



## 5. THE SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK/ PROGRESS

### Introduction

This workshop should ideally be held between workshops 9 and 10 of the *student* component.

### Specific workshop objectives

At the end of the workshop, the parent will be able to:

- Recognize the importance of the social support network;
- Identify the strengths and limitations of their child’s social support network;
- Identify ways to help their child build or maintain their network;
- Review their progress and accomplishments;
- Implement strategies to prevent their child from relapsing.

### How the workshop works

1. Welcome the parents and present the workshop objectives and how it will work.
2. If all the parents have consented to the research component, explain that a part of the workshop will be recorded for program evaluation purposes. It’s important to remind them that it’s the program impacts that are being evaluated and not them. Tell them you’ll let them know when you start recording. Encourage them to be themselves—open and honest—and to talk about both the good things and the bad. Their feedback will help to improve the program.

#### A. Discussion about your experience (15 min.)

1. Ask the parents about their day-to-day life with their child: How did the past few weeks go? Are they seeing any changes in their child or themselves?
2. Review the concepts seen in the last workshop: What things did they notice or use with respect to lifestyle habits and stress management strategies? How did the exposure activity go for their child? Did they implement the lifestyle habits and stress management strategies they identified together? Were they helpful?

## B. The importance of the social support network (10 min.)

1. Ask the parents what purpose they think a teenager's social support network serves.
2. Listen to a few answers and complete with the following explanations:

Having a social support network is a **protection factor** in coping with stress and life events. It helps **meet various personal and social needs**, including support for self-esteem (through the appreciation that others feel for us), the feeling of usefulness (by feeling useful to others, which increases our self-esteem), emotional support (by providing comfort, listening, and understanding), concrete help in terms of favours and occasional financial assistance, relevant information (by giving relevant advice, information about opportunities), academic support, support for social integration (helping to make new friends, meeting new people), etc. This social support network can also help when it comes to **dealing with the developmental stages of adolescence**. Being able to rely on different people is reassuring (Pauzé *et al.*, 2019).

During adolescence, it's important that a teen's social support network include both adults (parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, teachers, coaches) and peers (friends, classmates, teammates, cousins). **A balanced network includes both adults and young people**, friends, and family (Pauzé *et al.*, 2019).

What matters most is not the number of people in the social support network, but the **satisfaction and the reciprocity received from the support system and the quality of the relationships**. Having friends who are arguing with each other can be more stressful than comforting (Claes, 2003).

The main function of the people who make up the social support network when faced with stress or an anxiety-provoking situation is **to provide support by being present, understanding, available, listening, not judging, giving support, and providing relevant information** (Pauzé *et al.*, 2019).

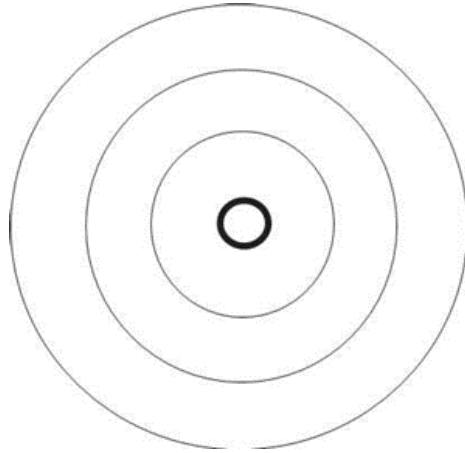
To better understand the importance of peers during adolescence, refer to the following information. Feel free to summarize in your own words.

According to several researchers, successfully fitting in with a peer group and forming friendships act as protective factors when it comes to the many changes that accompany the start of adolescence, whether physical, family related, social, or academic (Claes, 2003). In fact, heart-to-heart conversations with friends can help to lessen the anxiety related to transitioning to adolescence; they can also help to increase self-esteem and coping skills. Friendships also create feelings of security and well-being. They make you feel like you're "somebody," like you're important and have value and status. Finally, friendships are an important source of support during stressful events. Researchers have found that the quality of friendships is more important than the number of friends a person has (Claes, 2003).

Having friends to confide in, share concerns with, and trade opinions with creates feelings of security and support. On the other hand, feeling alienated (angry, distant) from your friends is linked to mental health issues, such as symptoms of depression and anxiety. A lack of friendships, or poor-quality or rocky friendships, are also risk factors for the eventual appearance of mental health disorders such as anxiety (Claes, 2003).

### C. Map of your child's social support network (30 min.)

1. Tell the parents that the next activity will allow them to think about the significant people in their child's social support network and the roles these people play.
2. Ask the parents to take out the *Social support network map* (adapted from Desmarais, Blanchet and Mayer, 1982), which is in their *Handy parent guide*.



Give them the instructions for drawing the map:

- Your child is in the middle.
- Think about how the people in their life are grouped into different categories (e.g., school, activities, family, teachers, case workers, etc.). On the map, draw a wedge (slice of pie) for each group. The size of the wedge should correspond to the importance of that group in your child's life.
- For each group, think about significant people and write them on the map according to the following:
  - In the first circle (small one), write the names of the people they see every day (their inner circle).
  - In the second circle (medium one), write the names of the people they see on a regular basis.
  - In the third circle (big one), write the names of the people they see only rarely. You can write their first name or their initials.
- Once everyone is listed on the map, draw arrows representing the reciprocal nature of each relationship. An arrow pointing from your child to the other person means your child is giving more than they are receiving in this relationship; an arrow pointing from the other person to your child means your child is receiving more than they are giving in this relationship; an arrow pointing in both directions means each person is giving as much as they are receiving.

3. Once the map is completed, go back over some of the concepts:

**Reciprocity (the arrows).** Your child may have friends who ask for a lot but give little in return. Over time, these friends can become a source of stress in their life. On the other hand, if your child takes a lot from certain relationships, these people may burn out, or your child may end up feeling like they owe them something. It's also important to think about the level of support that some people can provide. Some relationships can become "safe havens" when your child is anxious, even enabling them in avoiding stressful situations.

**The different categories (wedges).** It's important to maintain balance in this area as well. If your child's social support network is made up mostly of their parents and family members, they may end up isolated at school. Some shyer children tend to cling to their family, which becomes their main comfort zone. It's important for a child to develop their social skills with their peers. On the contrary, if their only meaningful exchanges are with their friends, your child deprives themselves of the possible support of their family. Despite the impression they give off, your teenager still needs you.

**Frequency (circles).** It can also be interesting to observe how many people are in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd circles, and how well your child gets along with these people. If their main sources of support are all in the 3rd circle (people they see rarely), then they may not be getting enough support. It may be worthwhile to find ways to spend more time with them. And if the reciprocity of the relationships with the people in the 1st circle isn't ideal, it could be a good idea to work on the quality of these relationships, since these are people your child sees often.

4. Now lead a group discussion by asking the following questions.

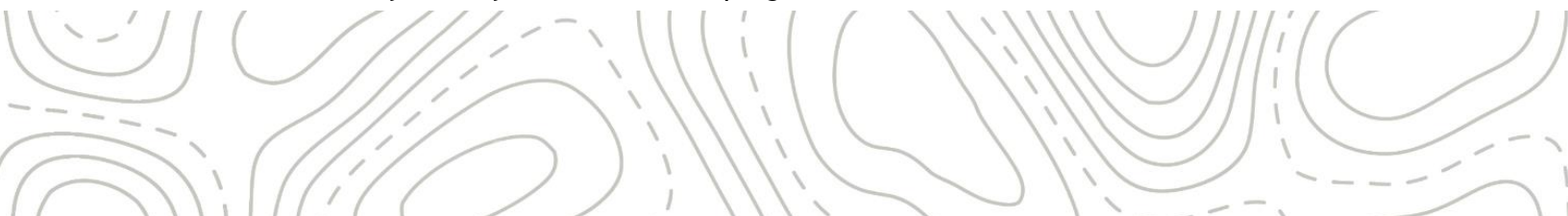
- What things do I notice when I do this exercise?
- Do I feel like my child's social support network is balanced?
- Can I identify two ways to help them improve the quality of their social support network?

3. Wrap up the activity by asking them to have a discussion with their child about this exercise, which they also did as part of the program, in order to validate their perceptions, tools and satisfaction with their network.

## D. Review of meetings (20 min.)

1. Now lead a group discussion by asking the following questions:

- What have you learned about yourself and your role as a parent?
- Which tools or information do you find most useful?
- Which strategies do you apply in your daily life?
- What changes have you noticed in the way your child deals with anxiety-provoking situations?
- Name a strength or accomplishment you noticed in another group member.
- Name three program activities you liked and three you liked less.
- How has your relationship with your child changed?
- Do you have any suggestions or comments for ways to improve the program?
- How do you see yourself after the program?



## E. And after...? (15 min.)

1. In reference to the last question in the previous review about the post-program period, explain that it's important to be prepared for more difficult times that potentially lie ahead. Ask the parents to answer the following questions, which are in their *Handy parent guide*:
  - What are some signs that your child isn't doing well?
  - What are some signs that you're dealing with a lot of emotions?
  - What tools do you want to remember when things aren't going so well?
    - Managing emotions chart;
    - Mindfulness exercise;
    - Strategies to replace accommodation;
    - Questions to help you reformulate thoughts;
    - Positive lifestyle habits and stress management strategies.
2. Reconvene as a group to discuss each parent's answers.
3. Lastly, take a look at the resources available in their region:
  - CLSC;
  - Community organizations;
  - School;
  - Parent help line: <https://www.ligneparents.com/LigneParents>.

## F. Closing statement

1. Take a few minutes to congratulate each parent and to tell the group how much you enjoyed your experience together.
2. Give everyone the chance to share something with the group, if they want to.

