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“Interactive digital tool to university students including those with disabilities towards supportive and preventive measures of aggression and bullying” (A-CHAT)

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RESULT 1:

GUIDANCE HANDBOOK

TO UNIVERSITY TEACHERS/STAFF ON SUPPORTIVE
AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES OF AGGRESSION AND
BULLYING VIA INCLUSIVE APPROACH

Work package 2: Project deliverables creation and pilot implementation

Version 4, November 2025



BULGARIAN
INCLUSION
SUPPORT
TEAM



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Glossary

Term	Definition
“Aggressor”	“Aggressor” is a student or member of the Academy’s faculty or staff who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation.
“Aggression”	Aggression refers to any behaviour intended to harm another person physically or psychologically. It can manifest in various forms, including verbal, physical, emotional, and relational aggression. Aggression is distinct from assertiveness, which involves expressing one's thoughts and feelings without intending to harm others.
“Bullying”	“Bullying” is the repeated use by one or more students or members of the University’s faculty or staff of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the targeted student or damage to the targeted student’s property;• (ii) places the targeted student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property;• (iii) creates a hostile environment at the university for the targeted student;• (iv) infringes on the rights of the targeted student at the university; or• (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process, orderly operation of the university, or the working environment at the university. Bullying shall include cyberbullying.
“Cyberbullying”	“Cyberbullying” is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but shall not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data, or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic, or photo optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications. Cyberbullying also includes (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or (ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or



	<p>messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions listed in the definition of bullying. Cyberbullying also includes the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions listed in the definition of bullying.</p>
“Disability”	<p>Disability is a condition that affects an individual's ability to perform certain activities or participate in society due to physical, mental, or sensory impairments. These impairments can be caused by various factors such as diseases, injuries, congenital defects, or other medical conditions. Disabilities can range from mild to severe and may be temporary or permanent. In the context of social policy and human rights, disability is often defined more broadly to include not only the limitations imposed by the impairment itself but also the barriers created by societal attitudes and structures that prevent full participation in community life. This perspective emphasizes the importance of addressing both the individual's needs and the broader social environment to ensure equal opportunities for all. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines disability through its International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF), which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding disability as a complex interaction between health conditions and contextual factors.</p>
“Hostile environment”	<p>“Hostile environment” is a situation in which bullying causes the Academy’s environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student’s education.</p>
“Retaliation”	<p>“Retaliation” is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.</p>
“Staff”	<p>“Staff” includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counsellors, university doctor and nurses, dining hall workers, physical plant personnel, shuttle drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and other support staff.</p>



Introduction



The Purpose of the Handbook And To Whom It Can Be Helpful?

Bullying among university students represents an emerging problem that is still insufficiently explored in the academic field. Unlikely, bullying is still manifesting in higher education environments, where social dynamics, academic pressures and the intensive use of communication technologies configure new scenarios of vulnerability. In the current context, marked by accelerated digitalization and the transformations derived from the post-COVID-19 period, bullying takes more complex forms, including psychological violence, cyberbullying and the different manifestations of discrimination that affect university coexistence and the emotional well-being of students.

Bullying is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening. Bullying can happen in person or online, via various digital platforms and devices and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert).



This definition usefully introduces a distinction between overt and covert bullying and nuances the point about power by referring to perceived power. It does, though, repeat the assertion that bullying is always intentional or deliberate, as well as introducing the debatable point that the bullied are unable to do anything about it. Research into bullying in higher education clearly developed from research into bullying in schools (e.g. Alvarez-Garcia et al., 2015; Cretu & Morandau, 2022; Gaffney et al., 2019; Moyano & Sanchez-Fuentes, 2020; Zych et al., 2021) and workplaces (e.g. Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Einarsen et al., 2020; Feijo et al., 2019; Hoel et al., 2001; Nielson & Einarsen, 2018); which are both of longer standing, and where a number of systematic reviews have already been carried out. Indeed, part of the interest in bullying in higher education is in assessing whether it translates directly from the experience of bullying in school (for both the bullies and the bullied), and in examining whether higher education, as a particular kind of workplace, attracts particular bullying behaviours. The rates of bullying range from 18% to almost 68%, with several studies in the 25%-35% range. These rates seem relatively high when compared to those noted in the general population, which range from 2%-5% in North European countries, 10%-20% in Central European countries, and 10%-14% in Eastern European countries (Keashly & Neuman, 2020).

Addressing aggression and bullying among students at universities presents unique challenges and requires tailored solutions. University's campuses often have diverse populations, including students from different cultural backgrounds, disabilities, ages, and with varying life experiences. We consider pressures of academic expectations, social dynamics, and living arrangements, when designing interventions and strategies.

With the increasing use of digital technologies in education, a significant portion of bullying and aggression among university students occurs online. We address with a special attention issue of bullying (including cyberbullying) via provision of dedicated guidelines and interventions (via digital tool) to protect students' privacy and safety including in digital environments.



University students face numerous stressors, such as academic pressure, financial concerns, and personal challenges. As a partnership we prioritize mental health and well-being, offering resources (handbook and a digital tool) and support to help students manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues that may contribute to aggression and bullying. University life can be isolating for students with disabilities and for those who come from different cultural backgrounds or who struggle with feelings of exclusion.

This handbook aims to deepen the understanding of bullying in the university environment from an interdisciplinary and international perspective, addressing both its causes and its consequences.

To this end, the different dimensions of interpersonal and digital violence in universities from different cultural contexts are analysed, in order to promote safer, more inclusive and equitable educational environments.

The main lines of analysis focus on discrimination, aggression and harassment towards students – including those with disabilities – cyberbullying and cyberaggression, homophobic and transphobic bullying, the impact of bullying on mental health, as well as the role played by the aggressor and the victim throughout the life cycle. This comprehensive approach seeks to provide knowledge and generate prevention, detection and accompaniment strategies that strengthen university coexistence and the psychological health of the entire educational community.

These aspects will be addressed through a digital tool specially designed in ChatBOT format, which will present different scenarios in which each student will be able to observe the consequences that derive from a situation of harassment or aggressive behaviour, both from the perspective of the aggressor and from that of the victim. This interactive tool will provide feedback and guidance on strategies and procedures to be applied when the victim requires additional support, to ensure their emotional and physical well-being.

The ultimate goal is to contribute to making higher education institutions more inclusive and for their students to develop greater resilience and preventive capacity against aggression and harassment, promoting safe, empathetic and violence-free university environments.



If you are ***an educator, lecturer or administrative staff member*** of a university, you may want to handle bullying effectively, and these are some of the questions they may wish to ask about it:

- What counts as bullying? How do I detect it? What can I do about it?
- If I see what looks like bullying, when do I become involved?
- When should I let the student sort it out themselves?
- How do I know when things have gone too far?
- What resources are there to help me solve bullying problems effectively?
- Is it my job to handle bullying or should I go to somebody else?
- Who can I turn to for support when I do not seem to be handling things very well?
- How can I create a classroom that is safe for all the student in my care?

If you are ***a member of the management staff of the university***, you are usually responsible for issues of crisis and discipline. You may ask yourself:

- What do I need to do to make sure bullying is handled effectively?
- How will an anti-bullying strategy fit into our overall programme/strategy for dealing with disciplinary problems, such as disruptive behaviour, truancy and drugs at university?
 - What programmes are available for dealing with bullying? How do I know what the best options are for our university?
 - What anti-bullying strategies and programmes are available for dealing with bullying? How do I know which ones work best?
 - If I am the person who will implement an anti-bullying policy, how can I best be prepared for this?
 - With whom can I discuss how best to deal with the problem of bullying within the university community and/or the social services community?



Over and above their concerns to have a university that runs well and achieves in a variety of ways, *the Rector, The Rector's assembly, The Academic Council, The Faculty Councils, the Ombudsman, other administrators and governors* of the university have a moral and legal responsibility to make their university a safe place. If a university has a reputation for being unsafe, parents may choose another university. Bullying is bad for any university. The concerns of administrators are therefore philosophical, legal and practical. Therefore, if you are among this group of people, you may ask yourself the following questions:

- What can I do to develop and support policies and programmes that will eliminate or reduce bullying in my university?
- What can I do to promote this university as a safe university?
- Providing an effective and proactive anti-bullying scheme is an excellent idea but can give the impression we have a major bullying problem. How can we adopt such schemes to show we are proactive and forward-looking rather than a 'bullying university'?
- What is our role as administrators in such developments – to provide support and structures, to implement or help implement the developments, to provide ongoing evaluations?
- What can best be done within the constraints of limited resources and competing demands?

Individuals in social and community agencies, such as *counsellors, educational psychologists, police personnel, social workers and therapists*, often work with the after-effects of bullying, university failure, and violent and disruptive behaviour. This may occur in the community; on other occasions, these people are brought into the university to share their expertise. The questions they may ask are:

- What can I find out about bullying in the university?
- How is it reflected in the family and society at large?
- How can I contribute my skills to help develop a university anti-bullying initiative that, if well implemented, will have beneficial effects in the community?

We hope that you will find the answers to the above questions in the chapters of this handbook.



The Importance of An Inclusive Approach in Prevention

The handbook aims to prepare university staff to prevent harassment at university and to adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach, articulating an action protocol that covers all phases of the process: from awareness and preventive training to the provision of accessible and confidential communication channels.

The creation of safe and inclusive university spaces is proposed, in which the entire educational community actively participates, promoting an institutional culture of respect, support and accompaniment. These spaces guarantee effective attention to victims, as well as specific training for the groups most vulnerable to harassment. Within this framework, we will offer a dedicated ChatBOT configured as the main technological tool and communication channel, aimed at facilitating early detection, advice and continuous accompaniment, contributing to strengthening the prevention and institutional response to any form of harassment.

An inclusive approach to preventing bullying against students with disabilities involves creating a positive university climate through social-emotional learning, fostering peer relationships, and implementing targeted interventions. Key strategies include providing general information and training for all students, establishing buddy systems, using team-based learning, and rewarding inclusive behaviour. It's crucial to ensure that students with disabilities are meaningfully included in all university activities and have their unique needs supported by a whole-university approach that prioritizes respect, empathy, and safety for everyone.

Below, we show a set of actions in the face of manifestations of harassment in the University environment:

- Promote a culture of respect and zero tolerance for any manifestation of harassment.
- Prevent, detect and intervene effectively in situations of harassment.
- Promote prevention programs among peers, promoting empathy and shared responsibility.
- Develop comprehensive protocols that guarantee the protection of the fundamental rights of victims.



- Adopt an inclusive approach that favours the awareness of the entire student population.
- To offer accompaniment and support based on institutional and community co-responsibility.
- Establish confidential, accessible and secure reporting channels for all people.
- Provide spaces for support, mediation and conflict resolution focused on reparation and well-being.
- Actively involve the entire educational community, as well as external support and advisory services.
- Promote safe and protective university environments, where coexistence and mutual respect are guaranteed.



1. Defining Aggression and Bullying and Impact on Students and University Staff

1.1. Types of Aggression and Bullying

We consider **bullying** to be:

- *deliberately hurtful* (including aggression).
- *repeated often over a period* (whilst recognising that even a one-off incident can leave a student traumatised and nervous of future recurrence).
- *difficult for victims to defend themselves against*.

Individual perspectives on what constitutes bullying is also a key element to take into account. Bullying can take many forms, but the three main types are:

- **physical** – hitting, kicking, taking belongings, sexual harassment or aggression.
- **verbal** – name calling, insulting, making offensive remarks.
- **indirect** – spreading nasty stories about someone, exclusion from social groups, being made the subject of malicious rumours, sending malicious e-mails or text messages on mobile phones.
- **neglect** - is often considered a form of bullying because it involves a pattern of harmful behaviour that undermines an individual's self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being. While it might not involve direct aggression like physical or verbal attacks, neglect can still cause significant emotional distress and harm.

Name-calling is the most common direct form. This may be because of individual characteristics, but students can be called nasty names because of their ethnic origin, nationality or colour; sexual orientation (or perceived); or some form of disability.



Any person can be bullied, and although none of these characteristics can excuse it, certain factors can make bullying more likely:

- lacking close friends in the university.
- being shy.
- an over-protective family environment.
- behaving inappropriately.
- having a precocious talent.
- being different in some obvious respect – such as stammering.
- having Special Educational Needs or a disability.
- physical, mental or sensory impairment.
- scarring or disfigurement on the face or body.
- having a long-term medical condition such as diabetes or asthma.
- physical characteristics, such as ‘thinness’ or obesity or body dysmorphia.

Being different from the perceived norm of the peer group may mean you are seen as a target for bullying.

- being from a different racial or ethnic group to the majority.
- religious affiliation.
- speaking a different language from most of the students.
- coming from a small village to a city.
- possessing expensive accessories.
- having physical characteristics or traits which do not conform to recognisable traditional forms of masculinity or femininity.
- coming from a different social class than that of most of the students.
- evidence of poverty.
- clothing.
- being from a family with unorthodox or ‘different’ family structures.



Most studies on bullying focus on the educational levels prior to higher education, especially in Primary and Secondary Education. In the university environment, however, there is little research on this problem, which gives our project an innovative and pioneering character. By exploring the negative perception and persistent impact of bullying, it is evident that experiences of bullying and abuse of power during childhood can leave lasting traces that are projected into later stages of development, including university education. This highlights the need to understand how the dynamics of power and exclusion learned in childhood can be reproduced or transformed in adult life and in higher academic settings.

Bullying victimization during adolescence can have significant consequences on mental health and long-term well-being especially when the student is transferred from the university education to university. The so-called "*long shadow*" of bullying can extend beyond the immediate effects in the psychological and educational spheres, extending into adulthood and generating sustained costs in social and health care (Pabian et al., 2022). Bullying can manifest itself in various ways, but in all cases, it constitutes a traumatic experience, characterized by an intense emotional response, where the victim experiences anxiety, loss of control over emotions and behaviours, and immediate fear (Tambunan, 2021). As Wolke, Copeland, and Costello (2013) point out, "being bullied is not a harmless rite of passage but casts a long shadow over the lives of those affected."

Although the literature on the impact of bullying is still limited, authors such as Marlowe and Ang (2021) highlight the need for effective prevention strategies, clear guidelines for action and the promotion of interventions to support victims in their professional lives. They also stress the importance of raising awareness of the long-term consequences of bullying, both on victims and on society. This problem continues to be silenced and scarcely reported in the institutions. Bullying remains, an underreported and inadequately largely addressed problem, which can have long-lasting effects on students' personal and professional careers. In this sense, Chowdhury (2020) proposes recommendations for the prevention, detection, and monitoring of bullying practices within the educational environment.



According to Horton (2019), a considerable number of students continue to report repeated victimization by their peers, which represents a critical problem that requires reflection and debate in the academic and social spheres. Although largely invisible, it can lead to hostile attitudes and dysfunctional behaviours within the educational community, highlighting the importance of the role of the bystander in the dynamics and perpetuation of bullying (Sánchez Romero, 2025).

Ignoring bullying has profound consequences, and it is no longer acceptable to consider it a normal part of everyday life that student must tolerate (Pearce & Thompson, 1998). Bullying can be direct, including physical or verbal acts such as hitting, stealing, or insulting, or indirect, characterized by social exclusion and spreading rumours (Hahlweg & Schulz, 2020). In this context, it is essential to generate collective awareness that inhibits bullying and mitigates its impact on adult life. As Meyers (2018) states, "we no longer accept it as an innocuous rite of passage, a part of the growth we carry and bury."

Adolescents who are victims of these behaviours can develop psychopathological symptoms and mental health problems, such as anguish, depression, anxiety, social isolation, among others, which can persist into adulthood and, in some cases, lead to suicidal ideation (Faraz Ali & Khan, 2022). Takizawa, Maughan, and Arseneault (2014) describe that childhood bullying is associated with poor social relationships, economic difficulties, and a perception of low quality of life in adulthood, especially towards the age of 50. Student who are bullied, especially those exposed frequently and for a long time, continue to be at high risk of negative social, health and economic consequences even decades after exposure.

According to above authors, preventive interventions should focus both on reducing exposure to bullying during childhood and on minimizing its long-term effects on the well-being of victims. In addition, these strategies must deepen the understanding of the causal processes involved, to develop more effective protection and recovery measures.

Other studies have documented that bullying victimization is associated with post-traumatic stress, characterized by feelings of helplessness, fear, and threat stemming from various forms of bullying, such as threats, spreading rumours, teasing, insults, or social exclusion from a group. The protection of victims requires sustained



attention and preventive education from childhood, so that student – in the process of becoming adults – learn to identify, reject and act in the face of bullying behaviour. In this way, states and educational institutions could minimize the incidence of bullying in different social settings and progressively reduce the number of victims each year (Jiang & Shi, 2024).

Other studies show that childhood bullying impacts the development of body image and eating disorders in adulthood, showing long-term associations with lower psychological well-being. Since incidents of bullying often focus on body and appearance, research has paid little attention to the development of long-term body image and the risk of subsequent eating disorders. In addition, the effect is more pronounced in girls than boys, underscoring the need for early and effective interventions (Gattario, Lindwall, & Frisé, 2020).

Protective factors have been identified that interrupt the continuity of bullying and reduce the risk of subsequent maladjustment problems. Among them are: good academic performance, solid social skills, belonging to a stable family, secure attachment to parents and prosocial friends. These findings are consistent with the resilience literature, which points to how certain factors favour emotional and behavioural adjustment in young people. The relationship is understandable given the interconnection and common pathways between bullying and other risky behaviours. Therefore, multicomponent programs and effective interventions can disrupt the continuity of bullying, and future research should integrate these findings to design more effective preventive strategies (Ttofi, Bowes, Farrington, & Lösel, 2014).

Prolonged exposure to bullying in vulnerable contexts can increase the risk of developing mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem, as well as difficulties in academic performance and social interaction, underscoring the need for preventive and supportive interventions specific to these groups.

A common characteristic among victims is the inability to resist or defend themselves, adopting strategies of avoidance, distancing or resignation, while seeking social support (Ali et al., 2019):



1. Physical appearance

- **Body image issues:** Being overweight and obese are associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing social aggression in the university setting, increasing the risk of long-term negative consequences on self-esteem and mental health (Ngo et al., 2021).
- **Outstanding physical appearance:** Those with short stature, different hair color, or other striking physical characteristics are also potential victims of bullying.

2. Sexual condition

- **Sexual minorities (LGBTQIA+)** With the growing number of people who identify as LGBTQIA+, high percentages of incidents of bullying at university and at work are observed, with significant negative effects on the lives of these people. Family support can reduce victimization both at university and in the workplace (Sidiropoulou, Drydakis, Harvey, & Paraskevopoulou, 2020). According to the State of Hate report, one in five LGBTQIA+ people has suffered harassment in the last year (insults, social isolation or digital coercion), and 25% of the group feels discriminated against because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

3. Racism and xenophobia

- **Students from multicultural families:** Chronic victimization can have lasting effects on emotional and social development, particularly in student from immigrant families, who face additional challenges related to cultural identity, social integration, and possible experiences of discrimination (Park, Son, Jang, & Kim, 2024).
- **Belonging to a different ethnicity or political ideology:** It also increases the risk of being a victim of harassment.

4. Functional diversity

- **Students with disabilities:** Students with physical, cognitive, or emotional/behavioural disabilities are at significantly higher risk of bullying, even when controlling for other known risk factors (Maag, 2012; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2012; Chatzitheochari et al., 2015; Chad & Rose, 2015).
- **Students with speech problems:** Student who stutter are at a higher risk of being bullied, which can affect their social and emotional development (Blood, 2011).



5. Psychological and social factors

- **Self-confidence and self-esteem:** Higher self-confidence is associated with lower levels of victimization and aggression, while higher self-loathing is associated with higher levels of both.
- **Assertiveness:** Increases aggression but decreases victimization.
- **Social skills and empathy:** Their relationship with the results of victimization and aggression may vary according to the cultural context, as observed in samples from Spain and Ecuador (Houchins, 2016).
- **Shy students with few friends,** as well as those who are going through moments of low self-esteem or have difficulties in the development of social, motor, intellectual or verbal skills, are also more susceptible to being victims of bullying.

6. Cyberbullying factors

- **Hate crimes:** this category is understood as conduct motivated by prejudice towards certain groups, which opens up opportunities to design more positive and preventive interventions (Erentzen & Schuller, 2024). Traditionally, hate crimes are characterized by acts of interpersonal violence accompanied by insults or verbal abuse, directed towards individuals perceived as members of marginalized groups (Kayali & Walters, 2021). During the pandemic, ethnic minorities experienced varying degrees of fear of victimization, even in the absence of direct incidents that affected them personally (Gies et al., 2023).
- **Cyberbullying:** The use of digital technologies to harass, intimidate, threaten or embarrass another person. It can include offensive messages, defamation, deliberate exclusion or the spread of false rumours, emotionally affecting the victim and their social environment.
- **Obsessive harassment (Stalking):** Repetitive and obsessive behaviour directed towards a person, with the intention of controlling, intimidating or generating fear in the victim. This type of harassment can have serious psychological effects.
- **Doxing:** Disclosure and dissemination of a person's personal or confidential information without their consent, with the aim of intimidating, embarrassing, or damaging their reputation.



- **Sharenting:** Overexposure of minors by their parents in digital environments. It involves sharing photographs, videos, or other content related to student's lives, which can compromise their privacy and safety.
- **Challenges / Happy slapping:** Viral activities shared on social networks that can be dangerous to the physical or emotional health of young people, encouraging risky behaviours or violence.
- **Digital gender-based violence:** Manifestations of violence directed towards women and girls in digital environments. It includes the dissemination of intimate images without consent ("revenge porn"), the coercive control of online activities, and the spread of humiliating rumours or comments.
- **Sextortion:** A form of manipulation in which a person is pressured to perform sexual acts or send intimate images, which are used to extort money through threats of dissemination if certain demands are not met.
- **Grooming:** A strategy by which an adult establishes an online relationship with a minor with the intention of gaining their trust and then exploiting them sexually or for inappropriate purposes.
- **Online Gaming Violence:** Includes harassment, intimidation, or discrimination within gaming communities, where players may be victims of insults, threats, or exclusion, affecting their gaming experience and psychological well-being.
- **Phishing and identity theft:** Digital deception strategies that seek to obtain personal information fraudulently. Phishing induces the victim to reveal confidential data, while identity theft involves the unauthorized use of said information, which can cause economic or reputational damage."

In the context of the increasing digitalization of society, addiction and the excessive use of digital technologies have become phenomena of great relevance, with a profound impact on both mental health and social dynamics. This technological growth has also reached the university environment, evidenced in the adoption of tools such as the issuance of digital credentials, adaptive learning and learning analytics, as well as educational planning and management platforms. However, its implementation requires that digital training be integrated as a structural component of higher education.



In this sense, approximately half of universities use social networks to interact in a two-way and personalized way with students. The most used are Twitter (93%), YouTube (92%), Facebook and Instagram (90%), with a growth in the use of LinkedIn and WhatsApp (CRUE, 2024). This expansion of digital technologies highlights the need to develop digital training and support programs that promote ethical and digital competencies, offering a solid framework for the responsible, conscious, and safe use of these tools.

At the same time, the rapid expansion of technologies and social networks has transformed the modes of interaction among young university students, generating new scenarios of harassment and digital violence with a much greater scope than in face-to-face contexts. Digital platforms facilitate the immediate spread of offensive messages, images, or comments, amplifying psychological damage and extending bullying beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom or university. Anonymity and limited supervision in virtual environments encourage aggressive behaviour, hate speech and exclusion dynamics that are difficult to detect and control.

In addition, the social pressure derived from the intensive use of social networks and the constant search for digital validation increase the emotional vulnerability of students. For this reason, critical digital literacy and training in socio-emotional skills are essential to promote an ethical, empathetic and responsible use of technology, promoting self-regulation, resilience and the prevention of cyberbullying in the university environment.

In this context, the university plays a central role in promoting digital culture and developing skills that respond to the demands of an increasingly technological society. The responsible use of digital technologies for information, communication and content creation is thus a fundamental axis in the comprehensive development of students' digital competence and in the construction of inclusive, safe and sustainable educational environments.



1.2 Impact of Bullying and Aggression on Students and University staff

As it is evident from the above cited studies, the experiences during early childhood, especially in the family and university settings, can significantly modify life trajectories and act as predictors of later adolescent bullying, underscoring the importance of even relatively minor early experiences on long-term mental and physical health. Likewise, the perpetration of bullying has been identified as a relevant predictor of later difficulties, and frequent participation in these behaviours during childhood is more intensely associated with adversity in adulthood, evidencing a cumulative effect on development and well-being. Bullying triggers include family difficulties, exposure to domestic violence, deficits in social skills, peer pressure, emotional regulation issues, and poorly supervised university environments. These factors increase the likelihood of involvement in the perpetration of bullying and amplify its negative effects, reinforcing the need for early, multicomponent interventions that address both the underlying behaviours and risk factors.

Adolescent victims of bullying can develop psychopathological symptoms and mental health problems, including anguish, depression, anxiety, social isolation, among others, which can persist into adulthood and even lead to suicidal ideation (Faraz Ali & Khan, 2022).

Mental health, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation

Most adolescents who experience bullying are at high risk of developing mental health problems, especially depression, anxiety, and even suicidal ideation and behaviours (Amin & Haswita, 2024). Being a victim of bullying during adolescence is associated with anxiety, depressive and somatic symptoms, generating negative consequences both individually and socially (Winding et al., 2020).

Antisocial and violent behaviours

The findings suggest the existence of an underlying long-term antisocial tendency, rather than a specific violent tendency (Ttofi, Farrington, & Lösel, 2012). Victims of bullying are at high risk of internalizing disorders, while bullies tend to externalize behavioural problems, including violent crime and illicit drug use.



However, not all studies examined victims as a separate group (Klomek, Sourander, & Elonheimo, 2015).

Drug use and problem behaviours

Bullying, drug use, and other problematic behaviours are interrelated, underscoring the need for holistic approaches to prevention that integrate multiple risk factors (Ttofi, 2016). These findings have direct implications for educational policies and practices, highlighting the importance of integrated strategies.

Psychosocial disorders and social anxiety

Blood and Blood (2016) found that adults who recalled being bullied in childhood had lower scores on the psychosocial scale, regardless of whether they stuttered or not, evidencing that persistent childhood victimization can contribute to the development of psychosocial difficulties in adulthood.

Education, absenteeism and working life

Being bullied during adolescence reduces the likelihood of enrolment in tertiary education and increases early participation in the labour market (Hasnat & Fakir, 2023). In addition, frequent university absenteeism has immediate and long-term negative effects on academic performance, social skills, graduation rates, as well as income, overall health, and life expectancy (Allen, Diamond-Myrsten, & Rollins, 2018).

Self-esteem and cognitive development

Bullying causes feelings of anger, sadness, shame, anxiety, and low self-esteem, affecting concentration and academic achievement. In addition, bullied student may be rejected by their peers, which reinforces low self-esteem (Ali et al., 2019).

Quality of life and mental disorders

Ngo et al. (2021) identified associated factors and assessed the relationships between bullying experience and health-related quality of life, as well as with various mental disorders in high university students.

Long-term illness and risky behaviours

Victimization is associated with perceived poor health, depression, chronic illness, a history of smoking, and frequent alcohol use (Stuart & Jose, 2014). Risk



behaviours include smoking, alcohol consumption, and sexual intercourse, being more likely among victims of prolonged bullying (Crookston et al., 2014).

Labour problems and productivity

Bullying can influence productivity and work outcomes in adulthood, where both the type and intensity of bullying affect mental health and long-term income (Drydakakis, 2014; Gorman et al., 2021).

Post-traumatic stress

A history of bullying or aggression is related to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Both victimization in childhood and aggression in adulthood increase the risk of PTSD and its progression after significant trauma (Mukherjee et al., 2020).

Higher education faces specific challenges that can amplify the risk, fear, and impacts of hostility directed toward certain groups, including hate crimes and incidents motivated by racial, religious, sexual orientation, gender, disability, or ideological bias. These phenomena have become more visible on today's university campuses, underscoring the need to examine attitudes towards vulnerable groups within the academic community. Faced with this reality, institutions must develop evidence-based and victim-centred responses that prioritise prevention, reporting and support for those who suffer hostility, promoting safe and respectful environments (Wertans & Chakraborti, 2024; Perry, 2023). Analysing perceptions, prejudices and behaviours towards different groups in the university context is essential to design effective policies for inclusion, equity and coexistence, as well as to promote an institutional culture that reduces the appearance of discriminatory and hateful behaviour.

Hate Crimes Based on Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Diversity

The increase in reported hate crimes, especially in contexts such as the United States, has been accompanied by an increase in overall racial animosity, evidencing that the broader socio-political environment directly influences campus climate and experiences, particularly affecting students of colour (Mellgren, 2016; Panadero &



Britton, 2023). Racial bias plays a critical role in how hate crimes are perceived: Among white students, greater racial bias is associated with a lower perception of these crimes and a lower willingness to report them. In addition, the moderating effect of victims' race indicates that the perception of a hate crime varies depending on the racial group affected, highlighting the importance of having state hate crime laws that mitigate the link between modern racism and the perception of these incidents (Guaau, Pitner & Wilson, 2022).

On campuses, hate incident management faces four interrelated dimensions: bias, discrimination, hate crimes, and inadequate institutional responses. Academic communities have experienced common difficulties in addressing these cases, underscoring the need for rapid, effective, and appropriate responses that protect victims and prevent future assaults (Wessler & Moss, 2001). It is also crucial to address both racism and religiously motivated hate incidents, as ensuring a safe and respectful environment is essential for all students to be able to fully participate in the educational process (Siddiqui, Towl & Earnshaw, 2023). Universities, therefore, have a responsibility to implement policies, training programs, and support systems that foster inclusion, equity, and safety on campus, recognizing that preventing targeted hostility is as much an ethical as an educational issue.

Hate crimes based on sexual orientation

Hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation tend to be underreported, posing challenges for state and institutional engagement in terms of reporting and prevention. Universities should implement mandatory training programs and update their institutional policies to explicitly include the prevention and management of this type of crime, promoting a safe and inclusive academic environment for all sexual orientations (Stotzer, 2010).

Hate crimes based on disability

Hate crimes targeting people with disabilities are a form of violence that increases harm to both victims and the communities in which they live. In particular, women with disabilities face a significantly higher risk of sexual violence, being between two and five times more likely to suffer this type of aggression than women without



disabilities or men with disabilities (Balderston, 2013). This vulnerability reflects existing structural inequalities and highlights the need for specific prevention, support and protection policies, aimed at promoting safe, inclusive and discrimination-free environments.

Ideologically motivated hate crimes are acts of violence, harassment, or discrimination directed against individuals or groups because of their political beliefs, philosophical convictions, or ideological affiliations. This type of crime not only causes physical and emotional harm to the victims but also undermines democratic coexistence and generates a climate of fear and social polarization. Educational institutions must promote tolerance, dialogue and respect for diversity of thought as key tools to prevent these behaviours and ensure safe and inclusive environments.

Gender-based hate crimes

Gender-based hate crimes are acts of violence, harassment or discrimination directed against a person because of their gender identity or expression, or their belonging to a certain sex. These behaviours affect victims both physically and emotionally and reinforce structural inequalities, perpetuating gender discrimination in society. Prevention and institutional response require educational and social policies that promote equality, respect and protection of all genders, ensuring safe and inclusive academic environments.



1.3 Faculty-student aggression

Faculty-student aggression refers to any form of hostile or harmful behaviour exhibited by faculty members toward students. This can range from verbal abuse and intimidation to unfair treatment and discrimination. Addressing faculty-student aggression is crucial for maintaining a safe and respectful learning environment.

Establishment of a clear code of conduct that outlines acceptable behaviour for faculty members. This should include guidelines on how to interact with students respectfully and professionally. University management should provide regular training sessions for faculty members on effective communication, conflict resolution, and cultural sensitivity. These workshops can help them understand the impact of their actions on students.

Universities should encourage open lines of communication between faculty and students. Regular office hours, feedback sessions, and anonymous suggestion boxes can facilitate dialogue and early identification of potential issues.

It is very important to have a confidential reporting system for students to report instances of faculty aggression. This could include online forms, dedicated email addresses, or designated personnel trained to handle such reports. Conducting periodic anonymous surveys to gather feedback on faculty-student interactions can be also very helpful. This can help identify patterns of aggression and areas for improvement.

Crucial parts are related to the investigation and resolution. Universities must ensure that all reports of faculty aggression are investigated promptly and thoroughly. This includes gathering evidence, interviewing involved parties, and documenting findings. It is recommendable that this process should be under the guidance of the university' ombudsman. Maintain a fair and transparent investigation process where both the accuser and the accused should be treated fairly, and the outcome of investigations should be clearly communicated. If faculty aggression is confirmed, appropriate disciplinary actions should be taken. This may range from warnings and mandatory counselling to suspension or termination, depending on the severity of the offense. Professional counsellors can help them cope with the emotional impact and



develop strategies for moving forward. Faculty members should model respectful and supportive behaviour. By demonstrating professionalism and empathy, they set a positive example for students. Recognize and reward faculty members who exemplify positive interactions with students. We need to empower students to advocate for themselves and each other. Educate them on their rights and responsibilities and provide resources for seeking assistance when needed.

The university committees responsible for behavioural issues needs continuously to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention and response strategies. By implementing these strategies, universities can create a safer and more respectful environment where students feel valued and supported, and faculty members are held accountable for their actions.



2. Recognizing Signs of Aggression and Bullying

2.1. Behavioural Indicators

Recognizing signs of aggression and bullying among students (over 18 years old) requires understanding the unique challenges and dynamics that young adults face. Here are some behavioural indicators to look out for:

Signs of Aggression:

1. **Physical Aggression:** Engaging in fights, threatening others physically, or displaying aggressive body language.
2. **Verbal Aggression:** Using harsh language, insults, threats, or engaging in heated arguments.
3. **Passive-Aggressive Behaviour:** Indirectly expressing anger or hostility through sarcasm, gossip, or sabotage.
4. **Substance Abuse:** Increased use of alcohol, drugs, or other substances as a coping mechanism for stress or anger.
5. **Academic Performance:** Sudden decline in academic performance due to distractions caused by aggressive behaviour or conflict.
6. **Social Withdrawal:** Isolating oneself from friends, family, or peers; avoiding social activities.

Signs of Bullying:

1. **Persistent Harassment:** Continuously targeting someone with insults, mockery, or derogatory comments.
2. **Social Exclusion:** Deliberately excluding individuals from groups, events, or conversations.
3. **Online Harassment:** Cyberbullying through social media, messaging apps, or online forums.
4. **Manipulation and Control:** Using psychological tactics to control or manipulate others, such as spreading rumours or undermining relationships.
5. **Intimidation Tactics:** Using threats, intimidation, or coercion to gain power or dominance over others.



6. **Victim Blaming:** Shifting blame onto the victim, making them feel responsible for the bully's actions.

What to Do if You Notice These Signs:

- **Open Communication:** Encourage open dialogue and provide a safe space for individuals to express their concerns.
- **Support Services:** Direct affected individuals to counselling services, support groups, or mental health professionals.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Facilitate mediation or conflict resolution sessions to address issues directly.
- **Policy Enforcement:** Ensure that university's institutional policies against bullying and aggression are clear, enforced, and communicated to all members of the community.
- **Educational Programs:** Implement educational programs on empathy, communication skills, and conflict management.



2.2. Emotional and Psychological Symptoms: Anxiety, depression, self-harm risks

Recognizing emotional and psychological symptoms in students over 18 years old is crucial for providing timely support and intervention. Here are some key indicators of anxiety, depression, and self-harm risks:

Emotional and Psychological Symptoms:

Anxiety:

- **Excessive Worrying:** Persistent and excessive worrying about various aspects of life, including academics, relationships, or future prospects.
- **Restlessness:** Feeling constantly on edge, unable to relax, or experiencing physical restlessness.
- **Irritability:** Easily becoming frustrated, impatient, or agitated.
- **Sleep Disturbances:** Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early.
- **Concentration Problems:** Difficulty focusing on tasks, studying, or completing assignments.

Depression:

- **Persistent Sadness:** Feeling down, hopeless, or empty most of the time.
- **Loss of Interest:** Losing interest in activities that were once enjoyable, including hobbies, socializing, or academic pursuits.
- **Fatigue:** Experiencing persistent tiredness or lack of energy.
- **Changes in Appetite:** Significant changes in eating habits, either increased appetite and weight gain or decreased appetite and weight loss.
- **Feelings of Worthlessness:** Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or self-blame.
- **Suicidal Thoughts:** Thoughts of death or suicide or talking about wanting to die.

Self-Harm Risks:

- **Cutting or Self-Injury:** Engaging in deliberate self-harm, such as cutting, burning, or scratching.



- **Risky Behaviours:** Engaging in risky or impulsive behaviours, such as substance abuse, reckless driving, or unprotected sex.
- **Withdrawal:** Isolating oneself from friends, family, or social activities.
- **Expressions of Pain:** Verbal or nonverbal expressions of pain, suffering, or hopelessness.
- **Sudden Mood Swings:** Rapid and extreme shifts in mood, often accompanied by intense emotions.

What to Do if You Notice These Signs:

- **Reach Out:** Initiate a conversation with the individual in a non-judgmental and supportive manner.
- **Listen Actively:** Listen carefully to their concerns and validate their feelings.
- **Encourage Professional Help:** Suggest seeking help from a mental health professional, counsellor, or therapist.
- **Provide Resources:** Offer information about available resources, such as campus counselling services, hotlines, or support groups.
- **Follow Up:** Check in regularly to see how they are doing and offer ongoing support.

Early recognition and intervention can make a significant difference in addressing emotional and psychological distress. It is essential to approach these situations with empathy, care, and a commitment to supporting the well-being of individuals in need.



2.3. Detecting Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

Detecting cyberbullying and online harassment is critical in today's digital age, where interactions increasingly occur online. Recognizing the signs can help protect individuals from potential harm and ensure a safe online environment. Here are some key indicators and steps to detect and address cyberbullying and online harassment:

Signs of Cyberbullying and Online Harassment:

1. **Mean Messages:** Receiving hurtful, insulting, or threatening messages via text, email, social media, or other online platforms.
2. **Spreading Rumours:** False or exaggerated stories spread about the individual online, aiming to damage their reputation.
3. **Exclusion:** Being intentionally left out of online groups, chats, or events by peers.
4. **Impersonation:** Someone creating fake profiles or accounts pretending to be the individual to post embarrassing or harmful content.
5. **Stalking:** Unwanted attention, monitoring, or following by another person online.
6. **Public Shaming:** Posting humiliating photos, videos, or personal information without consent.
7. **Trolling:** Provoking negative reactions or causing distress through inflammatory or offensive comments.
8. **Doxxing:** Revealing private or sensitive information about the individual without their permission.

Steps to Detect and Address Cyberbullying and Online Harassment:

1. **Monitor Online Activity:** Keep an eye on the individual's online presence, including social media accounts, chat logs, and emails.
2. **Look for Behavioural Changes:** Observe any sudden changes in behaviour, such as withdrawal from social activities, increased secrecy about online activity, or heightened emotional distress.



3. **Check for Unusual Notifications:** Be alert for unusual notifications, friend requests, or messages from unknown sources.
4. **Review Privacy Settings:** Ensure privacy settings are configured to limit access to personal information and posts.
5. **Document Evidence:** Take screenshots or save copies of harassing messages, posts, or comments as evidence.
6. **Report Incidents:** Use reporting features provided by social media platforms or websites to report abusive behaviour.
7. **Block and Mute:** Block or mute users who engage in harassing behavior to limit further contact.
8. **Seek Support:** Encourage the individual to talk to trusted friends, family, or professionals about what they are experiencing.
9. **Contact Authorities:** In severe cases, consider contacting law enforcement or legal authorities to address criminal behaviour.
10. **Promote Digital Literacy:** Educate individuals on safe online practices, including not sharing personal information, being cautious with online interactions, and knowing how to report abuse.

By being vigilant and proactive, it is possible to mitigate the risks associated with cyberbullying and online harassment, ensuring a safer and more positive online experience for everyone.



3. Creating an Inclusive Environment

3.1. Building Inclusivity

Building inclusivity and addressing bullying and aggression in universities requires a multifaceted approach that involves both preventive measures and reactive actions.

Certain key points should be followed:

- never assume that bullying does not happen in your university;
- never ignore suspected bullying;
- don't make premature assumptions;
- listen carefully to all accounts – several students saying the same does not necessarily mean they are telling the truth;
- adopt a problem-solving approach which moves students on from justifying themselves;
- follow-up repeatedly, checking that bullying has not resumed.

For that purpose, universities must develop and enforce a comprehensive anti-bullying policy that clearly defines what constitutes bullying and outlines consequences for violators as well as ensure that the university's code of conduct explicitly addresses issues related to bullying and harassment for both students and staff.



3.2. A university manifest towards prevention of aggression and bullying

We suggest the following manifest to be considered by the top management of your university. It will create a clear step towards prevention of aggression and bullying as well as the commitment of the institution towards reactions in case of manifestations of these conditions.

At [University Name], we are committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all our students, including those with disabilities and special needs. We believe that every individual deserves to learn and thrive in a space free from aggression and bullying. To achieve this goal, we have developed a comprehensive approach that focuses on both prevention and effective response to instances of aggression and bullying.

Our Commitment to Inclusivity

Our commitment to inclusivity is rooted in the belief that diversity enriches our community and enhances the learning experience for everyone. By embracing differences and promoting understanding, we aim to create a campus where every student feels valued and supported.

Preventive Measures

Education and Awareness:

We regularly organize workshops and seminars to educate our students and staff about the importance of inclusivity, respect, and empathy. These sessions cover topics such as disability awareness, mental health, and the impact of bullying on individuals with special needs.

Clear Policies and Guidelines:

Our university has established clear policies and guidelines that define what constitutes bullying and aggression, particularly towards students with disabilities and special needs. These policies outline the consequences for violators and provide a framework for addressing such incidents.

Training for Staff and Students:

All members of our community undergo training on recognizing and safely intervening when they witness bullying or aggressive behaviour. Faculty and staff are also trained to create inclusive classrooms and provide appropriate support to students with disabilities.



Support Services:

We offer accessible counselling services for students who have experienced or witnessed bullying. Peer support groups are available to provide emotional support and foster a sense of belonging among students with disabilities.

Inclusive Curriculum:

Our curriculum integrates diverse perspectives and includes case studies that highlight the challenges faced by students with disabilities. This helps to promote understanding and appreciation of different abilities and needs.

Reactive Strategies

Immediate Response:

When incidents of aggression or bullying are reported, we respond promptly and thoroughly investigate each case. Our aim is to ensure that victims feel heard and supported while holding perpetrators accountable for their actions.

Support for Victims:

Victims of bullying receive immediate emotional support, including access to counselling services. Academic accommodations are provided to ensure that their education remains uninterrupted.

Disciplinary Actions:

We enforce fair and consistent disciplinary actions against perpetrators, ranging from warnings to suspension or expulsion depending on the severity of the offense. Restorative justice approaches may be considered to repair harm and prevent future incidents.

Follow-Up and Monitoring:

Regular check-ins are conducted with victims to monitor their well-being and address any ongoing concerns. The behaviour of perpetrators is closely monitored to ensure compliance and prevent recurrence.

Community Healing:

Healing circles and group discussions are facilitated to help the community process and recover from incidents of aggression and bullying. Educational workshops follow up to reinforce positive behaviours and strengthen our inclusive campus culture.



Conclusion

At [University Name], we are dedicated to creating a campus where every student feels safe, respected, and included. Through our proactive and reactive strategies, we strive to eliminate aggression and bullying, ensuring that students with disabilities and special needs can fully participate in and benefit from their educational journey. Together, we can build a more inclusive and supportive community for all.



4. Building Positive Relationships

4.1. Teacher-Student Relationships

The foundation of a successful educational experience lies in the relationship between teachers and students. A strong teacher-student bond fosters trust, mutual respect, and open communication. When students feel understood and supported by their teachers, they are more likely to engage actively in the learning process and seek help when needed.

Strategies for Building Positive Relationships may include:

- **Regular One-on-One Meetings:** Schedule regular meetings to discuss academic progress, personal goals, and any challenges the student might be facing.
- **Active Listening:** Practice active listening skills to show genuine interest in students' thoughts and feelings.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Use positive reinforcement to encourage good behavior and effort, rather than focusing solely on correcting mistakes.
- **Inclusivity in Teaching Methods:** Tailor teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles and needs, ensuring that all students feel included and valued.



4.2 Students with Disabilities – Non-Disabled Students Relationships

Encouraging positive relationships between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers is crucial for creating an inclusive classroom environment. Such relationships foster empathy, reduce stigma, and enhance social skills for all involved.

Strategies for Fostering Inclusive Relationships may include:

- **Collaborative Learning Activities:** Design group projects and activities that require collaboration between students with and without disabilities.
- **Disability Awareness Education:** Incorporate lessons and discussions about various disabilities to increase understanding and acceptance among non-disabled students.
- **Buddy Systems:** Implement buddy systems where non-disabled students assist and support their classmates with disabilities during school activities.
- **Role Modelling:** Encourage role modelling by highlighting examples of successful individuals with disabilities to inspire and motivate all students.

4.3 Teachers – Parents Relationships

A strong partnership between teachers and parents is essential for supporting students' academic and personal growth. Effective communication and collaboration between teachers and parents ensure consistency in expectations and strategies, leading to better outcomes for students.

Strategies for Strengthening Teacher-Parent Relationships

- **Regular Communication:** Maintain regular communication through emails, phone calls, or parent-teacher conferences to keep parents informed about their child's progress and any concerns.
- **Open Door Policy:** Adopt an open-door policy to encourage parents to visit the university and communicate with academic or non-academic staff whenever they have questions or concerns.



- **Shared Decision-Making:** Involve parents in decision-making processes regarding their child's education, such as Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings for students with disabilities.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Organize joint extracurricular activities and events to foster a sense of community and shared responsibility for student' success.



4.4 Peer Support Networks

Peer support networks play a vital role in providing emotional and academic assistance to students. These networks can significantly improve students' self-esteem, resilience, and overall well-being.

Strategies for Establishing Effective Peer Support Networks may include:

- **Mentorship Programs:** Implement mentorship programs where older students mentor younger ones, offering guidance and support.
- **Student Clubs and Organizations:** Encourage the formation of clubs and organizations focused on various interests, allowing students to connect with like-minded peers.
- **Peer Tutoring:** Promote peer tutoring initiatives where students help each other with homework and study materials, fostering a collaborative learning environment.
- **Conflict Resolution Teams:** Train students to serve on conflict resolution teams, helping mediate disputes and promote peaceful solutions within the school community.

Building positive relationships across all levels—between academic, non-academic staff and students, including students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, and among students themselves—is fundamental to creating a supportive and inclusive educational environment. By implementing these strategies, we can foster a sense of belonging, enhance academic achievement, and promote the holistic development of all students.



5. Conflicts and Reporting

5.1 Conflict Resolution Techniques

Conflicts are inevitable in any community, including educational institutions. They arise due to misunderstandings, differing opinions, or personality clashes. Effective conflict resolution techniques are essential for maintaining a harmonious and productive learning environment.

Key Conflict Resolution Techniques may include:

1. Active Listening:

- **Description:** Active listening involves giving full attention to the speaker, showing empathy, and reflecting back what you hear to ensure understanding.
- **Benefits:** It helps in identifying the root cause of the conflict and promotes mutual understanding.

2. Mediation:

- **Description:** Mediation involves a neutral third party facilitating a discussion between conflicting parties to reach a mutually agreeable solution.
- **Benefits:** It provides a structured platform for resolving conflicts and encourages compromise.

3. Problem-Solving Approach:

- **Description:** This technique involves defining the problem, brainstorming solutions, evaluating options, and selecting the best course of action.
- **Benefits:** It empowers participants to take ownership of the resolution process and develop practical solutions.

4. Empathy and Perspective-Taking:

- **Description:** Encouraging individuals to see things from another person's perspective can lead to greater understanding and empathy.



- **Benefits:** It reduces hostility and promotes compassion, making it easier to find common ground.

5. **Compromise and Negotiation:**

- **Description:** Both parties agree to make concessions to reach a middle ground.
- **Benefits:** It ensures that neither party feels completely defeated, fostering goodwill and cooperation.



5.2 Reporting Aggression/Bullying

Recognizing the signs of aggression and bullying is the first step towards addressing these issues effectively. Early intervention can prevent escalation and minimize harm to victims.

Steps for Reporting Incidents may include:

1. Identify the Incident:

- Be vigilant for signs of aggression or bullying, such as physical harm, verbal abuse, social isolation, or changes in behaviour.

2. Document the Details:

- Record the date, time, location, and nature of the incident, as well as the names of the individuals involved.

3. Report to Appropriate Authorities:

- Inform teachers, counsellors, or designated staff members responsible for handling such incidents. For serious cases, contact the administration immediately.

4. Follow Up:

- Ensure that the reported incident is properly investigated and addressed. Stay informed about the outcome and any actions taken.



5.3 Mechanism/Committee for Reaction

Establishing a Clear Protocol

Having a well-defined mechanism or committee for reacting to conflicts and incidents of aggression or bullying is crucial for ensuring timely and effective responses.

Components of an Effective Mechanism includes:

1. Designated Personnel:

- Appoint specific staff members or a committee responsible for handling conflicts and incidents.

2. Clear Procedures:

- Develop clear procedures outlining steps for reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents.

3. Confidentiality:

- Ensure confidentiality to protect the privacy of all parties involved, especially victims.

4. Support Services:

- Provide access to counselling and support services for victims and those involved in conflicts.

5. Documentation:

- Maintain detailed records of all reported incidents, investigations, and actions taken.



5.4 Incorporating Anti-Bullying Themes

Incorporating anti-bullying themes into the curriculum and daily routines reinforces the importance of kindness, respect, and inclusivity.

Strategies for Integration

1. Curriculum Development:

- Include lessons and discussions on bullying, empathy, and conflict resolution in the curriculum.

2. Activities:

- Organize role-playing exercises, group discussions, and creative projects focused on anti-bullying themes.

3. Guest Speakers:

- Invite experts or individuals with lived experiences to speak about the impact of bullying and strategies for prevention.

4. University Events:

- Host assemblies, workshops, and awareness campaigns to raise consciousness about bullying and promote a positive school climate.

5. Student/Staff Involvement:

- Empower students and staff to become advocates for change by participating in anti-bullying committees or clubs.

Addressing conflicts and incidents of aggression or bullying requires a comprehensive approach that includes effective conflict resolution techniques, clear reporting mechanisms, and proactive integration of anti-bullying themes. By implementing these strategies, we can create a safer, more inclusive, and supportive learning environment for all students.



6. Professional Development for University Staff

6.1 Training on Recognizing and Responding to Bullying and Aggression

This section aims to provide university staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to recognize and respond effectively to bullying incidents. By understanding the dynamics of bullying, staff members can create a safer and more inclusive environment for students.

We suggest the following *framework for conducting micro-credential training for the staff on recognition and responding to bullying and aggression*:

Objectives:

- Define bullying and its various forms.
- Identify signs of bullying in different contexts (e.g., physical, verbal, social, cyber).
- Understand the impact of bullying on individuals and the community.
- Develop strategies for immediate intervention when witnessing or being informed about bullying.
- Learn how to support victims and address perpetrators appropriately.

Possible Content:

1. Definition and Types of Bullying:

- Physical bullying;
- Verbal bullying;
- Social bullying;
- Cyberbullying;
- Power imbalance and repetition as key characteristics.

2. Signs of Bullying:

- Changes in behaviour, academic performance, or attendance;
- Emotional distress, anxiety, or depression;
- Physical injuries or unexplained marks;
- Avoidance of certain areas or people.



3. Impact of Bullying:

- Short-term effects on mental health and well-being;
- Long-term consequences such as low self-esteem and social isolation;
- Impact on the overall school climate.

4. Immediate Response Strategies:

- Separating the involved parties;
- Ensuring safety and providing emotional support;
- Reporting the incident to appropriate authorities.

5. Supporting Victims and Addressing Perpetrators:

- Providing counselling and resources for victims;
- Implementing disciplinary measures for perpetrators while considering restorative justice approaches.



6.2 Continuous Professional Growth

Continuous professional growth is essential for university staff to stay updated with current trends, research, and best practices in education and student support. This section outlines opportunities and methods for ongoing development.

Objectives:

- Encourage participation in workshops, seminars, and conferences related to education and student welfare.
- Promote engagement in online courses and certifications.
- Foster collaboration and knowledge sharing among staff members.
- Support individual career advancement goals.

1. Professional Development Opportunities may include:

- Workshops and seminars on topics like classroom management, diversity and inclusion, and mental health awareness.
- Conferences and symposiums focused on educational innovation and student support services.
- Online courses and certifications from reputable institutions.

2. Collaboration and Networking:

- Encouraging staff to join professional organizations and networks.
- Facilitating peer mentoring and coaching programs within the university.
- Organizing regular meetings and forums for knowledge sharing.

3. Career Advancement:

- Providing guidance on setting personal and professional goals.
- Offering support for pursuing advanced degrees or specialized training.
- Recognizing and rewarding achievements through awards and promotions.



6.3 Sample Intervention Plan

An effective intervention plan is crucial for addressing bullying incidents promptly and comprehensively. This section provides a sample plan that universities can adapt to their specific needs.

Objectives:

- Outline a structured approach to handling bullying reports.
- Ensure consistency and fairness in responding to incidents.
- Provide clear guidelines for documentation and follow-up.

The university intervention plan may include:

1. Reporting Procedure:

- Establishing multiple channels for reporting bullying (e.g., online forms, designated personnel).
- Ensuring confidentiality and protection for reporters.

2. Initial Assessment:

- Gathering detailed information about the incident.
- Assessing the severity and urgency of the situation.

3. Immediate Action:

- Separating the involved parties if necessary.
- Providing immediate support to the victim.
- Informing relevant stakeholders (e.g., parents, legal authorities).

4. Investigation:

- Conducting thorough investigations involving all parties.
- Documenting findings and evidence.

5. Intervention Strategies:

- Implementing disciplinary measures for perpetrators.
- Providing counselling and support for victims.
- Facilitating mediation and restorative justice processes.

6. Follow-Up and Monitoring:

- Regularly checking in with victims and perpetrators.
- Reviewing and updating intervention plans as needed.
- Maintaining records for future reference and analysis.



6.4 Reaction Best Practices

6.4.1. Spain: Promoting Coexistence (*Convivencia*)

1. The TEI Method (Tutoring Between Equals)

- **The Practice:** A peer-mentoring violence prevention program where older students are formally assigned as "tutors" to younger students to ensure integration and prevent "othering."
- **Reference:** Developed by Andrés González Bellido. While originally for schools, it is being adapted for Higher Education via the **University of Barcelona**.
- **Link:** [TEI Program Official Site](#)

2. Service-Learning (ApS) Frameworks

- **The Practice:** Integrating social responsibility into the curriculum. By working with marginalized groups, students develop the empathy necessary to prevent bullying within their own peer groups.
- **Reference:** The **Spanish Network for Service-Learning (REDAPS)**.
- **Link:** [Red Española de Aprendizaje-Servicio](#)

3. Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) - Dialectical Tertulias

- **The Practice:** Using egalitarian dialogue to discuss "hot topics" regarding social exclusion, ensuring that the "law of the strongest" is replaced by the "power of the argument."
- **Reference:** Based on the **INCLUD-ED project**, the only Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities project included in the European Commission's list of 10 successful cases.
- **Link:** [Community of Research on Excellence for All \(CREA\)](#)

4. Inclusive Language and Diversity Protocols

- **The Practice:** Formalizing guides that prevent micro-aggressions against LGBTQ+ and minority groups, which are often the precursors to bullying.
- **Reference:** The **Complutense University of Madrid (UCM)** Diversity Unit protocols.
- **Link:** [UCM Diversity and Inclusion](#)



6.4.2. Portugal: Holistic & Relational Support

1. Observatories for Student Well-being

- **The Practice:** Data-driven monitoring of student mental health and social integration to identify "invisible" victims of bullying.
- **Reference:** The **Observatory of Student Life (OVE)** at the University of Coimbra.
- **Link:** [University of Coimbra - OVE](#)

2. Multi-disciplinary "Student-at-Risk" Teams

- **The Practice:** Using the "Tutorias" system not just for grades, but for social mediation.
- **Reference:** Portugal's **National Agency for Erasmus+** often highlights the "Safe and Inclusive Higher Education" (SAIHE) guidelines used by Portuguese Polytechnics.
- **Link:** [Directorate-General for Higher Education \(DGES\) - Student Support](#)

6.4.3. Bulgaria: Structural Reform & Digital Safety

1. Digital Citizenship & Cyber-Safety Initiatives

- **The Practice:** Training staff to moderate university-affiliated digital spaces (Telegram/WhatsApp groups) where modern bullying occurs.
- **Reference:** The **Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre**, which collaborates with universities on "Safe Lab" initiatives.
- **Link:** [Safenet Bulgaria](#)

2. Institutional Ethics Ombudsman

- **The Practice:** A neutral third party to mediate conflicts between students or between staff and students, ensuring "inclusive" justice.
- **Reference:** The **Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"** Code of Ethics and the role of the Ethics Committee.
- **Link:** [Sofia University Ethics Committee](#)

6.4.4. Greece: Community & Democratic Dialogue

1. Restorative Justice Circles

- **The Practice:** Shifting from "punishing the bully" to "repairing the harm" through facilitated dialogue.



- **Reference:** The **European Forum for Restorative Justice**, which has active implementation partners in Greece like the **Restorative Justice and Mediation Center**.
- **Link:** [Restorative Justice Greece](#)

2. Intercultural Sensitivity & Integration

- **The Practice:** Using "Intercultural Maps" in the classroom to validate the diverse origins of the student body, reducing xenophobic aggression.
- **Reference:** The **University of the Peloponnese** and their focus on "Inclusive Education" through the **HEAL-Link** portal.
- **Link:** [University of the Peloponnese - International Relations & Inclusion](#)



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