# A Childs Safety during the Contact with a Stranger: The Empiric Aspect

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#### Abstract

The given article deals with and analyze the main approaches to safety of a child's personality during the contact with an unfamiliar adult through understanding the phenomenon of trust, its substantial characteristics and also the conditions defining the children's trust to unknown adults. The analysis of the literary sources shows that the problem of studying trust of preschool and primary school-aged children to unfamiliar adults is little represented in psychological and pedagogical researches. The authors mark that the adults' idea about the level and content of a child's trust to familiar and unfamiliar people allows selectively and in proper time takes educational and psycho correctional measures in order to form an adequate level of trust promoting thereby the personal growth and child's safety. The child's utter distrust or, vice versa, trust compared with the majority of children of the corresponding age can be an indicator of inadequate adoption of social connections system or extreme unfavorable family relationships. In such cases it is necessary to take urgent psychological and pedagogical measures from the direction of parents, educators, teachers and psychologists.

The authors described a new toolset of diagnostics and a program of education and correction of children's trust to unfamiliar adults. The given author's diagnostic-learning computer technology (DLCT) "Children's safety" consists of three modules, in each of them the main goals and peculiarities of psychological and pedagogical activity of experts at every stage are revealed.

**Keywords:** safety, children, trust, unfamiliar adults, diagnostic-learning computer technology

# 1. Introduction

The current situation developed in the society dictates the necessity of paying special attention to the question of investigation of a child's personality safety during the contact with unfamiliar adults. Today mass media are overwhelmed with the information about losses, disappearances, kidnapped with different goals children of this age category, sexual violence, children's slavery, prostitution, etc. In accordance with the statistics in all cases of sexual harassments of children approximately in 25% of cases such actions are committed by unfamiliar people, in 40% of cases – by familiar ones. The average age of girls who become the victims of sexual harassment is 8-9 years; the average age of boys is 7-10 years. In most cases the children who became victims of criminals on their own free will under the pretext which was important for them, followed the criminals without any suspects of their true aims. That is why the loss of children happens very frequently because of high trustfulness and readiness to follow an adult, but not as a result of initially organized and violent kidnapping.

By considering the problem of securing the safety of personality of a preschool and primary school-aged children, it is necessary to state a number of aspects of children's trust to unfamiliar adults:

- relationships between children and unfamiliar adults when nearby there are no parents, teachers, neighbors or another well-known people;
- interaction with familiar adults, for example, parents' friends, neighbors, etc. when there are no close people.

In the first case the problem of child's safety becomes actual, when a child doesn't understand the meaning of the situation and is ready to follow the unfamiliar adults willingly. In this situation the child's safety is determined by a child's trust level and relation to the unfamiliar person in general.

The second case reflects those frequent examples when children become the objects of sexual harassments from the direction of familiar people. It is necessary to mention that formation of absolute distrust to all unfamiliar and

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little known people can negatively influence the social and psychological development of a child. In its turn the development of an optimal trust level will promote the securing of child's safety and his or her personal growth.

The child's manifestation of trust, connected with feeling of safety and security greatly depends on presence of anxiety and fear. The reasons of these phenomena lie in the following things: strong external stressful situations, inner-personal conflicts, deprivation of social and interpersonal needs in particular.

The feeling of instability and insecurity, inability to consider communication situation conditions, absence of proper internal criteria of evaluation accuracy or inaccuracy of actions, memorization of mainly negative events leads to accumulation of negative emotional experience. Such experience is constantly increasing and finds its expression in a relatively stable feeling of anxiety, which influences the forming of primary image of an unfamiliar person in a situation unusual for a child. The stronger the anxiety and fears are expressed, the more negative connotation has the image of another person.

Children's shyness plays an essential role in a demonstration of distrust towards people. A shy child has a high self-esteem, considers himself the best but at the same time doubts about positive attitude of people towards him, especially of unfamiliar ones. A child simultaneously has a desire and a fear to draw attention to him. This feature is brightly demonstrated in a situation when a child meets an adult for the first time at the beginning of any common activity. The diffidence of a shy child in his value to people blocks his developing motivation sphere and doesn't allow him to satisfy his communicative needs.

It is necessary to mark out the psychological aspects of children's trust to different people (familiar and unfamiliar ones). The children's trust to well-known people is demonstrated first of all by their readiness to tell important information about themselves and their behavior. It can be specifically manifested in a desire and a real readiness to share his favorite toys, secrets, personal achievements and success and also the actions. The motives of perception of the unfamiliar adults as pleasant and kind are based on external attractiveness of adults and child's self-profit. The people's kindness is also estimated from the point of view of some norm and social comparison. Unpleasant and unkind people are associated by children with people who carry a threat and possibility of making harm for them. The child's perception of unfamiliar adults is to a certain extent connected with a process of correlation their images with the images of the child's close people, first of all with parents.

In our opinion the problem of children's safety during the contact with an unfamiliar adult will be effectively solved if children have an optimal trust level to unfamiliar people which stands between the absolute distrust and the implicit trust to them.

### 2. Methodology

The systematic approach and its principles are the scientific-methodological basis of investigation. Logical-categorical and comparative analysis, content analysis, design method, expert evaluation method, polling method and experimental method are the main methods used. In this work the main approaches of providing child's safety through understanding the trust phenomenon and its content features are examined.

The nature of trust cannot be revealed within a framework of only one scientific field. The fundamental essence of trust phenomenon can be understood only in a wide ontological context. Conditionally four investigation approaches can be stated: trust as a condition of personal development, trust as a basic personal feature, trust as a component of interpersonal interaction and trust in case of risk. Trust as a condition of personal development is examined from the point of view of philosophic anthropology and humanistic psychology. One of its main statements lie in the fact that every person has a innate need to become a "fully functioning", self-actualizing personality and has a potential self-knowledge and self-constructing capability, finding his place in life.

The second approach to understanding the trust level is typical first of all for the psychoanalytical field of psychology. Feeling of deep (base) trust as a fundamental psychological supposition of the whole life, trust as a social phenomenon forms on the basis of the first year of life experience and then transforms into the aim defining a child's attitude towards him and world.

The investigation of interpersonal interrelation within a framework of behaviorism rests upon the "exchange theory" and such key terms as "wins", "losses", "rewards" and "punishments", "exchange" and "satisfaction". The interaction will proceed and develop if the wins of every person excels the losses.

The correlation of trust and risk is analyzed in two aspects. They are "trust in risk" and "trust as a risk".

Confidential communication is determined on the one hand by the importance of material which an interlocutor tells about himself and on the other hand by feeling of trust to the partner. In the research a conception of personal confidential relationships can be of some interest. From this point of view trust is a double-pole

phenomenon connected with the simultaneous orientation of a person into himself and into the world. The basic ideas of this conception are expressed in the following statements: a) trust is a two-dimensional construction (trust to the world and trust to oneself); b) trust as a two-dimensional construction has a high dynamism; c) trust expresses itself as a selective attitude to others and to oneself; d) trust is closely connected with the sense of self-safety; e) trust to the world and to oneself is a mechanism which integrates the external conditions and internal capabilities of a human vital activity; f) trust is a condition and a result of interaction between a person and world and a person with himself.

The carried out analysis of scientific literature on the subject revealed an active development of different approaches of investigation of trust phenomenon both in Russian and foreign psychology. However the problem of forming the children's optimal trust level to unfamiliar and little-known people is still poorly investigated. This question plays an important role in the safety of a child who is beyond the control of adult relatives and educators.

#### 3. Results

A complex correctional-developing work of experts from educational institutions (educational psychologists, educators, primary school teachers, social educators and methodologists) will promote to form the optimal trust level of preschool and primary school-aged children towards unfamiliar adults. The effectiveness of the experts' activity will grow in case the children's parents take part in this process as the immediate assemblers of effective interpersonal communications in order to develop a confidential interaction between children and parents. Not always children can by themselves define the risk of danger in different situations, that is why it is the educators and parents who must teach a child the rules of safe behavior, right reaction to the adults' requests.

To solve a problem of children's trust to unfamiliar adults we have developed and approved diagnostic-learning computer technology (DLCT) "Children's safety" which consists of three modules.

The first diagnostic module consists of 2 techniques: 1) "The technique of learning trust of preschool children to unfamiliar adults", 2) "The techniques of learning trust of primary school-aged children" which allows to estimate the children's trust level to unfamiliar adults. The diagnostic module contains videotests to estimate the children's attitude and trust to unfamiliar adults for two age categories of children (5-6 and 7-9 years). The motivation material of the techniques and videotests contains 11 pictures and 11 videos in which the typical situations of short interactions of a child with unfamiliar adults in the street are presented. The module consists of two parallel forms meant for boys and girls separately. Thus, if the work is held with boys, the exercises where the boys are depicted are used, so the boys associate themselves with the depicted ones. So the whole package of the motivation material contains 22 pictures and 22 videos. The variation of the concrete elements of situation of interaction between a child and an adult allows to establish the role of some factors of interaction and a child's trust expression.

The diagnostic situation is indefinite for a child because it's hardly represented in his social experience; there are no familiar people in it, who can help if it's necessary. Consequently the child's anxiety (maybe fear) becomes actual, which can become stronger because of parents' instructions not to communicate with unfamiliar people. That is why in such investigational situation the children express distrust to adults, practically as they do in the real conditions.

The diagnostic module DLCT "Children's safety" allow to solve a wide range of goals:

- to define the children's trust level to unfamiliar adults;
- to study the children's expectations of particular actions from the direction of adults towards them;
- to reveal the content of children's response actions towards the unfamiliar adults' actions;
- to define the children's emotional and estimative attitude towards unfamiliar adults;
- to study the children's identification of unfamiliar adults with parents and other close people;
- to establish the role of some factors of the interaction between a child and an adult when a child expresses trust;
- to estimate the parents' educational influence on the child's trust expression to unfamiliar adults.

The given goals can be solved both separately and together according to the diagnostic aims. The diagnostic material of the first module of DLCT "Children's safety" gives the opportunity to reveal the individual psychological features of children both in an individual and a group forms. The given diagnostic toolset can be used by psychologists, educators from children educational institutions.

The second correctional-developing module includes the author's program of forming and developing the skills of the adequate behavior of preschool and primary school-aged children during the contact with unfamiliar people in the street and at home ("My behavior at meeting with a stranger"). The program contains animations,

videos, presentations for children with text and sound recording. Classes according to the program provide the optimal interaction between children and unfamiliar adults and their safety.

The main goal of this program is forming and developing the skills of the right behavior of preschool and primary school-aged children during the meeting with unfamiliar people in the street and at home. The work according this program aims to implement the following goals:

- to tell and explain the preschool and primary school-aged children that the appearance of a stranger can be deceptive, and the stranger's pleasant appearance does not always coincide with his intensions towards the child;
- to tell the children about the possible dangerous situations which can take place during the communication with strangers;
- to teach the children the rules of the right behavior at a meeting with unfamiliar people in the street and at home, to promote the conscious perception of these rules;
- to develop the caution, attentiveness, circumspection during the contacts with strangers;
- to form and develop the skills of an adequate interaction with strangers; to form and develop the children's social and personal competence;
- to form the knowledge and skills of behavior in the dangerous situations during the communication with unfamiliar people.

The classes according to this program are held with the use of different so called active methods of working: the work in small groups, work in pairs, training exercises, testing, problem-and-game situations, collective discussions, mutual group evaluation method, "brainstorming" etc. Each class involves reading or performing the thematic fairy-tales and their analysis, solving the puzzles, thematic poetry, a plenty of visual materials. All classes are held in the form of a game according to the children's age.

The realization of this program is carried out within three stages: the preliminary diagnostics, the main unit of 7 classes, the final (repeated) diagnostics.

The diagnostic inspection both before working according to the program and after its ending can be held with the help of the toolset of the first DLCT module "Children's safety". The children's diagnostics is organized and held individually. The results of the diagnostics allow not only to generally define the level and content of children's trust to unfamiliar adults, but also to reveal children with a very high or very low trust level. It should be noted that both the utter distrust and the very high level of trust can be an indicator of the abnormality in mental development, inadequate adoption of social connections system or extreme unfavorable family relationships. In such cases the additional individual classes according to the "Children's safety" program held under the control of the educational psychologist are recommended.

The main unit of program contains 7 classes, each of an hour's or an hour and a half's length (depending on the age and individual potential and characteristics of children) with obligatory breaks in the form of the P.T. break. The frequency of meetings – once per week. Holding time of the complete cycle – 2 months. Classes are advisable to be held in a room, where you could rather quickly organize free space – rearrange chairs and tables, make room for outdoor psychological games. The room should be equipped with technical means (television set and DVD or computer), because during some classes it is carried out viewing of videos on program's themes.

Each class is dedicated to a certain aspect of children's interaction with unfamiliar people and enables to solve a range of certain tasks. Thus, at the first class children examine and analyze different types of appearance and features of unfamiliar people. They learn also, that pleasant appearance of unfamiliar person is not always corresponds with his good and pure intentions towards a child.

At the second class children together with psychologist (teacher) single out, examine and analyze the situations that can arise during children's communication with unfamiliar people outdoors and at home. Besides, children are learned how to behave properly in typical dangerous situations of getting in touch with strangers.

At the third class, dedicated to rules of behavior in extreme situations on meeting an unfamiliar person, children learn about possible violent acts of unfamiliar adults, get acquainted with rules of behavior in extremely dangerous situations on meeting unfamiliar people. This class is also aimed at the development of caution, resoluteness of children in the situation of violent behavior of strangers.

At the forth class children consider situations of possible contact of a stranger with a child at home. Children are trained in rules of behavior in the situations when the stranger has intentions to get into the house or the apartment where there is a child.

As statistics shows, danger to the child can proceed not only from the stranger adult, but also from elder children. Therefore in the course of the fifth class children consider and analyze peculiarities of communication and

friendship with children of different age from 5 to 14 - 15 years old. Besides, at this class are considered some aspects of friendship with adults which were unfamiliar to the child, but subsequently offered it friendship (for example, the stranger comes to the yard for a long time and tries to get acquainted and make friends with the child, or the stranger tries to get acquainted and make friends with the child over the Internet).

The last two classes are concluding which allow to check and consolidate the gained knowledge, and also to estimate efficiency of the given classes. At these classes children develop the general rules of safe behavior with strangers, and the psychologist (teacher) achieves conscious understanding and adoption of these rules.

In general all classes are aimed at the development of communicative skills, observation and attentiveness when communicating with strangers, formation of skills of cautious behavior upon contacts with strangers, formation of self-confidence and confidence in one's own opportunities.

As it was mentioned above, effectiveness of the correctional developing work with children on the Children Safety program increases in situations of effective interaction between children and parents. As parents' understanding of the child, communication with it based on acceptance and approval, a sensitivity to the child, relations with it without assessments are those conditions which existence will promote formation of confidential interaction between children and parents by which the child will be able to say openly about the troubles, alarms, doubts, difficulties. It will help to define as far as the child is able to be guided in various situations whether is ready to stand up for itself. In this regard full trust of the child to the parents will promote the effective solution of children safety issue in the situation of communication with unfamiliar adults. For the solution of this purpose in the third module DOKT "Safety of Children" the training program for parents "My child is: trust and safety" is presented. It allows to develop skills of establishment and maintenance of cooperative and confidential relations in the system of interaction "a parent-a child" (Захарченко & Кулинцева, 2011).

The program allows to solve the following tasks:

- to improve parents' understanding of their own child, peculiarities and regularities of his development;
- to promote development of empathic ability, understanding of feelings, states and interests of the child;
- to develop skills of adequate and equal communication based on acceptance and approval;
- to eliminate maladaptive forms of behavior and to train in adequate ways of reaction in problem and stressful situations.

The program of formation and development of skills of effective interaction between children and parents "My child: trust and safety" includes 7 classes for 2-2,5 hours each time and consists of sequentially built stages: team building; self-knowledge; self-control.

Classes on the program enable parents to gain lasting skill of effective communication, to learn effective interaction with children in different ways. Tasks and games for parents are models of life situations and each participant has an opportunity to carry out communication in the most acceptable way.

In general all classes are aimed at the development of communicative skills, observation and attentiveness when communicating with a child, formation of the confidential relations when interacting with the child, and also to informing about the basic principles of the child safety in the situation of communication with unfamiliar adults.

At the end of the program "My child: trust and safety" is carried out the class with joint participation of children and parents, which purpose is identification of problem situations of interaction between parents and children, creation of the psychological atmosphere of interaction and cooperation. After the class it is necessary to discuss with parents impression of the given class. The used forms of interaction between parents and their own child, the arising relations between children and parents can be the subject of discussion. Parents also speak about manifestations of the child in group, unexpected for them.

Efficiency of participation in the program in many ways depends on the general parents' group work set, on their readiness and ability to listen to various viewpoints of people, to take experience from it. It is important that in the course of such work participants of group got an opportunity to solve the arising problems independently. Therefore a presenter (psychologist-trainer) should avoid desire to offer parents ready versions of the solution of problem situations of the interaction between children and parents. Orientation of parents toward advices and recommendations doesn't promote achievement of the program's purpose, it blocks activity and independent search, which are necessary for successful work.

#### 4. Discussions

How to teach children optimum interaction with unfamiliar adults to create an optimum trust level to unfamiliar people and virtual strangers, thereby ensuring their full safety? That is the question which reflects one of the most important challenges of modern psychological science. To solve the problem of formation of an optimum

trust level at children of five – nine years to adults including strangers, we will consider the conceptual model of the trust phenomenon.

Trust represents such mental state, by virtue of that a person relies on any opinion that he treats as an authoritative, as a result of which he refuses from independent investigation of an issue (Глушко, 2010).

It should be pointed out that the phenomenon of trust is multidimensional and reflects different sides of social interaction. In researches there three types of trust are distinguished: impersonal (structural), dispositional and personal (interpersonal) trust. If it is a matter of individual's confidential attitude towards specific people, the role of information and expectations is especially great. In English-language literature for the description of this behavioural aspect is used the term "special personal trust" ("particularized trust") as trust expressed by the individual, first of all, to the internal circle, to the narrow group of people including family members and relatives. Undoubted is the fact that such basic trust is formed initially during the period of childhood (Дорофеев, 1999).

The analysis of the previous studies of the problem of children's trust towards adults allows to note the absence of comprehensive psychological-pedagogical programs of development of skills of adequate behavior in the communicative situation with unfamiliar adults, therefore activity of the specialists of children's educational institutions comes to pedagogical conversations with children.

What is the parents' role in formation of an optimum trust level towards adults? Which parents' skills promote personal development of a child, formation of child's feeling of safety?

Trust of children to a considerable degree depends on their conformality (correspondence between behavior and expectations of others), suggestibility. "Adults act for the child as authoritative people who are examples for imitation and interpersonal estimation. Therefore a child often non-critically perceives opinions and influences of an adult" (Эмерсон, 1992).

Parents' understanding of the child, interaction with it on the basis of acceptance and approval, sensitivity to the child, relations with it without assessments are those conditions which existence will promote formation of confidential interaction between children and parents, by which the child will be able to say openly about the troubles, alarms, doubts, difficulties, that will help to define as far as the child is able to be guided in various situations, whether it is ready to stand for itself. In this connection full trust of the child to the parents will promote the effective solution of the children safety question in the situation of communication with unfamiliar adults (Захарченко & Ситдикова, 2012).

Children are not always able to identify all measure of danger in different situations on one's own, therefore adults (parents) should teach a child behavioral safety (Захарченко & Кулинцева, 2011).

Establishment and maintenance of cooperative and confident relations in the system of interaction "a parent - a child" – skills which promote development of child's identity, formation its self-sufficiency, an optimum trust level to unfamiliar and virtual strangers adults, feeling of safety, either in the presence of the parent or not. Participation of parents in the training program "My child. Trust and safety" promotes development of these skills in adults (Захарченко & Ситдикова, 2012).

# 5. Conclusions

Thus, safety problem of preschool and primary school-aged children is undoubtedly the most actual and it demands to search effective ways of its decision.

It seems advisable to us to consider child's identity safety in the situation of contact with an unfamiliar person or virtual stranger through understanding of the phenomenon of trust, its substantial characteristics and conditions which identify trust of preschool and primary school-aged children towards unfamiliar adults. Manifestation of child's trust is connected with feeling of safety, security and depends on existence or absence of alarm, fear. The psychological reasons of children's trust to unfamiliar adults are readiness to communicate significant information about themselves and their behavior, to share toys, progress, etc.

Child's perception of unfamiliar adults is more often connected with the process of correlation of their image with the image of close people, for example, parents (Захарченко & Ситдикова, 2012). The fact that it is necessary to form child's adequate trust level to unfamiliar adults is of no small importance, as absolute mistrust can negatively affect personal development of the child in general. Complex diagnostic and correctional developing work of the specialists of children's educational institutions will promote formation of an optimum trust level of preschool and primary school-aged children to unfamiliar adults. This work will be more effective if parents of preschool children and primary school-aged children are directly involved in it.

To solve the problem of formation of an adequate trust level of preschool and primary school-aged children to unfamiliar people and virtual strangers we developed the diagnostic and training computer technology "Safety of Children" which consists of three modules:

- 1) diagnostic ("A technique of trust studying of preschool children to unfamiliar adults" (Сидоренков, 2012), "A technique of trust studying of primary school-aged children" (Захарченко & Ситдикова, 2012);
- 2) the correctional developing program for children "My behavior on meeting a stranger" (Захарченко & Ситдикова, 2012); 3) the training program for parents "My child: trust and safety" (Захарченко & Кулинцева, 2011). In addition to the offered programs is obligatory educational work with teaching staff in the system of preschool and general education institutions for the purpose of the comprehensive solution of the actual problem connected with safety of children in the situation of communication with unfamiliar adults.

Thus children cannot always identify a security measure while communicating with unfamiliar people and virtual strangers, therefore close adults (parents, teachers, psychologists and other specialists of children's educational institutions have to teach a child to the optimum rules of safe behavior.

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