

HANDBOOK

HELPING YOUR STUDENTS OR CHILDREN SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

Improving behavior related to school attendance

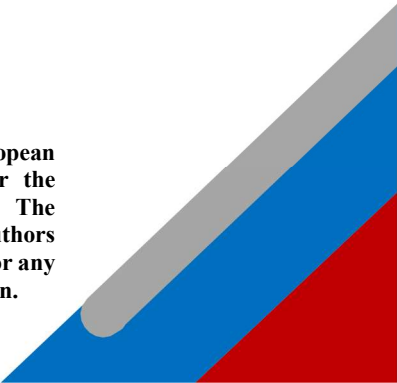


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRESENTATION OF THE HANDBOOK

- 1. Online training course**
- 2. Purpose of the handbook**
- 3. Observatory SOS-Attendance**

HANDBOOK

- 1. Understanding the problems of school attendance**
 - 1.1. What are School Attendance Problems (SAP)?
 - 1.2. How do SAPs manifest themselves?
 - 1.3. When does school absenteeism become a problem?
 - 1.4. What are the consequences of not attending school and the benefits of regular attendance?
 - 1.5. Causal component analysis
- 2. Reducing school attendance problems in secondary school students**
 - 2.1. Verbal expression of emotions
 - 2.2. Cognitive components
- 3. Promoting communication strategies and improving school attendance**
 - 3.1. Encouraging the use of effective communication techniques between parents and teachers
 - 3.2. Practical guide

CONCLUSIONS

REFERENCES



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PRESENTATION OF THE HANDBOOK

1. Online training course

The course "HELP YOUR STUDENTS OR CHILDREN SUCCEED IN SCHOOL - *Improve behavior related to school attendance*" is an online training resource for parents, educational professionals, and other interested persons from related fields. Through this training, participants will acquire key tools and knowledge to prevent and manage problems concerning attendance and school dropout. The course is designed to strengthen the skills and competences of these professionals or parents, so that they can support students in developing regular school attendance habits and overcoming related risk behaviours.

To this end, the course covers three main sections:

- 1. Awareness of school attendance problems.** This section defines school attendance problems and their consequences, establishes risk detection criteria, and analyses causal factors.
- 2. Addressing school attendance problems.** In the second section, tools are offered to tackle these problems by addressing emotions, thoughts, and behaviours.
- 3. Communication strategies and intervention in school attendance problems.** The last section deals with communication with pupils and strategies for intervening in cases of school absenteeism.

All sections have useful downloadable material, practical exercises, real scenarios, and videos. In addition, all blocks have a final test to check the knowledge acquired during the course. Those who complete the course and successfully pass the final test will receive a certificate issued by the Observatory SOS-Attendance recognizing the acquisition of competencies that are intended to be developed in this 20-hour course.



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2. Presentation of the handbook

This document is a "Handbook" or manual linked to the course developed by the Observatory SOS-Attendance (www.sosattendance.eu). It therefore serves as a complementary support guide to the online training course.

In this document we have included the theoretical part of the course and explored various aspects that are addressed practically throughout the course.

Thus, the manual does not include the practical activities or downloadable documents, and it is necessary to complete the online course to obtain them.

3. Observatory SOS-Attendance

The SOS-Attendance Observatory was created thanks to the funding received by the European Commission through an Erasmus+ Project. This project was created with the aim of establishing a scientific observatory on school attendance to collect information, generate reports, develop research, offer training actions, and promote awareness campaigns against school attendance problems and early school leaving.

The rates of students with school attendance problems in Europe have become a recent concern. This situation, coupled with the lack of high-quality and reliable information on the subject, inspired the creation of a Scientific Observatory for School Attendance.

The aim of the research is to clarify how absenteeism affects at-risk groups and to be able to offer training actions and pedagogical resources, both to teachers and families, to better address the challenge of guaranteeing the right to education and building an inclusive society.



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It also seeks to clarify the risk factors that influence the school attendance of all students, with a special focus on those with fewer opportunities.

To carry it out, the project is structured in five work packages. The first is aimed at the management and coordination of the project; the second at the design, creation and development of the observatory, through the creation of its website (www.sosattendance.eu); the third at the evaluation and analysis of the problem; the fourth at training activities, through free online courses for families and education professionals; and the fifth at the dissemination of findings and the development of an awareness-raising campaign. Therefore, the course and this handbook are included in the fourth work package, as they are training activities.

In conclusion, this project is expected to provide society, the education administration, and the scientific community with an **observatory on truancy in Europe** that will serve as a reference for data consultation and advice on how to prevent and intervene effectively in school attendance problems.

Similarly, the Observatory SOS-Attendance seeks to provide information on risk indicators of school attendance problems, propose lines of action to prevent or deal with them, promote networking, design training courses, and contribute to regular school attendance.



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1. Knowing the problems of school attendance.

1.1. What are School Attendance Problems (SAP)?

In recent years, it has been the focus of European political and educational institutions to reduce the high rates of students with school attendance problems. Regular school attendance and completion of secondary education or its equivalent have been widely recognized as key competences essential for the development of children and adolescents (Kearney et al., 2019). However, it is estimated that up to 28% of students display some form of anxiety-based and non-anxiety-based school refusal behavior at some point in their academic career (Sibeoni et al., 2016).

At the terminological level, there is no consensus. Broadly speaking, school attendance refers to a student's physical presence in class for a full academic day and truancy refers to a student's complete absence from school (Kearney, 2019). Absenteeism can be classified as excused or unexcused, depending on whether or not there is a legitimate reason for the absence.

On the other hand, school attendance problems, or SAPs, refer to a variety of challenges that prevent students from attending school regularly, which can involve a wide range of individual and contextual factors (Kearney, 2016).

We can differentiate between:

- **Chronic absenteeism:** it occurs when a student misses a significant amount of school time, usually 10% or more of school days.



- **Unjustified absenteeism:** this refers to absences without justification or permission from parents or guardians.
- **School refusal:** it occurs when the student refuses or is reluctant to attend school due to emotional distress, such as generalized, social or separation anxiety, depression, anguish, sadness, worry, etc.

School refusal is a type of school attendance problem that is often linked to internalizing difficulties, such as anxiety, emotional problems, or depression, while truancy is linked to externalizing difficulties, such as behavioural or authority problems (Dembo et al., 2016). In addition, parents/guardians are more often aware of school refusal than of their children's truancy (Bobakova et al., 2015), with the former manifesting more commonly in primary or lower secondary school and truancy tending to manifest in later grades (Melvin et al., 2017; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2017).

SAPs include total absence from school for one or more days, partial absences from school (e.g., missing classes or sections of a school day), tardiness to school, morning misbehaviours aimed at causing school absenteeism and/or significant mental/physical health problems, as well as structural and operational barriers to formal school attendance (Kearney et al, 2023). These problems can lead to early school dropout.

Several studies link school attendance generally to benefits for students, and SAPs have typically been linked to student impairments in critical domains of functioning (e.g., academic,



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socioemotional, mental health, physical health, family) (Ansari & Pianta, 2019). Similarly, school completion is associated with long-term benefits in adulthood, such as a wider range of opportunities and higher earning potential (Lara et al., 2018), while early school leaving is associated with greater economic, health, interpersonal, occupational, and mental health distress (Ansari et al., 2020; Lansford et al., 2016; Rocque et al., 2017; Rumberger, 2020).

Therefore, if these school attendance problems are addressed, we ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed in adulthood.

1.2. How do SAPs manifest themselves?

Warning signs can manifest themselves in the following environments:

- **School:** Frequent and unexplained absences; absences that follow a specific pattern (e.g. missing certain days of the week or at exam times); recurrent health problems (multiple calls to parents to pick up student).
- **Home:** Protests about attending school; anxiety or physical symptoms; worsening academic performance; difficulties completing homework or school projects.
- **Social interaction:** Lack of communication or negative interactions with peers (experiencing teasing or exclusion); negative interactions with teachers (feeling underestimated or afraid to ask questions for fear of appearing incompetent).

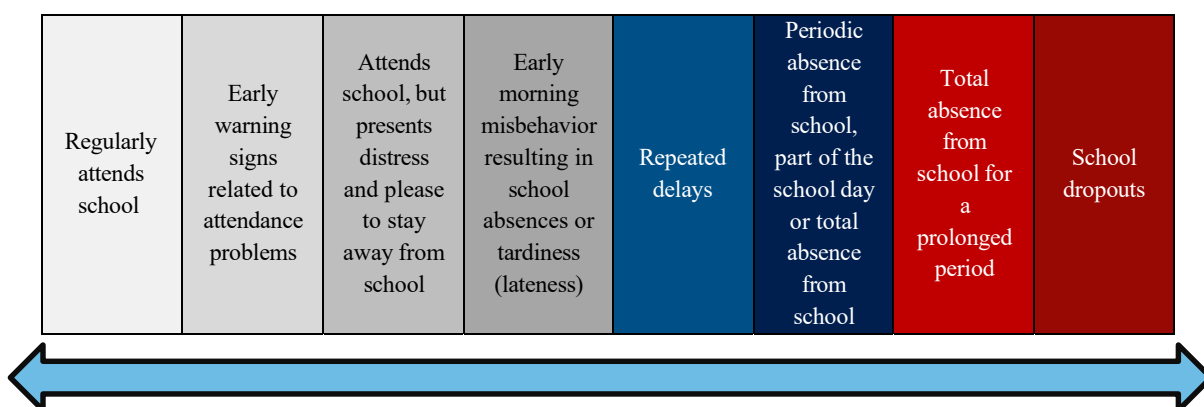
1.3. When does school absenteeism become a problem?

One way of approaching or analysing a student's SAPs is the dimensional approach, which involves looking at school attendance and its various associated problems along a spectrum ranging from total attendance to total absenteeism (Kearney et al., 2019):



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School attendance is represented at the left end of the spectrum and may include early warning signs that can lead to later absenteeism, such as frequent requests to leave the classroom or talk to the family, difficulties in moving from one class to another or going to certain areas of the school, or sudden changes in grades, homework submissions or behaviour (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014).

The centre of the spectrum represents school attendance combined with some form of absenteeism, such as being late to school, missing some classes of the day, periodic absences or leaving school early (Boylan & Rezulli, 2017).

The far right represents complete truancy, over a prolonged period of time in the form of absence or dropping out of school.

On a quantitative level, we can analyze absenteeism in terms of the number of absences the pupil had in the last academic year. Thus, 17 absences or less would not be a cause for concern, while 18 to 29 days should be considered a warning sign and more than 30 days of absence would correspond to chronic absenteeism, making it necessary to activate the absenteeism



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protocol and even refer to the school's educational guidance department or to the care resources in the area.

1.4. What are the consequences of not attending school and the benefits of regular attendance?

The following table summarizes the consequences of not attending school and the benefits of regular school attendance in three areas: academic, social, and personal.

	CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL	BENEFITS OF REGULAR ATTENDANCE
ACADEMIC AREA	Lack of basic skills: Students may miss the opportunity to acquire essential literacy and numeracy skills that are fundamental to daily functioning. Reduced knowledge base: Without school, they may lack knowledge in subjects such as science, history, and geography. Lower educational attainment: Lack of attendance often results in lower levels of formal education, limiting opportunities for higher education.	Acquisition of essential skills: Regular attendance helps students develop basic reading and maths skills. Broadening knowledge: Regular attendance enables the acquisition of diverse knowledge and contributes to a well-rounded education. Increased educational attainment: Regular attendance is associated with higher levels of formal education, facilitating access to advanced studies and improving career prospects.



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SOCIAL AREA	Limited socialization: The school provides a structured environment for developing social skills and building relationships. These skills may be affected by reduced attendance at school. Social isolation: Absence from school increases the risk of isolation, making it difficult to feel a sense of belonging to a community. Risk of behavioural problems: Without the school structure, there is an increased risk of behavioural problems, including delinquency and substance abuse.	Improved socialization: The school provides a structured environment that encourages social interactions and the building of meaningful relationships. Strengthening community connection: Regular attendance promotes a sense of belonging and connection with peers. Reduced risk of behavioural problems: The structure and guidance provided by the school helps to reduce behavioural problems.
PERSONAL AREA	Low self-esteem: Irregular attendance affects educational progress, which reduces confidence and self-perception. Poorer mental health: Lack of school participation can increase stress and feelings of social isolation. Lack of purpose and direction: Education provides guidance and a sense of purpose, without which it is difficult to set meaningful goals.	Increased self-esteem: Regular attendance supports educational achievement, building confidence and a positive self-image. Better mental health: Consistent participation in school reduces stress and social isolation. Sense of purpose and direction: Education helps to set meaningful goals and aspirations.



1.5. Casual component analysis

In the following, different factors related to the development and maintenance of school attendance problems will be described. Firstly, contextual factors, those related to the context close to the student (family, school, and community), will be addressed. After these, the individual factors of the student will be tackled, covering emotional, personal, cognitive, beliefs and educational resources areas.

1.5.1. Casual component analysis

Family factors:

- a. Parental involvement: The extent to which parents are involved in their children's education. This may be reflected in attendance at school meetings or support for educational tasks.
- b. Socio-economic status: Low-income families may face difficulties such as lack of transport, the need for children to work or care for other family members, or precarious housing situations.
- c. Family dynamics: Conflict, domestic violence, lack of parental support or supervision, and major family changes such as divorce or bereavement can influence absenteeism.
- d. Parental education: Parents with low levels of education may find it difficult to support their children's learning or may not value education in the same way.



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School components: Aspects of the school environment that impact on attendance and performance, such as school climate, teacher support and availability of resources.

- a. School climate: Negative school climate, bullying, conflictual relationships with teachers or peers.
- b. Teaching methodology: Teaching methods that are unattractive or not adapted to the individual needs of students can contribute to disengagement.
- c. Academic expectations: Too high or too low expectations on the part of teachers can affect students' motivation and participation.
- d. School policy: Rigid attendance rules or lack of early intervention programmes.

Family-school communication: The effectiveness of communication between students, parents, and teachers about academic expectations and student performance.

Community factors:

- a. Neighbourhood environment: Living in areas with high crime, lack of community resources or poor infrastructure can affect safety and the availability of educational opportunities.
- b. Support networks: Lack of community networks or support services such as after-school activities, counselling or programmes for at-risk youth can have a negative impact.



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1.5.2. Individual factors:

1. Interpretation of events and Locus of Control: How students interpret different situations can influence their behaviour.

Locus of Control defines how a person perceives their ability to influence their life, i.e. their perception of the extent to which they can control the events that affect them.

A person with an External Locus of Control feels that the events in their life are out of their control, they believe that external factors such as luck, fate, or the actions of other people, have more control over what happens to them. This can lead to a sense of helplessness or resignation. Students with an External Locus of Control feel that their school performance is out of their control. They may attribute their poor grades to factors such as "having bad luck" with a teacher or thinking that "school is pointless because it won't change their life situation". This perception may decrease their motivation to attend school regularly. In addition, if they face difficult situations in their environment, such as violence or poverty, they may develop a sense of learned helplessness, reinforcing the idea that they cannot do anything to change their situation.

In contrast, those with an Internal Locus of Control feel that they can determine their future and their reactions, they believe that their own efforts and decisions determine the outcome. Therefore, they have the ability to influence their environment and take



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responsibility for their actions. Students with an Internal Locus of Control tend to be more resilient in the face of academic difficulties, as they believe that with effort and persistence they can improve their performance. This makes them more likely to seek solutions when faced with problems, such as asking for help if they do not understand a subject or finding ways to manage their time. However, in a highly stressful environment or with overwhelming contextual factors, an Internal Locus of Control can generate an excessive emotional burden if the learner feels that he/she should be able to change things but fails to do so. This is why a balanced Locus of Control should be fostered.

2. Difficulty in understanding the relationship between effort and results. In the long run, students who struggle to comprehend the connection between their academic efforts and their school accomplishments can develop a perception of ineffectiveness in their academic abilities and be demotivated by the increasing demands of school. These students may develop non-attendance behaviors as school becomes a source of frustration instead of growth. Teachers and parents can intervene by promoting a growth mindset, valuing the progress achieved and emphasizing the impact that individual commitment has on the results achieved.

3. Emotional factors: Emotional negativity, such as anxiety, fear, or stress, can lead a student to avoid school. This can result in repeated absences or avoidance of certain parts of the school day. Negative emotions affect a student's motivation, making active participation difficult.

School anxiety is one of the main causes of negative emotionality in students. It can result from academic pressure, fear, failure, excessive expectations, or social anxiety when interacting with peers or teachers. Students experiencing social anxiety may



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find it difficult to concentrate, actively participate and, in extreme cases, avoid school altogether.

4. **Self-esteem and self-efficacy:** Providing specific positive feedback helps students to see their strengths and build confidence. Praise for effort, however small, can help students maintain their motivation and effort. To this end, breaking tasks down into smaller, more manageable goals can help students feel more capable and less overwhelmed. Achieving small goals increases confidence and motivation. Similarly, external support, such as that of an educational counsellor or tutor, can provide learners with personalised strategies to improve their confidence and deal effectively with challenges.
5. **Meaninglessness of school for future life:** Lack of connection between what they learn in school and their personal goals may cause some students to perceive education as irrelevant to their lives, interests, or future plans.
6. **Excessive school relevance:** It occurs when students place excessive importance on every assignment, test, or grade as if it were critical to their future. This interpretation of reality can lead to intense stress, as they believe that even the smallest mistakes will have serious consequences, leading to a constant sense of anxiety and fear of failure.
7. **Learning difficulties:** Problems such as dyslexia, ADHD or other difficulties can lead to feelings of frustration and helplessness.



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8. **Adolescent stage:** Hormonal changes, search for identity and peer influence are factors to consider in secondary school youth.
9. **Physical health problems:** Chronic illnesses, disabilities or physical limitations may influence attendance.
10. **Substance use.** Substance use can impair cognitive abilities and reduce school motivation, resulting in difficulties in maintaining a regular school routine and managing school demands. In addition, absenteeism itself can also encourage substance use, triggering a vicious circle where the lack of a structured and supervised environment may increase the risk of risky behaviour.



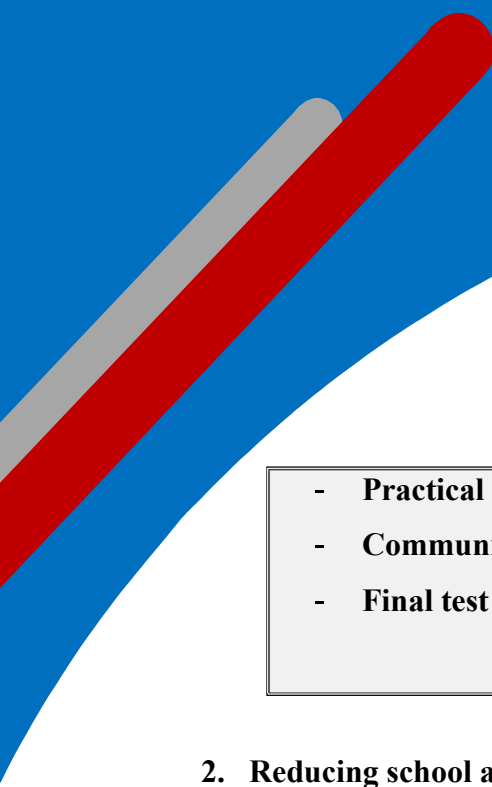
What will we find in the online course?

- **Checklist** to identify students at risk of school absenteeism. This tool helps early observation and intervention to promote better attendance and academic success. It can be used to classify the characteristics of each case into extreme, very high, high, moderate, or low risk.
 - The course also explains how to analyze the risk and to know the need for immediate intervention, monitoring of the evolution or referral to mental health or the school's Educational Guidance Department.
- **Explanatory videos** of the section.
- **Infographic summarising** when absenteeism becomes a problem (traffic light).
- **Examples of situations** reflecting the different causal factors of truancy.



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- **Practical activities** to consolidate learning and reflect in greater depth.
 - **Communication strategies** to support learners in their process.
 - **Final test** to check what has been learned.

2. Reducing school attendance problems in secondary school students

The following sections will discuss aspects related to school attendance problems and how to deal with them. A distinction will be made between emotional and cognitive aspects.

2.1. Verbal expression of emotions

- *Importance of emotions, how to recognise, express and quantify them in ascending order.*

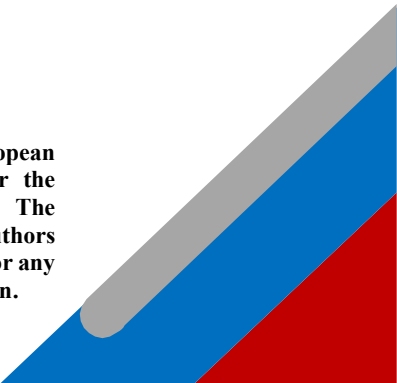
Increasing the verbal expression of emotions is crucial. Understanding how students cope with both simple and complex tasks can be a key factor in their development and resilience. How they respond to challenges, overcome obstacles, and maintain perseverance often determines their long-term success.

Successful people possess strong self-regulation skills that help them direct, sustain and redirect their attention when necessary. They also enable them to monitor and manage their thoughts, behaviours, and emotions. These skills, called "executive functions," are not innate, but can be learned and are critical in difficult situations. Learning to monitor and manage



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emotions allows students to recognise their intense feelings and use strategies to calm themselves, which facilitates the use of their executive skills.

Emotional regulation refers to a person's ability to monitor, evaluate and modify emotional responses to achieve a particular goal (Bettis et al., 2022). Research shows that students with strong self-regulation skills achieve greater academic success and are less likely to act impulsively or aggressively. They are also less likely to isolate themselves when feeling overwhelmed and achieve better social skills. Students with poor self-regulation skills may have emotional and behavioural problems, which affects their academic performance and increases the likelihood of being expelled from school. Youth with SAPs have been shown to display less healthy emotional regulation strategies, through less use of cognitive reappraisal and greater use of expressive suppression (Hughes et al., 2010, 2022), including anxious and depressive symptoms (Carpentieri et al., 2022; de Groot et al., 2023; Filippello et al., 2018).

Recognizing emotions requires interpreting the situation as perceived by the learner. Therefore, it is important to identify the specific emotion they are experiencing. Emotions such as fear are vital to detect and recognise in students.

In relation to the latter, students face both academic and emotional challenges, and fear is a natural response in many cases, whether it is a difficult exam, a presentation or trying something new. It is therefore important to explore students' fears in relation to the following key areas:

1. **Academic performance:** fears about grades, exams, and academic success in general.
2. **Peer relationships:** fear of interacting socially, being accepted, or being bullied.



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3. **Relationships with teachers:** fear of not meeting expectations, seeking help, or communicating effectively with teachers.
4. **Parental expectations:** fear of parental pressure, disappointing parents or not meeting their expectations.

TECHNIQUES TO ENCOURAGE VERBAL EXPRESSION OF EMOTIONS

- **Emotional vocabulary development:** Expand on the importance of teaching students a broad emotional language. Often, young people only know basic terms such as ‘sad’, ‘angry’ or ‘happy’. Introducing more detailed emotional vocabulary, such as ‘frustrated’, ‘anxious’, ‘disappointed’, or ‘excited’, allows for more accurate and effective expression of emotions. Doing activities where students label and describe their emotions with more specific words can be an initial step towards more effective emotional self-regulation.
- **Practical activities to recognise emotions:** Propose dynamics where students analyze and describe their emotions in everyday situations.
- **Quantifying emotions on a scale:** To help students understand the intensity of their emotions, it is useful to use tools such as a ‘1-10 emotional scale’. For example, if a student feels fear before an exam, they can rate the intensity of their fear and discuss how they can reduce it using breathing techniques or positive self-talk.
- **Dialogues about emotions in the classroom:** Encouraging students to share how they feel before tackling complex academic tasks or social situations fosters an environment where emotions are normalised and validated and helps to create a culture of emotional support.



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EMOTIONAL REGULATION TECHNIQUES

- **Mindfulness and emotional regulation:** Implementing mindfulness practices in the classroom can be a valuable resource to help students observe their emotions without judgement, allowing them to choose conscious responses rather than impulsive automatic reactions. Exercises such as deep breathing, where students focus on inhaling and exhaling in a slow and controlled manner. Or body scanning, where students are guided to focus on different parts of their body to identify and release tensions, are effective techniques to reduce the intensity of negative emotions and promote a state of calm and clarity of mind.
- **Group games and exercises:** Group activities that simulate academic or social stressful situations are useful tools for students to practice emotional regulation in a safe and controlled environment. These may include role-plays or simulations of scenarios such as difficult exams or public presentations. This is followed by a group discussion where students share how they felt, the emotions they experienced and the strategies they used to manage them. Reflecting collectively on these experiences helps to normalize feelings of anxiety or stress, while strengthening coping skills and encouraging shared learning of techniques to better manage emotions in real situations.

2.2. Cognitive components

- *Identification of situations, recognition and differentiation of thoughts, construction of cognitive alternatives.*

Cognitive distortions: mental traps



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Cognitive distortions are biased ways of thinking that affect the perception of situations, leading to distorted judgements and interactions. The most common ones that educators need to recognise are:

1. **Filtering:** When a person focuses exclusively on a single negative aspect of a situation, ignoring positive details. A student, for example, may focus on a minor criticism, ignoring positive comments.
2. **Mind reading:** This is assuming what others think without evidence. A teacher may think that he or she dislikes a colleague just because he or she did not say hello, drawing conclusions based on assumptions
3. **Labelling:** Judging or categorising someone based on limited information. Calling a student 'lazy' for a mistake ignores their abilities and strengths.
4. **Catastrophic thinking:** Overestimating minor problems, expecting the worst outcome. A teacher may fear losing his or her job over a minor mistake, unnecessarily increasing anxiety.
5. **Polarized thinking:** Classifying situations into extremes, considering them as absolute successes or failures. This prevents a balanced view.
6. **Emotional reasoning:** Basing beliefs on emotions rather than facts. Feeling guilty can make someone think they have done something wrong without evidence.

Constructing alternative cognitive pathways.

By recognizing these distortions, educators can not only improve their well-being, but also help students deal with these challenges.

To construct alternative cognitive pathways, when we identify a recent thought that a student has expressed that affects their school attendance, we should help them generate positive alternative thinking (e.g., when faced with a difficult task that the student feels they are not



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capable enough to do, we can help them approach it as a challenge that they need to work on). To do this, we must base our confrontation on recent evidence that reinforces the reformulation of thinking and does not lack reality (e.g., it is a student who successfully solved a similar task yesterday).

TECHNIQUES FOR WORKING ON THE IDENTIFICATION AND MANAGEMENT OF COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

- **Exercises to identify automatic thoughts:** There are various exercises or dynamics that we can carry out with students to work on identifying this type of thoughts:
 - Creating a thought diary in which they write down the situations that cause them stress and the automatic thoughts that arise. After this, you can work with them to classify these thoughts into the cognitive distortions mentioned (such as catastrophic thinking or labelling).
 - Challenging distortions with guided questions: Coach students to challenge their biased thinking with questions such as: "What is the evidence for and against this thinking?"; "Am I looking at the situation from a balanced or extreme point of view?"; "What would I say to a friend who had the same thinking?".



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- **Cognitive restructuring techniques:** These help students to reframe their negative thoughts into more balanced and realistic alternatives. For example, instead of thinking "I can never understand mathematics", they could learn to think "Mathematics is hard for me now, but I can get better with practice and help".
- **Constructing cognitive alternatives with recent evidence:** It is useful to create exercises where students look for recent examples of success or achievement. This reinforces the idea that they have the ability to meet challenges. For example, a student who believes they always fail in science could recall an experiment they did well and use this as evidence to counter their negative thinking.



What will we find in the online course?

- **Checklist** designed to assess students' emotional responses, from feelings of discouragement to their ability to cope with difficulties.
By analysing these behaviours, you will be able to better support your students, helping them to develop a mindset that sees challenges as opportunities for improvement.
- Brainstorming exercise with **practical strategies** to help students face their fears with confidence. You will also be able to download a checklist to support students in overcoming these obstacles and help them thrive in any learning environment.
- **Structured approach** to help students manages anxiety and build resilience.
 - By identifying their anxiety triggers and recognising negative thoughts, students can be guided towards positive and calming thoughts, thus promoting their emotional well-being.



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- **Explanatory videos** of the section.
- **Examples of situations and scenarios** of interactions between teachers and students to learn to detect common emotions in students.
- **Questionnaire on problem-solving skills.** Its purpose is to carry out a personal self-assessment of the strategies that you have as a professional to solve problems, distinguishing between those strategies that approach problems in a reflexive or thoughtless way, and those that consider the globality of the problem and those that do not (Farello & Bianchi, 2005).
- **Practical activities** to reinforce learning and further reflection, as well as templates for classroom activities.
- **Final test** to check what has been learned.

3. Promoting communication strategies and improving school attendance

This section will present various communication strategies (Porto & Castoldi, 2017) and reinforcement techniques aimed at promoting consistent school attendance and strengthening the connection between students and the educational environment. These strategies aim to create a climate of safety and trust in the classroom, where students feel listened to, valued and able to freely express their concerns and needs.

The aim is to provide tools that enable teachers to facilitate open dialogue and support students in overcoming challenges that may affect their engagement and participation in school life.

Finally, a practical guide to the "Token Economy" technique, a positive reinforcement tool widely used for its ease of implementation and results, will be discussed.

3.1. Encouraging the use of effective communication techniques between parents and teachers



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3.1.1. Active listening

Active listening is a key communication skill that goes beyond hearing words: it involves concentrating fully, understanding, and responding thoughtfully (Gordon, 2020). Practicing active listening demonstrates a genuine interest in the speaker's message, which strengthens relationships, improves collaboration and reduces misunderstandings (Gordon, 2013).

It helps to absorb information effectively and to create an environment that is respectful and open to dialogue. Active listening requires time, concentration and being available to process what the other person is communicating. Effective listening involves moving from hearing to listening through three fundamental approaches:

- **Concentration and time:** Listening should take place in a quiet situation, conducive to mutual attention, eliminating distractions and avoiding interruptions. This involves eliminating noise, maintaining eye contact, and avoiding interruptions.
- **Total listening:** Without anticipating or distorting the message. It must be constant and complete, not fragmentary.
- **Empathic listening:** Feeling the state of the interlocutor through emotional and sensory attunement.

To put it into practice, three activities must be carried out:

1. Interest in the message, expressing it both through non-verbal communication (expression, body orientation, gestures) and verbal communication.
2. Process the information received, discriminating the important parts, and interpreting the message.
3. Give listening responses, such as head nods or comments such as "go on, I'm listening" or "I understand."



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3.1.2. Assertive communication

In today's educational environments, it is crucial that both educators and students are able to express their thoughts and opinions in a respectful and confident manner.

We distinguish between three types of communication:

- **Assertive:** Expressing oneself honestly and appropriately.

Assertive communication involves knowing how to express our opinions without offending others, defending our rights while respecting those of others. Acting assertively, respecting one's own and others' thoughts and emotions, increases self-esteem, satisfaction, personal development, and favours respect for and towards others. This style is characterized by expressing what you feel and think, considering the rights of others, without humiliating or demeaning. Speech is fluent and confident, expressing exactly what you want and giving the other person space to speak. Positive and negative feelings are expressed in conversation, so that, for example, when negative criticism is made, it begins and ends with positive information. The assertive style is related to problem solving, a sense of control, self-esteem, and positive appraisal by others.

- **Passive:** Avoidance of confrontation, with difficulty in defending oneself.

Will is surrendered to others, not expressing what is expected to be achieved and avoiding conflict. It is often characterised by a low tone of voice, avoidance of eye contact, tense and awkward posture and slurred speech. The person prefers to keep quiet, despite being upset with the situation, and tends to apologise a lot, justify or over-



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explain, and act submissive. This style of communication tends to be related to interpersonal conflicts, low self-esteem and feelings of helplessness and guilt.

- **Aggressive:** Acting in an imposing or confrontational manner.

In contrast to the passive style, this is characterised by expressing yourself in a threatening manner, defending your rights and opinions without taking the other person into consideration. This style tends to show disregard for the opinions of others and focus on achieving their goals above others. It is often characterised by a loud voice, blunt speech, challenging eye contact, use of insults and/or threats and an intimidating posture. It is also often associated with interpersonal conflict, feelings of guilt, frustration, and constant anger (Colli, 2020).

When it comes to **effective communication**, responses that do not facilitate conversation include (Gordon, 2013):

Giving orders or directing.	Praising and pampering.
Warning and rebuking.	Labelling and ridiculing.
Exhorting, moralizing, and lecturing.	Interpreting and diagnosing.
Advising and offering solutions.	Comforting and reassuring
Teaching, arguing, and persuading.	Excessive questioning and research.
Judging, criticizing, and opposing.	Minimize, change the subject, joke, and distract.

3.1.3. Effective parent-teacher communication

Parent-teacher communication is vital to student success, connecting the school and home environments to address students' academic, social, and emotional needs. The goal is to establish clear, supportive, and solution-oriented communication.



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3.2. Practical guide

One of the most common ways, due to its effectiveness and ease of implementation, to guarantee the learning and maintenance of a behaviour over time is positive reinforcement. This involves rewarding when a positive behaviour is carried out. In the case in question, one way of generalising regular class attendance among students is to establish reward methodologies to motivate those students who have problems with attendance.

This section presents a widely used reinforcement strategy, especially in primary education, but easily adaptable to higher grades.

3.2.1. Reinforcement strategies: Token economy

Token economy is an operant conditioning behaviour modification technique based on positive reinforcement. The procedure to be followed in this technique is based on exchange, i.e., every time the person performs an appropriate behaviour, this will be rewarded with a token reinforcer, which will later be exchanged for a reward.

Objective: To improve school attendance through a structured reward system that motivates and reinforces positive attendance behaviour. Token economy involves giving tokens (coins, stickers, stamps, etc.) to students for meeting attendance targets, which can be exchanged for various rewards.

Duration: Variable, depending on the situation. It can cover a semester, a school year...

Parties involved: Students, teachers, and parents/guardians.



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Structure of the personalised token economy system:

1. Initial assessment:

- **Absence analysis:** Evaluate the frequency of absences of each student during a period.
- **Defining levels of participation:** Classifying students according to their frequency of attendance:
 1. High absenteeism.
 2. Moderate absenteeism.
 3. Low absenteeism.
- **Definition of tokens:** These can be coins, electronic dots, stickers, or other tokens that are easy to distribute and recognise.
- **Definition of the behaviours to be rewarded** (for example, getting up and getting ready for school without resistance, staying at school for the entire day, etc.).

2. Assignment of tokens - differentiated targets per level:

- **Level 1:** 1 token for each hour of class attended, with a bonus of 5 tokens for half a consecutive day at school.
- **Level 2:** 1 token for every two hours of class attended, with a bonus of 10 tokens for a full consecutive day.
- **Level 3:** 1 token for each full day of attendance, with a bonus of 15 tokens for a consecutive week at school.



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In order to adjust the system to students with severe absenteeism problems, it is recommended to integrate a flexible interest-based approach, focusing on the subjects they are most interested in to motivate them to attend those classes.

3. Table of rewards:

- **Small rewards (10-20 tokens):** For example, pencils, notebooks, stickers, etc.
- **Medium rewards (30-50 tokens):** Vouchers for the cafeteria, books, school supplies...
- **Large rewards (60-100 tokens):** Tickets to school events, excursions, diplomas of recognition....
- **Special rewards (100+ tokens):** Higher value rewards, such as gift vouchers, participation in exclusive events, etc.

4. Monitoring and recording:

- Use a log or application to keep track of tokens accumulated by each student.
- The teacher will update students on their progress on a weekly basis.
- Create an interactive calendar where students colour in attendance and absence days to visually encourage regularity in school attendance.

This positive reinforcement approach, combined with effective communication strategies, fosters a school environment in which students, parents and teachers are actively involved in improving attendance and academic achievement.



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What will we find in the online course?

- **Assertive communication questionnaire** designed to assess your communication style, differentiating between assertive, passive, or aggressive. The aim is to help you reflect on your personal communication style, identifying strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Videos of examples of communication** that reflect the different styles to learn how to differentiate between them.
- **Scenarios** for reflecting on possible communication strategies with learners.
- **Effective communication strategies** for interacting with learners.
- **Activity to strengthen teacher and family collaboration** through constructive feedback, understanding parents' observations and creating action plans that prioritise the holistic development of each student.
- **Templates for the token economy**, such as a slate for collecting reward tokens.

CONCLUSIONS

This course is expected to offer an in-depth understanding of school attendance problems, providing participants with key tools to effectively prevent and address this issue. Over three thematic blocks, the course has addressed everything from awareness-raising to direct intervention, ensuring that professionals in the field of education or parents have the necessary knowledge to identify, understand and act on truancy.

The first section works on raising awareness of the importance of school attendance, defining the associated problems and their serious consequences at both academic and personal levels. In addition, emphasis has been placed on early detection of the risk of absenteeism by



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identifying causal factors, enabling professionals to intervene early and reduce the negative impact of absenteeism.

Key to the second section has been the understanding of the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural aspects that can influence truancy. By developing specific tools to address these factors, participants are expected to learn how to implement personalized interventions that promote students' emotional well-being and motivation, helping to improve their attendance and performance.

Finally, in the third section, effective communication strategies and direct intervention techniques have been offered to manage truancy cases. Educational professionals interested in the course are expected to acquire skills to establish an open and respectful dialogue with students and their families, promoting an atmosphere of collaboration and commitment in solving attendance problems.

In summary, this course provides a solid basis for tackling truancy in a comprehensive way, combining prevention, treatment of underlying causes and direct intervention. With the tools and knowledge acquired, it is expected that professionals in education and other associated fields will be better prepared to act proactively, offering appropriate support to promote regular attendance and school success for all students.



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