



Recognizing the Signs

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Entering the classroom means entering a place where not only is knowledge imparted and learning takes place, but it also means entering an environment where emotions, expectations, fears, frustrations, joys, and satisfactions intertwine on a daily basis. Every student brings with them a personal story, an inner world, and emotions that they are not always able to express in words. This difficulty leads them to adopt behaviors that are actually visible signs of deep inner frustration—such as a lack of attention, a distant gaze, isolation, or, conversely, impatience, hyperactivity, increased irritability, responses out of proportion to the situation, and an altered, provocative tone of voice. Learning to express and manage these emotions is an important aspect of school life because not all students possess the necessary tools to process their emotions and live a more peaceful existence. In everyday life, students experience emotions—whether positive or negative—in very different ways. Not all students attach the same value to a positive experience (such as a reward, a good grade, or a compliment); some rejoice and openly express their satisfaction, others share it with teachers and friends, and still others downplay it to avoid drawing attention.

With negative emotions—such as a failing grade or a quarrel with classmates—the situation becomes more complicated. Anxiety, sadness, anger, or a sense of inadequacy can lead some to withdraw into themselves, others to react impulsively, others to brush it off and shift their focus, and still others to talk about it with their classmates, from whom they may feel understood because they share similar experiences and challenges. It is clear that, following the pandemic, young people have become more insecure and emotionally fragile; the period of isolation struck precisely during a delicate phase—one in which they are building their identity, friendships, and social relationships. Added to this is the constant pressure of social media, which fuels constant comparison with others, the need for approval, or the feeling of not being good enough.

Students often do not seek help from teachers—perhaps out of shyness or fear of being judged—but when a teacher manages to create an atmosphere of trust, they become a valuable point of reference: a safe space where students can talk about their struggles away from the gaze of their peers. Our role as teachers is not to ignore these signs or wait for the problem to escalate, but to recognize the signs, identify the student's distress, and distinguish between a student's behavior—which must still be addressed—and the emotion driving that behavior. The approach must be one of listening, never of judgment, and, if necessary, referring the student to a more specialized professional, such as a psychologist.

Our school offers various tools to support students emotionally and relationally—such as family outreach, the presence of a psychologist, and projects dedicated to student well-being—but the most powerful tool remains dialogue, through which a student feels cared for, heard, and understood.

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Precisely for this reason, I believe that emotional competence must become an integral part of education. It could potentially be a central theme in Civics, where emotions can be discussed and where students can learn to recognize the source of their emotions; because when an emotion is not recognized and managed, it can become increasingly burdensome until it overwhelms them if they lack the appropriate tools to deal with it. We can also view emotional intelligence as a discipline not based on facts and tests, but as a space for dialogue and growth where, starting from real-life situations in school, we can discuss anger, fear, frustration, disappointment, self-esteem, conflicts, and relationships. Students can be engaged through discussions and role-playing exercises; we can teach them to listen without judging, to understand that asking for help is not a sign of weakness, to manage anger, to express discomfort without turning it into a drama, to respond to criticism, to recognize their own strengths, to learn to get along with others, to cope with frustration, and to accept mistakes. All of this represents a form of maturity rooted in the awareness that the emotional and academic dimensions are deeply intertwined.

The emotional competence instilled in students thus becomes a valuable tool in their journey of growth at school and in life.