

Mental health in AKG

What Makes AKG Alternative?

AKG is a private school in Budapest where teaching is conducted in an entirely alternative way compared to traditional public schools. For instance, the core subjects (math, history, science, and literature) are taught using an epochal system. Moreover, students have a degree of freedom to choose the projects they participate in, as the school offers a wide variety of extracurricular activities and specializations.

Another important difference from other schools is the teacher-student relationship, which is highly informal. For example, students address teachers informally (using first names), and the same applies vice versa. There is no classic hierarchy between teachers and students; the relationship is much more egalitarian. This closer relationship allows students to discuss many things with their teachers, and sometimes even a friendly bond develops. This contributes to creating a more enjoyable atmosphere during lessons.

Additionally, every student is assigned a mentor, known as a "patron," whom they choose when entering the school in the 7th or 9th grade. A very close relationship develops between the student and their patron. It could be described as having a "third parent" with whom students can discuss anything and who helps them in various situations.

Education at AKG takes place across two buildings: the Kiscelli Street building and the Raktár Street building. The Kiscelli building houses both elementary school education (from first to sixth grade) and high school, while the Raktár building is dedicated solely to high school education. The students from both buildings often participate in joint projects, and teachers typically work across both locations.

AKG dictionary

By this point, and as its name suggests, it has become pretty obvious that AKG is an alternative high school. Rooting from this factor comes the fact that there are many unique names for things that are otherwise quite evident. Even though for us these names became a part of our everyday life, when we started here, we were just as confused as one can be. To help our readers better navigate the system of our school, and how it functions, and since there are no direct translations for these names from Hungarian to English, we made a little dictionary of these unique terms.

csibe: 1. A "class" consisting of 12 or 13 students and one patrónus.

	2. A 90-minute session every Wednesday afternoon, where the csibe (class) gathers and talks about whatever they would like.
	3. One single member of a csibe (class).
	commonly translated as <i>chick</i>
kupac:	1. A “class” consisting of two csibe (class), who have their epochal classes together.
patrónus:	1. The “homeroom teacher” of a csibe (class), commonly translated as <i>patron</i>
epocha:	1. A 3 weeklong period where a kupac has the same two epochal classes every day. 2. Referring to epochal class: an 80-minute learning session of an epochal subject.
epochazáró:	1. The final test of a 3-week long epocha.

Mental health supporting staff in AKG

Pólya Bella, psychologist

Pólya Bella works in the Raktár Street building and is now in her sixth year at the institution. She is the school psychologist at the Raktár Street building, offering support to anyone carrying mental burdens or in need of emotional assistance. Bella is deeply committed to helping students, teachers, and parents navigate challenging situations.

Bella also plays an active role in community programs, organizing group activities and events tied to special thematic weeks (one week of a year group focusing on one concrete aspect of life), which often involve entire year groups. Additionally, she collaborates closely with the teaching staff, conducting workshops and support sessions to help educators manage everyday challenges more effectively.

Szendresi Júlia, psychologist

Júlia Szendresi joined the AKG team in the fall of 2021 and primarily works at the Kiscelli high school, with some responsibilities at the Raktár Street building as well. Like Bella, Júlia supports students, teachers, and parents through individual consultations and group sessions as well. She assists with managing mental burdens, developing social skills, and resolving conflicts. Júlia is dedicated to ensuring that every member of the school community receives the emotional support they need.

Sajó Eszter, psychologist

Sajó Eszter has been the school psychologist at AKG since the summer of 2018, when the Kiscelli building opened. She works with students, teachers, and parents in grades 1 to 6, focusing on mental support. Through individual and group activities, Eszter helps develop social skills, manage stress, and resolve conflicts. She is committed to making emotional and psychological support accessible to everyone in the school community.

Tüskené Molnár Anita, developmental educator

Tüskené Molnár Anita serves as a developmental educator at the Kiscelli primary school, supporting children facing learning difficulties. She primarily works with students who have received professional assessments from the educational support service, detailing their challenges and potential support strategies. Anita provides individually tailored development plans, addressing learning obstacles while taking each child's unique needs into account. She is constantly helping students build confidence and succeed in their academic lives and hopes to continue this for as long as she can.

Bodonczy Andrea, patrónus

Bodonczy Andrea has been a patrónus at AKG for 21 years, teaching literature, Hungarian language, creative writing, and occasionally leads social studies classes. With a secondary qualification in history, she supports her students across a variety of topics. Previously, Andrea worked at a Waldorf school, where she became familiar with alternative pedagogical methods that continue to shape her educational philosophy. She aims to support her students in their learning, in their social life, becoming independent, critical thinkers, but above all, for them to be happy.

Patrik Pirk Anett, speech therapist

Patrik Anett joined the Kiscelli primary school a year after its establishment, working as a speech therapist. She primarily focuses on providing speech therapy for younger students, helping them develop their speech, articulation, and communication skills. Anett tailors her work to each child's age and individual needs, aiming to help them to communicate with more confidence.

Gergely Zsófia, mentor

Gergely Zsófia is a mentor at the Kiscelli primary school with a specialization in autism education and support for students with learning difficulties. Her primary role is to assist students in the transition from primary to high school, particularly those in the seventh grade. As a mentor, Zsófia supports students facing academic or social challenges, helping them navigate their new experiences.

Kozma Fruzsina, developmental educator

Kozma Fruzsina has been working as a developmental educator at the Kiscelli primary school for three years. With a degree in special education, she focuses on speech therapy for younger students, helping improve their speech and communication skills. At the start of each academic year, Fruzsina conducts speech therapy screenings for children entering from kindergarten, identifying those who require additional support.

Tóth Ábris and Virga Nóra, peer helpers

Tóth Ábris and Virga Nóra are peer helpers currently in the 11th and 13th grade at AKG, respectively. Their role is to support fellow students of similar age, providing a relatable perspective for those who may find it easier to discuss their problems with someone their own age.

Primary school sector

The primary school education at the AKG takes place in the Kiscelli Street building. From the first grade, students learn using the school's distinctive epochal system. However, a key priority in primary school education is ensuring that children learn while feeling comfortable and happy. To achieve this, all subjects—from mathematics to literature—are taught in a playful manner, helping young students approach learning with joy rather than pressure, thereby supporting their mental health.

Upon entering the school, every student is assigned a helper who accompanies them throughout their first six years (before transitioning to the high school section, where this role is partially taken over by a patrónus). The helper focuses on the child's mental well-being, academic performance, provides support and advice in any area needed, and helps them resolve various challenges.

Additionally, the primary school section has its own psychologist, Eszter Sajó, who has worked with the children since the section's establishment. She conducts playful activities, such as drawing, but also engages in one-on-one conversations with the students. Since the students are often as young as first or second graders, it is common for parents or mentors to signal when a child might need support, rather than the children seeking help themselves.

For students with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia or dyscalculia, there is additional support available. The school employs two developmental specialists, Anett Patrik and Fruzsina Kozma, who conduct speech therapy screenings when children transition from kindergarten to AKG. They also assist in developing students' speech, communication skills, and academic performance.

In summary, the primary school section of AKG places a strong emphasis on ensuring that students feel happy and mentally healthy. Numerous specialists work diligently to create an environment that meets the needs of every child, providing the necessary support to help their growth and well-being.

Transition into seventh grade (mentor)

In the Kiscelli Street building, since children attend primary school for their first six years and then transition to the seventh grade, they undergo a huge change in systems without changing schools. "My experience shows that starting high school in seventh grade can be challenging for some children. For some, the difficulty lies in academics, for others in social aspects, and my task is to support this transition during the seventh grade," said mentor Zsófia Gergely.

The transition to seventh grade is filled with challenges, many of which are common and characteristic of today's children. "I believe the biggest problem for seventh graders is that they need to learn in a completely different way. They require much greater independence and must use study techniques that they may not have used before. For instance, taking notes while listening, taking notes after reading, reading and interpreting longer educational texts, or practicing in mathematics. These are areas where I often assist them," Zsófia explained.

The Kiscelli mentor supports students through developmental sessions, but not only seventh graders seek her help, students of all age groups also find her, whether they need academic or communication assistance. In Zsófia Gergely's words: "I often help with academic matters, but there are also those who need more support in social areas, communication, or the development of certain skills."

High school sector

Patron System

At AKG, the patron system emphasizes the development of personal relationships. Patrons, who are teachers and mentors, provide direct support to students not only in education areas, but also with mental health and wellbeing. Students can confidently turn to their patron for help in coping with academic stress or personal issues. The personal presence, empathy, and attentiveness of the patrons play a significant role in ensuring that students feel safe and understood in the school.

Comfortable Community Spaces

The community spaces in the Raktár Street school building play a unique role in maintaining students' mental health. These areas are spacious and thoughtfully designed and are intended for relaxation, rest, and strengthening social connections. These spaces provide students with opportunities to unwind, recharge, or simply chat with friends, which helps in stress management. The calm and comfortable environment contributes to students feeling more at ease in the school.

Bella Pólya and Peer Helpers

Bella Pólya and the peer helpers are key figures in supporting students' mental health. Bella Pólya's personal presence and mentoring activities are particularly significant, as she maintains direct connections with students and helps them understand and process the mental health challenges they face. She offers both academic and emotional support, which students can feel within the school community. Her empathy and expertise ensure that students feel safe and supported.

Peer helpers also play a crucial role. These are experienced students within the school community who are willing to assist their peers. They help with social challenges, relieve academic stress, and most importantly give support in mental health struggles. Since peer helpers are fellow students, they can more easily relate to and understand one another, strengthening trust and allowing open communication about problems.

The mental support systems at the Raktár Street building of AKG focus on preserving the mental health of the school community and its students. The patron system, peer helpers, comfortable community spaces, and qualified psychologists all contribute to ensuring that students are balanced and happier in their daily lives.

Summary

Overall, AKG places significant emphasis on the mental health of its students, both at the primary and high school levels. By creating a welcoming environment and employing trained, supportive teachers and psychologists, the school strives to assist children in addressing their mental health. The epochal system, various extracurricular activities, and the supportive attitudes of patrons and mentors all make AKG a school that is happily attended by both staff and students alike.