

# SOS Détresse

## Conflicts between generations and cultures

### A generational and cultural gap

The fact that the children consult different models than those of their parents can make the parent-child relationship more complex. Tension and conflict can be born between the parents who may wish to teach traditional values and the children who want to be accepted by their peers and conform to their morals.

Through school, contact with peers or teachers, children are directly involved in the host society. They learn the customs and language of the country more rapidly by putting them into practice. On the other hand, the parents may never feel sufficiently at ease with the new language and culture. They may be closed to change and give a great value to maintaining traditional culture. Also, sometimes children have few occasion to learn about the original culture of their parents. Consequently, the parents and the children risk living more and more in different cultural worlds.

This gap can complicate communication and mutual comprehension at adolescence. At this stage, where the involvement of children outside the family becomes more and more important, it isn't unusual for tension to break out concerning house rules, dress, speech, company and late nights... Moreover, when each person is attached to ways of doing things, expectations and different values, the incomprehension and tension are more intense. The parents and the young people must manage their cultural difference as well as the generation gap. In this way it is possible that the parent stick to beliefs according to which the children must put the needs of the family before their own or that adolescents must put off the time when they can date someone or even avoid having friends of the opposite sex. What the adolescent demands may be impossible for the parents to accept. It is particularly difficult when arguments arrive on a regular basis where hurtful words and acts may be expressed and regretted afterwards.

If the conflicts are also part of the familial relations, it is obvious that each person, the children as well as the parents, needs and hopes to be close to those who are dear to him. It is the way on which the family resolves the conflicts that counts.

### From the point of view of children or adolescents ...

**If we are the children of immigrants**, it may be that our parents seemed stricter than others. Perhaps we didn't have as much freedom as our friends, who were

allowed to go out at night. We felt ourselves more controlled or under surveillance. At home, there were rules that could not be questioned. Perhaps we resented our parents for having strict parental practices when we saw that other parents were more permissive. Hearing "That's the way we do it in our home" was frustrating.

In being more familiar with the host society than our parents, we were better able to compare and evaluate the two cultures in question. We had more distance concerning the culture of our parents and perhaps had a more critical attitude concerning what they wanted to transmit to us. We could therefore have the impression that they held onto the conceptions from their home country, to old ways.

Sometimes there could be a discrepancy between ourselves and our parents due to mastering the language or our higher level of education. In better mastering the language and being more familiar with the present society, we can help our parents in specific administrative procedures and translations. Perhaps that helped us become more matures or responsible. At the same time, we had more difficulty acknowledging our parents authority.

In this situation reconciling on the one hand the expectations and values of our parents and on the other hand those of the society in which we are living is not obvious. If the two sides diverge too much, how can one know which direction to take and which expectations to satisfy? And so for girls on the one hand there is the expectation of success at school and acquiring qualities which are valued by the society such as individualism or creativity. On the other hand, there is the expectation of conforming to the traditional model of a woman. It is particularly difficult when everything gives the impression of being disloyal towards the family.

We are aware and acknowledge the sacrifice and efforts that our parent have made to give us better conditions in life. Somehow we feel liable and we don't wish to deceive their expectations and ideals. At the same time, we must adapt ourselves to the society where our future lies.

### **... From the point of view of the parents**

If we are the immigrant parents, it is in lacking support and in a foreign environment that we must manage the important task of educating the children. If educating a child is never a simple affair, in the situation of migration that we must face even more challenges to fulfil this role well.

Sometimes we feel alone faced with everyday difficulties. We have lost the important support of family and relative who stayed in the home country. However it is normal to need the strength of others to discuss question on the subject of education and to comfort us in our way of doing things. But what is above all missing is the mutual aid, the helping hand for small services given by those close to us, which lightened everyday life.

We all have our own models for what is a good parent and what constitutes the educational strategy of children. But in the new culture, we can find that others have very different conceptions. An educative practice in one country can be in unusual in another. The change of country but also the evolution of modern society, of the

everyday experience, is very different from that which we have known during our own childhood. Far from our own, we quickly doubt our competencies as a parent re-questioning our education system, no longer knowing how or what to do. We feel impotent.

Faced with destabilizing differences between the values and educative models of the two countries, we want to preserve the stability at the heart of the family if necessary employing greater harshness, interdictions and stricter rules. If our adolescent children wish to participate on their own and in that which represents the norm in the host society in our home culture this may be unacceptable. Sometimes, when children's actions are too far off our expectations or faced with the greater liberty that our adolescent demand, we see no other choice than stricter authority. Above all with the eldest child to whom we are trying to transmit with perhaps stricter rules the education that we imagine would be ideal in the country we had to leave. It is wounding when our educational ideas are reproached which are considered as protective and attentive in our native country.

If we have the impression the present society situates itself in conflict with our ideas, we nevertheless do not want to make adaptation an obstacle for our children in a world which represents their future. What we hold closest to our hearts is transmitting the values which will help them create a happy life.

## **The importance of dialogue: the only way of easing conflicts**

Each culture but also each family possesses its own way of interaction, of managing and expressing feelings rather by acts or by words and whether or not to approach certain subjects. It therefore happens that parents and children don't openly speak about certain questions. There are things that are not said, one can't talk about everything.

Nevertheless, when there are disagreements and when each generation closes itself off in its original culture or in its way of seeing things, the conflicts don't find a solution. The absence of dialogue creates even more distance and incomprehension between the generations.

Of course faced with generational and cultural conflicts, there aren't any easy solutions. The solution relies on permanent questioning and adjustments. It is in being open to listening, in being open to and trying to understand our own feelings (but also those of the other) that we can have a more positive dialogue. Dialogue enables us to find compromise and to come closer.

For the parents it is important to transmit their values while remaining open to the outside and new ways of life. Belief in their abilities as well as in the potential of their children lets them adopt a more flexible attitude and to better navigate their parental role in the host country. Being a parent always implies supporting and accepting one's uncertainties, one's doubts and fears in regard to one's children. It helps parent to think of all the effort and patience already invested in transmitting values and important abilities to the children. The children keep them in themselves like

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treasures. The parents can reassure themselves that this lets them find the right way and make the good choice.

Being in contact with one's feelings of vulnerability, while at the same time considering the feelings and points of view of the other side, reconciles and ameliorates dialogue thereby opening up suitable solutions. It is in listening to oneself and to the other that each person can better open oneself to the others.