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**Anxiety and stress after the pandemic: “The solution? Let's train ourselves to be empathetic. Let's learn to fly like kites, with the headwind” - Dialogue with prof. Salvatore Toti Licata**

*by Giulia Perri*

The pandemic is over, or maybe it's not over. Certainly the sense of fatigue, sadness, melancholy, aggression, the desire for revenge is not finished. During the lockdown, it was said, we will be better than before. It didn't quite go like this: the anxiety, the sadness, the stress of the pandemic, the fear of the disease, the people who have left us, the fear of the future made us feel helpless in the face of what happened and is happening to us today . We found ourselves isolated and, after the lockdowns, many continued to keep "the other" away. They have abandoned friendships and acquaintances. When they "opened the cages", the cases decreased, we looked around thinking that we were finally free again, ready to start a new life, find ourselves and our world again. The economy that was recovering, "come on we can do it". Then the war in Ukraine froze us, the high bills, the high cost of living gave us another "hit", magnifying the sense of uncertainty, the anguish. Anxiety rules and antisocial or aggressive behaviors are the order of the day.

In short, the situation is certainly not the most rosy. It is no longer enough for us to live in a beautiful country, to make us feel better. We talked about this - very delicate - issue with Professor Salvatore Toti Licata and WILL affiliate, sociotherapist, expert in social and psychological dynamics, training processes and systemic coaching, who has been working in psycho-social training since 1988 with support for the needs of people and organizations. He is the owner of Studio SINERGIE. Founding partner of SAM (Soluzioni Aziendali Meneghine) srl, he lived for over ten years in Catanzaro and worked in Isola di Capo Rizzuto, dealing with cyberbullying. We asked him if this sense of fatigue can be considered a disease such as chronic fatigue syndrome or is it the symptom of a more general malaise? And then, what can we do? None of us wants to stay in this precarious and negative state of mind. Let's hear what he replied: «This sense of fatigue is a symptom of a generalized malaise, which affects adolescents, young people and adults, who in theory have more tools to deal with the situation in which we find ourselves living than the adolescent , which is still in the process of forming, growing and looking for an identity. We are facing a New World, the post-pandemic one, in which the sense of reality has jumped, everyone tends to protect themselves in their own bubble of unreality, whether you live alone or with a family. In this reality, chaos seems to reign: in psychology, we call it "entropy", that is, the amount of uncertainty and disorder that exists within a "system".

**Q: Does this explain the sense of social "effort" that has spread?**

A: In part: we feel anxiety, a sense of bewilderment, the few references we had have disappeared, we are afraid, we feel helpless. This mix of sensations and moods often determines the lack of control over oneself and others, conflicts and aggression...

**Q: In fact, we see the increase in gratuitous aggression every day even if it is "fashionable" to talk about kindness, soft skills...**

A: The important thing is to have a renewed awareness of what is happening inside us, not to remove the problem and to cultivate interpersonal relationships...

**Q: This is a very interesting aspect: many people, on the other hand, have put much more than "social distancing" between themselves and others...**

A: Attention to relationships is essential, to break down social distances, at least the unnecessary ones! Of course, we must accept that relationships have changed profoundly and learn, taking advantage of the difficulties posed by this historical moment, to distinguish between the different

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relationships that can involve affections, feelings, love or simple friendships. This is possible, in psychology, through the right "mix" between empathy and entropy, to understand and reorder the relationships between choices and decisions, even setting aside, as far as possible, excessive expectations and investments, from an emotional point of view , on the other.

**Q: Is it making us understand that we can "train" ourselves to be empathic...?**

A: If we want to use a word that has to do with sport, sure! We need to train our ability to listen to each other, so that we can implement empathy. One of the ways is to behave with kindness, according to what was once called "good manners", which prevent thoughts and feelings from coming to the surface, doing unnecessary harm to the other. And then, it may seem trivial but it's not: smiling, always smiling, even when we really don't feel like it. Positive attitude draws positivity and positivity helps us deal with the anger we harbor within us. Little by little we will realize that anger and anxiety hurt us and hurt others and that it is preferable to go further.

**Q: Do you have any practical tips to feel better and start the change?**

A: What I can suggest is based on simple concepts, but difficult to put into practice, because change requires a decision and an initial "effort": it is said that it takes 21 days to change our habits... and it's not always easy. We have to find time for ourselves, choose an activity we like, cultivate our desires and our passions, decide to do it. Deciding already takes us out of the impasse. And then follow what the doctors also tell us: motor activity, eat well, hydrate, rest. It is essential to weave new relationships with others, make a selection among friends (without exaggerating!), do activities that we like, from reading to the cinema, to travel, to walks.

**Q: In a nutshell: live and not survive!**

A: Exactly! And remember that the kite rises against the wind and not against it! Let's follow the headwind, let's fly!

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