

# THE SIBLINGS' ROOM



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# BACKGROUND

The impact of pediatric cancer on healthy siblings' adjustment is well known.

Literature (increasing in recent years):

- unmet needs and significant impact on emotional, domestic, social dimensions and quality of life (Wawrzynski et al., 2022)
- It is essential to identify their needs (Wiener et al., 2015)
- sibling-specific interventions should become a standard of care in pediatric oncology (Gerhardt et al. 2015).

# OUR CENTRE'S HISTORY

## Before the project:

- Focus on communication (doctor) and first psychological interview with space to siblings' impact of the illness
- Not systematic intervention based on parental reporting or medical recommendation (TMO donor)
- Sometimes too late

## PLUS:

- ✓ 360° intervention on the family (helping families not to lose sight of siblings' adjustment, helping psychosocial and medical staff to have a wider vision of family functioning)
- ✓ previous relationship facilitates interventions at the time of any therapeutic complications (relapse, TMO, palliative care) → possibility to support any emotional consequence based on the effectiveness of the procedure

# THE BEGINNING

## The “Siblings’ room” began in 2019

### AIMS:

- promote siblings’ psychosocial adjustment with specific attention to the impact of the different phases of the illness, making them part of patient treatment, sharing with them honest information to enhance the perception of cohesion with other family members and to limit the fear of the unknown
- Fostering emotional and general coping strategies to increase the possibility of posttraumatic growth (D’Urso et al., 2017)
- act on different levels in order to promote constant mediation between the siblings’ experience, the family, and the social and school context

# OUR PROJECT

- Promoted person-centered, but also family-and context-oriented approach.
- Tailored psychological interventions settings, strategies and techniques sensitive to age and disease course.
- In the first interview with the psychologist, the sibling space is presented. An indication is given to share it with the family, and if there is interest or need they are contacted directly by the specialist.

## EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS

Working with  
emotions

Flexible  
settings

The emotional  
reworking of  
the experience

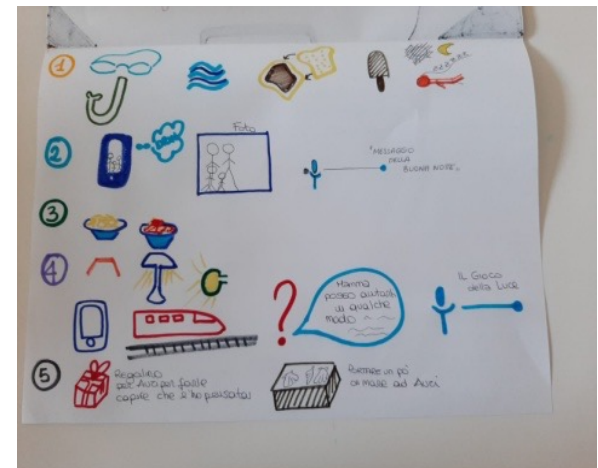
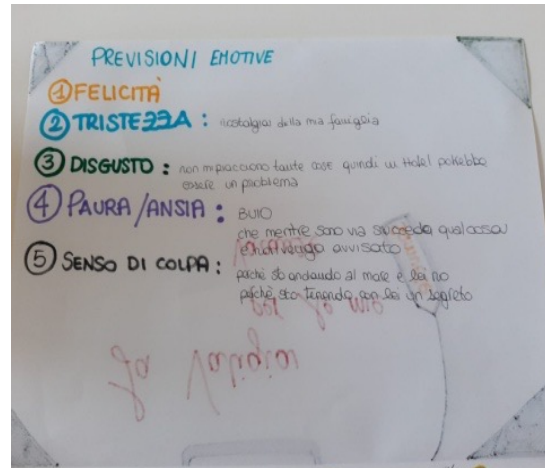
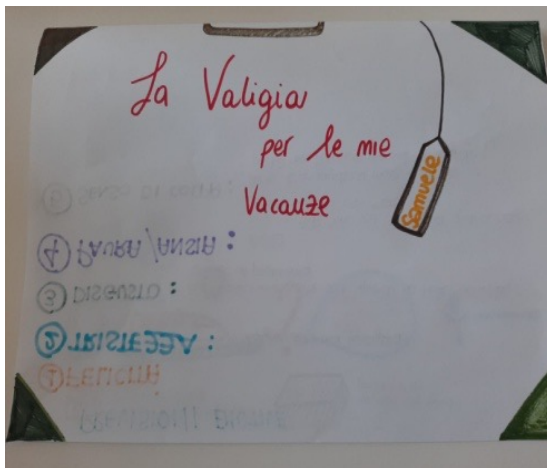
# WORKING WITH EMOTIONS

Several studies underline how the sibling experience is characterized by intense emotional experiences such as anger, guilt, sadness, anxiety and fear of the unknown



It is essential helping siblings to enhance emotional literacy skills and to identify emotions associated with the situation

# THE HOLIDAY SUITCASE AND EMOTIONAL FORECASTS



S. 10 Years.

A case of first separation from the family context due to holidays in which we focused on identifying associated emotions and creating emotional management strategies

# BOTTLES OF EMOTIONS



The monitoring of the internal state and the prevailing emotions at a specific time to work on and focus on.

The aim is to identify ones emotional experiences and express them creatively through salt and color.



# WORKING WITH ANGER

- Anger is a very common emotion in siblings' experience, but few times verbalized



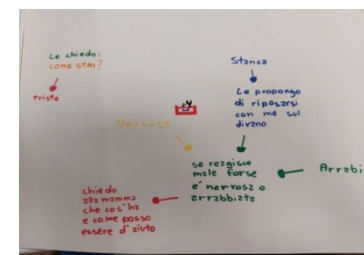
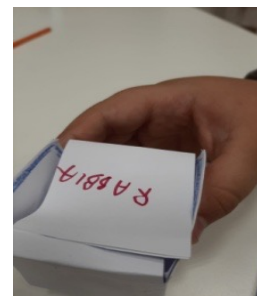
- Expression works

→ Legitimization

→ Identification of coping strategies

→ Recognition and management of anger in the other (as the sibling)

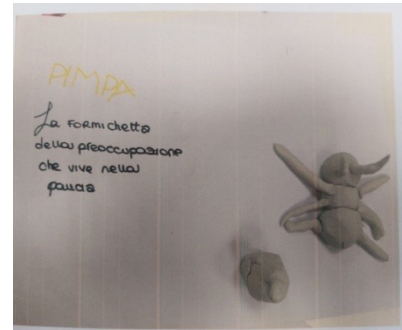
→ Positive function as opposed to its destructive aspects.



# EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

It's central to express emotions, to observe them, to give them form.

## The Pimpa's story: the ant of worry



- The use of techniques aimed at emotional management such as relaxation techniques and mindfulness techniques.



The safe place. S. 16 years old

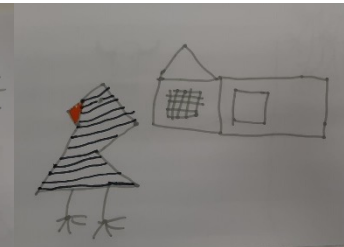
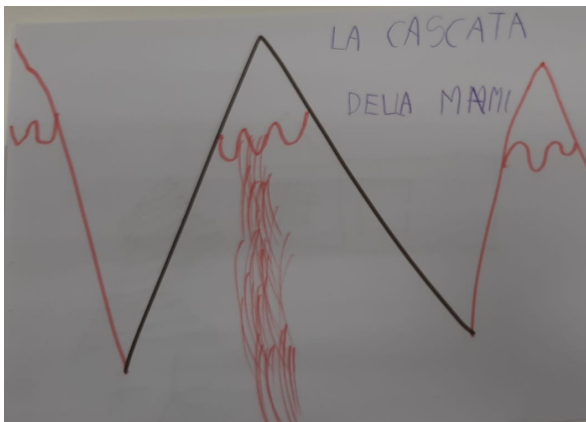
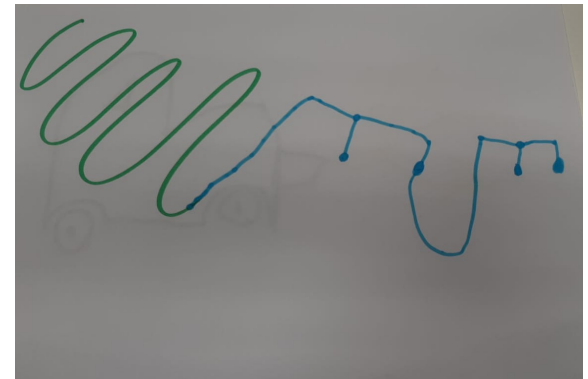
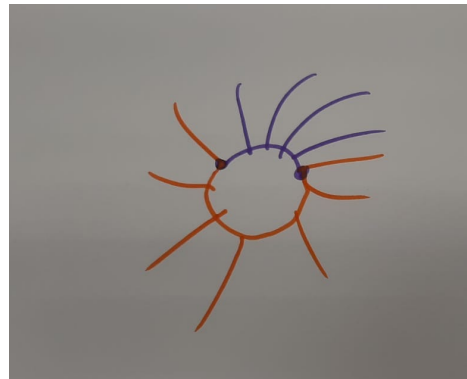
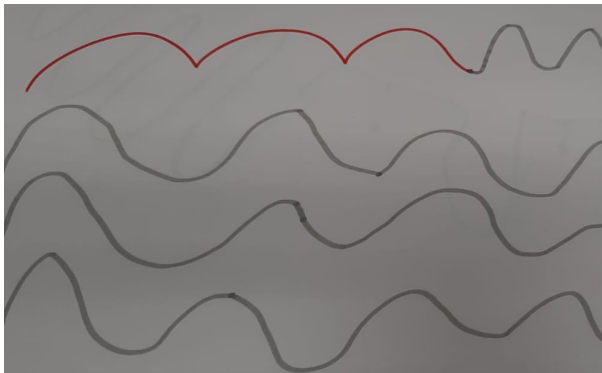
# FLEXIBLE SETTINGS

- During these years of clinical experience, it has happened several times to broaden the working setting in order to create an approach tailored to the specific situation.
- The typical situations in which this happens are with sibling pairs in order to build shared paths, if conditions are met.



A. 12 years S. 14 years  
THE SADNESS COLLAGE

# MOM AND DAUGHTER'S SCRIBBLE GAME

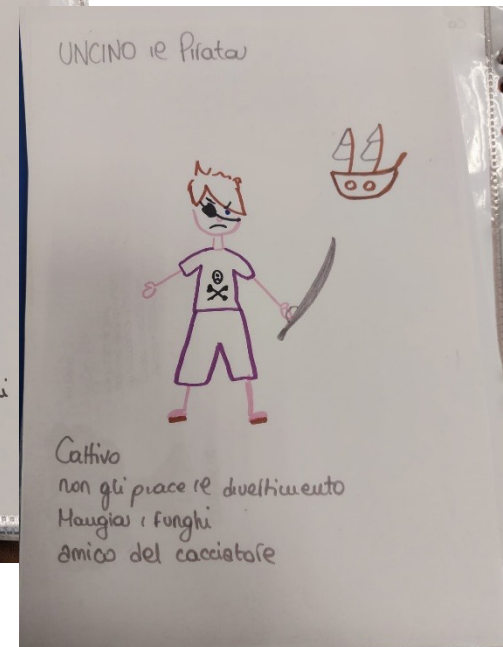
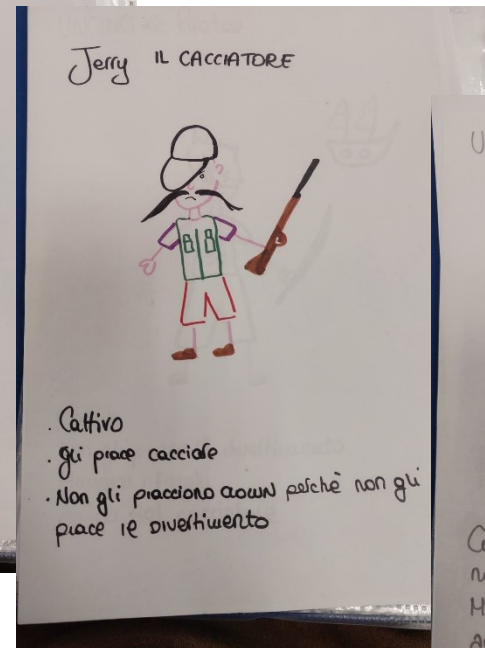
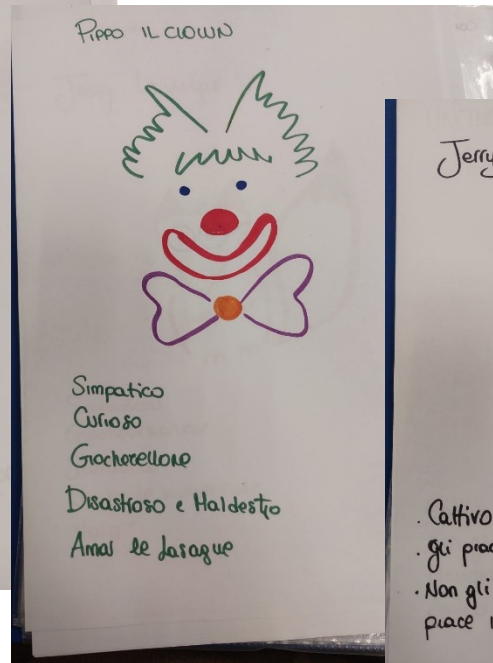
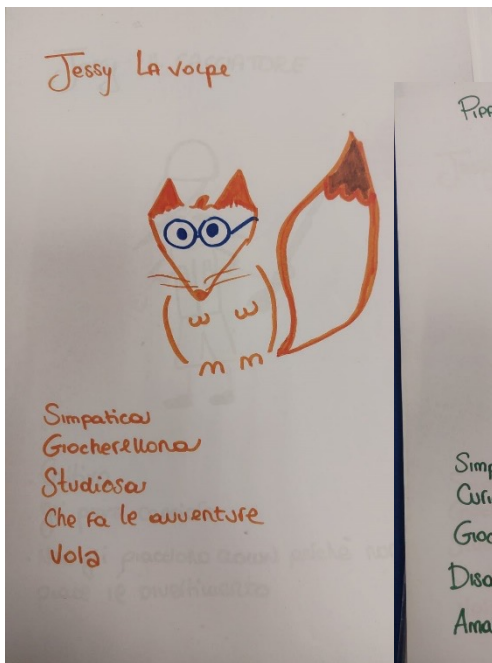


# THE EMOTIONAL REWORKING OF THE EXPERIENCE

- Health promotion interventions should be also directed at the development of psychological growth (Andrykowski, Lykins, & Floyd, 2008).
- One of the first authors to be interested in the theme of growth following traumatic events was Frankl (1963). The author states how the search for meaning can transform an experience of pain into an opportunity for growth (Grassi, Biondi & Costantini, 2003).
- Tedeschi and Calhoun proposed the model of post-traumatic growth, which includes feelings of increased self-esteem and confidence in one's own abilities, a change of perspective towards life and relationships as more meaningful and with different priorities (Andrykowski et al., 2008).
- Post-traumatic growth represents the final result of a process that goes beyond the individual's ability to overcome and not be harmed by the traumatic experience.

# «THE MYSTERIOUS TREASURE»

- L. 9 Years



# EVALUATION

From

- Dialogue with siblings
- Family and school context's feedback

- Reduction in anxiety symptomatology
- Better emotional management
- Emotional processing and integration of the event
- Improvements in school performance
- Greater psychosocial adjustment
- Greater involvement in the social dimension
- Better perception of cohesion with other family members

In some cases, it became as an essential assessment for setting specific subsequent interventions.

# CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Within the health care hospital team the human resource dedicated to siblings allowed for

- A broader view on the family, with integrated and more effective interventions (especially in the COVID period).
- Safeguarding the school and social dimensions through a constant review at these aspects and their unmet needs.
- Supporting parents in fostering a relationship with the school environment and collaborating with teachers in the school system are valuable resources (Alderfer et al., 2010).

## Future perspective

Introduce validated tests and questionnaires in order to collect quantitative prospective data.

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