



**OUTSIDE**



# OUTSIDE

## **Activating Strategies to Fight Hikikomori Condition**

**2023-1-IT02-KA210-ADU-000150723**

### **MODULE 2**

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### **MISSION EMPATHY**

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# MODULE: Intervention and Support Program

## From Isolation to Inclusion: Reengaging Disengagement

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### PREVENTION IN MANY CONTEXTS

An effective project to counter the phenomenon of hikikomori consists of creating a system of protection around adolescents at risk of “relational closure,” working in multiple contexts (school, family, and leisure), involving not only the direct recipients but the entire “educating community.”

#### SPECIFIC OBSERVATION OF SCHOOL BEHAVIORS

For early case interception, it is useful for teachers to know the profile of at-risk individuals.

**These are children who are afraid of peer judgment and live with a permanent sense of shame.**

Sociality involves states of anxiety that do not necessarily result in panic attacks, while they often cause headaches, stomach aches, and fatigue.

The phenomenon may begin in the seventh or eighth grade and worsen in the high school biennium.

Psychologically, these are boys who fear the gaze of others because they see themselves as unpresentable, awkward and inadequate.

The most problematic situations are motor activity or questions, when one is under the gaze and judgment of everyone.

They are often those kids who **stay on the sidelines**, who are alone at recess, and who sometimes relate to one or two classmates but wait for others to take the initiative and keep in touch just to catch up with classes.



**These students avoid the social self** that is built at school and start with **absences** that seem strategic as if they have not studied. They actually avoid showing themselves to others to reduce the level of anxiety that assails them.

In school, prevention is the universal one that promotes each person's well-being and resources, that is, **social skills**, which are activated in civic education, health education, wellness, empathy, cooperation, active listening, etc.

Since there is no pathology, these boys and girls just need to be supported to discover their personal value and help to go to school taking into account their difficulties.

**We need to watch them, create community, instill passion, be in dialogue.**

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE AVOIDED

In the examination and treatment of the phenomenon, maxime with boys, it is more than appropriate to **avoid pathologization tout court**, because while it is true that social withdrawal in some cases arises from a disorder that requires, in severe and extreme cases, neuropsychiatric consultation/intervention, it often concerns instead boys and girls who do not have a psychopathology and can be framed, therefore, as a mere social phenomenon, although it can still degenerate into mental illness.

## 2. SUPPORTING PARENTS

### DISORIENTATION AND PARENTAL DISTRESS

**Parents who experience real “grief” with their children's school dropouts.**

It is therefore necessary to support them first if the child is not in school.

The most advanced territorial services offer this support; schools must promptly obtain information and be ready to give practical guidance to parents, avoiding judging them responsible for non-attendance, which, almost always, does not depend on their failures.



It is **necessary to reassure and inform** them so that they do not force the student into attendance when he or she cannot make it, and it is necessary to present the alternative solutions that we will set out below.

It is also necessary to make it clear that if the girl or boy does not get help, they must undertake a psychological journey, to understand and change family relationships for the better, to facilitate a positive outcome of the distress.

### 3. INITIATIVES TO AVOID SCHOOL LEAVING OF CHILDREN/AND AT RISK OF HIKIKOMORI

#### PROPOSING ALTERNATIVES

Even when the child is locked in the home, the school can do something. **Failure or dropping out must be avoided and alternatives must be proposed.**

It will be necessary to identify a teacher of reference, who has a good relationship with the boy or girl and is a privileged interlocutor; involve the school principal; inform the class council; activate one of the student tutors.

It has also been indicated to involve classmates, carefully considering this modality and always with the advice of the listening desk operator, because the attention of classmates does not always help, as it could prove to be a burden.

#### CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

It is necessary to evaluate:

(a) the preparation of a **Personalized Educational Plan (PEP)**, deliberated by the Class Councils and teachers, validated by the School Director, which can indicate teaching, pedagogical, methodological and also organizational strategies to support the student;

(b) **the waiver of the minimum limit of days of attendance** required for the validity of the school year;

(c) concerting and arranging possible **devices to facilitate attendance and verification**;



(d) **flexibility in requests and assessments.**

**A great deal of creativity is needed to make it possible to find ways that are congenial to these children who do not reject study but confrontation with others.**

Interesting is the real-life case of a girl who was assigned a **student tutor**, who in theory was supposed to do homework with her, but in practice was in charge of getting her out of the house, even if only to get an ice cream.

The girl with time and thanks to the relationship of newfound trust that was established was able to return to school and continue, although changing later for the evening class, where she felt that the human climate was more bearable and welcoming to her.

## **SUPPORTING HOMESCHOOLING**

There is no such thing as the perfect path but having the right person in the right place.

Therefore, it is understood that studying in integrated digital education or, even better, with **home education** can be allowed.

For those at risk of hikikomori, this means studying from home but maintaining relationships personally with **one or two teachers at least**, who, even if they are not the ones in the classroom, represent an **empathetic and meaningful human connection to the school**, as well as **maintaining the habit of relationship and social skills training** in a protected and manageable way.

These children do not necessarily feel the need for classmates, while an adult figure is almost always reassuring and allows for **continued learning and the conduct of tests**.

These in turn should be offered in specific ways too, to avoid anxiety and confrontation, so even outside the classroom, in different places or times.

## **4. PREVENTION ACTIVITIES FOR ADOLESCENTS**

### **CREATIVE LABORATORIES**



In a number of Italian cities, including Ferrara, Vicenza, and Ravenna, municipal offices, in concert with local health authorities and secondary schools, have activated **Permanent Laboratories for Adolescents**, where, twice a week, from 5 to 7 p.m., a new creative activity for girls and boys is implemented.

The theme guiding the workshop activities, all free of charge, is that of **relationships**.

The participants try to create artistic works, through the use of a **variety of tools and languages**, including storytelling, videomaking, and drawing/comics.

The goal is the creation of spaces and times in which girls and boys can experience a form of **emotional closeness**. A place where they can feel a part.

### **Laboratories for adolescents as a relational gymnasium.**

An experience that can mend at least partially that safety net in favor of girls and boys that, in recent years, has broken down considerably.

In fact, adolescence has been, arguably, the age group most affected by the restrictions due to the pandemic. Teens are the years in which the desire to **socialize, to experiment, to discover** is most urgent and intense.

After more than two years of distance learning (DAD), sports played with hiccups, parties postponed and opportunities missed, the teens are feeling the blow.

The health emergency has exacerbated social isolation, the abandonment of schooling, and other activities that are fundamental to a person's healthy development. These include sports, language or theater classes, and going out with friends.

Creative laboratories aim to be a response to this widespread malaise.



## PEER EDUCATION

### First phase

#### 1. Establishment of the working group.

1. **Presentation** of the training proposal, the schedule of meetings, and discussion of any schedule difficulties and overlaps with personal or school activities.
2. **Training covenant:** co-constructed text where the commitment of the trainer and learners to respect the confidentiality, objectives and commitments of the course is emphasized.
3. **Setting:** during an intervention with Peers there is a restructuring of the physical space of the classroom that allows for the creation of new learning possibilities that are completely different from the frontal lecture.

#### 2. Knowledge:

1. Creating a peaceful climate among group members, also building the rules of the group itself, and defining modes of discussion, which support freedom, trust, and acceptance of thoughts and feelings among members.

#### 3. Introduction to the topic in which to define:

1. **Tools/activities** to introduce the topics such as icebreaker activities, simple games to warm up the group atmosphere and foster knowledge and sense of belonging).
2. **Modes of discussion i.e. fair information.** We take stock of the importance of doing correct information on health issues to avoid false myths and beliefs that have never been verified and can be dangerous.
3. **In-depth scientific discussion** on the topic, which may include the involvement of experts such as physicians, psychologists, social workers or others.
4. **Presentation of specific activities:** Role Play and Deployments to stimulate empathy and questioning of positions even opposite to one's own, Quizzes to test knowledge and encourage discussion, and World Café in order to trigger learning processes and sharing of ideas and knowledge.

All these hands-on and movement activities are supported by the use of videos, images, audio, campaigns, as well as the use of posters, colors...





## Second phase

It concerns the planning with the Peers, of the intervention that they will conduct in other classes or with other peers:

1. The peer group develops the **planning of the actions** that they are going to propose from the tools they experimented with during the training;
2. **Experimentation** is carried out in their own class or in small groups, where together with the trainer they collect feedback, before experimenting independently;
3. **Peer meeting** is carried out as planned;
4. The trainer and peers meet again for **verification**, and evaluation of the experience that will serve as meta-learning and feedback on the same.

*“The authenticity of the Peer Educator consists in the possibility of questioning himself in a welcoming environment, where he is urged to search for meanings and implications of lifestyles and choices, his strength lies in proposing to his peers, with new languages, credible and non-stereotyped roles, a reflection on the motivations of life choices.”*  
Michelini S. (2020)

Throughout this transition, however, the **supervision of the adult** remains active and present, who must be able to move from a central role in the first phase of training to a more secure background role in the second phase, continuing to be a point of reference for the Peers, stimulating ideas and reflections, while also leaving ample room for creativity and devising new ways to share the chosen concepts.

## 5. SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND LEGISLATION

### HIKIKOMORI E SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

The current legislation does not directly specify that a socially withdrawn pupil can be considered as having Special Education Needs, but on the first page of the Ministerial Directive of 12/27/2012 it is written: “... the contribution of the ICF (International Classification of Functioning) diagnostic model of the WHO, which considers the person in his or her totality, in a bio-psycho-social perspective, is relevant...the ICF model makes it possible to identify a pupil's Special Educational Needs (BES) regardless of preclusive typing.”



In this sense, every pupil, with continuity or for certain periods, may manifest Special Educational Needs: either for physical, biological, physiological reasons or also for psychological, and social reasons, with respect to which schools must offer an adequate and personalized response.”

And again, the **Ministerial Circular of 6/3/2013**: “... *it is the duty of class councils or teams of teachers in elementary school to indicate in what other cases it is appropriate and necessary to adopt a personalization of teaching ... in the perspective of a comprehensive and inclusive taking charge of all pupils. Taking charge of BES must be the focus of the attention and joint effort of the school and the family....*”

Although nowhere does it say that “Hikikomori is Bes,” the **Class Council nonetheless has the power** to recognize the student's Special Educational Need and has a tool to use with maximum flexibility, the Personalized Education Plan, building it precisely on the specific needs of the individual pupil.

It is undoubtedly true that teachers need training on how to “use” the regulations that have existed so far and the concrete actions (guidelines) to be able to cope with this phenomenon.

It is also important for schools to fill the current “regulatory holes” and to recognize this power and use it to provide concrete and effective responses to the problem.

## 6. CONCLUSION

### THE FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

Who identifies pupils with Special Educational Needs?

M.C. 8/2013 states that it is the Class Councils and teaching teams in elementary school who must indicate pupils in difficulty concerning whom it is deemed appropriate and necessary to adopt personalized teaching and any compensatory and dispensatory measures.

Even in the absence of clinical certifications, the class council or teaching team can justify the detection of special educational needs and therefore the need for a PDP, based on appropriate pedagogical-didactic observations.



It is not the school's task to certify pupils with Special Educational Needs, but it is its task to identify those for whom it is appropriate and necessary to adopt special teaching strategies.

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