

Counseling Interventions for Academic Stress and Burnout Among Students: A Scoping Review

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Abstract: *Academic stress and burnout have become persistent concerns across secondary and higher education because students increasingly face heavy workloads, examination pressure, competition, time demands, and adjustment difficulties. Guidance counselors and school mental health professionals are therefore expected to provide interventions that are preventive, developmental, and responsive. This scoping review mapped recent evidence on counseling and counseling-adjacent interventions used to address academic stress and burnout among junior high school, senior high school, and college students in educational settings. Guided by Arksey and O'Malley's scoping review framework, Levac and colleagues' methodological refinements, the JBI guidance for scoping reviews, and the PRISMA-ScR reporting extension, the review used a Population-Concept-Context lens. The population included students in secondary and tertiary education; the concept focused on academic stress, academic burnout, and counseling interventions; and the context covered school, university, and campus-based settings. A targeted search of web-accessible peer-reviewed studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and professional guidance published from 2013 to May 2026 was conducted. Twenty-six substantive sources were charted. Five themes emerged: (1) cognitive-behavioral and skills-based counseling remains the strongest structured pathway for stress reduction, (2) mindfulness and acceptance-based approaches support emotional regulation and resilience, (3) group counseling, psychoeducation, and peer support improve access and normalize help-seeking, (4) digital and self-guided interventions expand reach but require engagement and referral safeguards, and (5) burnout-focused work requires multilevel support beyond individual coping. An emergent framework is proposed to guide future guidance counseling practice and research. The review concludes that counseling interventions for academic stress and burnout should be integrated, developmentally appropriate, ethically delivered, and embedded within whole-school or whole-campus support systems.*

Keywords: Academic stress, Academic burnout, Guidance counseling, Counseling intervention, Scoping review

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic stress is a common and serious concern among students because academic life is organized around performance expectations, examinations, deadlines, grading systems, competition, family expectations, and transitions across educational levels. Although a certain level of stress may motivate learning, sustained and unmanaged stress can interfere with students' emotional adjustment, motivation, engagement, sleep, social functioning, and academic performance. In college populations, academic stress has been linked with lower motivation, impaired achievement, and possible dropout risk (Barbayannis et al., 2022; Pascoe et al., 2020). Among adolescents, mental health concerns are also increasingly recognized as educational concerns because depression, anxiety, and behavioral difficulties are among the major causes of illness and disability in this developmental period (World Health Organization, 2025). Academic burnout represents a more chronic and cumulative response to academic demands. Drawing from the student adaptation of burnout theory, student burnout is commonly described through exhaustion from academic requirements, cynicism or detachment from schoolwork, and reduced academic efficacy (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This means that burnout is not merely ordinary tiredness. It reflects a deeper pattern in which students feel emotionally depleted, become detached from learning, and begin to doubt their academic competence. Recent reviews show that burnout among students can negatively affect motivation, performance, and well-being, but there remains limited consensus on the most effective intervention models (Madigan et al., 2024).

The issue is highly relevant to guidance counseling. Guidance counselors work at the intersection of academic, personal-social, and career development. When students experience academic stress or burnout, their concerns are rarely limited to study habits alone. They may involve maladaptive thoughts, test anxiety, poor time management, perfectionism, low self-efficacy, family pressure, social comparison, avoidance, and reluctance to seek help. For this reason, counseling interventions must address both immediate coping and the broader academic environment that contributes to distress. The American School Counselor Association recognizes group counseling as a vital direct service because it supports academic, career, and social-emotional development, promotes belonging, and allows students with shared concerns to work through problems in a supportive setting (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2020).

Existing evidence suggests that different intervention families have been used to respond to academic stress and burnout. These include cognitive-behavioral interventions, stress management training, mindfulness-based programs, acceptance and commitment therapy, rational emotive behavior therapy, psychoeducation, group counseling, peer support, exercise-related interventions, and

digital or self-guided mental health programs (Amanvermez et al., 2023; Dawson et al., 2020; Jagiello et al., 2025; Madigan et al., 2024; Tang et al., 2021). However, the evidence is scattered across different populations and settings. Some reviews focus only on university students, some focus only on high schools, some address mental health outcomes broadly, and others examine burnout without explicitly linking the findings to guidance counseling practice. This fragmentation makes it difficult for school counselors and counselor educators to identify the range of available interventions and the conditions under which these may be appropriate.

A scoping review is appropriate because the topic crosses counseling, school mental health, educational psychology, and student well-being. Unlike a systematic review that primarily estimates intervention effectiveness, a scoping review maps the breadth of literature, clarifies concepts, identifies intervention clusters, and reveals gaps for future research. This review therefore aimed to map what is known about counseling interventions used to address academic stress and burnout among students in educational settings. Specifically, it sought to answer the question: What counseling interventions have been used to address academic stress and burnout among students? The review also aimed to develop an evidence-informed framework that can guide future research, program development, and guidance counseling practice.

2. METHODS

2.1 Design and Review Process

This study This study used a scoping review design. The review was conceptually anchored in the framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005), refined by Levac et al. (2010), and aligned with the JBI guidance for scoping reviews and the PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020; Tricco et al., 2018). A scoping review was selected because the literature on counseling interventions for academic stress and burnout is broad, interdisciplinary, and unevenly distributed across secondary education, higher education, health professions education, and digital mental health. The purpose was not to calculate pooled effects or rank interventions by certainty of evidence, but to map the intervention landscape, summarize recurring patterns, and identify implications for guidance counseling.

The review followed a Population-Concept-Context (PCC) approach. The population included junior high school, senior high school, and college students. The concept included academic stress, academic burnout, stress management, burnout reduction, counseling interventions, school counseling, group counseling, psychoeducation, mindfulness-based counseling, cognitive-behavioral counseling, acceptance-based counseling, peer support, and digital counseling-related supports. The context included educational settings such as schools, universities, colleges, and campus-based mental health or guidance services.

A targeted search was conducted on 31 May 2026 using web-accessible scholarly and professional sources. Search locations included Google Scholar, PubMed, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Frontiers, JMIR, and official professional or institutional websites where relevant. Search terms were combined in different ways, including "academic stress" AND counseling intervention, "student burnout" AND intervention, "academic burnout" AND counseling, "school-based academic stress intervention," "high school academic stress intervention," "college student stress management intervention," "mindfulness academic stress students," "CBT academic stress students," "group counseling academic stress," and "digital mental health intervention university students." Backward citation checking was used selectively to identify foundational sources and related reviews.

Eligible sources included peer-reviewed empirical studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, scoping or narrative reviews with direct intervention implications, and professional guidance documents related to counseling or school counseling practice. Sources were prioritized when they addressed student populations, academic stress or burnout, intervention content, counseling delivery, school or campus settings, or implementation implications. Sources were excluded when they focused only on employees, teachers, clinical patients outside educational settings, general stress without academic relevance, or interventions unrelated to counseling, psychosocial support, or student well-being. English-language sources from 2013 to May 2026 were prioritized to maintain relevance while still capturing influential earlier syntheses. Because the goal was mapping and conceptual clarification, no formal methodological quality appraisal was conducted, which is consistent with common scoping review practice when the objective is to examine the extent and nature of evidence rather than determine effectiveness with certainty.

After screening for relevance, twenty-six substantive sources were charted. Data extraction focused on author and year, student population, educational level, intervention type, mode of delivery, outcomes addressed, and implications for guidance counseling. The charted evidence was analyzed through an inductive-deductive thematic synthesis. Initial coding focused on repeated intervention components such as cognitive restructuring, coping skills, relaxation, mindfulness, self-compassion, group support, peer support, psychoeducation, online delivery, and referral needs. Codes were then organized into broader themes that describe how counseling interventions address academic stress and burnout across educational settings.

2.2 PCC Framework and Eligibility Criteria

Table 1. Population-Concept-Context framework and eligibility criteria

| Element | Description |
|------------------|--|
| Population | Junior high school students, senior high school students, college students, and comparable student groups in secondary or tertiary education. |
| Concept | Academic stress, academic burnout, student burnout, counseling interventions, stress management, psychoeducation, CBT, REBT, mindfulness, ACT, group counseling, peer support, and digital counseling-related supports. |
| Context | Educational settings, including schools, universities, colleges, campus counseling services, and school-based or campus-based mental health programs. |
| Included sources | Peer-reviewed empirical studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, scoping or narrative reviews with intervention implications, and professional guidance documents directly relevant to student counseling or school counseling. |
| Excluded sources | Employee-only studies, teacher-only burnout studies, clinical patient studies outside educational settings, general stress articles without academic relevance, and interventions without counseling or psychosocial support implications. |
| Time coverage | 2013 to May 2026, with older foundational sources included when conceptually necessary. |
| Language | English. |

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Theme 1: Cognitive-Behavioral and Skills-Based Counseling Remains the Strongest Structured Pathway for Stress Reduction

Across the charted literature, cognitive-behavioral and skills-based interventions emerged as a central pathway for addressing academic stress. These interventions typically help students identify unhelpful thoughts, reframe academic pressure, improve problem-solving, strengthen time management, practice relaxation, and use more adaptive coping strategies. This is important because academic stress is not produced only by external demands. It is also shaped by how students appraise those demands, how much control they believe they have, and whether they possess practical strategies for studying, organizing, communicating, and recovering from stress.

The evidence from college populations supports this pattern. Regehr et al. (2013) found that cognitive, behavioral, and mindfulness interventions were effective in reducing stress among university students. Amanvermez et al. (2023) further showed that guided stress management interventions for college students produced moderate effects for stress and anxiety and small-to-moderate effects for depression, with CBT-based approaches and longer interventions showing particular promise for highly stressed students. These findings are directly relevant to guidance counseling because CBT-consistent counseling can be delivered in individual sessions, structured group counseling, workshops, or short-term guidance programs.

Evidence from high school settings also points to the importance of cognitive-behavioral foundations. Jagiello et al. (2025) reviewed school-based academic stress interventions in high schools and found that programs were diverse in format and facilitator, but the strongest evidence was associated with programs grounded in cognitive-behavioral theory. For junior and senior high school students, this suggests that interventions may be more useful when they explicitly teach students how to challenge catastrophic

thoughts about examinations, manage avoidance, plan study routines, and distinguish realistic academic responsibility from perfectionistic pressure.

From a guidance counseling perspective, this theme suggests that academic stress intervention should not be limited to inspirational talks or general advice. Students often need structured counseling activities that translate emotional concerns into concrete skills. Possible components include stress education, automatic thought monitoring, study planning, relaxation training, problem-solving, test anxiety management, sleep and recovery planning, and development of realistic academic goals. These activities are especially suitable for short-term school counseling because they can be manualized, delivered to groups, adapted for different grade levels, and evaluated using stress or burnout screening tools.

Theme 2: Mindfulness and Acceptance-Based Approaches Support Emotion Regulation, Resilience, and Recovery from Academic Pressure

A second theme was the prominence of mindfulness and acceptance-based interventions. These approaches do not only teach students to solve external academic problems; they also help students relate differently to pressure, worry, self-criticism, and difficult emotions. Mindfulness-based interventions commonly involve present-moment awareness, breathing practices, nonjudgmental attention, body awareness, self-compassion, and values-based action. Acceptance and commitment therapy adds psychological flexibility by helping students act according to values even when stress is present.

Dawson et al. (2020) reviewed randomized controlled trials of mindfulness-based interventions among university students and found that these interventions were widely used in university stress-reduction programs. A more recent randomized controlled trial by Chen et al. (2025) reported that an 8-week structured mindfulness training program significantly decreased academic stress and academic burnout while increasing psychological resilience among university students. These findings suggest that mindfulness may be useful when stress is maintained by rumination, examination anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and low resilience.

Online mindfulness interventions also appeared in the charted evidence. Alrashdi et al. (2024) found that online mindfulness-based interventions may be better than no intervention for improving university students' mental health and well-being, although the evidence was less certain when compared with active controls and was limited by attrition and risk-of-bias concerns. This finding is important because many guidance programs now face high demand and limited counselor availability. Online mindfulness modules may extend access, but they should not replace human assessment and follow-up for students with severe distress, suicidal ideation, or complex psychosocial concerns.

For school and university counselors, mindfulness-based counseling may be used as a preventive and developmental intervention. It can be integrated into homeroom guidance, wellness workshops, group counseling, examination preparation programs, or campus mental health initiatives. However, mindfulness should be delivered carefully. Students need developmentally appropriate explanations, culturally sensitive examples, and practical activities rather than abstract or overly clinical language. Counselors should also clarify that mindfulness is not a way of ignoring academic problems; rather, it helps students regulate attention and emotion so that they can respond to academic demands more effectively.

Theme 3: Group Counseling, Psychoeducation, and Peer Support Improve Access and Normalize Help-Seeking

A third theme was the value of group-based and peer-supported approaches. Academic stress and burnout are often experienced privately, but many of their sources are shared: examinations, workload, fear of failure, family expectations, scholarship pressure, practicum demands, and uncertainty about the future. Group counseling can reduce isolation by allowing students to hear that others have similar struggles. It also provides opportunities for modeling, peer encouragement, social learning, and accountability.

The professional guidance from ASCA (2020) identifies group counseling as a vital direct service that supports academic, career, and social-emotional development. In the burnout literature, Tang et al. (2021) reported that group counseling was the most widely used intervention in learning burnout studies, while Madigan et al. (2024) found that student burnout interventions included approaches such as mindfulness, rational emotive behavior therapy, and cognitive-behavioral therapy. These findings suggest that burnout reduction is not limited to one-on-one counseling. Group formats can be appropriate when students share common developmental or academic concerns.

Psychoeducation also appeared as a common intervention component. In many educational settings, counselors begin with structured sessions that explain the nature of stress, signs of burnout, coping styles, study habits, time management, help-seeking, and referral pathways. Psychoeducation is not therapy by itself, but it can serve as a first layer of support. It can also reduce stigma by helping students understand that stress and burnout are valid concerns that can be addressed through counseling, self-care, social support, and academic planning.

Peer support and peer counseling were less consistently evaluated than CBT or mindfulness interventions, but they remain important in school counseling practice because students often disclose stress first to classmates or friends. Peer support can help identify students who need assistance, normalize help-seeking, and create a caring school climate. However, peer programs require safeguards. Peer facilitators should not be expected to perform professional counseling, assess suicide risk independently, or handle complex cases without supervision. In guidance counseling, peer support is best understood as a bridge to professional help rather than a substitute for it

Theme 4: Digital and Self-Guided Interventions Expand Reach but Require Engagement and Referral Safeguards

A fourth theme concerned digital and self-guided interventions. Colleges, universities, and schools increasingly use online modules, mobile applications, web-based mental health programs, and blended counseling support to address student stress. These approaches are attractive because they can reach large numbers of students, reduce scheduling barriers, provide privacy, and serve as low-intensity support for students who may not initially seek face-to-face counseling.

The broader evidence on digital mental health interventions among college students suggests cautious promise. Lattie et al. (2019) reviewed digital mental health interventions for college students and found that many programs were delivered through websites and that internet-based CBT was a common approach. Ferrari et al. (2022) found small but significant improvements in psychological well-being among university students using digital psychological interventions. Amanvermez et al. (2022) similarly concluded that self-guided stress management programs may be useful as part of a multi-component system, especially as a first step for students reluctant to seek traditional help.

Despite these advantages, digital interventions also raise implementation concerns. Many programs experience low engagement, dropout, or superficial completion. Students with severe academic burnout may lack the motivation or energy to complete self-guided modules. Students in crisis may also require immediate human assessment rather than a digital tool. Therefore, digital counseling support should be embedded within a stepped-care framework: universal self-help resources for mild stress, group or guided modules for moderate concerns, individual counseling for persistent or complex cases, and referral to mental health professionals when risk is high.

For guidance counseling programs, digital tools are most defensible when they are paired with screening, monitoring, confidentiality protocols, and referral systems. A school or university may use online stress check-ins, psychoeducational modules, mindfulness audio guides, appointment systems, or guided self-help worksheets. However, students should be clearly informed about privacy, limits of confidentiality, emergency procedures, and the difference between self-help and professional counseling. In this way, digital interventions can expand reach without weakening ethical responsibility.

Theme 5: Burnout-Focused Work Requires Multilevel Support Beyond Individual Coping

The fifth theme was that burnout-focused intervention requires more than individual coping skills. Academic burnout is connected to prolonged demand, insufficient recovery, low control, poor support, and declining meaning in schoolwork. Individual counseling can help students regulate emotions and rethink unhelpful beliefs, but counseling alone may be insufficient when institutional demands remain excessive or when students lack access to academic support, teacher understanding, financial assistance, or reasonable workload management.

Madigan et al. (2024) found initial evidence that interventions can reduce student burnout, but they also noted the need for more systematic examination of intervention types and organizational-level approaches. Tang et al. (2021) likewise suggested that integrated interventions based on burnout factors add value. These findings imply that burnout prevention should be treated as a shared responsibility among students, counselors, teachers, administrators, and families. Guidance counselors can lead the psychosocial component, but school-wide and campus-wide changes are also needed.

A multilevel approach may include universal prevention, targeted group counseling, individual counseling, academic advising, referral, teacher consultation, and policy feedback. For example, if many students report burnout during examination periods, the counselor may not only conduct stress management sessions but also coordinate with teachers and administrators on assessment schedules, workload balance, and recovery opportunities. Similarly, if students in a particular program experience practicum-related burnout, counseling interventions should be paired with mentoring, supervision, and academic planning.

This theme is particularly important for the Master of Arts in Guidance Counseling because it positions counselors as both direct service providers and student advocates. Counselors should not only teach students to endure pressure. They should also help schools understand patterns of distress, identify high-risk groups, and design supportive educational environments. Burnout intervention, therefore, is both a counseling issue and a school systems issue.

Emergent Framework

The synthesis suggests that counseling interventions for academic stress and burnout can be understood through a layered school-support framework. At the first layer are student academic stressors, such as workload, examinations, deadlines, performance pressure, family expectations, financial strain, and adjustment demands. These stressors do not automatically lead to burnout, but they increase risk when students lack coping resources, social support, recovery time, and access to counseling.

At the second layer are counseling system enablers. These include screening, referral pathways, confidentiality protocols, counselor competence, administrative support, culturally responsive materials, and coordination with teachers and academic advisers. These enablers determine whether interventions are accessible, ethical, and sustained. Without them, even evidence-informed interventions may remain fragmented or underused.

At the third layer are counseling intervention modalities: cognitive-behavioral and skills-based counseling, mindfulness and acceptance-based counseling, group counseling, psychoeducation, peer support, and digital or self-guided interventions. These modalities operate through core change mechanisms such as cognitive reframing, coping skills, emotion regulation, social connectedness, self-efficacy, resilience, and help-seeking. When these mechanisms are activated, expected outcomes include reduced academic stress, lower burnout, improved resilience, stronger engagement, and increased willingness to seek help.

Across all layers, safeguards are necessary. Interventions must be developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive, confidential, and connected to referral systems. Students with severe distress, self-harm risk, trauma, or major mental health concerns require professional assessment and possible referral beyond ordinary school counseling services. The framework therefore treats counseling intervention as a continuum of support rather than a single activity.

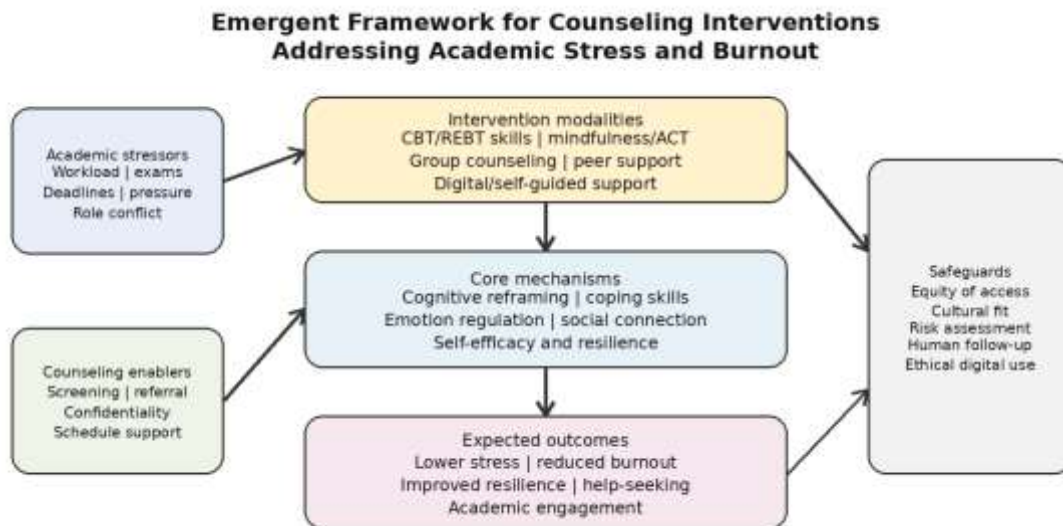


Figure 1. Emergent Framework for Counseling Interventions Addressing Academic Stress and Burnout Among Students

This review has several limitations. First, it used a targeted search of web-accessible scholarly and professional sources rather than a full database export with duplicate management. Second, only English-language sources were prioritized, which may have excluded relevant studies published in other languages. Third, because the review aimed to map intervention types and counseling implications, no formal quality appraisal was conducted. Fourth, the evidence base remains uneven: more studies are available for college students than for junior high school and senior high school students, and more evidence exists for stress reduction than for burnout-specific counseling interventions. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as an evidence-informed conceptual map rather than a definitive ranking of intervention effectiveness.

4. CONCLUSION

This scoping review shows that counseling interventions for academic stress and burnout among students are diverse but can be organized into several major clusters. Cognitive-behavioral and skills-based counseling remains a strong structured approach because it directly addresses maladaptive thoughts, coping deficits, time management problems, and academic avoidance. Mindfulness and acceptance-based interventions provide complementary support by strengthening attention, emotion regulation, self-compassion, and resilience. Group counseling, psychoeducation, and peer support improve access and normalize help-seeking, while digital and self-guided interventions expand reach when embedded within ethical and responsive counseling systems. The review also demonstrates that academic burnout should not be treated only as an individual weakness or lack of motivation. Burnout reflects prolonged exposure to academic demands and insufficient resources for recovery, meaning, support, and control.

Hence, the evidence suggests that the most useful counseling response is not a single technique but a layered system of support. Universal psychoeducation may help all students understand stress and burnout. Targeted group counseling may assist students with shared academic pressures. Individual counseling may be needed for students with persistent distress or complex concerns. Digital resources may extend access, but they should be connected to human support and referral. This integrated model is particularly appropriate for guidance counseling because it aligns with the developmental, preventive, and responsive functions of the profession.

5. RECOMMENDATION

Guidance counseling programs may develop structured academic stress and burnout intervention packages that include screening, psychoeducation, CBT-based coping skills, mindfulness practices, group counseling sessions, and referral procedures. These packages should be adapted for junior high school, senior high school, and college students because developmental needs and academic pressures differ across educational levels. Meanwhile, schools and universities may institutionalize regular stress and burnout screening, particularly during examination periods, transition periods, practicum placements, thesis writing, board examination preparation, and other high-pressure academic phases. Screening results can guide group counseling topics, wellness activities, parent or teacher consultation, and individual follow-up. Screening should be accompanied by clear confidentiality and referral protocols.

Moreover, counselor education programs may strengthen training in evidence-informed interventions for academic stress and burnout. This includes cognitive-behavioral counseling, rational emotive behavior therapy, mindfulness-based counseling, acceptance and commitment strategies, group facilitation, digital counseling ethics, crisis assessment, and program evaluation. Graduate students in guidance counseling may also be trained to design brief, manualized, and culturally responsive interventions suitable for school and campus settings. Future research may examine the effectiveness of locally developed counseling interventions for academic stress and burnout among Filipino junior high school, senior high school, and college students. There is also a need for studies comparing individual counseling, group counseling, peer support, and blended digital approaches. Future scoping or systematic reviews may focus more narrowly on specific populations, such as senior high school students, preservice teachers, nursing students, graduate students, or students preparing for licensure examinations.

Finally, schools and universities should treat academic stress and burnout as shared institutional concerns. Counseling services are essential, but student well-being also depends on teacher practices, assessment schedules, workload balance, family communication, academic advising, and administrative support. A coordinated approach is therefore recommended so that counseling interventions are not isolated activities but part of a whole-school or whole-campus mental health and academic support system.

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