Strategy 13 | Support in building and navigating healthy peer relationships

Support in building and navigating healthy peer relationships *(Strategy based on practices in Anglo-Saxon contexts)*

TYPES OF STRATEGY

☐ **Prevention**   ☐ **Intervention**   ☐ Compensation

ADDRESSED TO THE RISK FACTORS

☐ <u>Personal challenges</u>
  ☐ **Lack of motivation, aspirations and expectations; unrealistic expectations, worry about the future**
  ☐ **Disengagement**
  ☐ **Low self-esteem or confidence in themselves**
  ☐ **Negative academic self-perception or identity as a student**
  ☐ **Emotion management problems; insensitivity**

☐ <u>Social relations</u>
  ☐ **Difficult relationships in the VET educational centre; difficult relationships with teachers.**
  ☐ **Difficulty managing friendships; friendship culture, poor friendship management skills, friendship expectations, not trusting friends, losing friends or having trouble keeping friends, not having friends around.**
  ☐ **Feeling that teachers (or school staff) are not concerned.**
  ☐ **Isolation.**
  ☐ **Difficult relationships at work.**
  ☐ **Group challenges: low future expectations with a peer group, social and equality concerns, peer pressure and feeling, peer pressure to take drugs, alcohol, smoke.**

☐ <u>Institutional actors</u>
  ☐ **Lack of personal, work, academic, social orientation.**
  ☐ **Lack of trust and support from the institution.**

LEVEL

☐ **Individual level (psycho pedagogical actions)**
☐ Institutional level (institutional actions)

AIM

Support young people at risk of abandonment to build and maintain positive and healthy relationships with peers. "Peer" relationships refer to various forms of social relationships including friendships, learning, affective and work relationships.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STRATEGY

One of the key barriers that causes young people to leave education is the social challenges they face when it comes to building and managing healthy relationships with their peers. Psychological research has shown that early friendship experiences have a significant impact on future relationships, particularly on how young people learn to trust others. Therefore, helping young people to "build healthy relationships" and "make friendships" is a priority when it comes to supporting their social and emotional development. This strategy is committed to building and managing healthy peer relationships.

BENEFICIARIES

☐ **Young people**   ☐ **Teachers**   ☐ **Families**   ☐ Community
☐ Other beneficiaries:………………………………………….

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE STRATEGY

☐ **Tutor/a**   ☐ Teaching staff   ☐ Support staff   ☐ **Management team**
☐ **External expert** (e.g. counsellor, psychology professional)

IMPLEMENTATION CHRONOLOGY *(When will the strategy be implemented)*

☐ **At the beginning**   ☐ **During the academic year**   ☐ At the end of the academic year
☐ **Transition between the key stage**   ☐ …………………………………………………….

COST

☐ Low   ☐ **Medium**   ☐ High

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT *(How can the strategy be achieved?)*:

This strategy involves a variety of actions and resources. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but may include:

Social and emotional activities

1. *Social and emotional education focused on the reciprocal dynamics of friendship.* It includes social and emotional learning programs that work on ways to co-manage relationships.
2. *Identifying what are "healthy" and "unhealthy" relationships.* It is essential that young people are able to identify the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships before changing or ending their current relationships and having new ones.
3. *Guidance for the responsible use of social networks and mobile technology.* It includes raising awareness of threats and risks (for example, sending sexual images), as well as developing a respectful and responsible awareness in the use of these platforms.
4. *Strategies for ending and starting relationships.* Young people will not be able to start building healthy relationships while they are immersed in unhealthy relationships. This action involves mental, emotional and pragmatic strategies to end negative relationships, as well as to establish new ones.
5. *Programs that emphasise the importance of collective values, respect, empathy, tolerance, social boundaries.*
6. *Organise informed and reflective class work groups.* For example, making the young people reflect regularly on how they work in their group through co-evaluation rubrics that they have to send to the teaching staff for regular review.

Individual, couple and group support

1. *A systemic approach to managing friendships.* It consists of considering the relational dynamics of a couple or friendship group to work out how each member's beliefs, actions, communication and expectations shape and inform friendship processes, particularly regarding exclusion and inclusion.
2. *Peer mentoring*.
3. *Communication skills training.* Provide guidance to the young person on how they can present themselves to teachers, peers, etc. in their new educational environment, how to listen and ask questions, etc. (consult the *Centre for non-violent communication* in the resources section of this strategy).
4. *Conflict management and resolution sessions.* Mediation can play a key role in recognizing conflict, disagreement and compromise as key aspects of relationship management. These skills can also have direct application for other types of peer relationships.

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5. *'Safe space' to address social problems*. A little time in the usual schedule of the daily/weekly routine in order to raise, discuss and debate relational problems.

6. *Model appropriate relationships*, where adults who work with young people demonstrate what the components of positive and respectful reciprocal relationships are.

7. *Identification of "equal colleagues"*. Peers and equal companies are representatives of young people who offer friendship and support to all those who have trouble making friends.

<u>Support from external agents or support organisations</u>

8. *Work with organisations that provide educational support on healthy and unhealthy relationship issues.*

9. *School nursing and related sexual health services*.

In conclusion, it is important to recognize that strategies to help young people build and manage healthy peer relationships must be incorporated within a culture of peace and empathy. Strategies treated in isolation, as a complementary curriculum, will have less chance of being effective than if they are incorporated into the culture of the whole school. These activities require the action and commitment of the entire educational community, as well as designated support and external professionals to ensure that positive healthy relationships are at the centre of the school's culture and values.

RESOURCES *(What is needed?)*:

☐ Person responsible for the strategy (e.g. a pastoral leader)

☐ Private space for meetings

☐ 'Safe space / or wellness room' (Area dedicated to pastoral support)

☐ Social area, for young people to spend time in a relaxed and comfortable environment (personalised)

☐ Teaching tutor

☐ External agents (for example, educational psychology professional, health professional, school nurse)

☐ Materials / One:

☐ Training programs in inclusive education

☐ Resources for group work, for example round tables

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Vocational training centres must be aware of the difficulty of achieving a culture of respectful and healthy relationships within a neoliberal education context of what we call High Stakes Testing (HST). The HST refers to the priority given to national tests and examinations and the pressure on schools, teachers and students to achieve them. This ethic, based on comparison and competition between students and schools, contrasts with a supportive approach to peer relationships based on care, compassion and empathy. Actions taken in isolation and not targeted are likely to be ineffective.

Related protective factors:

▪ Individualised support when needed.

▪ Flexible learning environments, time out of class when needed, reduced hours, homework choice, break between classes.

▪ Positive behaviour management system.

▪ Work on the bonds of trust.

▪ Work on self-confidence and self-esteem (self-concept, self-perception and self-esteem).

▪ Inclusive school culture. A supportive ethos, the school as a safe space.

▪ Work on your own identity.

▪ Autonomy and independence of young people.

▪ Improve the learning environment.

▪ Warm welcome.

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- ▪ Raise aspirations.
- ▪ Non-teaching support.
- ▪ Integrate the young person into the community.
- ▪ Perceptions of students who have support.
- ▪ Support mechanisms.
- ▪ Educate in relationships. Teach social boundaries, build teamwork skills, teach empathy, model appropriate relationships.
- ▪ Construction of support networks.
- ▪ Peer mentoring.

REFERENCES *(related resources)*

FRIENDS for Life Youth (Youth for teenagers) *and Special FRIENDS* (for children and young people on the autistic spectrum, aged 9-13 years). https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/learning-disabilities/our-work/employment-education/friends-for-life

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Hill, A. (2016). *How the UK halved its teenage pregnancy rate*, the Guardian newspaper. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/18/how-uk-halved-teenage-pregnancy-rate-public-health-strategy

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Public Health England (2016). *Health promotion for sexual and reproductive health and HIV*. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-hiv-strategic-action-plan

Public Health England. *Health Profiles -Children and Young People's Health, Under 18 conceptions.* http://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles/data#page/4/gid/8000073/pat/6/par/E12000009/ati/101/are/E06000022/iid/20401/age/173/sex/2

Roots of Empathy. https://uk.rootsofempathy.org/

Splitz Support Services. https://www.splitz.org/

The Boxall Profile Online. https://www.nurtureuk.org/introducing-nurture/boxall-profile

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Barcelona, October de 2023

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