CARE + CONNECT

Delivering Mental Health Supports in Higher Education Institutions across Europe

CARE + CONNECT

Project No: 2025-1-PL01-KA220-HED-000357751

Beyond Academic Success: Why a Culture of Care Matters in Higher Education

Building supportive university communities through awareness, connection and shared responsibility

University life offers opportunities for growth, but also brings academic pressure, loneliness and emotional challenges. CARE+CONNECT promotes a culture of care in higher education by combining digital mental health resources, peer support and professional learning to help build supportive university communities.

A Culture of Care Begins with Awareness

A supportive university begins with recognising that mental well-being concerns everyone. Students may hide emotional difficulties because of stigma, uncertainty or fear of judgement. Greater awareness among students and staff can help them notice distress, respond respectfully and guide others towards appropriate support. Caring does not mean becoming a mental health specialist; it means being attentive, informed and willing to help.

The Power of Human Connection

Support can begin with a simple gesture: a classmate listening without judgement or a lecturer noticing someone is struggling. Such interactions strengthen belonging and make seeking help easier.

Through its CONNECT Peer Programme, CARE+CONNECT encourages student-to-student and professional-to-professional support, developing active listening, empathy and responsible communication. Peer support complements, rather than replaces, professional psychological services: it can encourage early help-seeking and guide people towards specialised assistance when needed.

By nurturing everyday connections, universities can help students and staff feel less isolated and more supported.

From Awareness to Action

A caring university needs more than good intentions. It needs everyone to play a part.

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Shared Responsibility Across the University

A culture of care depends on the whole university community, not only counselling services. Lecturers can respond sensitively to students' difficulties and guide them towards appropriate support. Administrative staff can foster welcoming environments, while students strengthen belonging through empathy and inclusion. University leaders can make well-being a priority by supporting staff training and cooperation across services.

CARE+CONNECT reflects this shared responsibility by combining CARE digital learning resources with the CONNECT peer support framework. Together, they aim to strengthen individual coping skills and the university's capacity to offer support.

From Good Intentions to Everyday Practice

Care becomes meaningful through consistent action: accessible mental health information, opportunities for peer dialogue, staff development and respectful communication. Digital resources allow students to explore ways of managing stress, while supportive conversations provide the human connection technology cannot replace.

By bringing these elements together, CARE+CONNECT offers universities a practical direction for creating more connected, accessible and supportive learning environments.

Towards Universities Where Everyone Can Thrive

A culture of care grows through shared values, institutional commitment and everyday interactions - not a single campaign or workshop. CARE+CONNECT aims to help universities make well-being an integral part of academic life.

A successful university is not only where students achieve academically, but also where they feel supported, connected and empowered to thrive.

Discover more: https://careandconnect.eu/

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