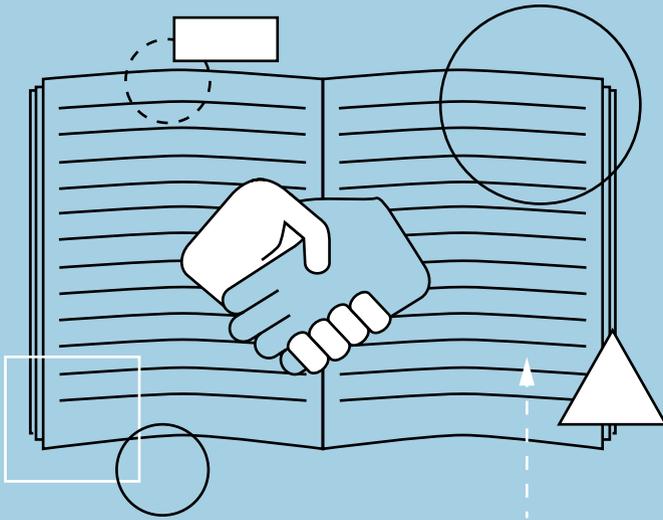


# TOOLBOX

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





# TOOLBOX

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

**Prepared by:**

Editorial and concept: Joanna Wajda, Dorota Whitten, Maja Zabokrzycka  
Design and typesetting: Sylwia Slowik

**House of Peace Foundation**

50-243 Wrocław  
ul. Wł. Łokietka 5/1

+48 883 047 310  
dompokoju@dompokoju.org  
[www.dompokoju.org](http://www.dompokoju.org)

The brochure has been produced within the framework of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) under the Memorandum of Understanding between UNICEF and Wrocław Municipality dated 09.06.2022 and Letters of exchange for the provision of support related to emergency refugee response in Wrocław dated 09.06.2022



## Table of Contents:

### Introduction

1. What is an initial situation diagnosis and why is it worth doing? **6**
2. Diagnostic tools **8**
  - 2.1 Conflict tree
  - 2.2 Conflict map
  - 2.3 Onion
3. How to distinguish conflict from violence (bullying)? **14**
4. What do I do after the diagnosis? **20**



## Introduction

The House of Peace Foundation has been working on conflict transformation and dialogue building for a decade. Our experience shows that conflict is a complex process that involves actors (individuals or groups), and that its causes are always embedded in a certain context. That's why to talk about effective and efficient conflict transformation, it's worth starting with a diagnosis of the initial situation, i.e. to see where we are in the process and how many parties are involved. This will allow us to take a clear look at the initial situation and understand the origins of the process, as well as plan the next step.

Below, we talk about why initial diagnosis is so important and show you three diagnostic tools. In our experience, it is also common to confuse conflict with violence. Sometimes we call violent behavior a conflict, and sometimes it's the opposite - we perceive a conflict-aggravated situation as violent. Since different actions are taken in relation to violent and conflict situations (violence - intervention, conflict - mediation), we devote part of our argument to distinguishing between the two situations.

Conflict has its origins in the unmet needs of one or more parties. If they are unnamed or unconscious, they fail to be explicated and the situation turns into a vicious circle. Thus, resolving the conflict constitutes a change in the existing situation. Change is one of the values that can be brought about by a conflict, although initially the emotions that accompany the unmet emotions don't allow us to see it.

We hope you'll find the following brochure helpful.

# 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.

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

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.

## **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

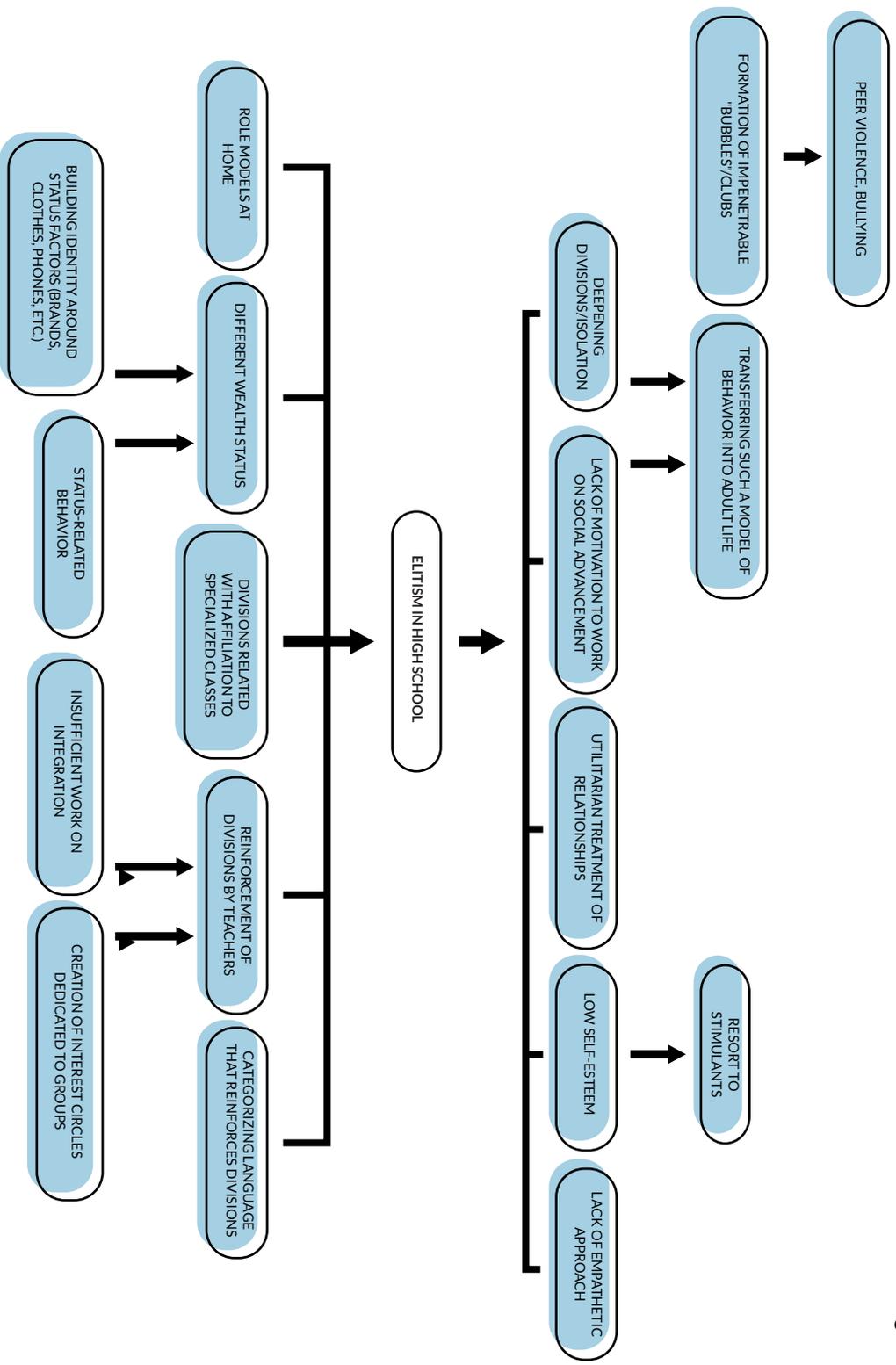
## **2.2 Conflict map**

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.

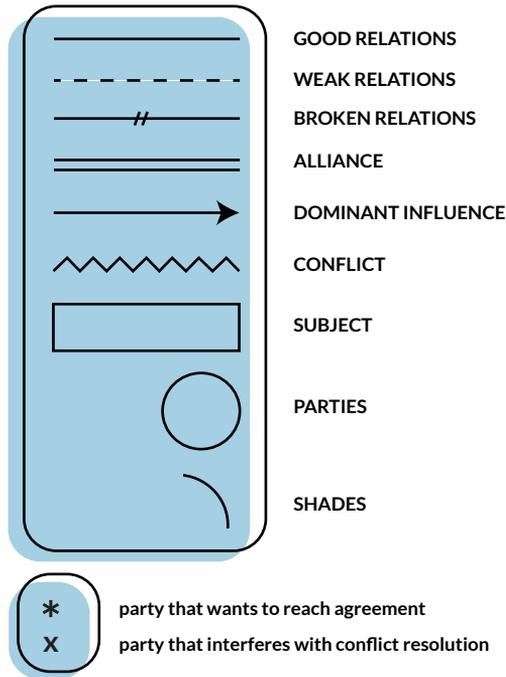
Actors in a conflict can be both individuals and institutions, as well as those individuals or communities that are influenced by the effects of that given conflict. Thanks to the map, we can also get an idea of the alliances between stakeholders, and with whom it is worthwhile to first enter into talks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

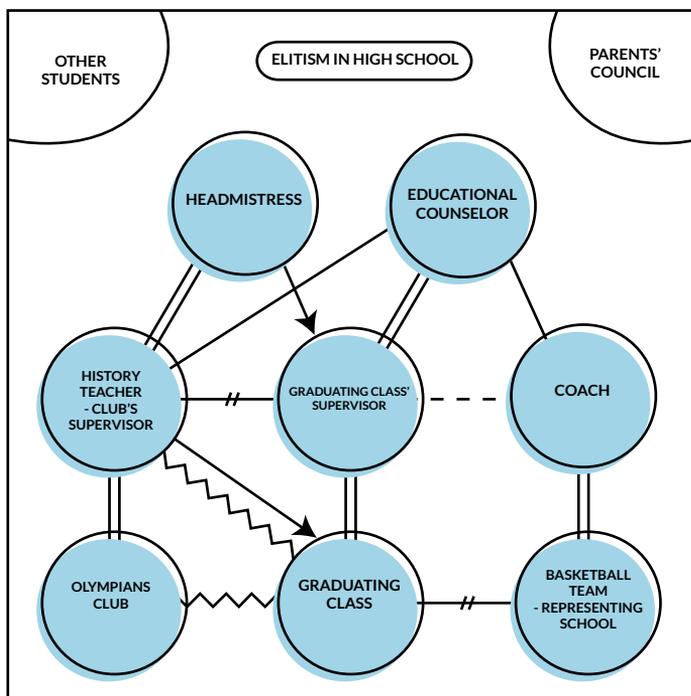
Divisions and tensions caused by these factors are evident in the school. The Olympians Club brings together the most talented youth who compete in inter-school knowledge competitions and often win them. Their supervisor is a history teacher who strongly favors this group, emphasizing their uniqueness. 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 Olympians 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.

### 2.3 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?

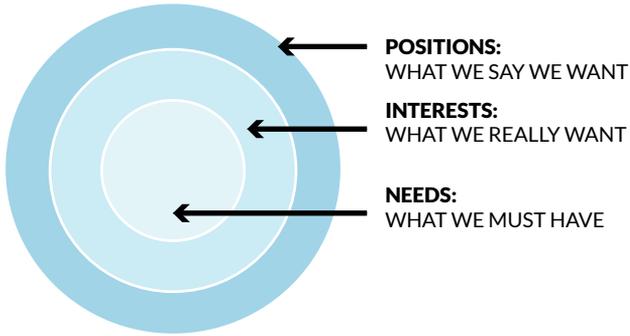
Is it necessary to meet these needs? Why? What happens if these needs are not met?

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:

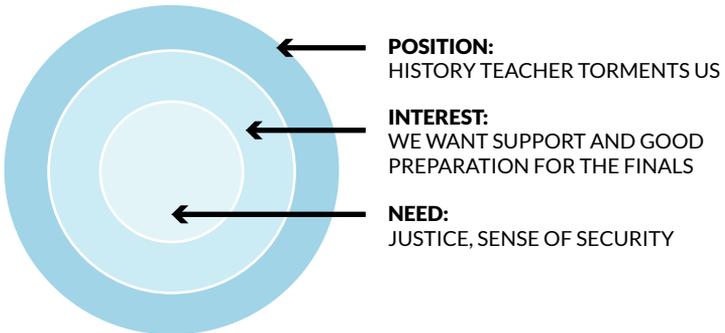
- **position** includes a statement from a person regarding what they (allegedly) expect from a given conflict situation,
- **interests** refer to what people actually want and what motivates them.
- **needs** (a must-have) which must be satisfied if the resolution of the dispute is to satisfy all parties.

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.

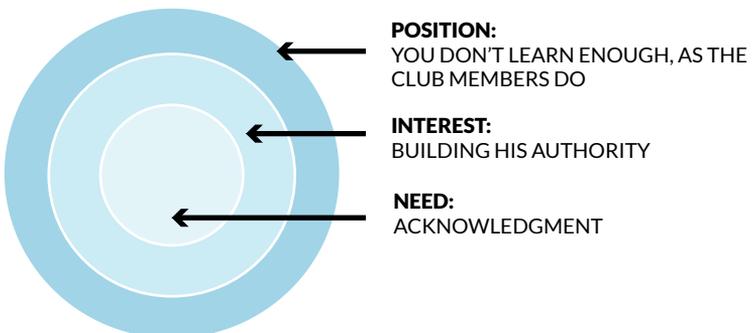


Below are two sample onions developed for the same conflict, which plays out around elitism in a high school.

**GRADUATING**



**CLUB SUPERVISOR / HISTORY TEACHER**



### 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).  
(wchodzi w rolę).

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.**

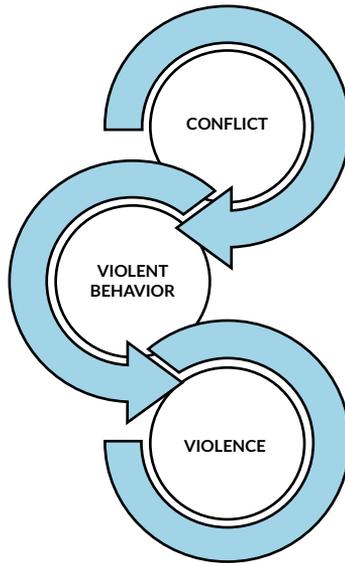
*The next day at school, Anna notices that her attitude toward Ola was noticed. Baška, an important figure in the students' community, loudly congratulated her on her courage. At the cafeteria, Anna was able to join her group, and she enjoyed that very much. She became important, she saw the stares of 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?

**Good luck!**



