



Psychosomatic illnesses; sleep and eating disorders;
anxiety and panic attacks;
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Presentation:

A child feels ill, he/she has a headache, a stomach-ache, or just a pain that he/she cannot explain. The paediatrician does not find any organic problem that can justify this pain, but the body still suffers. Fears, anguish, anger, disappointments often do not find words and it is the body that expresses these problems in various ways; the body speaks through the symptoms of these emotions that do not manage to be understood and metabolised properly.

This volume has a first chapter that shines a light on the complex relations between body and mind, it proposes a psychoanalytical perspective on psychosomatic illnesses and examines the possible methods, for doctors and psychotherapists to help adults understand their own children. In the second chapter the authors narrate their respective experiences as paediatrician and child psychotherapist; they compare their own different points of view on the more common illnesses that are present amongst children and adolescents during their development.

Paediatricians often observe a symptom or physical disorder that in reality hides another form of misunderstood problem. This type of physical upsets starts very early and can accompany the entire growth period in an unpredictable manner: from the 'small colitis' of the infant, to enuresis, to encopresis, to a whole myriad of frequent upsets of the baby, we pass on to examine the various forms of eating disorders, recurring abdominal pain, headaches, asthma episodes, that are more typical of the school child and adolescent.

The collaboration between the paediatrician and the child psychotherapist, allows a possibility of finding out the personal and original problem that has paved the way to the illness, thus helping the parents understand the meaning of their child's upsets.

In the life of the small child, sleep, nutrition and weaning are all strictly related aspects: sleep and digestion disturbances are very frequent and often present themselves together. Even very small children are extremely sensitive and receptive to what happens inside them, and in the surrounding environment. The third chapter suggests to parents that there is a new perspective for reflection on sleeping disorders of some children and on their request to sleep in bed with them.

The author explores possible bonds between the methods of interaction between parents and children and the rhythm of sleep within families, with the aim of helping adults interpret, understand, and favour the necessary process of separation and individuation within the child, adapting to his/her own needs. The fourth chapter confronts the important issue of fears and anxieties of the child and adolescent. In the course of development such emotions represent themselves every time the child tries out his/her new physical, emotional, and cognitive skills, in order to confront the new challenges of reality.



It is possible that children and adolescents start to avoid those situations which potentially arouse their own special state of anxiety: they might develop thoughts and repetitive forms of behaviour in an attempt to contrast that unpleasant emotion, imposing strong restrictions to their own social life, and to their desire to learn and understand things. All of us believe that it is impossible for a child to suffer from depression. Parents often ask themselves whether babies feel interior pain, if their emotional and psychic life is already present in their very early life, and how the babies can show pain beyond just crying out loud.

According to the author of the fifth chapter, it is difficult for us to abandon the idea that infancy is an innocent age, without difficult thoughts, and all in all a happy age. It is therefore difficult to think that children suffering from 'depression' really exist, not those hit by mourning or massive stories of loss, but those inhabited by an unexplicable form of sadness that is born inside them which makes them feel deeply unhappy. The authors of the last chapter examine atopic dermatitis and alopecia amongst other skin illnesses that often hit children.

In this chapter, as in the others, the authors demonstrate how it is possible, by holding an intimate relationship between a psychoanalyst, a small patient and the parents, to find meanings and put into words those emotions that were at first unthinkable; intervening early can help to substitute the symptom and help everyone open up to life.

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