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**Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future**

**INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES TO FORM SUBSTITUTE  
FAMILY SUPPORT SPECIALISTS' PROFESSIONAL CULTURE**

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***Abstract***

The study has revealed that substitute families often face various challenges in communication and relationships between parents and an adopted child. The parents usually are not aware of the reasons for emerging communication challenges. Unable to reflect on their own behavior and educational mindset, to perform their attitude towards the adopted child, parents experience arising failures. They are not always ready for self-change and sincere discussion with the experts on the issues of their concerns. Thus, it is important to realize psychological and pedagogical support of substitute families. In solving the emerging interpersonal communication problems, they can be helped by specially trained specialists with a high level of professional culture, in particular, its communicative component. Within the framework of the study, the authors propose a diagnostic toolkit, reveal the level of the specialists' professional culture formation, develop and test upgrade training courses for training psychologists-communicators to work with substitute families. It is established that the following innovative technologies are the most effective in terms of forming a communicative component of the professional culture: alternative communication, art technologies aimed at optimizing child-parent relations; environment therapy; clinical supervision, training sessions, organization of a campground, children-and-parents club, game and case study seminars, etc.

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**Keywords:** Communication, innovative technologies, professional culture specialists, substitute family.



## 1. Introduction

For a full-fledged social and personal development, children need an environment of loving parents who will support, care for and give them a sense of security and safety. Currently, the right to live and grow up in a Russian family remains unfulfilled for more than a hundred thousand children. These children spend their childhood in boarding schools, orphanages, children's homes. Every year, tens of thousands of children lose their family and have to go to these institutions.

In the cases where there is no opportunity to save the birth family for the child, the system of substitute families is a necessary condition of the children's cultural and moral education, their socialization, so that later they could build their own family on the example of a substitute one. The child who has got into a substitute family becomes an active participant in the reproduction of family experience through interaction with family members, mutual influence, and communication with representatives of different generations, relatives.

The system of substitute families is positively established throughout Russia (Noskova, Titova, & Vasil'ev, 2016), including the Tula region. As of the beginning of 2018, 85.5% of children without parental support have been brought up in substitute families in Tula Oblast, and in 2017 the number of children in the state databank has decreased by 120 people (by 18%).

Despite the fact that placing children in a substitute family positively affects their development, a crucial role is played by the relationship with their newly-acquired parents (Kiseleva, 2015). The degree to which the child-parent relationship in a substitute family will be built up positively will determine how quickly the child adapts to the new situation; assimilate socially significant knowledge and skills. Unfortunately, there are many challenges in communication and relationships between parents, foster and their own children in this area.

In the works by Averyanov and Khanova (2014), some types of families with various upbringing styles are described on the basis of pedagogical monitoring. These are families where interrelations are built on the basis of love, acceptance, caring, and those where relationships are based on rejection and disregard of the child, etc. In this connection it seems extremely important to study the communicative barriers and specifics of parent-child relationships as to understand the factors influencing the formation of the child's personality and individuality and to understand the reasons for possible challenges in a substitute family.

The parents usually are not aware of the reasons for emerging communication challenges (Sokolova, Pylkin, Safonova, & Stroganova, 2017; Gashkova, Berezovskaya, & Shipunova, 2017). Unable to reflect on their own behavior and educational mindset, to perform their attitude towards the adopted child, parents experience arising failures. They are not always ready for self-change and sincere discussion with the experts on the issues of their concerns, so it is important to realize psychological and pedagogical support of substitute families. For this purpose, specialists working with substitute families should have a high level of professional culture, in particular, its communicative component, preparedness and ability to instruct foster parents in various ways of communication.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The research objective is to study the peculiarities of various substitute families types functioning, to increase professional level of specialists working with substitute families. The priority is to solve the problem of communication and interaction between the adopted child and not only parents but all family members. The authors' data indicate the need for assistance in the field of communication for foster parents during not only the first (adaptation) year of the child's stay in the family, but the subsequent time.

Peculiarities of child-parents interaction in substitute families and the communicative challenges are dealt with in the works by Bakwin (1949), Colombo, de la Parra, & López (1992), Kreppner, Beckett, Castle, Colvert, Groothues, Hawkins, O'Connor, Stevens, & Sonuga-Barke (2007), Rutter (2000), Spitz, (1945), Tizard, Rees, & Coram (1975), Van Ijzendoorn, Juffer, & Poelhuis (2005), Vorria, Papaligoura, Sarafidou, Kopakaki, Dunn, Van Ijzendoorn, & Kontopoulou (2006), etc.

Our research is based on the works by Kiseleva (2015), Paliyeva and Solomatina (2010), Oslon & Kholmogorova (Oslon, 2017; Oslon & Kholmogorova 2001), Makhnach, Laktionova, & Postlyakova. (2015), Isaev and Pazukhina (2004), Samsonova (2013), Savchenko and Shulga (2017), Semya, Zaitsev and Zaitseva, (2016) and others, in which the authors analyze the types and causes of various communicative challenges in substituting families and offer ways to solve them.

The literature analysis suggests that the content and technologies of training specialists working with substitute families require serious improvement and substantial updating due to the recognition of identified challenges that has been insufficiently studied.

Statement of our research objective is connected with the search for the answer to the question: "While using which innovative technologies, the formation of substitute family support specialists' professional culture will be implemented more effectively?".

## **3. Research Questions**

At the initial stage, we have formulated a number of research questions, to which we would like to receive answers in the course of our study: What does the content of the concept "professional culture" include? What is its specificity in relation to specialists working with a substitute family? What components does the concept structure include? What is the place of the communicative component in this structure? With the help of what diagnostic tools can you study the formation level of the communicative component of substitute family support specialists' professional culture? By what innovative technologies can this level be raised?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of our research is to identify the level of the formation of communicative component of substitute family support specialists' professional culture and to justify the effectiveness of innovative technologies that contribute to its increase. At the same time, special attention has been paid to the development and testing of innovative technologies to train communicator specialists to work with substitute families on the basis of their own research on the substitute family functioning.

## 5. Research Methods

Empirical study has consisted of three stages. At the first stage, the characteristics of child-parent relationships in substitute families have been studied, and communicative challenges in interpersonal relationships that arose between parents and adopted children have been identified. At this stage, the following methods have been used: child-parent relations test, questionnaire "Analysis of family relationships", questionnaire "Faces of Parental Love", incomplete sentences for parents and children. The second stage is intended to reveal the main directions of psychological and pedagogical work with this family category on the basis of the author's questionnaire. The third stage has involved identifying the professional culture level of specialists working with substitute families by using such methods as questionnaire survey and the method "Psychological culture of personality". Increasing the professional culture level of specialists emphasizing its communicative component formation for solving identified communicative problems has been carried out through developing and implementing the upgrade training courses program.

## 6. Findings

The theoretical analysis of modern psychological and pedagogical literature has revealed that a substitute family is one of the forms of substitute care or reception (Palieva & Solomatina, 2010). There are three types of substitute care: institutional education, a substitute family and a professional substitute family. The main substitute family' goals are related to ensuring the successful children's socialization, continuity and sustainability of upbringing, adherence to cultural and family traditions and values, and formation in them of the healthy and harmonious family image (Makhnach, Laktionova, & Postlyakova, 2015).

In the process of adjusting parents and the adopted child to each other, the family faces challenges associated with changing its member number and function-role structure. Oslon (2017) defines the following family formation stages: indicative stage (primary adjustment); tension stage; rejection stage (the first crisis of system restructuring); "calm sea" stage (relative stability of family system); "depression" stage (the second crisis of system restructuring); acceptance of problems.

We have highlighted the main factors influencing the relationship particularities in substitute families: personal characteristics of substitute parents; motivation for the child to enter the family; psychological preparedness for substitute parenthood, availability of educational experience; ability of substitute parents to recognize the value of the adopted child as such; peculiarities of contacting substitute parents with the child; participation in schools for substitute parents, substitute parents' general educational level and age, presence of another child in the family, etc. These indicators have formed the basis for describing the various types of substitute families. The study has involved 50 substitute families. Our study on the characteristics of parent-child relationships has been conducted on the basis of Tula Oblast public institution "Social rehabilitation centre for minors No.4" in Shchyokino.

Let us give a brief description of the substitute family types that we have identified.

Family of the first type: a two-parent family; the mother holds a position in a private company; the father is engaged in real estate in a real estate company; their income is well above average; until the

decision to take the child to the family, the parents had no natural children, they have had no experience with children. The mother shows a high level of interest in relation to the child's interests, the father – an average level (partial interest). There are no psychological barriers between the child and parents in the family, but the control over the child's actions is rather low. Parents demonstrate a tolerant attitude and understand the child's failures. Parents note that after the child has appeared in the family, there have been no serious challenges; there has also been a lack of stress. In general, there is a pronounced sympathy for the child and an active parental position.

Family of the second type: a two-parent family; the mother is a deputy director for administrative and economic work in school; the father works as a public transport driver; their income is average; they have an adult daughter who lives separately; the child was taken to the family over a year ago. Although parents have had experience of communicating with their own child, difficulties have been observed in the first few months of communicating with the adopted child. For this reason, parents have applied for qualified help from specialists. Family relations in this substitute family are unstable and, depending on the situation, can be both negative and positive. The positive attitude to the child predominates, although the mother notes the presence of psychological barriers in communicating the child. The parents are tolerant and understanding towards the child's failures. Neurotic symptoms in the child are not observed. The first year of the child's adaptation in the family was problematic for substitute parents. The active parental position in the family prevails; there is concern for the level of the child's development.

Family of the third type: the mother occupies the position of a supplementary education teacher on the basis of a children's activity center; the father works as a coach in a children's sports school; they have an average income; there are no natural children; a child was taken to the family about a year ago. The experience of communicating with children is based on professional activity. There are stable positive relationships within the family. There are no psychological barriers in communicating with the child, in cases of failure of the child's parents supported them and believe in their success. After the child's appearing in a substitute family, challenges and stressful situations have not been observed. There have been no cases to contact specialists. The family has shown an active parental position and a pronounced sympathy for the child.

The families of the first and third types are dominated by a positive relationship with the child. All three families have a high score on the "acceptance / rejection" scale, which indicates a positive attitude towards the child. All three families have a lack of negative emotional states.

Analysis of the results of child-parent relations study has allowed us to draw the following conclusions: most of the surveyed substitute families are characterized by the "symbiosis" type of child-parent relationships; anxiety and neurotic symptoms in children in these substitute families are almost unexpressed; parents in substitute families have an active parental position, they are well informed on the child's life and take care to eliminate any of their problems or difficulties; parents are well aware of the places where they can get advice, types of psychological and pedagogical help and enrich psychological and pedagogical knowledge.

An important feature of the substitute family is the need for psychological and pedagogical support, which can be considered as a set of measures aimed at normalizing child-parent relations and increasing parental competence in matters of raising children. According to Semya, psychological and pedagogical

support includes creating full-fledged conditions for the child's development in a substitute family to minimize the causes that provoke the crisis of the family and the need to withdraw the child from it (Semya, Zaitsev, & Zaitseva, 2016).

Counseling of substitute families should begin long before the placement of the child in the family and unfold in several areas: instructing all family members to effective familial communication, optimizing the functioning of the family system, forming a responsible parent position, etc. (Oslon, 2017).

The analysis of the substitute families questionnaire results has shown that all the families have answered affirmatively the question "Do you know where you can address about the psychological problems of the child?". Singling out child's "psychological challenges", parents have pointed out the following: "misbehaving, rude" (26%), "bad student, unable to cope with study" (4%), "not communicating with people" (44%), "too sad" (26%), and others. Parents are concerned about the establishment of contact with the adopted child, misbehavior, disobedience, development of the child's individual abilities, relationship building between the adopted child and the natural child, etc. It seems important that 58% of respondents think that psychological and pedagogical support is necessary not only for the child and substitute parents, but for all the members of the family.

According to our research, about 80% of substitute families are not aware of the issue of the organization and provision of psycho-psychotherapeutic assistance.

The following psychological and pedagogical conditions are necessary for the realization of their subjective functions by the substitute family: each substitute family's subject's activity; integrity of the preparedness of the adopted child, substitute parents, specialists of support services to interact with each other and to solve specific problems; openness of such a family's sociocultural environment, an engaged attitude to it on the part of the society; quality of scientific and methodological support, etc.

It is important that work with substitute families is carried out by highly qualified specialists with a sufficient level of professional culture. To do this, it is necessary to help a specialist in understanding the importance of professional culture, to assist in the development of a communicative culture as a condition for mastering the pedagogy of interaction with a substitute family. According to Isaev and Pazukhina (2004), the content of the vocational and pedagogical culture is determined by the system of axiological relations of specialists, individual and professional qualities, and psychological competence and represents the integrative quality of an expert's personality, the generalized indicator of professional competence and the goal of professional development.

In the structure of the specialist's professional culture, we distinguish cognitive, emotional and axiological, and communicative units. The cognitive unit characterizes the necessary level of knowledge and skills, mastering the general orientation basis of activity (goal-setting, achievement of objectives, monitoring, and results evaluation), traditional and innovative work technologies. The emotional and axiological unit manifests itself in responsibility for the results and consequences of the work, preparedness to cooperation and interaction, in the pursuit of self-improvement, self-realization, etc. The communicative unit reflects the specialists' ability to solve the substitute families' problems in real life, ability to find contact with all the family members, to organize a dialogue between them, to mediate in the conflict resolution, while constantly striving for self-development, mastering something new, achieving quality results, reflecting on their work and etc.

A specialist working with a substitute family should rely on the results of research on identified problems of functioning in a substitute family, to connect other employees with problems to solve them; challenges can arise in the following aspects: legal, economic, pedagogical, psychological, etc. We believe that the concept of the specialist's activity should be based on the following conditions: organizational, informative and psychological-pedagogical. Organizational conditions have been classified as follows: organization and holding of training seminars, upgrade training courses for specialists working with substitute families. When implementing psychological and pedagogical support of families, specialists can use a variety of work forms: seminars on the parents' requests, joint visits to exhibitions, museums, training sessions, actions, organization of a campground, leisure activities, children-and-parents club, etc. This group of conditions makes it possible to create the environment for the personal and social development of all the substitute family members. Substantial conditions consist in strict conformity of the used material content, technologies and forms of psychological and pedagogical work to the requests and problems of substitute families. Psychological and pedagogical conditions presuppose a special organization of interaction with a substitute family, including through creating a special social and psychological atmosphere of trust, goodwill, willingness to dialogue and problem solving. This creates a space of mutual support towards the optimization of family life in the new status, cooperation of family members.

Our study has involved 15 professionals working with substitute families. The following levels of their professional culture formation have been revealed: high level – in 20% of respondents, medium level – in 53% of respondents, low level – in 27%. It has been found out that the indicators of the communicative component are least expressed among the particular characteristics of the specialists' professional culture.

Currently important manifestation of professional culture under modern conditions is preparedness and ability to search, research, and creative activity, which contributes to a more complete specialist's self-realization in the professional sphere.

These provisions have formed the basis to develop upgrade training courses for the staff of the center dealing with the problems of substitute families. When developing a program to improve the substitute family support specialists' professional culture, we have proceeded from the idea that the training system (teachers, psychologists, social educators) should respond to new challenges of time, meet the needs and demands of substitute parents. The upgrade training course program to train communicators-psychologists for work with substitute families included the following sections: "Communicative culture as a specialist' professional skill indicator", "Psychological regularities of communication with a substitute family", "Technology of productive communication and interaction with a substitute family". During the course implementation the following innovative technologies have been used: alternative communication, art technologies aimed at optimizing child-parent relations; environment therapy; clinical supervision, etc. For example, art-therapeutic technologies, including visual creativity (visual art therapy), music and dance therapy, have obvious advantages over other ones based solely on verbal communication, natural manifestation of thoughts, feelings, mood in creativity. Workshops in graphic arts become a means of getting children and parents closer, which is especially important in situations of mutual alienation, if there are difficulties in establishing contacts. Objectives of music therapy are aimed at optimizing the children's and parents' psycho-emotional status, involving the child in group communication, development of verbal and non-verbal communication skills, increase in levels of empathy and socialization (Samsonova, 2013).

Adaptation of alternative communication technology has contributed to the formation of communication skills at foster parents and children, adopted and natural children, and all of the family members. These technologies specifics lies in the fact that their implementation and development are carried out during training sessions, and then the generated habit patterns and skills for their application are transferred to practice.

Prepared at the upgrade training courses, the specialists have organized for substitute families foster parent courses and acquaintance with the child on the basis of a social rehabilitation center. Specialists working with the child attend these meetings with potential parents, for instance: teacher-psychologist, social teacher, educators. To establish contact, they have organized the stay of the child in the family on weekends and during vacation time (taking into account the child's wishes). After placing the child into the family, the center's specialists have monitored the child's relationship with family members through the organization of the family patronage, round table on the results of the child's stay in the family for the first month with the participation of all professionals, inviting the whole family for leisure activities, holidays, excursions, and interaction through the child-parent club.

It is a topical issue to create a space for mutual support of foster parents and guardians, to offer experts' help in maintaining a favorable emotional climate in foster and adoptive families, to provide timely legal, social, psycho-pedagogical assistance and support to substitute families as well as help to the parents contributing to a successful adaptation of the adopted child in the family, to prevent secondary refusal of the child by organizing family clubs, foster parents schools, seminars, events.

Based on the results of the work, 95% of the interviewed parents have indicated that they consider the parent club to be a necessary and interesting work form. Within the framework of such child-parent group work, it is possible to implement both general and individual routes for psychological and pedagogical support for substitute families. The value of the club work is voluntary nature of meetings, informal experience exchange, improvement of the psychological and pedagogical culture of substitute parents, and optimization of child-parent relations, etc.

According to the study results, the program of the children-and-parents club has been offered, taking into account the various types of substitute families (families of the first type have insufficient educational potential, low level of parents' education and development, they do not know the methods of effective education; families of the second type experience parents' alienation, lack of emotional support, cohesion, family traditions; in families of the third type there is mutual support, active position in the upbringing and development of adopted children, openness to social and cultural features).

The program of the children-and-parents club is aimed not only at the harmonization of child-parent relations, but also at improving the parental competence of the participants. The main club activities are as follows: psychological and pedagogical support to substitute families, organization of leisure activities, individual parents' counseling on emerging issues, psycho-diagnostics of child-parent relations, family microclimate, personal features, the child's and parents' emotional state, group training sessions, problem and game situations, lectures, talks, case study seminars, substitute family counseling on the issues of adaptation and upbringing of the child in the family.



The program results include enhancing the educational potential and improving the psychological resources of the substitute family at different development stages and the guardians' and adoptive parents' pedagogical viability level.

## 7. Conclusion

- The questionnaire survey has revealed that the foster parents confront a variety of issues of a communicative nature: how to communicate with children, how to overcome emerging differences, how to talk with a child in a conflict situation, how to cope with disobedience challenges without exacerbating the psychological trauma the child having received before being placed in the family, what and how to teach children, how to bring them up.
- The obtained empirical data generalization allows us to conclude that the communicative challenges encountered by substitute parents are diverse: lack of contact with the child, lack of communication skills to solve problems of the child's deviant behavior, interaction with peers, lack of developed strategies for constructive behavior in conflict situations, etc. Taken together, these challenges lead to an increase in the risk of returning children back to state institutions from substitute families.
- It is important that work with substitute families is carried out by highly qualified specialists with a sufficient level of professional culture, in the structure of which we distinguish three interrelated units: cognitive, emotional and axiological, and communicative.
- In the course of the study it has been revealed that the majority of professionals working with a substitute family have a communicative unit of professional culture at a low or medium level of development, which requires special efforts to improve it.
- The greatest effect to grow the communicative unit level of the substitute family support specialists' professional culture has resulted in applying the following innovative technologies: alternative communication; art technologies, environment therapy; clinical supervision.

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