The **TOOLBOX**

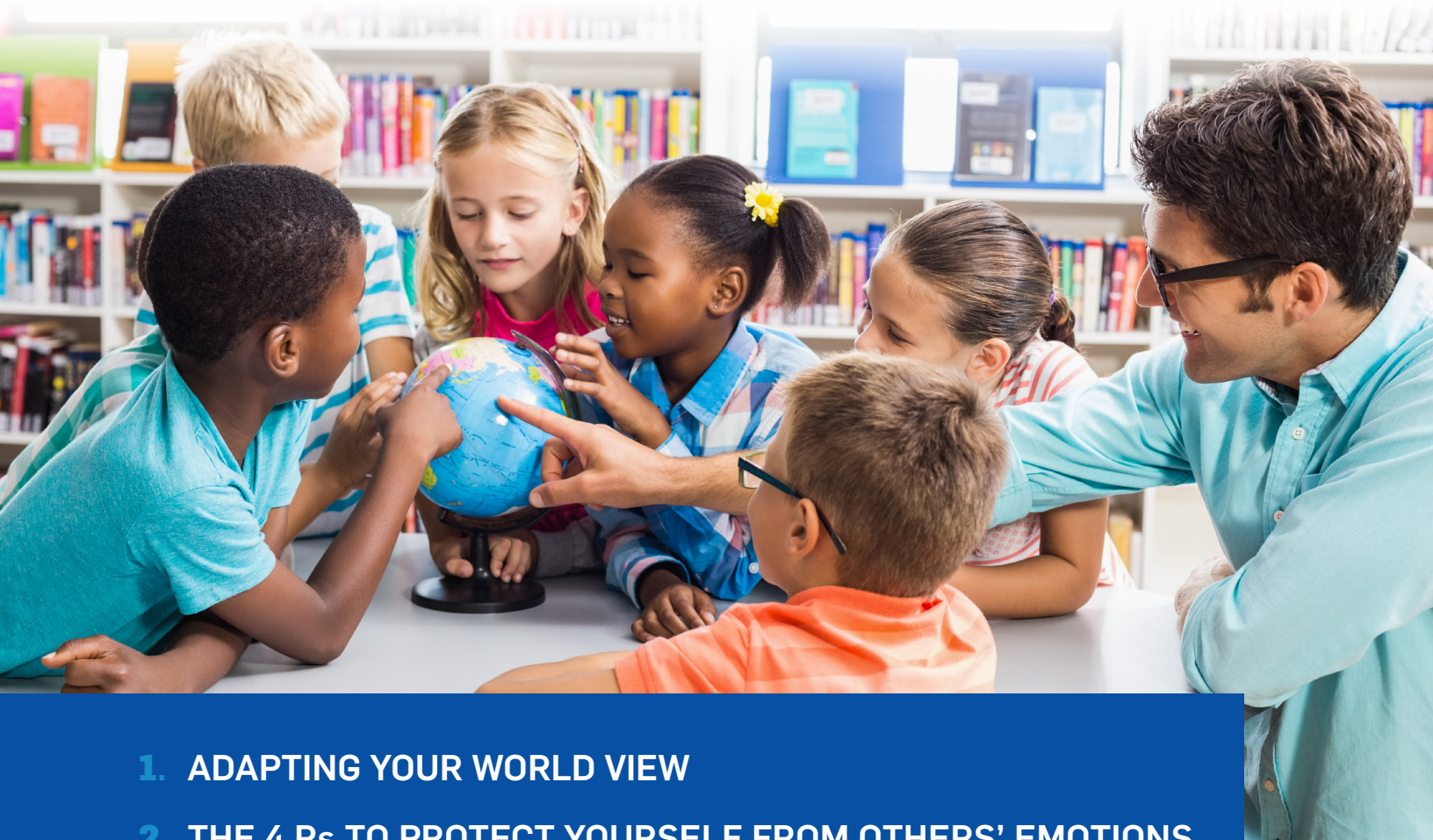## TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS

1. **ADAPTING YOUR WORLD VIEW**

2. **THE 4 Rs TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM OTHERS' EMOTIONS**

3. **IMMEDIACY: EMPATHY SKILLS**

TOOL: Prevention

TARGET AUDIENCE: Anyone in educational relationships with children

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Professionals

1. ADAPTING YOUR WORLD VIEW

TOOL: Prevention

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Professionals

– Details: E.g. Anyone in educational relationships with children

TARGET AUDIENCE: Anyone in educational relationships with children

NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS

– Crisis prevention, identification of at-risk children

SPECIFIC GOALS

– To improve the social awareness of adults in educational relationships with children
– To enhance children's ability to read non-verbal communication and better detect emotions

DESIGN

Pierrich Plusquellec

ADAPTING YOUR WORLD VIEW

Non-verbal communication is underestimated in our society. However, scientific literature indicates that we are very sensitive to it and, most importantly, we have everything we need to interpret it. If we implement a simple tool to make us aware of the wealth of information conveyed by children's non-verbal communication, then we will be able to better detect the emotions and behaviours foreshadowing particular events and improve listening and empathy in schools.

This tool consists in focusing on a non-verbal channel when we interact with other people and with children in particular. For this purpose, we have created a mnemonic device to remember these non-verbal channels, using the acronym **A.D.A.P.T.E.R.**

A stands for ADAPTORS,
emblems and illustrators, which are hand gestures.

Emblems are symbolic actions with a specific verbal translation known by all members of the same cultural group (for example, thumbs up is a sign of approval, or pulling your eyelid down with your index finger is a sign of doubt); illustrators complement verbal communication by describing the emotional content of interaction from afar (such as when a mother scolds her child from across the street or when children interact in the courtyard in the distance without you being able to hear them); regulators are the actions that maintain and regulate the flow of a conversation; and adaptors are gestures directed towards yourself or objects (scratching your chin, fidgeting with your hands, handling a pen) and that may indicate a negative emotional state.

D stands for DISPLAY.

Anger may be displayed by a heavy gait, sadness by a slight arm swing, joy by brisk walking. However, these indicators are not universal, which means that a person who walks briskly is not necessarily always happy. These indicators depend on each individual's basic level.

A stands for APPEARANCE/POSTURE.

Some postures are indicative of an individual's emotional tone. Others may indicate information about a relationship, such as the akimbo position (head straight, hands on hips), which may be displayed in front of people who we look down upon and who we consider hierarchically inferior to us at the time. Others describe the typical pride posture (head up, "swollen" torso), which may be very useful to spot when a professional is working on a child's challenges, for example.

P stands for PROXEMICS,

which is the study of the distance between people. Breaking these implicit interpersonal distances is viewed as an invasion of personal space. Our amygdala, the nerve structure responsible for fear reactions, is actually very sensitive to it. This phenomenon explains why the space we have between each other often makes us react. For professionals, paying attention to this interpersonal space can be very important when meeting a client for the first time. Subjects usually experience an invasion if strangers enter within 0.70 m of their space, but the space is 1.70 m for children who have been abused and may be up to 3 m for children with autism spectrum disorder. These differences are extremely useful for psychoeducators who want to develop smooth psychoeducational relationships; and teachers may justify workspace adjustments in order to reduce fear reactions, which sometimes lead to aggression.

T stands for **TOUCH**.

Although increasingly discouraged in Western culture, it is important to be aware of human beings' need to be touched. Many studies illustrate the importance and power of touch in non-verbal communication. First, touch conveys emotions that may clearly communicate joy, gratitude, sympathy and love. Being touched, even subtly, may also positively influence the opinion we have of a person and it may even increase the prosocial actions of the touched individuals. This is a way to develop highly effective relationships during educational interventions. Each person is sensitive to and tolerant of touch to varying degrees and cultural differences may greatly influence this.

E stands for facial **EXPRESSIONS**.

This is our most important means of communicating emotions. Since we do it naturally, we don't need to learn how to read them. However, the purpose of the tool is to focus on children's facial expressions. Frowning and tightening the lips may be signs of difficulty and annoyance; wide-open eyes are associated with surprise; a true smile is indicated by wrinkles at the corner of the eyes, etc.

R stands for **REVIEWING THE LOOK**.

It serves a variety of functions: to search for information and indicate to the observer what is getting a person's attention; to convey a certain social pressure, which sometimes triggers inappropriate behaviour on its own; to play a role in social support (through social referencing, for example); to reveal the degree of affinity between two people or a group's social hierarchy; to indicate the presence of an autism spectrum disorder. Paying attention to a person's look is a way to connect with their affinities, interests and intentions.

Once again, the goal is not to provide a glossary for reading non-verbal communication, since we all do it naturally, but simply to take a few minutes a day to focus on one non-verbal channel at a time and realize the wealth of information that we are able to consciously understand. For example, for teachers, paying particular attention to children's gait when they enter the classroom and noticing a child who has a heavier gait than usual will allow you to defuse the emerging anger, which could escalate in reaction to what they are experiencing in class. Similarly, consciously observing children's facial expressions during an individual exercise enables you to quickly determine who is having the most difficulty and whether or not to intervene depending on the intended purpose. By scanning groups of children in the schoolyard and focusing on illustrators, you can instantly grasp the emotional content of an interaction. Observing an anxious child's gaze allows you to determine who in particular they are watching or determine with whom they would like to have more interaction. This information may thus be useful when forming groups.

2. THE 4 Rs TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM OTHERS' EMOTIONS

TOOL: Prevention

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Professionals

– Details: E.g. Anyone in educational relationships with children

TARGET AUDIENCE: Anyone in educational relationships with children, particularly troubled children

NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS

– Preventing emotional contagion and emotional exhaustion effects

SPECIFIC GOALS

– To practise empathy and not sympathy
– To protect ourselves from the risk of emotional contagion

DESIGN

Pierrich Plusquellec

THE 4 Rs TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM OTHERS' EMOTIONS

Empathy is the ability to assess and understand other people's emotions. Sympathy is the ability to feel them and take them for our own emotions. Sympathy is facilitated by the process of emotional contagion from which we must know how to defend ourselves.

Emotional contagion is defined as the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements with those of another person. This mimicry and synchronization result in emotional convergence (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). We are all equipped with this process, which is very useful in everyday life.

Although susceptibility to emotional contagion has some inter-individual variability, it constitutes an adaptive advantage for life in society, since it increases the accuracy in judging others' emotions (Manera, Grandi, & Colle, 2013). Nevertheless, recent work has also shown that emotional contagion is stronger when it comes to negative emotions, particularly anger (Kelly, Iannone, & McCarty, 2016). A greater propensity for emotional contagion was accompanied by greater emotional reactivity, constituting a significant risk factor for professionals in helping or educational relationships and increasing their likelihood of empathic distress (Omdahl & O'Donnell, 1999; Petitta, Jiang, & Hartel, 2017).

It is therefore important for people working with at-risk children to complement this ability to emotionally converge with their clients with emotional regulation strategies to effectively protect themselves while continuing to take advantage of emotional contagion to cultivate empathy. Among these strategies, dissociation is considered to be the most effective cognitive strategy (Rempala, 2013). It consists in mentally removing yourself from the situation, for example, by imagining yourself in a movie theatre that allows you to watch the emotional scene taking place before you. The professional's job then consists of identifying non-verbal emotional indicators and then reflecting them to the client by attempting to associate them with needs, such as those identified by Colette Portelance (Portelance, 2007): security, recognition, affirmation, listening, creativity, love and freedom.

The following is a simple tool to remind teachers and professionals of the emotional stance to be taken when they want to protect themselves from an emotionally charged situation: the 4 R strategy.

R stands for **Reviewing**,

the look and observing the non-verbal behaviour of speakers, people who are in front of us, focusing on their non-verbal communication (posture, hand gestures, facial expressions) and identifying and mentally naming the emotions in action. This allows us to objectify and grasp the situation.

R stands for **Retreat**.

After grasping the situation, it is a matter of taking a step back and asking ourselves what emotional state we are in and then grounding that emotion within us if it is peaceful.

R stands for **Reflecting**,

the situation to the other individual(s) by naming the emotions they are experiencing with kindness and as calmly as possible.

R stands for **Relating the emotion and need**.

If the individual is able to do so, try to connect the emotion and need by using Portelance's basic needs, among other things. For example, sadness occurs when a person has lost something. This loss may be associated with a person's loss of affection, consideration, prestige, recognition, freedom, etc.

Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Rapson, R. L. (1994). *Emotional contagion*. Cambridge England; Paris: Cambridge University Press; Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.

Kelly, J. R., Iannone, N. E., & McCarty, M. K. (2016). *Emotional contagion of anger is automatic: An evolutionary explanation*. Br J Soc Psychol, 55(1), 182-191. doi:10.1111/bjso.12134

Manera, V., Grandi, E., & Colle, L. (2013). *Susceptibility to emotional contagion for negative emotions improves detection of smile authenticity. Front Hum Neurosci*, 7, 6. doi:10.3389/fnhum.2013.00006

Omdahl, B. L., & O'Donnell, C. (1999). *Emotional contagion, empathic concern and communicative responsiveness as variables affecting nurses' stress and occupational commitment.* J Adv Nurs, 29(6), 1351-1359. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2648.1999.01021.x

Portelance, C. (2007). *Relation d'aide et amour de soi* (4e éd. rev. et augm. ed.). Montréal: Éditions du CRAM.

Rempala, D. M. (2013). *Cognitive strategies for controlling emotional contagion. Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43(7), 1528-1537. doi:10.1111/jasp.12146

3. IMMEDIACY: EMPATHY SKILLS

TOOL: Prevention

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Professionals

– Details: E.g. Anyone in educational relationships with children

TARGET AUDIENCE: Anyone in educational relationships with children

NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS

– Strengthen the warm relationship with children in order to reduce anxiety

SPECIFIC GOALS

– To demonstrate behaviours that promote human warmth and relationships
– To have an empathetic attitude

DESIGN

Pierrich Plusquellec

IMMEDIACY: EMPATHY SKILLS

It is worthwhile for professionals to foster empathetic interaction through the appropriate use of non-verbal communication. To achieve this, we can refer to the concept of immediacy developed by Albert Mehrabian (Mehrabian, 1968), which consists in encouraging all behaviours that promote closeness while respecting the comfort of others and paying attention to children's non-verbal reactions.

In a very practical manner, this is reflected in student interaction by:

- getting physically closer to the person with whom we are speaking (while complying with current public health guidelines);

- touching them (once we can do so again);

- using direct eye contact;

- smiling;

- having an open posture;

- using illustrators (hand gestures while speaking);

- and working on our vocal expression.

These behaviours are not prescriptive. It is simply a matter of thinking about all approachable behaviours, which signal some consideration and can sometimes be consciously used by teachers or professionals to increase the impact of their message. We should especially examine children's behaviour when these gestures are used in order to determine and adjust to the appropriate comfort level for the children.

Research has shown that practising these behaviours significantly improves the quality of interaction between physicians and their patients, which has an impact on their adherence to treatment (Bartlett Ellis, Carmon, & Pike, 2016). In the world of education, these behaviours promote learning (Christophel, 2009).

Bartlett Ellis, R. J., Carmon, A. F., & Pike, C. (2016). A review of immediacy and implications for provider-patient relationships to support medication management. *Patient Preference and Adherence*, 10, 9-18. doi:10.2147/PPA.S95163

Christophel, D.M., 2009. *The relationships among teacher immediacy behaviors, student motivation, and learning*. Communication Education 39, 323–340. doi:10.1080/03634529009378813

Mehrabian, A. (1968). Some referents and measures of nonverbal behavior. *Behavior Research Methods & Instrumentation*, 1(6), 203-207. doi:10.3758/bf03208096

USEFUL RESOURCES

Pierrich Plusquellec

www.sciencenonverbal.ca et https://psyced.umontreal.ca/repertoire-departement/vue/plusquellec-pierrich/

General audience book on the science of non-verbal communication

http://www.editions-trecarre.com/votre-intuition-superpouvoir/pierrich-plusquellec/livre/9782895687412

Link to an online conference on the topic

https://livestream.com/ciusssestmtl/sclangageducorps/videos/164112234