

Good afternoon!

First of all, I'd like to start off by thanking the organisers of this event for such a relevant initiative, as well as all of the participants today, and I'd also like to give thanks for this opportunity to be present in this group and interdisciplinary reflection, which is so useful and enriching, for promoting better practices in listening to children and young people. The wide range of situations that arise in our day-to-day, challenge us to understand the experiences of children and young people who are victims of domestic violence - directly or indirectly - as part of a complex reality, with its own details, that arise from individual contexts and the personality traits of every family member, as well as the dynamics of each relationship within this family unit.

Within this context, it's very important to bear in mind that every family is composed of a group of people who feel and think individually and interact with each other, agreeing or differing depending on their affinity and aversions, which is tempered by their respective beliefs and emotions.

When a couple enters a dynamic of rupture and/or violence, the family's foundation is shaken and dependent children are directly affected by the parents' behaviour, especially in situations where they confuse their own feelings, beliefs, emotions and needs with those of their children. Such situations lead to instances in which the parents treat their children as nothing more than an extension of themselves, failing to recognize their children's own individuality and forcing them to take sides - consciously or unconsciously, voluntarily or involuntarily -, so they can serve as a weapon of aggression within the broken marriage. During this process, they forget that these children and young people continue to be INDIVIDUALS with their own feelings, beliefs, emotions, needs and desires, which are very often different from those of their parents.

The latest scientific studies published on this have concluded that situations of marital conflict negatively impact the couple's involved parenting skills, leading to situations of neglect and physical or psychological abuse of their children. They also reveal the great importance of making children visible, of recognising their individuality and of creating a space where they feel that their voice is being heard and respected by those who are making decisions involving them.

This need has already been widely recognised by the national and international legislation, which have consecrated the right to be heard, as a basic human right.

It should be noted, in the meantime, that while it's true that it's important for children and young people to be heard by those who make decisions directly affecting them, it's also true that listening to them could also be a disturbing and emotionally stressful experience.

Lots of the time, feelings of blame, fear and restlessness are associated with the concepts of love and loyalty that children and young people have. On the other hand, recounting situations they experienced at home also implies, in general terms, reliving these situations and falling into an internal conflict, for fear of breaking the ties of love and loyalty with their parents. This need to protect a child or young person's right to be heard, on the one hand, and preventing their revictimisation as much as possible, on the other, is a daily challenge in the judiciary's day-to-day

work, revealing just how crucial it is to work as part of a wider network and for experts in psychology to be present in courts, which is a fact that is being confirmed more and more every day.

Personally-speaking, within the scope of my duties as a Public Prosecutor, I have tried to reconcile the right of children and young people to be heard, with the concept of protective justice. I always listen to them in a space where they feel safe and respected, introducing myself and explaining my duties beforehand, and I only ask the essential questions needed to make a decision later, that will directly affect them, with an open mind and without any judgement about their parents. In my experience thus far, I have seen how children and young people appreciate the opportunity to express their opinion and contribute to clarifying their situation, talking about past and present experiences, whilst also expressing their wishes and desires for the future. I feel that all of the decisions I have made after hearing young people involved in these processes, has allowed me to have a more complete and consistent view of the situation in question and to make more just and appropriate decisions for their respective cases.