

# FRUSTRATION REACTIONS SPECTRUM DURING THE CRISIS OF PUBERTY



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## Abstract

In every sphere of life, whether it is education, academic or personal, adolescents feel lots of obstacles on the way to their goals in life. Sometimes they are able to deal with them rationally but sometimes they deal with them emotionally. If they are incapable of dealing with these obstacles, they become frustrated. To cope with frustration, the adolescents need time to develop their social and emotional skills. This means that they should have flexibility, optimistic thoughts and skills to control impulses. The present study will examine the reactions of adolescents in situations of frustration and the general level of aggressive tendencies, as well as the presence of a link between reactions of frustration and aggressive behavior. During the period of 2018-2020 we have consulted with 212 adolescents and their parents in our practice. Informed agreement for inclusion in the study of the characteristics and dynamics of reactions in situations of frustration was obtained from the parents of 109 adolescents, who were all male - 57 (52.3%) aged 12-14 years and 52 (47.7%) aged 15-17 years. The results showed that the adolescents are focused on their inner world and believe that the world should be what they want it to be. They lack enough experience to judge and accept opinions that differ from their own. They try to hide the uncertainty in their abilities and skills, relying on protective mechanisms.

**Keywords:** frustration, adolescents, aggression, crisis, Positive Psychotherapy

## Introduction

During one's individual development, one goes through different periods. Through each of them one faces the solution of various "psychological tasks", which require a certain resource in order to pass

"successfully". If this happens, the individual resolves the corresponding crisis, "accumulates" new "psychological experience" and moves to a higher level of personal functioning. Adequate role models and new coping strategies are being developed (Boncheva, 2013). In each normative crisis there are: objective

factors, most often changes coming from the environment or physiological processes and a subjective factor - deficit, ways of surviving and resolving the crisis.

Puberty is rightly called a crisis. During this period there are significant changes in the formation of personality, which lead to a radical change in the behavior, interests and attitudes of adolescents.

During the crisis of puberty, one of the most complex and controversial stages of every person's life begins and ends. L.S. Vygotsky (1984) identifies three phases during the crisis of puberty:

- Negative phase (pre-crisis) – Starts around the 10th - 11th year. The value system begins to rearrange themselves, stereotypes are broken. Problems begin in the relationship between parents and children.
- Real crisis - 12 - 14/13 - 15 years. This phase can go through several different ways: from expressed negativism towards all spheres of life, to a smooth transition to mastering new skills. The field of interests and way of thinking expands, new opportunities appear. The adolescent defends his individuality and struggles to separate from his parents.
- Positive phase (post-crisis). It marks the end of the crisis, a rather calm period, characterized by an already-expanded horizon (prognostic thinking), a changed worldview, formed life values and a certain further path of development.

Intense physical and physiological development causes adolescents to look at themselves differently. According to I. Boncheva (2013, p. 102), "while in earlier ages their main task was to adapt to the world outside of them, now the conscious attempt to adapt the world to their increased personal needs begins. The main conflict is the struggle between the relatively low level of psychosocial maturation and the increased need for sexual identity". And if in the beginning the challenges that the adolescents face are the changes that the body undergoes, then the next, much more complex challenge is how to build their social relations in a new way (figures 1, 2, 3, 4).

### Body

Beginning of puberty, the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics, rapid growth and change in the body, sudden changes in mood, accompanied by a feeling of influx of strength and energy to helplessness.

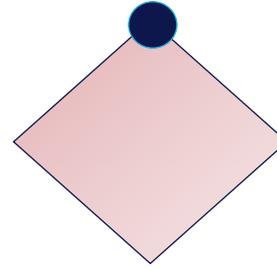


Fig. 1. Body

### Achievement

**Deficiencies:** Loss of interest in previous/old activities, decreased productivity of cognitive functions and reduced performance. Striving to prove their uniqueness by any means, incl. problematic behavior and rejection of norms

**Resources:** Differentiated attitude towards the learning content, expanded volume and selectivity of knowledge, preferences and abilities. Development of volitional qualities: from the basic dynamic - strength, speed and speed of reaction, through qualitative - the ability to withstand greater and longer load - endurance, perseverance, patience, to complex and differentiated volitional qualities - concentration, consistency, concentration and perseverance.

The need for self-determination gives impetus to increased cognitive and creative activity - curiosity, experimenting with different activities, participation in different clubs and schools

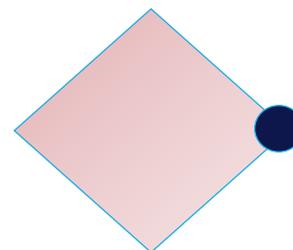


Fig. 2. Achievement

## Contact

**Deficiencies:** Stubbornness, rudeness, disobedience, arbitrariness, devaluation, ignoring and / or sharp opposition to the authority of the adult. Frequent mood swings – from irritability, "explosiveness", aggression and negativism, to tearfulness, indifference, indifference and apathy. The relationship with the adults is strongly conflictual, with an active pursuit of separation, expressed in disregard for norms, contesting rules, rejecting and not respecting restrictions, rebellion against sanctions.

**Resources:** Expansion of communication skills, formation and development of organizational skills, business skills, entrepreneurship, discipline, responsibility, expanding the range of strategies for dealing with conflict situations.

Contrary to the content of contact with adults, the desire for contact with peers develops - the circle of friends is the place to learn new models and practice them. In the group of friends, everyone experiences and shares the same thing. Reflection.

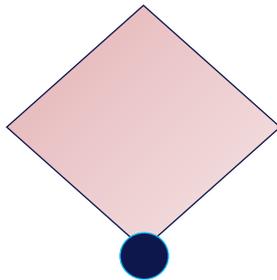


Fig. 3. Contact

## Future / meaning

**Deficiencies:** Feeling a lack of meaning in life, fear of the future, insecurity, helplessness, hopelessness. Strong internal contradictions between desire and possibilities.

**Resources:** Broadening the horizons and enriching and restructuring the system of values - in the field of communication - selective attitude and evaluation of others, and self-esteem.

During the "crisis of puberty", the susceptibility of adolescents to frustration is very strong. Young people are faced with many challenges, on the one hand there is the flourishing of creative, cognitive and intellectual abilities, and logical approaches to solving problem

situations, and on the other hand, the period is characterized by emotional instability, stressful and frustrating situations related to difficulties with psychological growth.

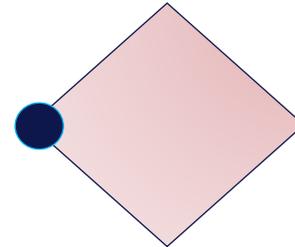


Fig. 4. Future/meaning

The key to growing with minimal emotional damage is the formation of psychological resilience of young people, based on confidence in their own strengths and skills, ability to accept and cope with challenges, flexibility in approaches to solving problems and overcoming difficult situations. In other words, it is a matter of forming tolerance against frustration.

Frustration tolerance is defined as psychological resilience to a frustrator, which is based on the ability to adequately assess the frustrating situation and predict a way out of it (L. S . Aseikina, 2005).

J. Wilde (2012) identifies some contradictory traits of adolescence that influence the formation of frustrating tolerance:

- Young people are focused on their inner world and believe that the world should be what they want it to be.
- They lack enough experience to judge and accept opinions that differ from their own.
- They try to hide the uncertainty in their abilities and skills, relying on protective mechanisms.
- Adolescence is a period of high sensitivity and frequent mood swings.

They show a tendency to quickly orient themselves to how it "should be" and not how it really is.

## Methodology

### 2.1. Participants

During the period of 2018-2020, we consulted with 212 adolescents and their parents in our practice.

Informed agreement for inclusion in the study of the characteristics and dynamics of reactions in situations of frustration was obtained from the parents of 109 adolescents, all male - 57 (52.3%) aged 12-14 years and 52 (47.7%) aged 15-17 years.

Aim of the study: To study the reactions of adolescents in situations of frustration and the general level of aggressive tendencies, as well as the presence of a link between reactions of frustration and aggressive behavior.

## 2.2. Instruments

Primary psychotherapeutic interview – 5-steps model of Method of Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy (Peseschkian H., 2000).

Rosenzweig Picture Frustration test (Rosenzweig S., 1945; Bulgarian standardization K. Мечков, 1979). A projective test, designed to measure characteristic modes of responding to frustration, in which the respondent is presented with 24 cartoon drawings, each depicting one person saying something frustrating to the other, the second person being shown with a blank speech bubble. The respondent's task is to fill in each of the 24 blank speech bubbles with the first response that comes to mind. The score is based on nine factors, derived from combinations of three types of aggression (obstacle-dominance, ego-defense, and need-persistence) and three directions of aggression (extraggression, imaggression, and intraggression).

Aggression questionnaire (Buss and Perry, 1992). The Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BP-AQ) is a 29-item, four-factor instrument that measures physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility.

## Results

During the first psychotherapeutic interview shared information with the parents, the conflict content was found:

- High anxiety (*"Things in contact with my/our son depend on me, I can't handle it - I'm helpless and that's a problem!"*) - in 60.5% of the parents, with a minimal difference in age - 31.2% for parents of young adolescents (12-14 years) and 29.3% for parents of adolescents (15-18 years).

- Disappointment, dissatisfaction, discouragement (*"I/we can't do it; We are supposed to be good parents, but it doesn't work! I don't understand what's going on!"*) is the experiences of 82.5% of parents, more for parents of young adolescents - 47.7 %, for parents of adolescents this is 34.8%.

- Outrage, irritation, accusations (*"He/she is not what we expected!; "He/she behaves childishly and none of our efforts work!"*) showed 63.3% of the parents, respectively 22.1% of those of young adolescents and 41.3% from the parents of the examined adolescents.

- Insult, aggression (*"I/we give him / her everything that a good parent is supposed to and we expect to get good behavior !;" He/she tries to overcome with his/her behavior, but it will not happen - with punishments and restrictions we will "cure" his/her stubbornness!"*) is observed in 38.6% of parents - less in young adolescents (15, 5%) and about 8% more in parents of older adolescents (22.9%).

On the opposite side are the experiences of young adolescents and older adolescents. The content of the problems they share could be conditionally divided into several main groups: Relationships with adults; peer relationships; problems at school; dissatisfaction with oneself and dissatisfaction with others (table 1):

Table 1.

Problems through the perspective of young adolescents and adolescents.

Problems	Age group 12 – 14-years old	Age group 15 – 17-years old
Relationships with adults (parents and significant adults)	Conflicts with parents: "They forbid me to go out!"; "They don't like my friends and we have fights over them!"; "They threaten me with punishment!"; "They constantly scold me and insult me!" "They accuse me of being disobedient, lazy and	Conflicts with parents: "They only demand and oblige!" "They don't understand me!"; "They argue with me and limit me"; They are always dissatisfied - with my style, with the music I listen to, with my friends ..., with

	irresponsible!"; "They want things to happen just their way - They don't understand me!"; "I have no right to want or to do anything – because I am young!"; "They don't buy what I want, but what they have decided!"; "They don't love me!"	myself! "" They accuse me of being lazy and irresponsible! "" According to them, I'm not good for anything if I don't do it the way they want it! "; "I have no say!"; "They don't believe me!"
Relationships with peers	Rejection, isolation, harassment, aggression, ridicule	Complex relationships with peers - betrayal, treason, rejection, harassment, aggression. Unrequited love.
Problems at school	Lack of interest and resistance - "My parents chose the school, let them study!"; bad grades - "They deliberately give me bad grades!"; punishments; Rebellion against the rules: "The rules are designed to be broken!"	Lack of interest, boredom; problems with teachers, injustice in assessment, a lot of requirements, a lot of homework, heavy workload; not understanding, not accepting, forcibly imposing "dumb" rules.
Dissatisfaction with themselves	Body; appearance; abilities	Irritability, resentment, anger towards oneself: "Everything is out of control!"; "Everything slips away from me!" "I'm not good for anything!"
Dissatisfaction with others	Others are evil, dissatisfied, vindictive, hate me, insult me and gossip.	"They're always outraged, they annoy me, I'm disappointed, they're not fair."

To track the age specifics of frustration reactions in young adolescents and older adolescents, we used the Rosenzweig Picture - Frustration Test.

The reliability of the results (Cronbach's Alpha) - 0.77 in the age group 12 - 14 years and 0.86 in the age group 15 - 17 years.

Both groups showed the highest values in external accusatory reactions as a way to deal with frustration

(category "E"). With regard to the object to which the reaction is directed, the highest values are observed in the reactions fixed to self-defense (category "ED"). (Table 3).

Compared to the normative range (K. Mechkov, 1979) the reactions of both groups are normal (Code 3).

Table 3.

Values of the mean values in both groups

Age		E	I	M	OD	ED	NP
12 – 14 years	Mean	<b>11,17</b>	4,833	7,684	5,99	<b>10,92</b>	6,77
	N	57	57	57	57	57	57
	Std. Deviation	3,853	1,9419	2,9725	2,304	2,904	2,591
15 – 17 years	Mean	<b>9,53</b>	5,442	8,683	4,27	<b>11,88</b>	7,51
	N	52	52	52	52	52	52
	Std. Deviation	3,884	2,1343	2,6972	1,708	2,646	2,500

Significant differences between the two groups were found in Rosenzweig's *Picture Frustration test* In 61.3% of 12 - 14 year olds (compared to 38.7% of 15 - 17 year olds), anxiety, tendency to rely on rigid stereotypes of activity and inability to assess the situation are found. Adolescents fixate on the conflict as an event / obstacle (factor E – extrapunitive responses) and through vulnerability, a desire to impose themselves and "have a say" try to attract

attention to themselves. Not without significance are the other participants in the frustrating situation, 58.0% of young adolescents, compared to 42.0% of older adolescents tend to react with acute rejection of what is happening, a desire to subordinate reality to their needs, striving for dominance and intolerance to "Foreign will" (factor E - extrapunitive responses). The other factor with a greater emphasis on young adolescents is the impulsive response to circumstances

(factor M – impunitive responses), respectively 61.1% of 12-14 year olds react with carelessness, frivolity, irresponsibility and / or underestimate the situation. Such behavior is subject to emotional breakdowns, and frequent change of values and asthenic states.

In the characteristic of frustration reactions in adolescents (15-17 years) compared to young adolescents (12-14 years) with a strong statistical significance (60, 1% in adolescents, compared to 39.9% in adolescents) proved factor "e", which on the one hand is an indicator of claims and expectations towards the other in order to remove frustration, on the other hand means activity, tendency to delegate responsibility and leadership. In the young people we examined, the factor "e" shows significance in combination with the factors:

- "I" (intropunitive responses) – a sign of self-criticism, focus on one's own inferiority, sense of guilt, remorse, sometimes self-blame and self-discreditation with the characteristic behavior of politeness and irrational conformism.
- "M" (impunitive responses) – tendency to be indifferent in situations of frustration, devaluation or demonstrated indifference, which is probably the selective use of psychological defence "reaction's formation" in order to deal with the fear of new frustration or to contain a repressed aggressive impulse built in the adolescent's perceptions of subjective unacceptability of aggressive behavior - 53.7% in young adolescents, compared to 46.3% in older adolescents).

Table 4.

Significance of the differences in the two groups by factors of the Rosenzweig P -F Study

	<b>E'</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>e</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>M'</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Mann-Whitney U test</b>	1028,5	1105,0	740,5	957,0	1030,5	740,5
<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	2406,5	2483,0	2393,5	2610,0	2408,5	2393,5
<b>Z</b>	2,770	2,293	4,527	3,21	2,762	4,527
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	,006	,002	,001	,001	,006	,001

Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire (AQ)  
Results:

The questionnaire reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) for the individual subscales varies between 0.73 and 0.79, reaching 0.77 for the overall score of aggression.

The average values of the studied variables are higher in the group of adolescents, and significant differences between the two groups are found in all components of aggression, except for the scale "Hostility". (Tab. 5 and Tab. 6).

Table 5.

Average value for the components of aggression

<b>Age</b>		<b>OA</b>	<b>FA</b>	<b>VA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>H</b>
<b>12 – 14 years</b>	Mean	98,74	34,49	22,77	22,89	18,84
	N	57	57	57	57	57
	Std. Deviation	13,915	6,596	6,921	5,554	3,895
<b>15 – 17 years</b>	Mean	76,17	23,52	20,46	16,50	15,69
	N	52	52	52	52	52
	Std. Deviation	12,269	6,210	5,465	3,739	3,644

Table 6.

Significant differences between groups on scales of aggression

	<b>OA</b>	<b>FA</b>	<b>VA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>H</b>
<b>Mann-Whitney U test</b>	337,0	362,5	803,0	518,5	1184,5
<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	1715,0	1740,5	2181,0	1896,5	2562,5
<b>Z</b>	-6,948	-6,797	-4,132	-5,855	-1,808
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	,001	,001	,001	,001	,071

2-14 year olds show a willingness to use these two forms of aggression to achieve their own. Young adolescents openly show their irritability, dissatisfaction, anger and irritability. Still limited cognitive abilities affect the meaning of behavior, and the lack of tolerance in achieving the desired and the strength of the impulse that guides the actions of adolescents gives aggression a more protective character. Limited self-control and the emerging self-esteem, expressed mainly in sensitivity to negative evaluation and the accompanying emotions and experiences, predispose to aggressive actions.

The low values in both groups on the scale "Hostility" are an indicator that the actions of young adolescents and older adolescents are not determined by prolonged and persistent negative attitudes towards the surrounding reality (people and events), but rather are the result of an emotional state of a provocative nature, such as anger.

By definition, hostility is an antagonistic attitude towards people, which includes a cognitive, affective and behavioral component. The affective component is represented by a number of interconnected emotions such as: anger, irritation, resentment, disgust, contempt and others. The cognitive component contains negative beliefs about the world and others - mistrust, suspicion, contempt, prejudice and cynicism, The behavioral component includes a diverse repertoire of actions, most often hidden - passive-aggressive actions, unwillingness to cooperate and compromise, avoid contact (communication), cold attitude towards others, etc. (Barrett et al., 2007).

Passive - aggressive behavior is, perhaps the worst way to show anger - as opposed to the open and spontaneous way, to strongly relieve the tension that usually follows the trajectory: dissatisfaction - irritation - anger - rage. The adolescents and the young adults are not yet able to understand their insidious and destructive ability, and they do not realize that their resistance and perseverance prevent the imprisoned anger from being released. Examples of such behavior are: procrastination, stubbornness, suspicion, resentment, anger, deliberate "inability" to make the expected or repeated failure to perform the required tasks. On a conscious level, the young man believes that in this rank he defends himself and "lets them understand." On an unconscious level, such behavior is

aimed at infuriating and / or upsetting authorities (parents, teachers, educators).

**"There is no smoke without fire!"** - what is the spark that ignites the aggressive behavior of a growing person?

## Discussion

The summarized information from the primary psychotherapeutic interview shows that in order to establish himself in his new social position, the young man tries to go beyond his current style of contacts. His efforts are focused on finding ways to realize his "growing" opportunities, the pursuit of autonomy and independence (experienced as freedom), to develop his individuality and to receive recognition from adults, whose model he repeats, and to whom he wants to show his readiness to take a place in the "world of the great."

The sphere of communication with peers is very emotionally charged. And if in the second normative crisis (of the first grader) the successful outcome is the good contact with just one person – "My friend! Peace in the group" (I. Bontcheva, p.101), then in the crisis of puberty the leading motive in the behavior of the young man is to consolidate his place and to establish himself in the group of peers. Friendship during the period is complex and controversial, and friends are a source of social and emotional significance. The assessment that he expects and receives from his peers acquires paramount importance and displaces from the adolescent's field of vision the relationship with the significant adult, but the content of the contact retains its strong emotional charge. The inner struggle of the growing person is, on the one hand, a strong desire for autonomy, independence and freedom, and on the other hand the need to feel and receive love, patience, attention, trust and time (primary capabilities) to feel secure and stable and to experience himself as significant and valuable.

This is where the "cornerstone" in the contact between parents and young/older adolescents is found. Shared problems show where the discrepancy is - parents have **expectations** for success, achievement, order, accuracy, courtesy, discipline, responsibility (secondary capabilities), and the young adolescent and adolescents have **needs** for support, help, cooperation and partnership. Parents demand and blame, and / or helplessly withdraw from active contact with their

children, while adolescents either protest violently or remain grimly silent and act in their own way.

Unmet needs cause frustration. The rapid pace of physical and cognitive development leads to the formation of new needs, and the narrowed psychological horizon of "Here and now!" determines the framework in which the adolescent insists on getting what he wants.

Based on the psychological features of the crisis during puberty, it is evident that adolescents, due to their vulnerability and not-strengthened self-image, choose demonstrative behavior - from open aggression, active-offensive position, striving for dominance and intolerance to requirements, to impulsiveness and poorly judged action decisions. Successful self-defense in their experience is the activity through accusations, demands / expectations of the other to take responsibility for what is happening, rejecting and denying their own guilt and / or participation trying to "equalize forces".

The comparative analysis allowed the demonstration of the characteristics of the frustrating reactions of young adolescents and older adolescents in the field of motivational needs: *destruction of the authority of the adults, orientation towards affirmation in the peer group, need for self-affirmation, self-expression, defending one's own position, gaining recognition from the others, need of autonomy and independence*. In terms of the emotional sphere and behavior: *irritation, resentment, anger, suspicion vulnerability, frustration, impulsivity, resistance, desire to resolve this situation oneself, stubbornness, disobedience and fighting, ego-protective behavior and demonstrativeness*.

Taking into account the age characteristics, it can be said that in general the reactions of frustration are normal, but non-constructive frustration reactions prevail, which are the probable barrier that creates another reality in young people and determines their reactions and experiences - resentment, suspicion, isolation and aggression. In general, in both groups the ego-protective type of reactions dominates, followed by the reactions fixed to the satisfaction of needs, and the influence of the obstacle is the weakest.

The adolescents sends messages to his parents through his behavior, sometimes in the form of unpleasant, aggressive attacks, outbursts of anger, and / or oppositional behavior. Parents need to respond to the message hidden in the behavior, not the way it is

conveyed. In many cases, adolescent anger is an attempt (sometimes consciously, more often not) to declare that some basic needs have not been met or have been unfairly ignored.

Young people are filled with indignation and anger when they feel they do not receive:

- **Respect** - Adolescents may be outraged because in talking to their parents they feel that their parents think they do not deserve respect. They are often considered more capable than their parents are willing to admit.
- **Space** - they need physical and emotional space for curiosity and experimentation and expect their parents to provide it. A space in which to explore life, themselves, without obeying parental rules, guidelines and imposed images. They need space to form their own self-image.
- **Recognition** - entering the lives of adults, adolescents do not yet have life experience. They experience for the first time what their parents have experienced many times. This makes it difficult for parents to understand the severity of their reactions to situations that seem common. This misunderstanding leads to conflicts: the parent does not recognize their emotions as appropriate to the situation, and young people simply have not yet learned to respond to the fluctuations (rise and fall) of life in the way the parent already knows how. It is good for the parent to remember that the growing person is still learning to live in a difficult period, and it is very important for him to know that his parents recognize and accept the reality and adequacy of his experiences.

## Conclusions

1. In general, in both groups the ego-protective type of reactions dominates, followed by the reactions fixed to the satisfaction of needs.
2. In the group of 12 - 14 year-olds, anxiety, the tendency to rely on rigid stereotypes of activity and the inability to assess the situation are found. Young adolescents fixate on the conflict as an event / obstacle and through vulnerability, a desire to impose themselves and "have a say", they try to attract attention to themselves. Young adolescents tend to react with acute rejection of what is happening, a

desire to subordinate reality to their needs, striving for dominance and intolerance to "Foreign will"

3. In the characteristic of frustration reactions in adolescents (15-17 years) with a strong statistical significance proved factor "e", which on the one hand is an indicator of claims and expectations towards the other in order to remove frustration, on the other hand, this means activity, the tendency to delegate responsibility and leadership.
4. Young people are focused on their inner world and believe that the world should be what they want it to be. They lack enough experience to judge and accept opinions that differ from their own. They try to hide the uncertainty in their abilities and skills, relying on protective mechanisms.
5. The crisis of puberty is characterized by the fact that the adolescent acquires new opportunities and strengths that were previously absent or were a process of development. Moving to a higher stage of development, the young person feels that he already has much more strength, independence and will to solve the problems that until recently were solved by adults.

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