

Freedom – Why is it worth discussing this topic?

Freedom is a value of special importance for teenagers. As they grow up, they often want to be independent and decide about things for themselves. They try to express this in different ways. They expect adults to trust them and give them the opportunity to find their own identities – individuality and independence.

This stage of life is the bridge to adulthood. It is important that parents and other carers cooperate with them to ensure that teenagers make it through this period safely. This task requires a lot of patience, calm and objective consistency, kindness and trust.

This is well illustrated by the metaphor in which adults are symbolised as the swimming pool in which children learn to swim and water is the freedom in which children immerse themselves to swim away from the edge. Parents and other important adults are stable walls which children can reach at any time when they want to turn back, catch their breath and then come back into the pool again to train. The walls must be stable to withstand all of a teenager's departures and returns. It is the responsibility of the adults to create a safe space by setting reasonable boundaries and consistently informing the children when these have been crossed. Adults are also the audience from whom children can hear words of support and encouragement.

Research shows that giving teenagers a significant degree of autonomy from the very beginning of adolescence not only improves their mood and the quality of their relationship with their parents, but above all, influences the development of important competencies necessary for independent adult life. It builds a teenager's self-esteem, improves their decision making abilities, the sense that they have an influence on the world, their empathy, and makes them more sensitive to the needs and emotions of others as well as themselves.

There is also the dark side of freedom. A teenager's psychophysical development is associated with very rapid biological changes. Their body grows and the child matures physically but the emotions can't keep up with these processes. The brain's frontal lobes, responsible for rational decision making, are not yet fully developed, while the reward system, which is associated with emotional support for actions, is fully formed. This results in the tendency for an adolescent to behave unexpectedly, recklessly or impulsively, under pressure from their peer group and without thinking about the long-term consequences. Apart from the frontal lobes, hormones also influence the behaviour of teenagers. Changing moods are caused by dopamine peaks and troughs. Adolescents go through mood swings and, as a result, demonstrate unacceptable behaviour which has consequences which must be faced. An adult should give the child clear information about why their behaviour is unacceptable, so that next time the child can decide that they do not want to do the same and instead take other people and their feelings into account. Punishments are ineffective as they make the child afraid of being caught and so they instead listen to the adult out of fear and not because they have made their own decision to moderate their behaviour. Instead, when the opportunity arises, they will try doing the same again, only trying to hide what they did better. Decisiveness, consequences, but above all, kindness and relationship building are necessary elements to create the conditions for children to experience conscious freedom and responsibility for their own decisions.



| DEAR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS!

During homerooms, we will go through a series of classes devoted to the topic of freedom entitled "Let's create the fan of freedom together", prepared by the Kulczyk Foundation. It is natural for children to constantly explore and try to define the limits of their freedom, and puberty makes this process particularly intensive. Therefore, I would like to encourage you to join the discussion on this issue which is important for all of us. After each class, I will send you a package of materials consisting of a short text prepared by an experienced psychotherapist about why it is worth discussing the given topic, as well as proposals for activities. I hope that this will help you in starting conversations which are important for you and your child.

During the first classes we talked about: *What is freedom?*

Proposals for activities:

- Talk to your child about what freedom means to them and to you. Listen carefully, don't push. Even if you don't manage to talk openly at the first attempt, don't be discouraged. Try to get back to the subject at another opportunity.
- Tell your child about when you started feeling free as a teenager. What were the circumstances and how did you feel?
- Discuss the limitations of freedom that are difficult for both of you – for your child at school, for you at work.
- Talk about whether the degree of freedom in your relationship is satisfactory. If you find that it is not, think about whether you can change it and on what terms. Agree some of the most important rules you want to introduce at home with your child, explain their purpose and what the consequences will be for your child if they do not follow them.
- Remind yourself and tell your child about a situation in which, at their age, you suffered consequences that you felt were fair and influenced your decision not to repeat a certain bad behaviour.
- Ask the child what kind of a person they want to be. Give them the challenge to learn to make well-thought-out decisions independently.