

## **A Psychological Case Analysis of Interpersonal Conflicts in Dormitories and Its Educational Implications**

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**Abstract :** This study focuses on a case of interpersonal conflict in a male student dormitory during a college transfer program. It provides a complete account of the entire process, from a clothes-drying rod falling to a physical altercation and subsequent police involvement. The study emphasizes how students from special backgrounds, such as those from low-income or single-parent families, face interpersonal crises in adapting to a new undergraduate environment due to personality differences, communication gaps, and accumulated past conflicts. Drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, interpersonal communication theory, and adaptation theory, it explores the psychological mechanisms and behavioral logic underlying the conflict. Through comprehensive interventions—including in-depth research, home-school collaboration, cognitive-behavioral interventions, and communication skills training—the conflict was successfully resolved. Finally, from four perspectives: self-awareness development, integration of theory and practice, innovation in work methods, and precise policy implementation, the study extracts transferable insights and practical strategies for educating college students on dormitory interpersonal relationships, offering a reference for addressing similar issues.

**Keywords:** Students Upgrading from Junior College to Bachelor's Degree; Interpersonal Conflicts in Dormitories; Psychological Cases; Educational Insights.

### **1. Case Overview**

In the A class of the 21st level of the specialized transfer program, there are a total of 4 male members in Dormitory E. Among them, 1 student applied for off-campus study at the beginning of the semester, while the remaining 3 core members are Student A (from Xuzhou,

Xinyi), Student B (from Chengdu, Sichuan), and Student C (from Yancheng, Jiangsu).

Student A, male, 23 years old, grew up in a single-parent family and has lived with his father since his parents divorced at an early age. His father suffers from chronic conditions including hypertension, high cholesterol, and high blood sugar, has no stable job, and relies on odd jobs and scrap collection for income, making the family's financial situation quite challenging. From a young age, he developed habits of thrift and diligence, approaches his studies with conscientiousness and seriousness, has a sensitive and somewhat suspicious personality, communicates in a gentle tone, and always wears a smile.

Student B, 24 years old, has served as the class Youth League secretary for one year. His mother suffers from chronic physical strain due to long-term labor, and the family's financial resources rely solely on his father's single income, placing them within the category of impoverished households. The student has an introverted and reticent personality, and is accustomed to keeping to himself. After entering undergraduate studies, he faced a completely different academic and social environment and desired to integrate into the class collective while actively fulfilling his duties as Youth League secretary, striving to assist his classmates. However, in the process of carrying out his work, he frequently encountered uncooperative classmates, which put him in a difficult position when handling dormitory and class interpersonal relationships. Over the past year since enrollment, Student B has maintained distant relations with his classmates and has repeatedly had conflicts with his dormitory mates, resulting in ongoing tense interpersonal dynamics.

Student C, 23 years old, comes from a rural area in Yancheng, Jiangsu, and both parents are farmers. The student is outgoing and cheerful, considers their relationship with roommates to

be harmonious, but has a tendency to relay others' words and can easily become an indirect conduit of conflicts.

The dormitory members had relatively harmonious relationships at the beginning of the first semester, but as they got to know each other better, the friction caused by individual differences gradually increased. Due to the lack of regular and effective communication channels, the dormitory conflicts continued to accumulate, and misunderstandings among the members deepened, with the conflict between Student A and Student B being the most prominent. Student A is highly proactive, sensitive and detailed in nature, and is good at understanding the feelings of others; Student B has a slower pace in actions, possesses a strong competitive mindset, and the two have significantly different personal styles. Initially, their conflict was not made public, and both chose to deliberately avoid it, which led to the conflict being hidden within the dorm for a long time. Student C, who is relatively close to Student B, frequently conveys both sides' words, unknowingly increasing the risk of conflict eruption.

### **1.1 Case Review**

At around 7:30 PM on April 17, 2025, the counselor received a call from student B outside the campus. B reported that earlier that evening, they had a physical altercation with student A over a fallen clothes-drying rod and had already contacted the police. The counselor immediately returned to the student dormitory and, after investigation and verification, found that the conflict centered on A and B. The two had previously clashed over toilet usage habits. On this occasion, while B was hanging clothes, the rod accidentally fell on A, directly triggering the confrontation. A believed that B acted intentionally, while B claimed that A frequently provoked trouble and, in a moment of heightened emotion, knocked A to the ground. Other dormitory members witnessed the incident, after which both students left the room to report it to the authorities. With the joint reassurance of the counselor and the police, the emotions of both students gradually settled that evening.

The day after the incident, the two students still refused to go to the police station to sign the related settlement documents, leading to a stalemate. At this point, I immediately contacted both sets of parents to communicate the progress of the incident and coordinate a plan. Since the

incident involved classmates d and e from the neighboring dormitory, the two were arranged to visit the psychological center at another campus for individual talks under the guidance of professional instructors. On the third day after the incident, after in-depth communication with students d and e, both agreed to cooperate in transferring student b to their dormitory; at the same time, through one-on-one discussions with multiple related students to provide guidance, students a and b ultimately agreed to go to the police station to reach a settlement.

### **1.2 Case Study Challenges**

The main challenges in handling this incident lie in three aspects: First, student A comes from a broken family, has a sensitive and suspicious personality, and tends to avoid conflict and friction, unwilling to adopt an open and honest communication approach [1]; Second, student B is young and hot-headed, lacking the mindset to tolerate others and experience in collective life, exhibiting obvious difficulties in interpersonal adaptation; Third, both students have not mastered scientific interpersonal communication skills, their social interaction abilities are weak, and they lack effective methods for resolving conflicts and disagreements, leading to minor friction escalating into intense confrontation.

## **2. Case Analysis and Handling**

### **2.1 Case Analysis**

This case represents a typical dormitory interpersonal conflict among students upgrading from college diploma to bachelor's degree programs. Its root lies in the lack of interpersonal adaptation and communication skills [1]. The following provides a detailed analysis from three theoretical perspectives:

#### **2.1.1 Interpretation based on maslow's hierarchy of needs theory**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory indicates that social needs and esteem needs are core human psychological requirements; individuals universally desire recognition, respect, and appreciation from others [2]. University students are in the stage of youth development, with a strong sense of self-awareness, making their need for tolerance and recognition from others particularly urgent. However, some students are prone to self-centered thinking, focusing excessively on fulfilling their own needs while neglecting the legitimate demands of others [1].

In the case, both student A and student B overly emphasized whether they were being respected during their interactions, yet failed to realize that respect is reciprocal, lacking consideration for the feelings of others. This is the core psychological trigger that intensifies conflicts. As some scholars have pointed out, behind the surface of dormitory conflicts lie differences and clashes in values and interpersonal boundaries, which need to be understood from the deeper perspective of psychological needs.

#### 2.1.2 Interpretation based on interpersonal communication theory

Interpersonal communication theory emphasizes that effective information transfer and emotional exchange are the foundation for building good relationships [3]. The students in this case are all from the 'transfer to bachelor's degree' group, coming from different regions, with significant differences in their growth backgrounds and living habits. Moreover, they have spent little time together, so their emotional foundation is weak, and their personalities are distinct. These factors have resulted in prominent dormitory conflicts. Student A and student B have long lacked proactive communication awareness, leading to cognitive biases in their understanding of each other's behavior and personality traits. Misunderstandings accumulated over time, eventually causing the conflict to explode completely. The cognitive differences in communication are universal and can be resolved through strategies like understanding differences and non-violent communication.

#### 2.1.3 Interpretation based on adaptation theory

Adaptation theory holds that after individuals enter a new environment, they must go through processes such as cognitive adjustment and behavioral adaptation. If these adjustments are not made in a timely manner, maladaptation is likely to occur [4].

Students who upgrade from junior college to undergraduate programs face an environment that differs greatly from their previous learning and living settings. Their formerly relatively stable and simple interpersonal relationships are disrupted, and they must establish new social interaction patterns.

In the case described, student B, due to an introverted personality and a lack of experience in collective living, failed to adjust their state in time to adapt to the new dormitory interpersonal environment. Gradually, this led them into social

difficulties and eventually triggered conflict.

For such adaptation-related issues, it is necessary to help students build a system for identifying sources of stress and cultivate psychological resilience that enables them to coexist with stress.

## 2.2 Case Handling

Regarding the conflict between the two students, I, together with the class committee, counselors from the psychological center, and the parents, established a comprehensive intervention system, implementing multi-channel, phased psychological guidance and behavioral guidance:

### 2.2.1 Precision-oriented conversation coaching, building bridges of communication

Before having a formal conversation with classmate A and classmate B, thoroughly collect information about their daily behavior, personality traits, and the root causes of their conflicts through class leaders and roommates. Develop targeted conversation strategies [5]. The specific implementation includes four dimensions:

(1) Conducting a multi-dimensional investigation. Immediately proceed to the dormitory to interview the members and class committee, carefully verifying the cause and development of the incident [1]; simultaneously monitor students' online social activities (Moments, QQ Space, etc.) to capture changes in emotions and potential concerns, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the incident and the students' psychological state, in line with the fundamental principle of student work: "fully understand and implement precise measures" [6]. The investigation revealed that Student A had expressed feelings of "being isolated" on social media, while Student B frequently posted about "high stress," providing important clues for subsequent interventions.

(2) Home-school collaboration in joint education. Given the severity of the incident, timely contact was established with both sets of parents, using a three-step communication method of 'fact presentation + emotional reassurance + solution discussion': first, objectively informing the parents of the event details and the school's progress in handling the matter, to avoid causing anxiety due to information asymmetry; second, guiding the parents to help the student regulate their emotions with a rational attitude, avoiding blame

or favoritism; lastly, clearly outlining the cooperation points between the school and the parents to jointly ensure the student adheres to school rules and regulations. When communicating with student B's parents, it was discovered that the family is currently facing financial pressure, which has, to some extent, heightened B's emotional sensitivity. This information provided important context for understanding their behavior.

(3) Combining emotional support with rational guidance. Immediately after the incident, I went to the dormitory to comfort the students involved, using the "empathy-normalization-empowerment" technique from psychological counseling: first, by listening and empathizing, allowing students to feel understood ("You must have been feeling really upset during this time"); next, helping students recognize the commonality of conflicts in interpersonal adaptation, alleviating feelings of self-blame or blaming others; finally, guiding students to see their own potential in problem-solving. When speaking with student B individually, I acknowledged their efforts as the class representative and encouraged them to resolve conflicts through a sense of responsibility; I maintained communication with the students involved through phone calls, face-to-face meetings, and other means, recognizing their cooperative attitude and encouraging them to resolve issues through honest communication.

(4) Perspective-taking guidance. Introduce the "role-switching" technique in communication: ask Student A to simulate the daily situation of Student B (such as the feelings of an introvert in a group), and ask Student B to experience the emotional response of Student A when being ignored. Through embodied experience, both students will feel understood and respected, gradually lowering their psychological defenses, and willingly sharing their true thoughts, laying the foundation for resolving conflicts. This step uses the "empty chair technique" to help students express unspoken emotions, which has proven to be very effective.

#### 2.2.2 Cognitive behavioral therapy intervention, reshaping cognitive patterns

Based on gaining the trust of the two students, and in conjunction with the professional framework of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), a systematic intervention targeting their irrational cognition was carried out. The

intervention is divided into four stages, occurring once a week for a total of six sessions, each lasting 60 minutes:

Stage 1: Psychological Education and Cognitive Recognition (Sessions 1-2). First, introduce the basic principles of CBT to the two students, helping them understand the connection between 'Event-Thought-Emotion-Behavior'. Use the 'Three-Column Chart' as the core tool to guide students in recording recent events that triggered emotional fluctuations, automatic thoughts, and corresponding emotional reactions. For example, Student B recorded: 'Event: Student A didn't greet me when returning to the dorm at night; Automatic Thought: 'She must still be angry with me' 'Our dorm relationship is completely ruined'; Emotion: Anxiety, Low Mood.' Through the Three-Column Chart, students begin to realize that their emotions are not directly caused by events, but mediated by their interpretation of those events [7].

Phase 2: Challenging Irrational Beliefs (Sessions 3-4). Use Socratic questioning to help students assess the truth and rationality of their automatic thoughts. Typical questions include: "What evidence supports this idea?" "What evidence opposes this idea?" "Are there other possible explanations?" "What would happen if the worst-case scenario occurred? Can I handle it?" Taking student B's case as an example, through guidance, student B gradually realized: "Student A might not have greeted me because they didn't notice me, or were too tired; it doesn't necessarily mean they dislike me." At the same time, introduce the "downward arrow technique" to help uncover the core beliefs behind surface-level thoughts. For student A, it was found that they held the irrational belief: "I must be liked by everyone, otherwise I am a failure"; for student B, it was found that they held the irrational belief: "All conflicts are my fault, I must maintain harmony in relationships".

Stage Three: Cognitive Restructuring and Development of Alternative Thinking (Session 5). Building on the identification and challenge of irrational beliefs, students are guided to establish more flexible and adaptive alternative thoughts. The "Five-Column Table" is introduced as an advanced tool, adding "Alternative Thinking" and "Emotional Outcome" columns to the original three. For example, student B reinterpreted the original event as "Student A probably just didn't notice me; I can proactively greet her tomorrow," and

their recorded emotional response shifted from “anxiety, low mood” to “calm, slightly anticipatory.” Through repeated practice, the two students gradually internalized the skills of cognitive restructuring.

Stage 4: Consolidation and Relapse Prevention (6th session). Guide students to review the gains and changes throughout the entire intervention process, summarize the irrational thinking patterns they are prone to, and identify effective coping strategies. Together, create a "Cognitive First Aid Card" to record the steps to take when encountering interpersonal conflicts again: Pause → Identify automatic thoughts → Seek alternative interpretations → Take constructive action. At the same time, schedule a follow-up one month later to reinforce the intervention effects.

The entire intervention process follows the principle of 'gradual progression, student-led,' fully leveraging the students' initiative to achieve the goal of helping others by empowering themselves.

#### 2.2.3 Communication skills enhancement training, improving interpersonal abilities

To address the issue of weak communication skills between the two individuals, a personalized training plan is developed, incorporating elements of group coaching.

For the introverted student B, use a "gradual exposure" strategy: it is recommended to start within the dormitory, initiating 5–10 minutes of daily conversation with one friendly classmate (e.g., discussing courses or sharing snacks), and record feelings after each interaction; gradually expand the social circle by participating in class group discussions, club activities, etc. Additionally, recommend books such as *\*Nonviolent Communication\** and *\*The Art of Communication\**, encouraging them to write weekly reading notes and share practical insights [7].

For the sensitive and vulnerable student A, the focus should be on cultivating emotional regulation and awareness of interpersonal boundaries. Introduce interpersonal effectiveness skills and GIVE skills from Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT): G stands for Gentle, maintaining a calm tone; I stands for Interested, actively listening to the other person; V stands for Validate, acknowledging the other person's feelings; E stands for Easy manner, keeping a relaxed attitude [8]. These skills can be practiced through role-playing exercises, such as

simulating a conversation with student B about their daily routine issues in the counseling room, anticipating possible challenges, and discussing coping strategies.

At the same time, it is recommended that the two students participate together in the interpersonal relationship group counseling organized by the school's mental health education center. In the group, they can enhance their social skills in a safe and supportive environment by observing others' interactions, receiving peer feedback, and practicing communication skills. The seven sessions of group counseling cover themes such as 'Fate brings us together,' 'Living with affection,' 'Living with methods,' and 'Cherishing the moments of gathering,' systematically helping members explore social approaches that suit them.

In addition, guiding the two students to establish clear life goals, actively participate in collective activities and social practices (such as volunteer services, sports and cultural competitions, etc.), learn from the excellent qualities of others in interactions, overcome their own character weaknesses, and achieve simultaneous improvements in both personality and social skills. Student A signed up for the college's debate team, while Student B joined the volunteer association. These practices provided them with rich interpersonal interaction opportunities for their growth [9].

### 3. Case Handling Outcomes

After nearly three months of continuous guidance and follow-up feedback, and with the proactive cooperation and active practice of the two students, the intervention achieved remarkable results:

First, their mental state improved significantly; both regained confidence and freed themselves from the negative emotions caused by conflicts.

Second, their interpersonal patterns were optimized; they no longer avoided dormitory classmates, actively initiated communication and interaction, and got along harmoniously with class leaders and other classmates — dormitory peers reported, "Now the two of them can communicate normally, and sometimes they even eat together."

Third, their physical and mental health tended toward stability; symptoms previously caused by emotional distress, such as insomnia and headaches, completely disappeared, and their

personalities became more cheerful.

Fourth, their learning focus improved, grades showed noticeable progress, and they rebuilt confidence and goals in their studies — currently, Student A is actively preparing for the civil service exam, while Student B is fully preparing for employment and plans to apply for a top-tier university graduate program next year [10].

During the follow-up after three months, both students reported that they were now able to apply the skills they had learned to handle daily interpersonal friction, achieving a shift from "passive response" to "active adjustment".

#### **4. Insights from Experience**

##### **4.1 Focus on Cultivating Self-Awareness to Strengthen the Foundation of Interpersonal Communication**

Counselors and dedicated psychological teachers should incorporate the cultivation of college students' self-awareness into their daily work. Through various forms such as themed class meetings, individual counseling, and group guidance, they can help students accurately understand their personality traits as well as their strengths and weaknesses, enhancing their ability to adapt to different environments. Students should be encouraged to actively participate in cultural and sports activities, volunteer services, and other group projects, learning to communicate and collaborate with others in practice, gradually improving their interpersonal skills and laying the foundation for building healthy relationships [11]. Special attention should be given to the adaptation needs of specific student groups, such as those pursuing top-up programs, with targeted guidance provided in advance.

##### **4.2 Strengthen the Integration of Theory and Practice to Enhance Overall Competence**

Counselors and psychological educators need to continuously improve their expertise in pedagogy and psychology, applying theoretical knowledge flexibly in student work. This study shows that evidence-based psychological interventions, such as cognitive behavioral therapy and dialectical behavior therapy, have significant application value in student work[7][8]. At the same time, students should be encouraged to fully utilize learning resources like libraries, electronic reading rooms, and

China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), systematically studying relevant knowledge such as interpersonal communication and emotional management. Theoretical learning should guide practice to enhance the ability to solve practical problems [9]. Establishing a "assessment-intervention-follow-up" three-dimensional closed-loop mechanism ensures the systematization and continuity of intervention work.

##### **4.3 Innovate Work Methods and Practice the Philosophy of Educating Everyone**

Make full use of the advantages of online platforms to establish communication channels and psychological health education fronts, promptly capturing students' thoughts and dynamics ; firmly establish the concept of 'educating everyone, throughout the entire process, in all aspects,' and when addressing student issues, proactively involve class committee members, psychological teachers, parents, and other forces, integrating resources to form a collaborative educational effort, enhancing the specificity and effectiveness of the work . The success of this case's intervention proves that the multi-party collaborative model, involving school-family cooperation, professional support, and peer assistance, can effectively address complex dormitory conflicts.

##### **4.4 Accurately Grasp the Key Work Priorities and Strengthen the Awareness of Timeliness.**

Student work should focus on key priorities and emphasize timeliness. For special groups such as students upgrading from junior college to undergraduate programs or those from single-parent families, a routine monitoring mechanism should be established. Early education on topics such as interpersonal adaptation and rules for communal living should be conducted. For common issues like dormitory conflicts, the principles of "early detection, early guidance, early intervention" should be adhered to, and the "three-day rule" intervention mechanism should be implemented to promptly identify risks and prevent minor issues from escalating into serious conflicts, thereby effectively maintaining campus harmony and stability. At the same time, every conflict resolution process should be leveraged to realize the multiple values of ideological and political education, transforming each conflict into an opportunity for student growth.

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