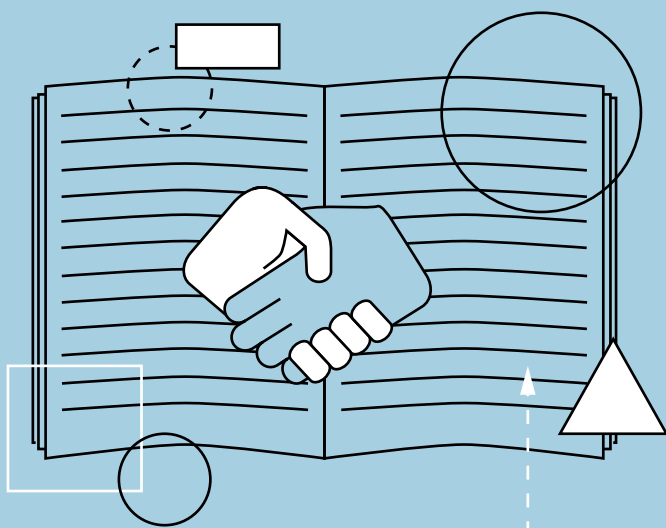


# TOOLBOX

How to manage conflicts, so that they don't turn into violence





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How to manage conflicts, so that they don't turn into violence

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Wrocław miasto spotkań



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# Introduction

Conflict is a natural part of how people relate to each other - and that includes what goes on at school. It can actually serve a useful purpose, bringing unmet needs, differences of opinion, and underlying tensions to the surface. When those things are spotted and handled well, they can become an opportunity to strengthen communication and relationships. That said, not every difficult situation calls for the same response. How you handle a conflict is different from how you handle aggressive behavior - and both are different from dealing with violence.

This publication has been written with the adults who work with or care for children and young people in and around school in mind - teachers, educators, school counsellors, psychologists, school administrators, parents, and guardians. It's for anyone who wants to get a better read on the tricky situations that come up in peer groups, figure out what's really going on, and respond in a way that actually fits the situation.

Parents and guardians have a particularly important role here. They're often the first ones to notice when something's off - withdrawal, tension, not wanting to go to school, low mood, or trouble with friendships. But it's not always easy to tell whether what you're seeing is a conflict, a crisis, or something more serious like violence. Getting that right really matters, because it shapes everything that comes next - from having a conversation and offering support, to stepping in more decisively.

This publication draws on the Foundation's hands-on experience working with conflict, peer violence, and school communities. The aim is to help adults take a careful look at what's actually happening - who's involved, what's driving it, what the effects are, and what the broader context looks like. The tools we're offering here are meant to help you not just understand the problem better, but also figure out what kind of response makes sense given the specifics.

We hope this publication turns out to be useful for all the adults who care about the wellbeing, safety, and relationships of children and young people. We believe it can be a helpful resource both for people working in schools and for parents and guardians who want to be more present and switched-on when things get tough - and to work together more effectively in the interest of the kids they care for.

# 1. What is an initial situation diagnosis and why is it worth doing?

As mentioned in the introduction - conflict is a complex situation. Most often it doesn't arise "here and now" and is the result of the correlation of three factors:

- unmet needs
- ineffective communication
- emotions

Motron Deutsch, an American social psychologist and researcher seeking effective forms of conflict resolution, believed that four conditions are needed for a conflict to occur:

- two or more parties (individuals and/or groups)
- which at the same time
- feel specific needs (usually contradictory)
- and take action to satisfy them.

For example - imagine that the class and the teacher are parties (a group and an individual) that feel conflicting needs (the class would like to do enjoyable tasks in groups, the teacher proposes a quick test) at the same time (during the lesson). If the fourth factor doesn't occur, we still can't talk about conflict. If the students openly oppose taking the test and the teacher pushes them and reaches for pressure tools (conduct grades, threatening to speak with parents, etc.) it will already turn into a conflict situation.

However, let's imagine that the teacher pushes them and the students continue to stand by their position. If in response the teacher reaches for pressure tools (conduct grades, a note to the diary) and the students rebel, it will already turn into a conflict situation.

Conflict analysis will determine **how many parties** are realistically involved in the conflict. It will point out the **factors** directly and indirectly **influencing** the conflict development, allow to clearly see and analyze what actually happened (**facts**), the **background** of the situation, its **origins** or root causes of the conflict, and the **relations** between the involved parties. Such analysis will also allow us to determine which individuals and groups are affected by the escalating conflict, even though they are not directly involved. It will also help us understand the perspectives of the parties and their behavior or actions.

Conflict analysis tools we'll present provide us with a comprehensive outline the situation at hand. It's best to use them in a group, so that the analysis contains as much input as possible. In total, after applying all three tools, the information obtained will relate to:

- causes of conflict
- effects of unattended conflict
- identifying conflict actors (involved parties and groups or individuals affected by the conflict) and the relations between them
- determining what are the parties' priorities and needs, and whether this coincides with the messages they formulate externally.

Conflict analysis will also allow us to see which of the factors generating the conflict the parties can realistically influence and discuss, and which are external and objective, with no possibility of change. In the second case, we'll want to talk about how to resolve the situation by accepting what is beyond our control. Hitting a wall (a sense of powerlessness) at this point severely undermines the sense of agency, so it's worth separating what we can change from what we can't influence.

Sometimes the conflict is frozen because for various reasons the parties don't want to engage in working on it, so they pretend that the situation is not a conflict. This is where an analysis of the consequences (short and long-term) of leaving the conflict as it is will certainly help.

### **1.1 The role of parents and caregivers in assessing conflict situations**

When trying to diagnose the situation, it's worth bringing parents and guardians into the picture too. They're usually not directly involved in what happens at school, but they're a big part of the world the child lives in. And quite often, they're the first ones to pick up on changes in their child's everyday behavior - reluctance to go to school, withdrawal, irritability, low mood, trouble sleeping, a drop in motivation, or visible stress linked to the class, a specific person, or something happening at school.

Talking to parents and guardians can give you really useful information about how the child is experiencing the situation - how they describe it, what they're worried about, and what kind of support they need. That said, this doesn't replace the assessment done at school - it adds to it. It helps you see the bigger picture and notice things that might not show up in the classroom, during lessons, or in direct contact with the group.

Bringing parents and guardians into the assessment process is especially important when the problem is starting to affect the child's wellbeing, social relationships, or sense of safety. In those situations, parents shouldn't just be on the receiving end of updates after the fact - they should be partners in understanding what's going on and figuring out what to do about it. Good collaboration helps separate facts from assumptions, work through the emotions involved, and make sure the adults around the child act consistently.

It's also worth being careful that contact with parents and guardians doesn't come across as judgmental or turn into a blame game. The family shapes a lot of the context around the child, but that doesn't mean they should automatically be seen as the source of the problem. The goal of the assessment is to get as clear a picture as possible - to understand the dynamics of the situation and plan the next steps in a way that puts the child's safety, relationships, and wellbeing first.

## 2. Diagnostic tools

We'd like to present you three tools - try to go through them all, as together they allow you to analyze the conflict in depth, understand its origins and develop a method for dealing with it. Thanks to them, you'll be able to take a close look at what is happening and work out possible solutions. Using all three methods, you can see the broad context, the causes and dynamics of the situation, as well as the connections between the conflict parties.

### 2.1 Conflict tree

A very helpful diagnostic tool, allowing for looking at an issue in cause-and-effect terms. Conflict tree is a tool for individual and group work. You can work with the shower of ideas method, while looking for the causes of the problem and writing out the effects (consequences) of inaction.

It's important to point out that conflicts are multidimensional in nature and there is no single cause - sometimes they are the result of past history or entangled relations.

The first step is to properly diagnose the problem and formulate it well. In the example below, it will be "Elitism in high school number... ", but you can also formulate it with reference to some other problem you see in your school (e.g., poor relations between foreign children and the rest of the class). Then, we look for causes and dissect them as

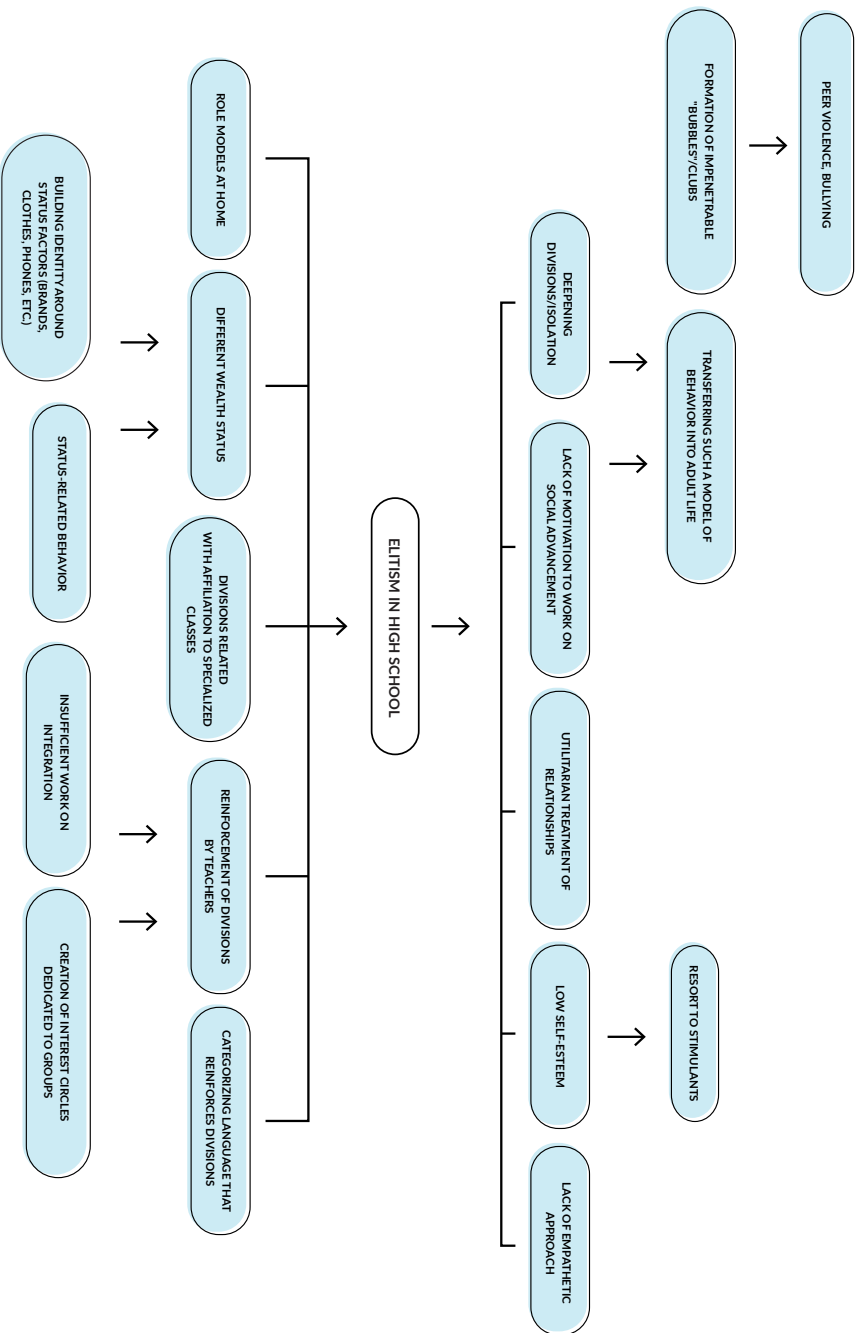
the roots of the tree. Keep in mind that they can arise from one another, branch out and go deep, just like roots often do. It's worth making an effort to actually "dig down" to the root cause from which subsequent causes may arise. In the next step, in order to show the full meaning of the conflict, you must also look at its consequences, i.e. results of not taking care of the situation - that is, the branches of the tree. Knowing the causes allows you to determine what to address in order to move toward a solution. In turn, knowing the consequences makes one aware of the individual, social, economic costs of the situation.

In the second step, analyze which causes of conflict you can influence and work with them. Do you have an impact on the differential wealth status of male and female students? Or patterns learned from homes, divisions related to specialties? Of course not. From the diagnosed reasons, you can work on deeper integration of students, as well as over the language of communication at school - conducting educational lessons on this topic.

## **2.2 Conflict map**

The following tool allows you to look at all the parties to the conflict, as well as the relations they share and the balance of power between the various actors. Developing such a map also allows you to see who in the conflict strives for agreement and seeks constructive solutions, and who contributes to its aggravation. Thanks to this, we can look at the viewpoints of various parties, as well as indicate which specific individuals are really in conflict - this is often different from the intuitive judgment of the situation.

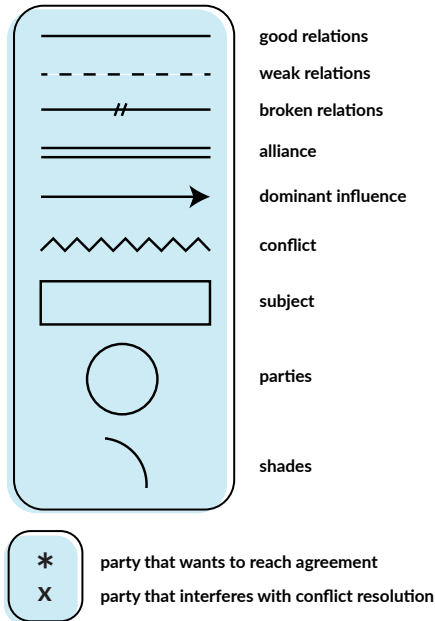
Actors in a conflict can be both individuals and institutions, as well as those individuals or communities that are influenced by the effects of that given conflict. Thanks to the map, we can also get an idea of the alliances between stakeholders, and with whom it is worthwhile to first enter into talks to deal with the conflict.



### Step by step:

1. list all the conflicts in circles
2. examine the relations linking the parties and visualize them graphically
3. identify who is working to establish peace, and who wants to interfere in the resolution of conflict - mark it on the map

### Map legend



### Example conflict map

Divisions and tensions caused by these factors are evident in the school. The Olympians Club brings together the most talented youth who compete in inter-school knowledge competitions and often win them. Their supervisor is a history teacher who strongly favors this group, emphasizing their uniqueness. Also, other teachers often pay more attention to those in the club than to the graduating class, which will be taking the final exam in three months. The class is supported strongly by its supervisor (a biology teacher), who also asks for help from an educational counselor (also, a friend of hers).

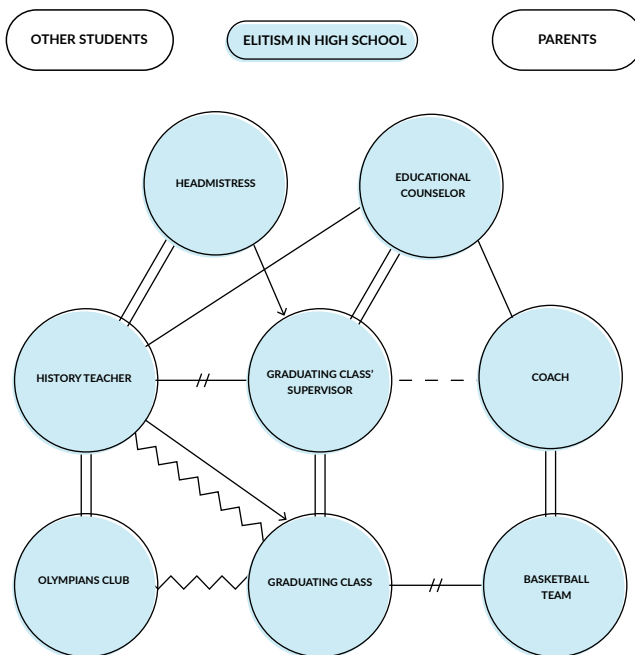
The counselor has bad relations with the history teacher, as she often confronts him at the teacher's council and criticizes his behavior. Meanwhile, the conflict between the

pians Club and graduating classes is rising. The Club's supervisor tries to prove to the graduates that they are unprepared for the final exam in history, constantly comparing them to two students who win competitions. He forces them to take unannounced tests and assigns them a lot of reading material. The Club's supervisor is in very good terms with the headmistress, since the Club's achievements is something she can boast about.

Another group that enjoys special treatment is the basketball team, representing the high school in competitions. Most teachers let them "slide" somehow and give them higher grades even if they happen to do very badly in classes. The Club members are jealous of their privileges - they believe they earned theirs with hard work, while basketball players get theirs "for free."

The person who works for the agreement is the counselor who has a lot of influence over the headmistress and often brings such issues to her attention. She also makes sure to be on good terms with everyone on the faculty.

The whole conflict also affects other students. The parents' council is also beginning to take an interest in the matter - some have their children in the graduating class.



As you can see from the map above, it's possible to accurately trace the axes of conflict (see legend), but also the alliances between the parties. It makes it easy to plan the next steps in good relations with all faculty members.

### 2.2.1 Section for parents/guardians

Depending on the situation, parents, guardians, or the parent council can also become key players in a conflict - especially when things start spilling beyond the classroom and affecting the wider school community.

#### Building a united front among adults

It's worth remembering that a school community is made up of three groups - two of which are adults: the teaching staff and the parents. The third group is the children and teenagers. A conflict map doesn't just show how many parties are involved and where the lines of tension run - it also helps visualize alliances. Teachers and parents are adults with a shared goal: the wellbeing of the child or children in their care. It's worth building that alliance, and the foundation for doing so is effective communication.

Effective communication is rooted in talking about needs and genuinely wanting to find solutions together. If the shared priority is managing peer conflict before it escalates or turns into something more serious, it's worth making the effort to build a relationship focused on working through the difficult situation as a team.

#### Effective communication

Often inspired by Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication (NVC) approach, effective communication is rooted in the language of needs and focused on finding solutions together. It comes down to a few key principles:

##### 1. Separate facts from judgements

Talk about what actually happened, without interpreting or evaluating it.  
e.g. Instead of: "You're irresponsible" - Try: "You didn't show up to our meeting at 10:00"

## 2. Express your feelings and emotions

Name what you're feeling rather than hiding it behind accusations. e.g. "I feel frustrated / angry / worried" This keeps things authentic and helps ease the tension.

## 3. Talk about needs

Emotions point to underlying needs - it's important to recognize them and put them into words. e.g. "I need more predictability / support / cooperation"

## 4. Make specific requests (not demands)

Requests should be: clear, realistic, specific  
e.g. "Could you let me know ahead of time next time if you're going to be late?"

## 5. Listen actively

Focus on actually understanding the other person, not just waiting for your turn to speak:

- paraphrase ("If I'm getting this right, you're saying that...?")
- ask questions
- if someone is speaking at length, don't interrupt - jot down your thoughts and questions so you don't lose track of them
- agree on a time limit for each person to speak, so one side doesn't end up dominating the conversation

## 6. Look for solutions together

Instead of "who's right", ask: "What can we do so that everyone involved is okay with the outcome?" This shifts the conversation towards collaboration and a shared goal.

## 7. Take ownership of how you communicate

Speak in the first person ("I") rather than pointing fingers ("you always...").  
"I feel...", "I need..."

## 8. Stay open and flexible

Be ready to:

- change your mind
- take on the other person's perspective, or at least sit with it for a moment before dismissing it just because you see things differently
- if you can't reach agreement - look for a third option or seek outside support

## 9. Avoid generalizations and extremes

Words like "always" and "never" tend to pour fuel on the fire. Stick to talking about specific situations instead.

## 10. Care about the relationship, not just the outcome

The goal isn't to "win" - it's to keep the relationship intact and find a way forward that works for everyone.

### 2.3 Onion

This idea assumes that the behavior and positions of individuals or groups resemble an onion: they have many aspects, but only those on the surface are visible. Once we begin to "peel" the layers, will we get to what lies beneath the declared position to know the interest and the real need. In many situations, we are not aware of our needs - getting into conflicts and thus defending one's position and wanting to win an argument is part

of human nature. Position and interest are not at all the same as needs. Supporting questions that facilitate the analysis are:

What do the conflict parties need in a given situation?

Is it important to them?

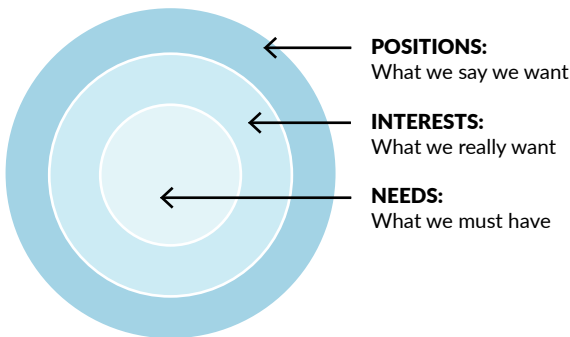
Is it necessary to meet these needs? Why? What happens if these needs are not met?

How will meeting these needs affect the positions and behaviors of the conflict parties?

Let's look at the differences between the different onion layers:

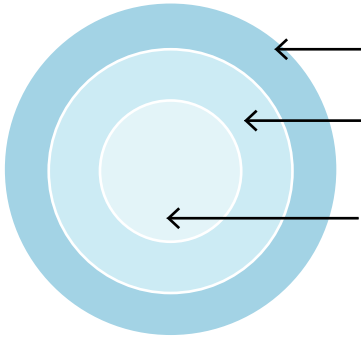
- **position** includes a statement from a person regarding what they (allegedly) expect from a given conflict situation,
- **interests** refer to what people actually want and what motivates them.
- **needs** (a must-have) which must be satisfied if the resolution of the dispute is to satisfy all parties.

Interests are sometimes negotiable - unlike needs. In resolving a conflict, it's crucial for the parties to understand their own basic needs, the needs of those they are in conflict in, and to consider how (and whether at all) these needs can be met, thus helping to achieve a constructive outcome. It's important to realize that there is always more than one acceptable solution to a problem.



Below are two sample onions developed for the same conflict, which plays out around elitism in a high school.

**GRADUATING CLASS**

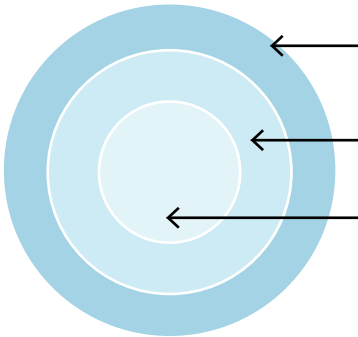


**POSITION:**  
History teacher torments us

**INTEREST:**  
We want support and good  
reparation for the finals

**NEED:**  
Justice, sense of security

**CLUB SUPERVISOR/  
HISTORY TEACHER**



**POSITION:**  
You don't learn enough, as the club  
members do

**INTEREST:**  
Building his authority

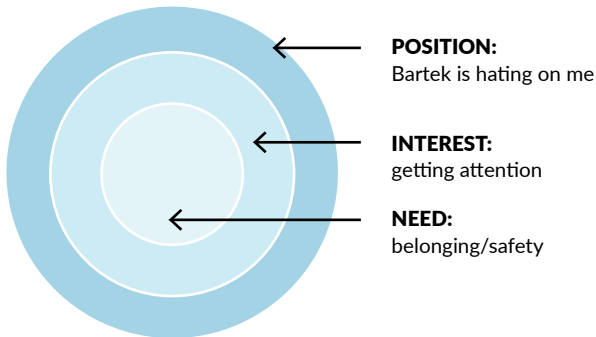
**NEED:**  
Acknowledgment

### 2.3.1 Section for parents/guardians

#### How to get to the interests and needs behind a conversation with your child?

Picture this: your child comes home from school and says "Bartek is hating on me." Your instinct as a parent might be to jump straight into action - size up the situation, give advice, call the school, or defend your child. But before rushing to solutions, it's worth slowing down and paying attention to what your child actually went through, what they're trying to tell you, and what they need right now. The word "hating" can cover a really wide range of experiences: a one-off hurtful comment, repeated mockery, being left out of the group, online comments, threats, or a conflict where both sides played a part. A handy tool here is the Onion, which helps you dig deeper and try to understand what your child is really communicating.

Tool: The Onion



Behind the words "Bartek is hating on me" there can be all kinds of situations - from a moment of hurt feelings to genuine peer violence. So in the conversation, it's worth asking about specific behaviors, how often they happened, the context, and how it's affecting your child.

said something unkind once, like "I don't like you"

criticized an idea during a game or group activity

didn't want to play with or sit next to your child

rolled his eyes, scoffed, or acted dismissively

pointed out your child's mistake in front of others, for example during a lesson

made a joke that your child found hurtful

called your child a nickname they didn't like

sent unpleasant messages, comments, or memes about your child

nazwał przezwiskiem, którego adresat nie lubił

told others not to play with your child

repeatedly teased, picked on, or provoked your child

spread rumors or passed on false information about your child

took, hid, or damaged your child's belongings

made fun of their appearance, clothes, hair, or the way they talk

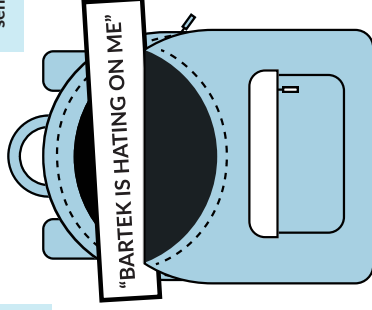
posted an embarrassing photo, video, or screenshot without permission

crossed physical boundaries - pushing, shoving, kicking, hitting

intimidated, threatened, or blackmailed your child

subjected your child to systematic bullying

encouraged others to exclude or mock your child



## How to handle this kind of situation?

A good place to start is with a calm, open question: **"What exactly happened?"** This gives your child the space to tell the story in their own words, without pressure and without you steering them towards a particular answer. You can build on it: "When did this happen?", "Where were you?", "Who else was there?", "Was this the first time, or has it happened before?" Questions like these help separate facts from interpretations. Your child might say "He hates me," and you can gently help them get more specific: "I understand that's how it felt. But what exactly did he say or do?" This helps your child learn to describe situations more precisely, and gives you a clearer picture of what's actually going on.

The next step is to ask: **"What did Bartek do, or how did he behave?"** It's worth encouraging your child to describe specific actions, words, gestures, or messages, rather than just sticking with the label "hating on me." You could ask: "What words did he use?", "Did he say it in front of others?", "Did anyone react?", "Did it happen during break, in class, or online?" The point isn't to interrogate your child - it's to gather information calmly. Your tone as a parent matters a lot here: your child needs to feel that you're on their side, while at the same time you're helping them make sense of the situation rather than ramping up their fear or anger.

It's also really important to pause and check in on how your child is feeling: **"How did you feel in that situation?"** This question shows your child that their emotions matter and deserve attention. You can go deeper: "What was the hardest part for you?", "Did you feel more angry, sad, ashamed, helpless, or scared?", "What did you think about yourself at that moment?", "What did you need most right then?" A child who's on the receiving end of hurtful behavior from a peer doesn't usually need a lecture straight away on how to stand up for themselves. First, they need to feel that what they went through has been taken seriously: "That must have been really upsetting for you", "I get why you might have felt embarrassed with others listening", "I'm glad you're telling me about this."

Only once you've got a handle on the facts and the emotions is it time to move on to needs and possible next steps. Asking **"What solutions do you see?"** gives your child a sense of agency. Rather than handing them a ready-made script, invite them to think it through together: "What might help if this happens again?", "Is there anyone in the class you feel safer around?", "Would you want to talk to Bartek yourself, or would you prefer

to have an adult there?", "What solution feels possible to you, and what feels too hard right now?" Questions like these help you tell the difference between what your child actually needs and what you as a parent want to do immediately. Sometimes a child needs protection and intervention, sometimes support in having a conversation, sometimes a chance to practice what to say - and sometimes, more than anything, they just need to be heard and have what happened put into words.

At the end, it's worth asking directly: **"Where do you need my support?"** This question is particularly important because it shows your child that you're not taking over completely - but you're not leaving them to handle it alone either. You can get more specific: "Do you just want me to listen?", "Should I help you figure out what to say?", "Do you need me to talk to your teacher?", "Do you want us to write down what happened together first?" Through conversations like this, your child starts to get better at recognizing their own needs - safety, respect, belonging, fairness, courage, support, or just some peace and quiet. And you, as a parent, can respond in a way that actually fits - not too much, not too little, but just right for the situation and where your child is at.

This kind of conversation takes you further than just hearing "Bartek is hating on me." It moves from a label to something concrete, from an emotional reaction to understanding, from feeling stuck to having possible next steps. The most important thing is for your child to feel: "I'm not dealing with this alone. There's an adult who hears me, believes me, helps me make sense of what's going on, and supports me in finding a way through."

### **3. How to distinguish conflict from violence (bullying)?**

In everyday language, it's not uncommon to use the words conflict, aggression, violence as synonyms. However, these terms differ and require different responses. Knowing the differences is all the more important as it allows us to interact in a way that, on the one hand, is not excessive and exaggerated (treating conflict as violence) and, on the other, will avoid downplaying and belittling the scale of the problem (treating violence as conflict).

What are the phenomena in question?

**CONFLICT** - you already know a lot about it from previous parts of the brochure. At this point, it's worth noting that an unmet need will lead to frustration. Frustration consists of a whole range of different emotions experienced in situations that thwart our intentions, plans, don't allow us to achieve goals or satisfy ambitions. In such circumstances, we may feel both anger or rage, grief, sadness, disappointment, but also shame or helplessness. And while frustration is a developmental factor, its excess will lead to isolation, apathy, indifference or even the opposite - aggression (directed outwards or inwards). The latter will be seen e.g. if the power and scale of the child's internal agitation has outgrown their ability to cope with it. The body's automatic reactions, dictated by the protection of well-being and the desire to regain control, will often be the link and driver of actions/behaviors/attitudes that will have their expression in the school corridors.

**Real life example:**

*Anna is Ola's classmate. A few weeks ago, she lent her a CD. It was a memento of a person important to Anna and is currently very difficult to buy. Ola doesn't return it for a long time, and Anna would very much like to have it, to be able to listen to it. What's more, she promised to lend the CD to Kate, who runs a school radio station and would like to play songs from this album. The girls have already set the date. Anna cares a lot about it but has growing concerns. When she asks Ola about the CD, she dismisses her and jokes that she's a hothead and she'll get the CD eventually. Kate also asks her about the album - Anna doesn't dare tell her about her concerns. On the contrary, he assures that everything will be ok.*

*Deep down, she is not at all sure about this. She is becoming increasingly angry with Ola.*

**CONFLICT**

**AGRESSION** - behavior that leads to causing harm to someone/something, inflicting pain. Characteristically, forces of both sides are equal. It's usually a reaction to frustration and is an automatic way of expressing anger, defending our interest or defending our boundaries that should be available to each of us. Not all frustration leads to aggression, but the correlation of these phenomena is strong.

The likelihood of aggression increases when:

- frustration affects a person unexpectedly (we were sure of achieving our goal), its causes are incomprehensible, or when we (subjectively) feel it's unjust;

- the person has a disturbed self-image and/or lowered self-esteem;
- we presume a person's blocked or unmet needs such as affiliation, acceptance, appreciation, respect.

Importantly, aggressive behavior can be directed against another person (not necessarily involved in the conflict) or oneself (self-aggression). It can take the form of:

- physical behavior: pushing, kicking, punching, pinching, etc. (towards a person), hiding a backpack, destroying a notebook (towards an object)
- verbal behavior: shouting, name-calling, insulting, etc.
- offline and online behavior
- relations-related behavior directed at deteriorating ties between the person experiencing aggression and third parties, such as spreading rumors;

**CONT.**

*In a biology class, Ola is asked to solve a task on the board. She is not doing well, although the questions seem trivial. A few hours later, she asks a question about the biology assignment in the class forum. Anna seizes the moment and writes a spiteful comment. Then there is another, also mocking. Others join in, their posts have a similar mood. Anna is aware that her behavior is not right, but she is satisfied that Ola "got what she deserved".*

**AGGRESSION**

Aggressive behavior will most often accompany prolonged and/or inflamed conflicts. Unrecognized or trivialized, it can develop into peer violence defined as bullying.

**VIOLENCE/ BULLYING** - Contrary to popular belief, violence doesn't have to involve aggressive behavior at all. It can happen in silence, without shouting, brawling, poking, hiding things etc. While the goal in conflict is to convince others to your point, in aggression it's usually to defend oneself, the goal of violence is to subjugate and control the other person. Here we're dealing with both contempt and an imbalance of power, often demonstrating itself in a sense of superiority, which, in turn, is lined with indifference and disregard. In violence, the goal is to humiliate the victim, entrap it and take control. Therefore, a more appropriate term is bullying, i.e. abuse and harassment. Bullying has three distinctive features that all have to present:

1. The activities are repetitive and lasting;
2. The act or omission is intentional (I want to harm someone)
3. There is a power disparity between the parties

Bullying can take many forms, among the most common are physical aggression, child exclusion and taunting. We also distinguish cyberbullying. Importantly, with cyberbullying we can be almost 100% sure that it also occurs in the real world (although as adults we may not notice it, at least up to a certain point). Of particular note is relational violence, i.e. a sublimated form of exclusion from a peer group.

Bullying is a process that begins with **stigmatization**, or labeling. Someone in the group becomes labeled as other. It can happen because of appearance, behavior, attitude, or even objective factors beyond the person's control, such as being a new student in the class. Otherness always refers to a specific peer environment. For example, unique clothing style or a penchant for science seen as a norm in some communities, in others may be labeled strange, or even become a reason for bullying.

The consequence of labeling is a simplified way of looking at the group's view of the person - they begin to be seen by the labeled trait, as if they lose all the complexity of their identity and subjectivity. She/he becomes stupid, poor, redhead, fat, Ukrainian, etc. A person who experiences these types of attitudes and behaviors begins to adopt a stereotypical way of looking at themselves (enters into a role).

Thus, the bullying process moves into the next phase, in which **cognitive dissonance mechanisms** play a huge role. The longer students exhibit or passively observe negative behavior and attitudes toward the Other, the harder it will be to convince them that they are doing wrong. Elements of dissonance, particularly rationalization, combined with the need for affiliation (belonging) and conformism (in particular, fear of rejection) brilliantly "extinguish" remorse. This is especially important in the context of witnesses, students who "only" observe what is happening in the classroom. It's worth being aware that the attitude of witnesses is the basis for further escalation of violence. If the perpetrator of violence receives reinforcements from their environment (even unspoken, such as a subjective sense of ruling the class, attentiveness, a sense of instilling fear, or seemingly insignificant ones - like another like on a social media post) then bullying relationships will form "new life" in the group. Thus, we enter the third phase - a **vicious circle**, in which the actions of the violence perpetrators cause reaction from the Other, and this in turn escalates the subsequent actions of the perpetrators.

Unfortunately, the longer the violent processes continue in the classroom, the more fixed they become, turning into the group's taboo (according to the rules of the group process). The possibility of adult impact is decreasing in direct proportion. The nature of the necessary actions is also changing - with violence, intervention is necessary. It is too late for prevention.

**What behaviors, attitudes, signs should increase an adult's attentiveness in the context of diagnosing a violent situation:**

- there is a child in the group who is left out of class activities (both in class and at recess, in extracurricular situations)
- the child "sticks" close to adults during breaks
- the child goes to the toilet during the lesson
- the child deteriorates in learning, has difficulty concentrating, is withdrawn, apathetic or, on the contrary, irritable and agitated;
- the child's peers make cynical or insulting comments and provocative gestures;
- parents report problems with their child's sleep, lack of appetite, health emergencies (abdominal pain, nausea - especially in the morning);
- parents report that the child began to behave strangely, became reserved, secretive, suddenly started losing things at school;

The above list is not exhaustive, but a fraction of the most common symptoms of hidden violent behavior. Each of them may arise from different situations (e.g., be strictly related to a family situation), but the noticing even one signal should arouse increased attention in adults and motivate them to diagnose the situation in the classroom.

## **CONT.**

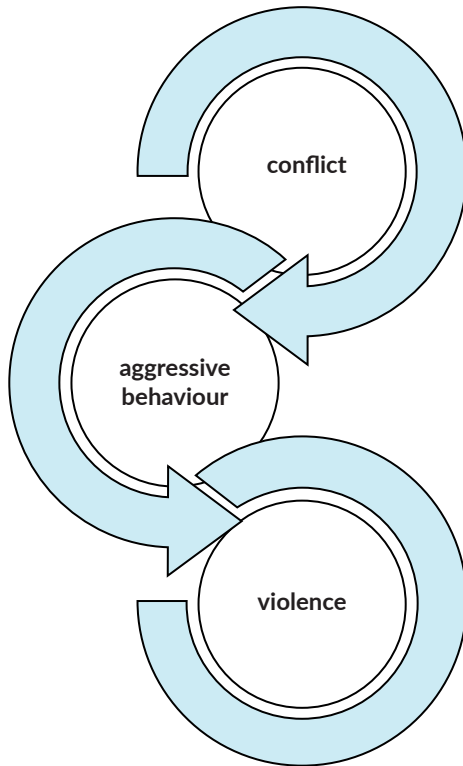
The next day at school, Anna notices that her attitude toward Ola was noticed. Baška, an important figure in the students' community, loudly congratulated her on her courage. At the cafeteria, Anna was able to join her group, and she enjoyed that very much. She became important, she saw the stares of others - they probably envied her. With each passing day, Anna entered Baška's group more and more firmly, adopting the attitudes and behaviors desired in the group. Baška hinted to Anna how she could mess with Ola even more. Ola repeatedly wanted to talk to Anna, but to no avail. Every attempt ended in ridicule, insult and challenge. Anna already knew that Ola had taken advantage of her and robbed her. She agreed with Baška that she should suffer a well-deserved punishment for this. She warned others about the thief on an online forum, of course her new group helped her a lot. Ola has become shunned by others. No one wanted to sit with her or borrow her anything. She was excluded.

At school, Anna and her classmates refrained from doing that (they didn't want to get in trouble). However, at home, in front of the computer screen, in forums and on social media, they had no limits - Ola became the object of group's jokes, memes, etc.

In the locker room, before a gym lesson, Baška began to insult Ola - her appearance and clothes. All the girls laughed. Ola stood in silence, red spots on her face and neck. This further empowered the other girls. Baška took a photo and sent it to Anna, Who immediately had an idea how to "beautify" them - she was sure to get many likes for that.

## **BULLYING**

The story describes a classic model of bullying - from an unmet need through aggressive behavior to bullying. Despite the fact that the process involves only a number of individuals (Anna, Ola, Baška), the spectrum of actors includes the entire classroom and even the school community. We see how such phenomena transform over time, escalate and spill over. We can also easily see their complexity, especially at the last stage (bullying).



There is no standard and simple solution for preventing and eliminating manifestations of peer violence, because it's a dynamic phenomenon that can occur differently in different groups and environments. Moreover, as a rule, it occurs in many simultaneous forms, and the interrelationships are often subtly interconnected and not always visible to adults. That's why selecting the right interventions is a difficult endeavor and doesn't always have the desired effect. Hence, it makes sense to focus on prevention, which include conflict management. Admittedly, that won't guarantee eliminating violence, but at least you'll have a tool to influence its emergence and scale.

## 4. What do I do after the diagnosis?

Diagnosing the existing situation, as repeatedly written above, allows you to plan effective work on the classroom situation. You can plan activities appropriate to the diagnosis results.

Of course, it's perfectly possible that a given class has changed its structure after the summer break and you'll have to start working on integrating them again. And perhaps you're already dealing with a violent situation, in which case implement intervention measures as soon as possible.

If you have found conflict in the classroom, diagnosis helps to know the causes and to see which of them you can influence. At the same time - you know what will happen if you delay work on the conflict or completely ignore the situation, considering it a non-issue.

Thanks to the diagnosis, you'll know whom to invite to talk about the conflict, how numerous the parties may be (if any of the parties is a large group, it may be a good idea to designate representatives) and what their intentions and needs may be. All of this ensures that at the beginning of the conflict transformation process, you're prepared to jointly seek a solution that suits each party.

Before inviting the parties or their representatives to a joint meeting, meet with them individually, tell them about the purpose and course of the process, inquire about their consent to participate and the issues the party would like to raise.

Remember that each side will have its own version of the story - it's not your role to seek a solution or give advice. Consider whether you're able to be impartial and neutral towards the subject of the dispute. Perhaps it's better to invite an outsider to lead the meeting?

Once you've assessed the situation, it's worth thinking about how to communicate and work with parents or guardians going forward. The approach should follow from what you found and be appropriate to whether you're dealing with a conflict, aggressive behavior, or violence. Parents and guardians need clear, calm, fact-based information about what was observed, how the school understands the situation, and what steps it

plans to take. This kind of communication helps everyone feel more secure, clarifies the roles of the adults involved, and reduces the risk of things getting more heated.

That said, working with parents after the assessment shouldn't be just about passing on information. The goal is also to build a shared understanding of the situation and agree on how best to support the child. Depending on what the assessment found, this might mean agreeing on how to stay in touch, keeping an eye on how the pupil is doing, stepping up efforts to bring the group together, or, in cases involving violence, working closely together as part of an intervention. The more consistent the message and actions of the adults involved, the better the chances of stopping the problem in its tracks and helping the child feel safe again.

It's also worth keeping in mind that conversations with parents after an assessment can come with a lot of strong emotions: anxiety, anger, helplessness, guilt, or a strong urge to do something right now. That's exactly why it matters that the school's communication is thoughtful, straightforward, and free of judgement. The job of the adults involved isn't to point fingers at each other, but to create the conditions that allow the child to feel safe again and the group to get back to functioning as well as it can.

**Good luck!**

