

# How do we stop the negative spiral of development of young people with antisocial and aggressive behaviour problems?

*.....and why is it so important?*

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# Who am I?

- Trine Gaardsoee
- Master of Science in **Psychology**
- Been working in the field of treatment for children, young people, and families since 2008.
- Since 2013: Chief consultant in **The Method Center** in Aarhus, Denmark.
- The Method Centers primary target and focus is on translating and implementing new science and knowledge into practice in a close collaboration with local Municipals and professionals in Denmark.
- My primary role and responsibility: Professional project management and quality assurance, facilitating education and training, providing consultation and supervision etc.
- My methodological approach is based on a holistic, structured, systematic, goaloriented, problemsolving practice.
- I am driven by working with prevention of negative developmental paths and empowerment of vulnerable children, youth and families.



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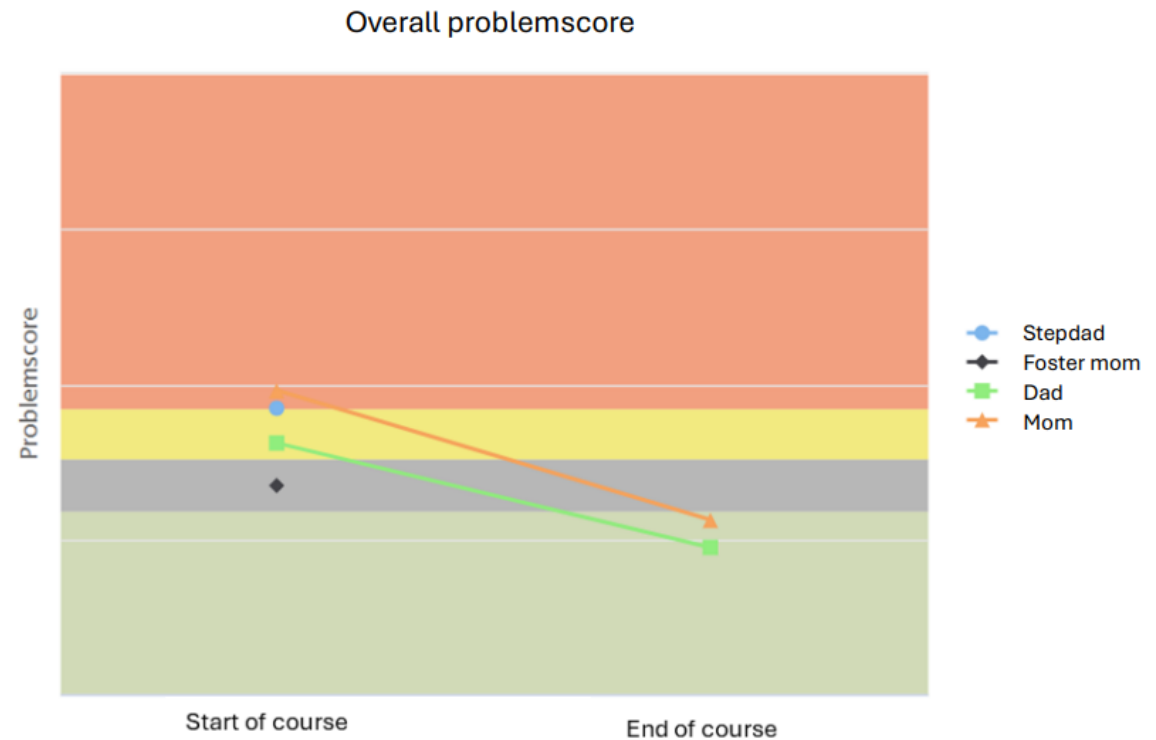
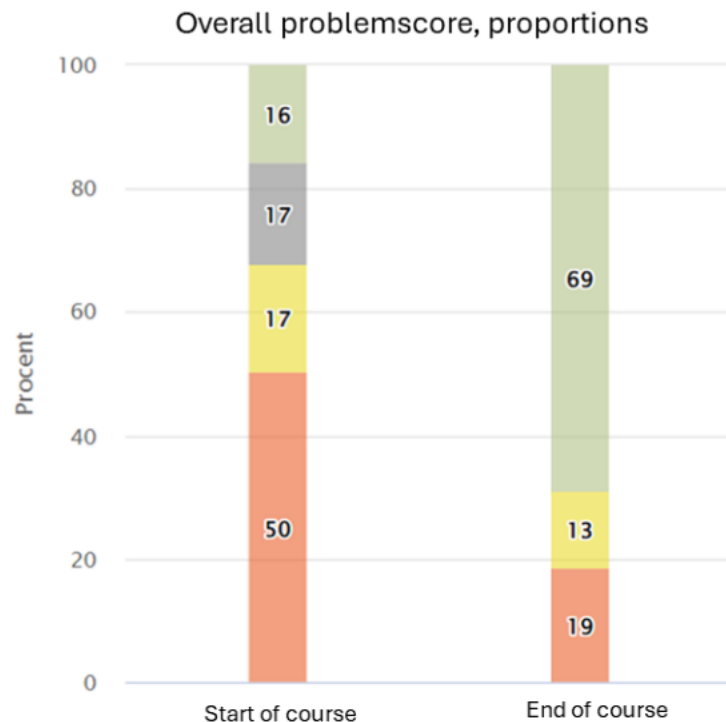
# The Danish Program - Family & Network as a case



- Program started in 2019
- Danish-developed program for vulnerable and at-risk children/young people and their families
- Based on decades of experience working with very troubled target groups, drawing on both international and local programs.
- Broad target group: children and young people aged 6 – 18 (with both externalizing and internalizing issues)
- Currently, there are 8 teams in Denmark
- Team-based approach (4 therapists and a clinical supervisor)
- Each therapist has an average of 4–5 cases at a time
- Short-term intervention program (6–8 months)
- High level of quality assurance in the program (weekly case consultations/supervision on all cases, weekly team supervision, consultations with a consultant at The Method Center, focus on frequent skill development, professional development, etc.).
- Method – systematic and structured problem-solving model, holistic and systemic approach, goal-oriented.

# Target Group and results – Family & Network

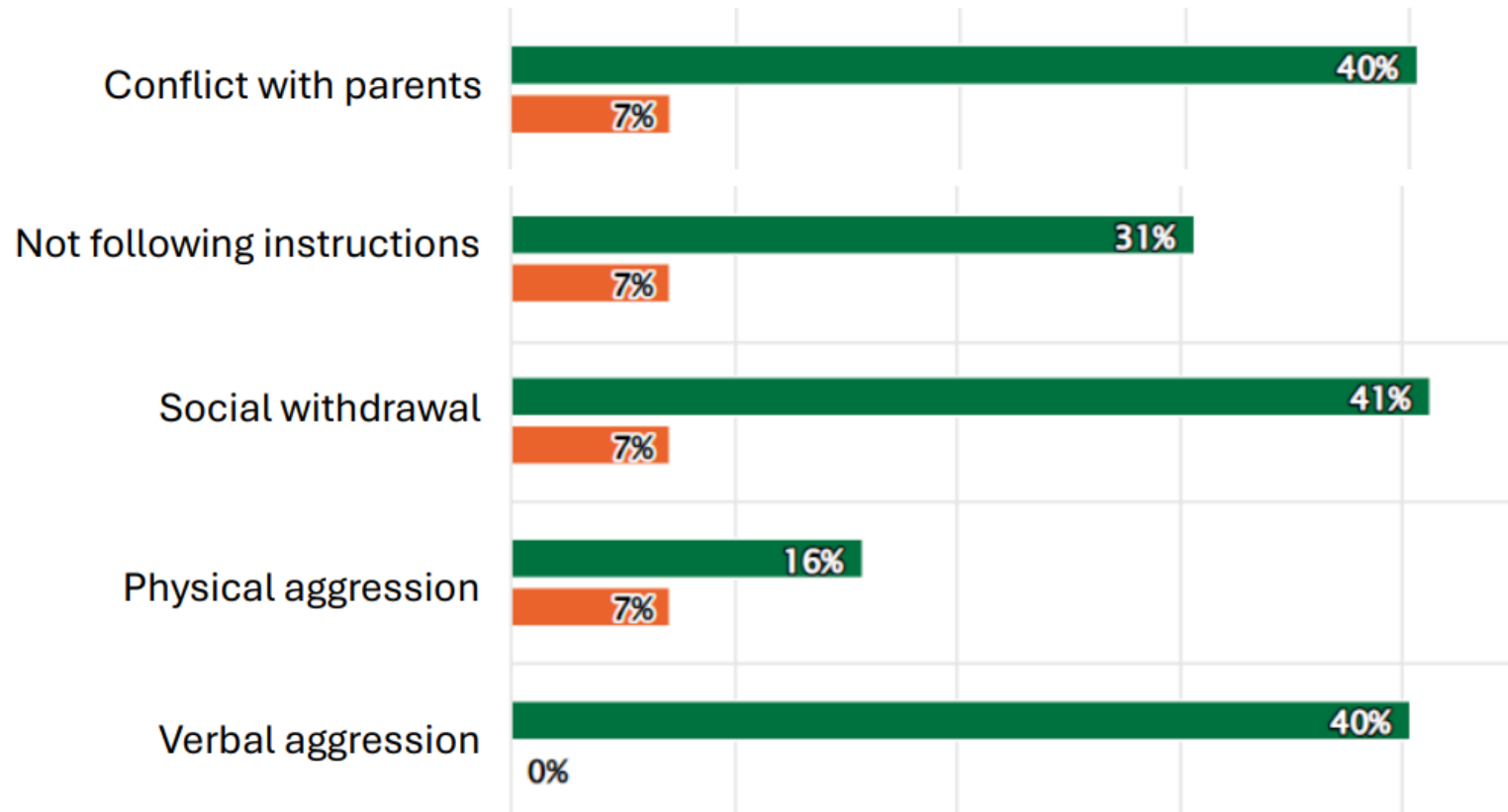
- We work with the children who make up **the 5% most vulnerable children and young people in Denmark** (those with the highest level of non-well-being- and behavioral issues). We help most of them transition to a normal level of problems – the green zone!



# Target group and results continued

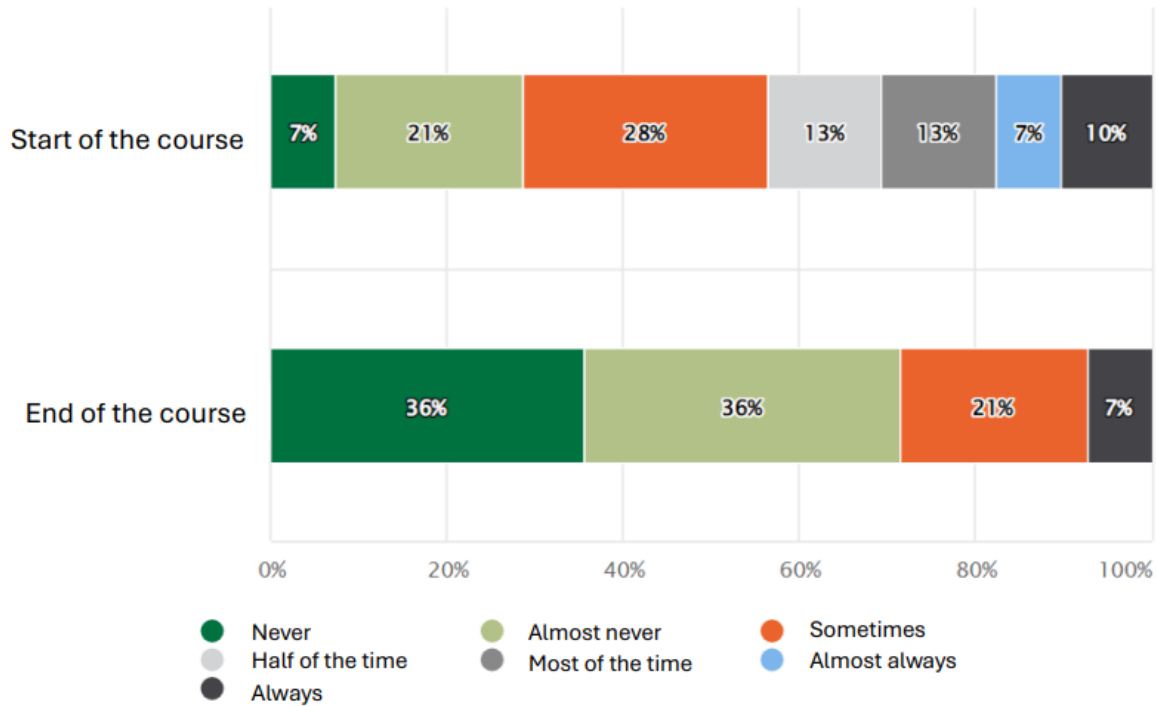
Approximately 50% of the enrolled children and young people have diagnoses – (2/3 of these 50% have an ADHD/ADD diagnosis).

Additionally:



# Target group and results - School

How often is the child/young person absent for their school or employment program?



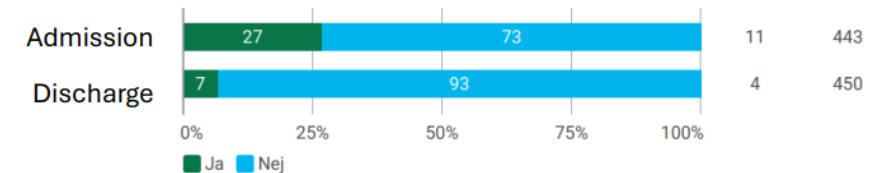
Has the child/young person, to your knowledge, had more than 10% absenteeism in the past 4 weeks (excluding holidays)?



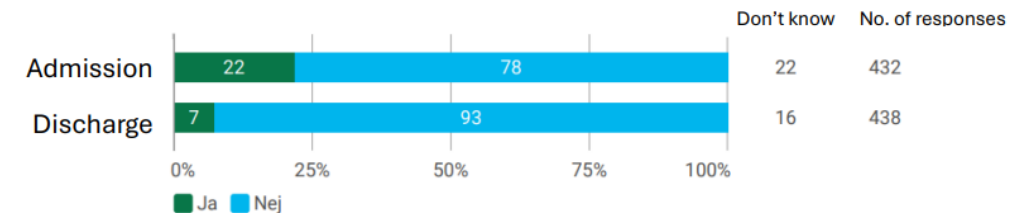
# ...And a few additional results

- The proportion of children and young people with an active leisure life doubles during the treatment.
- The proportion involved in active crime or abuse is reduced by 80%.
- 9 out of 10 families are very satisfied with the program.
- Over 80% of families report that 6 and 12 months after completing the Family & NetWork program, they are still able to use the things they have learned during the program.

## Crime



## Abuse



# What works when it comes to treatment programs for young people with antisocial and aggressive behavior problems and their families and environment?

- Since it is difficult to predict exactly which young people will develop serious behavioral problems – antisocial behavior and crime → there is a need for broad, holistic, and early intervention when there is a high degree of behavioral problems and poor well-being!
- The younger the child, the more focus should be on the adults and the environment around the child, and the less focus should be on the child!
- Rule of thumb – the more negative factors we influence and work on in the young person's life simultaneously, the better the outcome, and the fewer factors, the worse the prognosis...
- The focus should be on improving the young person's life in school/employment, with friends, and in leisure activities, making it function better and more prosocial – huge protective factors for the majority – GREEN time!!
- In interventions with young people, we should primarily reduce and remove risk factors and strengthen protective factors!



**And what are the most significant risk and protective factors in relation to aggression and antisocial behavior according to science...**



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# Risk factors – antisocial and aggressive behavior

## Individual:

- Being a boy
- Difficult temperament and early externalizing behavior
- Early initiation of alcohol/substance use
- Addiction
- Cognitive problems or learning difficulties
- Insufficient social skills

## Family:

- Insufficient parenting skills or ineffective parenting style (lack of warmth and involvement in the relationship)
- Lack of monitoring of the young person (who, what, when?)
- Family conflicts, abuse, and neglect
- Cooperation problems/conflict between mother and father
- Parents engaging in crime, violence, and substance abuse.
- Bad socioeconomic conditions in the household (unemployment, poverty, etc.)
- Parents with individual difficulties (mental and/or physical)
- Lack of social networks/support

# Risk factors – antisocial and aggressive behavior

## **School/Employment:**

- Lack of participation in school. Attendance issues (truancy)
- Changing school frequently
- Lack of academic and social success in school

## **Friends:**

- Conflict with peers
- Friends with antisocial behavior
- Lack of prosocial friends
- Bullying/social exclusion

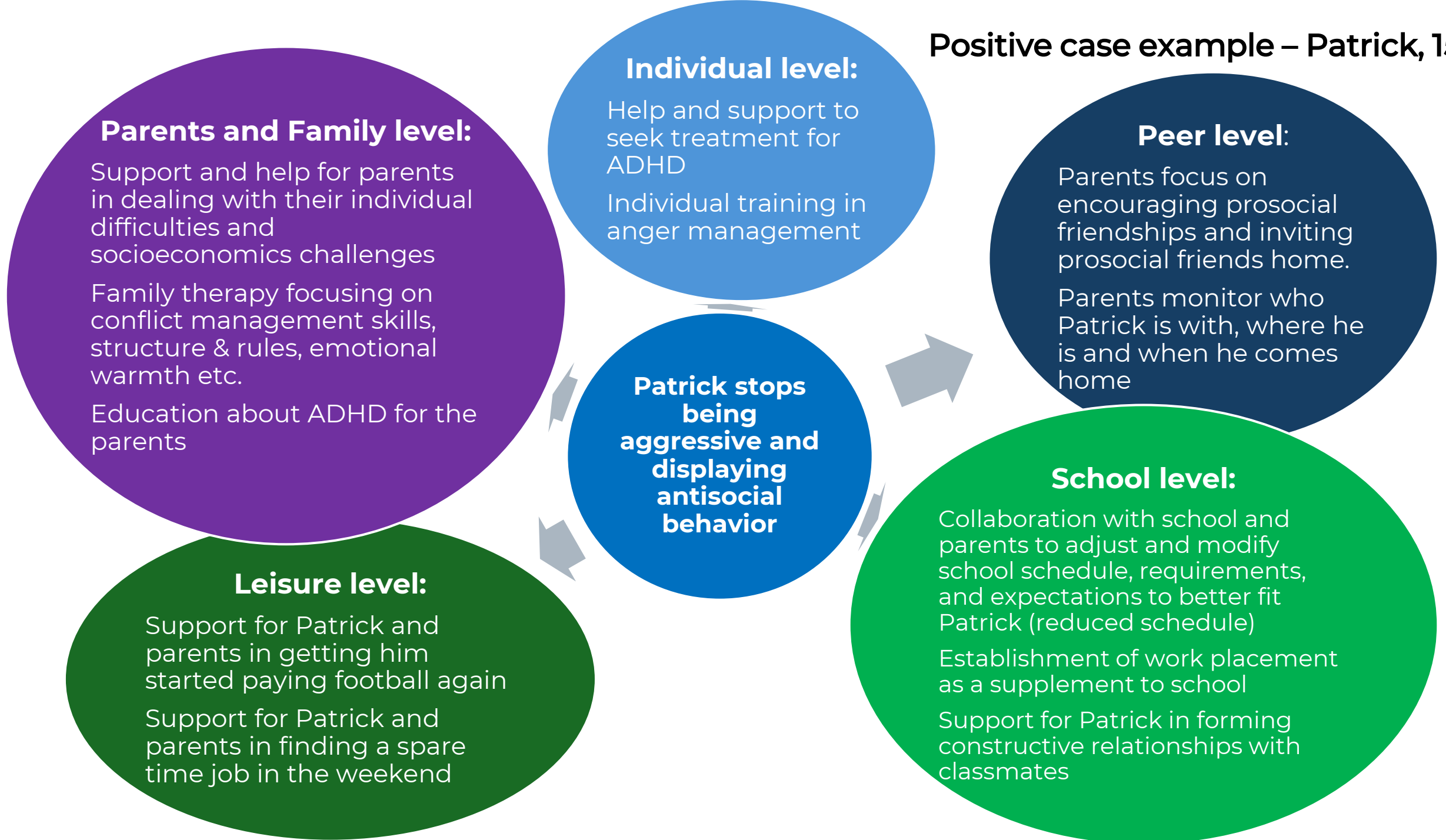
## **Leisure**

- No leisure activities/job
- Engages in antisocial and unsupervised environments

## **Troubled local environment:**

- High level of uncertainty
- Crime
- Easy access to substances
- High unemployment rate
- High exposure to negative role models, etc.

## Positive case example – Patrick, 15



# Implications – general principles...

- We must involve parents and the network when working with young people with aggressive and antisocial behavior – this is based on knowledge of risk and protective factors and what creates long-term and sustainable results.
- What remains and continues of positive factors and changes **after** our treatment (interventions) is what really counts in the young person's life – not us as professionals. We are just visitors in the young persons life!
- It is not easy to work professionally with troubled young people and their families – it is difficult and complex!
- Therefore - the best 'formular' is to work within the framework of (interdisciplinary) teams, to engage in systematic reflection and supervision at case level with colleagues/leaders. This serves as protection against burnout, losing focus - being infected by "chaos," getting tunnel vision on only one problem and one solution.

# Implications – general and universal treatment engagement strategies

- "Engagement is treatment" – If the young person and their family are not engaged, there is no treatment/intervention.
- **What creates engagement?**
  - Experiencing being seen, heard, and understood. Use a lot of validation to show that you understand how difficult and vulnerable their situation is and that you are not judging them or thinking negatively about them. Humans do what they can and have capacity to do rather than what they 'want' to do.
  - The professional must have a primary focus on resources. Humans grow, develop and become motivated from positive expectation and positive feedback - not from punishment, criticism and negative feedback.
  - We have an important job in creating motivation and meaning together with the young person and the parents. The '*What is in it for them*' - perspective in engaging in change and cooperation with you – rather than 'talking sense' and giving lectures to them?
  - Be aware of that the young person's amygdala is probably over-active and super alert (fight, flight, freeze). Therefore – be supportive, warm, humorous, curious, and have a non-judgmental position. Be calm and non aroused....

**Questions?**



# References og Contact

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