery was bad. A boy of twenty to twenty-five found it and started to repair it and then started to programme it. Only then the boy forgot where he had put it. He didn't find it, but eventually he did, but it was no longer functional, because the charge had run out. Since it was the last phone in the world of that type and all the chargers were destroyed, at some point he remembered what a good friend of his had taught him before he was exiled, namely, that he could recover CPU and ram from another phone. That phone woke up and was faster and said: "What did you do to me?" and he said:

"I modified you to save your life". And the phone answered: 'Thank you very much, finally'. And they lived happily ever after.

The relationship of the children with the staff caring for them can be more or less good, intense and dialogical.

In the case of children with autism spectrum disorder, there is a tendency to think that they are distant and cold with their caregivers. This may be the case when the subject is particularly severe or at the beginning of the child-therapist relationship. However, when the relationship between the child and the therapist becomes rich, intense and profound, even these very disturbed children become intensely attached to the people who follow them, so much so that they are able to show, towards those who work to understand, accept and help them, considerable attention, affection, gratitude and respect.

The interpretation of this tale is not difficult. The boy perceives the old doctor who follows him as one of the few people who understands him and puts him at ease. Therefore, this person has become important to him, so important that he would like to rejuvenate him, just as one might do with an old mobile phone (Figure 112), updating its essential components, so that they can continue to live together 'happily ever after'.

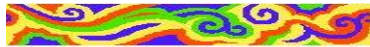




Figure 113

A pleasant therapy

Once upon a time there was a therapy and it was very nice because sometimes the female doctors made me laugh and so one day I went to therapy. When I arrived I played catch with two female doctors called Anita and Martina, then the doctor called me and I drew a picture of a female doctor called Cristina. In therapy there was also a female doctor with Cristina called Giulia. I did "Ambarabà ciccì coccò" to choose who to paint the portrait of and Giulia came out, so I painted Cristina's portrait. So now I am telling this story which is very beautiful.

Also present in Katia's account is joy and pleasure at her therapy, as well as gratitude towards the therapists, who not only understand her needs but also address them through smiling, joking, playing games and other pleasant activities. The little girl, in order to visualise the affection of the therapists following her, places little hearts around her sad face. Notice how the little girl, in her anxiety and fears, mixes up the names (*I did "Ambarabà ciccì coccò" to choose who to draw a portrait of and Giulia came out, so I drew a portrait of Cristina*).

2.7 SCHOOL RELATIONS

There is no doubt about the usefulness of the school, for the functions that this worthy institution performs in the cultural, educational, training and socialising growth children. Having a specific place with specially trained staff to perform all these important tasks is essential in our modern societies.

However, not all children manage to experience school life well. Often children with disabilities, learning difficulties or physical or mental peculiarities are mocked, excluded and marginalised by the class group or, even worse, ostracised and bullied.

As for the children who present psychological problems with anxiety, fears, irritability, instability, closure, and behavioural disorders, these have considerable difficulties in accepting the schedules, rhythm, norms and rules in the school environment

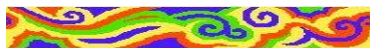




Figure 114

In this drawing of Gabriella (figure 114), which is also a story, the little girl manifests her impatience with and rejection of school: *"I don't want to go to school"* the little girl says to her mother. The latter replies almost automatically: *'But you have to go'*. These two lines summarise the frequent clash that occurs between children who, for various reasons, suffer from attending this institution and would like to escape the institutional obligation.

Notice in the drawing the school windows, closed as if by bars, to indicate that for the girl the school is like a prison, from which it is difficult to escape. Revealing details can also be seen in the two characters: on the face of the little girl who does not want to go to school there is a trace of red to indicate her anger, while on her shoulders there are two black spots, indicating the presence of maternal constraint. The mother, for her part, has

an obvious puzzled expression. As if questioning herself: "Why does this daughter of mine refuse to go to school?" But also: "What can I do to convince her?"



Figure 115

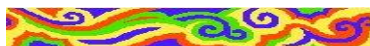
At school you have to work hard

Once upon a time there was a child who went to school, and he was angry because he didn't get good grades, then he tried hard and got good grades, so his mother was happy. One day someone teased him because he was studying and the child tried to make him understand that studying was more important than teasing. Then that boy understood what he was trying to tell him and did not tease him any more.

Francesco, a ten-year-old boy with mild mental retardation, with consequent difficulties in learning curricular subjects and integrating with his classmates, manifests in this story both his anger at the difficulties he encountered in school activities (*Once upon a time there was a child who went to school and was angry because he did not get good grades*) and his difficulties in integrating with his peers.

The latter, while at first making fun of him for not being able to follow the school syllabus, at a later stage, rather than expressing their admiration for the effort their comrade put into his studies, mocked him for his excessive diligence (*One day, someone mocked him for studying*).

A final notation concerns the relationship between parents and school. In many children with psychological problems or mental retardation, doing everything to get good grades is aimed at pleasing their parents. In Francesco's case, it is his own mother that the child wants to please (*then he tried hard and got good grades, so his mother was happy*).



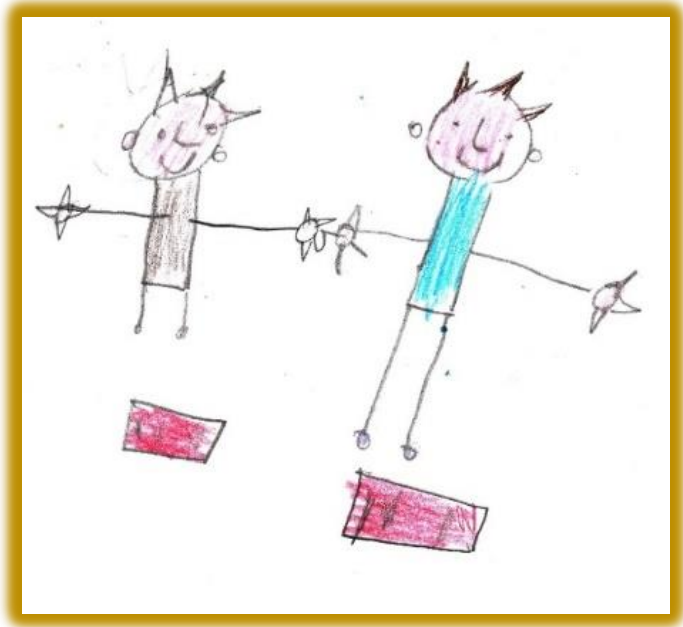


Figure 116

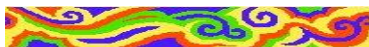
A demerit

I was going to school and, with my classmate Cristian, we were studying. The teacher scolded Cristian because he had brought his cards and they gave him a note.

Cristian and I drew a picture and then we went outside, and the teacher talked to Cristian and Dennis's mother.

Danilo, on the other hand, remembers the demerit mark given by the teacher to his classmate Cristian for bringing figurines to school. Maybe he should have said, in a more sincere

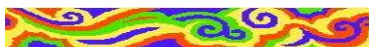
way, that the teacher had put the demerit mark for seeing Cristian playing with the cards!



All the tricks to escape from school

Once upon a time there was a little boy called Francis; he had a sister and a brother. Once he went to school, started doing his homework and got bored. So he hid and never went to school again. So Mum and Dad dragged him to school while he was sleeping. But Francis found an escape route to the North Pole. Santa brought him back to his parents and so back to school. Francis then thinks: 'That's how life is'. But then he thinks: "Wait, I can catch a disease!". (This ruse also did not work so...) Francis one day brings his computer to school, the teachers so they sent him to kindergarten as a punishment, (a place this) where you play, not study. So Francesco is happy.

In this tasty tale, we can understand how, for some children, school is experienced as a place of boredom and torment, from which they try to escape by using any expedient: hiding, escaping to the North Pole or bringing their computer to school, so that the teacher, as a punishment, demotes them to kindergarten (*where they play, not study*)



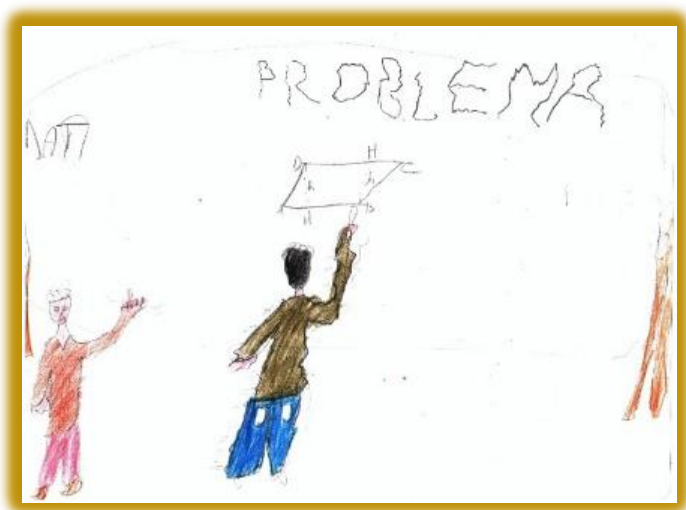


Figure 117

The fear of questions

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Carlo who, before being interrogated, was very frightened because he feared that the teacher would put two and two on him if he did not do well. In the morning, Carlo tried hard not to go to school, pretending to feel sick. But he failed: he just had to face the professor. When he called him to the blackboard, nobody understood because he wrote shakily. As soon as the professor told him to draw a parallelogram, he managed to do it perfectly.

This teacher, of whom everyone was afraid, had become a friend because as soon as the lesson was over, he took him out with him, telling

him to carry on like this, with good will. The child went on to higher classes and made everyone realise that he was a great little genius.

Ivan introduces another theme on the relationship between pupils and school: the fear of interrogation. (*There was once a little boy who, before being questioned, was very scared because he feared that the teacher would put him down for two if he did not do well*). Related to this fear is often performance anxiety (*When he was called to the blackboard, no one understood why he was writing shakily*). This child also does everything, pretending to be ill, not to go to class (*In the morning, Charles tried hard not to go to school, pretending to feel ill*). However, despite his fear of the questions, it took little for this good professor to make Carlo feel at ease (*This professor, of whom everyone was afraid, had become a friend because as soon as the lesson was over, he took him out with him and told him to carry on with his good will*).

Notice in the drawing (figure 117) the flickering writing on the blackboard and the dark colours used for the insecure pupil. This is intended to convey the sadness and fear present in him



A pressing invitation for the mother

Dear Debora's mum, I am informing you that she is afraid of school and kindly do not talk to the teachers tomorrow she does not want to go to school

Seven-year-old Debora, who was in the second grade of primary school, had written directly on a sheet of paper, using large capital letters, her plea to her mother so that she could understand her fear of school. As one can read, this child was not very good at writing! Hence, one can understand why her mother took her to class every day, despite the fact that her daughter expressed her impatience with school, complaining of somatic symptoms such as general malaise, headache and vomiting.

However, in such cases, one must always ask not whether the child needs to learn to read and write well, but what is preventing the child from learning to read and write well. It is not school attendance at all costs that can solve learning problems, but a careful examination of the child's needs. In Debora's case, for example, her learning abilities were impaired by numerous psychological problems: the child suffered from intense fears, relationship difficulties with peers and her brother, as well as behavioural disorders. In addition, it was also evident that the parents' lack of commitment in following the child's schoolwork at home was so evident that they, too involved and busy with work, had left the task of school learning to the teachers alone.

In such cases, it is easy for a vicious circle to be set in motion: parents neglect the child both affectively and in following her in school activities > the child does badly at school > her psychological problems increase > parents increase their pressure not to miss days of school > her psychological distress worsens > her school performance worsens.

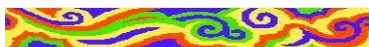




Figure 118

A journey to escape from school

Once upon a time, there was a young man who lived the same way every day and did not have many amusements to pass the time and the only thing that punctuated his days was studying and, now tired of that living, he asked his parents for advice on how to continue. They told him that studying was boring, but it was useful and that he would have to continue (studying) to achieve something. So one day, after years at school, he was walking on the beach and decided that what he had to do was to go on a journey. So, leaving a note for his parents, he took his father's boat and started sailing, until he was happy with what he had done.

Some parents, too busy with work and the many daily activities, have neither the desire nor the time available to

experience moments of joy, fun and dialogue with their children. They tend to focus all their educational efforts on subject of school and schoolwork (*a boy lived the same way every day and had little fun to pass the time and the only thing that punctuated his days was studying*).

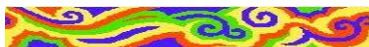
In these children, the need to escape and to live a different, less oppressive life away from homework and the stress of questions is frequent and understandable. Massimo, in his story, dreams of acquiring happiness and joy by abandoning boring schoolwork and sailing his father's boat (*So, leaving a note to his parents, he took his father's boat and started sailing, until he was happy with what he had done*).

Many times another type of vicious circle is triggered that is equally detrimental to the child's well-being: the child does not do well at school > teachers press parents to make their child study more> they engage him/her in doing homework for a greater number of hours, limiting play and leisure time as much as possible> the stressed child does not learn as attention and memorising skills decrease > his/her school performance worsens > teachers feel the need to stimulate parents even more to engage the child for more time in schoolwork. And so on³⁴

When these issues are brought to our attention, we urge parents to do exactly the opposite of what is normally recommended. We recommend that parents decrease the time spent studying and increase the hours of free play in the open air with peers and parents themselves. The results obtained, with the

³⁴ Tribulato E. (2017), *The child and the environment*, Messina, Centro Studi Logos, P.119.

seemingly strange intervention we have described, amaze parents and teachers alike



Going to school to avoid imprisonment for the mother

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Francesco, eight years old, who did not want to go to school. He told his mother that he didn't want to go to school. His mother told him that he had to go, that it was compulsory, otherwise the carabinieri would come. One day the child decided not to go to school and went to play with his skateboard. After five days, the carabinieri arrived. When the child came home, his mother scolded him for not going to school. She then took away his playstation for a week. The child then on Monday decided to go to school, and there the teacher scolded him as well, so he started studying.

He returned home, he did not feel like studying. His mother decided to take him by car, to find out where he was going, but after a few days the car broke down. The child went to school again. Since he did not want to go, he decided to break the rules again. The mechanic was sick and didn't fix the (mother's) car. The carabinieri again, after five days, came to the house, because the teacher had called them. The carabinieri told the mother that if they went again they would put her 'inside' (the prison). The child again decided to study more, so

*the mother would give him back the play and
she would not end up 'inside' (the prison).*

It is sad to think that this child decided to go to school just so he could go back to playing with his playstation and avoid jail time for his mother

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