

Pedagogical Contexts 2019, No. 1(12)
www.kontekstypedagogiczne.pl
ISSN 2300-6471
pp. 73–87
DOI: 10.19265/KP.2019.11273



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Received: 8.10.2018
Accepted: 30.10.2018

Karol Konaszewski

ORCIDiD: 0000-0003-1362-4245
University of Białystok
k.konaszewski@uwb.edu.pl

Sebastian Rutkowski

ORCIDiD: 0000-0002-8504-0129
Education and Social Readaptation Youth Centre in Goniądz
srutkowski@skryba.media.pl

Alfred Tuci

ORCIDiD: 0000-0002-6147-7422
Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education in Warsaw
fredi72@live.com

IDENTIFICATION WITH SELECTED EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS AND INTENSIFICATION OF ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIORS IN THE GROUP OF JUVENILES PLACED IN YOUTH EDUCATIONAL CENTERS

IDENTYFIKACJA Z WYBRANYMI ŚRODOWISKAMI WYCHOWAWCZYMI A NASILENIE ZACHOWAŃ ANTYSPOŁECZNYCH W GRUPIE NIELETNICH UMIESZCZONYCH W MŁODZIEŻOWYCH OŚRODKACH WYCHOWAWCZYCH

Keywords:
sense of identification, educational environments, youth, antisocial behaviors

Summary: The study was to determine the correlation between the level of antisocial behaviors and the sense of identification with selected educational environments in the group of socially maladjusted youth. A total of 481 residents of Youth Educational Centers participated in the study. The focus was on the sense of identification with the chosen educational environments in

the context of manifested antisocial behaviors. It turned out that, regardless of the intensity of antisocial behaviors, the sense of familial identification is always equally strong. In the case of the sense of identification with a peer group, a certain regularity can be observed. The higher the intensity level of antisocial behavior, the stronger the sense of peer identification. However, when the sense of identification with school is strong, the intensity of antisocial behaviors decreases.

Słowa kluczowe

poczucie identyfikacji,
środowiska
wychowawcze,
młodzież,
zachowania
antyspołeczne

Streszczenie: Celem badania było ustalenie związku między poziomem zachowań antyspołecznych a poczuciem identyfikacji z wybranymi środowiskami wychowawczymi w grupie młodzieży nieprzystosowanej społecznie. Ogółem przebadano 481 wychowanków młodzieżowych ośrodków wychowawczych. Skupiono się na poczuciu identyfikacji z wyróżnionymi środowiskami wychowawczymi w kontekście przejawianych zachowań antyspołecznych. Okazało się, że niezależnie od nasilenia zachowań antyspołecznych poczucie identyfikacji rodzinnej zawsze jest tak samo silne. W przypadku poczucia identyfikacji z grupą rówieśniczą można zaobserwować pewną prawidłowość. Im wyższy poziom nasilenia zachowań antyspołecznych, tym silniejsze poczucie identyfikacji rówieśniczej. Natomiast w przypadku poczucia identyfikacji szkolnej wraz z nim nasilenie zachowań antyspołecznych maleje.

Introduction

The humanist perspective of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1976a, 1979, 1988) draws attention to a specific type of system (which can be defined as an exchange) involving the individual and his or her life environment. This interaction can take place within a defined microsystem, for example, within a family, between parents and their child. The author focuses on the problems of the social and physical environment that affect human development. He observes that different theoretical approaches focus on the characteristics of the individual, and only some on the characteristics of the environment in which the individual lives. Human existence does not take place in a single environment, but in a system of different places and as

a result of many social interactions (Bańka, 2002, p. 92). Such places include, inter alia, one's family, peer group, school and the other environments with which the individual interacts.

In the literature on the subject, Bronfenbrenner (1976b, 1979) is seen as the creator of the theory of place, since he was the first to point out that place is a product of the mental processes occurring in the individual, social interaction processes and the physical properties of the environment. For this reason, some researchers (Kemp, Whittaker & Tracy, 1997; Dubois & Krogsrud, 1999) emphasize the importance of the environment in human life and the process of mutual adjustment of the individual and his or her environment. In order to understand human mental development, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1988) proposes looking at the environment of human life holistically, taking into account the physical, intra-mental and socio-cultural environment. To discern the role of the environment in the process of shaping young people's behaviors, attitudes and identities, it is necessary to look at their development in the "ecological" dimension and determine what kind of relations take place among them (Brzezińska, 2000, pp. 187–188). Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1988) explains this approach with the need to present hierarchically ordered structures that contain each other and between which there are a number of different patterns of behavior. This stance suggests that the term "environment" is understood as a place with a number of physical properties, in which particular family members participate, undertaking certain types of activity and fulfilling their roles for a certain period of time. The author describes the social environment of development as a system of mutually dependent subsystems permeating and supplementing each other. This approach emphasizes the dynamism and relations between the person and his or her environment. The researcher treats the environment as a certain system, the whole of material and non-material conditions that are connected and interacting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1988).

Psychology recognizes the importance of the environment where a human develops; this environment is defined as "any event outside the body that may affect the development of the body and over which the body may also have an impact" (Brzezińska, 2000, pp. 188–190). The environment of human development is described as relations between people and, in the case of the issue discussed here, the relationship between the formation of behaviors and educational environments such as the family, peer group and school. Analyzing the influence of the environment on the actions of an individual, Bronfenbrenner (1976a, 1976b, 1979) emphasizes that each person perceives and interprets

his or her environment individually, and “their reality” is defined as the space in which they undertake various actions, alone or through interaction with other people. The influence of the environment may be direct, i.e., related to what kind of interactions the individual enters into in a given place and with whom. The environment may also influence a person’s life indirectly, i.e., even though the person does not participate in certain events and situations and is not present on the spot, they are affected by them through other participants. Certain events and situations may also create conditions for both the individual and the people associated with him or her to act. In the course of their lifetime, people change the environment, take on new challenges and interact in different ways. These are the so-called ecological transitions/shifts, which – according to the author – constitute the key moments of human development.

According to the Ecological Systems Theory, the individual and his or her living environment interact bidirectionally (Izdebska, 2000, p. 26). The ecological perspective depicts the environment as a place where the individual develops and where particular intended as well as unintended influences of the family, peer group and school occur. This approach emphasizes the relationship between humans and their environment and shows its effects on individuals in different aspects of life. To a significant degree, this relationship can shape behavior, including, as in the case discussed herein – antisocial behavior. Moreover, the theory described above makes it possible to search for the sources and factors influencing antisocial behavior in particular environmental spheres and to analyze them.

Methodological assumptions of own research

The aim of the study was to establish a correlation between the level of antisocial behavior and the sense of identification with selected educational environments in a group of socially maladjusted youth. It was assumed that the phenomenon of identification with a group is one of the key socio-cultural issues in adolescence, and identification, which is based on the individual’s perception of him- or herself as a member of a group, is connected with the emotional sense of belonging to a specific group. On the other hand, the question of “Who am I?” – a constitutive question for the identification of a human being – can *de facto* be more precisely answered when followed by different ones: “Where do I belong?” and “Which social groups do I identify with?” In the social dimension, finding an answer to the main question regarding one’s

identity determines the stability of the subject and the cohesion of behavior in subsequent situations as well as the integration of one's own self. Paying attention to a wider spectrum and different levels of shaping the sense of identification is dictated by the search for a possible relationship between environmental influences – the microsystem of family-home, peer groups and school – and the intensification of antisocial behavior. It seems that the approach to the formation of one's own self requires taking into account the interactions within his or her microsystem, i.e., the relationship between the individual and his or her parents, teachers, peers, as well as aspects related to their functioning in a wider social context – in this case, with manifestations of demeanor that does not comply with social norms.

The selection of the study group was partly purposive and partly accidental. The criterion for purposive sampling was the type of institutions in which the respondents were placed by the family court. The accidental sampling referred to the rehabilitation centers (Youth Educational Centers). Twelve institutions (Goniądz, Borowie, Otwock/Józefów, Puławy, Różanystok, Kolonia Ossa, Kolonia Szczerbacka, Rusinów Konecki, Wola Rowska, and centers on the following streets in Warsaw: Strażacka, Dolna, Patriotów) from all over Poland were selected for the survey. The sample was determined by the character of the population (finite) and its specificity (youth who had been placed in Youth Educational Centers by departments of family services and juvenile district courts). The necessary sample size $n_b = 390$ was determined for the population of wards in Youth Educational Centers (when selecting the sample, only youth within the intellectual norm were taken into account) with a confidence factor of 0.90 and a maximum error of 4% (Brzeziński, 2004). Taking into account these calculations, a total of 481 wards from Youth Educational Centers were surveyed (the research included those wards who gave their consent). A small majority of the respondents were boys – 54% (258), while girls constituted 46% (218) of the respondents. Five pupils did not indicate a gender. The data obtained indicate that the age ($M = 16.34$, $SD = 0.97$) of the respondents was between 14 and 18. The largest group of respondents were persons aged 16 (36.4%) and 17 (36.0%), followed by 15 (13.3%). The least numerous groups were respondents aged 18 (10.0%) and 14 (4.2%). The towns and centers in which the research was conducted are presented below (Table 1).

Table 1

Summary of the surveyed centers and percentage share of wards in each of the Youth Educational Centers

Name of the Youth Educational Center (Młodzieżowy Ośrodek Wychowawczy)	Number of questionnaires completed	Participation in the sample
Youth Educational Center, Goniądz	49	10.2%
Youth Educational Center, Borowie	16	3.3%
Youth Educational Center, Otwock/Józefów	29	6.0%
Youth Educational Center, Kolonia Ossa	45	9.4%
Youth Educational Center, Kolonia Szczurbacka	64	13.3%
Youth Educational Center, Puławy	46	9.6%
Youth Educational Center, Różanystok	57	11.9%
Youth Educational Center, Rusinów Konecki	34	7.1%
Youth Educational Center, Wola Rowska	27	5.6%
Youth Educational Center, Warsaw, Strażacka street	35	7.2%
Youth Educational Center, Warsaw, Dolna street	15	3.1%
Youth Educational Center, Warsaw, Patriotów street	30	6.2%
ND (No Data)	34	7.1%
All	481	100%

Source: Konaszewski, 2016 and the authors' own research.

In the research, the method of diagnostic survey was applied, in which the questionnaire technique was used. According to L. Pytko, the term “social maladjustment” is a mental shortcut meaning various anti-social behaviors. Therefore, it can be assumed that these are behaviors of children and adolescents that are in conflict with the existing norms of social coexistence. These behaviors are accompanied by negative social reactions because of their demonstrable social harmfulness and involve violating ideals and legal norms, breaking moral and ethical standards or causing suffering of the social environment. In order to determine the picture of faulty social functioning, the Social Maladjustment Scale (hereinafter abbreviated as SNS according to its

Polish name, i.e., *Skala Nieprzystosowania Społecznego*) devised by L. Pytka was applied to study young people aged 13–17. The SNS consists of six subscales. The subscale used in the research was an Antisocial Behavior Scale (hereinafter abbreviated as ZA according to its Polish name, i.e., *Zachowania Antyspołeczne*). This subscale consists of 10 categories describing the characteristics of social behavior. A three-tier scale (0, 1, 2 points) is used to describe the severity of each characteristic. A 0-point value is assigned to statements describing normal, socially desirable characteristics. The 1- and 2-point values are assigned to statements describing moderate and significant degrees of intensity of negative behavioral characteristics, respectively. The basis for determining the type and level of social maladjustment is the sum of points obtained in individual partial scales.

The sense of identification has been operationalized as the processes of identifying and identifying oneself. The former is the process of self-recognition resulting from perceiving oneself as an object of cognition. The latter is the phenomenon of subjective affiliations, i.e., striving for becoming part of the community, experiencing a sense of connection with the social world. Subjective identification is the search for and feeling of community or unity (Jarymowicz, 2002, p. 110). Moreover, based on A. Kłoskowska's assumptions (2012) that an individual is a member of many groups and communities, for example, the family, nation, target groups and many other communities, and that a person identifies him- or herself with various communities to a different degree, the respondents were asked to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do you identify with your family?
- To what extent do you identify with your peer group?
- To what extent do you identify with the school?

To diagnose the intensity of identification within a group, a scale from 1 – “I do not identify myself at all” – to 5 – “I identify myself to a large extent” – was used.

In order to confront the independent variable, i.e., the intensity level of antisocial behaviors with the sense of identification with educational environments, three intensity levels of antisocial behaviors were distinguished on the basis of sten scores: low (N = 75), medium (N = 130) and high (N = 276); moreover, three levels of identification were distinguished: with the family (weak N = 21, medium N = 36, strong N = 424), with the peer group (weak N = 43, medium N = 164, strong N = 274), and the school (weak N = 91, medium N = 173, strong N = 217). The obtained results were divided into

percentiles, namely, weak identification level – below 1.7, strong identification level – 3.4 and above, and medium identification level – from 1.7 to 3.3.

To verify the relationship between the sense of identification with selected educational environments and the intensity level of antisocial behavior, the non-parametric Chi-squared test (χ^2) was applied.

Results of own research

The study was intended to establish a correlation between the level of antisocial behaviors and the sense of identification with selected educational environments in the group of socially maladjusted youth. The first attempt to determine the variables was an analysis of the disintegration of the sense of identification with the family and the intensity level of antisocial behaviors. The results are presented in Figure 1.

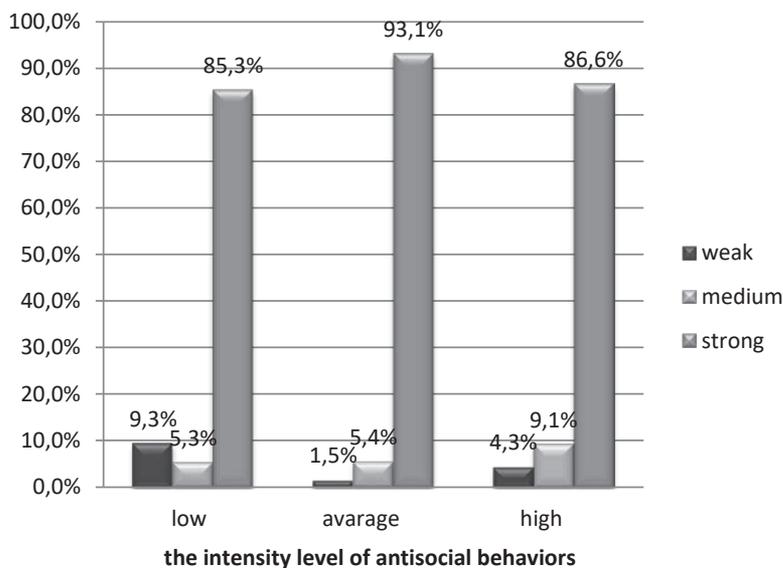


Figure 1.

Sense of identification with the family and intensification of antisocial behaviors.

Source: the authors' own research.

The obtained results show that minors with low, average and high levels of antisocial behaviors feel similarly strongly identified with the families they come from. Strong attachment was shown by over 85% of youth with a low level of antisocial behaviors, 93.1% with an average level and 86.6% with a high level. In order to verify the relationship between the sense of identification with the family and the intensity level of anti-social behavior, the Chi-squared test was used. The results turned out to be statistically insignificant $\chi^2(4, N = 481) = 9.26; p = 0.055$, which may indicate that the sense of identification with the family is comparable regardless of the intensity of antisocial behaviors. This means that individuals who manifest different degrees of antisocial behavior feel similar identification with their families. It should be noted that in families of maladjusted youth, one can observe: a lack of positive role models, numerous dysfunctions, unresolved problems, disturbed interpersonal communication and socio-cultural structure, poor knowledge about upbringing and defective and pathological models of parents' behaviors; all of the above factors drastically reduce the level and educational potential of the family environment and negatively affect the course and effects of the psycho-social development of youth (Bębas, 2011, p. 263). A. Bandura also pointed this out, claiming that acquiring criminal and aggressive behavior patterns takes place through direct experience or imitation (Kuć, 2010). It can therefore be concluded that the above-mentioned unfavorable family factors contribute to the emergence of antisocial behaviors, but in the declarations of minors, they do not affect the sense of identification with the family. Family attachment is high in all groups of young people who exhibit varying degrees of antisocial behaviors.

The next dependent variable, which was analyzed in the analysis of disintegration, was identification with the peer group. The results obtained in this area were presented in Figure 2.

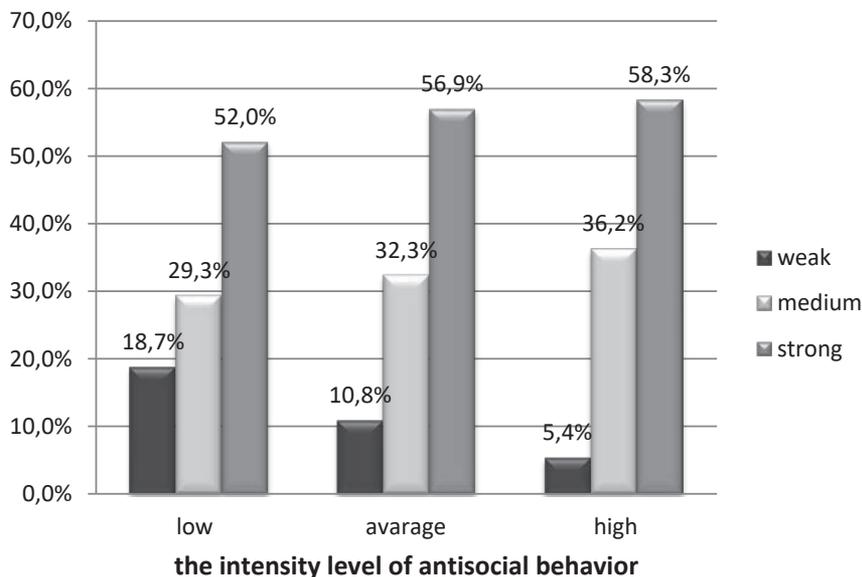


Figure 2.

Peer identification and level of antisocial behavior.

Source: the authors' own research.

In the case of a sense of identification with the peer group, a certain regularity can be observed. The higher the intensity level of antisocial behavior, the stronger the sense of peer identification. Thus, in the case of a low intensity level of antisocial behaviors, 53% of minors strongly identify themselves with their peer group, in the case of an average intensity of socially unacceptable behaviors – 56.9%, and in the case of a high level – 58.3% of minors strongly identify themselves with their peer group. The presented relationship turned out to be statistically significant $\chi^2(4, N = 481) = 13.43; p < 0.05$. Stronger peer identification, therefore, contributes to the intensification of antisocial behaviors. Emerging difficulties in the family (growing conflicts between the child and adults) as well as at school (mainly related to education) contribute to the search for acceptance in other social circles. Thus, if a young person encounters failures at school which expose him or her to the disregard and dislike of teachers and students, he or she starts to seek acceptance in an environment in which he or she can count on help and a positive assessment of his or her behavior. Then the peer group, deprived of adult control, represents an

exceptionally attractive value and becomes the environment in which young people seek contact, acceptance and recognition. Such a group is often a group with negative characteristics, and contacts with peers who do not participate in school life result in a rapid deepening of demoralization. It is therefore quite often a dangerous stage in the process of the derailment of minors (Pospiszyl & Żabczyńska, 1981, p. 110). Moreover, building interpersonal relationships in adolescence usually boils down to seeking acceptance among one's peers, often by trying to impress them in a certain way. If the reference point is an environment of peers who prefer antisocial behavioral patterns, this will be at the expense of relations with the school or other educational institutions (Payne & Cornwell, 2007).

In the subsequent stage, a dependent variable, i.e., identification with the school environment, together with an independent variable, concerning antisocial behaviors manifested, were analyzed.

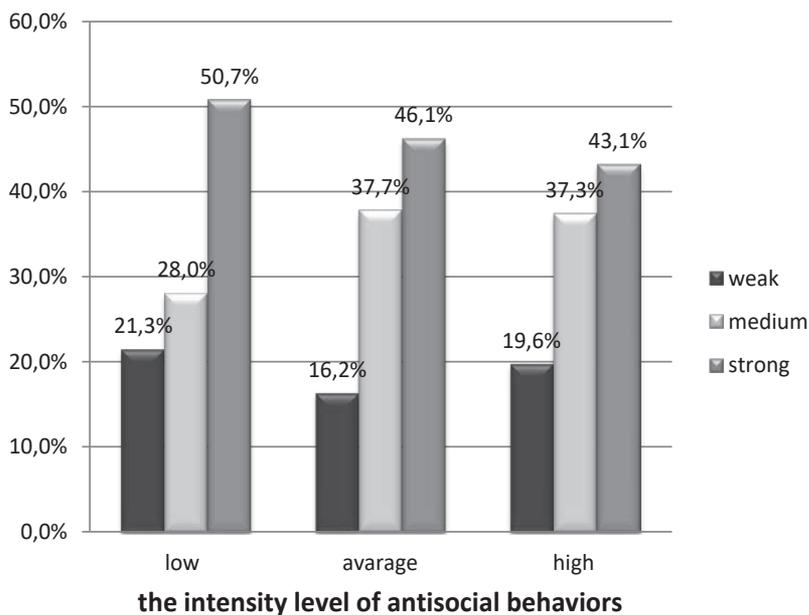


Figure 3.

The sense of identification with the school environment and the intensity level of antisocial behavior.

Source: the authors' own research.

In order to verify the relationship between the sense of identification with school and the level of anti-social behavior, the Chi-squared test was also used. The results turned out to be statistically insignificant $\chi^2(4, N = 481) = 3.17$; $p = 0.529$. This may indicate that regardless of the intensity of antisocial behaviors, the sense of identification with the school is comparable. In the case of a sense of identification with the school environment, some proportionality can nevertheless be observed. The lower the level of antisocial behavior, the stronger the sense of identification with the school. Thus, in the case of low levels of antisocial behavior, 50.7% of minors identify themselves strongly with their school. When we look at antisocial behaviorst hat are of an average intensity level, 46.1% of youth are strongly attached to their school. When the level of antisocial behavior is high, the percentage of identification is reduced to 43.1. This is confirmed by research conducted, inter alia, by the Ministry of National Education, which confirms the importance of identification with the school community and the sense of security at school in countering the demoralization and delinquency of minors. At the same time, what is emphasized is the need to develop proper relations within the school environment, to build a friendly environment and encourage identification of students with school (<https://archiwum.men.gov.pl/> [accessed: 21.01.2016]). Such activities certainly help to shape the integrated identity of a young person. He or she can then creatively participate in social life, finding appropriate activities, thanks to which he or she can spend time as constructively as possible.

Conclusions

Taking into account the sense of identification of young people with the selected environments, one should pay attention to the characteristics of the social group, strictly speaking, its components. According to J. Szczepański, a social group is a group of people (at least three) associated with the following constitutive features (components): goals (tasks), structure (authority, social roles and positions), identification (“we,” “they”) and means of concentration (values, symbols, ideas) (1970). Moreover, H. Muszyński discusses the following mechanisms by means of which the social environment exerts impact on an individual in the process of socialization: the influence of significant persons, based mainly on imitation, modelling, identification; mechanisms of internal strengthening which are secondary to already formed attitudes and habits – they consist in the active assimilation by an individual of certain

beliefs, attitudes, skills and information within the framework of his or her social role; mechanisms of social control stimulated by the general interaction of the environment with the individual and the system of positive and negative reinforcement (Muszyński, 2005, p. 66). As the authors point out, the influence of educational environments on the behavior of young people is indisputable. Therefore, the research discussed above focused on the sense of identification with the selected educational environments in the context of antisocial behaviors. It turned out that regardless of the intensity of antisocial behaviors, the sense of identification with one's family is always equally strong. In the case of the sense of identification with one's peer group, a certain regularity can be observed. The higher the intensity level of antisocial behavior, the stronger the sense of identification with one's peers. However, as far as the sense of identification with one's school is concerned, the intensity of antisocial behaviors decreases with an increased sense of this type of identification. For this reason, it seems that building good relations between students and their school environment is one of the more important tasks in providing support for young people, especially if they are facing various school difficulties or unpleasant experiences. Creating such relationships may increase the sense of identification with their school, which – in our opinion – may be a factor limiting antisocial behavior. Analyzing educational environments, it is impossible to overlook the functioning of an individual in his or her peer group. Participation in the activity of various types of groups may constitute an important value in educational work, but it may also be a cause of future antisocial behaviors (Czapów, 1993, p. 222) and result in shaping identity in a socially undesirable direction. It can be assumed that depending on the group one identifies with, such a group realizes and adopts norms, systems of values, attitudes, principles and patterns of conduct. A negative group may be one of the potential criminogenic environments, as it provides positive feelings and compensates for unpleasant experiences connected with problems at home and difficulties at school.

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