

Roger Schaller

Violent children and adolescents:

Ways to reach them

Psychodrama and self-management training with violent children and adolescents

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Foreword

This is actually an afterword. After years of theoretical and practical work on anti-violence training and questions of morality, this book came into being. When I had practically finished the manuscript, the question arose: why are you doing this? My wife, who is also a psychologist, gave me a short, concise answer to this question yesterday at dinner: "Because of your profile neurosis".

I think this is (not entirely) wrong. That is why I would like to give my afterword as a foreword here:

I have been working in education and behavioural training for over 20 years. Always with marginalised groups who are not thirsty for education and behavioural change: the mentally ill, the unemployed, drug addicts, alcoholics, traffic offenders, victims of violence, children and young people with severe behavioural problems.

Time and again, the life stories and events I witnessed have preoccupied me, sometimes making me sad and often angry. But what has always weighed most heavily on me are the life stories that trigger powerlessness and hopelessness in those affected. Witnessing how people have no strength and no idea how to get out of their mess is extremely stressful. Even more difficult for me to watch is how people can accept obvious disadvantages, poverty, lack of opportunity and injustice.

I cannot do that. I am a fighter and a user of force. For example, I have never and would never allow my children to be severely disadvantaged, abused or even starved. I would use any form of force to protect my children.

Thanks to my education, my good decision-making skills, my professional status and the good fortune of living in a rich and well-structured country, I have never had to resort to serious physical violence. However, I am far from teaching disadvantaged children and young people not to use violence. Violence is not a disease, but part of our behavioural repertoire.

"Based on the findings of comparative behavioural research, there is reason to believe that we humans have a predisposition to react with violence in hopeless situations. Those who did not do so had no chance of passing on their genetic material. Conversely, whoever our ancestors were, a propensity for violence was part of their behavioural repertoire. Violence is not a disease of the poor. But the combination of poverty, powerlessness, lack of opportunity and injustice is explosive (...). From this perspective, the willingness to use violence against others and oneself is no more a disease than the vitamin C synthesis deficiency that affects us all. Despite this fundamentally fatal metabolic defect, we are generally symptom-free because we know what our nutritional context must look like in order not to develop symptoms. If this context is not right, i.e. if vitamin C is lacking, things get progressively worse." (Spitzer, p. 227)

The connection between living in unfavourable conditions and violence is not much different: we should ensure that the living conditions for children and young people are such that violence is not needed or used.

This book is a small contribution to this: it aims to encourage trainers¹ to also work with children and young people who suffer from multiple life and developmental stresses. There is a fundamental dilemma in the treatment of aggressive-dissocial children and young people, namely that those who need treatment the most do not fit into the relevant training programmes. Although these training programmes are scientifically sound, clearly structured and impressively presented, they cannot help those who have 'failed therapy'. In a sense, vitamin C is being administered where there is already enough of it. This is extremely beneficial for any profane neuroses that therapists and scientists may have: they can present impressive 'vitamin C treatment successes' at conferences and conventions.

With my target group (children and adolescents with severe behavioural problems who have difficult family circumstances, poor school performance and other problematic life experiences), it is difficult to present good treatment results. Anyone who works with these children and adolescents must know that training can only be one piece of a complex treatment framework. It is merely one vitamin among many that are essential for life.

My goal is to empower children and adolescents who repeatedly engage in violent behaviour to critically examine their own use of violence in everyday life according to the following points:

- Does the use of violence improve my well-being and health?
- Does it help me achieve my goals and desires?
- What are my goals and desires?
- Are there other ways to achieve them?

This training objective seems unattainable in a short-term training programme. However:

Would you like to have a positive influence on world events? Then first bring order to your own life. Anchor your actions firmly in the fundamental principle so that your behaviour is positive and effective. If you succeed in doing this, you will gain the respect of those around you – your influence will have an impact.

Your behaviour will have an effect on others according to the so-called ripple effect. Everyone influences everyone else – and powerful people exert a correspondingly strong influence.

If your life is working, this influences your family. If your family is working, this has an influence on the community. If your community is working, the effect spreads to the nation and from there to the rest of the world. If your world is working, the ripple effect continues throughout the cosmos.

¹ The text alternates between the feminine and masculine forms, but always refers to both women and men.

Remember that your influence begins with yourself and spreads out in waves. Therefore, make sure that your influence is strong and positive. How do I know that this is working?

All growth springs from a cell nucleus. You are the cell nucleus." (Lao Tzu)

Educational work with violent, behaviourally challenged children and young people in the form of a short self-management training course is successful when the participants themselves experience it as successful. Then the training will have an effect according to the ripple effect.

I wrote this book for no less than to positively influence world events. (I'll tell my wife that tonight).

Biel/Bienne, 11 February 2005

Roger Schaller

Framework conditions

Introduction

Case study 1:

Stefan is 11 years old. He is dragged out of the classroom by three teachers who have been called to the scene. The teacher stands stunned in the classroom: she was unable to stop the violent altercation between Stefan and Yvan because there was too much destructive force between the two children. She called her colleagues for help, fearing that the two might hurt themselves or others. Stefan feels he has been treated unfairly and claims that Yvan provoked him.

Case study 2:

Bruno, 15, returns with boxing gloves. In the meantime, his two classmates of the same age have pinned a fellow pupil to the ground. Bruno is now kneeling on the victim, while the other two are still holding him down. Bruno punches him several times in the face. Other pupils who have seen the scene from a distance call a social worker, who is able to stop this brutal use of force. When discussing the incident, Bruno claims that he just needed to let off steam and that the other boy deserved the beating.

Bruno and Stefan are in a special boarding school because they were no longer acceptable in public school. They receive social education and therapeutic care. Nevertheless, there are repeated escalations of violence. In addition to the measures taken so far, anti-violence training is indicated and necessary. Longitudinal studies tracking aggressive children from preschool age to adolescence come to a clear conclusion: aggressive behaviour is very stable over time. Petermann (2001) describes the great uncertainty among experts regarding the treatment of repeatedly violent young people:

"Aggressive-dissocial behaviour is particularly stable in adolescence if it has developed at an early age. Such stable behaviour affects various areas of the environment, such as peer relationships, school and family, but also neighbourhood relationships. The accumulation of problems in adolescence is often difficult to change through therapeutic interventions." (p. 27).

Bruno and Stefan point to several risk factors that will make any therapist feel uneasy:

- It can be assumed that these young people were excluded by others in kindergarten and school due to their highly aggressive and uncontrolled behaviour.
- Their academic performance was probably poor.

- It can also be assumed that this reinforced their aggressive behaviour because they had to act even more aggressively in order to achieve minimal social success.
- If they attended a therapy group, they probably experienced exclusion again – their behaviour simply made them unacceptable.
- If they attend a therapy group in the future, they will display the same antisocial and aggressive behaviour again, as this has led to certain successes so far.

It is astonishing that no one is offering behavioural change training to violent young people² whose development is at serious risk. Behavioural therapy training programmes are not suitable for 'difficult cases' like Stefan and Bruno. These two young people are typical therapy dropouts: they would be thrown out of these group training sessions because of their provocative and inappropriate behaviour. The reason given would be: 'They are simply too difficult, resistant to therapy and unable to work in a group'.

In this book, I will show ways to reach antisocial-aggressive types like Bruno and Stefan. However, these are not paths that lead to a sure goal. They are often bumpy, arduous and difficult to find.

Imagine the following picture: a wide white blanket of snow, the sun is shining, it is very cold, the snow cover is hard, you can walk on it. Every now and then you sink in, sometimes only up to your ankles, sometimes up to your knees or even up to your hips – you trudge on laboriously and then the snow cover carries you again. You are now making good progress. But then you suddenly sink in again, this time not so deep, and with the next step, things are a little better again. But the path remains difficult, you have to keep weighing up whether you want to take a different direction or even turn back. Perhaps the snow cover further to the right is a little harder and more stable? Or maybe you should turn left? Then suddenly the path becomes easy again, you walk on the snow cover as if on a carpet, wonderful. And oops, you've sunk knee-deep again...

This is roughly how you can imagine these training paths. This book contains psychodramatic techniques and psychoeducational methods for reaching violent young people. I will attempt to answer the following questions:

How can group therapists work with children and young people who show little insight into their own massive social behaviour disorders and little motivation to change?

How can we continue working and activate resources when participants behave destructively and indecently from the very first session?

This first chapter defines the *framework conditions*: positioning in relation to other prevention programmes, definition of the target group and basic attitude of the therapists.

² In this book, the term 'young people' generally refers to children and young people aged between 9 and 16. The term 'children' is used when I am referring specifically to children aged between 9 and 11.

Chapter 2 describes the *basic didactic principles*: the three worlds of knowledge, the developmental psychological prerequisites for treatment, and the principles of exploratory learning and relative unstructuredness.

Chapter 3 outlines the *learning objectives* pursued with the methodology/didactics described:

- experiencing self-efficacy in a group of peers
- recognising stress-inducing factors in everyday life that increase aggressive potential (stress management)
- and knowledge of one's own moral and ethical values (moral judgement).

Chapter 4 introduces the *basic techniques of resource-oriented psychodrama*. This is followed by a repertoire of methods; these exercises can be introduced into the training sessions as work suggestions. However, this is not a "training menu"; instead, it is "à la carte".

Overview of training programmes

There is already a whole range of versatile, manualised training programmes for the prevention of violence among young people. These are aimed on the one hand at parents and professional educators, and on the other hand directly at the perpetrators of violence and the school classes concerned. However, manualised training courses are hardly suitable for violent pupils such as Bruno and Stefan, as these intervention programmes all require a significant motivation to learn and change. The motivation can be internal ("I want to improve my ability to act in stressful situations," "I suffer from these difficulties") or external ("...otherwise I'll be expelled from school," "otherwise the youth court will do something even worse to me..."). In any case, these programmes require that the children/young people are able to work in a group.

As Petermann (2001) makes clear, the chances of success of these programmes are significantly reduced if the social behaviour disorder is accompanied by additional psychological disorders, massive performance deficits at school and major family stress. Bruno and Stefan, our two case studies, belong precisely to this difficult target group. They cannot be motivated by the threat of sanctions (they have already experienced too many of these). They are school failures, learning refusers, provocateurs and have experienced little positive control expectations in their lives. They show little internal motivation and no external motivation: they have already been expelled from mainstream schools, and further sanctions are hardly feasible. They will not participate constructively in structured role-playing games. They will turn a questionnaire into a paper aeroplane and will not carry out self-observation tasks.

Their willingness to participate actively and constructively in the training must arise from a sense of joy/curiosity about the programme itself. And this joy/curiosity will initially manifest itself in the joy of disrupting the training programme and curiosity about the reaction of the stressed therapists.

We meet these challenges with a form of training based on psychodrama and modelled on the *activity-discussion group therapy* described by Slavson & Schiffer (1976): Tensions and fears drive Bruno and Stefan to 'fight or flight' – but most of the time it is fight. It is quite obvious that they are unable to reflect on emotional symptoms and the processing of difficult experiences in a group setting. They simply lack the language to articulate complex intrapsychic conflicts. We therefore allow them their fighting behaviour and suggest various activities that they can accept or reject. This open framework very quickly leads to group conflicts.

"Open conflict has a socialising effect in an accepting, non-punitive atmosphere that does not trigger guilt or fear, such as that found in activity group therapy. If the opponents end their conflict themselves without (adult) intervention, they will discover the form of friendly relationships. As they discover the advantages of cooperation and mutual compromise, friendly rather than hostile feelings arise in them. The non-intervention of adults, which contrasts with their previous experiences, enables children to recognise for themselves the advantages of friendly solutions to interpersonal problems." (Slavson & Schiffer, p.99)

If the disputants do not succeed in finding this solution, the therapist has means at his disposal to activate the process of insight: using techniques such as interviewing, doubling, mirroring and others, he can immediately initiate a discussion in which attempts are made to find solutions. And sometimes, in this way, even the causes of a conflict can be explored. These immediate interventions are of considerable therapeutic value, as they reveal anger, frustration, disappointment, desires and needs. However, the therapist should be careful not to interpret every significant action of a child. Their interpretations must be given in small 'homeopathic doses' – and only when their meaning is obvious and can be easily understood and accepted by those involved.

The manualised prevention programmes require constructive participation. In the case of Bruno and Stefan, this will be difficult to achieve, even with an excellently planned introduction. They will display defiance, delaying tactics and even open aggression because they find the training stressful. This can be seen as a stress reaction, the causes of which are not of interest to us at the moment. Rather, we want to give the two young people the opportunity to explore whether this coping behaviour is necessary and appropriate in the current situation.

"We fundamentally start from the Gestalt therapy premise that resistance is the best of all currently possible solutions. As a protective measure with its own history, resistance makes sense, or at least once made sense. We therefore do not dismiss resistance as something disruptive, but rather derive valuable insights into personal development history from it. Therapeutic work is about repeatedly examining resistance to determine its appropriateness in the present moment under the given circumstances." (Vogt & Winizki 1995, p.60)

Target group: violent children and adolescents

Those who drop out of manualised training programmes are the target group of the psychodrama training described here. In the residential child and youth welfare services where I work, we need intervention programmes that address the multiple disorders and deficits of aggressive clients and do not fail at the first sign of significant resistance.

Bruno and Stefan, whom I cited above as case studies, belong to a target group of repeatedly violent young people between the ages of 9 and 16 (I have rarely worked with girls in my training groups so far). These young people exhibit a variety of stressful characteristics, such as:

- difficult temperament; impulsiveness: parents often report that these children were very active and impulsive from an early age
- attention problems: an abnormal degree of inattention, hyperactivity and restlessness is often observed
- learning difficulties and school failure, such as performance problems, repeating classes, withdrawal from performance situations, truancy
- Problematic family environment: marital conflicts and divorce, migration, poverty, violence in the family/neighbourhood
- Attachment issues: insecure, avoidant attachment style
- Inadequate parenting skills and little orientation towards norms and values
- Rejection by peers: often in the role of an outsider, a satisfactory position is fought for through impressive and threatening behaviour
- Problematic self-image: low self-esteem is concealed by feigned self-confidence (emphasis on physical strength and idealisation of deviant behaviour)
- High consumption of violent media: adoption of aggressive models and the opinion that aggressive conflict resolution is effective.

These violent youths, as well as their families, belong to the group of dropouts from manualised training programmes, or they are not accepted at all due to preliminary assessments. These programmes, which are mostly based on cognitive behavioural therapy, have a standardised and structured process, and as the playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt aptly put it: *"The more methodically people proceed, the more effectively chance can strike them."*

And chance here consists of a wide variety of group events that arise against the backdrop of the participants' aggressive antisocial disorder: coincidences of group dynamics that are unstable and hardly predictable. With great effectiveness, these children and young people confirm the fears of educators and therapists and display destructive, aggressive behaviour right from the start of training or, at the latest, after a few sessions.

In psychodrama training, destructive behaviour towards the programme, the facilitator and other group participants is not seen as a disorder that needs to be eliminated as a matter of priority, but as an unfortunate attempt to participate actively and constructively in the challenge

of the group. The target group for these programmes are children and adolescents aged 10 and above who display a repetitive or persistent pattern of aggressive behaviour and show no significant change in behaviour despite adequate socio-educational and therapeutic measures.

Following Alsaker (2004), they can be described as 'perpetrator-victims'. Perpetrator-victims have experienced violence, both as perpetrators and as victims. Perpetrator-victims are aggressive towards other young people; they are or have been bullied themselves. Although they seek contact with other young people, they tend to have little success and gravitate towards outsiders. They also tend to behave physically and verbally aggressively towards adults. In many cases, they have been confronted with aggressive role models in their families and themselves suffer from the aggressive behaviour of older siblings, parents or other people in their social environment.

What goals can actually be achieved with these young people in a prescribed short-term training programme? Bruno and Stefan are sent to learning islands where they can try out new responses to existing challenges without being punished for their attempts and mistakes.

These prescribed training programmes are designed for inpatient care. They do not replace experiences, model learning and behavioural training at school, during leisure time and within the family, but rather complement these offerings. Ideally, Stefan's class will also train skills in the areas of empathy, impulse control, dealing with anger/rage (*Faustlos* programme) and parenting skills (*Triple P* programme). In many cases, however, this will not be possible and we can only reach violent young people in group training sessions. This self-management training can enable young people to develop certain pro-social skills and reduce anti-social and aggressive behaviour. The list below outlines some of the training objectives.

	Reduce/decrease	Build up/increase
Self-efficacy	Emotional reactivity External blame	Expressing needs non-violently Self-reflection Regulating social contacts
Stress management	Impulsive aggressive reactions Use of violence Increased awareness of Negative stimuli	Frustration tolerance Expressing anger non-violently Perceiving social support Mindfulness for oneself and others
Moral Judgement	Glorification of violence Toxic masculinity Deference to authority	Culpability Judgement Ability to justify

Training is successful when development in the desired direction becomes apparent. I am referring to training here, not therapy. By this I mean that this is only part of the treatment. Just as, for example, training in basic speed and jumping technique is not enough for a hurdler to be successful in competition. In addition, training in strength and endurance, reaction speed and coordination is also necessary – and ultimately, mental strength, emotional state, daily form and motivation to perform are also decisive factors. The same applies to the training presented here: young people will not overcome the high hurdle of non-violence, but they will acquire favourable conditions for the targeted further development of their resources.

Who can benefit from this book? The self-management and psychodrama training is aimed at all behavioural trainers who work with violent children and young people and support violent young people in a group setting to learn peaceful forms of communication and conflict resolution. It describes a training method based on psychodrama that can be used in mandatory anti-violence settings in counselling centres, schools, homes and clinics. This is not a structured training manual, but rather a set of building blocks that can be combined as desired and adapted to the needs of the young people and the respective institution. Experience or training in psychodrama is not required. I am a psychodramatist and therefore work with the basic techniques of psychodrama. However, the training approach described here can also be adapted and implemented with training and experience in another effective psychotherapy method.

In this book, you will find concrete instructions on how to bring the antisocial and mostly covertly aggressive behaviour of violent young people in a group setting to the centre of the learning process. These destructive behaviour patterns are not seen as disorders that need to be eliminated, but as emotion-oriented learning fields. In this situational learning, emotional processes are experienced and made conscious, resources are activated and new behaviour is rehearsed 'in vivo'.

The goal of self-management training for violent adolescents is, in a sense, the training itself: adolescents who have difficulties with their personality development and comprehension should learn that they are actually capable of learning and want to learn. As Grawe (2004) emphasises, the actual experiences gained in the sessions with regard to one's own need for control and self-esteem have a strong influence on whether the therapy sessions are successful. "

It seems to be particularly important for the outcome of therapy that the patient feels that they now have more control over their problems (experiences of clarification, coping and self-efficacy). A therapist has a very strong influence on whether or not the patient has experiences that satisfy their needs in therapy. However, it is not only important that they have such experiences at all, but that they have them while working on their problems with the therapist (p. 390)."

Accordingly, the emphasis of self-management training is not on confrontational pedagogical methods, but on playful methods that enable a joyful and resource-oriented exploration of one's own problem behaviour.

Non-violent communication in the group

The group setting itself provides the aspect of teaching social skills. Young people with antisocial-aggressive disorders, who often have a perception of themselves that differs significantly from how others perceive them, can particularly benefit from group training:

- they realise that they are not alone with their social difficulties
- at the same time, fantasies of omnipotence and uncritical self-righteousness are brought down to earth by the reality of the group
- they experience the creative possibilities of interpersonal learning
- they learn that a group can also be a place of safety and trust.

In addition, aggressive and violent behaviour occurs predominantly in groups. As soon as interaction occurs, whether in conversation, psychodramatic play or non-verbal communication, the individual's perception changes, and with it their approach to their own problems. Young people with aggressive and antisocial behaviour must be treated in a group that somehow corresponds to their natural social environment. Individual therapy may be necessary as an additional tool for treating their own traumatic experiences as victims.

However, a group of young people with a high potential for aggression carries the risk of becoming a stage for aggressive self-expression. It must be pointed out during the initial interview that very strict rules of conduct apply – but that there is considerable leeway within these rules. However, the leaders must not show any uncertainty or divergence and must demonstrate their authority clearly at all times if the basic rules are violated. They will show no tolerance for disruptions and will immediately impose the appropriate sanctions (which, in a sense, is an untherapeutic approach). The reason for this behaviour is that the young people will constantly try to challenge the leaders and thus work their way up the group hierarchy. This is a circus that must be avoided from the outset.

However, the potential for aggression in the group also has a major therapeutic advantage: when the wolf dances in front of scaredy-cats, he may well think he is the biggest and most beautiful. But when the wolf appears in front of wolves, he is confronted with the reality principle: through peer group feedback, the young person learns

- whether his perception and assessment of the situation is correct ("the other one started it")
- whether the assessment of his actions is correct ("he deserved the beating")
- whether his conflict resolution skills are strong ("that was the best thing to do in this situation")
- whether his self-assessment is adequate ("I'm really cool")
- whether their value system is shared ("a punch in the face has never hurt anyone").

The leadership takes a detached stance in this regard. Otherwise, there would be a risk that the group would glorify violent behaviour (in order to challenge the leadership). However, one of the trainers' core values always remains visible: non-violent communication. This is not discussed, but demonstrated through non-violent group work. The leaders find themselves in a dilemma here: it is precisely those who need treatment the most who display provocative, highly disruptive group behaviour. And once a violent young person has experienced a successful power interaction in the training group, this brings them enormous pleasure and reinforces their destructive tendencies.

Setting boundaries and sanctions

Boundaries and sanctions for violent young people

When violence threatens to escalate, immediate intervention by the leaders is necessary, without any consideration of the deeper causes of the disturbance.

"Setting boundaries is one of the most important and difficult processes in social education and psychological work. Every day, practitioners find themselves in conflict and boundary situations with their aggressive subjects, which make it seem irresponsible to allow things to continue or to refrain from intervention. In such cases, swift action is required, as well as the professional willingness and ability to engage in passionate debate – even against the will of the subject. Not intervening decisively and behaving in a (pseudo)tolerant manner often means accepting victims." (Weidner 2000, p.62)

The trick is to handle the necessary physical confrontation with the attacking young person in such a way that violence does not escalate. Both my co-leader and I have the advantage of being physically rather weak and not posing a serious threat to the young people. We can also rarely count on the support of the other group members. Nevertheless, we do not shy away from physical confrontation; we often have to intervene to protect individual group members and do so by shouting, standing between them, blocking them or pushing them away. This use of physical force is appropriate when a young person demonstrates their power by threatening or hitting another participant in front of us. If our stop signal is ignored by the young person in question and provocative violence occurs, the following sanctions are imposed:

- Time-out: I ask the aggressive young person to take a 2-minute time-out (either on a chair next to me or outside the door).
- If this is not sufficient or is not complied with, exclusion will follow: in minor cases for the current session, in more serious cases a discussion is necessary before the next session; even if it is a prescribed training session and the young people always complain that they would rather be somewhere else, exclusion is perceived as a sanction. In any case, the parents/guardians will be informed of this measure and its cause.
- Permanent exclusion: in cases of serious violence that is not followed by a convincing acknowledgement of guilt, the young person in question will be permanently excluded from training. Possible further sanctions are a matter for the parents or guardians.
- Otherwise, no other forms of punishment (or withholding of rewards) are used during training. If these sanctions are ineffective and there is a risk of an escalating power conflict with threats of violence, it has proven effective to immediately terminate the session: we declare the current session over and invite everyone to return to their residential groups – except for the main provocateur. We ask him to stay for a

moment: we apologise for our own possibly unfortunate intervention, ask if he is feeling reasonably well, suggest a date for a follow-up discussion and then dismiss him too. In the follow-up discussion, we will decide whether to permanently exclude this participant.

It is surprising that exclusion is perceived as a sanction in the case of training prescribed by the school or boarding school. One possible explanation is that the young people enjoy coming to the training sessions. They enjoy the relative freedom of thought and playful conflict resolution. The number of definitive exclusions and therapy dropouts for other reasons is less than 10%. It also happens time and again that young people request to continue participating in the training voluntarily during the exit interview.

It requires group therapy professionalism to form a group of young people with aggressive-dissocial disorders into an active learning group. Appropriate group therapy training/experience on the part of the therapists, as well as the possibility of supervision, are necessary prerequisites to ensure that the training group does not turn into a circus. The basic attitude of the therapists can be described with the term 'self-organisation', as defined by Omer & von Schlippe (2004, p. 26 ff) for parental counselling:

It is not a matter of teaching what is right and wrong, but of working with young people to find a framework that helps blocked and negatively escalated self-organisation dynamics to return to a constructive path. We do not have a structured training programme for non-violence, but provide a framework in which non-violent relationships can be tried out. This framework includes a group structure in which each individual can feel comfortable and recognise and activate their own resources. This positive framework is in place when descriptions of relationships and conflicts are not at the expense of one or more people in the system. Any descriptions that reduce the emerging group conflicts to the malice, stupidity, incompetence or disorder of one or more participants are rejected with authority. Instead, descriptions are sought that make the mechanisms and risks of negatively escalating systems understandable. This framework enables the self-organisation of relationships between young people with aggressive behavioural problems by leaving the scope for action relatively open. I will return to the specific conditions of this framework in detail in the chapter on didactics.

Limits and sanctions for children prone to violence

In children's groups, I do not use written rules and therapy contracts, as this would overwhelm the children. Instead, the rules and objectives are learned through action. This often requires physical involvement on the part of the therapists. In my training sessions, I work with children who still have very poor control over their aggressive impulses and show a high willingness to take risks in the following behaviours:

- harming themselves by smashing a window, hitting a wall, jumping from dangerous heights, etc.
- intentionally or unintentionally causing serious injury to other children
- physically aggressive behaviour towards adult authority figures

- damaging property by scratching, throwing things around, setting things on fire, etc.

When they are highly agitated, they are unable to respond to verbal requests to stop this behaviour. It is extremely important that therapists take a consistent, disapproving stance towards this behaviour and that this stance is followed up with action. After an initial verbal warning, this behaviour must be followed by physical intervention to stop it.

Example: During the opening round, Thomas punched Stefan, who was sitting next to him, square in the face. Fortunately, Stefan was able to block the blow somewhat. Thomas was warned and I am now sitting next to him, separating the two quarrellers. At the next opportunity, Thomas tries to strike again. I manage to grab him and leave the group room with him. The training is continued by the co-leader. In the anteroom, I let go of Thomas, but lock the doors because I fear he will run away. We remain in the anteroom until Thomas is prepared to fulfil the following two conditions: to give a verbal explanation that he will refrain from further violence in this session and to apologise to Stefan for his actions.

Another reason that necessitates immediate physical intervention by the therapists is the traumatic experiences of violence suffered by the children. The diagnostic assessment has revealed that almost without exception, all children who are referred to the training sessions because of their aggressive behaviour are themselves victims of violence by peers or educators. These perpetrators/victims have learned that violence is socially acceptable; through the unchecked exercise of antisocial behaviour, they have become increasingly numb and, to a certain extent, insensitive over time. They have learned to accept violence, both as perpetrators and victims. They simply do not care how others feel. These harsh manners, in both giving and receiving, become increasingly entrenched and are regarded as normal (cf. Alsaker 2003). It is important that therapists prevent these children from having further experiences in the role of perpetrator or victim. In extreme cases, this principle of absolute victim protection must be enforced with authoritarian educational force, as illustrated in the case study above.

Basic didactic principles

Didactics comes from the Greek and literally means teaching. However, this does not refer to *what* (the topics), *how* (the methods) or *why* (the goals) we want to teach. Rather, it refers to the type of connection between the topics, the goals and the learning psychology requirements of the target group (skills, needs, motives).

In this chapter, I describe *why something is done in a certain way*: with theoretical excursions into philosophy, the environments of animals and humans, and developmental and learning psychology, I attempt to illustrate the principles according to which self-management training is designed.

The three worlds of psychodrama

Case study: Fritz and Franz

Fritz is standing in the doorway before school starts, leaning back comfortably and lazily. Franz wants to enter the classroom, but Fritz is blocking his way. Franz is unsettled; he is afraid to go into the classroom because access is blocked. Franz is both perpetrator and victim: he knows these situations from both perspectives, as he is often bullied or displays aggressive behaviour himself. He is now feeling insecure and will seek a solution using the means he knows: violence. Is he responsible for the violent conflict that ensues? It's not his fault that he is a victim and suffers from low self-esteem. Psychodiagnostically speaking, Franz is a young person with a severe social behaviour disorder. And with Fritz, it's the same thing with a few variations – only now he's in the other role: it looks as if he were the perpetrator. But he, too, is a perpetrator-victim. Psychodiagnostically speaking, Fritz suffers from reactive attachment disorder. He has experienced violence and separation within his family. He can't really help being the way he is.

Many psychologists would say that Fritz first needs intensive individual psychotherapy before the violence issue can be addressed. I, on the other hand, believe that the two of them need to deal with the issue of violence at school right now, otherwise further developmental disorders will arise. They need to learn to take responsibility for their actions in the here and now.

"Mental disorders arise from who we are. They are an integral part of ourselves, no matter how much we suffer from them. They belong to us like our CV. Their foundations go back to the very beginning. They have been a part of us from the start. At the moment when a mental disorder arises, this part is particularly active."

If mental disorders are part of who you are, do you have to feel responsible for them? Of course not. No one is responsible for what happened to them in the first months and years of their life. They were not responsible then either. The foundations for mental disorders are a matter of luck and misfortune in life, just as you can be lucky or unlucky with your appearance. But even if you were unlucky with your appearance, it is still good to accept your own appearance as part of yourself and take control of it. You can still make the best of it through careful grooming and clothing. This also applies to people with mental disorders. It is wise to accept them as part of yourself and take control of them." (Grawe, p.357)

Psychodrama is a scene-based, action-oriented method: the client becomes the director of their own life. The path to this goal leads through the recognition of social contexts, values and needs. Psychodrama makes use of a philosophical trick, which I will describe briefly here.

The philosopher Karl R. Popper distinguishes between three worlds in terms of epistemology:

1. He refers to the physical world ("I see a student standing in the doorway") as World 1. World 1 includes all material bodies that we experience through our senses.
2. The world of our conscious experiences ("I feel insecure") is World 2. All psychological states such as joy, pain, fear and grief belong to World 2.
3. Ideas, theories, hypotheses, legends, myths, interpretations, etc. belong to World 3. Fritz, who is standing in the doorway, may have the idea of "avenging an injustice by provoking Franz into a fight". And Franz will also have a theory as to why he is being denied entry to the classroom.

Popper's main thesis is that objects in world 3 can be real; for example, the theory of flight led to the development of aeroplanes. But even theories and ideas that never appear in the form of material bodies can have a major influence: they can cause people to do or refrain from doing certain things. Objects in World 3 are abstract, but nonetheless real, because they are powerful tools for changing World 1. Our ideas, values and attitudes determine our behaviour by acting as motivational goals that guide our actions.

World 3 therefore has a very significant influence on the development of the conflict between Franz and Fritz. But how can we grasp this problem?

In my view, we should understand the perception or comprehension of an object in world 3 as an active process. We must explain it as a creation, as a re-creation of this object. In order to understand a difficult Latin sentence, one must construct it: one must see how it is made, one must reconstruct it, comprehend it. To understand a problem, one must try out at least some of the more obvious solutions and discover that they are wrong; in this way, one rediscovers that there is a difficulty – a problem. To understand a theory, one must first understand the problem for which the theory was designed to solve, and then one must see whether this theory succeeds better than a more obvious solution. (...) So we do not learn by direct observation or contemplation, but by practical action, by actively participating in how to make objects of the world 3, how to understand them and how to 'see' them. (Popper 1989, p.70)

We will therefore create situations for Franz and Fritz in which they themselves can take the lead and try out different solutions to their problem. The basic techniques of psychodrama (staging, interviewing, mirroring, doubling, role reversal, symbolic representation, constellations) enable participants to materially create their world 2 (psychological states) and world 3 (ideas, theories). The participants' states of mind (such as aggression, fear), ideas, theories, values and goals become visible, negotiable and changeable.

Possible application in the case study of Fritz and Franz

- Staging: I have Franz act out the conflict situation. Then Fritz acts out the situation. We notice that there are differences ("mistakes") in the portrayal. What do these differences mean?
- Interview: I ask one of them to stand up and say, "Let's imagine there is a door to the classroom and a student is standing there blocking the way. What comes to mind? Do you have any ideas about what he wants?" etc.
- Mirroring: I have another person play the role of Fritz standing in the doorway. Fritz watches and perhaps comments on his mirror image.
- Doubling: Franz stands 3 metres in front of the door and says nothing; he looks reasonably relaxed (as if nothing were wrong...). I stand behind him, as his double, and voice a hypothesis ("I think he wants me...").
- Role reversal: the two parties in conflict swap roles to find out how it feels to be in the other role and what the mutual effect is.
- Symbolic representation: Franz has spoken of injustice. I ask Franz to choose an object that symbolises *injustice* and place it next to him.
- Constellation: I recreate the scene with wooden figures and blocks. This allows us to explore the different courses of action as if on a chessboard.

The aim of psychodrama training is not to teach solutions to the problem of violence, but rather to search for non-violent solutions in a non-violent way. The effective factor is the search process, i.e. trying out plausible solutions and recognising that they may also be wrong. The examples of application described above rarely lead to the true solution, but they do represent connections between the three worlds of a person in conflict. The psychodrama techniques described above create added value in terms of reality: objects from worlds 2 (state of mind) and 3 (theories, attitudes) can be presented in a visible and tangible way. This brings the problem behaviour to the fore, promotes self-awareness and activates potential resources. The young people themselves direct these plays. The theatre director (or trainer), on the other hand, is responsible for the infrastructure, organisation, schedule and possible cancellation of a play or director. The director only intervenes in the artistic design of the drama by giving feedback: whenever possible, positive feedback to encourage the young directors in their attempts to portray worlds 2 and 3 on stage.

I would now like to show the learning processes that Fritz and his colleagues go through during the training. In chronological order, this could look as follows:

1. At the beginning, Fritz behaves in a sneaky-aggressive manner, but without crossing the line. He shows in words and pictures that he is bored here and does not see the point of his participation. The effective factor here is the actualisation of the problem of his aggressive behaviour in his subjectively perceived world 1 ("a stupid, shitty compulsory group"). We try to show him that he himself is part of the group process and is jointly responsible for the quality of the training (self-efficacy experience).

2. The next step leads to world 2: expressing and implementing feelings and needs (stress management). The aim is to clarify what is and is not causing Fritz stress and, above all, what could improve his well-being – in a non-violent and solution-oriented way.
3. Finally, in world 3, his social role is activated with the aim of enabling him to take on roles in the training group that he enjoys and that match his resources.

This basic structure of moving from one world of knowledge to another is carried out countless times during the course of the training. Let's assume that Fritz addresses a violent scene from his everyday school life ("I was standing in the doorway when..."). This scene, as Fritz remembers it, belongs to World 3: it is his construction of reality. I let him act out this memory. This updates the problem in the simulation of the role play and constructs it physically (World 1). It must be emphasised that this is a reality of the simulation: so if we now swap roles and Fritz takes on the role of Franz, he can enter the clarification perspective (World 2) and view and evaluate himself through the eyes of the other person. However, it is and remains his own world of psychological states. And in the game, he can develop and try out fantasies about the theories, values and basic attitudes (world 3) of his conflict partner. The aim of this approach is to examine one's own aggressive "glorified self-image".

"Basically, it's about both Party A and Party B being confronted with their own inner problems. Party A (and Party B in parallel) must recognise certain weaknesses of their own, which they do not want to accept; therefore, they blame the other party for them. They occasionally allow themselves to be carried away by destructive behaviour and regret it shortly afterwards because they have reacted excessively to the given situation. However, they use the 'aggressive' behaviour of the other party as an excuse or explanation for their own uncontrolled behaviour. The resulting pangs of conscience increase inner tension and further contribute to shifting the blame onto the other side. We are dealing here with the psychological 'defence mechanism' of projection, which is of great importance for understanding the dynamics of conflict and its effective treatment. (...) The mechanisms that lead to projection are paradoxically linked to those of self-frustration. The projection processes give rise to self-reproach, feelings of guilt and disappointment, which in turn reinforce the projection processes. This creates a psychosocial vicious circle that sets the escalation in motion and keeps it going. Party A's irritation, anger and ambivalence are compounded by feelings of guilt and self-reproach. Party B's clumsy, uncontrolled behaviour can increase the irritation until Party A shows its displeasure. Eventually, the dam may burst and Party A will give free rein to its pent-up emotions for a short time. The paradoxical chain of both mechanisms – projection and self-frustration – can only be broken if at least one party is able to recognise the projection process within themselves. At least one party must be willing to accept the problem of mutual relationships: namely, as a challenge to work on their own development by means of an intense confrontation with themselves – mirrored by the other party. (Glasl 2002, p. 194)

This confrontation with oneself is only possible if one party to the conflict is willing to address their own state of mind (world 2). This is practised step by step. In a first step, participants are encouraged to express their current state of mind: they are also allowed to express negative feelings about group participation and are reinforced with positive feedback ("...I think it's good that you can say that so directly without resorting to insults"). In a second step, the experience of one's own feelings is also practised in role-play, for example through the technique of doubling: the leader stands next to Fritz in the fictional door frame and says: "...actually, I don't feel entirely comfortable here, I would like to...". World 2 (mental state) plays a mediating role between worlds 1 (visible behaviour) and 3 (theories and evaluations).

Aggressive-dissocial adolescents, whose lives are particularly affected by aggressive behaviour, generally have great difficulty perceiving themselves and dealing with their own feelings. They do not see themselves as needing treatment, but project the disorder onto their environment ("I'm fine, I don't have a problem – do you?"). Therefore, the adolescents must first be able to have positive experiences in the group before the actual training goals can be worked on.

Treatment requirements

With our target group – violent young people with behavioural problems who are experiencing significant stress in their lives – the first step in identifying and clarifying problems can only be resource-oriented. These young people are not (yet) capable of working in a group. The problems therefore become apparent all by themselves: simply by being in the group, problems will arise. The conflict dynamics described above already arise in the here and now of the group.

The strategy of psychodrama training is to distance oneself from the actual symptoms (violent actions) in order to enable an exploration of the underlying theories, ideas, values and goals. Before we delve further into the basic didactic principles in this regard, we must clarify who our clients are and what treatment requirements they have.

The target group for the training described in this book is children and adolescents aged 9 to 16 who display particularly unusual behaviour in terms of aggression and who are among those who drop out of highly structured training programmes. Standardised training programmes suffer from the fact that a significant motivation to learn must be present. Success with such teaching programmes can only be achieved with aggressive children and adolescents who show a great willingness to change their behaviour. However, if there are additional psychological disorders, massive performance deficits at school and significant family stress, the chances of success are considerably reduced (cf. Petermann 2001, p. 31). The treatment of aggressive and antisocial children/adolescents with standardised training programmes has a very high dropout rate (40 to 60%), and it is usually those participants who show increased risk factors who drop out. Our target group is children and adolescents with behavioural problems who, in addition to aggressive behaviour, are burdened by school failure, complex upbringing conditions and developmental disorders.

Psychodrama training for violent adolescents was used at the Bachtelen children's home with children and adolescents aged 10 and above. For cognitively well-developed children/adolescents who are not impaired by abnormal parenting conditions and learning difficulties, parts of this training can also be used with younger children.

The World 3 approach described above requires the ability to view an event from different points of view. Following Selman (1982), four stages of social perspective-taking can be distinguished:

Stage 1: Self-reflective role-taking – The child can put themselves in someone else's shoes mentally or in play (from approx. 5 years of age)

Stage 2: Self-reflective perspective taking – The child is aware that each individual is conscious of the other's perspective and that this influences mutual assessment (from approx. 7 years of age)

Stage 3: Third-person perspective – The child can step outside of a two-person interaction and view it from the perspective of a third person (from approx. 9 years of age)

Stage 4: Insight into bio-psycho-social contexts – the ability to place life situations, thoughts and feelings in a bio-psycho-social context through abstraction and hypothesis formation (from approx. 11 years of age)

According to this, a seven-year-old child is aware that every person has their own point of view. One way to assess the intentions and actions of another person is to put oneself in that person's shoes. However, this ability to take on different perspectives is poorly developed in children with pronounced social behaviour disorders and should be further encouraged through training.

From around the age of 11, young people are able to use abstraction and hypothesis formation to place external life situations, inner emotional experiences and their own behaviour in a bio-psycho-social context (cf. Arbeitskreis OPD-KJ 2003). This ability to distinguish between events that are related to one's own actions and those that are uncontrollable is extremely important for healthy psychological development and well-being. Children often perceive connections that do not exist; they often see themselves as contributing to an event in which other actors are actually involved. This results in an incorrect picture of their own effectiveness, which can lead to internal and external conflicts. From around the age of 11, young people are able to test their hypotheses in this regard with other people and correct them if necessary. This self-reflective ability is certainly present in younger children in play situations: in play, they can imagine different variants, but these all remain valid and may be contradictory. The proposed training methods must therefore be adapted to the cognitive development of the children.

I would like to illustrate this using the example of the *family crest* exercise:

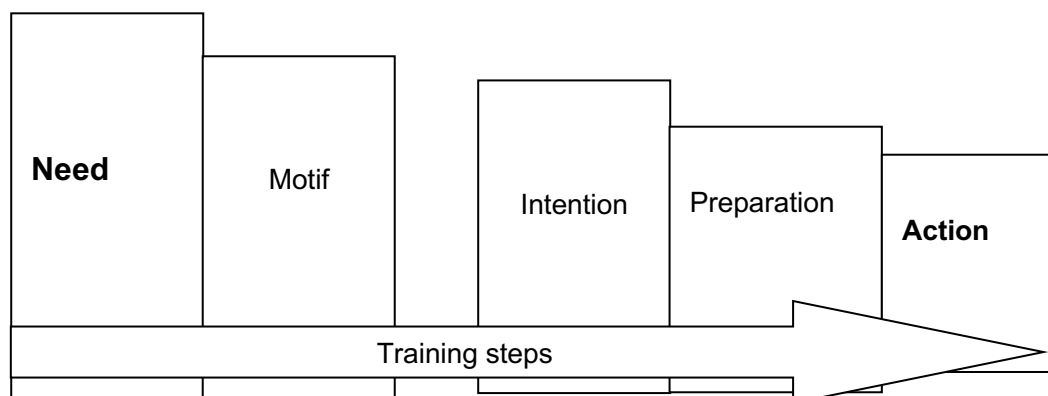
With young people in self-management training, this exercise can be carried out using the following instructions: "Wealthy families and the nobility used to have their own family crests. Crests are coloured badges that were worn by knights on their shields or printed on flags, for example. They express the values that are most important to that family. A family coat of arms is something that connects people, an expression of a shared fundamental attitude. Now imagine that your family has a coat of arms – what would it look like? Maybe your family even has a coat of arms – what does it look like? Imagine this coat of arms hanging on the wall – one here, another there, etc. – what does it look like? I'll give you two minutes to think about it, then we'll take a look at the coats of arms."

A more playful approach is chosen with children: "Imagine you are knights – knights from different kingdoms – but you have to fight together against an evil, powerful enemy/dragon/monster or something similar. Everyone has a shield with a beautiful family coat of arms on it – a badge for what you are fighting for." The psychodramatic group game is guided (see Methods), and during the course of the game, the coat of arms can be discussed: "But you are a brave fighter and carry a beautiful shield. What kind of coat of arms is that? What does it mean? What are you fighting for?"

Another important prerequisite for treatment is the subjective experience of one's own conspicuous violent behaviour. Whether young people perceive or deny their behavioural difficulties and whether they are able to recognise the resources and assistance available to them is crucial to their ability and motivation to change. The first step is therefore to work on the ability to form a working alliance.

These treatment requirements result in a very difficult task for those in charge: "Help me without me noticing that you are helping me." This task is based on an extremely insecure sense of self. As Storch & Riedener (p. 46 f) explain, young people can be subject to unrealistic "self-glorification", which can also bring short-term social advantages. This glorious self-confidence is extremely unstable and must be constantly defended, which is why these young people are extremely often involved in violent interactions. It is quite understandable that a young person can suffer from an insecure high self-esteem on the one hand and benefit from it on the other. This "house of cards" should not be allowed to collapse, but rather be rebuilt. The order in which information about oneself is obtained and processed is important for psychological stability. *"In order to achieve a stable sense of self-confidence, reflection on one's own standards – processing in the inner world – must precede evaluation in the outer world, not the other way around."* (Storch & Riedener, p. 52). This means that we do not teach in training, but learn together with the participants: in a first step, the inner world (individual thought patterns, norms, values, goals, as well as one's own feelings) must emerge into consciousness and become recognisable/changeable. In order to protect their unstable self-confidence, the young people in our target group either engage in aggressive and destructive behaviour or they adapt and participate in the training without showing any emotion. In order to avoid such idleness, the needs and unspoken motives must first be made recognisable so that action planning and behavioural training can be implemented. This process cannot be clearly structured – rather, young people must have the freedom to distance themselves from the problem and the group activity and to process the experiences for themselves in their inner world.

Storch & Riedener (2005) have based their self-management training for young people on a 5-phase model: they distinguish between need, motive, intention, pre-action preparation phase and action.



The model above illustrates that action is the result of an existing need: *"I want something"* – and we are often not even aware of this desire. The path from need to action is relatively easy, it goes downhill, often almost by itself. But be careful: there is a gap between motive and intention, and it is important not to fall into it, otherwise we will remain in a state of general dissatisfaction because the motive cannot be realised. It is more difficult, however, to find our way back from an action to the underlying needs and motives: for example, wanting to explain and change violent patterns of behaviour by referring to the underlying intentions and motives.

We want to follow this path to the needs in a model way here:

Every new goal-oriented action requires pre-action preparation, as there are not yet sufficiently elaborate and neurally wired automatisms for the new pattern of action that corresponds to the newly developed intention. To ensure that the newly developed intention can be translated into action even in critical situations, it must be practised thoroughly. In the case of violent young people, it is advantageous to form precise intentions for action with the help of conscious reflection. For example, with clear resolutions: "If the situation arises where the teacher asks me to leave the classroom, I will calmly get up...". Such clear intentions for action can be formulated as "inner slogans" and support the realisation of the action.

One step before pre-action preparation is the intention to act. Many social skills training programmes focus on this area:

- From a range of generally formulated goals, precise goals are defined that can be realised through one's own actions.
- The desirability and feasibility of an action goal is examined and ways, possible obstacles and resources are sought
- An implementation plan is defined by setting priorities.

When working with repeatedly violent young people, there is a risk of suggesting non-violent action goals to them. This can lead to a bathtub learning effect: during training (bathtub), the bathers are warm and accept the suggestions and recommendations of the instructor. After the bath, however, they cool down and the learning effect evaporates. Training that focuses on intention runs the risk of remaining an externally determined bath with little lasting effect.

Our self-management training therefore starts even higher up: with motives and needs. Most of the methods described in Chapter 4 aim to identify unconscious or uncommunicated needs and put them into words as motives.

"Needs are unconscious drives and desires, while a motive is when the person with the motive has already consciously acknowledged the previously unconscious need and can communicate it to themselves and their environment. (...) From a motivational and personality psychology perspective, there is broad agreement that the synchronisation of conscious and unconscious tendencies is an essential factor in both mental health and successful action." (Storch & Riedener, p.81)

In the context of self-management training with violent young people, the World 3 approach is used to identify and communicate their own needs and motives: by trying to give theories, ideas, desires and fantasies a visible form. This is a difficult path and requires a lot of patience and frustration tolerance on the part of the trainers: we rarely experience warm baths with

well-structured learning processes from the manual – rather, cold showers with refusal, difficult group dynamics and learning blocks. For our target group, it is a great challenge to realise and communicate their own needs. This learning process cannot be achieved with standardised cognitive-behavioural therapy programmes.

In addition, resource-oriented psychodrama focuses on the inner world, on needs and motives. I assume that violent children and adolescents with multiple life stresses must first play: *"The child's play is the infantile form of human abilities to create model situations in order to process experiences and master reality through planning and experimentation (Erikson, p. 216)."*

Behavioural training with children and adolescents who display severe behavioural problems can only be successful if it utilises the forces available for playful integration. We often perceive the aggressive-dissocial symptoms that emerge in the training group as disorders that need to be replaced immediately with more desirable behavioural traits. Erikson, on the other hand, recommends understanding these symptoms as the defence of a necessary step in the development of ego identity: the basic therapeutic principle is therefore to open up a stage for the disruptive behaviour so that the underlying needs can come to the surface. Only when the needs are recognisable can they take the form of motives. Motives are, so to speak, "matured" needs that no longer hang unattainably high up on the highest branch of the apple tree, but lie in the basket, where they are manageable and communicable. They can be "sold" as goals for action. However, motives can also conflict with each other: should I eat the beautiful red apple first, or this one, which is already a little overripe? Weighing up and selecting motives is very closely linked to moral development and is therefore the main focus of training with violent young people. The motives/ideas must be linked to an analysis of the conflictual life situation. Only then can an intention be defined and developed into an emotionally acceptable action plan.

This psychodramatic approach to self-management training requires similar characteristics to those described in the group analytical approach by Slavson & Schiffer (1976):

- *Group size:* No more than 8 and no fewer than 5 participants. In a smaller group, personal relationships become too intense in the sense of couple relationships. In a larger group, relationships develop in subgroups that are difficult to control and influence.
- *Room size and furnishings:* A sufficiently large room with little furniture to allow for plenty of freedom of movement. Objects: Foam seating cubes and cushions, exercise balls, ropes, mats, blankets, sheets – a few tables and chairs against the wall.
- *Role of the therapists:* The therapists do not take centre stage in the group; they do not actively lead the group, but rather refrain from interacting with the young people as much as possible and try not to interfere in the relationships that develop between the participants. Only when serious conflicts or rule violations occur do the therapists intervene, using appropriate interventions to facilitate a discussion of the events. These interventions, which follow immediately after the conflict, are the most therapeutically effective moments of the group training.

- *Freedom for motor activity:* Verbal expression of feelings is not very suitable for aggressive, antisocial children. When disturbed, their immediate need is to express their feelings through movement. Disorders, tensions and social anxieties drive them to 'fight' or 'flight', usually to fight. Asking them to sit still and talk about their feelings is not appropriate in these situations. Rather, they should be allowed to run around freely in the room during emotional outbursts and communication processes, or sit/lie down where they feel most comfortable and at ease.
- *Freedom and spontaneity of action and speech:* participants are often aggressive, provocative, vulgar and indecent in their words and actions. As long as they do not violate the integrity of other participants and therapists, this behaviour is not sanctioned, but forms the material to be worked on.
- *High frustration tolerance* on the part of therapists: aggressive, antisocial behaviour comes to the fore in the training group. The attitudes and values displayed often grossly violate the sense of decency and fairness. Therapists must set boundaries when verbal and physical aggression threatens to escalate. Within these boundaries, however, therapists must be able to respond with a high degree of tolerance and flexibility.

Exploratory learning

Aggressive children and adolescents can be observed to have a one-sided, distorted perception and misinterpretation of social situations. They tend to select provocative stimuli and, in complex, conflictual situations, interpret the behaviour of other people as hostile and provocative. Accordingly, they react with an aggressive attitude. A special perception can also be observed in the interpretation of their own aggressive behaviour: their own violence is often excused as a justified aggressive reaction to previously perceived provocation and threat.

"The causes of the distorted perception processes of aggressive children have not yet been described in detail. However, it is assumed that the misinterpretation of personal intentions is caused by perception disorders. Even outside of social conflict situations, aggressive children have difficulty interpreting the facial expressions and gestures of other people and inferring underlying intentions from their behaviour." (Petermann 1993, p. 328)

When we talk about aggressive young people having a one-sided, distorted perception, we could conclude that there is an objectively correct perception (for example, that of the educator).

However, the world does not enter the mind via the senses in such a way that information flows into the brain in a single channel – filtered, if anything – and leaves impressions and images of the world there, like photographs. *"Perception is rather a sensory-specific, active process of engaging with the world, in which tactile, visual, auditory... sensory impressions are converted into sensory data or transformed into the neural (electrochemical) 'language of the brain'." (Gasser 2002, p. 52).*

When a young person says, "I was provoked," they are stating which part of reality they observed. This is "their image" of the event, their reality. *"In principle, the sensory organs cannot depict the world 'as it is'. Perception is the result of parallel hierarchical information processing within the brain. The brain constructs perception with the help of raw data from the sensory organs and with the aid of enormous prior knowledge." (Gasser 2002, p. 45).*

We are familiar from our everyday lives with conflict situations between two people, where each accuses the other of "But you started it". Each person believes that they were only reacting to the other's provocation. Watzlawick (1990) calls this a punctuation conflict: at what point does an action begin and when does it end? The starting point of an action is very often decisive for the assessment of an action ("first you did..." – "No, before that you did..."). We find examples of punctuation conflicts every day in our everyday lives: contradictory assumptions by partners about what is the cause and what is the effect of the conflict. These are not distorted perceptions, but rather the perception of fragments of reality. The human brain is not designed to perceive all sensory stimuli, but rather to make an appropriate selection according to what we need or are interested in:

"We can see that in the realm of life phenomena, causes and effects only emerge in the context of moods. Every mood is a fragment in which only that which has the readiness or possibility for the realisation of a goal comes to bear." (Th. Uexküll 1953, p. 134).

Social events can only become causes when there is a mood that enables a corresponding readiness to perceive them. So there are no causes per se; rather, we determine what a cause is. If young person A "punches" their partner B in the face, this is the cause of a conflict for B. For A, on the other hand, B's mocking smile was the cause of this conflict. In contrast to physical and chemical causes and effects, causes in social relationships are completely subjective and only become effective through perception. What is not perceived has no effect. And every behaviour can be both a cause and an effect.

What is described as a perception disorder, I would rather associate with a basic mood. Young people with antisocial-aggressive behaviour perceive the world with a specific mood. By mood, Uexküll means that a goal or motive determines which part of the environment an individual is currently interested in. Which external factors are perceived as stimuli depends on the objective in question and the individual's responsiveness.

Perception is an active, constructive and interpretative process. If we feel provoked by our environment due to our inner psychological state, we will also "see" these signs of constant provocation and develop a theory based on them. The following characteristics of construction and interpretation are typical of violent young people (based on Glasl 2001):

- Arbitrary conclusions (when conclusions are drawn that contradict general opinion)
- Selective generalisations (focusing on one detail)
- Overgeneralisation (a general rule is made on the basis of a single incident)
- Maximisation or minimisation (the significance or magnitude of an event is inaccurately assessed)
- Personalisation (a person's tendency to relate external events to themselves – internal attribution)
- Thinking in absolute terms (tendency to see only black and white).

Our therapeutic goal is for young people to learn to examine their own perceptions by comparing them with their own observations and with the perceptions of others. The act of perception is essentially based on the confirmation of hypotheses that the brain generates on the basis of its prior knowledge and verifies through incoming signals. Because perception in all its sensory modalities is a highly dynamic, active-constructive and interpretative process, perhaps the most important component is the flexibility it enables in learning to understand and interpret the world: learning is approximation, it is a change of perspective, it is reconstruction and questioning through new experiences. (Gasser, p. 53).

Explorative learning in practice:

Self-management training offers participants a social learning environment in which to explore their own being and actions within the group: testing hypotheses, making mistakes, trying out

new things, formulating new hypotheses, recognising new cause-and-effect relationships. It is crucial that the participants formulate and test hypotheses – and that the therapists do not try to teach their own theories.

Here is an example from session 3 of *the self-management training with young people* (see practical examples):

The participants chose the *Safe Place* exercise. They have settled somewhere, but there are repeated insults and attacks that have to be stopped by the therapists. Exploratory learning here means that the young people try out different forms of interaction. However, the therapists are bored and want to achieve more. They have a hypothesis as to why the potential for conflict in the group is so high today: a power struggle between two young people, with the others unsuccessfully seeking their position. At first glance, a sensible approach would be to find out what the group structure is like – to do this, we would set up a sociometric constellation with intermediate objects (it would be too dangerous to set up the people themselves, as the power conflict is ongoing). However, the young people sense that the therapists have a hypothesis. They will use all their energy to destroy it, and the exercise will escalate into a conflict between therapists and young people. Creative exploration techniques may only be used in working with violent young people if the young people themselves want to learn something with this technique. They are unsuitable as "demonstration techniques" and lead to destructiveness. In the situation described, however, the therapists can communicate their hypothesis. One therapist stands up and sets up an arrangement of animal figures (bear, rhinoceros, sea lion, dog, horse) in a corner of the therapy room. The young people glance at it from time to time. One young person asks what it is for. The therapist explains: "These could be your animal roles in the group." The young person comes closer and remarks: "...ah, I'm the dog." The therapist sees his hypothesis partially confirmed. He agrees and a discussion develops with the young person: he wants to know which animal figure symbolises whom and gives his own opinion. He enters into an exploratory learning process initiated by the therapist. The others do not actively participate, but do not really interfere with the process.

This example clearly shows that exploratory learning must not be didactic: constellations, role-playing, value exercises and group games are not used to prove something to the young people – they would not be able to accept this instruction. These methods are used when the participants want to find something out. In the absence of this motivation to learn, the therapist can initiate a learning process themselves and test their own hypotheses, as in the example described: in the emerging dialogue with the interested participants.

Principles of the exploratory psychodramatic model:

- The leader behaves receptively: they allow themselves to be shaped by the "impressions" of the learners (within clearly defined limits), like a clay surface.
- They repeatedly check how far their perception corresponds to the perception of the learners.
- They express their own feelings that arise from the "deformation".
- Checking perceptions and verbalising feelings require active communicative behaviour.

- If the technique is not used properly, the management risks restricting the learners' creative freedom.
- On the other hand, she tries to select and interpret as little as possible based on models
- Due to her "not knowing", the leader pays attention to moments when the learners' interpretations come to the fore
- The frequency of expressions of uncertainty and misunderstandings is a sign of cooperative communication

Relative lack of structure

"Every session is unique, a first time, unrepeatable. Neither their problem nor the development of the problem during the session, the dialogues, spontaneous interactions, etc. are predetermined or even determinable....The therapist does not come into a group with a specific plan or hypothesis, nor with the demand that the group members adopt a specific work plan. Everything develops as in life itself, with all its uncertainties, pauses, tensions and hostilities." (Moreno quote in Fürst 2004, p.193).

This relative lack of structure in a psychodrama session is characterised by the fact that the therapists make work offers and also ask the participants for their ideas and wishes. However, the therapists leave it up to the group to decide which learning activity will be undertaken (e.g. listening to a story, building a castle, working through a current conflict). The lack of structure is relative, as the framework conditions and objectives are predetermined (see practical examples) and the roles have been clearly agreed upon (the therapists lead the group and impose possible sanctions).

The relatively unstructured approach frustrates the learning habits and expectations of the participants. At school, clear learning structures and processes are predetermined – in psychodrama, participants must take on much greater responsibility for the group process and formulate their own wishes, ideas and demands. This creates tension, and the group's attention is directed towards the group itself. The ideas, associations, views, assumptions and suggestions contributed directly and indirectly by the participants are discussed and worked through. The current experience in the group thus becomes the basic element of the learning process.

In behavioural therapy-oriented training programmes, social skills are often successfully taught using the method of structured role-play. These newly acquired social skills can be put into practice in well-structured situations (such as school or sports clubs). However, young people with behavioural problems experience more difficulties in transitional situations (such as during breaks, in the cloakroom, on the way to school, or during chance encounters). In these situations, a greater degree of spontaneity and creativity is required in interactions. Social interactions are more open and less predictable here. A multitude of decisions and choices have to be made in a very short time: "Should I say hello? Can I ask if... Can I leave now? Should I say that...?"

Psychodrama offers a simulation of relatively unstructured everyday situations in which group members can try out and observe different courses of action. They can try to reflect on and control themselves, examine expectations and role attributions, postpone desires and their fulfilment, convert energy, refrain from actions, etc. – but without restricting themselves too much, so that they do not become incapable of giving to others and receiving from others.

"The individual must therefore restrict their personal freedom in favour of the coordination and stability needs of the group, while the group must grant them enough – personality-specific – freedom and opportunities for satisfaction that they can remain in the group or leave it." (Majce-Egger 1999, p.142).

However, in order to be able to conduct group training at all, there must be a minimum willingness to interact with mutual respect. This is usually the case even with prescribed therapies for violent children and adolescents with behavioural problems: they usually come to therapy and seek confrontation by very quickly seeking an effective position from which they can determine or destroy the movement of the group (cf. Schindler 1999). By not having a predetermined training programme and making few demands in terms of content, the therapists leave it up to the participants to distribute the positions of rank within the group and become capable of working. Out of a need for control, many group therapists strive for the learning motivator position (alpha). In doing so, however, they also block this position and take on all responsibility, making themselves vulnerable to blackmail. As Schindler (1999) points out, the therapist institutionalised in Alpha is problematic for therapies involving early ego development disorders: they will remain embroiled in conflicts with the opposing positions and block the learning group. Due to the relative lack of structure (minimal demands on group members to adopt a specific work plan – only offering work), the group cannot form a simple destructive counter-position. Instead, individual ranks and roles must now be clarified and defined: the group begins to become capable of working.

The relative lack of structure is based on group rules that are clear and do not change during the course of the group process. For young people, the group rules are provided in writing. For children, they are communicated verbally depending on the situation. The rules contain clear information about:

1. The group leadership and any different tasks of the leaders
2. The time (duration of a session, duration of the group as a whole, consequences of absence and discontinuation)
3. Individual make-up sessions for tardiness or inappropriate behaviour
4. The binding nature of the opening and closing rounds
5. Respect for the ultimate stop signal and time-out
6. Prohibition of the use of violence that violates the psychological and physical integrity of others
7. Use of the room, room layout and prohibition of damage to property
8. Confidentiality regarding personal information
9. The modalities of cooperation with the school management and home management.

Serious non-compliance with the rules will result in a warning and, if this has no effect, a time-out or immediate exclusion. The excluded person must explain at a joint meeting with the responsible educators and therapists whether they are prepared to respect the rules in future. In addition to the above rules, the minimum standards of decency and respect customary in our society apply. As Aichinger (2004) emphasises, the core task of therapists is to guarantee a safe environment. Therapists must continually create structure by pointing out the rules of the game and the group and enforcing them where necessary. The relative lack of structure gives the negotiation processes a lot of leeway. Therapists provide a clearly defined framework for this leeway in order to protect children and adolescents from overwhelming, destructive aggression.

The working method of relative unstructuredness is nothing new. It largely corresponds to the approach used in group and individual therapy with adults. What is new and unfamiliar is the

application of this didactic principle to aggressive, antisocial children and adolescents.

Behavioural therapies usually follow a clearly defined programme that must be adhered to (Petermann 1992, Weidner 2000). Guggenbühl (1993 and 1999) recommends that therapists act as authoritarian leaders and do not engage in unplanned discussions.

I only follow this recommendation in the initial and final rounds. The initial and final phases of a group session represent an exceptionally high challenge for our clients. They display the most conspicuous behavioural problems at the beginning and end of the session. This is due to the attachment issues typical of our target audience. These children and young people had few successful interpersonal relationships in their early childhood and have not successfully learned to explore their environment with confidence in new group situations and to form open, fear-free relationships. This lack of a secure basis for exploratory behaviour has a negative impact on their social skills in peer groups: they focus on the short-term success of their actions. We can assume that violent adolescents have great difficulty forming emotionally positive attachments. Both establishing and ending relationships are often problematic. These children and adolescents with attachment disorders therefore need a clearly structured beginning and ending phase: we begin and end each session with a circle time (at least 1 minute). What happens during this time is open; it can range from silence, enjoying chocolate, telling stories to discussion and clarifying organisational issues.

Relative lack of structure in application:

When I write the minutes after a training session, I am always surprised: a lot of work was done in a fairly structured manner. During the session, however, we therapists had the feeling that "nothing is happening". And in fact, often little happens. In *training with young people*, for example, a session lasts 70 minutes. Of that, sometimes 50 minutes are spent sitting around, making a suggestion, being provoked, demanding minimal manners, waiting, listening to a long, uninteresting conversation (about the latest video game or the idiotic teacher), making another offer of work, remaining silent, talking to the co-therapist (interpretations of the group process), answering some nonsensical question, looking out of the window, issuing a warning, waiting, rejecting a provocative offer of work, commenting, remaining silent, making another offer of work, listening, waiting and then possibly taking up a teaching activity yourself (e.g. setting up chairs). The participants can help shape a relatively open learning arrangement and play a constructive role in the learning process.

The relative lack of structure in working with young people with severe behavioural problems requires therapists to have a great deal of patience, frustration tolerance and a high level of competence in perceiving their own and others' emotional states in a group context.

Learning objectives

Young people with behavioural problems who are prone to violence and have experienced multiple stresses in their lives form an extremely challenging training group. These *perpetrators/victims* are "unteachable". However, they are certainly capable of learning. They just won't learn what we want to teach them, but rather what seems useful to them at the moment.

In this chapter, I therefore do not talk about learning objectives, but about teaching objectives: I specify the "disciplines" in which we want to train violent young people. These "sports" are self-efficacy expectations, stress management and moral judgement.

I will describe these three disciplines in detail. However, I would like to emphasise that this is not a list of goals that the young people should achieve. The perpetrators and victims do not have the right psychological prerequisites for these disciplines, and they (and we as trainers) would be completely overwhelmed by these training goals. Rather, the teaching goals are intended as guidance for the trainers: Where is urgent action needed? Which path do we want to take?

Self-efficacy expectation

A case study: Daniel first attracted attention at nursery school due to behavioural difficulties and was therefore assessed by the school psychology service. As a result, Daniel was taken out of school and received early remedial education. However, due to behavioural difficulties and developmental deficits, he was again unable to start primary school. The family was eventually supported by an interdisciplinary group (school, guardianship, family counselling, school psychology service). Daniel then attended an introductory class, where he lived with an extended educational family during the week. Due to ongoing severe disruption to lessons, the school psychologist carried out another assessment. This revealed severely delayed personality development. It became clear that Daniel could only be integrated into school in a consistently managed small group. In addition, his parents were unable to cope with the educational conflicts and tasks on their own.

Children of the same age develop at different rates. One child may be more advanced in motor skills, another in language, emotional development or social skills. However, children of

the same age are not only different from each other, but each child also develops at a different rate. Every child has an individual profile of abilities.

"Most children manage to find a balance between their strengths and weaknesses. Children rely on their strengths in family and school and try to cope with their weaknesses. Most children manage this reasonably well. They have their successes, can integrate socially, feel comfortable and develop good self-esteem." (Römer 2002, p. 201)

Daniel has experienced failure at school and at home for years. He has not been able to learn enough about his strengths and how to use them effectively. Daniel has low self-esteem. Numerous studies in the field of educational psychology have confirmed that self-efficacy expectations at school can explain differences in performance (Satow 2003). This means that the optimistic belief that one can solve certain tasks is very important for actual success. Fear, on the other hand, that the task might be too difficult ("I'm bad at maths anyway") leads to increased failure.

"Our brain constantly and automatically forms expectations about how things will continue from the current moment. If someone has had many negative experiences, they will predominantly form negative expectations of outcomes, reactions and self-efficacy. They will therefore usually expect bad things to happen and will not have confidence in themselves. People who have repeatedly experienced violations of their need for control do not develop positive expectations of control (...) They are more prone to negative emotions; once negative emotions have arisen, they find it more difficult to regulate them down again; they react with excessive stress responses even to moderate stress, and the stress responses last for a long time. Their autonomic nervous system is very often overexcited." (Grawe, 2004, p. 362).

It is very important for healthy child development to learn where one's strengths lie and that learning can lead to positive results. Long-term failure at school is terrible and harmful to health. Only with a good social network (loving parents, positive and supportive teachers and friends) can this serious problem be overcome. Children who do not have these social resources, on the other hand, risk falling into depression ("I don't need to try hard, everything will turn out badly anyway"). Daniel did not develop depression, but noticed that he could achieve a high level of impact and attention when dealing with peers and adults by using violence ("if I am treated unfairly, I can hit out or destroy something and it changes things"). Daniel was able to develop a sense of social self-efficacy: he has an optimistic confidence that he can assert his own interests through aggressive actions. When he is angry or stressed, he can swear and smash things – and when he wants to assert his opinion or interests to a group of peers, he can lash out. Both sometimes bring the desired success. These experiences of self-efficacy through violence are a central theme in group therapy work: on the one hand, violent young people will try to be "effective" towards the therapists as well, with the declared aim of destroying the therapy programme. On the other hand, they will repeatedly idealise violence (and not without reason, as we can see every day on our screens). In opposition to this, we have the following objectives regarding self-efficacy in self-management training: the promotion of cooperation, mutual respect and spontaneity.

"Social self-efficacy expectations are defined here as optimistic confidence in one's own social skills in the face of difficult social conflicts and demanding situations. Three areas or requirements are considered central for young people: (a) asserting one's own interests and opinions in a group, (b) the socially acceptable

regulation of anger and stress, and (c) social communication and the establishment of social networks."
(Satow 2003, p.169)

An important component of the feeling of self-efficacy is the expectation that one will not be unexpectedly attacked or hurt. Group leaders must ensure that uncontrolled violent acts do not occur. In extreme cases, they must intervene with force to protect the participants.

In *self-management training for children*, for example, we therapists are physically active in practically every session, holding, blocking, pulling away and isolating to prevent physical injury and damage to property. Although I have an optimistic confidence in my own social skills in difficult group situations, I repeatedly have to intervene with force because I do not want to allow children and young people under my supervision to be mistreated. I therefore clarify point b) of self-efficacy expectation: threats and violations of physical and psychological integrity (= significant stressors) are not accepted and are immediately stopped.

Practical example: in the *self-management training group for children*, I jumped up during the initial round ("Indian circle") when a participant suddenly started violently beating his neighbour. I blocked the attacker, held him down and reprimanded him loudly. I then said to the designated session leader (main person) that this was actually his job, "because a good leader protects his Indians".

I believe it is important not to overwhelm violent children with excessive and idealised goals. If we professional educators are unable to regulate difficult group situations without resorting to violence, then we cannot expect children to do so either. However, we can show them that there are appropriate forms of using force. We can also demonstrate that inappropriate use of force leads to feelings of guilt and active remorse.

Feelings of guilt arise from *"unnecessary, negligent or even intentional injury, destruction and annihilation of the integrity of our environment, unnecessary because it goes far beyond the goal of satisfying needs, or because this goal could also have been achieved by less violent and even lesser means. The difficulty lies in the fact that this feeling is often avoided; genuine guilt is active repentance that seeks to do good even when restitution of the previous state is not possible. Genuine feelings of guilt must be endured; they transform themselves into a healing activity that is now protective and often creative"* (Dreitzel 1995, p.511).

In this sense, I would like to add another point to the concept of self-efficacy expectation: dealing with issues of injustice and guilt.

In summary, the following specific goals can be formulated in the area of self-efficacy expectations:

- Young people can assert their own interests and opinions in a group without resorting to violence.
- They can vent anger and stress without hurting others or damaging property.
- They can express their desire to establish and end relationships within a group, thereby regulating their social contacts.
- To protect themselves and others, they can use as little force as necessary and as much as required
- They deal with questions of injustice and guilt when using violence.

I am always surprised at how reasonable and understanding violent young people are in one-on-one conversations: they will have no problem agreeing to the specific goals described above. They often believe that they have long since achieved these goals themselves: "I only use violence when there is no other option or when I am severely provoked." Daniel (see case study above) is also convinced that he acted appropriately after committing an act of violence: "It was necessary." In conversation with an authority figure, he is then able to see that he acted wrongly and admit his own guilt. However, it often remains questionable whether this is genuine insight or merely conformist behaviour. Is he really grappling with questions of wrongdoing and guilt?

In the following section, I will describe how we try to encourage young people in our training to reassess their own actions in past, present or future stressful situations. To do this, we take a brief look at the environments of animals:

In his book *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere (Environment and Inner World of Animals, 1921)*, biologist Jakob von Uexküll developed his theory of *functional circles of living beings*. In it, he postulates that there is no reality that is valid for all living beings – rather, reality arises in an interplay between action and perception. Objects only become "real" when they are perceived. And they are only perceived when they have meaning for the observing subject (i.e. when they "play a role"). He illustrated this in detail using the example of a tick sitting at the tip of a protruding branch waiting for its prey:

"The approach of its prey is revealed to the blind and deaf ambush predator (tick) by its sense of smell. The scent of butyric acid (1st characteristic), which emanates from the skin glands of all mammals, acts as a signal for the tick to leave its sentry post and pounce. If it falls onto something warm (2nd characteristic), which its keen sense of temperature detects, then it has reached its prey, the warm-blooded animal, and only needs to use its sense of touch to find a spot of skin that is as hairless as possible (3rd characteristic) in order to burrow into the skin tissue of its prey up to its head. If, after the butyric acid has taken effect, the tick falls onto something cold, it has missed its prey and must climb back up to its lookout post. The tick hangs motionless at the tip of a branch in a forest clearing. No stimuli penetrate it from the entire surroundings. Then a mammal approaches, whose blood it needs to produce its offspring. And now something truly wonderful happens: of all the effects emanating from the mammal, only three become stimuli, and these in a specific order. From the vast world surrounding the tick, three stimuli shine like light signals from the darkness and serve as signposts for the tick. The whole rich world surrounding the tick shrinks together and transforms into a poor structure consisting mainly of three characteristics and three effects – its environment. However, the poverty of the environment determines the certainty of action, and certainty is more important than wealth." (J. von Uexküll 1956, p. 28)

Uexküll uses the functional circle to illustrate this process of the tick adapting to its environment by equipping its environment with "meanings". Three functional circles run systematically one after the other:

1. The butyric acid triggers a signal in the tick's sensory organ, which leads to an impulse in the effector organ (releasing the legs and falling down), and the tick falls onto the hairy skin of a mammal.
2. This skin has the characteristic of warmth. This triggers a second action: groping around until a hairless area of skin is found
3. This characteristic triggers a third action: drilling in and sucking blood, etc.

Three characteristics of this escalation of violence, as depicted in the diagram above, are of particular interest to us:

- At each step, the tick assigns meaning to a new characteristic. When sitting on its branch, it will not react to warmth, as this characteristic has no meaning for it in this life situation.
- One functional cycle follows another, and the previous characteristics lose all significance – when the tick uses its sense of touch to search for a hairless spot, it no longer perceives the characteristics of butyric acid or warmth; it is no longer capable of doing so.
- The object, the mammal (victim), is only involved in the action insofar as it must possess the necessary characteristics.

The violent Daniel has a more complex life story and has far more extensive emotional and intellectual resources than a tick. Nevertheless, it appears that in some social conflict situations, Daniel perceives only a few characteristics from his oversized environment. This is particularly the case when he believes that he cannot achieve certain goals or that his safety is at risk. Then certain perceptions and reactions are developed – and the environment is endowed with characteristics. Daniel will watch for the emergence of these characteristics with the utmost sensitivity and react accordingly when they occur.

Let's take the initial situation of a group session as an example:

Everyone is already sitting in a circle when Daniel is the last to enter the room. He grabs the only chair still available from the seating arrangement and creates a new seating order: he squeezes himself between two participants. The therapist asks him to return to the gap that has now been created so that the circle remains closed and there is a distance between the participants. Daniel replies in an aggressive tone: "I'm sitting in the circle, I don't know what you want." The therapist waits a moment and says, "We can only start when the usual seating arrangement is observed."

We can describe this conflict using the functional circle as follows:

- In a first step, the characteristic 'empty chair' triggers certain thoughts in Daniel. We do not know what these ideas, theories or fantasies are. However, this characteristic then loses all significance: Daniel focuses his attention solely on the therapist.
- Daniel now sees the second characteristic ("Please put the chair back in its proper place") as a declaration of war; the fact that there is now a gap in the circle no longer has any meaning for him. He will focus all his attention on possible aggressive verbal and non-verbal signs in the therapist's behaviour. Arguing is now pointless, because Daniel has now focused his attention on signs of aggression.
- The third characteristic (a more severe warning) will now cause "Tick-Daniel" to disregard all other characteristics of the group situation (including rules and agreements): he will now focus solely on the conflict with the therapist.

In self-management training, we try to show Daniel how he affects his environment: by selecting a characteristic from his environment (empty chair in the sitting circle) and reacting to

it (moving the chair). Daniel could also have reacted to the friendly greeting, for example, or a hundred other characteristics.

It is a spiral of conflict escalation: we will now trace the spiral back and try to understand why Daniel behaves in this particular way:

- What meaning does he attach to this feature?
- What feelings (world 2) are associated with the characteristic of the seating arrangement?
- What ideas, theories, fantasies (world 3) does Daniel associate with the seating arrangement?

Using psychodrama techniques, we try to activate the young people in the training group's current conflict situations to engage in learning processes. In Daniel's example, we do this by making the empty chair in the seating arrangement the topic of discussion. The aim is to convey the experience that every person is jointly responsible for shaping their environment. The question we will work on with Daniel is: "Why don't you just sit down on the empty chair instead of moving it to a new place?"

However, we cannot address all disruptions in the leadership and analyse how the escalation process unfolds. The group session with Daniel, for example, has not even started yet and the conflict is already there. At this point, we do not engage in psychodramatic games.

Another way to respond quickly to this conflict is through leadership dialogue: I discuss the *how* and *why* of this behaviour with my co-therapist, and we develop possible hypotheses in a humorous way ("He's in a bad mood today", "He wants to show that he's not a sheep", "He needs to be close to his two assistants", "He wants to be able to look out the window," "He wants to keep an eye on the escape route," etc.). Finally, we select one of these hypotheses, assume that the new seating arrangement contributes to Daniel's well-being, and invite everyone to move their chairs so that a circle is formed again and we can begin the session. On behalf of Daniel, we therapists try to formulate what certain features of his environment mean to him. In doing so, we start from hypotheses that we want to test together with him.

Just as the tick on the branch perceives only one characteristic of all the things we discover in its surroundings – fragrant and colourful flowers, rustling leaves, singing birds – namely the smell of butyric acid, we (like Daniel) also perceive only very specific characteristics of our environment. The difference between our efforts and those of a tick is that we can critically examine the interactions between our perceptions, our actions and their results.

"The process of learning or the growth of subjective knowledge is basically always the same. It consists of imaginative criticism. By seeking to find, construct and invent new situations – that is, test situations, critical situations; and by limiting our prejudices and habitual assumptions, trying to discover and question them. In this way, we pull ourselves out of the swamp of ignorance by our own hair; we throw a rope into the air and climb up it – if it finds a foothold on even the weakest of branches. The difference between our efforts and those of an animal or an amoeba is only that our rope can find a foothold in a world of critical discussion: a world of language, of objective knowledge. This enables us to eliminate some of our competing theories. And if we are lucky, we manage to survive some of our false theories (most of them are false, after all), while an amoeba (or tick) perishes with its theory, its beliefs and its habits." (Popper, p.153)

Stress management

Based on Popper's theory of knowledge and Uexküll's theory of meaning, I have argued that we should treat violent behaviour in young people not as senseless destruction, but as behaviour based on false theories. Seen in this light, violence is an individual attempt at problem solving by people who do not have the necessary resources to live their lives without violence. This also makes it understandable that perpetrators of violence often believe that others have forced them into this unpleasant action.

The aim of the training is to create critical situations where these theories can be tested within the group. It is very important in this clarification process that the needs and motives that lead to a certain perception become recognisable. We therapists often believe we know what is important to the participants. We reckon that everyone organises their relationships with their environment using the same criteria as us. Uexküll's theory of meaning disagrees with this: just as a foodie picks only the best bits from a buffet, violent young people pick only the stressful things from their surroundings. In this young person's environment, the emphasis of significance is not on what is favourable to them, but on the characteristic of threat. Uexküll provides a beautiful image of this:

"Every subject spins its relationships like a spider's threads to certain characteristics of things and weaves them into a solid web that supports its existence." (p. 31)

Our job now is to make this spider's web recognisable and changeable.

The solid "spider's web" that controls our actions is, in a sense, our personal brain. Hundreds of thousands of functional circuits run simultaneously in the brain. Modern neuroscience sees the brain as a network of systems that are partly genetically determined and partly developed through our experiences. The primary purpose of the brain is to adapt to the environment with the aim of physical health, well-being and reproduction. Storch & Krause (2002) explore the question of how the brain manages to ensure that its owner can experience as much psychobiological well-being as possible:

"It does this by ensuring that the things that happen to the individual are evaluated in terms of whether they were beneficial or detrimental to well-being, by storing this knowledge and then using it – depending on the situation – either ad hoc or for planning actions. In other words, experiences form the basis for the brain's self-organising processes. (...) If a person behaves in a way that is detrimental to their psychobiological well-being, then they have inadequate knowledge of how to achieve this desired state" (p. 28).

We can assume that our target group – behaviourally disturbed and violent young people – have accumulated a great deal of inappropriate knowledge through many bad experiences. The particular difficulty of our work lies in the fact that these young brains are equipped with memory organs that pick out those characteristics from the environment that have a subjectively threatening component because they have had bad experiences with them. An important learning step is recognising that one and the same situation can be assessed very differently by different people. In self-management training, we use so-called everyday adversities as practice situations.

Stress research distinguishes between three types of stressful experiences: chronic stressors (e.g. years of excessive demands at school, poverty, constant absence of the father, abuse), major life events (e.g. addition to the family, accident, parents' divorce) and acute daily adversities (e.g. everyday conflicts, poor food, insect bites, homework, losing at games, being excluded).

There are complex reciprocal causal relationships between these stresses and health. However, these causality mechanisms do not reveal which stressors have a decisive impact on health and which are more secondary. Stress-related burdens do not develop linearly but in quantum leaps. A "small" stressor can have far-reaching effects on health and well-being:

Cognitive processes play a crucial buffering role between stressors, stress perception and health. A stress response that is harmful to health (such as withdrawal/isolation or aggression/violence) arises primarily when the stressor is experienced as uncontrollable, unpredictable, meaningless, incomprehensible or illegitimate. Social support (practical and emotional support from family, friends, caregivers, etc.) also plays a crucial buffering role. People who have sufficient social support are more likely to believe that they can control their environment and any stressors. Knowing that social support is available strengthens self-esteem, self-confidence and emotional stability. The greater the emotional stability and self-esteem, the more flexibly a person acts in stressful situations: they will examine the situation closely, question the requirements, identify and provide resources, seek feedback and interim assessments from others, and adjust their strategies for action if necessary. (cf. Meyer 2000, p. 47 ff.)

The young people we treat are emotionally unstable, have low self-esteem, have often grown up in chronically stressful family situations, have experienced failure at school, are socially isolated, and have modest material and social resources. The so-called minor stressors, i.e. everyday adversities that arise in psychosocial contact with other people, often seem harmless, and the reaction of outsiders is often "don't be like that, nothing happened". For the person affected, however, too much has already happened, as if an additional drop has caused the barrel to overflow. In self-management training, we work on minor stressors. Chronic stressors and significant life events are not covered in this group activity. It can be assumed that a large proportion of violent children and young people have themselves suffered violence. This issue must be addressed in other therapeutic settings. Our objective is therefore to address *minor stressors*, such as "... he gave me the finger / he called me an asshole / the other one got more / everyone looked at me funny / I was ignored". Using the functional circle, I will now show how cognitive processes and social support can act as a buffer between the characteristic (stressor) and the effect.

Case study from self-management training with violent young people (see the description in the section on *methods/reverse role-playing*)

1. Yvan reports that he became "slightly" violent towards his teacher last week: Yvan had a heated verbal argument with another young person. The teacher then grabbed him by the arm from behind. Yvan wanted to break free and accidentally hit the teacher in the face with his elbow.
2. Yvan acts out the altercation with the young person and the teacher standing behind him – "as it was", from Yvan's perspective, without looking for alternative solutions.
3. Interim evaluation with feedback: I formulate the hypothesis that the teacher may not have wanted to grab him at all, but only wanted to get Yvan's attention ("...maybe he had already tried unsuccessfully to tell you something by shouting..."). Doubling: I stand next to Yvan and say, "If someone grabs me from behind..." Yvan adds, "I can't stand that." Yvan explains that it feels like an attack to him when someone comes up behind him.
4. Role reversal: Yvan takes on the role of the teacher and tries out de-escalating interventions from the teacher's position.
5. Search for a solution: Yvan observes the role play as a spectator.
6. Role play in the initial situation: playing out a possible solution – how can Yvan react non-violently to the teacher grabbing him?

In the role play, Yvan learns that he does not even notice characteristic 1 (the verbal request): he is so agitated and ready to fight that he ignores verbal warnings. In step 3, we explored Yvan's mental state (world 2) at the moment of the conflict. Through steps 4 and 5, Yvan can view the situation from a different perspective and infer possible motives and intentions (world 3). In step 6, he comes to the realisation: "When I'm fighting and someone grabs me from behind, I see red." He has taken a step forward in his learning in that the blame is no longer one-sided ("...he shouldn't have touched me"), but Yvan has now recognised that he is difficult to stop in this situation and often "just sees red". This self-awareness makes it possible to search for non-violent courses of action in the first place.

In the above example, we see how characteristics (admonishing or tackling) are effective or not. Based on previous experiences, characteristics from the environment are evaluated directly. We are only aware of this evaluation process when we are uncertain and have to think about it. Most evaluation processes (and every perception involves an evaluation) take place unconsciously in a modular process system that is constantly evolving in a continuous learning process with the environment.

Neuropsychology today assumes that two systems in the human brain are involved in the creation of actions. One system functions automatically, so to speak, and we are not even aware of it. The other is responsible for conscious actions that are experienced as arbitrary. Mischel (2003) describes the older system as 'hot', automatic, impulsive and fast, starting below the threshold of consciousness (and is therefore referred to as the 'adaptive unconscious'). He characterises the other system as 'cold', based on logic and intellectual activity, and therefore somewhat more cumbersome and significantly slower. The functioning of the conscious and unconscious processing systems are significantly different; they are also based on different structures in the brain. This distinction between conscious and unconscious

control systems in the brain corresponds to the explicit and implicit processes in memory psychology (Schacter, 1986). Explicit processes require time and attention, while implicit processes run automatically and at lightning speed.

"If you think about the difference between your first driving lesson and the way you drive today, the difference between explicit and implicit processes becomes immediately clear. Basically, the brain's ability to handle many things automatically in implicit mode is usually an advantage. For psychological processes, however, this ability can sometimes become a problem. This is the case when maladaptive neural networks take over the control function and trigger perceptions, motivations and actions in humans that are detrimental to their psychobiological well-being. This happens especially in situations of 'acting under pressure' (Wahl 2001), in which the brain switches to the implicit regulatory system. Then arbitrary action is no longer possible; the activated pattern runs automatically." (Storch & Riedener, p. 69)

In this sense, anti-violence training means creating learning situations that are similar to the 'pressure situations of everyday life'. In these training pressure situations, an attempt is made to build two buffers into these automatic process systems in order to reveal the individual 'spider's web' that is specific to each person:

1) Cognitive review of the assessment:

- young people can experience that an event can be evaluated from different perspectives
- that their own feelings play a decisive role
- and that reactions to an event can also vary
- This leads to the realisation that new behaviour can be learned.

2) Social support:

- In role-playing and evaluation, young people learn that their own needs and desires are important (also to others), but that there are different ways of implementing them.
- they experience that other young people, as well as the leaders, also have uncertainties when it comes to resolving everyday conflicts
- and that there are at least as many solutions as there are people.

In the methods section, I will describe what this looks like in practice during training. However, it should be emphasised here that self-management training does not involve extreme stress simulations. In contrast to anti-aggression training, in which participants are put in the hot seat and subjected to criticism from peers who are former perpetrators of violence and trainers (Weidner 2003), psychodrama training does not focus on confrontation, but on promoting resources: the stress is generated solely by the fact that it is a group activity in which problematic issues are dealt with in a playful manner. Within this framework, positive emotional experiences are primarily promoted. The willingness to resort to violence can only be inhibited if young people perceive the training as challenging but not threatening.

Moral judgement

In the transition from childhood to adulthood, young people must redefine their social position with socially normalised behavioural and attitudinal expectations and role models. Every person has an age-specific combination of different social roles (e.g. student, footballer, flatmate, son, brother, etc.). The sum of all the roles assumed by an individual is called the role balance (Meyer, 2000). In the transition to adulthood, the role balance becomes more complex and the previously dominant family roles lose their significance.

"The danger of this phase is that it can create a feeling of inadequacy and inferiority. If the child despairs because it cannot cope with the tools and manual skills or because it cannot find its own place among its work companions, it may give up hope of being able to identify with the grown-ups who operate within the same general framework of the tool world. (...) At this point, society at large becomes important with its respective methods of guiding the child to an understanding of more significant roles in the overall economy. How many children experience a break in their development because family life has not prepared them for school life, or because school life has not lived up to the promises of earlier stages?" (Erikson, p. 254)

The integration that now takes place in the form of ego identity is the adaptation of the developed abilities to the possibilities of the available social roles. The danger of this stage lies in role ambiguity (the requirements of a role are ambiguous), role disparity (more personal responsibility is expected without more rights being granted), role change (from student to apprentice), and in person-role conflict (contradiction between personal goals/values and the actual role expectations and role possibilities). Psychodramatic theory postulates that violence can be a consequence of such role stress. Every role involves tasks, duties, requirements, restrictions and constraints. If personal values and goals conflict with social role expectations, or if the role holder does not have the means/abilities to meet expectations, or if there are massive contradictions between several roles of a person, then this is defined as role stress. The extent to which this stressor is perceived as a burden and leads to violent behaviour depends on various factors. A violent stress reaction will occur primarily when the burden appears incomprehensible, unjust and uncontrollable by peaceful means. (cf. Meyer 2000)

In order to escape these stresses, young people sometimes over-identify with cliques, submit to a clan leader or idolise mass heroes. In doing so, they can be cruel in excluding all those who are different. This particular form of stress management helps young people with weak egos to survive the difficult period of developing an adequate role balance.

An important method here is the establishment of a role balance. In psychodrama, this is referred to as a *cultural atom* and is frequently used. The cultural atom (or role balance) makes it visible and tangible that social roles are not only associated with requirements, duties and tasks, but also with resources.

"The resource aspect includes the rights, privileges, rewards, remuneration and resources associated with the role, as well as the various options, in particular the opportunity for development, self-realisation and the identity-forming function of a social role. It can be assumed that the resource aspect of a role generally has a positive effect on health and quality of life." (Meyer, p. 43)

And this brings us back to World 3: when a young person behaves violently in a certain social role, i.e. violates a generally accepted cultural norm of avoiding violence, there is usually an identity-forming function behind it. The perpetrator of violence wants to show that his expectations and needs have not been met. His sense of justice tells him that he must send a clear message: "Hello, here I am and I want something." The aggressors themselves consider the violence they use to be part of the role in question. The study of the moral concepts of perpetrators of violence is therefore a very central problem area.

Child psychologist Jean Piaget distinguishes between two types of morality: a morality of coercion and a morality of cooperation:

"Moral coercion is characterised by one-sided respect. This respect is the source of moral obligation and a sense of duty. Every instruction that comes from a person one respects is the starting point for a binding rule. The obligation to tell the truth, not to steal, etc. are just as many duties that the child perceives as such, without them originating from his own consciousness: they are rules imposed by adults that the child accepts." (Piaget 1954, p. 221)

By the *morality of cooperation*, Piaget means a more developed morality: a sense of justice based on mutual sympathy and respect and independent of any external pressure. This is a sense of justice in the sense of an autonomous understanding of the rules governing the distribution of goods or rewards/punishments in a social system. This includes the temporary postponement of one's own interests and needs in favour of others, the experience of compassion and the capacity for guilt.

According to Piaget, younger schoolchildren think and act according to the criteria of moral compulsion. For example, if they respect their teacher, they will adhere to the rules set for them. At around the age of 10, a more mature morality, that of cooperation, becomes effective.

This develops in the child's consciousness, largely independently of adult influences, as "its development requires only mutual respect and solidarity among children. Often, the concepts of right and wrong impose themselves on children's consciousness despite, and not because of, adults. In contrast to such a rule, which is initially imposed from outside and not understood by the child for a long time, such as not lying, the imperative of justice is a kind of immanent condition or law of equilibrium in social relations." (Piaget, p. 224)

When Rudi verbally abuses and threatens his teacher in the worst possible way, he believes he is acting out of a pure sense of justice. And thanks to his high intelligence and strong social skills, he is able to present this to outsiders in a reasonably credible manner. The teacher, on the other hand, thinks he is disturbed and has no morals. Rudi cannot understand why he now has to attend anti-violence training as a punishment. Accordingly, he insults the therapist during the preliminary discussion.

As group therapists, we now have the task of teaching Rudi that he must not insult or threaten teachers, therapists or other educators. We take his statement "I was provoked by the teacher" as our starting point: I use cushions to act out the interaction between the teacher and Rudi. I take two different coloured cushions and place them at a random distance from each other. Rudi reacts immediately and moves the teacher closer to him. In doing so, he gives his practical consent to a staged re-enactment. I can immediately ask how Rudi experienced the distancing behaviour: "...aha, you feel that she came too close...". It now becomes apparent that Rudi – in response to the distancing behaviour – stood up, shouted abuse and reduced the distance even further. I move the cushion a little closer.

In doing so, we capture his inner image, his subjective world (his *psychological* image, so to speak). The aim of this staging is not to find out how the scene played out in reality (the *physical* image), but rather to explore his sense of justice: what attitude, what theory causes Rudi to perceive the teacher's behaviour as provocation?

For the philosopher Karl Popper, "*the world consists of at least three ontologically different sub-worlds; or, as I will say, there are three worlds: World 1 is the physical world or the world of physical states; World 2 is the mental world, the world of our psychological experiences (desires, hopes, thoughts...); World 3 is the world of intelligibilia or ideas in the objective sense; it is the world of possible objects of thought: the world of theories themselves and their logical relationships*" (Popper 1998, p. 160).

So when Rudi says, "I know she wanted to provoke me," he is expressing his psychological experience (world 2). If we had a video recording of the school lesson, we could perhaps show him that the physical world, as recorded (world 1), contains hardly any provocative elements. But we are not referees, we are psychotherapists. Our goal is to promote mature moral development: Rudi should be empowered to examine his statement "I know she wanted to provoke me": how does he know she wants to provoke him? What theories, experiences and images tell him this? Our experience of the world, our immediate self-awareness, depends crucially on our World 3, i.e. on our theories about the world with its norms, obligations and values. As Piaget assumes, morality is not simply predetermined or innate. Rather, it develops through trial and error, experience and experimentation, thereby acquiring a very individual logic. We will therefore attempt to initiate a process of insight into individual theories, moral judgements, prejudices, ideals and attitudes to life by means of role-playing, group games, metaphors, intermediate objects and discussions.

With Rudi, we visualised the conflict situation using a simple arrangement of cushions: what does the situation look like? By situation analysis, I mean a specific preliminary or presumed explanation of a human action based on the situation of the actor: the situation as he saw it. By letting Rudi portray how he sees the "provocative" situation, we try to make his beliefs and judgements (his world 3) recognisable.

In doing so, we are catching up on a developmental step that violent young people missed in their childhood: "*The child's play is the infantile form of the human ability to create model situations in order to process experiences and master reality through planning and experimentation. In certain phases of his work and his oeuvre, the adult plans beyond the scope of his experience, in dimensions that appear accessible to his influence. In the laboratory, on the stage and on the drawing board, they revive the past and thus dissolve residual emotions. In reconstructing the model situation, they correct their failures and develop new hopes. They anticipate the future from the standpoint of an improved past shared with others.*" (Erikson, 1984. p.216)

In the model situation, Rudi is not to be shown how he should have behaved (a morality of coercion). He can behave correctly when required to do so by significant adults. He would perform a corresponding role play emotionlessly (if he wanted to). The model situation is therefore not an exemplary showcase situation, but rather an experimental space, a maquette, a laboratory. Morality is a logic of action. In the model situation, Rudi can playfully explore what his logic is. And in these model games, he will (hopefully) be able to take a step towards a morality of cooperation.

The group thus becomes a place for discovery and problem-solving by trying out possibilities conceived in the imagination. By trying to represent our life experience through the theories of

World 3 (attitudes, values, norms). By learning to distinguish between personal needs, social role expectations and a sense of justice.

"As long as the child does not detach his ego from the influences of the physical and social world, he is not capable of cooperation, because in order to cooperate, one must be aware of one's ego and place it in relation to the thinking of the community." (Piaget p.100)

Basic assumptions about moral judgement

1. Aggressive, antisocial young people want to change their behaviour but find it difficult to show this.
2. They are responsible for their actions in the here and now, but at the same time they are victims of difficult living conditions.
3. Many of them have experienced psychological and physical abuse – it is important to avoid them falling back into the role of victim in the training group.
4. Every behaviour of the young people in the training group is seen as an attempt to make the best of their difficult life situation and social position.
5. These observations and interpretations are reported back with appropriate boundaries.

Basic techniques and methods

Introduction to psychodrama

Psychodrama is a method of group and individual psychotherapy developed by psychiatrist Jakob Levy Moreno (1889–1974) in the 1920s and further developed internationally by him and his students.

Psychodrama is a way of working through conflicts and problems through dramatic representation. With the help of various techniques such as role-playing, role reversal, interviewing, doubling and mirroring, real conflict situations, fantasies, past experiences, dreams or plans for the future are not only dealt with verbally, but also acted out with assigned roles.

In contrast to the use of role-playing in behavioural therapy (where model role-playing is used to eliminate disruptive behaviour), psychodrama uses dramatic representation, in which the behavioural disorder plays an important role, to explore the function of this disorder and find solutions.

If we look closely at how someone copes with themselves despite being in great difficulty, we come to some very surprising discoveries. We recognise many maladaptive behaviours such as aggression, destructive rage, self-harm and compulsive actions. But we also see other behaviours that people use to try to keep themselves under control. (..) These are ways of perceiving, defining a situation, acting and thinking that enable them to just about keep their heads above water, just about hold their own. Once you realise that people with entrenched behaviours are also looking for ways out, you have discovered the key to solving behavioural problems. The solution is to promote self-assertion and self-protection." (Heijkoop 1998, p. 18)

However, when we take a closer look, young people with behavioural problems and repeated violent behaviour present us with a difficult task. Even arriving in the group is problematic, and it is rarely possible to play a game controlled by the leader. The welcome is often conflictual, and the initial round can only be opened after a few disruptions. This means that we cannot proceed in four steps, as is usual in psychodrama:

1. Group formation with opening round
2. Search for a theme and warm-up for the play
3. Psychodramatic role play on stage
4. Integration and conclusion.

In our groups, conflicts are brought to the fore upon entering the group room (if not before). This means that the reality level is already the play level; from the moment we enter the therapy room, we are on stage. And as in classical psychodrama, the truth of the soul

(*psycho*) is explored on stage through action (*drama*). On the psychodrama stage, the world is reconstructed and explored. We assume that human beings are seekers: they try to improve their life situation and give meaning to their lives. In doing so, they make many mistakes and often get stuck in unhappy situations.

On stage (i.e. from the moment they enter the group room), the protagonist can examine their entrenched behaviours, question their interpersonal relationships, try to see their experiences through different eyes, express unspoken desires and goals, develop fantasies and test corrective trial actions. They are not punished for this (if they respect the basic rules of the game). On the contrary, they receive support and empathetic participation from the group and the therapist. On stage, the aggressive young person can try to understand their destructive aspects and learn to understand themselves. In this sense, psychodrama is reconciliation work with oneself:

- *perceiving* one's own person/history with its violent aspects
- recognising and evaluating behaviour patterns
- exploring and naming one's own values, attitudes and norms
- and thus fathom the subjective *truth*.

"Psychodrama is not about objective truth, but about deeper intersubjective truth, about truth as an existential quality that 'gives voice to the invisible'. In psychodrama, the true second time arises through the appropriate use of psychodrama techniques. They expand the remembered scene into the 'true' scene by releasing the blocked spontaneity within it. Moreno speaks of psychodrama techniques creating 'surplus reality', a reality that was not there before, an excess of truth. I am deeply convinced that, in psychotherapy, apart from accepting love, nothing else has a healing effect in the long run other than truth, truth in the sense of trying to be true. By truth, I do not mean so-called objective reality, in psychodrama a repetition of the memory on stage that accurately reflects the facts, in which the therapist, like a detective, would make sure that no details are omitted. Rather, it is about being true, about expressing something essential about the person or the conflictual relationship here and now in the ever-changing alternation between consciousness formation and shaping. The opposite of truth is not lying, but self-deception." (Krüger 1997, p. 21)

Psychodrama has various basic techniques at its disposal to enable this 'surplus reality'. I have described these in detail elsewhere (Schaller 2001, pp. 16-53). Below is a brief summary of the central basic techniques: scene construction, role assumption, doubling, interviewing, mirroring, constellations.

The effective factor of these techniques is that they create a reality that does not otherwise exist in the world. When a violent young person says, "I was provoked," eyewitnesses to the incident can clarify that this was not the case in the real situation. There was no provocation. The provocation is not reality, and yet it has a real effect.

The philosopher Karl R. Popper was a contemporary of the psychiatrist J.L. Moreno, and both began their careers in Vienna. There is no evidence that they philosophised together. However, they arrived at a strikingly similar theory regarding "being true". In Moreno's psychodrama theory, the concept of roles is central: each individual is characterised by a specific repertoire of roles that shape their behaviour, and each culture is characterised by a certain type of role that it imposes on its members. Moreno distinguishes between three categories of roles: somatic roles, psychic roles and social roles.

The philosopher Popper was concerned with the question of how we perceive the world in which we live. He distinguishes between three worlds: 1) the world of physical objects or physical states; 2) the world of states of consciousness or mental states, or perhaps behavioural dispositions to act; 3) the world of fantasies, ideas, theories and values.

We often believe that we can solve problems by focusing solely on visible behaviour (somatic roles/world 1) and psychological states (psychological roles/world 2). Moreno and Popper, on the other hand, take the following view: if we want to work on a statement such as "I know he wants to provoke me", we cannot remain at the somatic and psychological role level. To solve this problem situation, we must make the 'surplus reality' of world 3 recognisable.

"Seen in this light, life is problem solving and discovery – discovering new facts, new possibilities, by trying out possibilities conceived in the imagination. At the human level, this trying out takes place almost exclusively in World 3, as we attempt to represent our World 1 through the theories of World 3, and perhaps also our World 2, with increasing success; by trying to get closer to the truth, a more complete, more interesting, more logically sound and more relevant truth – a truth that is relevant to our problems." (Popper, p. 153)

Using psychodrama techniques (such as role reversal), we can explore the theory/fantasy behind the statement "I know he wants to provoke me". The diagram below shows an example of a training process in five phases:

- 1) We see that the starting point is always the described or actual behaviour (World 1). In self-management training, this is the observable behaviour in the training group, information provided by the young people or by teachers/educators. The basic technique here is the opening round and the unstructured conversation.
- 2) In a second phase, world 2 of feelings and needs is explored using techniques such as scene building, constellations, symbol work, interviews, etc.
- 3) In a third phase, the social and transcendent role is updated: this is the core of the work. Here, the young person must be able to have positive experiences of self-efficacy, such as: orientation, gaining insight, clarifying the question of guilt, reviewing assessments, taking responsibility, clarifying ambivalences, reviewing theories. All of the basic techniques listed below can be used in this phase. However, it is important that the counsellor does not fall into the trap of taking action for action's sake: the basic principle is to wait and see – better too little than too much.
- 4) In phase 4 of integration, the insights are adapted to the needs and demands of the social role: what is desirable, urgent, possible, feasible? Among others, the following techniques have proven to be particularly effective here: interview, doubling, imaginative scene construction, imaginative role-playing.
- 5) During the transfer phase (5), the group's current behaviour in the here and now, as well as group games and group discussions, are of great importance. This is where it becomes apparent whether a change in behaviour is noticeable. Forward role-playing can be used to prepare for desired behaviours.

Below you will find a brief description of the basic techniques of psychodrama. This is followed by a collection of methods for practical implementation in self-management training. These methods originate from psychodrama and various psychoeducational approaches. For a detailed and theoretically sound presentation of the basics and basic techniques of psychodrama, I recommend von Ameln et al. (2004) and Fürst et al. (2004).

Basic techniques of psychodrama

Scene structure

Our individual construction of reality, which Popper refers to as World 3 (experiences, dreams, fantasies, future prospects, ideas, etc.) and our psychological world (World 2) can be given physical form (World 1) and made visible through scene construction. Scene construction is a kind of visual language: we try to give physical form to the immaterial things of worlds 2 and 3 so that we can talk about them. Scene construction can be carried out in a wide variety of ways:

- The scene can take the form of a theatre stage ("...we need a table, three chairs, there's the entrance, here's the window, and in front of the window is a large cactus...") – here, for example, an experienced conflict situation is re-enacted by imitating the room where the conflict took place with furnishings.
- Figurative scene construction: a conflict situation that has been experienced can also be re-enacted using miniature figures, wooden blocks, small stones, etc. This approach has the advantage of distancing and manageability: the situation can be analysed and easily changed, as on a chessboard.
- Imaginative scene construction: the scene is projected onto a blank white wall or a blank sheet of paper "as it looks in my head" – but it is not actually drawn; instead, the person concerned simply describes the imagined scene: "There is a table tennis table in a basement room – there are posters of athletes on the wall, two people are sitting at the table, they are talking to each other, on the right-hand side are me and...". This approach is well suited for exploring the feelings of the people depicted from a safe distance: "How are you feeling here in the picture? How do you think this boy feels, with the bat in his hand?"
- Symbols: abstract constructs of the world 3 (such as the concept of justice) are often difficult to put into words. Working with symbols proves to be an effective "surplus language" here: I can choose an object (a plant, coloured pencils, jewellery, etc.) to represent what I understand by justice and explain why I chose this particular object. Symbols such as stones, personal items, office supplies, etc. are also suitable for representing psychological states (world 2) ("I feel like a piece of tape... I function, stick and remain stuck...").
- Constellations are a reduced form of scene construction: only certain dimensions of an experience (or a fantasised situation) are represented with objects in the room. For example, I can set up how I assess the relationships in my family according to the criterion of closeness/distance: I choose a small stone for each family member and position them so that the distances between them are right for me. Constellations can also be used to represent certain questions spatially, such as the question: "Who wants to learn something today?" (see motivation scale below).
- Still images are the language of emotions: by representing certain body postures and facial expressions as "living sculptures", the psychological world becomes visible. When I set up my family as a still image, I can do this with expressive miniature figures or with people whose facial expressions and body postures I shape myself.

Role-playing

If we want to transform the constructed scene into a role play (in order to initiate a learning and change process), the participants must take on roles. There are various possibilities for role-playing:

A young person can play themselves in a backward role play to recreate the conflict situation they have experienced themselves.

In a forward role play, future behaviour in a critical situation can be practised.

Role-playing can be figurative: for example, after setting up a conflict situation using animal figures, I let the participants take on the roles of the animals in question.

Role-playing can be imaginative (see above: imaginative scene setting): "Suppose you are now this table tennis player, you are now in this picture, in this situation, what would be your next step...?"

In role reversal, a young person can take on the role of another person involved in the conflict, or even fictional roles from their own imagination, roles of animals, plants, objects, etc. Various roles from their own role repertoire can also be played.

A widely used technique is to have the two sides of an ambivalence played out as roles: in this way, a young person can experience two players behind them who recommend two opposing courses of action ("I'd better just hit it..." and "I don't want to do that again..."). As Lammers (2004, p. 236) explains, role reversal can enable new perspectives on the world or specific problems to be experienced and, possibly, other behavioural strategies or problem-solving skills associated with a particular role to be explored.

Role reversal is the method of choice when it comes to clarifying the specific relationship between two people: the two swap roles in the game and try to imitate each other's gestures, facial expressions, body language and behaviour. By taking on the role of their conflict partner, they may gain insight into the mindset, values, feelings and goals of their counterpart. They slip into the other person's shoes, so to speak, and see themselves through the other person's eyes. For the target group of violent young people with multiple life stresses, role reversal is only indicated if the role-playing games deal with minor everyday adversities and there is no discernible high potential for violence. In confrontational role-playing, on the other hand, where an act of violence is staged, I never let the perpetrator and victim swap roles.

Doubling

Using the technique of doubling in role-playing, leaders can playfully support individual participants in activating their own motives for action and goals. The leader stands next to the person whose action has somehow stalled and speaks for them, in their place, an inner monologue ("Actually, I quite like being here..."). In training sessions, I usually use the doubling technique in discussion groups when the behaviour of individual young people is blocking the whole group. Lammers (2004) distinguishes between two types of doubling:

- Supportive doubling enables a person to regain their ability to act by verbalising their own feelings. Doubling supports them in recognising and expressing feelings and desires and conveys the feeling that they are not alone with their own experience ("...I think that's unfair...", "...I feel like I'm in kindergarten...").
- Activating doubling enables the exploration of possible courses of action by formulating probing questions or surprising ideas ("...actually, I wonder why I always have to provoke, somehow I'm always...", "...I'd love to blow everything up right now...").

Interview

In contrast to other forms of role play, in which the leader does not intervene in the game, in psychodramatic role play the leader is always on stage. He remains in constant contact with the main character and conducts a kind of ongoing interview with him:

"Within psychodramatic group therapy, a component of individual therapy comes into play: the therapeutic conversation. This conversation is usually conducted as a dialogical interview. The therapist tries to empathise with the patient's personality and problems and to open up ways for them not only to talk about their difficulties, but also to act them out." (Petzold 1993, p. 141)

The interview can address a variety of topics, for example:

Self-perception – "How do you feel about that?", "Isn't that difficult to bear?", "What do you feel in your gut?", etc.

Inhibitions – "There are probably things you'd rather not say..."

Values – "Do you think it's fair that...", "Does that correspond to your basic attitude?"

Motives – "If you could change something here, what would it be?"

Expectation of control – "Did you anticipate what is happening now?"

Resources – "You seem to radiate a certain strength, what is that?", "Haven't you already shown that you can do this in a similar situation?"

Reflect

"How do you see me?", "How do I come across to you?" and "What do you think of me?" are very

key questions in adolescence. From a neuropsychological perspective, a new self-image develops from the age of 10: areas of the brain that enable us to reflect on ourselves mature and become well connected with each other (Storch 2005, p.34). Looking at one's own behaviour as if in a mirror is therefore an exciting and development-promoting activity for young people. The effect of mirroring is already achieved through the scene setup, role-playing (and here especially through role reversal) and doubling. This mirroring can be further enhanced by:

- Confrontational mirroring: The leader imitates a person's behaviour. He becomes a caricaturist, so to speak, by imitating a person's sitting position, posture, facial expressions, voice, intonation, volume, etc. Confrontational mirroring is impressive in loud, conflictual arguments: "Don't shout at me" – "I'm not shouting at you, you're shouting at me" – "I'm not shouting at all, I'm talking normally, you're shouting..."
- Integrative mirroring: In order to be able to view oneself as an object, the main person is removed from the scene and replaced by another person or an object (e.g. a chair). The scene is now viewed and discussed from a distance ("What do you notice? What do you like? What would you like to change?"). The physical distance also gives the young person in question an inner emotional distance from a conflictual situation. They can see themselves from the outside in the current group context and better bring order to their emotional chaos.
- Video recordings are very well suited for subjecting one's self-image to a reality check. We periodically record the sessions on video and also watch individual sequences with the young people. We leave the commenting to the young people and limit ourselves to asking questions: "What does it mean when you sit like that? What did you actually want to achieve here? Did you find that provocative?"

Constellation work

The quality of relationships between people can be described in words. A constellation is more concise: I can ask a pupil to arrange his school class with coloured Smarties. He chooses a Smartie for each pupil, as well as for himself, and places them on the table. The structure that emerges and the position of the self-Smartie within it create a picture of the school class as seen by this pupil. In the subsequent interview, I can ask the pupil why he is a yellow Smartie among a majority of brown and red ones. Or: Why are these Smarties so close together, is that a kind of subgroup?

Relationships between people are abstract and theoretical; they are not directly visible, they are immaterial objects of world 3. As Popper explains in his *theory of objective knowledge*, world 3 includes all our theories, fantasies and ideas. World 2 includes our feelings and sensations. Both World 2 and World 3 are immaterial and therefore cannot be measured or seen. They can be communicated and made recognisable through language. Relationships can be made even easier and more accurate to see and work with through constellations

(World 1). For example, with Smarties: the relationships in a class are given a shape, a structure, colours and distances.

Constellations are a central tool of psychodrama. With constellations, a precise inventory of the emotional relationships, hierarchy and structure of a group can be made in a short time and with little effort. A conflict situation can be staged just as effectively: chairs, game pieces, Smarties, stones, etc. can be used to symbolically represent a social situation, making it easier to recognise different relationship qualities: closeness/distance, relationship constellation, attraction/rejection.

Positive relationship building

The training courses described here are prescribed measures – which makes it all the more important that a positive bond can develop between the participants and the leaders. This positive bond must be embedded in resource promotion and confrontational pedagogy. If the positive bond is not successful, the training is pointless. If the positive bond is successful in the beginning, the training can begin. However, at each session, the participants will repeatedly test the trust with aggressive provocations. We can assume that the participants have had little opportunity to build stable relationships and bonds with peers and adults in their lives so far. Their relationships with their siblings are also usually problematic and often marked by episodes of violence. They have poor social skills for forming positive relationships and often end up as outsiders. It is not uncommon for them to have experienced chronic stress and even abuse in their family environment. At school, their relationships with teachers were also often very difficult.

Due to these negative life experiences, these young people tend to perceive offers of friendship as threatening and often attribute hostile motives to others. Every laugh is interpreted as mockery, and a polite greeting as belittlement. This inability to develop trust and positive bonds is the main difficulty in any treatment.

Methods of self-management training

Preliminary discussion and evaluation discussion

Preliminary remark: For organisational reasons, preliminary discussions are not held for all groups that I lead. In some cases, registration is carried out via the school management or boarding school management, and the assignment, duration and objectives are also defined with them. The preliminary discussion for self-management training for violent young people takes place with the young person and a referring person (social education worker or teacher). The participation of the referring person is important, as these are prescribed group therapies and possible sanctions in the event of refusal/termination (work assignment of the same duration) are announced. Another reason is to objectify the reason for referral: violent acts are often trivialised by young people, whereas the referring person describes the incidents from the perspective of the educator.

Self-management training is a short-term intervention that focuses on promoting resources and finding solutions. The solution- and resource-oriented approach is now firmly established in various schools of psychotherapy. In somatic medicine, too, there is a noticeable shift away from stress research and towards resource research. The question is not "What is the cause of an illness?", but rather "What helps us stay healthy or get well again?"

In the case of aggressive antisocial behaviour, this does not mean "What is the cause of this disorder?", but rather "What possible solutions are contained in the client's description of the problem and how can the available resources be activated?"

A central postulate of theme-centred interaction (TCI) – *"Be your own chairman"* – is incorporated into the solution-focused approach: clients themselves are responsible and competent for searching for new behaviours and take the lead in finding solutions. The therapist's task is to enable the client to gain the distance necessary for a change of perspective and self-awareness.

The following treatment requirements are clarified in the preliminary discussion:

- Can the young person formulate a minimum goal?
- Do they consider a change in behaviour to be desirable?
- Are they willing to work on specific social conflict situations?

The evaluation meeting is conducted with the same basic approach as the preliminary meeting. The evaluation meeting focuses on the insights gained during the training and the intended behavioural changes. Reference is made to the preliminary meeting. It would be

premature to make statements about the success of the training during the evaluation meeting. This can only be assessed by the educators in the longer term.

Opening and closing rounds

The opening and closing rounds are the only mandatory rituals. Outside of these opening and closing rounds, participants are free to move around the room and engage in any activity or posture that does not disturb others, but they are not allowed to leave the room. In the opening round, objectives and working methods are defined. In the closing round, the facilitators provide interpretations and feedback and follow up on any open questions.

Learning objective

The initial round implicitly establishes the working contract: by sitting down on chairs in a circle, the participants tacitly declare that they will try to adhere to the group rules.

The aim of the final round is to integrate the group participants back into reality after the work they have done in the psychodramatic game.

Relation to the topic of violence

The didactic principle of relative unstructuredness poses a major challenge for young people with aggressive antisocial behaviour in terms of impulse control. The ritualised opening and closing rounds offer participants support in starting and ending a group activity appropriately.

Framework conditions

The participants must sit on chairs in a circle. It can take up to 5 minutes before we can start, i.e. until everyone is sitting quietly. In extreme cases, the session will not start at all.

The following topics are discussed in the opening round: state of mind, special events in the meantime related to violence, today's main person, group activity.

An evaluation takes place in the final round. Most of the time, the young people do not say anything. The therapists interpret the group process. Sometimes there is simply 2 minutes of silence or a short sitting meditation is performed.

Instructions and implementation

"Please sit on a chair in the circle." (Wait – repeat the instructions if necessary – wait – etc.).

Once everyone is seated, work tasks are formulated and the young people's expectations/goals are asked. A main person may be designated (see below).

Allow sufficient time for the final round (at least 5 minutes). The minimum duration of the final round is 1 minute of relative silence. Depending on how things go, the leaders can provide interpretations and feedback.

Protagonist

One young person takes on the main role for the duration of a session: they can help decide which group activity will be undertaken. They are also the focus of the therapists. The therapists will suggest that they act out a conflict situation from everyday life. During the session, they will also receive many interpretations of their behaviour from the therapists.

Learning objective

This approach has proven successful in several ways:

- At least one young person can shed their destructive role and make a constructive contribution to the group.
- The young person in question can try out new role behaviours in the group.
- The main person can experience self-efficacy by being elevated to the position of group leader (alpha).
- It becomes clear that responsibility for the group process cannot be delegated to the therapists.
- Decision-making ("What shall we do today?") is significantly shortened.

Relation to the topic of violence

Repeatedly violent young people often take on passive-destructive roles in training groups. Group dynamics can be significantly improved by elevating one participant to a role that involves shared responsibility for the group process and the well-being of the participants.

Framework

This method is only used when group dynamics are very unfavourable.

Instructions and implementation

"At each session, one participant is the main person, i.e. they can have a say in what we do today and must contribute their personal topic. For example, a specific conflict situation that escalated into violence. Today, you (name) are the main person, and at the next session it will be someone else's turn."

The unstructured conversation

Unstructured conversation is a central method of training. Role-playing is far more spectacular and satisfying for the leaders. Unstructured conversation usually seems meaningless; often,

people don't even speak, but remain silent. The silence can last several minutes and cause impatience and dissatisfaction in everyone. In unstructured conversations, young people often talk about things that, in my view, have nothing to do with the objectives of group therapy. These conversations can be seen as avoidance behaviour or provocation: by talking about topics such as football, video games, clothing, pocket money problems, etc., the participants demonstrate rejection. Or by remaining silent. From a humanistic therapeutic approach, it can be assumed that the participants will bring up the right topic at the right time. Therefore, we allow these discussions to take place in a benevolent, attentive but often somewhat bored manner – and intuitively join in when we feel that the topic may be of interest for the training.

Learning objective

Participants can contribute their own interests and opinions in a group and practise their communication skills in the process. The *unstructured conversation* seems unstructured and aimless, but it has great significance: experiencing self-efficacy.

Relation to the topic of violence

"Pay attention to the silence. What happens when nothing happens in a group? That is the reality of the group.

Learn to grasp the emptiness – the nothingness. When you enter an empty house, can you feel the spirit there? It is the same with a vase or a pot: learn to understand its inner emptiness, for it is this that makes the vessel useful.

Language and movement give the group form and content. Silence and emptiness, however, reveal the true mood of the group – the context of all that happens." (Tao Te King, according to Heider 1996)

Framework conditions

The facilitator ensures that mutual respect and consideration for third parties, other groups, cultures and institutions is maintained.

Instruction and implementation

No guidance. The *unstructured discussion* can take up the entire duration of a session. In this case, the participants will criticise at the end that "nothing happens in this group". The leader refers briefly and concisely to the formulation of work offers and to the personal responsibility of the main person and each individual.

This method cannot be used with children, as it would overwhelm them and lead to open aggression.

Variation

The therapists also conduct an unstructured conversation: they may ask themselves how long this discussion will continue, or whether everyone present is interested in what the two are discussing loudly, or they may wonder why Z is not saying anything, etc. This method often leads to the paradoxical situation that, after a certain amount of time, the participants themselves ask what we are actually doing here, as it has nothing to do with the topic of

violence. The therapeutic answer: "Yes, it does, somehow, otherwise you wouldn't be talking about it for so long."

Working with symbols

We often work with objects that symbolise a feeling, an action, an idea or a person. In prescribed therapies, children and adolescents with behavioural problems show great resistance to direct questions and questionnaires. However, they readily engage in activities such as: "Choose an object in this room that somehow matches your current mood," or "...an object that represents violence for you," or "...an object that makes it clear why you have to come to this group."

They are then asked to hold this object in their hand or place it on the floor in front of them. In most cases, we therapists then comment on this object in a benevolent and resource-oriented manner. We offer cautious interpretations as to why Max might have chosen a *ruler*, for example, and thus encourage the participants to contradict and comment.

Learning objective

Symbols are ideal for giving visible form to the intangible "objects" from our psychological world (state of mind, mood, feelings – world 2) and our intellectual world (ideas, theories, values, morals – world 3).

Relation to the topic of violence

Violence is rarely the result of planned actions. Most often, violence arises from a state of unintentionality/carelessness. In this careless state, human behaviour is controlled by unconscious needs, motives and values (world 3). Working with symbols enables the causes of actions to be recognised and experienced.

Framework

Very well suited as an introductory method. All kinds of objects available in the room can be used as symbols: small pieces of furniture, plants, office supplies, writing materials, clothing, books, etc. – but also specific objects such as figurines, pictures, coins, buttons, stones, etc. It is important that the choice of an object is made fairly spontaneously; thinking about it for too long should be avoided.

Instructions and implementation

Example of instructions: "Today we are dealing with the topic of justice. Please choose an object that can somehow represent what you understand justice to be. You can take any object that is here in the room, except of course personal belongings of other people."

Participants are asked to find one or more symbols for their state of mind, an event, an idea, a concept (such as justice), etc.

Evaluation: It is wrong to ask participants why they chose this object. This leads to justifications and whitewashing. It is more effective to comment on and question the objects together with the participants in the spirit of exploratory learning. Example: Why Peter chose a yellow gym ball for the term justice – we don't know and neither does he. However, we can think about it aloud together: "is always in motion...does not stand still...is conspicuous...highly visible...can be threatening...". In a kind of "brainstorming" session, we try to understand what justice means to Peter.

Practical example 1:

In Unit 1 of *the self-management training for violent young people*, symbol work is used as an introductory method. The task is: "Choose an object that has something to do with violence." The learning atmosphere is not good; the young people are cheeky and quite provocative. Comments such as "What's this crap...", "...then I'll just take anything...", "...I'll take something you can stick up your arse...", etc. The participants sit down again with their objects in their hands. It took several minutes to choose the objects, and in the meantime I discussed the next steps with my colleague (an open, clearly audible conversation). We decided on the basic technique of activating doubling, as we feared a disrespectful and provocative feedback round: I will speak on behalf of the individual participants and interpret why the respective object was chosen. I give the following feedback:

- I took these scissors because I can use them to cut things open or damage the floor. I can just drop the scissors on the floor with the blade facing downwards – that annoys the therapists.
- "I took the scissors because Gerd also took a pair of scissors, which I thought was cheeky; you can act really stupid with them."
- "I took the ruler because it was nearby, just like that. But in an emergency, I can also use it to fight back."
- "The tape is very practical – you can stick something down with it or tie someone up, like we did recently – you can even tape their mouth shut."
- I took the chair because I'm usually just there – I'm not violent, but I'm also there when something happens."
- "The rope is quite practical, you can tie someone up, hang them up, make a noose, I think that's quite fun."
- "I chose the ball because I always need something to do – I don't like it when things are boring."

These interpretations are based on what I learned in preliminary discussions about the violent acts committed by the young people and their roles within the group. With this activating and provocative dual approach, we wanted to show the young people that we accept their provocative behaviour (as long as no damage is done to property or people). Not only do we accept it, we also examine the meaning of this behaviour by taking a close look at their behaviour in the here and now. With this in mind, we would like to thank the young people for their excellent cooperation in this first round of training: "These objects represent different types of violence. I think you have put together an interesting picture of violence here. Do you see a connection between these objects and your own use of violence?" Several young

people comment on this question, and this leads to the topic for the next intervention: the staging of a conflict.

Practical example 2:

In *self-management training with young sex offenders*, the introductory question is: "Why are you in this group therapy? Find an object that can represent this reason." A blanket, a football and two soft toys (a dog and a lion) are chosen. This is followed by the question: "Why did you choose this object?" The answers reveal very different qualities of culpability: from the blanket, which expresses a sense of shame, to the ball, which simply rolls somewhere. The two stuffed animals show aggressive potential. The young person who chose the dog says, "I just wanted to have some fun." The comment on the lion is: "She provoked me." This introductory round gives the therapist an idea of the young people's attempts to explain the cause of the act. This symbolic work is taken up again at the end of the session to activate resources: a counterfigure to the lion or the ball is selected. The aim is to help the young people realise that both forces are present within them (this motif is also taken up later in session 4 with the story *The 2 Wolves in Me*). These positive counterfigures to the cause of the offence are incorporated into the subsequent sessions with confrontation of the offence: "When could your positive figure, the dolphin, have first noticed that something was wrong here?"

Backward role-play

Aggressive antisocial behaviour often occurs against a background of hyperkinetic disorder. Encouraging self-observation and self-management has proven effective with these young people (cf. Döpfner 2000, pp. 7-26). One method of choice – and this was explained in detail in the didactic section – is psychodramatic role-play. This takes the form of backward role-playing: experienced social situations are staged in order to clarify why someone behaved in a certain way and not differently, and to explore whether other behaviours might be more appropriate and desirable. These are therefore backward role-playing games with a forward perspective.

Procedure: a main character acts out the stressful situation from their point of view. The main character is both the director and the lead actor. On the one hand, acting promotes the experience of self-efficacy and self-regulation; in the play, the young person becomes the creator and transformer of their reality. Through the externalisation of inner states or the portrayal of conflictual relationships using the imaginative techniques of psychodrama, new perspectives are also opened up and more distance from the experience is achieved (cf. Schaller 2001).

Learning objective

The young people do not acquire new skills in the sense of behavioural training through model learning. Rather, the aim is to experience in simulated problem situations

...that one's own perception of a situation is always also an evaluation
...that several assessments are always possible
...that there are several possible behaviours in every problem situation
...that it can be worthwhile to observe and reflect on one's own behaviour
...and that aggressive behaviour is often inappropriate.

Relation to the topic of violence

A characteristic feature of aggressive young people is a lack of impulse control. In conflict situations, this leads to quick reactions that often appear rash and ill-considered. Before carrying out an aggressive act, no additional information is sought; instead, action is taken immediately, regardless of the consequences. Triggers for impulsive aggressive reactions are often complex situations that are misinterpreted or disappointments (i.e. situations that do not meet expectations and desires).

Framework conditions

The main character plays their own role in the conflict. It is advisable to have the other roles played by the therapists or by means of objects. Due to their lack of impulse control, the other group members are often unable to adequately take on the additional roles – they find it difficult to serve the main character. The spectator role is therefore easier for them. It is contraindicated to assign the victim role to a group member. This could reactivate their own experiences of victimisation and lead to uncontrolled aggressive actions in the game.

Instructions and implementation

Search for topics: In the initial round, I ask whether there have been any new incidents of violence. One young person (let's call him Yvan) reports with a laugh that he had "problems" with a teacher. I ask: "What happened? Can you describe it?" Yvan reports that he had argued with a schoolmate and "the teacher then intervened. He shouldn't have done that, because he got punched in the face."

Start of the role play: As in a Formula 1 race, you have to accelerate from zero to 200 within a few seconds. There is no time for a more detailed description of the situation, stage setup, choice of fellow players, etc., because otherwise the young people will "take off" with their tried-and-tested provocative behaviour. So I get up immediately and ask Yvan to show me quickly (sometimes I even help him get up by taking him "collegially" by the arm). I also ask another young person to play the role of the quarrelsome colleague ("you just have to stand there, do nothing, you are the colleague Yvan is arguing with"). Now I repeat the initial question: "Can you tell me again what happened?" If Yvan now begins to recount the story again on the improvised role-play stage, this is an implicit task for me. Yvan is showing that he agrees with the approach, and the role play can begin.

Setting up the scene: Now I ask about the location, time and other participants in this scene. I ask the co-leader to take on the role of the teacher, as he will be the victim of the violent

conflict. If this role is played by another young person, it is guaranteed to cause massive disruption to the role play – no one would take it upon themselves to be a future victim. Yvan goes on to describe that the situation took place in the passageway to the cloakroom, so it was quite cramped. This cramped space seems important to me, and I set up chairs to mark the confined space.

1. Playing through the original versions: The conflict situation is now played out in the original version, i.e. as Yvan sees it. It turns out that Yvan hit the teacher – who was coming from behind to settle the dispute – in the face with his elbow. He blames the teacher, who should not have intervened.
2. Role reversal: Yvan takes on the role of the teacher. This allows him to experience the same situation from a different perspective.
3. Search for a solution: I ask a member of the audience to take on the role of Yvan in the original version. I then take Yvan aside and we observe the scene from the outside, commenting on and discussing possible non-violent solutions. It is important not to prescribe any models at this stage, as Yvan would simply adopt them and then forget them again. The solution must meet Yvan's needs and goals. The solution therefore lies in his violent behaviour: we need to find out why he reacted so violently with his elbow; what was the goal of this action? Only then can we attempt to explore other behaviours.
4. Target version: Yvan resumes his role in the original version and, with my active support, attempts several times to find a response to the teacher's intervention that meets his needs and goals.
5. The evaluation is largely resource-oriented: the many disruptions caused by Yvan himself and the other young people are not addressed. Instead, praise is given for the willingness and ability to act out a conflict situation and thus reflect on it. Constructive feedback from the other young people is not to be expected.

Forward role-plays

Forward role-plays create "as if" situations that the participants might experience in the future. The aim is to find out and try out what possibilities there are to behave differently in a certain situation than before.

Forward role-playing forms the backbone of all training programmes for violent children and young people (see summary in the introduction). As a rule, the first step is to demonstrate the desired pro-social skills in model role-plays (by the leaders or on video). In a second step, the participants themselves practise the previously discussed positive behaviours in role-plays. This cognitive model approach is not feasible with our difficult target group, as it does not take into account the needs and motives of the participants. In contrast, psychodramatic role-playing also considers the participants' state of mind, needs and feelings and weaves these into a process-oriented staging.

Learning objective

As described in detail in the section on didactics, the objective of this training is for participants to have positive experiences with peaceful communication in the group: they can refrain from showing off and making threatening gestures and still realise their own needs and goals within the group setting. In the simulation of forward role-plays, they can play a positive, peaceful role in a fictional conflict situation and experience a good feeling in the process.

Relation to the topic of violence

Children and young people with persistent aggressive-antisocial disorders in their behaviour have usually experienced many problems and failures in their lives. But even positive experiences, and some of these positive experiences, are associated with violence: their violent behaviour has repeatedly led to the expected positive results. This violent positive expectation of control can be countered with forward role-playing to create a peaceful positive expectation of control. In role-playing, they have a positive experience in which they resolve future conflict situations peacefully with their hearts and minds.

Framework conditions

Violence has the advantage of short-term success. Care must be taken to ensure that young people do not bring this advantage into the role play and glorify violent fantasies.

This role play can be carried out as an individual exercise (each participant brings their own story) or as a group exercise (in small groups, a story is invented with a positive role model).

Instructions and implementation

Topic: "Please imagine a difficult situation that you might experience in the future. I mean something really difficult, and it should involve several people (at least two). Make up a story and imagine that you play an important role in it. It is important that it is a personal story in which no one else from this group plays a (negative) role. It can be something imaginative that doesn't happen every day or may never happen at all. Just take a situation that comes to mind."

Checking the topics and preparation: After one or two minutes of thinking, I ask the participants to briefly tell their stories. I exclude stories that are not suitable for role-playing for technical or ethical reasons. If a story is excluded, I give the participants a short time to think of a new one. I can also provide ideas for stories. Then the timing and organisation of the role-playing games are defined.

1. Stage setup and role introduction: The respective main character determines a stage and sets it up accordingly (e.g. table, chair, telephone, etc.). The leader selects the other players to avoid negative choices. The main character gives them names and describes their behaviour and special characteristics.
2. Role play: it is difficult for young people in our target group to perform a personal topic in role play with self-discipline and seriousness. Very directive guidance from the leader is required to prevent fooling around or glorification of violence.
3. After the role play, it is important that all players thoroughly shed their roles. The facilitator addresses the individual ex-role players by their real names.
4. Feedback: The main character describes their experiences, impressions and feelings. Afterwards, the other players report on what they experienced in their roles. Finally,

the audience and the facilitator report on what they liked about the game and the main character's special resources.

Free group play

"We should always remember that playing is therapy in itself. Encouraging children to play is already psychotherapy that can be applied immediately and generally if we develop a positive social attitude towards playing. Such an attitude must be based on the recognition that playing can always be frightening. Games with rules must be seen as part of an attempt to pre-empt this frightening aspect of playing. When children play, responsible persons must be present; however, this does not mean that the responsible person must intervene in the children's play. If the person organising the play has to be involved in a leading role, then this means that the child or children cannot play creatively (in the sense of this paper). The essential idea of this paper is that play is an experience, and always a creative experience, an experience in the continuum of space and time, a basic form of life. The riskiness of play arises from the fact that it always stands at the theoretical boundary between the subjective and the objectively perceived." (Winnicott, p. 62)

Learning objective

Gaining prosocial experiences of self-efficacy through shared play: expressing one's own interests and opinions in a non-violent manner and asserting them non-violently or, if necessary, adapting them to the needs of the group. Being able to regulate social contacts appropriately in a group and learning to deal with mistakes and frustrations without violent outbursts of anger.

Relation to the topic of violence

The target group of our training courses is characterised by the fact that these repeatedly violent young people played very little during their childhood. They were often unable to take the risk of playing and instead ended their attempts to play with aggressive behaviour.

Framework

Like other groups of children and young people, the training group is a testing ground. New forms of relationships can be tried out in the group. The experimental character does not arise from predetermined content or tasks, but from spontaneously developed games with rules and agreements that must be discussed and negotiated. Two principles apply: no physical injury and no damage to property. The role of the leader is to guarantee the framework and rules and to ensure that all participants can have positive experiences in free group play. The children and young people should be able to experience as many positive emotions as possible in this difficult – because unstructured – setting. These positive group experiences are more healing and effective if they arise spontaneously in group play rather than as a result of intervention by the leader. The leader intervenes when participants risk experiencing too

many negative emotions. To this end, it is necessary to introduce the STOP rule in advance: when a participant or the leader calls STOP, the (often aggressive) actions are immediately interrupted.

Instructions and implementation

There are no instructions; the idea for the activity arises in unstructured conversation.

Free group play in psychodrama training usually consists of fighting: participants throw cushions, foam seat cubes, exercise balls, mats and other soft objects at each other, forming ever-changing coalitions. A popular variation on this occurs when one participant remains lying on the floor: they are buried under a mountain of soft objects and often remain there until another participant wants to take their place.

It is astonishing that this form of free group play is very popular among young people aged 13 to 16. Children, on the other hand, tend to choose one-on-one fights within the group.

Variation

If free group play leads to excessive physical activity and playful aggression threatens to turn into violence, the game can be interrupted with short sitting meditations to practise self-control, provided that sitting meditation is already familiar as a relaxation technique (see below).

Theme-centred group play

Theme-centred group play is a variation of free group play and, like the latter, a central method of anti-violence training. Participants are challenged and encouraged mentally, emotionally, physically and behaviourally. With this experience-oriented and body-related method, participants learn new pro-social skills without being aware that they are involved in a learning process. However, if we consider the group dynamics to be too restless for free group play, we specify a theme. Possible themes are: building a castle, creating a place of well-being or staging a peaceful battle.

Learning objective

To gain prosocial experiences of self-efficacy through joint play: to be able to put one's own needs aside when they do not coincide with the needs of the group and to deal with frustrations constructively.

Relation to the topic of violence

The children and young people in our target group usually have extremely problematic peer relationships: their aggressive behaviour causes them to be rejected by their peers as "troublemakers" and, over time, they only find contact with other aggressive children and young people. As a result, their disturbed social behaviour becomes stabilised: they are used to constantly trying to impress, threatening and provoking others. They are hardly able to ensure their own well-being within the group: their behaviour of trying to impress and threaten leaves them little time for this. And they are certainly unable to consider the well-being of others. Through the experience-oriented, body-related method of theme-centred group play, participants can have pro-social experiences of self-efficacy in real group situations: developing fun and joy without others having to suffer.

Framework conditions

As in free group play.

Instruction and implementation

Theme-centred group play arises from unstructured conversation. However, it may be necessary to define the theme more precisely in order to avoid dangerous group dynamics.

- For example, the suggestion: "We don't want to do anything." The leader then clarifies: "That's fine, but what does 'doing nothing' mean? Could it mean that everyone chooses a place here in the room and settles down where they feel comfortable sitting, standing or lying down? And leaves the others alone?" If this is agreed, the leader clarifies: "So the aim is for everyone to find a place where they feel comfortable, set it up minimally with a chair, mat, cushion or similar items, and enjoy their free time there. Without disturbing others, either physically or with words, noises or signs. Just be there, not have to do anything, enjoy the moment of peace."
- Another example: "We want to have a battle." If the leaders feel that the game could get out of hand, then some more specific rules are necessary. The leaders ask: "But we are a non-violent training group. How can a battle be made non-violent?" The young people will then usually come up with constructive suggestions on how the battle can be carried out in a non-violent setting.
- Final example: "We want to fight." The leader adds a restriction: "Perhaps a castle would be useful for this. A castle from which attacks can be launched. A castle that offers a certain amount of protection, temporary protection. I suggest that you first build a castle on your own or in small groups. When everyone has a castle, we will take a moment to admire them and then give the signal for the fighting to begin."

Psychodramatic group play with children

Children with behavioural problems and aggressive social behaviour disorders have limited skills when it comes to constructively organising free or theme-based group play. It is also inadvisable to address their social behaviour difficulties directly. It is more effective for learning to invent fantasy stories and organise them in an experience-oriented way in role play.

As Biegler-Vitek (2004) explains, all stories suggested by the children for play and on which the children can ultimately agree are important for the therapeutic process. It is irrelevant whether the therapists recognise the meaning of the story and can establish a cognitive connection with the children's problems. The decisive factor is that the children enjoy playing and that the game does not have a destructive, antisocial character. The therapists must also enjoy playing: they must be the guarantors of the established boundaries of time, space and rules within which the free group play takes place. Within these boundaries, however, freedom is limitless – even for the therapists: anything can be played that does not violate the physical and psychological integrity of the participants and those close to them.

The method of psychodramatic group play with children is described in detail by Aichinger & Holl (2002) and Pruckner (2001).

Learning objective

"In play, the child constructs a reality in which the self is exaggerated, control can be exercised and actions can be carried out at will. The child achieves liberation from fear and relative security in play by changing the course of action in the form of a story that has a desired outcome." (Oerter 1997)

Relation to the topic of violence

Among the children in our target group, aggressive antisocial disorder usually appears very early in childhood. These children often stand out in kindergarten and also display hyperkinetic disorder. Their interactions with other children are often characterised by hostility, dominance and insufficient empathy. In addition, they are often somewhat behind in their linguistic development, which does not promote communication. These children are unpopular and are often excluded from play because they take on an overly dominant and destructive position. Group games are a major challenge for these children. Individual therapy can do little to help in this regard; training must take place in a play group.

Framework conditions

Group size: from a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 8 children with behavioural problems.

Starting and ending rounds: sitting in a circle on the floor.

Room: a large, almost empty room. A few mobile tables and chairs can be useful as "building materials", otherwise the room should be sparsely furnished. A small gym would be ideal.

Materials: foam seating cubes, cushions, blankets, coloured cloths, ropes.

Leaders: ideally two people; one leader plays along and takes on roles that facilitate group cohesion among the children (mediator or antagonist).

Instructions and implementation

The invitation is: "We could act out an exciting story." And addressed to the main character: "What would you like to play? Who would you like to be? Hero, king, prince? Or a star, an athlete, I-don't-know-what? Or an animal, a fantasy character...? And what roles will the others play?"

With our target group, the development of the story requires active support and control by the leader:

- Provide ideas for resource-oriented roles (knight, king, wizard, hero)
- Ensure that the distribution of roles is not used to stigmatise negatively connotated roles ("You, *Yugo*, can play the thief").
- Provide ideas so that the story can have a happy ending.

Constellation of conflict situations

Young people often seem very reluctant to engage in learning activities during psychodrama training. They simply want to sit still and have no interest in role-playing. They talk about conflict situations but do not want to do anything about them. When faced with such learning blocks, the facilitator can take the initiative and visualise the conflict situation described by setting up a constellation. This can set a learning process in motion.

Learning objective

Recognising that a social situation can be viewed from different perspectives and does not always look the same.

Relation to the topic of violence

Children and young people with aggressive antisocial behaviour patterns show a clear tendency to look for threatening and hostile signals in social situations. This leads to misinterpretations of certain behaviours of other people, which are then regarded as hostile. Everyone sees things from their own personal perspective, with their own point of view; in the case of aggressive young people, this is often from an aggressive perspective. Constellation work is an attempt to look at the image we have formed of a particular situation from a different perspective and thus to examine our own perception.

Framework conditions

The constellation can be done with a wide variety of objects or with people. The smallest objects I carry with me are buttons. I can use this collection of buttons when I want to get an idea for myself: I make a constellation with buttons to visualise a certain situation. I do this in the group, but not primarily for the group. The intention, however, is to arouse curiosity. For constellations that are to be visible to the whole group, I usually use seat cushions (these are rectangular or square, with side lengths of 30 to 60 cm, with different coloured fabric covers). These seat cushions have the advantage that they are quite large, light and come in different sizes/shapes/colours.

Instructions and implementation

A conflict constellation arises from a conversation. For example, Martin reports that he had a heated argument with his teacher. I ask him what that means. Martin says that he shouted at her, saying, "Fuck you, you dirty slut," and then strangled her by the throat. Based on the course of the session so far and the way Martin has reported this, I estimate that he is reluctant to deal with this situation. However, I signal my interest in working on it: "That seems pretty intense to me. I'd like to understand more precisely what happened there." I stand up and take two different cushions: "So this is you and this is your teacher." Martin corrects me: "No, the blue one is me." This shows that he agrees to work on the issue. I ask where it took place, whether other people or objects are needed, and what the distances were like. Martin says that a desk is needed between him and the teacher. I take another cushion and place it between them.

Based on this constellation, we can now discuss the conflict situation. We can rewind the situation ("Where did the conflict start? Where were you and where was the teacher? What did you say or do?") and we can also visually capture the various stages of escalation ("When did you realise you were getting angry? What did you feel at that moment?").

Martin never actively participated in this constellation; he remained seated in his chair and I moved the relevant cushions. I also stand next to a specific cushion and can speak from this role ("I think that's unfair...").

The staging of conflict situations is always well accepted by those involved. Obviously, this spatial representation is experienced as non-threatening and helpful distancing.

Role balance

Recognising roles is central to the healthy development of personality. Children learn in everyday life and through play that different life situations require very different behaviours (the roles of the student, the mama's boy, the brave comrade, the fast player, etc.). This is made apparent with the role balance exercise.

Learning objective

Young people can distinguish between the standardised attitude and behaviour expectations of different roles. They recognise that some roles are more associated with everyday stressors than others. From this, they can develop suggestions for coping with stress.

Relation to the topic of violence

Good development means that a large number of different roles with correspondingly different behaviours are available. The peer group is of central importance in the development of roles. This is where adolescents learn about and practise new roles, and where individuals learn to see themselves as others see them. The perception and structuring of one's own personality

through the lens of social groups leads to the formation of the social self with a repertoire of social roles.

Aggressive adolescents tend to have a limited repertoire of roles. They are also unable to recognise that their behaviour is not appropriate to their role. Healthy behaviour can be described as the ability to respond appropriately to interpersonal and situational demands using the available patterns of behaviour and experience (roles). Disruptive behaviour can therefore be described as follows: new challenges are responded to with old, rigid and inappropriate role behaviour.

Framework conditions

I have described this method in the role-play book (Schaller 2001, p. 49) under the heading "*Life Roles*", as it is used in adult education. With aggressive, antisocial young people, I use an adapted form of application – here is an example: A therapy session is characterised by a great deal of passivity, silence and rejection of work offers on the part of the young people. After about half an hour, I get bored. I begin a constellation exercise without involving the participants. The fact that I am doing something for myself draws the group's attention to the constellation.

Instruction and implementation

I leave the group sitting together and start setting up small seating cubes lined up against the wall in an empty part of the room. First, I place a large exercise ball in the middle. Then I arrange the different coloured seating cubes at varying distances from the ball. I am engrossed in my work, thinking, changing, correcting. In between, I also ask the main character what he actually does in his free time. This arouses curiosity. After several minutes, the young people's attention is focused on what I am doing. Finally, one of them asks what it's all about. I explain that these are the different roles in Hans's life (the main character in this session), which I have symbolically represented with coloured seating cubes: Hans as a student, as a flatmate, as a video gamer, as his mother's son – here I ask Hans a question: "Are you still in contact with your father?" – in response to his answer, I add another cube, representing Hans as his father's son, whom he sees very rarely – then I continue describing the roles. Then I come to the exercise ball in the middle: "This is the *self*, the actual person, the real Hans, as we will never know and see him – for me, he only appears in the role of group participant, and for you perhaps also as a classmate, colleague or flatmate. But who he really is, his *true self*, we cannot see. And in his role as a participant, I often experience Hans as disparaging, joyless, but also curious, surprising, secretly warm-hearted." Then I ask Hans if there are any other roles I have forgotten. I also point out the importance of distance: roles that have great personal significance are closer to *the self*, while others are further away. A constructive conversation develops with Hans about positive roles. It becomes clear that Hans actually feels very comfortable in the residential group – even if this cannot be recognised by the educators because of his aggressive behaviour. I point out that adults must be able to think and act differently in different roles (for example, I am different as a father than in my role as a group leader) – there are roles where you can show more emotion and others where you

should be *cooler*. I encourage him to show the residential group in some way that he feels comfortable there.

I end the exercise by asking everyone whether they are currently fulfilling their role as group therapy participants in the way they would actually like to.

With healthy, motivated young people, it would now be entirely possible to assign the role management exercise as individual work. With the young people in our target group, however, this short but intensive work must now be followed by a completely different group activity, such as a game or a relaxation exercise.

Animal figures

Animals have a wide variety of behaviours to successfully protect themselves from threats. Each animal does this differently: the field mouse hides, the sheep runs to the others, the hedgehog makes itself small and prickly, the chameleon camouflages itself by changing colour, the wasp stings, the swan lashes out, the lion roars. We address the question: Are there parallels between my behaviour in threatening situations and the behaviour of my favourite animal?

Learning objective

Recognise that there are always several successful behavioural strategies for responding to threatening situations. Recognise the specific characteristics of your own behaviour in threatening situations and, if necessary, formulate goals for change.

Relation to the topic of violence

In his bestseller *On Aggression* (1963), Konrad Lorenz puts forward the theory that aggression is a drive-like energy that accumulates in the nerve centres and must be discharged regularly. There are many opportunities for humans and animals to do this in everyday life (struggles for power, hierarchy, sexual partners, food, etc.). Aggression is therefore not primarily a reaction to external stimuli, but rather an internal arousal that demands release. According to this theory, the occurrence of aggression does not depend on external stimuli. Lorenz has illustrated this instinctive behaviour, which serves to preserve the species in animals, with many vivid examples. The aggression instinct serves, for example, to enable animals of a species to divide up the available space through territorial fights in such a way that food sources are used and preserved as optimally as possible. In humans, however, according to Lorenz, this instinct seems to have "gone off the rails" and leads to self-destruction, senseless violence and war.

Framework conditions

Required materials: a large selection of animal figurines (or drawings/photographs of various animals). These are laid out on a table at the edge of the group room before the session.

Instructions and implementation

"I have a collection of animal figures here on the table. Please choose an animal that you like in some way. (When everyone has taken a figure:) Please place this animal figure on the floor in front of you. My question to each of you is: Why did you choose this particular animal?"

Other possible questions are:

- Is it an animal that flees or defends itself?
- If it is a flight animal, what kind of flight? Running away or waiting it out?
- Does this flight animal have special skills for fleeing? Such as speed, zigzagging, camouflage, etc.?
- If it is a defensive animal, what kind of defence? Threatening or attacking?
- What threatening gestures does this animal make?
- Does this animal have "special weapons" such as stingers, claws, venom, sharp teeth, foul odour, roars, etc.?
- Do you have similar abilities as humans?

Variation 1

The exercise described above can also be carried out using a personal questionnaire:

Questionnaire Types of violence

What do you do when you are threatened? Do you flee or are you prepared to defend yourself? Or do you attack first?

.....

What kind of violence do you use when you are threatened?

.....

When do you think it is acceptable?

.....

When do you think it's bad?

.....

Are there other types of violence that you use?

.....
.....
Which animals have similar escape or defence techniques to you?
.....
.....

Variation 2 (with children)

This exercise can also be done with children as a pantomime.

Instructions: "If you were an animal, which animal would you be? Please just think about it and don't say anything. Once everyone has chosen an animal, we will play a guessing game. Take turns acting out your animal as if it were angry. What does this animal do when it is angry? Imagine how it moves, what happens to its body, what you hear."

Violence has many faces

Violence is not only when blood is shed. And the perpetrators of physical violence are often victims of psychological or structural violence. In this exercise, the participants deal with the topic of violence: What is violence? What types of violence are there? Where am I a perpetrator of violence and where am I a victim of violence?

Learning objective

Participants expand their moral judgement of different types of violence. They recognise that they also use or experience different types of violence in their various roles in life.

Relation to the topic of violence

Repeatedly violent young people tend to idealise their potential for violence. This is only possible if they view individual types of violence in isolation. In this exercise, violence is placed in relation to social roles.

Framework

To introduce the topic, we use the video "25 Images of Violence" (from "Violence Has Many Faces" by the *Institute for Youth Film and Television*). Various forms of violence are depicted in 25 short sequences: a shootout in a Western, car exhaust fumes, violence against women in advertising, poor living conditions, etc.

Evaluation and implementation

Step 1: "Today we are looking at the question: What types of violence are there? First, here is a short questionnaire. This questionnaire is for you and will remain with you. It is only intended to stimulate thought. Please answer these questions."

Questionnaire: Violence has many faces

What types of physical violence do you use?

(e.g. hitting, strangling, tripping, use of weapons, damage to property...)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

What types of psychological violence do you use?

(e.g. laughing at someone, threatening them, making racist remarks, excluding them, ignoring them, withholding affection, using sexualised language, taking something away from them, lying, etc.)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

What types of structural violence do you suffer from?

(e.g. poor school grades, lack of apprenticeships, separation from family, hunger, poverty, little free time, inadequate care, foreigner status...)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Step 2: In an unstructured conversation, various topics from the questionnaire are addressed indirectly. It is important that the conversation remains unstructured and does not take the

form of a lecture. Instead of asking, "What did you write?", ask, "Do you have any questions, thoughts or comments?" If nothing comes up, the leader can also stimulate the conversation: "I think that stress at school can be very stressful. It is a kind of structural violence. I experienced this myself as a pupil. My mother tongue is Italian and I had to go to a German-speaking school. I was a very poor pupil in the first few years. It was terrible."

Family crest

In the transition from childhood to adulthood, young people have to redefine their social position with appropriate norms and moral attitudes. The family of origin plays a formative role in shaping these basic attitudes. In this exercise, young people are asked to symbolically represent these basic family values with a family crest.

Learning objective

- Orientation in the area of conflict between family values and personal, developing values
- Being able to describe personal values in words
- Being able to stand by personal values in a group of peers

Relevance to the topic of violence

Violence can be understood as an inadequate attempt to realise one's own needs and desires. At the heart of every training session with violent young people is the task of identifying their mostly unconscious needs and desires. The family crest exercise is an attempt to reveal unconscious needs and desires that drive behaviour, so that their influence on how people live their lives becomes apparent.

Every violent young person sees themselves as a kind of *Robin Hood*: a fighter for certain values, perhaps family values. With this imagination exercise, the participants in the group can take a stand for certain fundamental values that are symbolically represented on an imaginary family crest.

Framework conditions

This imagination exercise can tap into inner resources that cannot be accessed in conversation. It is always amazing how easily children and young people engage in this exercise: as if they had been waiting a long time to finally get something important off their

chest. Often, the imagination initially leads to a provocative symbol (e.g. a penis, a rope, a fist). Simple, serious questioning then usually leads to a new image.

Instructions and implementation

Step 1: "In the past, knights and nobles had a family coat of arms that they carried on their shields or displayed as a flag. A family coat of arms is a pictorial representation of something that connects people: colours and symbols are used to represent something that morally connects a family. A coat of arms can consist of two coloured areas or depict objects and living beings. Suppose your family – and now let's go back many generations in our imagination – has a coat of arms; what does this coat of arms look like? Imagine this coat of arms in your mind's eye: what colours? What pattern? What figure? I'll give you a minute to imagine this."

Step 2: "Now imagine your coat of arms hanging here on the wall, in large format. Project the coat of arms onto the wall with the power of your imagination. Let it appear there on the wall, take a good look at it. And now everyone presents their coat of arms. What does it look like?"

Step 3: A more theme-centred discussion about values and moral attitudes.

Variation

Variation: the coat of arms can also be drawn and then presented. Another option is role play: participants are asked to stand as a coat of arms and describe themselves. This variation offers the advantage that the goals/values of the coat of arms can be explored in conversation ("so you are a coat of arms with a golden sword on a blue background – a beautiful sword, when is it used?").

Achilles heel

Cognitive exercise designed to enable the recognition of small everyday stressors ("sensitive areas"). Every person reacts individually to certain provocations. If we know what affects us sensitively, we can react more appropriately.

Learning objective

Participants can recognise that they have sensitive areas where they react impulsively and aggressively. They recognise how to deal with their sensitive areas. They also recognise that they often try to hit others where they are sensitive.

Relation to the topic of violence

When sensitive areas are hit, the escalation of violence is accelerated. When participants recognise where their sensitivities lie, they can develop strategies to deal constructively with targeted attacks.

Framework

The film *Troy*, starring Brad Pitt, can be used to introduce the topic. Alternatively, a short version of the story of Achilles can be told.

Instructions and implementation

"Achilles was one of the most important heroes in the Trojan War. He was considered invulnerable. After his birth, his mother bathed him in the river Styx in the underworld, making his body impervious to all arrows and swords. Achilles had one weak spot: his mother held him by the heel when she dipped him into the water so that he would not sink. At this spot, the Achilles heel, he could be wounded. So anyone who wanted to defeat Achilles had to find out where his weak spot was.

We are heroes. Heroes in finding out what other people's weak spots are. And heroes because we are invulnerable to many attacks. But we all have our weak spots too. And we want to think about that now."

Questionnaire: Achilles heel

What words, gestures and facial expressions can I use to provoke others most easily?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Which words, gestures, facial expressions make me angry?

.....
.....
.....
.....

What is my Achilles heel?

.....

How do I react when my Achilles heel is exposed?

.....
.....
.....

Values

The question of the "right" values is at the heart of educational tasks. Just as social values adapt to social changes and developments, so too must one's own personal values be adapted to the changing social environment. Personality development and self-awareness are closely linked to the development of values. That is why it is particularly important to become aware of one's own values and to reflect on them in a group process.

In this cognitive exercise, participants can explore their own values and those of others.

Learning objective

Young people with behavioural problems and aggressive tendencies rarely talk about their personal values. They tend to express themselves through idols and boastful behaviour. Here they have the opportunity to try this out.

Relation to the topic of violence

An important condition for the emergence of violence is a lack of opportunities to communicate about different values and attitudes. Those who have not learned to argue about different values will also have fewer skills to resolve value conflicts without violence in threatening conflict situations.

Framework

Materials required: One sheet of A3 paper, moderation cards, felt-tip pens.

Instructions and implementation

Step 1 – Participants receive 5 small cards, a felt-tip pen and the following instruction: "What is the most important thing in life? What do I need to be able to say that I am doing well? Write a term on the cards that is absolutely valuable to you. There are material values (such as money, clothes, travel, etc.), spiritual values (such as justice, discipline, faith, etc.) and psychological values (such as happiness, contentment, humour, etc.). One term per card. Write down a maximum of 5 values that you aspire to. Please do this individually, then we will lay the cards on the floor and look at/compare them.

Step 2 – The cards are laid out on the floor and examined. If anything is unclear, questions are asked. There will certainly be some provocative values listed ("fuck", "kill", "X-Box", etc.). The facilitator can ask questions ("What do you mean by that?"), but the values are not evaluated or devalued in any way; they are left as personal statements.

Step 3 – Each participant receives an A3 sheet of paper with the following instructions: "We have now seen a whole range of values. Now write your name and the three values that are most important to you on the sheet. You can also draw symbols instead of words. Afterwards, everyone will present their sheet and comment briefly on it."

Hot chair

This method has become established as part of anti-aggression training (cf. Weidner 2000). The main person (the perpetrator of violence sits on the "hot seat") is verbally provoked in order to improve their ability to control themselves. From a learning psychology perspective, this provocative form of role training is necessary to enable behavioural change in people who react impulsively and violently to stress.

Learning objective

The neural connections in our brain that are necessary for survival (such as controlling the heartbeat, body temperature, breathing, etc.) are already established at birth, but many others are determined by the strongest environmental factor in our lives: learning. Here, the neurons are in constant competition for new connections. Positive stress challenges the brain and allows for the constant expansion of neural connections. Behavioural patterns that become routine are transferred to the subcortical area of the brain and stored there in a fixed "wiring". An example of such wiring is *verbal abuse and physical violence*. This ability of the brain to simultaneously "hard-wire" connections and constantly form new ones means, in principle, that humans are always capable of learning and can recover from disturbances and injuries. However, if we want to bring about changes in attitudes and behaviour that have been practised for a long time, it becomes difficult to break these "hard-wired" connections. (See Ratey 2000). Talking is usually of little use here. Action is more promising: through repeated practice of new ways of thinking and behaving in role training, new neural connections can be formed and strengthened. For example, perpetrators of violence can practise remaining calm in the hot seat: *surrounded by the other perpetrators and trainers, their sensitive areas are attacked, the nastiness is increased to the pain threshold and justifications for violence are massively questioned.* (Ahrends 1991, quoted from Weidner 2000, p.14) This form of role training offers the advantage of breaking down complex behaviours into small individual elements, practising these learning steps individually first and then putting them back together into a complete behavioural sequence. This repeated rehearsal of behavioural patterns leads to new, stable neural connections that have the potential to replace old patterns. The motto here is: practise, practise, practise.

Relation to the topic of violence

The topics of the hot seat sessions are triggers of violence such as enemy stereotypes (e.g. foreigners, freaks), non-verbal communication (e.g. hostile looks, puffed-up chest, inappropriate distancing behaviour and insults or hints thereof). Participants can practise responding peacefully to these triggers of violence.

Framework

A prerequisite is the participants' permission for intervention: they must give their consent to the confrontation on the hot seat.

With young people under the age of 15, the *hot seat* cannot be carried out with strong provocations that go to the pain threshold. We use a playful variant in which the type of provocations are agreed in advance and are somewhat milder. This can relate to appearance/origin ("you fat bastard", "dirty Albanian", "nigger"), sexual swear words ("gay pig", "arse fucker") or family insults ("your mother is a whore"). The aim is to learn to respond to these provocations in a way other than with violence.

This method should not be used with children.

Instructions and implementation

A chair is placed in the middle and designated as the "hot seat".

"You are grand masters at provoking. It is easy for you to hit someone else where it hurts. Now let's turn the tables: Who among you dares to sit on the hot chair? We will then try to hit them where it hurts. The aim is to remain peaceful and calm on the hot seat. Whoever manages to do so for 3 minutes is the winner."

Variation: Swear word competition

Another playful variation is the swear word competition:

Competition pairs are formed. The pairs now have 5 minutes to think up insults for the others. Two hot seats are then set up. One party sits on each seat. They must listen to the insults of the others for 2 minutes without reacting aggressively. In this win-win game, everyone can win: both the good insulters and the calm victims (and both receive a chocolate bar as a reward, for example).

Depending on the group dynamics, this competition can also be carried out in such a way that the whole group takes turns insulting one person at a time. In contrast to the hot seat, however, this variant is not about provocative role-playing; rather, the focus is on the topic of *swear words*. The young people grapple with the question: What is hurtful about insults?

Warm shower

A basic principle of the training group is to convey positive experiences that satisfy needs. In groups with aggressive young people, there is a lot of provocation and disparagement among the participants. One focus is therefore on positive mutual feedback: "What do I like about you?"

Learning objective

In this exercise, the young people can experience that sending and receiving positive feedback leads to well-being.

Relation to the topic of violence

The problematic behaviour of aggressive young people often causes them to be rejected by their peers and to have few relaxed relationships. In the long term, this leads to extremely conspicuous peer relationships, which in turn stabilises disturbed social behaviour based on negative feedback.

Framework

This exercise can be used after an exercise such as *Achilles' heel, hot seat, swear words*. Feedback can be given in sequence (A to B, B to C... F to A) or a 'warm seat' can be set up. The facilitator must ensure that the feedback does not contain any negative messages. If in doubt, intervene immediately and ask questions. Likewise, feedback that appears inauthentic is not permitted.

Instructions and implementation

"Strangely enough, we find it difficult to give positive feedback. It is much easier to tell someone what they are not good at and what we don't like about them. Even here in this group, expressions such as 'you're wrong, stop this nonsense, you're stupid, ...' are used much more often. For a change, we now want to emphasise only the good things, to give a kind of warm shower. The basic message is: 'You are good at.../ You are good at.../ What I like about you is that.../ What I like about you is that...'.

Variation: Video commercial

A double warm shower occurs when this is staged as a role-play *commercial*. Each participant takes turns playing the role of TV presenter, shower person and cameraman: Participant A introduces B in positive terms and also obtains feedback from other participants in short interviews ("What positive things can you say about B?"). The whole thing is recorded by C. Then the roles are switched until everyone has received a warm shower.

My strengths

Self-assessment is a difficult subject. Positive self-assessment is even more difficult: either we fail completely, or we end up with a completely unrealistic view of ourselves. *"70% of young people consider their leadership skills to be above average and only 2% consider them to be below average. All of the one million young people surveyed considered their ability to get along with other young people to be above average, 60% considered themselves to be in the top 10% in this regard, and 25% believed themselves to be in the top 1%. Anyone who thinks*

that only the inflated egos of young people cause such a gross distortion of their perception of themselves in comparison to others is mistaken: 94% of all professors consider themselves to be better than the average of their colleagues." (Spitzer 2004, p. 144)

Oh, I consider myself one of the best psychologists. That's why I'm writing this book. And a German publishing house, one of the most important ones, has enabled me to maintain this misjudgement by accepting my manuscript and publishing my invaluable knowledge and skills. The vast majority of people who use violence think the same way: they are all above-average 'clever and cool' and they only use violence when it is objectively necessary. As Spitzer notes, there is a prejudice that one is better and happier than others. This prejudice makes life easier and enables us to face everyday adversities with a certain serenity.

Nevertheless, it is useful to compare self-assessment with external assessment from time to time.

Learning objective

Aggressive antisocial disorder is often so 'disturbing' that the young person's strengths and resources can no longer be perceived. They also often focus their attention on the negative characteristics of other people. This exercise aims to identify the positive characteristics of group participants that normally receive too little attention in a group setting. In this sense, it is a perception training exercise.

Relevance to the topic of violence

Petermann (2001) points out that aggressive young people tend to overestimate their own abilities and that the degree of overconfidence is obviously related to the severity of aggression. It becomes particularly problematic when this overconfidence needs to be increased because of failure at school, blame within the family and rejection by peers. Overestimation of one's abilities has a protective function: where positive experiences are rare, everyone has to give themselves a pat on the back.

Framework conditions

This exercise can only be carried out once the participants have already got to know each other from a few sessions and a certain level of trust has been established within the training group.

Instructions and implementation

"Most drivers consider themselves to be above average: they think they drive better and more responsibly than most others. Most teachers consider themselves to be above average in terms of competence, and most footballers only see their own strengths and the weaknesses of their teammates.

We can try to compare my own assessment of my strengths with how others assess them.

The starting question is: What am I good at?"

After this introduction, two groups are formed, which work separately in the room. Each group discusses and defines several strengths of the individual members of the other group. The groups then come back together and share their findings in a plenary session. One person begins with a self-assessment of a strength ("I am good at..."). The group members then give

their external assessment, as discussed in the working group. In this way, each participant receives feedback on their strengths in turn.

Video recording of the group session

Seeing themselves in a group situation on video is both uncomfortable and fascinating for many young people. The distance created by the recording allows them to observe their own behaviour and recognise their own provocative tendencies.

Learning objective

To promote the ability to observe and control oneself.

Relation to the topic of violence

Aggressive children and young people focus their attention in everyday life on possible hostile signs in their environment. They often interpret the behaviour of other people as aggressive and react very quickly and sensitively to it. This pattern of perception organisation is geared towards enabling preventive intervention. Information must be gathered and processed in an increasingly short time (because the environment appears threatening). This leads to a "flight forward": threatening and intimidating behaviour is activated. These interactions between a person and their environment lead to a vicious circle: A thinks that B is preparing for a violent confrontation, so A arms themselves – now B sees A's threatening behaviour and wants to at least match it, showing an intense reaction – A sees this, feels confirmed in their sense of threat and reacts violently – and so on.

Those involved are often unaware that they are caught up in such escalation processes. On the contrary, they usually assume that they have been provoked for no reason. The use of video recordings can enable self-observation in conflict situations.

Framework conditions

As a rule, the camera is placed on a tripod in a corner and switched on at the beginning of the session. Another option is to have the participants take turns standing behind the camera and giving them responsibility for the recording.

Instructions and implementation

"I will be recording today's session on video. The recording will be used by us leaders: we can analyse a session together in between and consider suggestions for improving the training. If you like, we can also watch a tape here in the training session."

Motivation scale

It is only natural that not everyone in a learning group has the same level of motivation (even if we so-called healthy adults always pretend to be highly motivated). In this exercise, participants can declare how high their personal motivation to learn is and what personal learning goals they are pursuing.

Learning goal

Participants can contribute their own interests and goals to the learning group. This teaches them that they can play a role in shaping the learning process.

Relevance to the topic of violence

The experience of self-efficacy through the use of violence is very important to our target group. They have often already learned that they can effectively interrupt and even prevent learning processes. With the motivation scale exercise, they can learn that there are other ways to influence a learning process.

Framework

From a group dynamics perspective, every conflict within the group is an expression of a group process – and this group process reflects the conflicts of the individual participants. The existence of group conflicts is very important for the development of a functional group. The existence of group conflicts is seen as an indicator of a learning group. It is therefore wrong to suppress group conflicts; they should be seen as part of the learning process and dealt with.

Instructions and implementation

"Please stand up and line up on an imaginary line from here to there (runs from one end of the room to the other). Standing here means: 'I just want to sit this out, I don't want to learn anything about non-violence'. And standing there means: 'I want to use the time here to learn something about non-violence'. The whole thing is a scale, like a thermometer. So, for example, those standing here have little motivation to learn, those standing in the middle would be willing to engage in a learning process if the others pulled them along. And up here, the temperature is high: they want something."

The participants can now sit down on the floor where they are, and a discussion begins based on this arrangement: What are the consequences for the learning group? How can we organise the learning process so that the "unmotivated" do not disturb the "motivated"? What do the "unmotivated" do to spend their time in a reasonably meaningful way?

In the next step, job offers can be made to those who are "motivated".

Avoiding violence

Participants answer questions on the topic: How did I manage to avoid an escalation of violence in a real-life situation?

Learning objective

Recognise and develop your own resources for conflict resolution.

Relevance to the topic of violence

Develop strategies for de-escalating conflict situations.

Framework

Can be carried out as a questionnaire in individual work followed by a discussion in plenary or as small group work.

This can be followed by role-plays in which participants demonstrate how they were able to avoid an escalation of violence in a specific risk situation.

Instructions and implementation

"You have probably experienced situations in which there was a high risk of other people using violence (not directly against you, but against third parties or property) and in which the situation ultimately ended without violence. How did it come about that no violence was used? Did you contribute to this in any way? Please fill out this questionnaire individually. We will then discuss what can be done when a dispute threatens to escalate."

Questionnaire: Avoiding violence

Think back to a situation: an argument broke out, perhaps you were involved or just a bystander – what happened?

.....
.....

How did the dispute get resolved peacefully? Did you or someone else do anything special?

.....
.....

Do you think there are certain techniques/strategies that can be used to avoid violence? What do you do when you want to settle a dispute?

.....
.....

Smarties auction

In this game, a packet of *Smarties* can be purchased at auction. The auction is conducted using *Smarties* that the participants receive as a gift at the beginning. The game is played according to the usual auction rules, with one exception: not only the last bidder has to pay, but also the second-to-last bidder. The player who bids the highest (e.g. 7 *Smarties*) pays what they bid and receives the packet of *Smarties*. The player who made the second-to-last bid, on the other hand, pays what they bid but receives nothing.

Learning objective

- To learn that a common strategy can lead to a common gain
- Testing a group's ability to cooperate
- Recognise one's own role in the group.

Relation to the topic of violence

This exercise is known in game theory as a *dollar auction* (Mérö, 2000): a dollar can be auctioned off – once the auction gets underway, the dollar is usually auctioned off for much more than it is worth. This escalation in bids occurs because the penultimate bidder obviously does not want to lose and invests more and more. Countless situations in everyday life follow this principle: we make an effort to achieve something – if we cannot achieve the goal, we invest more and more. Ultimately, we do not want to lose; the gain becomes meaningless.

Framework conditions

In an educational setting, the game cannot be played with money. Therefore, *Smarties* are distributed at the beginning. One packet contains approx. 30 pieces. These can be used for bidding.

Depending on how the auction develops – whether bids escalate or participants cooperate by agreeing on and sharing the winnings – parallels can be drawn with everyday situations during the evaluation.

Instructions and implementation

"We are now going to play an auction game with *Smarties*. You will each receive a small packet of *Smarties* as a gift; there are approximately 30 pieces in each packet. But please don't eat them now, we need them for the game. The game consists of a single packet of

Smarties that can be auctioned off. Bids are made with individual Smarties and the highest bidder can buy the additional packet. But the special thing about this auction is that the second-highest bidder also has to pay and does not receive a prize. Are there any questions?" It is possible that the young people will agree among themselves and make only one bid (one Smartie). This person will receive the packet, and it will be interesting to see if and how they then divide it up. However, if the auction really gets going, the leaders should observe the process closely so that they can provide feedback in the evaluation.

In the daily news, young people learn that violence leads to effective conflict resolution. They also learn that military pre-emptive strikes resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths are necessary to determine whether another country has hostile intentions and weapons of mass destruction.

"The statistics on violence on television (according to a study of 2,500 hours of television in Washington) are as follows: in only 4% of violent scenes are non-violent conflict resolution options addressed, in over 50% the violence does not hurt, and in over 70% the perpetrator gets away scot-free." (Spitzer 2004)

It is therefore foolish to try to teach in anti-violence training that aggressive, antisocial behaviour does not resolve conflicts.

Instead, learning opportunities should be created that trigger moral conflicts and differences of opinion among young people about the problem situation and lead to the development of their own values and ways of thinking.

Scissors, rock, paper

This popular children's game is described in detail by Mérö (2000) in connection with psychological action strategies. He refers to the concepts of pure and mixed strategy developed by mathematician and game theorist John von Neumann:

"We say that a player pursues a pure strategy when he determines his behaviour on the basis of a principle and when, in a given situation, the same step always follows this principle. We call a strategy mixed when the player first assigns a probability value to each possible action and then acts on the basis of these probabilities." (p. 39)

A footballer who always kicks the ball to the right when taking a penalty kick is pursuing a pure strategy. On the other hand, the footballer is pursuing a mixed strategy if he makes assumptions about the possible behaviour of his opponents and takes the penalty kick

differently depending on these assumptions. In the game rock, paper, scissors, a pure strategy is when a child always chooses scissors.

Learning objective

To expand the ability to evaluate the success of one's own actions and to expand the repertoire of actions.

Relation to the topic of violence

Aggressive children choose a pure strategy in conflict situations: attack. This antisocial behaviour in the form of aggressive actions is sometimes successful. Therefore, the strategy is maintained. It is like when a footballer has scored a goal from a penalty kick once – and now he always takes the penalty kick according to this principle. The few attempts he has made in a different direction have been unsuccessful. Therefore, the original strategy is maintained. Aggressive children have acquired certain violent manners at a very early age and use them in most conflict situations.

Framework conditions

The game can be played as a one-on-one or a team game. The team game version is particularly interesting because the children have to discuss their strategy. It is advisable to let the game be played without commentary. Then you can pause briefly to ask questions about strategy and then resume the game. In the final evaluation, ask the question: Did you change your strategy during the second phase of the game?

Instructions and implementation

On command, two players show one of three things with their hands: scissors (index and middle fingers extended), rock (fist) and paper (open hand). Scissors cut paper, paper wraps rock and rock grinds scissors – therefore, the first items always win over the second. If both show the same thing, the round is a draw.

Short texts, fairy tales

Reading short texts aloud can stimulate the imagination and creativity of children and young people. It is important that the texts leave room for imagination and interpretation and that the *moral of the story* is not obvious or clumsy. The therapeutic aspect of the story is not the material that is clearly described, but the material that stimulates the imagination. Mills and

Crowley (1996) emphasise that the therapeutic power of stories lies precisely in the fact that they cannot be fully analysed. In good stories, there is always a certain intangible quality that remains. This is what gives the story its transformative power and challenges the listeners.

Learning objective

- Activate your own resources
- Expanding moral reasoning and evaluation skills
- Increasing emotional involvement in stories and events

Relevance to the topic of violence

Being able to delay immediate gratification in favour of later, more important satisfaction is difficult and often unsuccessful for children/young people in our target group. This self-management skill appears in many stories. Another frequently occurring theme is subjectively perceived injustice.

Framework

The announcement of the texts is brief ("I would like to start with a story today") and I do not formulate any objectives. I end the story without comment (i.e. not: "you see how things can turn out if..."). Sometimes I ask if the listeners would like to say anything, but most of the time I just leave the story as it is.

A small selection of texts

Young people today love luxury. They have bad manners, despise authority, have no respect for older people and chatter when they should be working. Young people no longer stand up when older people enter the room. They contradict their parents, rant in society, devour desserts at the table, cross their legs and tyrannise their teachers.
(Socrates, 470 – 399 BC)

The wolves within me

One day, a grandson came to his grandfather and told him angrily that a classmate had wronged him. The grandfather replied: "I want to tell you a story:

I, too, have often felt great hatred towards those who have wronged me. But hatred costs energy; it does not hurt your opponent. It is like taking poison and hoping that your opponent will die. I have had to fight these feelings over and over again."

He nodded and continued: "It's as if two wolves live inside me; one is good and does no harm. He lives in harmony with everything around me and does not attack unless I am truly attacked. He only fights when it is right to do so, and he fights fairly.

But the other wolf, oh... he's full of rage. The smallest thing sets him off. He fights with everyone, constantly, for no reason. He is incapable of thinking because his anger and hatred are so great.

It's hard to live with these two wolves inside me – because they are both constantly trying to control my mind."

The grandson looked intently into his grandfather's eyes and asked, "Which one wins, Grandfather?"

The grandfather said solemnly, "The one I feed."

(Native American story, author unknown)

The fairy tale of the king and the master thief

Once upon a time, there was a good king who ruled and administered justice for many years. But now, in his old age, he often wondered about justice and injustice, truth and lies. And at night, the convicted thieves and robbers often appeared to him in his dreams: they cried out their innocence and complained about their unjust convictions.

The king could no longer sleep peacefully at night, completely unsettled by these dreams: what if he had wrongfully chopped off this thief's hand? Or what if the pair of robbers had been hanged innocently?

One day, the king said to his minister: "Send out your secret police and bring me the most notorious thief in the land."

When the thief stood before him, uncertain but proud, the king said: "You are the most notorious thief in the land, a true master of your craft. But you need not fear, I do not want to punish you, I want to learn from you. I want to know how a thief thinks, what he feels, what he wants. Only then can I be a good judge. You must teach me the craft of thievery."

A wave of indignation swept through the thief's body: "Me, a thief? How did Your Highness come up with that idea? I am a decent merchant and family man. I have never stolen anything in my life. I am a thoroughly honest person. This must be a mistake."

The king: "No, it is no mistake. My secret police have caught you, it is useless to lie. You shall teach me the art of thievery. And for that I will reward you richly. More than you have ever stolen. You will be rich, honourably rich."

The thief burst into desperate sobs: "I am such an unfortunate person, all the gods seem to be conspiring against me. My beloved wife is seriously ill, my eldest son was the victim of a tragic accident, my favourite cat has disappeared, perhaps kidnapped, the poor little thing – and now I am the victim of a crazy case of mistaken identity – I am not a thief, I swear, I am not a thief."

The minister whispered in the king's ear once more that a case of mistaken identity was out of the question: this man had long been under surveillance by the secret police and was the head of a real family of thieves.

The king became angry and ordered the thief: "Stop this theatrics. And now let us begin with the first lesson."

The thief replied, "Oh, if only I could. I would be an idiot not to want to teach the king, especially when I would be richly rewarded. But I have nothing to teach. I am not a thief."

The king was furious and dismissed him. He scolded his minister and ordered him to bring a real thief the next day.

But in the evening, when he was about to go to bed, he noticed that his large gold ring was not on his finger. He immediately had the thief arrested and brought before him: "You lying, miserable thief. You were the only visitor to the palace today, you stole my gold ring. I will punish you severely for your deceitful, disrespectful and thieving behaviour. Tomorrow I will pass judgement on you. Be afraid. Guards, take him to the most gruesome dungeon we have."

The thief sobbed and protested his innocence with heart-rending words, but it was no use; he was dragged away.

But that night, the king was unable to sleep again. The images of the condemned, those restless souls, appeared to him once more. And he couldn't stop thinking about the thief, who was now sitting in the damp dungeon: "What if he's telling the truth and isn't a thief at all? Then I've done wrong again."

The king tossed and turned restlessly in bed. Finally, he got up. He wanted to speak to the alleged thief once more to find out the truth. In his royal nightgown and with a candle in his hand, he descended the narrow spiral staircase to the dungeon and searched for the thief's cell. As he walked down a long, dark corridor, he heard a pleading, sobbing voice in the distance. It was the thief's: "...I only want one thing now, and that is death. But when I think of my poor children and my dear, brave wife... I am so unhappy... I have always been decent and helpful throughout my life. But my neighbours were jealous and envious, they discredited me... I have only one wish, that my children will always remember me as a decent and hard-working father..." and the sobbing of this unfortunate man continued. The king was deeply moved and thought: "He cannot know that I am here listening to him, he is truly innocent, now I know it, fortunately I came and heard this with my own ears."

The next morning, the king had a beautiful breakfast buffet prepared and a warm bath with the finest scents prepared for the thief. He summoned him and apologised for the false accusation. He told him that he had

gone down to the dungeon during the night and heard everything. Now he knew for certain: "You are an honest man and not a thief. It was a terrible mistake."

The alleged thief replied: "Your Majesty is generous and eager to learn. That is wonderful. We have now successfully completed the first lesson. It is this: a master thief will never, even under threat of death, admit that he is a thief and will always be able to credibly claim the opposite. Only then is he a master thief. So that was the first lesson. This has already been paid for, as I was able to sell Your Majesty's gold ring at a good price. Shall we set the date for the second lesson right now?"

(Indian fairy tale)

The giants in the car park

Three giants once went into a car park. "I'm going to the ground floor," said the first. "I'm going to the first floor," said the second. "I'm going to the second floor," said the third.

Then each of them took a heavy iron bar, went to their respective floors and smashed all the cars parked there.

Afterwards, they met at the exit, left together and never returned.

(Franz Hohler: *Grotesque Stories*, 2003)

The poisonous gift

Once upon a time, there was a very strict teacher. The father of a former pupil sent him a box filled with sweets as a token of appreciation for his good work.

The teacher wanted all the sweets for himself. So he put the box in a corner and said to the pupils: "A bad person sent me these sweets. I assume he put poison in them and wants to kill me. Don't touch this box."

During the break, when the teacher was outside the classroom, one pupil said: "This story about poison is definitely not true, he just doesn't want us to eat any of it. That's why he made up the story about poison. Let's try the sweets."

But the other pupils were afraid of being punished. Then the cheeky pupil said, "Don't be afraid, I'll take responsibility."

When the box was empty, the cheeky pupil took the teacher's pocket knife from his desk and broke it. The other pupils were worried because this would make the teacher even angrier.

When the teacher returned to the classroom, he saw the broken knife and the empty box. Angrily, he asked, "Who did this?"

Silence reigned in the room. The cheeky pupil raised his hand and said, "I wanted to sharpen my pencil with the good pocket knife – but then the blade broke. Afraid of being punished, I wanted to kill myself. Then I thought of the poisoned sweets. That's why I ate them all. Unfortunately, I'm not dead after all."

(Peseschkian 2004)

Guiding the blind

In this partner exercise, one person carefully and attentively guides another person (who keeps their eyes closed) through the room. Without words. The person who is "blind" needs a great deal of trust in the guide. The guide, on the other hand, must be mindful of the "blind" person's perceptual limitations and plan accordingly for speed, changes in direction and obstacles.

Learning objective

- Perceptual ability in the kinesthetic and social areas
- Improvement of responsibility
- Practising contact behaviour
- Building trust

Relevance to the topic of violence

Aggressive, antisocial behaviour usually leads to problems for the children and young people in our target group when interacting with their peers at school and in their free time. This exercise promotes cooperative contact in a playful way. Particular difficulties are to be expected when taking on the role of the blind person: it is not easy for these young people to play the role of someone in need, as it contradicts the threatening and impressive behaviour often displayed in peer groups.

General conditions

A large, open group room, which may have some obstacles (tables and chairs). Expressly point out the risk of injury. The leaders must interrupt the exercise immediately if it is not being conducted properly.

Instructions and implementation

"Taking responsibility for other people is not as easy as we imagine. In this exercise, we want to see if we can do it for two minutes.

The leader demonstrates the exercise with one participant: "Let's say I'm blind – I'll close my eyes – and you have to guide me. Would you like to try it? Please be careful." Then pairs are formed and the exercise is carried out for two minutes. Afterwards, the roles of leader and follower are swapped.

In the evaluation round, there are two basic questions:

- How did you feel as a "blind" person?
- Was it difficult to lead?

Letting yourself fall

One participant stands in front of a semicircle and lets themselves fall backwards into it – they are caught by the other participants standing in the semicircle and gently brought back to an upright position.

Learning objective

- Ability to relax
- Promotion of body awareness
- Building trust
- Improving responsibility

Relation to the topic of violence

The young people in our target group are often in a state of constant tension when interacting with their peers. This need for constant control is probably the result of bad experiences and various stresses in their lives. This exercise allows them to practise letting go of control for a brief moment and relaxing. When they succeed, it gives them a feeling of happiness – in the evaluation round, they often report that this is a great feeling.

General conditions

At the beginning, the instructor must also stand in the semicircle to prevent dangerous carelessness and jokes. If the group shows that it is responsible, the instructor can take a step back from the semicircle.

Instructions and implementation

"I often see you tense, alert, always on the lookout. It is important to switch off from time to time and be able to trust others. You can practise this with a simple exercise: letting yourself fall." The leader then asks the group to form a semicircle and asks who dares to slowly let themselves fall backwards. The participants can take turns doing this several times, but there is absolutely no pressure.

Mindfulness training

The purpose of mindfulness is to enable and maintain our brain's ability to function. Mindfulness has a decisive influence on how we assess and experience a situation. Mindfulness can be practised. A relatively simple method is the practice of mindfulness according to J. Kabat-Zinn (1999):

Mindfulness is the other essential direction of meditation practice, also known as vipassana or insight meditation. In the practice of mindfulness, one initially uses established attention to cultivate calm and stability, but then goes beyond this by expanding the objects of observation and introducing an element of exploration. When thoughts or feelings arise, one does not ignore them, suppress them, or analyse or judge their content. Instead, one observes them,

intentionally and as best one can, without evaluating them, as they arise moment by moment as events in the field of awareness. By observing thoughts and feelings from a certain distance, one can more clearly recognise what is actually going on in the mind.

Mindfulness is practised in two ways, both of which are necessary to integrate it into our lives. The first is formal meditation, in which specific methods are used to help us remain awake and mindful in the moment for a certain period of time. The other area is informal practice in everyday life. This involves simply reminding ourselves to be present during our daily activities and checking from time to time whether we are indeed mindful. (pp. 11-15)

Learning objective

Attention is of crucial importance in the perception and experience of stress. The ability of humans to use their attention to focus their consciousness on certain areas of their environment and to perceive other areas only peripherally or not at all is a highly useful and valuable trait. For example, when driving a car, we can concentrate on the traffic. What is happening at the side of the road does not really enter our consciousness. But if we see a round object at the side of the road that looks like a ball, our attention is immediately drawn to what is happening at the side of the road ("Watch out for children playing") and we adjust our driving behaviour accordingly.

Our brain is a highly complex network that is designed to react immediately in dangerous situations, or to strike immediately. If our brain classifies a situation as dangerous, there are two reactions: flight or fight. Attention plays a very central role here, as it is vital that we recognise dangers (as well as pleasant events) at an early stage.

Our brain is always switched on, even when we are asleep. However, we learn to distinguish between important and unimportant inputs. If your partner's hand touches you at night, you will hardly register this in your consciousness. But if a stranger's hand touches you, you will probably startle. If the brain were a simple input-output machine (like a computer), this would not be possible. Our brain not only takes in and processes information, it also waits and searches for information and decides which information to process.

Attention is therefore much more than just absorbing input. Attention means

...that perceptions are filtered (after all, we want to sleep peacefully),

...that they are compared with each other and related to existing material (shape, size, temperature, skin texture, movement and pressure of the hand are known and correspond to those of the partner)

...and that emotional significance is attached to them (they unconsciously enjoy the tender touch, do not allow themselves to be woken up, but are in a good mood and affectionate in the morning).

The aim of mindfulness training is to constantly readjust one's own mindfulness: like a gourmet who not only focuses his attention on a particular quality, but is constantly open to new perceptions.

Relation to the topic of violence

Just as a tick extracts only the butyric acid from the things around it, or a gourmet picks only the raisins out of a cake, violent young people repeatedly focus their attention on things that have a conflictual character. Mindfulness training can improve the ability to perceive.

General conditions

We recommend that young people do this exercise as a sitting meditation. However, they usually lie down, as they find it difficult to sit quietly on a chair for long periods of time.

Duration: approx. 15 minutes.

Instructions and implementation

"An important part of anti-violence training is relaxation. In a sense, relaxation is the opposite of violence. However, it is often difficult for us to be calm and relaxed: we are constantly in action, alert, ready to spring into action. For a period of approx. 15 minutes, we allow ourselves to put aside the state of constant activity and try to enter a state of non-activity, of simply being.

Sit down in a place in this room where you feel comfortable, where your body can relax. You can remain seated on a chair, sit on the floor, lean against the wall, or simply let your head fall forward while sitting, or adopt any other position that is comfortable for you.

During this time, there is nothing we need to achieve or accomplish.

We can leave our eyes open or close them, simply letting things happen. If our eyes remain open, we should not focus on anything in particular, simply letting our gaze rest, allowing our eyes to relax as much as possible. Our shoulders are relaxed, letting all unnecessary tension flow out of them.

We feel the points of contact with the chair – the points of contact with the floor. We feel the contact of our hands, either with each other or with our thighs, our knees. The body becomes more and more relaxed.

Gradually, we now turn our attention to the movement of breathing. The inhalation and exhalation of the breath, which happens all by itself and which we do not need to change, we simply perceive it as it is.

Just feel the breath as it flows into and out of the body. When we notice that our attention keeps wandering into thoughts, daydreams and images, we simply allow it to happen. And slowly bring our attention back to our breathing.

Perhaps we are also disturbed by physical sensations or inner restlessness, which can sometimes be very intense. We observe all sensations, whether pleasant or unpleasant, with calmness. We try not to react to them, but we can also change our posture.

Be attentive to the experience of the present moment, expect nothing, want to achieve nothing, just be there, awake in every moment.

And again and again, direct your attention to your breathing and your body as a whole, how the air flows in and out of your body.

We can now also pay special attention to sounds. Perhaps sounds from the environment or sounds from within the body. We do not need to name the sounds, just listen without judging whether we like what we hear or not. We do not need to do anything to hear, just be there.

And when we notice that we are becoming restless, we gently bring our attention back to our breathing.

We can also become aware of our thoughts. The thoughts that pass through our minds. Instead of pursuing individual thoughts or getting caught up in their content, we simply observe the appearance and disappearance of thoughts and images.

And keep returning our attention to our breathing. Sitting quietly. Not searching for anything. Just being there.

Slowly, we refocus our attention on the here and now, in this moment, in this space, with these people. We move and stretch, open our eyes. We can stand up, laugh, walk around, look around – slowly, we return to our normal state of activity.

And now I would be interested to know how you found this relaxation exercise. Do you feel comfortable? Would anyone like to say something?

(Simplified short version of sitting meditation according to J. Kabat-Zinn)

Variation

We often do the sitting meditation as a short 2-minute meditation, for example in the final round or as a break during free group play, to improve the ability to regulate arousal.

Chocolate meditation

Chocolate meditation is a simple introductory exercise that prepares participants for the more demanding mindfulness training described above. In the initial round, participants are given a small piece of chocolate and asked to savour it slowly, focusing their attention entirely on the enjoyment for about one minute.

Learning objective

- To be able to focus attention on enjoyment.
- Improve self-observation and impulse control.
- Side effect: positively changing attitudes towards training.

Relevance to the topic of violence

We can assume that aggressive children and young people with severe behavioural problems who are referred to anti-violence training will arrive with an anxious and defensive attitude. They are unsettled, do not know what to expect and fear being reprimanded again. In this state of agitation, they are completely incapable of participating in training activities. They first need to calm down and make their bodies and senses receptive. Chocolate meditation is a kind of comforting gesture. We address the somatic needs of the children/young people a little by giving them something sweet and asking them to enjoy it as much as possible.

Framework conditions

Materials: Mini chocolates.

We do this pleasure exercise at irregular intervals. Never in the first session, so as not to raise false expectations. Usually at the beginning and end of the session.

Time and again, individual participants disrupt this meditation with loud smacking, throwing the chocolate or paper around, obscene comments, etc. In these moments, we try to focus our own attention and that of the group on enjoyment and not to engage in power interactions with the disruptive participant.

Instructions and implementation

"To get in the mood, we suggest a short meditation: everyone receives a small piece of chocolate. Your task is to let this chocolate melt slowly in your mouth and enjoy it. We will take one minute for this enjoyment."

Ice water test

"When we are in pain, the sensory sensations are often so strong that it is difficult to concentrate on anything other than the pain. All our attention is focused on the pain, preventing us from noticing other things in our environment. When pain reigns supreme, we no longer perceive the positive things that are also present. The pain becomes stronger than the fun, the joy, the enjoyment of life. The 'spotlight of attention' is 'stuck' so that it can only shine in one direction, only on the pain. If, on the other hand, the spotlight is movable, other, more pleasant things can also come 'into the light' of attention.

The effectiveness of distraction techniques has also been investigated and proven in scientific experiments. Volunteer test subjects were asked to try to immerse their hands in ice water for as long as possible. This causes severe pain in all individuals due to hypothermia. The subjects were able to endure this pain for varying lengths of time, depending on how well they were distracted or how well their attention was directed to something else." (Basler 1998, p.122)

Learning objective

Participants should experience the importance of attention and attention control.

Relation to the topic of violence

Young people with aggressive antisocial behaviour are more likely to be victims of physical abuse. They have developed techniques for dealing with physical pain. These techniques can be activated as resources for conflict resolution.

Framework

Materials required: A bucket with water and ice cubes, a clock.

We leaders also take part in this exercise and show that we are not very good at it. Some young people exceed their pain threshold and accept self-harm: in this case, we take their hand out of the ice water.

Instructions and implementation

"There are people who, through years of practice, have learned to ignore pain. For example, a fakir who lies down on a bed of nails: he can control his pain by concentrating very hard on something else. The ability to focus one's attention on certain things like a spotlight and block out others is very valuable in many situations. For example, when we go swimming in the lake in summer: some people just dip their toes in and find the water much too cold. Others jump in and don't find it cold at all.

I have a bucket of ice water here. We are now going to take turns trying to keep our hands in the ice water for as long as possible. But this isn't a competition; I know that most of you are very good at this. What interests me more is: How do you do it? What is your technique? What do you think about?

Evaluation

In the evaluation, the participants report how they managed not to focus their attention on the pain.

Concluding comment: "The ability of humans to actively select parts of their environment with the help of their attention and to ignore others is a highly useful trait. It allows us to focus on certain things without being distracted. However, this spotlight function of attention can sometimes be unfavourable. This is the case when we focus our attention on disturbing and negative things and no longer notice the positive aspects. For example, when we only see the negative aspects of a person and just wait for them to do something negative again."

Imaginary journey

Another way to train self-control of attention is through relaxation exercises: travelling to an imaginary land. Here, mindfulness is not directed towards breathing, but towards an inner image of an imaginary landscape. Participants can fill this imaginary land with their own experiences and desires.

Learning objective

Activation of existing relaxation resources; expansion of skills for self-control of arousal and attention; recognition of the inverse relationship between tension/stress and well-being.

Relation to the topic of violence

Children and young people who display aggressive behaviour often have a high level of impulsivity and a tendency to perceive negative stimuli in their environment. Negative images seem to have a greater effect on them. This exercise is designed to strengthen their ability to perceive beautiful images.

General conditions

Duration: approx. 10 minutes.

Instructions and implementation

"When we are angry, it is difficult for us to have pleasant thoughts. Everything seems dark and bad. We are then completely unable to enjoy anything or take pleasure in anything. There are simple techniques for activating your imagination and creativity in order to experience moments of contentment, even when everything around you seems difficult and unpleasant.

Sit down somewhere in this room where you feel comfortable, where your body can relax. You can remain seated on a chair, sit on the floor, lean against the wall or simply let your head fall forward while sitting, or adopt any other position that is comfortable for you.

You may want to close your eyes or you can fix your gaze on any point in the room, not on other people, but on a wall, a window or something similar. It doesn't matter what, just look into space somehow. And if anything is bothering you, if it becomes uncomfortable, you can change your sitting position. Just be comfortable, breathe calmly, do nothing.

And while we are sitting there, doing nothing, we can imagine that we are mentally leaving this room, moving away from this place, walking further and further along a path that leads across a large, wide meadow. And as we walk along this path, we see a large gate in the distance. Our path leads towards this gate. We get closer and closer and finally stand in front of the gate. The gate is lower than the path, five wide steps lead down to the gate.

We can now imagine taking these steps. The first step, then the second, the third, the fourth, and with the last step we stand at the gate. We can now open the gate and see a beautiful place.

We can now enter this place and look around, smell the scents and odours, hear the sounds, feel the ground beneath our feet, perhaps touch something.

We can continue walking in this beautiful place or stand still, sit, lie down, do whatever we want, get up again, continue walking. Just as we like it best.

This beautiful place may also awaken certain thoughts, memories and feelings in us. Just allow whatever comes, if it is pleasant, and otherwise continue with your thoughts.

Perhaps we also see other people, animals, unusual plants, special objects; we let our curiosity guide us, simply take in the images that appear, let our imagination run wild.

And while we are in this dreamlike place in our imagination, we may notice different sensations in our body: tingling in our hands, warmth or cold, tension, stomach rumbling, etc. We simply allow all of this to happen while we remain in our fantasy image, breathing calmly, enjoying the beauty.

Then we slowly walk back to the gate. We look back once more and say goodbye to this beautiful place. We walk through the gate, close it and put the imaginary key in our pocket. We walk back up the five steps, slowly and still full of memories, and make our way back across the large, wide meadow to this place here.

We move our arms and legs, stretch, open our eyes and stay where we are for a moment. If you want, you can also get up, walk around the room and move around.

And now I am very curious to hear how you felt: did you find a place of well-being? Was the imaginary journey relaxing? Would anyone like to share their experience?

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