



ACPUA

AGENCIA DE CALIDAD Y PROSPECTIVA
UNIVERSITARIA DE ARAGÓN

QUALITY GENERATION. DESIGN YOUR “LIKES” AND BE HAPPY

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Quality Generation. Design your “likes” and be happy

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Criterion 3.4 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) requires agencies to carry out thematic analyses, with the following standard: ‘Agencies should regularly publish reports describing and analysing the overall findings of their external quality assurance activities’.

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© Edited by: ACPUA – Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight
(Gobierno de Aragón)
Avda. de Ranillas n.º 5D, 1ª Planta
50018 Zaragoza
www.acpua.aragon.es

Design and layout: Technical team of the ACPUA.
ISBN: 978-84-09-63180-3
First edition: Zaragoza, October 2024

References in this publication to the masculine gender shall be understood to refer to the corresponding feminine gender.



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Serie «The ACPUA learns» XII

Dedicated to
Francesco Ferrati, Clara Serrano y Sofia McMahon
(my godchildren)
and to all those people who, with their lives,
decide to leave the world
a little better than how they found it.

Home page

M.^a Belén Serrano Valenzuela is a psychologist and Doctor in Education, as well as a teacher and play leader.

After her experiences as an international volunteer in different countries (Northern Ireland, United States and Bolivia) and her work experience in the field of mental health and disability, she has worked as a psychologist in the Government of Aragon for more than 20 years, managing youth, educational, volunteering and citizen participation projects.

Her interest in healthy education and participation management as the main ways of preventing mental health disorders has always been her motivation. Hence, her involvement in educational outreach through blogs, magazines and publications.

The Aragon regional government published her first book ‘Educational guide for parents’ in 2006 which was marketed by 3ooks Editorial in 2010. Following her research on the learning of values by young people participating in non-formal education programmes (her thesis was published in 2018 by the University of Zaragoza), Certeza Editorial published her third book "Lo que meto en mi mochila: descubriendo la educación no formal, una aproximación desde la psicología" “What’s in my bag: discovering non-formal education, an approach from psychology” in 2019.

You have in your hands his new challenge, **Quality generation. Design your “likes” and be happy.**



Presentation

Since 2005, the Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight (ACPUA) has been the Agency of Aragon that guarantees and promotes the quality of the university system in Aragon. In order to do this, this public institution carries out technical tasks of evaluation, certification and accreditation; an activity that is complemented by the study, foresight and promotion of a culture of quality in higher education in Aragon.

For this reason, the Agency publishes informative monographs of interest to the university community through its collection of publications "ACPUA learns". This new edition is based on two aspects. On one hand, the functions carried out by the Agency in relation to its commitment to the student body and, on the other hand, the needs detected in the latest studies and plans on youth mental health.

Firstly, since 2014, the ACPUA has been undertaking actions to support students with its ACPUA+ Students Programme¹. In this regard, in 2022, it became interested in finding out about the emotional state of university students after the pandemic. Through a survey and four face-to-face work groups, it evaluated these three dimensions: learning and teaching, communication with the teaching staff and emotional state before and after the pandemic. Some orientations were detected to alleviate socio-affective needs such as the promotion of a greater offer of extra-curricular activities (both face-to-face and distance), the strengthening of psychological care services in universities and the improvement of empathy by improving the knowledge of the university community about mental health.

Secondly, according to a recent study by the Ministry of Universities², more than 50% of university students in Spain perceived the need for psychological support during the last four-month period. In addition, the new Law on Universities states that students have the right to counselling for the care of their mental and emotional health.

In Aragon, psychological care services are offered in the University System of Aragon; however, it is perceived as an insufficient resource, alerting us to the need to prevent and promote the psychological health of all the expected users, which in our case would amount to more than 20,000 people. If we look at the strategic lines of the Mental Health Plan of Aragon³ in force, we can see the importance of prevention and the existence of information resources to train citizens in this area.

Thanks to these two arguments and immersed in our internal strategic planning process for the next four years, the ACPUA has decided to collaborate, by publishing this book, to alleviate the socio-emotional difficulties of students in higher education, as well as of young

¹ Compliance with the ESG 1.6 European university quality standard.

² [Study on "mental health among students in Spanish universities"](#).

³ [MENTAL HEALTH PLAN FOR ARAGON 2022-2025.pdf \(aragonhoy.es\)](#)

people entering the university system or who, in their transition stage towards employment, need psychological guidance and support. At the end of the day, we are talking about empowering them and offering them quality psychological tools to create their personal project, adapting to the vital moment in which each one of them finds themselves. We hope you like it.

Cristina Rodríguez Coarasa
Director of ACPUA



Foreword

One of the greatest contradictions we find in this 21st Century is the fact that we live in the most developed and technological world in the history of mankind, and therefore, the world in which we could have the greatest well-being, and yet the rates of psychological distress and psychiatric illnesses are continually increasing. This is true for the general population, but it is even more evident in university students, one of the sectors of the population with the highest levels of psychological stress and morbidity.

Factors causing this malaise range from the high demands of today's university studies, to the uncertainty that the modern world (ecological emergency, overpopulation, etc.) projects on young people, to the stress generated by the process of constructing one's own identity. All this is aggravated by the fact that young people tend not to seek psychological help and consider that being stressed is normal for a university student. For all these reasons, most universities worldwide, aware of this problem, are developing prevention programmes for their students.

The book before us deals with this very relevant topic: structured and accessible prevention for the psychological distress in young people in general and in university students in particular. If the aim is appropriate, the way it is written is even more so. I would highlight as some of its strengths that it is an eclectic book, where cognitive-behavioural, third generation or positive psychology techniques and concepts are combined, in line with current trends in psychotherapy of using effective ingredients from different currents. It also encourages participation because it actively involves the reader in the whole process of change, a prerequisite for success among its target readers. And, above all, it is easy to read, approachable and attractive, with examples and practical cases that allow young people to identify with the characters of the vignettes and apply the recommendations given.

The book shows the broad knowledge of its author, a psychologist who has been an expert in helping and guiding this sector of the population for most of her life, and whose experience has been extended with international volunteering, which allows her to include a cross-cultural vision that is necessary in today's multifaceted societies. The breadth, appropriateness and excellent interconnection of the ideas presented in this text give an idea of Belén Serrano's depth of knowledge and of the hours she has had to devote to producing it.

In short, this is a necessary book in the current context, written with knowledge and affection by an expert on the subject, so I strongly recommend its reading and use, and I hope it will be a great success for the benefit it will bring to society.

Dr. Javier García Campayo
Professor of Psychiatry. Director of the Master's Degree in Mindfulness and
Chair of Contemplative Sciences University of Zaragoza, Spain



Introduction

If you have this book in your hands, it is a good sign. Don't put it down it, don't miss the adventure that awaits you after reading "Quality generation. Design your *likes* and be happy". Open your eyes, breathe, prepare your mind and penetrate through the characters that make up its stories. With them, you will learn to fight against dragons, to believe in fairies, to see the enemies in your battles and to wield new weapons that will accompany you on your journey through the world that awaits you.

The reality is that you are not born learning how to live; you are taught by people close to you (family and friends), who have taken the example of others or distant people present in social networks. Through all of them, you get to know yourself. However, along the way you may encounter some difficulties like those of Eva, Teresa and Jorge.

At 16, Eva did not know how to stop crying when her grandmother passed away; she was faced with the unexpected death of a family member she loved. She had no previous experience and, saddened, she began to think about her existence.

It took Teresa more than three years to decide what to study. Tired of being asked what she was going to study, she finally chose early childhood education and did not get it right the first time; every day of her first week of teaching she arrived home nervous.

Nobody explained to Jorge that the adventure of love was difficult, but when, at the age of 26, his lifelong girlfriend left him, he lost his way; and he was left alone, disoriented and rudderless.

Who teaches Eva, Teresa and Jorge to be happy? *Mindfulness* experts warn that life is full of inevitable suffering, of daily obstacles that put you to the test. But, in addition, the pandemic suffered by the entire world population since 2020 has highlighted the need to train young people to cope with situations that cause suffering and not to leave them alone and exposed to learning through social networks.

Human beings and, in particular, babies when they are born helpless are not able to cope with all their difficulties; but young people can. To achieve this, you can apply psychological resources that will strengthen

you and stop you running away from yourselves and the difficult environment around you in order to improve your well-being.

This book aims to provide you with a self-help manual to help you reflect, create your personal strategy, know your talents and share them.

This manual, in which all the sections are interrelated, consists of three parts. The first is entitled "Developing my personal strategy" and describes a simple method of designing your life project, developing some of the elements necessary to create just that.

The second one called "Learning to be happy" focuses on how to psychologically analyse what happens to you, differentiating between what you think, what you feel and what you do. In each of these sections, we first define what we do not control and, in the positive section, simple problem-solving guidelines are given.

And finally "Quality Generation" includes a test for you to evaluate the level of design of your strategy, as well as your degree of satisfaction with your life, offering guidelines for the constant improvement and renewal of your lifestyle; available for you to use whenever you need it.

“Quality Generation. Design your *likes* and be happy” is a journey through time, of life stories, diaries and poems of young people who, through their difficulties, will teach you the keys to improve your sense of happiness. Fasten your seatbelt and take a deep breath; we will accompany you on your journey, to infinity and beyond!



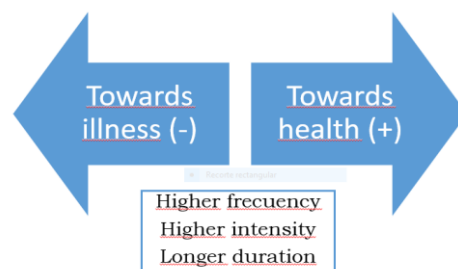
PART I: DEVELOPING MY PERSONAL STRATEGY

In the first day of Psychopathology class in a Clinical Psychology degree, lecturers teach the introduction of mental disorders and comment, as examples, on some of them: anorexia, addictive disorder, agoraphobia, paranoid disorder, reactive depression and psychotic disorder, among others.

The funny thing is that all the students, while we listen spellbound to the lecturers' explanations, we can identify with some of the symptoms of each of these disorders. In relation to anorexia, who hasn't skipped a meal at some point and replaced it with physical activity, out of a desire not to have such a big bum or tummy? In relation to paranoid disorder, who has thought about a situation in which different people spoke badly about him or her, without having any evidence that it was true, and has therefore modified his or her behaviour? In terms of addictive disorder, who has consumed more alcohol than they should have during a night out with friends?

This does not mean, as was later explained to us, that all the students were unwell. Illness and health are considered to be part of an extended period and, depending on the frequency, intensity and duration of the symptom or set of symptoms, the young person can be diagnosed as ill or healthy.

Health and disease: the continuum



As you can see in this graph, the arrow to the left directs you towards illness; it contains negative symptoms that occur more frequently or that are more intense or that have a longer duration in time, or even that manifest all three characteristics together. If you continue your life in this direction, you may enter a negative life circle from which it will be more difficult to escape.

However, the arrow pointing to the right directs you towards health and contains positive symptoms that occur more frequently or that are somewhat intense or that have a long duration in time, or even that manifest all three characteristics together. If you continue your life in this direction, you can enter a positive circle of life from which it will be easier to be motivated and feel joy.

In this example, you can see how Berta, little by little, began to change her position from the right arrow to the left:

A group of friends, after spending Thursday morning at university, meet at the usual bar. They greet each other and order their beers until the table is so full that they can't fit any more on. It's their time of relaxation for the week. A few months ago, they added a new element to their entertainment system. Juanrra shared his joint with the others and 20-year-old Berta, although she didn't really know what it was or what its effects were, she didn't dare to refuse and took her first puff. Since that time, it is not only Juanrra but also Mabel who regularly brings along a joint. Berta feels at ease with the group she wants to be part of, as she wants to feel integrated. Although she sees that not everyone smokes, she doesn't know how to say no and thinks that it doesn't do her any harm either; besides, it generates more laughter.

It has been 2 years since she started using and the last two Thursdays she has felt a bit strange. After smoking, she thinks she hears the voices of people whispering and thinks that they are probably talking badly about her, although she doesn't really know if it's true. She doesn't know what to do, she gets overwhelmed and thinks about asking someone in case the same thing happens to them, but she doesn't dare.

She is thinking about stopping going to the group...or quitting smoking...she thinks that perhaps this continuous and increasingly frequent, intense and longer-lasting consumption is not beneficial for his health.

What can you do to improve your health? If you have any symptoms such as nervousness, sadness, consumptions, adjustment problems or problems in your social relationships, have you ever thought about how you can reduce the frequency, intensity and duration of your symptoms? Have you considered how you could change your situation from a negative to a positive vicious circle?



The difficulty is sometimes generated by your own context: the place where you live, your school, your partner, the boss of your company or your parent, and because of this, you can sometimes find yourself at a crossroads or in what you think is a dead end.

I invite you to reflect on whether you believe that happiness is linked to the absence of negative symptoms or whether, on the contrary, you can do something as a person to be happy in the face of adversity.

The strategy outlined in this book aims to generate hope and excitement, by proposing that you are part of the solution to your sense of difficulty, designing your personal strategy, knowing yourself and planning what you would like to achieve in order to have quality friends, improve your studies, go on fun trips, improve communication with your family, offer your talents to the world or simply feel better about who you are.

Creating my life with quality

The proposal is that you create your life with quality. And in this section, we explain how to do it. The first step is to reflect on your mission, your vision and your values⁴, which is the opposite of moving forward blindly or stumbling through life.

Drawing up a personal quality plan, as in a company, consists of the development of a strategy in which you design your own project which, in its initial part, consists of 3 parts: mission, vision and values.

A young person's **mission** is the definition of the goals he or she wants to achieve in life in the short term. This personal reflection generates in you the perception that you are heading towards where you want to go. In other words, you will be aware of where you are going, following your own plan.

When you attend class, some teachers set you assignments and ask you to look for documentation, design an action plan, prepare the work and then present it in class. When you are part of a company, every 3 or 4 years, the objectives and strategic lines to be followed are defined, based on the mission, vision and values already formulated.

In this publication we use these common elements of quality so that you can do the same in your life, always focused on improving your sense of happiness.

Answering these two questions can bring you closer to defining the objectives you need:

- What do I have to do that is compulsory (by law or by the requirements of the family I live in)?
- What can I do that I like?

In this way, between the compulsory and voluntary activities, you will be able to define 5 objectives⁵. This will be the requirement to define your mission, expressing what you want to achieve in the next 6 months, by answering this question:

⁴ These are the terms used to develop strategic planning for organisations.

⁵ Idea derived from the publication "Discover the Secret" by Janet Bray and Chris Attwood.



- Have you defined 5 goals to develop in your life for the next 6 months?

As you will see in the following example, their formulation starts with a verb and continues with the activity. They are very simple, very straightforward and very operational; they must be achievable in order to be fulfilled. This is the first step for you to start thinking for yourself, deciding whether you want to embark on designing your own life.

Juan is a 2nd year engineering student.

To define his 5 objectives, he lists 2 compulsory activities (passing his course subjects and helping with household and family chores) and 3 voluntary actions that he likes to do (going out with friends, doing sport and earning some money for himself), taking into account that the timeframe for completion is 6 months.

John will write the 5 resolutions on a card and keep them in sight to focus on the daily fulfilment of the resolutions.

If at the moment you are not clear about any goal you want to achieve or only one of them because you are indecisive and don't know what to put, don't get overwhelmed; keep reading and keep learning. Reading and getting to know other people's stories is the first step in reflecting on your life and your participation in it.

A young person's **vision** is a reflection on how you envision your future, i.e. what you hope or imagine your life will be like in the long term.

This information is essential because it will help you to plan some of the actions you would like to take that may not be immediately clear to you and you could start making changes in the present in order to achieve the desires you have in mind.

Juan plans to go on a trip to Europe with his friends in the summer when he finishes university, and to do this he needs money as well as to start planning all the destinations with them. They will have to look for cheap options to book the necessary means of transport and accommodation, and they will have to get discount cards for cultural visits. Therefore, it would be to their advantage to carry out their project in 1 year's time because it gives them time to look for a job and to raise sufficient funds to finance the trip.

On the other hand, one of their compulsory objectives is also to pass their subjects and finish their degree therefore, they organise themselves in the short and long term to get to know the subjects of the final-year courses, which include a work placement and the major project and in order to begin to design how to carry it out in time, choosing the subject and the company.

John's example focuses on studies and travel because that is what he wants to achieve and that is what he is aiming for. However, everyone can choose their own vision related to the personal issue (get fit, so I go to the gym), to the social issue (choose two good friends and keep them, so I focus on being a good friend and look after their needs) or to the professional issue (become a civil servant, so I join a college and study).

The timeframe we have set for the design of your vision in the personal strategy is 2 years. Therefore, you must answer this question in order to plan it:

- Have you thought about how you imagine the life you want in 2 years' time, designing more than 2 challenges/achievements that you will have achieved?

The formulation of these challenges or actions to be achieved can be written in the same way as the objectives (verb plus activity: take the B1 English qualification) or on the contrary it can be defined as a completed activity (B1 English course completed and exam passed). Other examples can be related to any of your hobbies: sport, cooking, music, dance, excursions, travel, etc.

It is important that you take into account your context, your reality, because whatever you set out to do, you should be clear that it is possible to achieve it at the present moment (your mission) and in 2 years' time (your vision).

Values are those principles that you have decided are positive for your life and that you consider will guide your actions (goals linked to your mission and challenges linked to your vision).

In order to choose them, you must have an idea of what they are. Regarding their definition, some authors have studied these principles from a wider point of view within an international context and have found that people all over the world can be guided by these so-called universal values. They are intrinsic aspects that people believe and think are



essential for their lives and, therefore, they will try to make them the direct guide for their actions.

Regarding their classification, I want to share the model created in Spain by Alfredo Oliva⁶, professor at the University of Seville, who, together with his team, has selected the 27 assets or strengths that are essential for the personal, social and moral learning of young people. They then chose the 6 characteristics (values, principles, assets) to be developed in the moral area, which are: social commitment, responsibility, sociability, justice, equality and respect for diversity.

Furthermore, in order to understand these 6 characteristics, they can be broken down into further sections:

- If you are interested in social commitment, you can focus on helping other people: grandparents, neighbours or friends or join an organisation to volunteer, make charitable donations or improve society through research.
- In relation to responsibility, you will be aware of your obligations and focus every day on fulfilling them.
- By addressing sociability, you can build positive social relationships in every context in which you live: family, school, work, neighbourhood or friendship.
- If you stand up for what you think is right, justice, you should be consistent with your principles and focus on them, both to apply them personally and to support others who are disadvantaged, intolerant or discriminated against.
- If you are looking at equality, you can do work and presentations in class on this subject, join an association to give talks or respect the way you treat your colleagues at work.
- If you focus on respect for diversity, you will collaborate on improving accessibility with your local council, go camping with an association for people with difficulties or create a new inclusion project with other companies.

⁶ Model created by Alfredo Oliva (coord.) in 2010 on Positive adolescent development; approach developed from positive psychology whose creator was Martin Seligman.

Promoting each of these aspects, or at least some of them, can make you a person of integrity, honesty and solidarity. To identify your values you need to answer this question:

- Have you defined between 2 or 3 principles that can guide your actions (objectives/challenges) in your daily life?

When Juan reflects on the values or principles that he wants to guide his life, he defines his will to fulfil 3 aspects: to be responsible, to work for equality and to commit himself to society, in this case, to the environment.

Therefore, it integrates the value of responsibility with its first compulsory objective: to study long enough and long enough to pass his course every year.

Furthermore, in order to be consistent with his principle of equality, he decides that he will include data related to the gender perspective in his final thesis.

And finally, as he is interested in sustainability, he decides to take responsibility at home for all the tasks related to waste recycling: buying the bins, putting up the signs with what each container should contain and taking the waste down twice a week to the corresponding bins.

As we can see in the example above, Juan has generated coherence between his mission (the 5 proposed objectives), his vision (the challenges for 2 years) and his values or principles.

You should bear in mind that the theory is very easy, but the action is more complicated, i.e. it is easy to say it and more difficult to do it. Therefore, as an outline, the definition of your personal strategy with its 3 sections is up to you.

Your personal strategy: definition



Mission: immediate. 3 to 5 objectives (compulsory and voluntary)

Vision: further away. 2 aims/challenges for the next 2 years.

Values: across the board. 2 or 3 principles to guide my life

When you have this outline defined, you have to write it down on some nice cards or in a notebook so that you can have at hand at any time. In this way, every day you will be able to think about each of the proposed objectives, choosing the activities to carry out and maintaining values in accordance with what you want to be in life at the present moment. The best thing about this design is that it only depends on you and, as you will see later, you can go back and renew it whenever you want.

If you find it difficult to get started on your project at the moment, you can read on for more ideas on how other young people have learned to improve their daily lives.

Quality design 1

DREAM WITH YOUR OWN CHALLENGES



1.- Define 3 to 5 objectives to work on in your life for the next 6 months (mission).

Compulsory Objectives

Voluntary Objectives

2.- Think about how you imagine the life you want in 2 years time, designing at least 2 challenges/achievements that you will have achieved by then (vision).

Decide on between 2 or 3 principles that can guide your actions (objectives/challenges) in your daily life (values).

Setting my project in motion

In this section we'll give you the key ideas to feel free, which is an aspiration of all human beings, together with the feeling and hope of being happy. When we are born we know nothing. We learn according to different factors: the country, the social and economic context, the people who take care of us. We learn through what we are told, what we see and what we read.

The ability to adapt in your life depends on your genetics, which can be understood as everything you have inherited that affects the way you behave. It is also influenced by your family, your early adaptations to stressful situations, the level of maturity you are able to reach and the process of your personality development.

When you grow up, you begin to detect behaviours in you that are similar to those of your parents and siblings; however, there are also characteristics of your temperament that are unique to you and are part of your individuality. Therefore, there are theories that support that what is most important is innate (what we are born with), others defend the influence of context (what we learn from others) and the prevailing trend is called interactionism (we are a mixture of both factors). Therefore, you have a high percentage of possibilities to be what you want to be, to modify or shape the way you are and all those aspects that you don't like too much.

As the authors of Happytialism⁷ say, it is time to get the best version of yourself by increasing your positive emotions, improving your happiness, optimism and hope, as well as learning new alternatives for solving your problems.

You will need to find out what resources you have (personal, the characteristics that define you; social, the people in your life) and what activities you undertake on a daily basis, as everything you own and do influences your ability to adapt.

In Maria's story you will find some of the influences that have marked her life.

⁷ Publication by Luis Gallardo and Javier García Campayo (2022)



It all started when Maria was expecting her first child. She was excited but at the same time afraid. All previous generations had done the same in her family.

"This is the normal thing to do, this is the right thing to do" - her mother told her hundreds of times.

María was born in a village in the province of Madrid and that is where she met Paco. A mechanic like his father, a tireless worker who dropped out of his studies before finishing his certificate. Paco liked María's smile, her joy and how well she danced.

After dating for 6 years, he asked María to marry him. They were both 24 years old and she had finished her studies as an infant education assistant some time ago in a village near Cercedilla. This was the normal thing to do, she had to get married. She liked Paco and their families got on well; she was happy.

Village life was quiet. In a big town you can go about your life without being criticised too much and to go unnoticed if you follow a routine life without differences. Cercedilla was a large and spacious village. It was a comfortable place to live and so close to the capital of Spain that, you could always find everything you needed and look for alternatives to have fun.

María had two brothers. Felipe, the eldest, had continued studying in Madrid. His parents had saved up for the boy to become "a successful man" and he worked in a law firm. Marta, the youngest, worked in a shop in the village.

Maria was very restless and dreamy. She longed for her child, looked after herself, ate healthily and went for walks. At night, after helping her family in the grocery shop and doing the housework, she would fall into bed.

Adelia⁸, the magical fairy, appeared to her in her dreams. She was her best friend and confidant. (It seems that there are thoughts that you can't tell anyone. They bring you up in a certain way and teach you that it is not right to say certain feelings). Maria told Adelia about her excitement about her pregnancy and the arrival of the baby: "Hi Adelia, I want to have

⁸ Her fairy godmother, her guardian angel, her spiritual guide or her invisible friend (an idea derived from the publications of Elisabeth Kubler Ross).

my baby but I'm scared. They say that it hurts a lot and... do you think that I will be able to look after the child as I need to?" (Often in dreams, everything that worries people appears. But is this normal?) Maria woke up and went about her routine.

"That's the way it should be," her mother told her.

In this story, you can find out about Maria's background, the place where she was born, her siblings and the place she occupies among them, her parents' jobs, her studies, what all the members of her family were like, her dreams, plans, thoughts, feelings and actions.

As we can see, every life is different and everything you do on a daily basis has an impact on you, but as we know from scientific research⁹ we have a 40% capacity (not determined by genetics or circumstance) to be happy.

To start with, you can reflect on your self-knowledge. It is time to understand your personal and social resources that support the actions you take now and the actions you want to take in the future.

⁹ From the publication of Sonja Lyubomirsky , professor of psychology at the University of California: "The Science of Happiness: A Proven Method for Achieving Well-Being".



1 What am I like? My personal resources

Knowing who you are is not easy, but it is a learning process that begins in childhood and develops through adolescence and young adulthood. In this personal development, you learn about yourself through your reactions, your tastes and the effect of what you do on the people around you.

At the core of your personal growth, you find the part that has to do with your self-esteem (feeling good about yourself), self-concept (thinking good about yourself), self-efficiency and self-control (proper attribution of results on what you do), personal autonomy, sense of belonging and personal initiative; all of them are characteristics that, when well developed, help you to become a balanced and emotionally stable person.

To reflect on what you are like, I'll list some of the ideas that can help you to get to know yourself: I learn quickly, I find it hard to study, I am nice, I am shy, I look good, I am a good sport, I get angry easily, I do not get angry easily, I am aggressive, I am calm, I am tall, I am slim, etc.

When I was young and finishing my Psychology studies, many of my friends wanted me to give them personality tests. It seems that at that stage of life, it is important to know one's qualities and flaws, one's strengths and weaknesses, as well as to receive guidance on how to act in life. Some of the questions they wanted to find out were related to these aspects: what I am like, what temperament I have, how I learn, what traits define me, how I adapt to everyday difficulties, what I do when I get angry, how I can improve and feel happier.

This is an example of the result of the personality test I gave my friend Miriam:

Miriam's most characteristic personality traits:

Unconcerned with rules, acts according to needs. Accepts few obligations. At times, her behaviour can be maladjusted, unsocial and careless. May be elected leader in informal groups.

Severe lack of internalisation of norms (low super-ego strength).

Independent: Bold, with a considerable degree of initiative. Detached from others, cooperates poorly with the group. Likes things to be done her own way. Low group integration.

Extrovert: Socially uninhibited, uninhibited. Lively, enthusiastic, jovial, active, talkative. Impulsive, unpredictable and changeable activity.

Dominant: Authoritarian in handling others. Tends to disregard all authority. Competitive and stubborn. Likes to dominate and control others, as well as criticise them. Likes to be in charge, enjoys taking on challenges, considers herself superior to others and does not hesitate to make her ideas prevail over others. Moreover, all of this amuses her. She rebels against the stereotypical role of the conservative.

Medium-high anxiety: Insecure, worried, restless and impatient. Guilt-prone and remorseful.

Sensitive: Dependent on reinforcement and affection, overprotected, affected by feelings. Needs group approval.

Suspicious: Suspicious, difficult to deceive. Ambiguous. Often complicated with her own self, likes to give opinions about herself and is interested in intimate mental life.

Experimental: Analytical-critical. She is interested in intellectual questions and doubts fundamental principles. Sceptical and inquisitive about ideas, whether traditional or new. Usually well-informed.

Other Traits: Reserved and intelligent.

As you can see, there are many adjectives and words that relate to a person's way of being. It is often difficult to be familiar with this vocabulary and to put the right words to what happens with our reactions. By taking a personality test, it is possible to detect the strong points of your personality at a certain moment in your life. In Miriam's case, her sensitivity and extroversion stand out, with a medium level of anxiety, standing out as an enthusiastic and active person, among other aspects.

Tests of this kind, carried out by a professional, also help you to find out the important traits of your character. They help to detect those aspects of your way of being that make it difficult for you to adapt effectively to life and that, therefore, when evaluated, benefit the planning of advice to improve them. For example, Miriam could put her lack of concern, her dominance, her lack of acceptance of authority and her lack of group integration into the aspects to be worked on in a more positive way.

Therefore, as our early philosophers warned us, knowing yourself (your qualities or strengths and your defects, weaknesses or threats) is essential to achieve your happiness, because you acquire this awareness, but you also know the effect you have on other people.

Self-awareness is defined through the awareness you have of the way you are, understanding your positive and negative aspects. It is the



perception you have of yourself. Over the years, you may have heard comments about whether you are more like one parent or another, whether you are the same physically or have the same character as one of your siblings. Looking in the mirror of others helps you to know how you are and how you react, to know, after all, how you are. In the section on self-esteem, you will find more tips on this skill.

Answering this question can bring you closer to defining your qualities:

- Are you aware of the 3 most important personal qualities you have? Write them down.

In addition, this exercise of introspection is relevant for the preparation of job interviews where you have to express, in front of people who do not know you, what your skills are and what competences you will bring to the benefit of the company or organisation that is interested in recruiting you.

Marcos sent in his CV and was called for an interview. He was happy because he had prepared well (looking into the content of the company's website). After inquiring about his education and previous work experience, he was asked about what he could bring to the organisation and he described his top 3 qualities.

In addition, he was given examples of problematic situations that could arise in order to find out his point of view and how to solve them.

And finally, he had to verbalise where he would see himself in 5 years' time, outlining the role he could be undertaking in the same company with the learning acquired over time.

Personal and professional training is essential after adolescence, as it is a time of vocational definition. After your youth, the process of personality development should have been completed. If this does not happen, so-called personality disorders can occur, which are difficult to manage and which, in adult life, can lead to social and work-related problems, with paranoid, passive-aggressive, anxious-avoidant or narcissistic symptoms, among others.

2 How do I interact and who with? My social resources

Firstly, the relationships that most influence us in the first part of our lives are family relationships. There is no single model; there are multiple options and different experiences that can be experienced in this area.

Taking this diversity into account, in addition to your close family (referring to the group of people with your first blood ties), you also relate to your extended family (other relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins).

Secondly, we increase our social resources with people we know such as schoolmates or work colleagues, friends, partners or other people you meet when you are on a bus or in a shop, go to play football in the park or attend a conference¹⁰.

The difference between family and friends is the capacity you have to choose between them. You do not choose the people in your close or extended family; however, you have the capacity to select the type of friends you want to have, depending on your tastes, affinities and interests. Moreover, these friendships do not necessarily have to be stable over time, but can evolve according to context, but also in relation to the development of your way of being.

In relation to your family, it is interesting to observe and analyse the system of interactions that takes place between all its members, assessing how the changes or difficulties in the life of one of them affect the others. There are some negative situations that affect the family system:

- a child's failure in a particular subject
- the dismissal of a parent from employment
- the death of a family member
- physical or mental illness
- forced emigration to another country.

In addition, issues such as knowledge of your family's socio-economic status or intellectual level may act as relevant factors in choosing and focusing on your goals and could affect your academic or work performance.

¹⁰ The social relations referred to in this publication are all face-to-face.



Mateo, 25 years old, was born into a family with 9 siblings, unstructured and with a low socio-economic level. He lived with an alcoholic father and suffered abuse.

He did not have it easy, but although needing psychological care and being unable to detach himself completely from his nuclear family, he was able to form his own family, starting an independent and stable life. Thanks to his positive friendships and in particular to his girlfriend Alicia, Mateo was able to isolate the problems of his childhood, even though he was aware of them.

He focused on his character strengths such as perseverance, responsibility and affability, learned relaxation and cognitive psychological techniques that helped him to differentiate incorrect beliefs, distorted thoughts, unrealistic expectations and to analyse his thoughts, feelings and actions with the sole aim of having his own life and being happy.

It often seems that the system or society demands from people an adequate and necessary, but not flexible, performance in order to obtain effective results; however, conditions should be flexible for diversity, i.e. for the number of situations that affect a person on a daily basis and prevent him/her from acting in a stable and balanced way, taking into account that these two elements are essential for motivation, learning and adequate work performance.

Maite is 22 years old and comes to see a psychologist on the advice of her mother, who is worried about whether the boyfriend she is dating is a good person for her. In her family, Maite has a history of family members with depression and this situation has affected her mother. She doesn't think that she has any problems. She only recognises that she is very nervous and that perhaps she could improve her anxiety control and learn some psychological resources to improve her social relations both inside and outside her family. In this way, she uses the therapy to gain more self-awareness, self-esteem, social skills and self-control.

In addition to the influence of the family, friendships in youth are relevant to finding your own identity. One of the essential skills for human beings is to have at least one friend. Friendship is to relate to other people, to seek them out to talk to and share with them the activities we enjoy. Having friends is important, as humans are social beings. However,

although we think it is easy to initiate and maintain satisfying relationships with others, it is not; it is a learned social skill.

Friendship is a feeling that unites people and leads them to relate to each other in a special way. It responds to immediate needs for security, approval and rejection of loneliness, but it also brings us gratification: companionship and the feeling of being understood and loved.

Having friends helps you to improve your self-concept. You feel happy and satisfied so you are motivated to go to school or work, to go out at weekends with friends or enjoy a meal with your family. However, if you have low self-esteem and compare yourself with other people's appearance or way of being, you often feel sad or frustrated.

Occasionally, Maria would reminisce about school life. Marta was her best friend. For years, they had sworn eternal friendship, written diaries together and told each other many secrets. "We will be friends forever" - they said to each other. Physically they were complete opposites. Maria was of medium height, brown-haired and had brown eyes. She was, as the saying goes, an average girl. Marta, however, had always stood out for her height. She had a broad back, long legs and was one of the prettiest girls in the class. They always went out in a gang. For fun, when the weather was nice, they would ride their bikes out of town to find their secret hideout. And there they would play non-stop until late at night. "Come on, it's 10 o'clock and we have to go to dinner," one of the girls would say.

Normally, we choose as friends those with whom we identify because they are similar to us in some way, think alike or like the same things. We also like to choose the most popular in the group, those who are nice and supportive of others, and even those who complement us the most because they have the characteristics we lack.

To learn from a young age to create and maintain friendships, we must collaborate with our classmates or colleagues, pay full attention to homework, not hinder the play of others or not constantly draw attention to ourselves.

Answering this question can bring you closer to defining your relationships:

- Do you know what social resources (support available to you: family, friends and others) will help you achieve your goals?



The 3 basic keys to maintaining a friendship are: express acceptance in order to be accepted, don't express rejection in order not to be rejected, and trust yourself more.

In addition to being kind, we can also follow advice derived from Sonja Lyubomirsky's research that recommends expressing gratitude, cultivating optimism and learning to forgive.

In the following section, you will find more tips and methods on how to achieve this.

3 What do I do? The activities I do

Our daily activities are a reflection of what we do. Others see us in terms of the actions we take. It is therefore important to decide what you do, and to think about what you want others to see of you.

Through the activities we carry out in our daily lives, we learn different things. This does not mean that, in any case, what we learn is positive for our life or for our future, but simply that through what we do, we assimilate concepts, numbers and images.

In order to be able to make a decision about what you want to do, I'll show you a classification model¹¹ that can help you. If we differentiate what we do according to this type of learning, we can consider that we receive some kind of education. This education can be formal, informal and non-formal.

It is not the same as your father teaching you how to ride a bicycle, or joining a summer camp, or attending a language class at school. In all these activities, you get a kind of education and you learn, but the context in which you do it is not the same and the results you get are not the same.

Firstly, formal education, which is the education that takes place in schooling: school, high school, vocational qualifications and certifications, and university. A type of compulsory education (for some years and in the vast majority of countries), which is organised by institutions that must comply with regulations. After attendance at classes, students are assessed by teachers and a final result is produced in the form of a numerical mark.

In addition, among these formal activities, we could include all the time we spend on our daily work, which is necessary to earn a living and which occupies at least one third of our time.

Secondly, informal activities are all those that we learn from birth with our families and later with our friends or on our own. Here we can include what you learn when you cook, when you get together with cousins or neighbours to play board games, what you see and hear when you travel, conversations with your grandparents, taking care of your siblings, doing

¹¹ Another possible classification could be the one that differentiates what you do according to this trilogy: body, mind and spirit.



household chores, your dedication to drawing, reading or listening to music, etc.

Informal activities are where you generate affective learning. Through your family and friends, you get to understand the system of personal interactions where you will find different characters and ways of understanding the world.

Thirdly, there are other activities known as non-formal education. These include cultural, sports, leisure and volunteering programmes organised through associations and companies. It also includes your attendance at different types of training (conferences, courses, congresses, seminars or presentations).

Álvaro works as an intern at the university while he prepares his PhD (formal education), but he also goes to the gym during the week and goes out with his friends on weekends (informal education) and, in the time he has left, he coaches basketball to a group of primary school children (non-formal education).

If we have said that formal activity takes up one third of our time and another third we need to spend resting, we have the other third of our life available for informal and non-formal actions.

Throughout our whole life cycle, so-called *life long learning*, you will have to learn to manage your time properly, deciding your priorities in relation to these 3 types of education¹² .

I met Carmen when she was 30 years old and had been working as a factory worker for at least 12 years. She spent her time working, visiting her family, going out with friends and doing housework. However, an economic recession caused her to be made redundant and turned the organisation of her life's tasks "upside down". After returning home to her parents' house (she could no longer afford to pay her rent), she found herself lost and at a loss as to what to do. Her CV was not very good as she had generic work experience and had only completed her compulsory secondary education when she started working.

¹² More information in: Serrano Valenzuela, B. (2019). "Lo que meto en mi mochila. Discovering non-formal education. An approach from psychology". Ed. Certeza.

She was lucky enough to have her friend Isabel who invited her to participate in an association, attending an activity on a Saturday afternoon and, as she had nothing to lose, she decided to join her. After participating in more than 3 different sessions, she thought about signing up to volunteer in the organisation, where she accompanied people with mental disabilities in a free-time programme (outings to the park, to the cinema, to exhibitions, etc.).

Carmen thought: “isn't it better to leave the house with Isabel, instead of lying on the couch watching TV or scrolling through my mobile screens, thinking about whether I'll get another job soon?”

And she went on to verbalise her story in first person: "From my participation during different days in the association, what started as a sporadic activity of non-formal education became a stimulating learning that motivated me to start studying again. And I started a vocational training degree in social integration. I was encouraged because I discovered that I was happy helping other people. And the good thing is that I then found a job that was more fulfilling than the factory job and at the same time I could continue volunteering.

When formal education or work fails, it is better to engage in non-formal activities in which you continue to improve your CV or contribute to society, or informal ones in which you lend a hand to your needy relatives, rather than staying at home brooding over your bad luck. Keeping your spirits up and staying active is essential advice in times of difficulty.

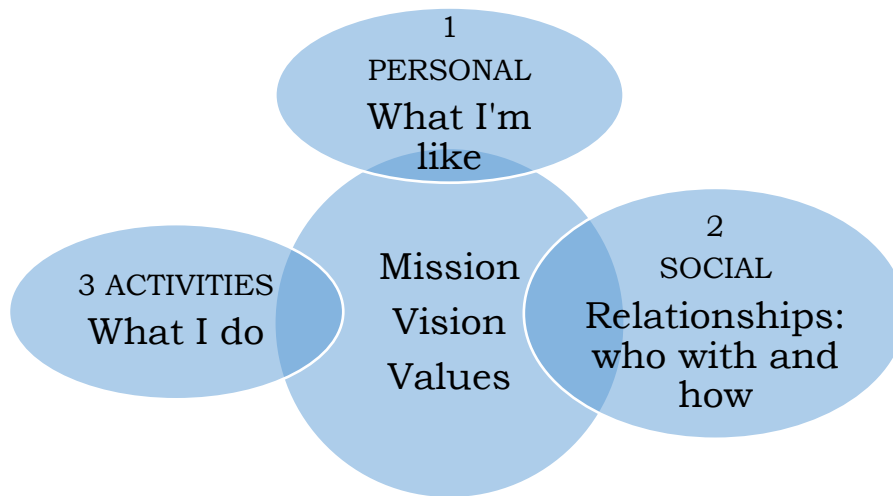
Answering this question can bring you closer to defining the actions you want to engage in:

- Have you thought about the 5 activities you are going to do in the coming year?

With Carmen's story we can conclude the first part of this publication. And we do so with a graph, in which you will find the outline of everything we have discussed so far.



I create my life with quality and I set my project in motion.



Defining your personal strategy happens when you think about your mission or goals, when you reflect on your vision or how you see your life in a few years and decide what your values or guiding principles are, as you have seen in the tasks of quality design 1.

There must be coherence between "I create my life with quality" and "Implementing my project". According to the personal and social resources you have, you get down to work and carry out the necessary activities aligned with and based on your mission, vision and values.

Below, even if you still don't make sense of these exercises, you can find the necessary tools that will help you design and execute your personal strategy to carry out your activities effectively, with the sole objective of continuing to learn about more tools that can help to make you happy.

Quality design 2

CREATE A PLAN TO CHOOSE YOUR *LIKES*



1.- Are you aware of the 3 most important personal qualities you have?
Write them down

Would you be able to draw a picture of yourself? Draw it and describe it

Have you asked the people who love you what you are like? Write it down

2.- Do you know what social resources (support available to you: family, friends and others) will help you achieve your goals?

3.- Have you thought about the 5 activities you are going to carry out during the next year?

Can you differentiate which of your activities are formal, non-formal or informal?

PART II: LEARNING TO BE HAPPY

To be happy is an aspiration of all human beings. It is a constant desire that is present regardless of where you were born. However, the perception and experience of this feeling of happiness differs from person to person, and there are a variety of internal and external factors that can increase or decrease your feeling of happiness. In this second part, I will outline some learning tools that you can learn and develop to make progress in improving this feeling.

There are different theoretical approaches and methodologies in the field of psychology that address the disorders that people experience. Rocío Fernández Ballesteros¹³ is one of the authors who has designed methods of intervention for problems that come from behavioural psychology. She focuses on the solution of difficult situations that happen to us, takes into account the characteristics and environment of the person and uses qualitative and quantitative assessment and intervention techniques and resources. We can say that it is the closest thing to a scientific method that we can apply in our daily lives.

But there are also other authors such as Ellis and Beck who introduce us to other types of psychological theories¹⁴ adding to the previous model the cognitive and affective part and creating learning tools in which our thoughts and emotions mediate our daily behaviour.

Understanding each of these sections will give you the key to what you can do in your daily life to understand and be more aware of what is happening to you. It is a method that helps to analyse and to think of alternative solutions, because when you are aware of what is happening to you, you have the capacity to design other responses and resolve your conflicts.

¹³ Psychologist at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, specialist in publications related to psychological and behavioural assessment.

¹⁴ In the field of psychology, you can find a multitude of explanatory theories of behaviour.



Analysing what happens to me

Before we start treatment, psychologists collect information to analyse what is happening to the person who is telling them about their problem. It is a method that, in the first place, tends to look for what is happening in the environment before the appearance of the situation that worries us, that is to say, the so-called precursors.

This is the basic observation scheme in this type of assessment: B-O-R-C-R and it is called functional behaviour analysis. This is what the acronym stands for:

Background-Organism-Response -Consequences-Relationship

I am not asking you to be a professional psychologist, but I do want to explain some aspects that can help you understand the sequence of what happens to you: what you think, what you feel and what you do. In this way, you will be able to see why you finally react the way you do, or even be able to observe, analyse and understand the behaviour of the people around you.

So, we start with the **precursors** that have to do with the causes. This is everything that happens before the appearance of the behaviour that makes you uncomfortable. The cause is usually never a single cause but is part of a set of factors that come from different sources: from your own organism, from the people around you or from your physical environment.

You may feel upset because you are in pain, you are bored, you are sad or nervous, a colleague is bothering you, your parents are fighting, you have a physiological need, you are in a place where you are not comfortable, your boss has changed and you don't like them, you don't feel like studying, or you are uncomfortable when your mother tells you to do chores that you don't feel like doing.

Secondly, we refer to the **organism**. It has to do with the way you are, what you are like as a person, what your personality characteristics are and what your family and personal history is. All these aspects were discussed in the previous section when we dealt with personal and social resources.

Understanding yourself is essential in determining what happens to you. And when you are young you are constantly changing because you are evolving. Therefore, the exercise of knowing your strengths and weaknesses every 6 months will help you to detect why your positive and negative reactions are the way they are. And, above all, you will be able to see those factors of your character that you need to change because they are detrimental to your daily life.

The **answer** is the behaviour we are analysing. It is something you do that you know is hurting you, because you would like to improve it, because it is affecting you and preventing you from achieving your goals.

All your responses can be explained through 3 aspects: cognitive, physiological and motor, or what you think, what you feel and what you do.

First of all, what you think. It is a first instant in which you can detect your cognitive part that has to do with your thoughts and your way of reasoning. It can take the form of rumination, repeated thoughts, self-evaluation, detection of your complexes, thinking that you are inferior and, in general, everything that causes you to find yourself in a negative vicious circle.

Secondly, what you feel. It is a second instant in which you can detect the physiological element that has to do with what that affect your organism. It can manifest itself in the form of sweating, rapid heartbeat, rapid breathing or blushing, chest tightness or somatization, among others. In addition, our response also generates negative emotions¹⁵, which are the ones that we feel as disturbing to our well-being: fear, sadness, anger and disgust.

Andrea's parents have just separated. After hearing this information, she has felt her whole body speed up (breathing and heartbeat), but she has also experienced emotions of rage, anger and sadness. Although she has lived through a year of intense arguments and she sometimes thought that this could happen, she doesn't like it at all. She had the feeling that it would be solved. At the moment, she would like to hit someone or break something and she just wants to be alone and cry.

And finally, what you do. It is a later moment when you can observe your motor part that has to do with your performance when it involves

¹⁵ Defined by the American psychologist Paul Ekman in the 20th century.



movement or, on the contrary, blocking or inactivity. This translates into different behaviours such as hitting, shouting, tics, crying, swearing or shaking or, on the contrary, being blocked, inactive and doing nothing.

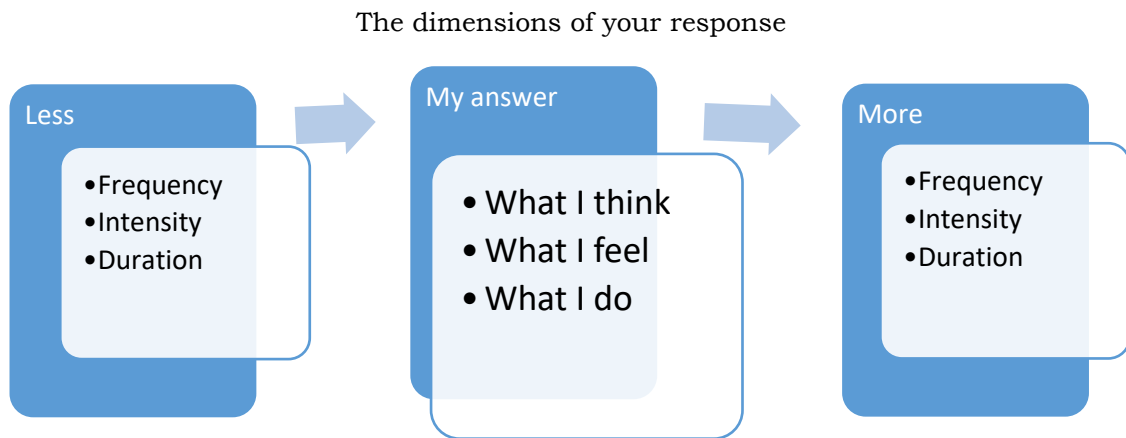
Three years after her parents' separation, Andrea does not know what is happening to her, but she is uncomfortable with the situation she has had to live through and feels anxious. She thought the world was a happy place, but this situation has created a feeling of lack of control that three years later she doesn't know how to resolve. But not only that, there is also her sister, her group of friends, the fact that she doesn't like her body, the social networks and the boy she likes who won't even look at her. In fact, she finds herself blocked and really, even when asked, she doesn't know how to express herself. She knows that others worry about her, but after so long, what she feels inside is a tangle of different feelings related to so many accumulated thoughts that she wouldn't even know how to begin to explain them.

If you reflect on this section, you will realise that what you do is the most important thing about people. It is what you see and it is really the only thing that counts, because no one is a fortune teller and therefore, no one can know what you think or what you feel if you don't tell them. Because of its relevance and because it is part of the sequence of what I think, what I feel and what I do, we leave this section for the end.

What we think and what we feel belongs to our inner self and what we do is part of the outer self. In the latter we can integrate our behaviour, but also our verbalisations (what we say), the image we display, what we express through written words, our gestures and all those movements we make with our body.

But we must also add other components that affect our response, aspects that we have already pointed out in the sequence of health and illness. These are its dimensions: frequency, intensity and duration. Observing these three aspects of what you think, what you feel and what you do is fundamental to know if we are really facing a problem. And if we detect that there is one, we can discover whether the problem is easy or difficult to solve.

In this diagram, you will see how the three dimensions behave:



Consequences are everything that happens after the behaviour that is causing us problems. It usually refers to how the people around us react and even how you react to your own difficulty. It can be a friend's reaction, your father's response, a co-worker's behaviour, a teacher's attitude or the ignorance or lack of response (ignorance) of any of them.

The **relationship** is determined at the end of this whole observational chain. It is the one that tells us why our problems are maintained and perpetuated and gives us clues as to how to change them. It is this last section that tells us why the behaviour that harms us is maintained.

Adrián is studying an intermediate vocational training course. In the school classroom he constantly behaves inappropriately, calling attention to himself by lightly touching his classmates, making noises, moving his chair, etc.

The teacher gives him repeated punishments for every behaviour he engages in. However, on the day when Adrian behaves appropriately, no one talks to him, smiles at him or draws positive attention to him.

Adrian, because of his immature personality and low self-esteem, needs contact with adults, but when he behaves well he does not receive his reward (his reinforcement), the one that brings him happiness.

Therefore, he detects, analyses and observes that the teacher's attention is a gift for him.

Adrian, not otherwise rewarded, unconsciously decides to continue bothering the others.



1 What I think

*The diary*¹⁶

"I've been going out with Alberto for a month. I've been very nervous for a few days and I've been thinking a lot about the same thing (about Alberto); it's all so strange, I'm ready to leave him because I see that it's better on the one hand, but on the other I can't see it clearly. What if I don't find anyone better? If I meet him tomorrow I'm going to tell him that I want to break up, because although it seems silly I've been thinking about it for a long time. I still don't see the point of being together, especially when I don't feel what I thought I was going to feel. I know that loving someone is much more than that and that we can just be friends, but ok. "I'm sorry for making you wait, but I had to get to the point where I could make myself clear. I know that I'll regret it later because I like you even if not completely, but I prefer to leave it because if I don't, it might end up worse and I don't want to do things that go against my way of thinking. I want to act according to my thoughts. I don't understand my feelings very well because they keep changing and that's a sign that I'm not mature yet and neither are you. It's better to leave it and we'll see.

"I also feel very strange now and I don't know what's wrong with me; I do a bit, but I'd like to be able to go out with the person I'm going with, but until I find him, I don't know who he might be. Well, the thing is that I have to study and I have to forget about everything else".

"I would like to always be happy, but there are times when I need to feel bad; I don't know. The worst thing for me is that I never know how to explain what is happening to me and when I tell it badly, I always think that nobody understands me because of the conclusions they draw, but it's my fault. My friends have asked me about it, but what am I going to tell them if, in reality, I don't even understand myself? I want this incomprehension and indecision to end soon... I'm already crying, if I'm an imbecile, but the worst thing is that I'm a child and indecisive. Is it good to want to be a little independent from people? Maybe it's a form of evasion and what I have to do is dissimulate and open up more to others?".

¹⁶ Short extracts of first-person thoughts, written in a diary.

I can't control my negative thoughts

First of all, you think what you think. It is a first instant in which you can detect your cognitive part that has to do with your thoughts and your way of reasoning. It can take the form of rumination, repeated thoughts, self-evaluation, detection of your complexes, thinking that you are inferior and, in general, everything that causes you to find yourself in a negative vicious circle.

Thinking is an essential human cognitive activity. The feeling of lack of control of your thoughts is generated by the effect of the 3 dimensions described above: more frequency, more intensity and/or more duration.

You know your negative thoughts (those that prevent you from being happy and living a functionally effective life) are frequent when you measure how many times they come up every day, every week or every month.

I first met Fran when he was admitted to the clinic with a very severe anxiety disorder caused by his tics. What prevented him from leading a normal life was the very high frequency of his behaviour, which consisted of saying prayers for every negative news or event he heard during the day, whether it was trivial conversation or news from the media. This was one of his tics, although he also had others. However, this behaviour alone consumed a large part of his daily routine, as it affected the time available for other tasks and also his socialisation. If he did not engage in this "irrational" behaviour, it caused him a very high level of anxiety.

It is also possible to know if your thoughts are intense when you realise that they generate such a strong negative feeling that it is unbearable. In addition, you will know if they are long-lasting by detecting their temporality, defining whether they have occurred more than a day ago, more than a month ago or more than six months ago.

These negative thoughts can take different forms, and we are going to discuss 3 of them: you are a pessimist, you have irrational beliefs or you generate some distorted thoughts¹⁷.

On one hand, we can see the glass half empty and be pessimistic. Pessimism can be part of our character traits, but it can also be modelled

¹⁷ These two concepts are the brainchild of psychologists Beck and Ellis.



and we can learn it from our context. This happens to us, simply put, when we attribute our successes or what we do well to other people's causes and attribute what we do badly to ourselves. Along with this negative attribution, thinking about what happens to you, you may detect a lack of control in your life and think that you are not being effective in your daily adaptation.

On the other hand, these thoughts, when they are irrational beliefs, can take the form of fear. And fear to an intense degree generates the so-called phobias, which are uncontrollable fears that make you nervous. And these phobias can be specific and be related to an object, or an animal (arachnophobia) or be linked to a situation that makes us uncomfortable and paralyzes us and that, therefore, we want to avoid (school or social phobia).

In addition, our cognition includes distorted thoughts and anticipates that the object we are afraid of has already arrived and generates the same anxiety as if it were already near you... just by thinking about it. At other times, the fortune teller's error occurs. This occurs when we anticipate negative comments that other people have not made; we interpret them through looks; we invent them and consequently, we act.

I met Laura, referred by her parents, when she didn't want to go back to her school anymore. She had a school phobia caused by *bullying*. She attributed it to her appearance as she was an obese child still growing up. What prevented her from living a normal life was not this; it was her fear that was blocking her, generating repeated thoughts, anticipating all the negative things that would happen when she finally decided to leave her house in the village to go to school.

This lack of control of thoughts in the form of pessimism, irrational beliefs or distorted thoughts is harmful to you, as it makes you feel sad, have low self-esteem and have uncontrollable fears.

To find out how to overcome them, we initially explain these 2 methods: improving your self-esteem and tips to improve your depression. However, throughout the book and especially in the third part, you will find more tools to help you.

IN POSITIVE

LIVE IN SUCH A WAY
THAT YOU WILL NEVER
BE ASHAMED OF
YOURSELF
OF WHETHER WHAT YOU
DO OR SAY IS SPREAD
ALL OVER THE WORLD,

EVEN IF WHAT IS
SHARED IS NOT TRUE.



Learning to have self-esteem

One of the most powerful strategies for happiness is to achieve a proper sense of self-esteem. Self-esteem is an attitude, a feeling that comes from one's self-worth. Self-esteem is learned from birth, but it is from the age of 5-6 that self-concept begins to form.

When you are a child, the role of the adults around you is crucial in fostering positive self-esteem. Adults can build a child's self-esteem in different ways: praising the things a child does well, valuing his or her achievements, giving affection, playing with them, giving attention and telling them that they are important.

The adult can also build the child's self-esteem in a group. This is one of the greatest rewards: saying in front of the other children how well they have done something. It is important that the child hears phrases like: "Very good, what a nice drawing you have done"; "You are very strong, that's why you go down the slide so well"; "Your brother is very happy because you have lent him your toy".

However, the attitude of the adults around us can also undermine the child's self-esteem with their continuous words or actions: saying that he is bad and good for nothing, saying in front of the group what he has done wrong and that he will never be capable of anything, insulting him, hitting him, not paying attention to him and not playing with him.

As we can see, when we are small we are negatively affected by hearing phrases like these on a daily basis: "you are lazy, your parents can't take it anymore, we don't know what to do with you, you never obey, you never stop for a moment, you always hit your brother, he does better than you, we are going to leave you to live at school, etc.".

If the adult who accompanies you and is supposed to educate you, values himself, is calm and relaxed and is usually happy, you learn this attitude. But if this adult does not value himself or herself, plays the victim, complains about the partner, shouts or is sad, you will learn to imitate this attitude and you may behave in a similar way in the present and also in the future when you manage your own life.

Not everything that happens to us in childhood (both the good and the bad) is a determining factor. We have lived through it, it has affected us,

but it does not prevent us from learning to live our lives and to get to know other models of behaviour.

You are now young and therefore the role of the adult in your life should no longer be so relevant as you are able to acquire sufficient resources to reward yourself without depending on others.

Hugo has started his first day at work. He gets up happy and gets ready in time to arrive on time. He was taken on after passing 3 job interviews in which he showed his best version.

Although he has the uncertainty of not knowing what his first day will be like or what he will have to do, he feels happy and excited. He knows that whatever happens, as he has self-esteem, he has the personal resources to overcome the different obstacles that may arise.

When a young person is happy and feels good, they have self-esteem. He likes his body and what he is like. We have seen that every young person has qualities and defects, good and bad characteristics. If you set your mind to it, you can learn to be better: you can be nicer, more studious, responsible and committed, or help more at home and be less angry.

It is as simple as following these assumptions, which are also depicted in the graph below:

- if you do things well, others are happier with you,
- if you share your things with others, you have more friends,
- if you study more, you learn more and get better marks,
- if you obey more at home, you improve everyone's happiness,
- if you're a good friend, you get picked in the games and get called to go out.



Examples to increase your self-esteem: positive vicious circle



To improve in this type of thinking, you should integrate different phrases that you should constantly say to yourself without waiting for others to tell you: "congratulations, you have done well", "I am my best friend", "I am neither better nor worse than others but I am different", "I have defects, but if I am aware of them I can also improve them", thinking at the same time about all those good aspects that you have in order to maintain them.

When María and her friends turned 12, that hiding place was no longer meaningful. In the village, at that age, it was time to join the peña. This was a group of friends or that got together to share a place and organise activities, especially in the summer and during the village festivals.

So boys and girls started going out together. Maria didn't like it because Marta was bossy and always wanted to be the one in charge. So one day María got tired and without saying anything to Marta, she joined Ana, Teresa and Lucía who continued to go cycling and to the swimming pool. They didn't mind so much not being the organisers of the parties.

Maria's character was also average. A cheerful, quiet, honest girl who got average marks, neither very good nor very bad. As she was also the middle child in her family, she went almost unnoticed everywhere. "She's a very good girl, she doesn't do anything wrong" - her mother said.

She, however, saw how her siblings took all the attention from her parents. Felipe was always praised for his studies and Rebeca because, as they said, she was naughty and they had to constantly remind her

how to behave. "Rebeca, the room has not been tidied up again," her mother would shout at her.

Those nights Maria asked Adelia: "Why do my parents only listen to others? Shouldn't it be the other way around? I am compliant and obedient, but nobody says anything to me, neither good nor bad. Sometimes I think it's better to behave badly so that they pay more attention to you.

One day, when the 5 friends were settled in their secret lair and playing "truth or dare", a group of rude boys appeared, including some of their classmates. They insulted them and wanted to take away the soft drink bottles they had refilled at home. Maria felt terrible, she didn't know how to defend herself. She felt her stomach shrink and wanted to run away.

And suddenly, with all the calmness in the world, he heard Marta saying to them: "I know you and your parents. My uncle is a policeman and he can come and get you if you don't get out of here right now, you envious children. She got up from the ground and as tall as she was at the age of 12 and with such a big body, the children didn't hesitate for a second and ran back down the hill. In fact, some of them slipped and started rolling down to the bottom. We ended up laughing our heads off and praising Marta's brave behaviour.

After that episode and others that followed over the years, Maria decided that she didn't like the way she was. In the evening, she told Adelia that she didn't want to be so shy, that she didn't want to turn so red and that she had to dare to say what she thought.

And from that day on, she dared a little more, but she must have overdone it because her mother punished her for talking back and insulting her sister. "How difficult it was to find the middle ground between daring to say things and expressing them well, without insulting and without feeling that she was being trampled on," she thought. That feeling happened to her on many occasions after that day.

Like Maria, when you feel insecure, it is normal to compare yourself with others and think that they are better than you. Becoming self-confident is a process that starts at puberty and is achieved in different ways: by observing, learning from those you choose as role models, reading and setting small goals that bring you closer and closer to your goal.



Every time you start a task that makes you uncomfortable, you should write on your coloured cards those positive thoughts that will help you overcome it. Positive messages that work for you should appear on these cards, sequenced like this:

- before I start (I can do it, if others do it I can do it too)
- while I do it (I'm already doing it, it's not that hard, I've already started and I can feel good)
- at the end (I am happy for having dared, good work, little by little you get the achievements, I am ready to face the next challenge).

When you gain good self-esteem over time, it will be all to your advantage because you will achieve:

- ✓ better personal adjustment (being happy with yourself and being more stable),
- ✓ greater social adaptation (being able to relate to others),
- ✓ stable autonomy (trying to do things on your own and becoming more independent).

But you will continue to earn the *boosters*¹⁸ generated by having good self-esteem, as they will keep coming for the different contexts in which you move because of that:

- ✚ you will be more responsible (being consistent and aware of the consequences of your actions and making your own decisions)
 - ✚ reduce your problems (not standing out for bad behaviour, dialogue and being conciliatory)
- you will improve your academic or work performance (being motivated to study and learn, to attend school or work or being proactive for constant improvement in your company).

¹⁸ Booster dose

Tips for coping with depression

For this section, I have chosen an interview with Elena, a 16-year-old student interested in youth mental health in the aftermath of the pandemic. This is the topic she chose for her cross-disciplinary baccalaureate project: "I chose this topic to complete my research work, because I like psychology and I have also realised that young people who are going through bad times need support resources to get out of difficult situations".

In this interview, 4 relevant themes were discussed:

- the pandemic situation
- the visibility of mental health in today's world
- tips for helping other sad people
- the necessary advice for you to find the solution to your negative life feeling.

THE PANDEMIC Why do you personally think that cases of depression and suicide have increased so dramatically during the pandemic?

The pandemic, and in particular confinement, has not been a trivial issue. For a significant percentage of the population, it has meant enduring or suffering extreme reactions and responses; for others, uncertainty and fear have been experienced although we have been kept informed by the media and social networks. Moreover, in many cases, the consequences have led to illness and death in people close to us.

Our country, in a 21st century welfare society, and in the specific case of youth, has generally facilitated the lives of many people who, in their early years of life, have not had to face major difficulties. As a result, we have not been educated in living in the present, about tolerance of frustration or resilience in the face of serious or unexpected life circumstances. The experience (hearing, thinking and feeling) of these unpleasant events generates, per se, in people feelings of nervousness, sadness and difficulty to feel pleasure in carrying out daily activities; all of them, incipient symptoms of depressive disorders.

What brings young people into this mindset?



Confinement meant for the young people a life of captivity, without stimulation, without a face-to-face social life and without the opportunity to continue their normal routine as they had conceived it up to now.

Youth is characterised as a period of learning in the constant search for identity in which it is necessary to be in a daily social group which the young person feels part of and which they need to claim their role as a "person in search of autonomy", as opposed to the relationship they have with their parents.

Losing the privilege of leaving home to go to school, work or university or going out at the weekend or not being able to participate in extracurricular activities, generates a feeling of frustration and helplessness, as well as a setback both in cognitive learning (of school knowledge and basic mental processes) and in social skills. For example, young university students verbalise their current difficulty in concentrating and paying attention to schoolwork¹⁹.

What has the pandemic caused in terms of young people's mental health?

It has led to an increase in the negative characteristics of this period of life, such as insecurity, fear, inferiority complexes, indecision, low self-esteem, anxiety and feelings of loneliness.

However, there are also some protective factors that have been able to alleviate this affectation in many cases, such as the following:

- ✓ Personality type
- ✓ Reactions and positive messages from their family
- ✓ Maintaining jobs
- ✓ The absence of serious illness or death in their environment

VISIBILITY Why is mental health more visible today?

It has become socially widespread that going to see a psychologist does not imply that you have a serious mental disorder. You can receive help at specific moments in your life when you experience situations that are more complicated to face, such as: separation of parents, anxiety before exams, death of a family member or personal self-demand, among others.

¹⁹ Visit the ACPUA website: Covid Impact Study

The globalisation of the media and the information drive of associations working in mental health have also favoured this visibility.

Did depression not exist 50 years ago or was it simply not talked about?

Mental disorders are categorised in two manuals called DSM and ICD, which set out the universal criteria that guide professionals in making psychological and psychiatric diagnoses. In the first editions, childhood depression as such did not appear. Moreover, 50 years ago we were in another century, in another context in which some of today's problems did not exist and, in relation to communication, we did not use today's technologies to share information as globally or as quickly.

However, the social context is changing and modifies the development and symptomatology of some disorders and, consequently, the edition of these manuals. For example, the frequency of the appearance of eating disorders in Europe and Africa is totally different and, in the case in question, we have detected that childhood depression is now a fact although, on many occasions, it does not manifest itself in the same way as in adults.

FAMILY/FRIENDS' HELP AND THERAPY How to help a loved one with depression or suicidal thoughts?

On a day-to-day level, patience, understanding and accompaniment are required, not only at specific moments, but also in the long term.

Specifically, we should not constantly ask questions about how you feel or how you are, which expect yes or no, good or bad answers. However, we can ask open questions (which require longer answers) and tell or explain aspects of ourselves, seeking attempts to get interest, distraction, a smile, a laugh or a chuckle and improve motivation.

It is a good idea to try, at the pace of the person concerned, to accompany them in certain activities that motivate them, according to their tastes, such as: music, sport, cooking, reading, excursions or travel, for example.

It is appropriate to call associations that deal specifically with this type of disorder, but also to contact the city's leisure time organisations that offer activities and social groups, which are highly positive for young people.

It is appropriate to seek professional help for the young person, but also for the family. There are activities or therapies aimed at young people to



combat depression or suicidal thinking. There are different types of therapies that, carried out by competent professionals in psychology and psychiatry, have been scientifically proven to be effective.

Specifically, we can briefly explain the effectiveness of rational emotive-behavioural therapy, which intervenes in at least 4 relevant aspects:

- ✓ It contrasts negative thoughts,
- ✓ It applies techniques to combat anxiety,
- ✓ It trains in social skills and emotional intelligence, helping, among other things, to verbalise our everyday thoughts and feelings in an appropriate way,
- ✓ It proposes, together with the young person, realistic and evaluable programmes of activities (formal, non-formal and informal).

If drugs are used (their relevance is assessed by the psychiatrist), we must remember that their effectiveness is not immediate. The adjustment of the medicines in the body does not take place in a single day, but requires a little more time until the person perceives that his or her mood has improved, provided that they keep to the prescription.

It is important to call on governments to increase public resources for psychological care for young people, ensuring immediate attention (without waiting lists) and regular appointments. This would imply improving resources in public health (for cases already detected), but also in schools and universities where, with an intervention in primary prevention, many specific situations could be alleviated (with the consequent saving of economic costs for all and suffering for families).

SELF-HELP How can I help myself cope with depression?

The 9 tips for DEPRESSION:

- ✓ Decide on your own acceptance of your suffering.
- ✓ Understand your needs, being aware of what is happening to you (in relation to the cycle of thinking, feeling and acting).
- ✓ Think about which family members or friends you can share your distress with, accepting their help and thanking them for it.
- ✓ Book an appointment with a mental health professional.
- ✓ Express in some way (words, music, painting) what is happening to you.
- ✓ Learn to differentiate when your symptoms are mild and you can cope and when you really need help.

- ✓ Imagine your future in a positive way, feeling the improvement of your feelings, emotions and affections.
- ✓ Organise a simple diary in which activities to be carried out, those completed and the level of satisfaction with them are recorded.
- ✓ Don't look for the solution on social media.

Why is it important to talk about depression?

Talking about depression is very important, always and not only once, but many times. Getting out of this situation is a process with ups and downs and it is a period in which young people should feel accompanied. A professional, a member of the family and a friend can be the people of reference for the expression of your fears and desires. And above all, don't throw in the towel thinking that you are a bore and that the people around you don't want to listen to you.

How does a person eventually overcome depression?

When they feel joy or pleasure again in relation to everyday situations in their life, when the constant sadness disappears (although not the problems) and when they are able to set realistic and exciting goals for the immediate future.

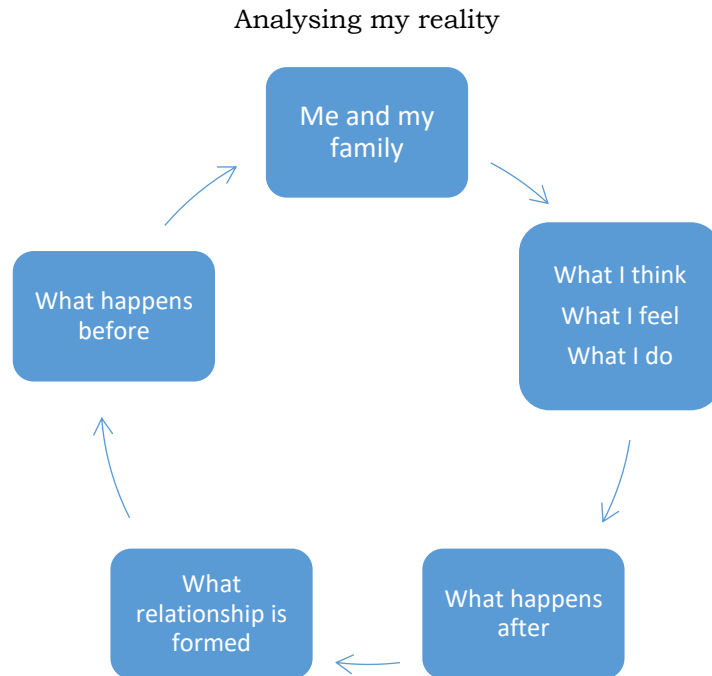
Olga is happy again. She has been hiding at home for months, so she wouldn't be seen crying. She didn't know how to get over the break-up with her boyfriend. She was totally out of her mind. They had been together for more than 6 years and shared common friends. Although it is clear to her that it is better this way, it is difficult for her to resume a life that will now be totally different. Everything makes her feel insecure.

However, what seemed to have no solution, with the passage of time and with effort on her part to move forward, not to throw in the towel and to face daily situations by her own choice, she feels happy again. She does not feel the happiness of before when naivety impregnated everything; now that she has suffered and overcome sadness, she feels that she has matured, knowing that life changes and that enjoying every little detail fills you with peace and stability.

To conclude this section, it is important to remember that the phrases that we make up in our thoughts to improve our self-esteem,



optimism²⁰ and self-concept, can be created and developed throughout life.



We'll then go on to describe everything that happens to our response, breaking down each of the sections to continue to generate self-help tips to prompt your reflection for constant improvement. Specifically, for each of the sections, you will get an excerpt from a diary of a young person conveying their concerns, then begin the negative section entitled "I'm not in control" to continue accessing improvements.

If we learn to observe this whole process, we will be able to detect where we are failing and remedy it. In the "positive" section you will find the learning tools you need to begin to change the negative aspects of what you think, feel and do that are detrimental to your life.

²⁰ See the research references by Santos Orejudo (University of Zaragoza).

Quality design 3

COLLECT YOUR GOOD SELF- ESTEEM BOOSTERS



1.- Write your sentences: the ones you need to tell yourself everything you do well and everything good you have (=what you are worth, i.e. your self-esteem).

What I do well (skills, abilities, hobbies)

The good things I have (people, things, qualities)

2.- When you detect your negative thoughts, what strategies do you use to avoid suffering?

What do you say to yourself to help you get on with your daily life?

What actions do you take to distract yourself from the negative in the present moment?

2 What I feel

*The diary*²¹

"I went home thoughtful and lonely. Why, you may ask? Quite simply, I felt that Elena didn't value me and was a bit selfish. Yes, her golden dream will be music and she will live for it, but she also knows how much I'm looking forward to being useful in that field too, and I go totally unnoticed. She always has a go at me for how excited she is that I get excited when she teaches me her songs, but what about me?, Don't I need praise in that respect too? I'm not looking for a reward, but I do want to be taken into consideration.

Perhaps I have been too abrupt in my reaction today, and I am discovering new things every day. All I could think of was to go downstairs, shout "asshole" and throw my books on the floor just like a child.

"Something seems to be missing in this family. And that something is called communication. Why? The answer seems to be clear and difficult to answer. We eat together, we're together and we don't talk. We seem to be afraid to confront each other. And so, I perceive that conversations take place two by two that will never be complete.

"My grandmother has just fallen ill and I am very sad. I'm going to pray to the Virgin she loves so much to take care of her. I was listening to her just now before they took her away in the wheelchair and she was rambling on and saying very strange things. She was talking very strangely, although she didn't have her false teeth in so she was just clicking between her remaining teeth. I thought she looked so ugly with those beautiful blue eyes of hers. I couldn't resist kissing her on the forehead and holding her hand tightly. She was hot, very hot and her breathing was labored.

The other day I was walking down the street looking at the elderly and I realised that I felt sorry to see them; that it was sad that strong, young people were gradually becoming wrinkled and *self-effacing*. You have to have a very strong and fighting spirit to keep your self-confidence at such an advanced age.

²¹ Short extracts of feelings in the first person, written in a diary.



I can't control my anxiety

Secondly, what you feel always comes out. It's a second instant in which you can detect your physiological part that has to do with the effects that affect your organism. It can manifest itself in the form of sweating, tachycardia, agitated breathing, blushing, chest tightness or somatization, among others.

Feeling is an essential physiological activity of the human being. The feeling of lack of control of your feelings is generated by the effect of the 3 dimensions described above: more frequency, more intensity and/or more duration.

You know your negative feelings (those that prevent you from being happy and living a functionally effective life) are frequent when you measure how many times they come up every day, every week or every month.

I met Rebeca when she came to the clinic to report a mild anxiety disorder related to sweating caused by her profession. She had just passed the competitive examination to become a lawyer a few months earlier.

However, what should be joy for her was tension. She felt that, although theoretically prepared, she did not have sufficient personal competences skills to deal with the legal cases she had to work on.

The very thought of the courtroom, with her being the main focus of attention, made her not only sweat, but also her chest tighten and she had difficulty breathing.

It is also possible to know if they are intense when you realise that they produce such a strong negative feeling that it is unbearable. In addition, you will know if they are long-lasting by detecting their temporality, defining whether they have occurred more than a day ago, more than a month ago or more than six months ago.

We all sometimes find ourselves in situations that generate an uncomfortable internal feeling that makes us think that we will not be able to control it. Feeling nervous is adaptive, i.e. it helps us to be awake and active in order to be able to cope with everyday situations in life.

Feeling nervous is normal. Feeling nervous is synonymous with feeling stressed, feeling anxious and feeling distressed, although we can say that between the three there is a progression from less to more.

The anxiety continuum



We often say that some stressful situations or stimuli have made us feel nervous. There are both positive and negative situations that make us feel nervous. We usually think that only aspects such as taking an exam, having a job interview scheduled, having to say something negative to your partner, having to be at home when the situation with your parents is uncomfortable, an illness, accident or death of a loved one are important aspects that trigger tension in us.

As discussed in the previous section, being nervous about what is going on in your environment is the result of:

a.- What happens in your thinking.

Leyre gets nervous when she remembers what she suffered when her father died, when she thinks of his absence and how much she misses him.

b.- What happens in your body.

I am worried and feel anxious and stressed about my weight gain. I know I'm the size I want to be, but in some shops I can't even get my trousers to fit through my calf.

Evolutionary changes, especially when you are growing up, can provoke strange and uncontrollable feelings: those related to your silhouette, such as having wider hips, short stature, little muscle or a lot of acne.

c.- How you act and how you don't act (your performance and your passivity).

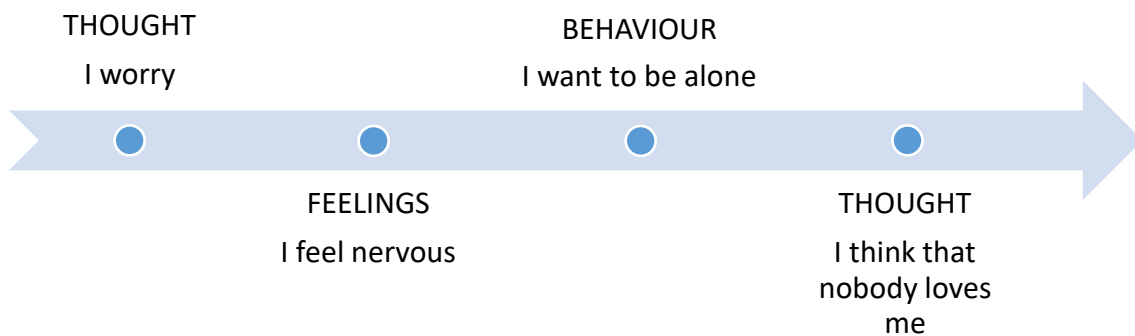


I would like to meet up with friends more. They hardly call me anymore because since I broke up with Diego I've been a bit left behind and now I'm ashamed to get close to the group.

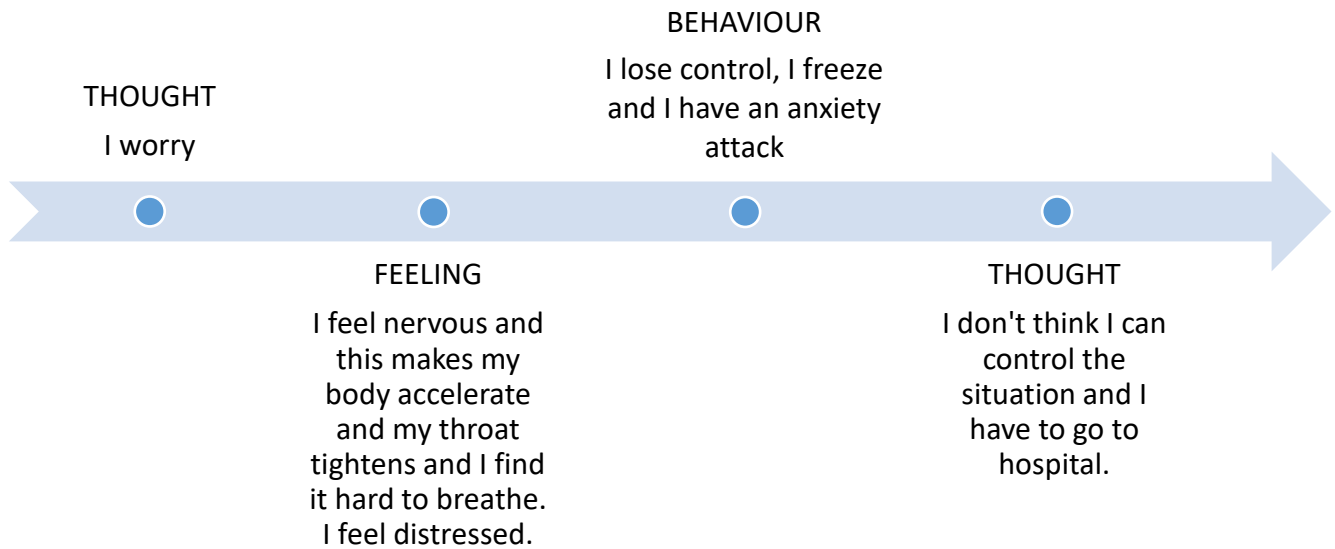
Positive aspects or good news also create tension, such as being lucky and winning the lottery, preparing for a trip, being chosen as the best in the class to present a project or being selected for a job interview.

Sometimes, the simplest and most punctual aspects that occur in our daily lives, such as neighbours banging on the floor, hearing someone in your family chewing or the noise of construction work, affect us and trigger exaggerated reactions of anger and lack of control.

The way you mentally process everything that happens to you, thinking about your problems makes you even more nervous. It's a vicious circle that leads to irritability or isolation.



Being aware of the vicious circle you are in can help you detect what is going on and discover where the problem is coming from. Now we will see how another sequence of thoughts can also occur that starts in the same way as the previous scheme.



These are examples of so-called irrational thoughts that we have already discussed in the previous section; they worry us, we usually anticipate them, sometimes they paralyse us, sometimes they stress us out and cause us to avoid a specific situation; however, they are considered absurd because they do not help to solve the situation

It is also common that if these problems are not dealt with in a timely manner at the present time, they tend to become generalised. This means that what started out as a major problem at work also starts to occur at home and eventually also with any conversation with friends.

Esther's case, left untreated, could have been disabling for her work. At the age of 22 and working as a clerk in a company, she had the perception that at any moment she could start stammering. Worrying too much about this feeling made the problem more acute for a year.

She worried about what others would think if this happened, she said she noticed how people looked at her, she constantly turned these thoughts over in her head. What was initially just a simple fear, over time began to become more generalised and followed the sequence outlined above.

With the worrying, her nervousness increased and it became so real that she would slur her words or change her order when she picked up the phone, or simply when she was asked a simple question.



Serie «The ACPUA learns» XII

This lack of control over your feelings in the form of stress, anxiety or anguish is detrimental to you, as it makes you feel blocked, with a tendency to run away from your problems or a feeling that you have no control over your life. To find out how to overcome them, we'll explain 2 methods: learning to breathe and relax and advice on how to seek support.

IN POSITIVE

NEVER LOSE HEART,
EVEN IF YOU SEE THAT
NOT EVERYTHING IS
PERFECT,
FOR EARTHLY
PERFECTION IS
IMPOSSIBLE.



Learning how to breathe and relax

The basis of any kind of relaxation technique is breathing. Breathing in through your nose as you feel your abdomen increase and breathing out through your mouth as your abdomen decreases is a basic exercise for you to begin to feel relaxed. It is the opposite of chest breathing, which hyperventilates your body and can subject you to uncomfortable feelings of tension.

Therefore, finding a moment every day to breathe abdominally and completing it with another relaxation technique will help you feel better.

One of the existing techniques is relaxation called autogenic training²² which has the advantage that you can learn it and do it on your own anywhere.

Here are the simple steps to follow to perform it. You should choose a comfortable position such as lying on your back on a bed or mat or sitting with your elbows on your thighs and keeping your head down.

It consists of mentally saying relaxing phrases to yourself. These are the 6 phrases that you must gradually reproduce in the first person, saying them to yourself:

My arms and legs are heavy: my right arm is heavy, my left arm is heavy, my right leg is heavy, my left leg is heavy, I am completely calm.

My arms and legs are warm: my right arm is warm, my left arm is warm, my right leg is warm, my left leg is warm, I am completely calm.

Then the last 4 phrases are repeated at least 4 times each. The first one says "my heart beats calmly", the second one "my breathing is calm", the third one "my solar plexus is warm" referring to your abdominal area and finally the phrase "my forehead is cool" is also repeated at least 4 times.

I recommend that these 6 steps are learned and practised gradually. Each step is learnt for one week, but in the second week the first step and the second step are spoken and in the third week the first three steps are added in sequence, and so on.

²² Technique developed by the German neurologist Schultz in 1969.

Every morning Roberto relaxes when he enters his office. It takes him just 3 minutes to do abdominal breathing. During this time, he focuses on the present moment and remembers the 6 sentences he learnt from Schultz's relaxation. It is a method he remembers from when he went to the psychologist twenty years ago and now, in the morning silence, the simple fact of remembering them gives him an immediate feeling of well-being and makes him smile every day.

This relaxation exercise can also be done as a group in everyday or therapeutic situations. In particular, I was lucky enough to learn it with the psychological counsellor ²³ at my school, together with other classmates, all sitting in the comfortable position described above, sitting on the chairs of a classroom. The psychologist gave us group relaxation sessions at break times (for those students who attended voluntarily), to prepare for university entrance exams or, in general, to alleviate stressful feelings in our lives.

Later, as a practicing psychologist, I was able to apply it in other contexts as well: in therapy with acute patients at the psychiatric clinic where I worked, in moments of relaxation with play leaders and children at summer camps, before giving a talk, and in general, it has accompanied me on my journey through life, improving my sense of well-being in a large number of situations.

There are other relaxation methods that can also be used and are effective, such as progressive training ²⁴ or relaxation based on visualisation, both of which can be carried out in individual or group sessions. The first consists of tensing and relaxing the different muscles of the different parts of the body, going through each of them until the fullness of well-being is reached. The second is about expressing out loud visual techniques to make people feel relaxed through narrated images. Here is an example of this technique.

We imagine we are walking through a green meadow. We stop and take in the scenery. We look at the trees, look at the birds and listen to them. We keep walking forward and we discover a lake. We look at its colour; it is blue like the colour of the sky and we feel its calm and tranquillity. As we look at the sky, we feel the desire to come closer and so we start to climb the mountain. It is a rocky path, but we know that we will reach the end.

²³ Amparo Palacios was the psychologist at the Goya Secondary School in Zaragoza.

²⁴ Relaxation method developed in the United States by the physician Edmund Jacobson in 1938.



We continue to climb slowly, enjoying the nature and look for a place to sit down. From there, we look out over the landscape.

We think about all the problems that we have, about anger, about the things that we are afraid of, about the things that we don't like about ourselves and we decide to leave them all there. We get rid of them; we get up and we start to go down.

We go down and we feel better and better, we keep breathing deeply. As we go down, we think of all the good things we have in the place of the activity, with friends, with family, with studies, with work and we stay with all of them. We breathe deeply, breathe, breathe, breathe, breathe... and then we wake up... slowly.

In addition to breathing, relaxation and imaginative techniques, there are other ways of seeking help for everyday problems. Some people choose a religion, others prefer to use the *mindfulness* technique, some rely on their family and friends, and others seek a professional therapist to help them identify and remedy what is wrong.

Tips for seeking support

The feeling of restlessness produces more restlessness and, although we are usually advised to breathe and relax, it doesn't really help us; what we are looking for are vital solutions to existential problems that as young people impede our personal development at the particular moment in time.

In this section, those who speak in the first person are young people who tell us where they have been supported in some of their difficult moments. Listening to them will help us to know that psychology, sport and interpersonal support can help us to improve our well-being. In addition to introducing some spiritual options that you can count on and that are able to improve your existential feeling, they offer you new opportunities to approach the unknown²⁵ and what cannot be explained with the mind.

These are the common experiences²⁶ of Elizabeth, Anne, John and Paul.

Elizabeth: *"I rely on meditation, specifically mindfulness techniques"*.

I am a 30-year-old girl, born in Spain, who is preparing for competitive examinations, but I also work in a human resources department. I consider my family's socio-economic level to be medium-high and my current level of happiness is 8 out of 10.

What has been the worst situation you have had to face in your youth, the one that has caused you the most stress or anguish? Describe it.

6 months ago, facing the sudden death of my uncle. He was also my godfather. We thought he had overcome cancer, but he hadn't.

What personal, social and spiritual resources have you used to try to solve it? Explain them.

The first reaction was an emotional block, as if the situation was neutral. I tried to process it as rationally as possible until I started to cry. Day by day I assimilate and accept that these feelings are normal, that they should be like this. I don't try to avoid the memory, on the contrary, I

²⁵ Javier García Campayo is one of the most prestigious psychiatrists in the field of contemplative sciences.

²⁶ These are verbatim responses from 4 young people on the *ad hoc* questionnaire created for this section.



expose myself to it as a natural part of life. I meditate every day for 15 minutes, which helps me not to connect emotions and thoughts.

Meditation based on mindfulness, yoga or some Eastern techniques can be a resource for finding personal well-being. It is usually combined with abdominal breathing, relaxation or visualisation techniques or other physical exercises. It often uses messages such as non-judgemental mindfulness in each of the daily activities we do, as well as accepting the negative thoughts and feelings that are constantly surfacing in our lives.

To follow this line of support, you can read books, look for associations or support centres and watch videos to develop these kinds of techniques.

Anne: *"I rely on my family and friends".*

I am a 17 year old girl, born in Mozambique, of African descent, and I am in the first year of my baccalaureate in Social Sciences. The socio-economic level of my adoptive family is average and my current happiness level is 7 out of 10.

What has been the worst situation you have had to face in your youth, the one that has caused you the most stress or anguish? Describe it.

In schools, when I am new I have a perspective of how I am going to be treated because I am African. I have thoughts related to the fact that I think I won't fit in because of racism, being a different colour. I think people don't want to be with me because of that.

What I do is that I don't relate to people for fear of being rejected because I think that with the friends I have, I have enough and I don't give people a chance to get to know me and I take it for granted that all people are the same. And I would like to change that, but there is a long way to go because it is very difficult for me to get to know people.

What personal, social and spiritual resources have you used to try to solve it? Explain them.

Forgetting that I'm in a new school and trying to open up a bit more, but it's difficult because I don't have a lot of trust in people. I tell my friends and family, even though I'm a bit embarrassed. I try to get people to welcome me in order to make friends, and if I like the group, I stay with them.

Seeking support from family or friends can always be used, alone or in combination with other resources. Having friends and being able to depend on your family on an occasional or continuous basis generates a feeling of happiness that makes your life more bearable. This does not mean that you have to be dependent on others, but that you share your life with others, who know you and when it is time to tell them about a problem or make complicated decisions, you know that they are there to lend you a hand.

To follow this line of support, you must decide which person or people you are going to trust to be your mentors. It could be someone who knows a lot about managing emotions because of their profession or life experience, a person who gives good advice, or simply someone who you know loves you and shows their affection and friendship.

John: *"I rely on my family, friends and priests".*

I am a 26 year old Italian-born European who has completed a Master's degree in Biomedical Engineering. My family's socio-economic level is average and my current happiness level is 8.5 out of 10.

What has been the worst situation you have had to face in your youth, the one that has caused you the most stress or anguish? Describe it.

When I finished my studies I didn't really know what I wanted to do. It was a time of great uncertainty because I didn't know what I liked and where I wanted to go.

What personal, social and spiritual resources have you used to try to solve it? Explain them.

I have asked my family, friends and priests for help. Being able to tell your thoughts to others who can give you advice and their point of view is a great help, but the only answer in the end is up to you.

Seeking support in religion that connects you with the belief in the existence of a spiritual being that you feel helps you and loves you produces well-being in people. It makes you experience feelings of faith and find arguments based on the inexplicable that give you hope and help you to relax. It gives you the opportunity to feel forgiven and invites you to dedicate your life to the service of others.



To follow this line of support, you can attend services or rites of different religions, buy prayer books and experience prayer on a daily basis, or contact the leaders of churches or religious institutions to talk to them.

Paul: *"I rely on psychological help and sport".*

I am 17 years old, I was born in Spain and I am a member of the human race. I am currently in the 2nd year of my baccalaureate in Health Sciences. I consider my family's socioeconomic level to be average and my current level of happiness is 8 out of 10.

What has been the worst situation you have had to face in your youth, the one that has caused you the most stress or anguish? Describe it.

The death of my grandparents within a short period of time in which the first bereavement was poorly managed and had an impact on my state of mind.

What personal, social and spiritual resources have you used to try to solve it? Explain them.

I went to a psychologist who I have been seeing with different issues for two years, as well as talking to different people about what was happening to me. Although it is true that I have never been one to talk to people much, I tried to write it down.

Anyway, apart from those methods, what I have always turned to is sport, because while I train I don't think about anything else but myself and the javelin or the bar in the gym; it's just me and those objects when I train, although obviously I train with other people but I am more focused on training per se than on engaging in conversation with my colleagues.

Seeking support in psychology gives you the possibility to express what is happening to you. Having professional problem-solvers who know how to assess and focus on the situation ensures that you receive the right advice, tools and vital guidelines to find a solution and be able to continue with your daily adaptation as happily as possible, regardless of the severity of the disorder.

To follow this line of support, you can turn to the state health system, to counselling resources in your community that help young people, or choose private professionals recommended by others who have done well.

In addition, seeking support in sport and, in general, in all activities that help you to have fun while learning, to escape for a while from daily difficulties are another vital type of support.

In general, reviewing the advice of our four young people, facing the death of your loved ones, the anxiety generated by your immediate or distant future and the anxiety produced by your own fears, insecurities and worries about what people will say, are some of the factors that you may face daily, in person or online, and for which you need effective tools to help you cope.



Serie «The ACPUA learns» XII

Quality design 4

BE COOL
**FEEL THE RELAXATION AND
WELLBEING**

1.- What are the negative emotions you experience (anger, sadness, fear, disgust)? List some of them and give an example.

Do you have resources to improve your negative feelings or emotions and manage your anxiety? Explain some ideas.

Can you describe an effective type of relaxation that you know and can use? Do you practise it? Describe it.

Do you have the resources to feel happy? What do you do?

2.- What are your tips for seeking support when you have a problem that you don't know how to solve?

Professional _____

Spiritual _____

Relational (family, friends, colleagues)

Activities (sports, cultural or artistic)

Others _____



3 What I do

*The diary*²⁷

"Maturity is another new stage in our lives, understood from a subjective point of view, in which people become more aware of their existence in the world, of their relationship with others and of their own reality. It can come at any age, as not all people have the same growth, moral or otherwise.

A mature person is considered to be a responsible person, able to cope with problems, willing, self-controlled and confident to do whatever they set out to do, as well as having a clear idea about their ideas and a critical point of view for those of others.

Maturity comes with time and life experience; it is not an abrupt change, but a continuous struggle of personal growth that those of us who want to achieve it gradually go through.

"I try not to think about anything, to keep empty this crazy head that keeps looking for an explanation for everything. A number of roots weave my thought, while preventing it from appearing clear and simple at the same time. There is no defined colour. When it seems that blue has penetrated to paint everything, through a gap in this small studio, red can be seen, and so the painter's palette continues to mix colours, thinking about what the true tonality might be.

At times, it seems that the painting is finished, everything is perfect and the simple details are finished, everything is silent and tranquillity dominates everything. We can see the variety of brushstrokes, the contrasts of light and shade, the perspectives so well achieved from the window through which I can see everything.

But do you know what happens? The painting never seems to be completely finished. There always come moments when you, as a painter, realise that something is missing; sometimes it's the most essential thing, but almost always it's the trivialities of everyday life, and you need to touch up the whole painting a little, and like each canvas, the whole studio.

²⁷ Short excerpts from first-person performances, written in a diary.

But you don't always feel like doing it. You think you are no longer a good painter, and yet people say so. It takes a few doses of confidence to get you back to work with a better face. Three bowls of self-confidence and a spoonful of sugar will be enough to get you back to normal, but no, no, no....

We will start painting again: another easel, another canvas, clean brushes, the colours and start again.



I am not in control of my actions

And finally, what you do always happens. It is at a later moment when you can observe your physical self that has to do with your performance when it involves movement. This translates into different behaviours such as hitting, shouting, tics, crying, swearing, shaking or being inactive and doing nothing.

Acting is an essential human motor activity. The feeling of lack of control of your actions or behaviour is generated by the effect of the 3 dimensions described above: more frequency, more intensity and/or more duration.

You know your negative behaviour (it prevents you from being happy and living a functionally effective life) is frequent when you measure how many times it comes up every day, every week or every month.

It is also possible to know if it is intense when you realise that it generates such a strong negative feeling that it is unbearable. In addition, you will know if it is long-lasting by detecting its temporality, defining whether it has occurred more than a day ago, more than a month ago or more than six months ago.

There are two conditions that can lead to inappropriate social development in young people, demonstrating a lack of control, through aggressive and passive behaviour.

First, we focus on **aggressive behaviour**. Before we act, we normally have thoughts and feelings in a certain way.

In this way, you become aggressive, having negative thoughts about what has happened to you and the situations you are experiencing, you manifest a series of "unwanted" emotions: you feel frustrated, irritated and angry with yourself and with others.

Typical 'aggressive' behaviours include calling for attention, interrupting others' work, showing little positive behaviour, being uncooperative, not asking for information and not wanting to participate normally in tasks proposed by adults or peers. In its extreme phase, you may even insult or hit others and even yourself.

When you were a child you displayed aggressive behaviour to defend your possessions. If you have been brought up in the right way, from the age of 3 this behaviour should have gradually subsided.

There are young people who, when faced with situations they consider unfair to them, do not respect others and act on impulse because they do not think before they act. These young people show a stronger character, as they are more irritable and get angry very quickly and explosively. However, for others, anger lasts for a long time because they are spiteful and do not forget what has happened to them; they accumulate it.

Sergio couldn't control his feelings of frustration when last weekend, his girlfriend told him she wanted to break up. He was taken by surprise because he had invited her to dinner that day and was excited after deciding that it was time to formalise their relationship a little more.

Leaving the restaurant, Sergio got on his motorbike and channelled his rage by driving at an exaggerated speed. When he stopped, he parked and punched a stone wall, at which point he began to bleed and cry hysterically in pain.

The causes of this impulsive action may be due to your own character, to not knowing how to solve your problems in other ways, to peer pressure, to not knowing how to react to situations that overwhelm you (when you don't get what you want, when you experience an inner feeling of anger or sadness, when you are told what you have to do and you don't like it) or to a predisposition to suffering from a psychological disorder.

The group also influences your aggressiveness. Sometimes, the group of young people around you encourages you to perform inappropriate acts that you would not be able to do on your own. In this case, it is important that you are the first to reject these situations. To do this, you should learn about social skills and assertive communication; two skills (which you will find in the following sections) that will help you to deal with unfair situations.

To be an aggressive person is to behave in a negative way that makes you antagonistic towards others. This aggressiveness, which is not positive for either party, usually generates rejection, as no one likes to be insulted or hit.

This type of behaviour leads you into one of the negative vicious circles we have already mentioned, because the consequence in your peers of this behaviour is for them to reject you or that you feel integrated into a



group where aggressiveness is also a way of behaving, without respecting others in any way.

Secondly, we focus on **passive behaviour**. Being a passive person is not expressing your thoughts or feelings towards others out of embarrassment or intimidation, feeling unprepared to engage in an appropriate relationship with others. It is the reaction of someone who is passive, frustrated, irritated, angry with themselves and others.

There may be some causes for a person to be passive: having had overprotective parents, insufficient interaction with other children their age, feelings of inferiority complex or low self-esteem, or it may be part of their character or personality.

Marisol has a problem that she doesn't know how to solve. Ever since she was a child, she has been taught to please others, to be nice and kind and, if possible, to do them favours. Lately, she has noticed that at work she is asked to do more work than her colleagues, because she is always available and puts on a good face.

However, Marisol would like to learn to say no without feeling guilty. She would like to be treated the same as others and to know how to express herself properly to say what she thinks and what she wants.

It is normal that this behaviour is more common at an early age and that it decreases with age due to improved self-esteem, inclusion in a social group and the appropriate development of the personality, reaching maturity.

Here are some examples of passive attitudes: they are immobile, silent, avoid social contact, passively scan the context visually and have little eye contact with people. They often show nervous hand and foot movements, do not know how to interact with others through reciprocity and role exchange strategies and are therefore often ignored or even rejected.

The reasons that may cause you to have this behaviour (being shy, withdrawn or self-centred) and make it difficult for you to have good relationships with other friends, are related to what you think and what you feel:

- ✓ you are afraid of what they might say about you,
- ✓ you want to avoid being assessed,

- ✓ you are suspicious or paranoid and do not trust others,
- ✓ you think that your privacy should be only for yourself and you keep all your thoughts and feelings to yourself,
- ✓ you don't know how to put into words what is happening to you,
- ✓ you get very nervous in front of people
- ✓ and you feel physically and psychologically unable to talk to others.

Sandra is a smart and perfectionist girl. She has been trying to lose weight for a few months now and has started to play with her meals: she wants less food, avoids all sweets, does more exercise every day than before and weighs herself constantly. What used to be called "healthy eating" has now started to become an obsession.

As she is also introverted, she does not want to tell anyone that it is also affecting her thoughts and the way she perceives her body. She also gets angry more easily and does not take advice from anyone. Little by little, she is isolating herself and her self-esteem has started to decrease.

She has attended talks at her school about eating disorders and is beginning to identify with the profiles described and to doubt herself. She wonders if she should ask her family for help.

I did my internship in educational psychology with my teacher M^a José Díaz Aguado²⁸, training social skills in schools in Madrid. She starts from very simple and useful hypotheses: acceptance produces acceptance and rejection produces rejection, peer rejection is a clear predictor of psychiatric problems in adulthood. Accepted children are more popular, more socially rewarding, more successful at school and develop better cognitively and emotionally.

The risks of rejection and passivity are different. Feeling rejected in adolescence is a predictor of adjustment problems later in life and is associated with learning problems, truancy, alcohol and substance abuse, delinquency, suicide or the need for psychological and psychiatric care in adulthood.

Feeling isolated has the risk that you may be a young person socially separated from the rest and lacking in social skills and that this may

²⁸ Professor at the Complutense University of Madrid.



cause some inhibition in your development, but not problems as serious as in the first case.

In relation to the emission of these two types of aggressive and passive behaviour, difficulties in having friends may arise because:

- You are shy: you don't dare to talk to others, you get nervous.
- You are introverted: you do not communicate your feelings and thoughts to others. You talk, but only about superficial things.
- You are self-centred: you have too high a self-esteem and think you are better than others.
- You are aggressive: you express yourself in a verbally or physically violent way and hurt others.

Lack of control of your actions in the form of aggressiveness or passivity is bad for you, as it makes you feel rejected, like a freak, or make you feel lonely and that no one understands or loves you. To find out how to overcome them and following the above indications, we'll explain 2 methods: learning social skills and tips to improve your assertive communication.

IN POSITIVE

**WHEN I WANT TO SAY WHAT I
FEEL
AND I CAN'T FIND ENOUGH
WORDS TO EXPRESS IT,
I TURN TO MY DIARY.**

**THERE, I LIKE TO IMPREGNATE
THROUGH WORDS, NOTES AND
POEMS,
MY FEELINGS.**



Learning social skills

As part of this development and for the improvement of your personal knowledge, we'll continue to offer some hints, such as learning the so-called soft skills that are relevant to your personal life, to your job interviews and to your adaptation at school and at work.

In general, learning them will help you to live a healthier and happier life, and to build more self-confidence. You will know how to react when people insult you, criticise you, contradict you, pick on you or don't pay as much attention to you as you would like them to.

As social beings we need to learn and develop our social skills. People need others and we seem to be happier if we feel part of a group. For this reason, it is essential to know how we should behave socially.

Having social skills means expressing social behaviours that are appropriate for the society in which you live and effective in terms of the goals you have set for yourself. In general, having skills is having the necessary knowledge to make your behaviour appropriate. They are those skills that you need to know in order to make your life better, more effective and healthier.

The important thing is that they are types of behaviour. Thus, it is possible that you may have these innate abilities, but if you do not have them, you should know that it is possible to learn them at any age. At the same time, it is essential that when you show them, you do so in a calm or assertive way, defending at all times your rights but also those of others, with respect; without being aggressive but also without being too inhibited.

To develop them, focus on learning the different types:

- say no when you are asked to do something and you don't want to do it,
- stand up for your own rights,
- show responsibility in making your decisions,
- knowing how to give and receive compliments,
- be able to accept criticism from others,
- asking favours of others or
- initiate new friendships and learn how to maintain them.

The basis of this learning is to know these social practices and to practice them. In this way, all young people will be able to improve their relationship with others as a way to solve their conflicts.

Manuel arrived at his senior school and didn't know what to expect. All the other students arrived a week earlier and some of them already knew each other from other years.

He felt ashamed and very unsure of himself. What if picked on him for being new? He wanted to disappear and be alone in his room so that no one would know of his existence. He heard laughter outside and at some point he would have to go out for dinner.

He anticipated his fear of not knowing what to do if another classmate pushed him and called him a new boy. He wouldn't do anything, he would just stand there, feeling his blushes rise until his face turned red, so he just wanted to disappear. Besides, on social media, he'd already seen videos of practical jokes being played on others.

At that moment, there was a knock at his room and it was Pablo, a friend of his brother's who had been living there for a year. He let him in and Pablo explained that he had been very lucky because picking on the new kids is usually only done in the first week and that the only thing that could happen was that he would be picked on verbally, but nothing more.

He joined Pablo and went down for dinner; what he had anticipated as a negative omen did not happen and, from that day on, he began his university adventure with peace of mind.

In life, you will encounter many family, school and work situations in which you become emotionally activated because you do not achieve your goals. Therefore, it is important to realise that there are always other ways to respond or alternative solutions.

These are some of the strategies you can use in your day-to-day life to start developing them:

- build up a knowledge of social strategies through reading books, watching films or attending courses,
- prioritise cooperative rather than competitive activities,
- promote discussion with others through reasonable dialogue, seeking alternative solutions,
- train conflict resolution by trying to mediate between the parties,



- rehearse empathy and make the effort to put yourself in the other person's shoes,
- reduce your social anxiety, without avoiding crowded places or places where there may be situations that make you uncomfortable,
- improve your self-esteem by increasing your motivation to be able to get along with others,
- express the reasons why it is not positive to antagonise people, through writing in a notebook or through drawing,
- engage in physical activity or sport.

Marta is 21 years old and is now an adult but still lives at home with her parents. When they tell her that she can't do something she wants to do, she feels bad and gets angry. Normally, she locks herself in her room slamming the door, while other times, she starts shouting at them, throws a tantrum like when she was little and ends up crying.

What works best for you is when you control yourself, take a deep breath, think before you speak and communicate calmly with them, explaining the reasons why you want to do the activity. You don't always get what you want, but this last method is the most effective and has the least side effects for everyone.

To control your negative aggressive behaviour (hurting others or yourself), there are different reward and punishment techniques²⁹ that teach you which method is assertive or appropriate and that you can use yourself:

- ✓ the time-out technique or the so-called "thinking corner": create a space where you can withdraw from the activity you are doing or from the person you are at odds with,
- ✓ loss of privileges: not using some of the objects or activities you like until you behave appropriately again,
- ✓ reward or congratulate yourself when you regret what you have done, by apologising, giving a kiss or returning the stolen object.

More specifically, you can learn skills or techniques to prevent or control your aggression and which help you to be calmer and more collaborative.

²⁹ Serrano Valenzuela, B. (2010). Educational guide for parents. Editorial 3ooks, Zaragoza.

You can learn how to collaborate and share with others, encourage control of your own emotions, thoughts and behaviour, learn to express what you think and feel through different techniques and ways of expression or actively participate in discussions to acquire maturity in dialogue.

In general, it is important to accept when things don't go your way. It is normal to get angry, but you have to know how to manage your anger. Now you have the opportunity, as you get older, to learn to manage your emotions and stress without responding negatively, but above all by accepting the situations that you find yourself in on a daily basis.



Tips to improve assertive communication

An assertive person (the opposite of aggressive or passive) is someone who has a good self-concept and is able to express themselves and relate effectively to other young people and adults, respecting their rights. When someone is assertive, they are happy and calm, even when they do not achieve the goals they have set.

When you have a problem, what do you usually do? Do you tell a friend, your mother, your girlfriend, your teacher or a colleague at work and, following their advice, talk about it in order to find a solution? Or, on the other hand, do you not tell anyone, get sad and lock yourself in your room? At other times, do you get angry and argue with everyone?

To develop your assertive communication, we will first focus on how you communicate, as this is the key to getting it right. And to do that, we start by explaining what it really is. Communicating is conveying a message. In this way, there are two people, the young person who speaks and another person who receives the message, or the other way around, the person who sends the message and the young person who listens. This message is verbal or oral, but it is also accompanied by gestures (kinesic elements) and paralinguistic elements, i.e. aspects related to the way you speak, which are called non-verbal communication.

Oral information is your vehicle of expression, the one with which you can say what you think and feel. It is essential to know the content you want to convey, the right message you want to send to the other person.

As we have already mentioned, this oral message is accompanied by two elements: kinesic and paralinguistic, which together make up what is known as non-verbal communication. This information, which is more observational and largely affects the outcome of the relationship between the speaker and the listener, is involved in the communication process and, through it, various psychological processes are revealed.

Paralinguistic elements are those that affect the way you deliver the message: it is the tone of your voice (high, low, soft, medium), it is the intonation (severe, melodious, medium), it alludes to the speed at which you verbalise, the phrases you use when you express yourself, etc.

The kinaesthetic elements have to do with everything you do with your body that can affect the interpretation by your interlocutor: the gestures

of your hands, arms, body or face (moving strangely, too much, too little or not at all), the posture of your body (forward, upright, leaning backwards), your gaze (looking into your eyes or averting them downwards slightly or sharply without daring to meet the eyes of the other person), the personal space (too close, medium or far away).

25-year-old Silvia had registered to take part in a competitive examination in her region. She was studying her syllabus, planning the appropriate time for both the written and oral exams. In addition, she was focusing on learning how to solve the case studies necessary for her future work.

However, she also had to prepare her presentation. To do so, she prepared a topic to present in front of her psychologist Ricardo, who recorded it on video. There were 2 sessions in which they were able to jointly analyse all the non-verbal elements that accompanied her words with the aim of commenting on the appropriate advice to appear calm and give confidence to the examining board.

As Ricardo told her: "All these elements account for 40% of the final result of the exam". And in Silvia's case it worked and she passed all 3 exams on the first attempt.

Non-verbal behaviour gives us two types of information. On one hand, it emphasises, contradicts, helps or directly replaces the spoken message and, on the other hand, it gives us information about the level of activity, and about the accumulation of tension or anxiety in a specific time.

Success in effective communication begins when we are young, so it is also interesting to learn about the evolutionary development of people. When you are born, you emit your first gurgles, glances and smiles towards the people you live with. From the age of 18 months, you can make yourself understood and in your own way you ask for what you need and express what is happening to you, while adults must adapt to your phrases and try to put themselves in your place.

Until the age of 6, you may not be able to develop sentences with adequate grammatical accuracy. It is in primary school when sentence development improves, although there are still syntactic, spelling and semantic elements that are not controlled. During these years, the expression of your feelings and making up stories about your reality begin to improve. At this time the adult plays an essential role in the improvement of your learning.



Effective and successful communication is about talking to others, saying what we think and expressing what we feel. To learn to communicate, you must be aware of the importance of what you say, how you say it, the use of your gestures and expressions, the posture of your body, the expression of your face and the space of relationship between people accepted by our society, among others.

Here are some quick examples that can help you to improve your communication:

- don't be afraid to say what is happening to you and to tell the people who love you (your parents, your teacher, your friend) what is happening to you, knowing that others cannot guess what you are thinking and feeling,
- don't get into the habit of telling lies for fear that they might get angry or punish you.
- always try to dialogue to find a solution to your problems.

In addition to these tips for improving your communication and expression, you should begin to understand the importance of using "I-messages" in your daily conversations. This type of expression ensures that in any conflict situation, you can express what you need to.

David says to his brother Fran: "I understand that you are upset because I broke your favourite glass, but I felt bad when you shouted at me so aggressively;

I don't think it was an appropriate attitude towards me when my intention was not to break it;

so I would like you not to shout so loudly at me next time if it happens again".

At first, this verbalisation may seem a bit pedantic or corny, but if you rehearse it and get used to using it, it will make it much easier for you to resolve conflicts in many situations in your life. This practice, together with the methods described above, will lead you to achieve the desired emotional intelligence³⁰ and personal balance.

This is the scheme to follow. Follow these 3 steps carefully and learn them to put them into practice in your daily life:

³⁰ Term chosen by Daniel Goleman to describe the intelligence that helps us to relate affectively and effectively.

- 1.- Listen to your interlocutor and show understanding and empathy (I understand what you mean).
- 2.- Say how you feel (answer, using your name to speak or do it in the first person, expressing how you have felt about a certain situation).
- 3.- Say what you want to happen (express your sentence with a verb of desire and comment clearly on your request).

When talking about feelings, the interpretation you make when listening also greatly affects the final outcome of the communication process. In addition, it is essential to speak in the first person and say "I feel sad because I do not feel recognised in my work".

However, if we remain in the mere expression that we are not well but without specifying the reason, we get nothing. You must go a step further and say clearly what you want to happen, what you are asking of the other person or persons and what you would like them to change in their behaviour in the future.

Marina had a problem with her group of friends when they posted a photo of her on Instagram that she felt did not look good. She got angry...thinking about how she could solve this problem. She remembered the advice of her school counsellor when she gave them a talk on assertive behaviour.

And she did. She had the opportunity to speak out, to express her anger, telling her friends what was happening to her, to achieve her goal, to have the option of not losing her friendship.

Her goal was clear; she had to try to get the photo removed or, if this was no longer possible because others had already shared it online, ask the whole group of friends to promise not to do it again without asking her for permission.

In this example, we see how Marina dares to take the first step to tell her friends what she doesn't like. Following the 3 steps of effective assertive communication, we see how she expresses her anger in the first person, saying that she felt angry (first step) when she discovered that there was a photo on the social media where she looked bad (second step) and asking for what she wanted to happen, that the photo be removed from the social media (third step).

It is essential to follow this complete scheme in order to do it well, but we must not forget that these verbalisations must be accompanied by all the



necessary conditions of non-verbal communication to be able to initiate this interaction. In particular, it is necessary to find the right moment, medium, place and position, as well as to use a tone of voice that reflects your self-confidence.

Finally, this information must be provided in person. It is not useful in any case to write a whatsapp with broken sentences or to use any online media to express the important matters of your life.

After learning about the analysis of your responses (thoughts, feelings or emotions and actions) to events, we can go a step further and continue to offer tools for your life.

In the third part, we'll go deeper into this, offering a simple test that will help you to detect how you are carrying out your design or strategy of quality of life in order to continue improving your actions towards leadership: coherence, modification of habits and civic behaviour.

Quality design 5

SOCIALISE

LOOK FOR QUALITY FRIENDS TO FEEL INTEGRATED



1.- Do you consider that you have the power to do what you set out to do? What are your strategies?

What are your techniques to calm your most impulsive moments?

What tools do you have to improve your passivity?

2.- Do you know how to behave assertively? How do you do it?

What are the social skills that work best for you when relating to others?

PART III: QUALITY GENERATION

If you have come this far, you will have realised how many resources you can still learn to gain self-esteem, learn to communicate well with others, be resilient and cope with life's setbacks, or simply enjoy every moment of your life to the fullest.

In this last section, you will find the methodological keys to put everything you have learnt into practice. These are the tools you need to become part of a quality generation.

First of all, I invite you to answer this mini-questionnaire called the *#qualitytest*. By answering each of the questions you will be able to detect the level at which you are in the fulfillment of each of the sections explained in this book with the aim of developing a conscious, full and quality life. At the end of the book, you will find a qualitative summary of solutions to the test that will guide you on how to continue on your path to maturity.

Before we begin, it is important to remember that learning is part of a lifelong process, so you can repeat this test as often as you need to. With your answers to the test and the thermometer tool, you will easily see whether you have made progress or setbacks in your planning and you will discover how to review your strengths and weaknesses.



Personal quality test

#qualitytest³¹

PERSONAL STRATEGY. Answer some questions about how you currently plan your life (checklist YES/NO).

Have you defined 3 to 5 objectives to work on in your life for the next 6 months? (Mission) YES/NO

Have you thought about how you imagine the life you want in 2 years time, designing at least 2 challenges/achievements that you will have fulfilled? (Vision) YES/NO

Have you decided between 2 or 3 principles that can guide your actions (objectives/challenges) in your daily life? (Values) YES/NO

Are you aware of the 3 most important personal qualities you have? YES/NO

Do you know which social resources will help you achieve your goals? YES/NO

Have you thought about the 5 activities you are going to carry out during the next year? YES/NO

Do you consider that there is coherence between your proposed activities and your objectives, challenges and principles? YES/NO

LEARNING. Answer about what happens to you on a regular basis (frequency).

Are you aware of strategies to detect your negative thoughts and not feel sad?

None 0/Some (1 to 4)/Some (5 to 7)/Many (8 to 10)

Do you have resources to improve your negative feelings or emotions and manage your anxiety?

None 0/Some (1 to 4)/Some (5 to 7)/Many (8 to 10)

Do you believe you have the power to do what you set out to do?

Not at all 0/Somewhat (1 to 4)/Somewhat (5 to 7)/A lot (8 to 10)

³¹ This test is designed ad hoc for this publication.

THE SATISFACTION THERMOMETER

Identify your current level of life satisfaction (scale from 1 to 10).

Solutions to the test

Depending on your answers to the test you will find out whether you are a "*quality person*", whether you still have to learn because you are "in the process of becoming a *quality person*" or whether you still have a lot of work to do because you are a "person without knowledge, but with the possibility of becoming a *quality person*".

Definition of a **quality person**:

A person with 8 or more out of 10 in life satisfaction, who has defined 2 to 5 objectives to work on, has designed at least 2 challenges for the future and has identified between 1 and 3 values to guide their actions.

The *quality person* is aware of the 3 most important personal qualities they have, knows what their social resources are that will help them to achieve their, has reflected on the 5 activities they are going to carry out during the next year.

Furthermore, they verbalise, maintaining coherence between the activities they propose with their objectives and values.

The *quality person* knows plenty of strategies to detect and control their negative thoughts, has the resources to improve the feelings that harm them and has the power to achieve what they set out to do.

Definition of a person **in the process of becoming a** quality person:

A person between 5 and 7 in life satisfaction, who has defined at least 1 objective to develop, has designed at least 1 challenge for the future and has decided on at least 1 value to guide their actions.

The person in the process of becoming *quality* is aware of some of their personal qualities, knows some of the social resources that will help them to achieve their objectives and has also reflected on some of the activities they are going to carry out during the next year.

They also verbalise some coherence between the activities they propose with their objectives and values.



The person in the process of becoming a *quality person* knows a strategy to detect and control negative thoughts, has the resources to improve the feelings that harm them and has the power to achieve what they set out to do.

Definition of a person ***with no knowledge, but with the potential to be quality*** if they put their mind to it:

This is a person with less than 4 out of 10 in life satisfaction, who has not defined any goals to develop, has not yet designed any future challenges and has not decided on any values to guide their actions.

The person with no skills but with the potential to be *quality* is not aware of the most important personal qualities they have, does not know what their social resources are that will help them to achieve their goals and has not reflected on the 5 activities they are going to carry out during the next year.

In addition, they say that they do not maintain coherence between the activities they propose with their objectives and values.

The person without knowledge but with the possibility of being *quality* does not know any strategies to detect and control their negative thoughts, has resources to improve the feelings that harm them and has the power to achieve what they set out to do.

The result of the quality test helps you to detect where you are in the design phase of your life. Think that you can do the test whenever you want (every 6 months or a year would be appropriate) to adjust your expectations to reality. Life is a process, your circumstances, and those around you, change. You have to think that life is not static, life moves and you adapt to it. Moreover, although you do not control everything that happens in your life, but you do have the power to design it at every moment.

Next, we look at the last question of the test which is the satisfaction thermometer where you can self-assess your level of well-being.

The satisfaction thermometer

A high level sense of satisfaction can be achieved when you learn the maximum number of psychological tools that generate a feeling of self-control and self-efficacy and which, in turn, produce a full sense of self-esteem because you have become resilient³².



When you are resilient, you will find that it doesn't matter if you have a boss you don't understand or a family you don't think understands you or a partner who doesn't share your views or friends who have shared a group photo on social media that you are not in.

When you are resilient, your thinking filters everything that happens to you intensely and generates alternative feelings and responses that, before learning them, would never have occurred to you before. And it is at that moment when you pray, meditate, listen to music, relax, dance, play sports, go for a walk or talk to a friend; and, in general, you flow³³. It is at this moment that you discover that you are in control of a part of your life because you know how to think and feel before you respond.

But do you really have the full power to control everything that happens to you? Logically, no. You cannot have the power to know what is going to happen to you next, nor to read the minds of others, nor to know what natural or health disasters may affect you: pandemics, earthquakes, fires, accidents, and life and death in general.

In reality we must prepare ourselves as a society and as individuals for prevention, but the uncontrollable exists at all stages of our lives and shows us that the inexplicable exists and that rationally we cannot cover the totality of events.

So, I pose this question, does being satisfied with yourself mean that you are 100% happy? The answer to this question could be yes or no, knowing

³² Adaptive and coping skills.

³³ Term coined by Csikszentmihalyi: "the fact of feeling fully engaged in the activity for its own sake".



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that even if you score between 8 and 10 on the satisfaction level, it is very likely that you will encounter daily or weekly problems in your life.

Renewing my personal strategy: the Vlp Vle chart

If you have taken the test for the first time, but have not read the book, go to Part I entitled "developing my personal strategy" and start reading.

If you have already read the book, taken the test and your satisfaction level is below 7, this is the section for you: the one called "Renewing my personal strategy".

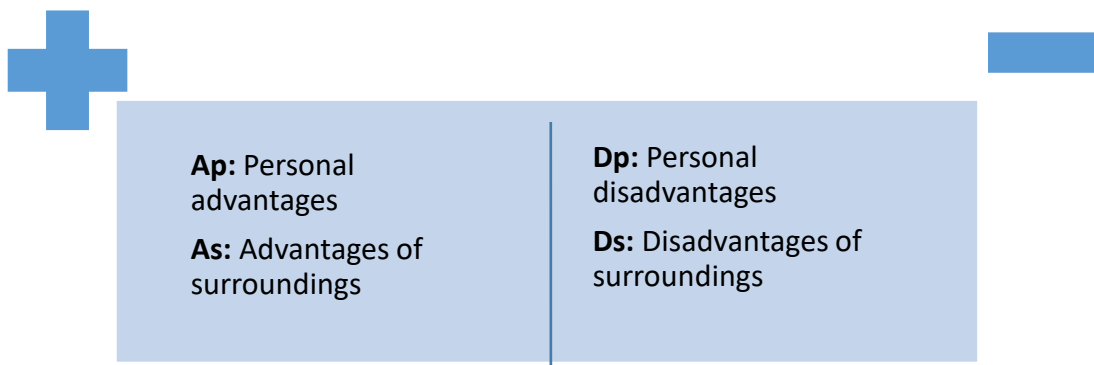
I congratulate you because lifelong learning is a constant and you have the desire to continue to set yourself new goals. It doesn't matter how old you are, what counts is your motivation and your desire to move forward, regardless of how bad you have had it, your sadness, frustration, anger or anxiety.

To do this exercise, it is good to keep using your notebook to write things down. In the world of organisational quality planning, this technique is called SWOT and refers to the strengths and weaknesses of the company and the opportunities and threats that surround it.

In our personal assessment task and similar to the way it is used in organisations, we will use the outline to find out the pros and cons of your current situation.

To do this, we draw a square with 4 sections called ADpADs: your strengths (personal advantages), your weaknesses (personal disadvantages), the strengths around you (advantages of your surroundings) and the weaknesses around you (disadvantages of your surroundings).

The ADpADs chart





The first step in defining your ADpADs is to generate lists of ideas for each of the 4 sections. These are broad lists (brainstorming type) that should make you think, without fear, to express all the things you can think of for each of the sections.

Ap are your personal assets. In this part, you should point out all those aspects that give you strength to face the situations in your life, whether they are your qualities, your values, your skills or your competences.

The As are the advantages of your surroundings. In this section, you can write down the social (family, relational) or contextual (economic, political, technological, domestic) aspects that you consider can make your life easier, especially in relation to the goals you want to achieve.

Dp are your personal disadvantages. In this section, you define all those aspects that you consider to be part of your weakness, whether it is your lack of control over your thoughts, your inability to detect or improve your anxiety levels or your feelings, or your difficulties in acting as you think you should.

Ds are the disadvantages of your environment. In this part, you describe which social or contextual aspects (listed in the previous section) can make your life more complicated at the present moment.

When you have the whole picture in place, it is time to start reading again Part I of this publication "developing my personal strategy". Again, you have the opportunity to start again to set goals, challenges and values with motivating enthusiasm.

You know it's not possible to make a mistake because you will always be able to start the process again. It only depends on you, on this manual and on the notebook you use to jot down your thoughts, knowing that you choose and decide because you know yourself, you improve by learning and you pursue new dreams that are part of your life process.

In the following lines, you will find the advantages of having reached this point and being able to say that you are part of the quality generation, understanding that you belong to the new generation of tomorrow's leaders who seek to "leave the world a little better than how they found it³⁴": the so-called *plus* leaders.

³⁴ The legacy of Baden Powell, founder of the Scout movement.

Leadership+

When we think of a leader, we think of someone with the power to properly plan tasks and manage people so that they are able to carry out the proposed work and thus contribute to the achievement of organisational objectives.

However, we may be in doubt as to whether, as a consequence of the above definition, we are dealing with a manager or a leader, and not just any leader, but a plus one.

Alba is an exquisite boss, young, multilingual and academically prepared. She joined the company thanks to her CV and after passing 3 job interviews. She keeps up to date with all the work, meets the quality criteria of her company and has fulfilled the proposed objectives in the last 6 months.

She is in charge of 8 employees from different parts of the country and she herself realises how difficult it is to manage work teams. Trying to combine the difference in characters, the different levels of demands and compliance, the different ways of communicating through so many channels (telephone, email, whatsapp, video-call, face-to-face and social media) is overcoming her.

When she works alone she is happy, but dealing daily with people of all ages with different levels of experience makes her anxious. She understands her training needs in this area...so she must continue to learn in order to become more self-confident and to be able to offer her talents to the service of others.

The existence of this leader+³⁵ should first of all enjoy an adequate personal and/or social balance, with a high level of self-knowledge, self-esteem and social skills, but also with spiritual strategies that can provide a sense of peace, connection with others and personal well-being on a daily basis.

In addition, they must be people capable of meeting the proposed objectives, communicating their messages adequately, generating work

³⁵ Research by Iris Rueda, a civil servant of the Government of Aragon on leadership.



teams that, by undertaking the task at hand, add their talents and have the tools to be resilient and happy.

Thomas Harris³⁶, in his publication "I am well, you are well", detected the need to transmit happiness to others, as long as the person feels good about themselves. Following this idea, the leader should develop a vital system of reflection and constant improvement that helps them to connect and focus on the present moment.

Achieving this personal well-being will help you to lead and direct your own life in every moment, every day and in the daily situations in which you find yourself; it will also help you to be prepared to offer your serenity, your learning and your talents to the service of society.

In the following section, we'll continue to give some guidelines on how to achieve this necessary plus for leadership, how not to give up and to continue learning in a constant way. Specifically, we'll focus on the value of being consistent, maintaining positive habits and modifying those that are detrimental to us, as well as the presentation of ideas for effective behaviour.

³⁶ 20th century American psychiatrist who continues the theories of Eric Berne's transactional analysis.

The value of being consistent

Another key to being a happy, positive leader is to be consistent between your values (the principles that guide you), your skills (the knowledge you have to deal with life) and your competences (what you do on a daily basis to be consistent with your principles).

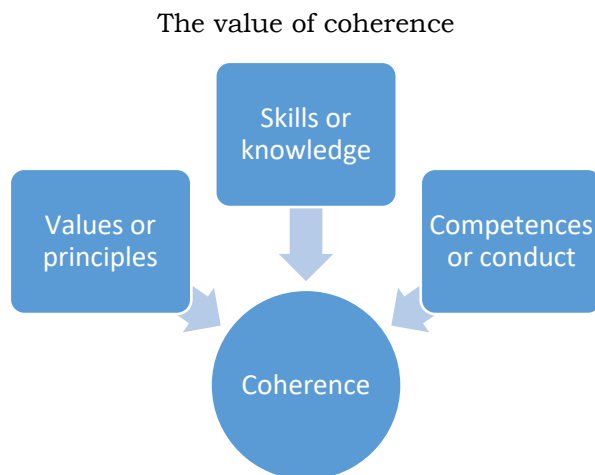
It was Christmas and Clara, at the age of 18, wanted to develop the courage to help others. She therefore signed up with her parish association for an activity to visit sick people in the hospital in her region. They went as a group, they brought instruments and had been rehearsing a few days beforehand some Christmas carols to liven up the ward they were going to.

When they got there, they were divided into small groups so that as many people as possible could attend. There was an activity in the general hall and then the nurses, assistants and families invited them into different rooms to chat with them and sing Christmas songs.

Clara encountered a difficulty in performing the task: she felt shy, did not know what to say and was a bit afraid because she did not want to mess up. In order to be able to do this activity and have the competence to do it, Clara needed to learn social, empathy and anxiety management skills that she had not yet learned.

She felt powerless and frustrated when she got home, for trying something she was not prepared for.

The coherence between the definition of your values and what you actually do in your life (what others see of you) should be mediated by the necessary knowledge of *soft skills*.



Being coherent helps you to follow your purpose with a focus on what you really want to achieve in your life, regardless of the circumstances around you. In the following section, we elaborate a little more on what this coherence consists of.

In relation to your **values**, in the section "Creating my life with quality" we have selected 6 of them, explaining their definition and specific examples of what you can do with them. The novelty in this section is that we are going to give examples of how to develop them.

The aim is that if you have decided to comply with your principles of social commitment, responsibility, pro-sociality, justice, equality and respect for diversity, you can do so. In this section, we provide you with a model for doing so.

In order to develop the values you have decided on, you will need to have some knowledge called *soft skills*³⁷. In this book we have discussed many of them, in particular, we know about improving self-esteem, anxiety control, social skills or assertive communication.

However, it is relevant to know that the WHO³⁸ in 1993 selected 10 life skills that it considered universal, encouraging them to be learned in all countries as a means of preventing health problems. The objective of the definition of these 10 skills is based on achieving a healthy education for all people around the world, with the hypothesis that having all of them, people would be much healthier.

³⁷ See research references by Alejandra Cortés and Ana Rodríguez (University of Zaragoza).

³⁸ World Health Organisation

In the following diagram, I outline each of them and their relationship to the different learning outcomes described in this book.

List of *soft skills*

Life skills WHO	From this book
Self-knowledge	Learning to have self-esteem
Empathy	Learning social skills/ tips to improve my assertive communication
Assertive communication	
Interpersonal relations	
Decision-making	Help-seeking tips/Renewing my personal strategy/Modifying my habits/
Problem solving and conflict resolution	
Creative thinking	Analysing what happens to me
Critical thinking	
Managing emotions	Learning how to breathe and relax
Tension and stress management	

Soft skills should help us to activate our values. They are halfway between our inner self (the principles we want to apply in our lives) and the competences (the actions that will reflect what we really want to convey when others see our learning).

Having these skills means having the knowledge to put your values into practice. And this is done through competences.

Your competences are your behaviour or what you do. We have already devoted some sections to talk about them. However, here again we will give a specific example of competences of relevance in the European field of education.

Specifically, we refer to the so-called key competences³⁹ for lifelong learning:

- communication in the mother tongue
- communication in foreign languages
- mathematical, scientific and technological competence
- digital competence
- learning to learn
- social and civic competences
- sense of initiative and entrepreneurship

³⁹ Developed in the field of education by the European Commission.



➤ cultural awareness and expression

As you can see, the first 4 refer mainly to those acquired in formal education (derived from your learning at school or university) and the last 4 can be identified with non-formal and informal education (see section "What do I do? The activities I do").

In this book we have mainly worked on competences 5, 6, 7 and 8. Competence 5 or "learning to learn" refers to the capacity we have as humans to acquire knowledge at all stages of our lives, but above all, to be aware of what we learn as we carry out activities: we travel, play goose, walk with grandma, chat with our boss in the workshop, dance in a discotheque, attend catechesis in the parish or study for competitive examinations.

When Fernando meets a work colleague who he has to prepare a project with and discovers how patient he is in discussing his ideas, he remembers the walks he used to take with his grandmother on Saturday afternoons. In those moments, unconsciously, he had learned to listen actively even though the topics did not really interest him much, but knowing that the other person was happy to talk about them.

Competence 6 or "social and civic competences" is aligned with the ability to relate well to others and to be good citizens. It refers to the contribution you can make with your social skills, not only to your own well-being, but also to the improvement of the society in which you live at any level (local, national, international).

Competence 7 or "sense of initiative and entrepreneurship" motivates people to be autonomous in their actions, finding the necessary inspiration to realise their goals and thus fulfil their dreams. We all have a creative side within us that we can develop to a greater or lesser extent.

This creation or design can lead to individual or group activities (playing music, painting a picture, writing a poem, making pottery, sewing a scarf, taking a photograph or performing a monologue, starting a theatre group, etc.) which can be used to undertake tasks as a self-employed person (setting up a business), as an entrepreneur (starting a company) or as a creator of solidarity and sustainable initiatives (setting up a non-profit organisation or a cooperative). These latter activities are also linked to competence 8 "cultural awareness and expression".

In general, competences should be actions or behaviours that you perform and that are observable. Remember that what other people see of you are your behaviour, what you do. Others do not know what values or ideals you dream of or are driven by, nor do they know what you think.

In the following scheme, I point out the 4 competences described and their relation to the different learning outcomes described in this publication.

List of Competences

From the European Commission	From the publication
Learning to learn	Part II: Learning to be happy
Social and civic competences	What I do/IN POSITIVE
Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship	Part I: Developing my personal strategy
Cultural awareness and expression	



Change your habits

In this section we'll help you to develop a programme, called a behavioural programme, to modify your habits.

First, we'll focus on that behaviour that you want to stop because you know it hurts you.

Fernando spends too much time playing games and this causes him personal problems, as it prevents him from having enough time to do his homework, attend to daily family chores and socialise in person.

It all started a year ago when he got this new device at Christmas with which he was able to interact with other players from all over the world, compare himself and measure himself according to the number of screens he passed. This gave him an adrenaline rush and a desire to excel in games that made it impossible for him to stop.

A year later, this gaming has become a problem, because if he doesn't play, he becomes anxious and if he starts to play, he can't stop.

If you are really aware that you have a problem that prevents you from living your life normally and you decide to try to find a solution, you should take the following steps:

- define your behaviour
- observe it for one week, drawing up a baseline for it
- analyses what happens
- think about the best solution

Define your behaviour. This consists of clearly specifying what this harmful habit is. The list of examples could be endless. The most important thing is that it is something very specific and that you are able to point out how often it occurs. In any case, it should be defined in a short sentence formulated with a verb and when you read it, it should be clear that you can observe it, count the number of times it occurs and write it down on a piece of paper.

Here are some examples of harmful actions that you may notice: smoking a cigarette or a joint, having a tic of touching your hair, biting your nails, feeling anxious when you see a person who has hurt you, playing a mobile application, eating between meals or junk food, insulting a colleague you don't like, etc.

Observe it for a week. When you have defined this behaviour, you can start to create your baseline. To do this, you need to do the second step, which is to prepare the log. On a sheet of paper, you time a whole week from Monday to Sunday with its time slots.

Examples for your personal registration

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timetable • Duration • What happens before • My answer • What happens after • Alternative solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of my answer, what I think, what I feel, what I do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of my answer: what I think (number of times, intensity, duration) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of what happens before: I'm asked to something at work that I don't know how to do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of what happens after: I say that I don't feel well and I ask if I can go home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of alternative solution: I send out a message explaining my difficulty and suggesting an alternative solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of timetable and duration: it starts at 9.00 and goes on until 10.00 (continuous thinking) which is when I say I'm going home (avoidance).

If you want to know the frequency of this habit in a week of your life, it would be enough to put small signs in the register, detecting the number of times it occurs.

However, you may also be interested in knowing, qualitatively, what it is that generates a feeling of sadness in you. In this case, you would add a new column in order to write down what happens before this feeling.

Ana was interested in detecting the moments that made her feel unwell. In the register she specified the following behaviour:

- ✚ day 22 at 10 p.m., I feel sad and want to cry;
- ✚ day 25 at 2 p.m., I get a 6.5 average in my marks, but I don't feel anything positive and this feeling makes me uncomfortable. In addition, I distance myself from my friends in class, I feel indifference, because I think they do things in a bad way;
- ✚ day 26 at night, I only sleep for two hours;
- ✚ 27th in the afternoon, I don't feel well doing my homework;
- ✚ On the morning of the 28th, it affects me when my parents argue at home, as well as seeing them in a bad way.



Within a week, by observing yourself and with a simple record, you can find out what it is that prevents you from being happy, how often it happens and at what time.

In addition, as we have seen in the graph above, you can get more information by paying attention to other aspects:

- the duration
- the intensity
- what happens and which people are present before
- what happens and who is present afterwards

Secondly, you may be interested in improving habits that you like, so you can also measure this behaviour that you want to increase because they seem positive to you, considering that you are not making enough effort yet or that you could do even better.

Raul, who is a physical education teacher, is interested in drinking the recommended number of litres per day for his personal diet. With his manual register, he decides to monitor the number of glasses of water he drinks each day and at what time of day he drinks them.

Paula, who is studying for a competitive examination, needs to increase the time she spends studying each week. In her notebook, she specifies her planned and actual timetable and also notes down the factors that prevent her from achieving optimum efficiency.

Pedro, whose main value is solidarity, expresses his interest in dedicating a weekly time to helping others. To do this, he sets a goal for himself and writes down his weekly actions for the benefit of others.

Lidia has just started her new job as a section manager in a shopping centre and in order to be more efficient, she decides to take half an hour out of her time each day to continue training in those tasks she does not control. To keep track of her progress, she records the time and content of what she is studying every day and so, at the end of the month, she is satisfied with her achievements and reflects on the best way to continue her training.

Analyse what happens. With the actions that happen after the occurrence of the habit, the problem is reinforced, maintained, modified or eliminated.

It is important to observe this process in order to know what each person likes, what is the reward that each person needs in each situation. In many cases, what happens after this negative behaviour is a reinforcement of it, as if it were a reward.

When Adrian constantly fights with a football teammate, the coach comes to him and tells him off, every time this happens.

It is normal for Adrian to repeat his fights during the afternoon, because what he is really looking for is to attract the attention of the trainer so that someone will pay attention to him, which is what he unconsciously needs.

Reinforcement⁴⁰ can take on different modes. It can be consumable, social, informational, immediate or delayed, differential or point system.

Punishment also takes different forms. It may take the form of a mild reprimand or reprimand, time-out, over-correction or loss of privileges.

Think about the best solution - which guideline will you apply? After having observed, recorded and analysed the whole process, it is time to reflect.

If what you usually do does not work for you, what should you change? And in any case, what can you do so that this never happens again or so that it gradually decreases the number of times it happens or decreases its intensity in some way?

This is the time to draw up a list of alternative solutions that you can try out over time, ranking them on a priority scale: from the easiest to the most difficult or from the most effective to the least effective.

⁴⁰ See definitions in "Guía educativa para padres y madres" Editorial 3ooks (2010).



Ideas for demonstrating good citizenship

Behaviour is the conduct you perform. It is all the activities, gestures, expressions or movements you manifest in your daily life. Behaviour is a rough reflection of how you think or feel. If you are worried or nervous, you will show it in your behaviour. Acting appropriately means that what you do is good for you and those around you.

We have already described how there are young people who internalise their problems and show themselves to be inhibited, sad or nervous, and there are others who externalise them and show themselves to be impulsive, aggressive and capricious. The assessment of whether this behaviour is appropriate or not is conditioned by the society in which we live.

In order for a young person to learn to behave appropriately, they need to be taught the behaviour we want them to follow and need to be observed, listened to and understood. The adults around them should be consistent with what they say and reinforce their positive behaviour.

The young person should know that the people around them will accept him or her unconditionally. At the same time, they should know what the clear and coherent limits are, explained in a clear and simple way, as well as knowing in advance the positive and negative consequences of their behaviour. However, although this would be expected behaviour on the part of others, it often does not happen.

Therefore, when you are young, you should not build up expectations about how others should behave towards you, otherwise this thinking will make you feel frustrated. Whether you have had a positive upbringing or not, this is the time when you have to take responsibility for the consequences of your actions and decide what is the right behaviour for each situation.

You already manifest your personal autonomy and know how to act in your real life. Reaching this personal balance should help you to reflect on which of your qualities and talents can serve and help others to get what they need, even without being asked.

You have already designed your personal strategy through your mission and values and you already practice coherence between your values, skills and competences; you have self-esteem and feel good. This is the

moment when you should be ready to offer your talents (the qualities you have identified that make you different) to the service of society.

Mario is a basketball coach. He is a good player and the association has assigned him to a team of 12 13-year-old girls. He teaches them technique, prepares physical training in the pre-season and analyses the games to think about the next moves. However, when the game is over, whether they have won or lost, he loses his temper and shouts at the team because he thinks they have not tried hard enough.

This attitude, provoked by his perfectionist spirit (which comes from his father) manages to demotivate the players, as it does not relate at all to the players' way of being, nor to the group's process, nor to the individual effort of each one of them.

Although he does not realise it, as a coach he should be trained in psychological skills as well as sporting knowledge.

Here are some ideas to help you think about what it means to be responsible for your behaviour towards others (whether you are a friend, child, partner, boss, teacher or parent):

- be less inconsistent (I learn to expect the things I want, I have a tolerance for frustration)
- be less impulsive (think things through before doing them)
- be generous (others need more than I do, I share my things with others)
- be tolerant (even if I am different in race, religion or ideas I hold)
- be supportive (if someone has a problem, I can try to help them solve it)
- be more empathetic (I put myself in the other person's shoes and understand them)
- respect others (no swearing, shouting, hitting, or breaking objects)
- respect nature (I do not throw rubbish on the ground, I separate glass and paper and I use little water).
- cooperate with others (not pretending to know everything and always acting individually)
- learn to work in a team (knowing how to exchange roles and how to adapt the proposed tasks to all members)
- develop skills (identifying what I need in my role as a decision-maker in relation to others)
- collaborate with associations or foundations, getting involved in actions (volunteering, donations, one-off actions, cooperation, material aid, political action) according to the time you have



available and the subjects that interest you the most or the needs that motivate you the most.

➤ BE A LEADER+

Because if I am selfish, do not share and only look after myself, others will shun me. Or the opposite, if I am generous, give up my own things and seek the best for everyone, those around me will want to share and be with me.

This is the key to the leader+. Life is a *boomerang* that comes and goes, that shakes us and teaches us and that we must analyse in order to constantly reinvent ourselves and pick ourselves up when we fall and renew our personal strategy.

And to work towards this dimension we can also connect globally with the global goals of the 2030 Agenda⁴¹, developing activities that follow some of these 17 principles on improving health, education, environment or equality.

In conclusion, the leader+ is a person who prepares to complete their studies or do their job, start a family or live as a couple or enjoy being single, getting involved in the society in which they live actively, being a coherent, upright and honest person. To do so, they develop their personal strategy, learn to be happy and form part of a quality generation.

⁴¹ 17 Sustainable Development Goals created by the UN (World Health Organisation) to be achieved by all nations of the world.

Quality design 6

BE A LEADER+ **OFFER YOUR TALENTS IN THE SERVICE OF OTHERS**



1. Is there coherence between these activities that you propose with the design of your objectives and with the values that you have chosen to guide your life? Give the reasons for your answer.

Why is it important to obey/respect those in charge? Give an example.

How do you deal with conflicts in your school/company? Are you the first to initiate the way towards mediation and resolution? Or are you one of those who constantly complain and judge others? Give an example.

Search the internet for examples of people having fun and expressing happiness in different contexts (laughing, having a drink together, at a work meeting, travelling, helping an elderly person, dancing at a party, kissing, etc.). Analyse and say what you like about what you see.

2. Have you ever been supportive and do you think it is important? Explain.

How do you think you could contribute to improving these aspects of where you live?

Health

Education

Environment

Equality

Adrian and Julia are 20 and 22 years old respectively. At their university they have been presented with a dilemma. This Christmas there is a children's campaign to collect toys and clothes to take to Kosovo and they have been invited to help. Adrian and Julia have to decide what useful and usable things they want to give to other children they don't know.

Following Adrian and Julia's example, what could you donate?

Select organisations with which you could collaborate.

3.- If you are in charge of people (because you are a trainer, teacher, boss or parent), what kind of skills do you need to have in order to do it well while respecting others and creating a good atmosphere?



When is it necessary to seek professional help?

The level of frequency, intensity and duration of disorders is defined in international manuals⁴² shared by mental health professionals. These determine the universal symptoms that together make up disorders, including the so-called neurotic disorders (where the main component is anxiety) or psychotic disorders (where the focus is on the distorted perception of reality). Behavioural disorders, personality disorders and those derived from the consumption of addictive substances, among others, are also described.

In order to determine the existence of the disorder, the variables mentioned above are taken into account in relation, first of all, to frequency, referring to the number of times the symptom occurs in a day, a week or a month. Secondly, the intensity is analysed, as the symptom can be infrequent and yet appear with a brutal intensity that paralyses your life. And finally, the duration in time is assessed, as it is not the same if you have been feeling that your life has no meaning for 3 years or if you have been feeling that your life has no meaning for just 1 month.

In addition, it is necessary to evaluate some vital, organic or relational aspects, as well as the milestones that have occurred in your life, such as illnesses, moves, break-ups, travel, etc. The stressors that may have influenced the growth of the symptom or feeling of discomfort and the protective factors that serve to make this disorder less negative are assessed.

To know all this, it would be good for you to take pencil and paper and determine, as we have mentioned in the section called "modify your habits", what is happening to you and everything that is happening around your negative symptom. In this way, when you ask for help from a mental health professional, you will be able to express roughly what you think is wrong with you.

Pili introduced us to a lot of people. There was a good atmosphere. At 12 p.m. the orchestra started playing the typical Spanish songs such as the chocolatero, the pajaritos, the paso doble and the Mexican. Then it was the turn of the disco music. It was at this point that I started to feel tired and moved away from the group a bit. I had drunk some alcohol and it was difficult to keep up with the rhythm. Two guys came up to me to

⁴² In the year 2023, they are the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) and the American Psychiatric Association Book of Psychiatry (DSM-5).

make conversation. I remembered that they were some of the guys my friend had introduced us to. They said they needed me to come with them because they wanted to give me something. I was excited. They also said I was very close, so I didn't inform my friends of my absence. But as I turned the corner they pulled me aside against the wall of a house in a dark alley and asked me to kiss them. They tried to squeeze and grope me while I tried to get away as hard as I could. I was definitely weaker. One tried to kiss me and the other insisted on touching me. I was running out of breath, I couldn't scream, I felt a tightness in my chest that prevented me from reacting. All my muscles were tense and I felt completely immobilised.

At that moment, I could hear voices. A group of older people were approaching from the end of the street. It was a large group and thank God it could only head towards where we were. It was my moment of salvation. The men ran away and I was left alone, confused, gasping for breath, limp, crying.

I strolled slowly down the street. The group of older people passed me by and didn't notice my embarrassment. I didn't say anything either. I quickened my pace to follow them and went back to the dance. I didn't feel like anything anymore. What would have happened if...? My life would have changed radically. I needed to go home, I couldn't stay there any longer. Pili came with me because she understood that I needed to rest, but she never asked me and I never told her. I went to bed shattered and fell asleep exhausted.

I never told anyone about this episode, it remained hidden in my subconscious. 10 years after I met Paco, weeks before the wedding, I told him about it. I started to have images of these boys trying to abuse me. They had stayed with me and now, 10 years later, they overwhelmed me and prevented me from enjoying my sexual relations. Talking to him about it relaxed me, but it didn't make these feelings go away. It was clear that I needed other help and I thought about the possibility of going to a psychologist. I asked Marta if she knew anyone outside the village. I didn't want to say what it was for or have to explain where I was going. So we decided to look for someone in Madrid.

Going to a psychologist seemed crazy, but I thought I should give it a try. I was also going to the eye doctor and the dentist, so why not go to a mental and behavioural professional? Carmen listened to me with kindness and professionalism and captivated me to get to know myself



better. Getting to know myself, my way of being, reactions and personality were learnings that during the 20 sessions that the treatment lasted for a year, filled my new rucksack with the new things I had learnt. We didn't really focus on the disturbing images that I kept dreaming about, but it taught me to relax and to focus my attention on the more positive aspects of myself, some of which I had never even known before.

Many times, as happened to Pili, we have doubts because we don't know exactly if our negative vital feeling is enough to ask for help or not. Faced with this dilemma, it is interesting to know that psychologists, after a conversation and some initial assessments, are able to determine what you have and give you appropriate guidance on what you could do to improve.

It is also true that the experience of going to a psychologist may not be entirely positive the first time, as with other professionals. Therefore, you can ask for a second opinion and look for a psychologist who connects with you in the right way.

You should also know that there are different orientations in psychology and that each one of them focuses on specific aspects and uses certain therapeutic tools or others; therefore, it is interesting to ask for information from the professionals of the health systems, professional associations or other people who have already been there so that they can refer you to the professional that best suits your problem and your way of being.

In general, you can seek help in different private and public services in your city: health centres, hospitals, universities, public administration (youth, women, social services), human resources departments of companies, trade unions, counsellors in schools, helplines, associations and foundations that work to improve different social and psychological problems.

If you have come this far, I would like to think that you are now a little wiser and that you have more tools in your bag to be able to solve the setbacks in your life. I would like to think that you have been left with the idea that if you manage to be good with yourself and discover your talents, you are going to put them at the disposal of your environment and the society in which you live, to try to leave the world a little better than how we found it.

Poems to express the soul

These poems reflect real experiences of young people. They can be inspirational for other young people who choose to use writing as a means of expressing their own feelings.

Indecision

Thinking and not knowing what you think,
searching and not knowing what to find,
singing without writing the notes
for not knowing what to recite.
Waking up and not finding the moon,
sleeping and not finding the sun,
live to find life,
die and suffer no more.
Feeling and not understanding what you feel,
dreaming and not knowing with whom,
doubt without understanding doubt,
to love without discovering whom.
Born to cross paths,
grow without disappearing,
to walk this new path
to be reborn at last.

The death of a loved one

In the twilight of the night
with the flowers already cursed,
the darkness is opening up
with the black daisies.
Those dull red flowers
they already smell of incense, they are already withered.
Those sweet hours shared
make their way to heaven to continue their lives.
It is the eternal rest of death,
is the great way forward.
Part of the big dreams
where God was the most good to love you.
It is sad to lose a soul,
but the glory is already theirs.
It's sad to lose your cool
without the loved one.



Lonely in the night

Lonely in the night,
I remember with kindness
the best moments of an April afternoon,
rainy and wonderful.
As I glance through my book,
trying to retain in my memory the paragraphs of a Spanish language lesson,
my thoughts evade such cultured words into the flight of night,
towards the dreaming of the enchanted person.
I no longer live in the present,
of feelings and emotions,
alive with imagination and impulses of the heart.
Inside me lives a book of poems and songs,
with a fixed, certain, immutable destiny;
an open book with musical notes,
with sonorous caresses, with triumphant kisses.

Free, without fear

If you free yourself from the fear marked by your life,
you will be able to fall more times oppressed
and feel doubly hurt.
If you free yourself from the fear marked by your life,
you can feel free and welcome,
you will be able to truly love, to give yourself
and give your trust as a friend.
If you free yourself from the fear marked by your life,
perhaps you will suffer again or weep for your beauty,
but you will have the joy of having loved others,
of having totally entrusted yourself to the person you loved.
Free yourself from the fear that oppresses you and you will be quicker in your
flight.
You'll be a happy, extroverted, flaming bird,
who looks to others for trust,
spreading its wings without delay.

Autumn weather (when I'm unwell, but I don't know what's wrong with me)

Autumn leaves, scattered on the ground,
are closing dreamy roads.

From time to time, the wind scatters them.
and forms a very dense nebula.

On the slopes of the mountain, the pines already saddened
dominate the horizon;
the absence of live branches,
riverbanks, poplar groves, streams and rivers.

It is the bitterest time

where sleep makes lethargy;

is the time of year

that can do you more harm.

The landscapes I see in the darkness
are drifting away in the fog;
the few lights spotted,
are disappearing, fading away.

They are the birds of the day
that have gathered their wings.

They are the smallest beings
who have forgotten their souls.

It's the days already lost...the hours you try to make up for them.



Acknowledgements

The experiences with my young friends are the inspiration for the diaries, poetry and stories that permeate this book: Isabel, Michel, Porto, Luis, Mena and our dear Tito, among others.

At the Aragonese Youth Institute I had the opportunity to meet incredible young people, participants in entrepreneurship courses, artists, volunteers in field trips, play leaders and job seekers, etc. From all of them, I learned stories of self-improvement, commitment, learning and fun.

The mini-surveys that have been used to complete the "Tips for seeking support" section belong to 4 young people who have shared with you their real difficulties in understanding the messages in this publication.

Iris, a psychologist and colleague, has been an inspiration to me through her reflections and research on leadership and well-being. I look forward to sharing many more psychological adventures with her.

I love sharing with my daughters Laura and Gema the new pieces of work I am starting. The ideas they have given me about the style, the title, the illustrations, the type of messages and the updating of some themes have contributed to perfecting these pages.

The complicity and stability that I have enjoyed living with Oscar for more than 20 years means that, after reading the manuscript, I accept his advice from the heart.

I am grateful for the disinterested help of Professor of Psychiatry Javier García Campayo for his kindness and willingness to participate as foreword writer. He is an international reference on well-being and happiness and his contributions are a valuable endorsement for this publication.

Last but not least, I am very grateful to Cristina, the Director of ACPUA, for trusting me from the beginning and accepting to edit this Self-Help Manual for Young People.

Back cover

Feeling happy (experiencing that your life has more meaning) doesn't that you don't have problems or illnesses, but that you have enough tools to live with acceptance, following the life project you have set for yourself.

Quality generation: design your "likes" and be happy is a self-help book aimed at young people, their educators and families, which offers psychological learning tips, necessary for reflection and decision making in the process of forming your personality.

Based on concepts of cognitive behavioural and positive psychology, it is developed in a structured and dynamic format, accompanied by a touch of quality.

It interweaves theory with real life examples to demonstrate the ability to create a healthy and happy life in an entertaining way.

A SIMPLE METHOD TO LEAD YOUR LIFE PROCESS.
DON'T LET OTHERS DECIDE YOUR **LIKES**.