

# RECOVER

## Youth Workers Capacitation Toolkit

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# Foreword

The toolkit at hand has been developed to familiarise youth workers, trainers, educators, and facilitators with a set of practical, accessible methods for supporting young people’s mental wellbeing in non-formal education settings. While its primary focus is to provide tools for early recognition, emotional literacy, and resilience-building, the toolkit also illustrates the broader potential of integrating wellbeing practices into everyday youth work. By emphasising reflection, creativity, body awareness, and supportive dialogue, the RECOVER Toolkit offers a comprehensive framework that can be applied across diverse contexts where youth workers seek to create safe, inclusive, and empowering environments.

This publication explores the foundations of youth wellbeing, identifies the most common challenges young people face, and offers a wide range of practical resources that can be directly implemented in workshops, mentoring, or group activities. It presents theoretical insights into mental health and wellbeing alongside ready-to-use assessment tools, creative exercises, and facilitation techniques. The toolkit is structured to guide practitioners through self-awareness methods, stress and emotion management tools, and youth-centred activities that foster connection, resilience, and positive coping strategies. By the end, readers will not only understand the key concepts behind wellbeing in youth work but will also be equipped with concrete methods, reflection prompts, and workshop structures to support young people effectively.

This toolkit has been developed within the framework of the “Youth Wellbeing Recovering Kit”, an Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership Project in the field of Youth. The project unites partners from Austria, Croatia, Latvia, and Poland, working collaboratively to advance mental health awareness, strengthen youth workers’ competencies, and promote innovative, participatory approaches to wellbeing. Through this joint effort, the RECOVER Toolkit serves as a practical contribution to building healthier, more supportive communities for young people across Europe.



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# INTRODUCTION

Young people today are navigating a fast-changing world shaped by academic pressure, social comparison, economic uncertainty, and the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. These realities are placing increasing strain on their mental health and emotional wellbeing (Bailey et al., 2024; WHO, 2022). At the same time, youth workers are often expected to offer support - even though most have not received specific training in mental health (Eurofound, 2022). The RECOVER project was created to address this gap. It focuses on strengthening youth wellbeing by empowering youth workers to act as confident, compassionate first points of contact. Using a human-centred and participatory approach, including the Dragon Dreaming approach (Hutchinson et al., 2014), RECOVER co-designs practical tools and training activities with young people, not just for them. The goal is to embed mental health awareness into everyday youth work, reduce stigma, and promote inclusive, supportive environments across Europe.

## UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

To support others, we need a shared understanding of what mental health and wellbeing actually mean. These terms are often used interchangeably, but they reflect different, though connected, aspects of a young person's life.

MENTAL HEALTH is not just the absence of illness. It's a positive and dynamic state that allows individuals to cope with stress, learn, relate to others, and participate in their communities. As the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) defines it, mental health is "a state of well-being in which every individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community." For young people, this influences how they see themselves, how they interact with peers and adults, and how they respond to daily pressures.

WELLBEING, meanwhile, is a broader concept that includes mental and physical health, emotional safety, a sense of belonging, and purpose. It is shaped by both internal factors (like resilience and self-esteem) and external ones (such as family relationships, access to services, community inclusion, and structural inequalities) (OECD, 2021). In youth work, promoting wellbeing means creating environments where young people feel seen, valued, and supported, not just in crisis, but as a part of everyday practice.

Importantly, mental health and wellbeing are not static. They can shift depending on circumstances, support systems, life transitions, and emotional challenges. That's why all young people, regardless of background, benefit from environments that prioritise wellbeing (European Commission, 2022).

## WHY IT MATTERS IN YOUTH WORK

Mental health is no longer a side issue - it is central to the way young people learn, grow, and participate in society. Yet many still struggle in silence. Some are unsure how to name their feelings; others fear being judged or misunderstood. That's why the youth worker's role is so important (Mental Health Foundation, 2023).

Youth workers are often trusted adults who provide safe, informal spaces for reflection, expression, and growth. While they are not expected to diagnose or treat mental health conditions, they play a crucial role in early recognition and emotional support (Bailey et al., 2024).

A simple conversation, group activity, or supportive check-in can create space for a young person to feel heard. Over time, this trust can support emotional literacy, self-care skills, and positive coping strategies. Youth workers are also uniquely positioned to embed wellbeing into everyday programmes - using experiential methods, creative tools, and relational learning to make mental health support approachable and empowering (UNICEF, 2023).

Equipping youth workers with tools to respond to emotional needs builds not only confidence, but also resilient communities.

## COMMON CHALLENGES YOUNG PEOPLE FACE

Young people go through significant changes - physically, socially, and emotionally. While these years can be exciting, they're also full of pressure and uncertainty. Recognising common mental health challenges can help youth workers offer more informed and responsive support.

- **Anxiety and stress** are increasingly common, especially around school performance, family expectations, and the future (Eurofound, 2022).
- **Low self-esteem and body image concerns** are often amplified by social media and unrealistic beauty standards (OECD, 2021).
- **Social isolation** affects many young people, especially those who feel excluded, misunderstood, or unsupported (UNICEF, 2023).
- **Burnout and pressure to succeed** are no longer limited to adults - young people also feel pressure to constantly achieve and "do more."
- **Fear of failure** and hopelessness about the future can lead to withdrawal or risk-taking behaviours.

These challenges don't always show up in obvious ways. A young person may seem fine on the surface but be struggling internally. Youth workers can often spot subtle signs, changes in mood, loss of interest, or withdrawal, and offer support early, before the situation worsens (Mental Health Europe, 2022).

## BREAKING THE STIGMA

Even as awareness of mental health grows across Europe, stigma remains one of the biggest barriers preventing young people from seeking support. Many still fear being judged, misunderstood, or labelled as “weak” or “unable to cope.” Research shows that young people often avoid reaching out because they expect negative reactions or feel ashamed of their emotions (European Youth Forum, 2022; WHO, 2021). In communities where mental health is rarely discussed, emotional struggles are frequently minimised, leading many young people to stay silent at moments when connection would help most (UNICEF, 2021).

Stigma appears in subtle, everyday behaviours: jokes about “being crazy,” pressure to stay positive, reluctance to name emotions, or the belief that asking for help means failure. Internalised stigma can deepen shame and reduce self-esteem (OECD, 2021), while structural stigma, such as limited youth-friendly services or long waiting times, creates additional barriers. Understanding these dynamics is essential for youth workers, who are often the first trusted adults young people turn to when they begin to struggle.

Youth workers are uniquely positioned to challenge these patterns. By creating open, welcoming, and non-judgmental environments, they help young people feel seen and heard without fear of consequences. Stigma reduction does not require clinical training; it begins with everyday interactions—how we listen, respond, and make room for all emotions. Empathetic communication signals that feelings are valid and that seeking support is an act of strength, not weakness (WHO, 2022).

Small, practical actions can make a significant difference. Using inclusive language, offering quiet spaces, modelling emotional openness, and encouraging peer support all help normalise conversations around wellbeing. Creative expression, storytelling, and resilience-sharing activities show young people that challenges are universal, not personal failures. Such approaches support a culture where mental health is understood as a normal part of youth development (UNICEF, 2022).

This toolkit was designed to support this cultural shift. It provides accessible tools, structured activities, and reflective exercises that integrate wellbeing into daily youth work. When conversations about emotions, stress, and coping become routine, young people learn that wellbeing is something they can actively build—not something to hide. Breaking stigma is an ongoing process that requires patience and consistency, but every small step matters. Each supportive conversation, stereotype challenged, and safe space created contributes to lasting change. When youth workers challenge stigma, they open doors to trust. When young people feel safe to speak openly, they gain the confidence to seek help, build resilience, and support one another.

# ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Youth workers play a critical role in supporting the mental health and well-being of young people. Even though they are often not trained clinical professionals, they can nevertheless facilitate early detection of psychological distress and encourage self-reflection through structured tools and sheets. Early recognition of mild symptoms is essential: according to the OECD, mild to moderate symptoms of anxiety and depression often remain unrecognized and without timely intervention may progress to more serious disorders. Therefore, it is essential to provide tools and sheets that are practical, accessible, and that facilitate reflection, observation and conversation around early signs of distress (OECD, 2024). Also, according to the WHO, approximately one in seven adolescents (aged 10-19) live with a mental health condition; yet many of these issues go unrecognised and untreated (WHO, 2025). In the youth policy field, the OECD highlights not only mental health but also meaningful youth participation as part of a broader enabling environment (OECD, 2024.).

There is a clear and growing need for structured tools that can effectively support youth workers in addressing mental health and well-being among young people. Such tools serve as a bridge to open safe and meaningful conversations about emotional and mental states, reducing the reliance on improvised or ad-hoc questions.

By integrating assessment tools into their practice, youth workers can bring structure to observation, reflection, and self-reflection processes, making it easier to notice subtle behavioural or emotional changes over time. Indicators such as mood shifts, withdrawal, changes in energy, declining academic or vocational performance may all signal emerging distress. Screening and observation tools in youth settings help surface these signs sooner (SHAPE, University of Maryland). More importantly, these tools contribute to building mental health literacy among young people by transforming stress, mood fluctuations, and coping mechanisms, into tangible, visible patterns.

As highlighted by the OECD (2025), enhancing mental health literacy, ensuring accessible low-threshold support, and reducing stigma are essential components of effective youth mental health promotion. Ultimately, these tools empower self-reflection, enabling young people to better identify their stressors, recognise their coping resources, and strengthen their awareness of their emotional well-being. By equipping youth workers with simple, non-clinical tools, youth organisations become places of support rather than mere referral points. Having tools helps shape safe conversations, frame observations and direct young people to additional support when needed (Copenhagen Youth Network, 2022.)

# WEEKLY MOOD TRACKER

The **Weekly Mood Tracker** is a simple yet effective self-assessment tool designed to help young people monitor their emotional well-being over time. By visually recording daily moods and reflections, participants can identify recurring emotional patterns, triggers, and positive influences. This tool promotes emotional literacy; helping young people name, understand, and normalize a range of feelings, while fostering self-awareness and early recognition of potential distress. Regular use of mood tracking supports the development of self-regulation and emotional resilience.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Introduce the Weekly Mood Tracker during individual or group sessions focused on well-being, reflection, or emotional awareness. They should also clarify that the tracker is not a diagnostic tool but a self-reflective exercise to understand personal emotions throughout the week. Participants should begin by assigning a specific color to each primary emotion in the key. These colors will be used consistently throughout the week to visually represent their daily moods.

## DAILY REFLECTION

Each day, participants select the emotion that best reflects their overall mood and mark it using the corresponding color from the key. In the following column, they note the main feeling they experienced that day (e.g., anxiety, stress, excitement). In the final column, they record one positive event or moment that occurred during the day.

## WEEKLY REFLECTION

At the end of the week, participants review their entries to reflect on their overall emotional patterns. They are encouraged to consider which emotions appeared most frequently, identify the positive experiences that stood out, and think about areas for improvement or strategies to enhance their well-being in the upcoming week.

## ADAPTATION

The tracker can be adjusted for digital or printed use, and adapted for different age groups or literacy levels by modifying the emotional vocabulary or adding color coding and visual icons.

# WEEKLY MOOD TRACKER

## Mood



good



melancholic



sad



happy



crying



angry

How did you feel overall?

Main feeling (excitement, anxiety)

One good thing about the day

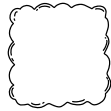
Monday



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Tuesday



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Wednesday



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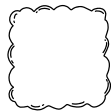
Thursday



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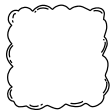
Friday



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Saturday



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Sunday



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## DAILY STRESS JAR

The **Stress Tracker** is a reflective self-assessment tool that helps young people recognize and manage their daily stress levels. Using a simple visual metaphor, the “stress jar”, participants can identify what fills their jar (stressors) and what helps to empty it (coping strategies). This exercise promotes awareness of how daily experiences and habits influence emotional balance and encourages the development of healthy coping mechanisms. By externalizing stress visually, youth can better understand their triggers, resilience patterns, and personal limits, fostering proactive self-regulation and emotional well-being.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Introduce the Stress Tracker during sessions focused on stress management, emotional regulation, or mental health awareness. They should explain that the tracker is not meant to measure stress clinically but to help participants reflect on how they perceive and manage it daily.

### DAILY REFLECTION

Participants start by assessing how “full” their daily stress jar feels by coloring the level of the jar; whether it’s nearly empty, half full, or overflowing. In the section “What is filling my jar?”, they list the main sources of stress, such as school pressure, social expectations, or lack of rest. In the section “What could empty my jar?”, they identify coping mechanisms or actions that could help reduce stress, like physical activity, spending time outdoors, talking with friends, or mindfulness exercises.

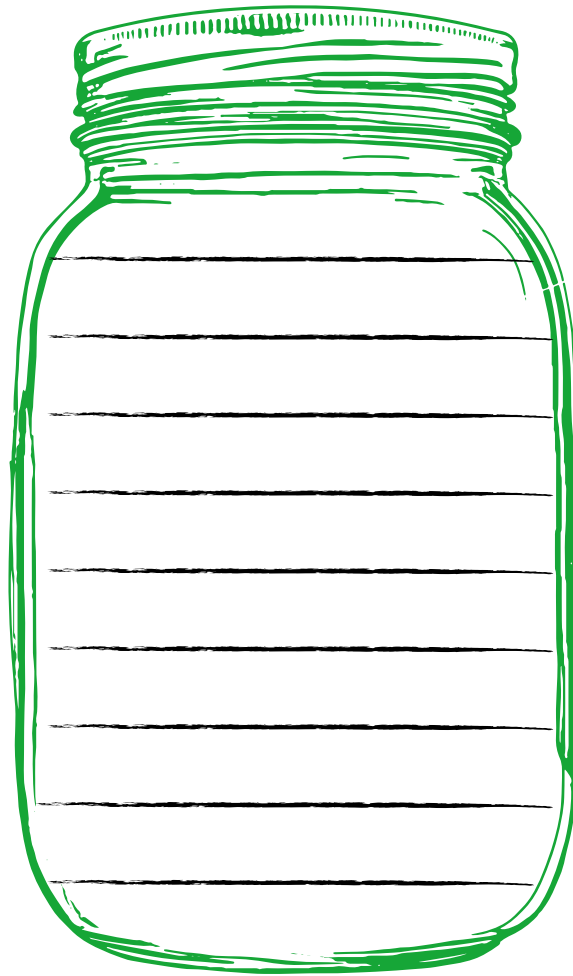
### WEEKLY REFLECTION

At the end of the week, participants revisit their stress jars to notice any trends or patterns: when their jars felt fullest and what strategies were most effective at emptying them. This reflection supports personal growth, helping them adopt more consistent, positive coping habits.

### ADAPTATION

The Stress Tracker can be used individually or in group sessions. It can also be adapted for digital or printed use, with color-coding or symbols for younger participants. For older youth, it can be integrated with journaling or follow-up discussions on stress triggers and resilience-building techniques.

# HOW FULL IS MY DAILY STRESS JAR?



**What is filling my jar?**  
(sources of stress)

◆ \_\_\_\_\_  
◆ \_\_\_\_\_  
◆ \_\_\_\_\_  
◆ \_\_\_\_\_  
◆ \_\_\_\_\_  
◆ \_\_\_\_\_

**What could empty my jar?**  
(coping mechanisms or actions)

◆ \_\_\_\_\_  
◆ \_\_\_\_\_  
◆ \_\_\_\_\_  
◆ \_\_\_\_\_  
◆ \_\_\_\_\_  
◆ \_\_\_\_\_

The **Monthly Self-Reflection** sheet is a structured journaling tool designed to help young people pause, reflect, and assess their emotional well-being and personal growth over the course of a month. By engaging in regular reflection, participants can strengthen self-awareness, emotional regulation, and gratitude, key components of positive mental health. This tool encourages youth to look beyond daily fluctuations in mood and instead identify broader patterns in their behavior, mindset, and coping strategies. It promotes mindfulness, self-compassion, and goal-setting for continuous personal development.

## MONTHLY SELF-REFLECTION

### INSTRUCTIONS

Introduce the Monthly Self-Reflection sheet at the end of each month during individual or group sessions. It is recommended to create a calm and supportive atmosphere, allowing participants to reflect without judgment. The facilitator should remind participants that the sheet is a private reflection tool, not an evaluation, intended to promote self-understanding and emotional balance.

Participants begin by marking the overall feeling that best represents their month using one of the illustrated emotion icons (happy, sad, crying, melancholic, angry, confused). They then proceed to fill in the guided prompts:

- “What are you thankful for?” Encourages gratitude and recognition of positive aspects or people in their lives.
- “What didn’t go as planned?” Helps identify challenges or setbacks, fostering constructive self-reflection rather than self-criticism.
- “4 good things that happened” Focuses on positive experiences, helping build emotional resilience and optimism.
- “Reminder for the next month” Encourages forward-thinking by setting small, realistic goals for improvement based on the month’s experiences.

### ADAPTATION

The sheet can be adapted for different age groups by simplifying language or adding visual prompts for younger participants. It can be used in both printed and digital formats, individually or in small groups, and can also serve as a conversation starter in mentoring or counseling sessions.

# MONTHLY SELF REFLECTION

Year

Month

JAN FEB MAR APR  
MAY JUN JUL AUG  
SEP OCT NOV DEC

Overall feeling



What are you thankful for?

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What didn't go as planned?

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Reminder for the next month

-----  
-----

4 good things  
that happened

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-----  
-----  
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# WELLBEING CHALLENGES

The mental health of children and adolescents is one of the key areas of contemporary psychological and pedagogical assistance and school prevention. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the incidence of mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders, and burnout, which poses a serious challenge to public health. A 2020 UNICEF report on the mental health of young people points to numerous negative effects of the pandemic. These include increased anxiety, depressive and anxiety disorders, decreased motivation to act, and resignation from previous responsibilities.


The WHO defines mental health as a state of psychological well-being that allows people to cope with the stresses of life, pursue their goals, learn and work effectively, and contribute to their communities. It is an integral part of health and well-being, forming the basis of our individual and collective ability to make decisions, build relationships, and shape the world in which we live. Mental health is a fundamental human right. It is crucial for personal, community, and socio-economic development.

Dynamic social, economic, and technological changes, as well as urbanization, excessive screen time, and reduced social contact, intensify the occurrence of disorders such as anxiety, depression, and stress-related ailments. Weakened social ties and feelings of loneliness further exacerbate these risks.

According to WHO estimates, approximately one billion people worldwide struggle with mental health problems, and depression is one of the main causes of difficulties in daily functioning. These challenges have been significantly exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted daily routines and deepened feelings of isolation. As a result, there has been a sharp increase in the number of people, including young people, experiencing anxiety and depressive disorders, feelings of helplessness, social exclusion, leading to a loss of joy, motivation, and distance from their surroundings. It is also worth mentioning the social factors and elements of lifestyle that affect a person's mental health.

Depression, recognized by the WHO as one of the leading causes of coping difficulties in everyday life. It is characterized by, among other things, low mood, loss of interest and pleasure. Anxiety disorders, social phobia, and panic disorders manifest themselves in excessive anxiety, fear, and avoidance behaviors.

The mental health of young people is the foundation for their harmonious development and proper functioning in society. Unfortunately, various types of mental crises are increasingly observed among them. A growing number of teenagers experience chronic stress caused by life difficulties, unexpected obstacles, or random events.



When a young person is unable to cope with a new situation on their own, they may react with a crisis. Stress in the educational environment may be related to an intense and demanding curriculum, an excessive number of extracurricular activities, peer pressure, and parental pressure. Other important factors include: lack of opportunities to develop passions and interests, difficulties in learning and assimilating new material, and conflicts with peers and teachers.


An important factor affecting the well-being of young people is relational violence. Young people mock others, bully them, ridicule and gossip about them, and exclude them from their circle of friends. Those who experience the above situations become victims of verbal, physical, and electronic violence.

Another cause of crisis can be family problems, which are the source of many difficult situations and experiences. Difficulties may be related to, among other things, the emotional coldness of parents towards their children, chronic illnesses of family members, addictions, domestic violence, conflicts, change of residence, or emotional and mental disorders in the family environment.

Young people face growing challenges related to educational pressure, peer pressure, difficult relationships in their immediate environment, and a lack of understanding and acceptance. They

experience difficulties resulting from excessive use of digital devices and the influence of social media on the world they live in and on their perception of the body and the meaning of values. In addition, young people are still feeling the lingering effects of the pandemic. All these factors contribute to increased levels of stress, anxiety, behavioral disorders, eating disorders, burnout, and depressive disorders among young people. In a rapidly changing world, these issues are widespread and require multidimensional strategies combining prevention, improved mental health literacy, and accessible, inclusive interventions. Only such a comprehensive approach can foster mental resilience and promote well-being in modern societies.

Excessive use of digital technologies and social media is both a cause and a consequence of the mental health crisis among young people. The media negatively affect social relationships through withdrawal and the emergence of health and educational problems. Young people are exposed to violence, pornography, and contact with dangerous content. The internet is an escape from problems such as loneliness, a feeling of lack of acceptance and support among peers and family, shyness, solitude, and introversion. Virtual resources create unrealistic expectations regarding appearance and lifestyle.




The widespread and excessive use of smartphones, computers, the internet, and social media has revolutionized human interactions. Excessive screen time can be linked to increased feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression, especially among young people. Constant connectivity leads to information overload, sleep disorders, and a lack of real social contact. Anxiety levels rise and moods decline, and despite apparent connectivity, young people experience feelings of loneliness and alienation. Intensive use of modern technologies reduces concentration, impairs memory functions, and reduces productivity. Social media, by promoting narrow and often unrealistic standards of beauty and success, becomes a source of strong social pressure, which is particularly noticeable among teenagers. Constant exposure to this type of content significantly increases the risk of developing body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem, and in extreme cases, can be a contributing factor to eating disorders. In addition, there is a real risk of developing a behavioral addiction to technology. Lack of access to a device can cause withdrawal symptoms such as severe anxiety, mental tension, or feelings of isolation.

Technology is an important part of our lives, but too much of it can be harmful to our mental health. Conscious use of devices, maintaining a balance between the online and offline worlds, and building healthy habits are the keys to well-being.

Reaching for commonly available stimulants, such as alcohol, e-cigarettes, designer drugs, and narcotics, is a response to the need to belong to a peer group, to be accepted, and sometimes it is a form of entertainment or curiosity. These substances often serve as a so-called remedy for emotional difficulties, low self-esteem, or stress resistance.

Burnout, defined as a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused mainly by chronic stress, has been recognized by the WHO as a widespread problem. It is characterized by chronic fatigue, exhaustion, a feeling of ineffectiveness, a sense of meaninglessness, and a lack of motivation. Undoubtedly, the factors contributing to the increase in the number of young people struggling with burnout are: constant pressure and increased demands, high expectations, both in the school environment, among peers and at home, and comparing oneself to others. Another significant challenge is concern about the fate of the world in relation to environmental pollution, climate change, and ongoing wars. An excess of negative news has a harmful effect on the psyche of young people.

Often downplayed by parents and guardians, romantic disappointments and identity crises are significant challenges of adolescence. Young people experience their first relationship failures, breakups, and the associated suffering very deeply.



The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health problems, rapidly increasing the number of cases of depression and anxiety due to, among other things, lockdowns, isolation, social exclusion, uncertainty about the future, fear of infection, and grief over the loss of loved ones.

Loneliness, sadness, feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem, difficult family relationships, stress, and depressive disorders are part of everyday life for today's youth. These are associated with eating disorders, behavioral disorders, risky behaviors, self-harm, and suicide. Young people face low self-esteem and a lack of agency, peer pressure, the search for identity, trends created by the media, and the discrepancy between the virtual and real worlds. They are often judged and live under pressure.


Young people experiencing emotional difficulties is growing. Mental health determines a high quality of life and a sense of well-being. It enables young people to derive joy and satisfaction from life, influences their ability to develop cognitive skills, promotes the building of good relationships, and encourages active participation in social life.

The modern lifestyle and pace of life have a huge impact on the mental well-being of young people. The correlation between the family environment, education, and peer relationships are important for mental health.

Among the important factors that promote interaction are a sense of belonging, positive relationships based on trust, honesty, and acceptance, a pro-social attitude towards joint activities, the opportunity to experience successes and failures, the ability to recognize and name emotions, counteracting all forms of violence, and mutual help, support, and understanding.

A healthy lifestyle is an integral part of caring for young people's mental health. It is important to ensure adequate sleep and quality rest. Regular physical activity, which, in addition to supporting development, primarily acts as a natural antidepressant by stimulating the production of endorphins. A balanced diet also plays an important role. Eating foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, and fish provides the body with essential nutrients that directly translate into improved mood, increased energy levels, stress resistance, and overall strengthening of the body and mental well-being. The interaction between mental and physical health is increasingly recognized as crucial to overall mental health.

Sleep and mental health are closely linked. Sleep deprivation or poor sleep quality have immediate consequences such as reduced concentration, increased irritability, susceptibility to stress, and chronic fatigue. This can exacerbate anxiety, feelings of burnout, and low mood, among other things.



At the same time, emotional difficulties often disrupt sleep. Sleep disorders such as insomnia, frequent waking, or excessive sleepiness contribute to reduced well-being, poor mood or irritability, and decreased emotional resilience.

Regular and good sleep improves mood and emotional balance, increases stress resistance, supports memory, concentration, and decision-making, and helps regenerate the body and mind. Sometimes, small changes in your daily routine can be a big step towards greater peace and energy every day.

The impact of a healthy diet on the mental well-being of young people is invaluable. It is a fundamental building block for a developing body, for proper brain function and emotional balance. Conscious eating, based on nutritious products, affects mood stability, stress resistance, and overall well-being, and improves mood. Unprocessed products that provide essential nutrients play a key role here. Complex carbohydrates, complete protein, omega-3 fatty acids, and micronutrients should be a regular part of a well-balanced diet, which acts as a natural mood regulator and an effective tool for supporting the mental health of young people.

Regular exercise supports mental health. Physical activity stimulates the release of endorphins, which improve mood and reduce stress, lower cortisol levels, and improve memory, concentration, and creativity. In addition, physical activity supports sleep and regeneration, builds mental resilience, promotes relaxation, and provides energy for everyday challenges.

# KEY PILLARS OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Preventing mental health problems is an investment in the well-being of individuals and entire communities. Focusing on early support, education, and creating supportive environments not only reduces the risk of crises but also builds mental resilience and improves quality of life.

## 1. Education and awareness

Awareness is the first step toward change. Educational programs break stereotypes, reduce stigma, and show that mental health matters as much as physical health. Through campaigns, trainings, and workshops, young people gain stress-management skills, emotional awareness, and tools to respond early to mental health challenges.

## 2. Early intervention

Quick response prevents crises and reduces suffering. Regular discussions and workshops in schools and communities help identify early warning signs and provide accessible support. These actions make assistance more preventive, empowering individuals and strengthening their overall sense of well-being and security.

## 3. Promotion of a healthy lifestyle

Mental and physical health are closely linked. Exercise boosts endorphins, mood, and confidence, while a balanced diet supports emotional balance and brain function. Local sports, cooking workshops, and recreational spaces make healthy habits easier and more appealing.

## 4. Mindfulness and stress reduction


Practices like mindfulness, yoga, and meditation help calm the mind and manage daily stress. Regular practice improves emotional awareness, strengthens focus, and increases resilience. Integrating mindfulness into daily life enhances balance, reduces anxiety, and promotes sustainable mental well-being.

## 5. Social support and connections

Strong relationships are vital for mental health. Community initiatives that promote helping others foster belonging, empathy, and mutual trust. These connections counteract loneliness, build supportive networks, and create a sense of purpose—key elements in maintaining emotional resilience and stability.

## 6. Access to resources and support

Easy access to professional help is essential. Helplines, crisis chats, peer groups, and online therapy offer quick, confidential support. A strong and visible network of resources sends a clear message: no one has to face difficulties alone, and help is always within reach.



Another systemic problem is the severe shortage of specialist staff, including psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and clinical psychologists. This problem is particularly acute in peripheral regions, rural areas, and socially marginalized neighborhoods. This results in months-long waiting lists to see specialists or even a complete lack of access to help.

Economic considerations also remain a significant obstacle. The costs of commercial therapy sessions or psychiatric treatment often exceed the financial means of those who need them, especially those without adequate insurance. As a result, psychological help becomes a luxury, inaccessible to the most vulnerable social groups.

Logistical barriers are also a significant limitation. For residents of areas far from large urban centers, as well as for people who are immobile or do not have transportation, physical access to regular visits is often an insurmountable barrier. Inefficient public transportation further hinders systematic participation in the therapeutic process.

The final factor discouraging people from seeking help is the complexity and intricacy of the healthcare system itself. Complicated procedures, multi-level pathways to services, and bureaucracy place a particular burden on people with reduced mental capacity and may result in them giving up on seeking help at the procedural stage.

The field of mental health is evolving rapidly, driven by technological innovation, growing social awareness, and a deeper understanding of the factors influencing well-being. Key directions shaping the future of research and practice include the integration of technology into care, individualized approaches, prevention, consideration of social determinants, innovation, and improved accessibility alongside reduced stigma.

Despite significant progress, further research is needed on the causes of mental disorders and their long-term effects on individuals and societies. Mental health challenges impact not only emotional balance but also physical health, productivity, and overall quality of life. Insufficient support can result in addiction, social exclusion, or even premature mortality.

To effectively address these challenges, it is crucial to implement a multidimensional strategy combining early identification, personalized treatment, and greater access to mental health services. Systemic measures should focus on education, reducing stigmatization, and integrating mental health care with primary health services. By aligning research, policy, and practice, societies can strengthen young people's resilience, limit the effects of disorders, and enhance the overall well-being of communities.

# Challenge No. 1:

# FEAR (Anxiety)

## Brief description

Anxiety is an emotional state of tension, unease, and fear caused by real or imagined threats. It can be a natural reaction to stress, protecting us from danger. However, when it becomes chronic and disproportionate, it turns into an anxiety disorder that interferes with everyday functioning and well-being.

## Why it matters for young people

Anxiety is common among young people facing change, uncertainty, and social expectations. In small amounts, it serves as a protective signal, promoting caution and self-regulation. Yet when it becomes overwhelming, anxiety limits freedom, paralyzes action, and distorts perception of reality. Excessive fear can negatively affect learning, relationships, and self-confidence. Understanding anxiety helps young people recognize it as a normal emotion and manage it constructively, while enabling youth workers to create safer, more supportive environments that strengthen resilience and emotional balance.

## Signs and symptoms

- excessive worrying and vague fear
- feeling of panic or tension
- difficulty concentrating or relaxing
- muscle tension or trembling
- sleep problems and fatigue
- rapid heartbeat or stomach pain
- social withdrawal and avoidance
- overcontrol or perfectionism
- irritability and restlessness

## What a youth worker can do

A youth worker should remain calm, patient, and empathetic, providing a sense of safety and stability. It is important to listen without judgment, validate the young person's emotions, and reassure them that what they are experiencing is understandable. Guiding simple relaxation or grounding exercises, such as slow breathing, can help reduce immediate tension. Creating a calm space for conversation and focusing on the present moment allows the young person to regain control. Encouraging healthy habits, including regular sleep, physical activity, and balanced nutrition, supports long-term emotional well-being. When necessary, the youth worker should gently suggest professional help and, if possible, assist in accessing appropriate support services.

## What a youth worker should not do

A youth worker should avoid dismissing or downplaying the young person's fears, as this can intensify feelings of isolation or shame. Phrases such as "don't worry" or "calm down" may appear supportive but can invalidate their experience. It is also important not to pressure the young person to talk before they are ready or to confront their fears prematurely. Criticism, mockery, or threats must be avoided, as these responses can heighten anxiety and undermine trust. Instead, the focus should remain on empathy, understanding, and gradual reassurance.

## FEAR EXERCISES

### 1. 4-7-8 BREATHING EXERCISE (RELAXATION TECHNIQUE)

Objective: to reduce physiological tension and slow down the heart rate.

Instructions:

1. Sit comfortably and place one hand on your stomach.
2. Inhale through your nose, counting slowly to 4.
3. Hold your breath while counting to 7.
4. Exhale calmly through your mouth, counting to 8.
5. Repeat the cycle 4 times.

Effect: reduced tension, greater control over your body, and minimization of difficult thoughts.

### 2. COGNITIVE EXERCISE: HERE AND NOW

Goal: to divert attention from the flood of anxious thoughts and focus on the here and now.

Instructions:

1. Stop for a moment and look around you.
2. Name the following in order:
  - 5 things you see
  - 4 things you can touch
  - 3 sounds you can hear
  - 2 scents you smell
  - 1 taste you smell or remember

Effect: staying in the present moment, calming racing thoughts, reducing panic.

# Challenge No. 2:

# DEPRESSION

## Brief description

Depression is a mood disorder characterised by persistent sadness, loss of interest, and reduced energy. It goes beyond temporary feelings of unhappiness, affecting emotions, thinking, and physical health. When untreated, depression interferes with daily functioning, relationships, and learning, often requiring professional support through psychotherapy and/or medication.

## Why it matters for young people

Depression is a common mental health challenge among young people, often arising during times of change, emotional instability, and social pressure. It affects motivation, self-esteem, and the ability to feel joy or connection. Persistent sadness and withdrawal can lead to academic and social difficulties. Early recognition and support prevent long-term harm, while open discussion helps young people see that seeking help is a sign of strength and self-care.

## Signs and symptoms

- prolonged low mood or sadness
- loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- fatigue and lack of energy
- changes in appetite or sleep
- difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- low self-esteem or excessive guilt
- social withdrawal and isolation
- feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness
- suicidal thoughts in severe cases

## What a youth worker can do

A youth worker should approach the young person with empathy, patience, and genuine care. It is important to listen attentively, without judgment, and to acknowledge their feelings instead of trying to immediately “fix” them. Encouraging small, achievable activities, such as going for a short walk, engaging in a hobby, or spending time outdoors, can help restore motivation and a sense of control. Creating a supportive, accepting environment within the group can reduce feelings of isolation. The youth worker should also encourage seeking professional support from a psychologist, therapist, or doctor, and provide information on helplines or local services. Above all, they should offer consistent presence and remind the young person that they are not alone.

## What a youth worker should not do

A youth worker should not minimise or dismiss the young person’s struggles or tell them to “cheer up.” Criticising, comparing, or blaming them for their condition can deepen feelings of guilt and hopelessness. Avoid forcing positivity or giving unsolicited advice that oversimplifies the problem. Depression cannot be overcome by willpower alone, so avoid suggesting that the young person should simply “try harder.” The focus should remain on understanding, support, and professional guidance rather than judgment or pressure.

# DEPRESSION EXERCISES

## 1. SMALL STEPS MAP

**Objective:** This exercise aims to gradually and gently break the vicious circle of depression (depression saps energy and motivation, leading to avoidance of activity) by planning small, achievable goals. The aim is to achieve a sense of small satisfaction, not to accomplish great things.

**Materials needed:** a piece of paper, Bristol board, something to write with.

**Instructions:**

Take a sheet of paper and divide it into three columns, writing:

**Column 1: What can I do?**

List 8 very small, neutral, or potentially enjoyable activities that can be done during the day, e.g., drink a good cup of coffee, go for a walk, listen to calm music, read an interesting article, bake a cake, watch a movie, etc.

**Column 2: What I managed to do**

Mark each thing you managed to do that day with a dot, a plus sign, or an underline. Don't judge yourself for what you didn't manage to do. Every item you completed is a success!

**Column 3: How do I feel about it?**

After completing the activity, rate your mood on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is: this activity did not improve my mood at all, and 10 is: I feel much better. Sometimes it may only be a few points. That's okay, it's about observation.

**Effect:** this exercise helps build a sense of agency, gently increases activity, and shows that even small things can improve your well-being.

## 2. GRATITUDE JOURNAL

**Goal:** Depression filters reality through black, negative glasses. It makes us see only what is bad, difficult, and hopeless, while neutral or even good moments escape us. This exercise helps to deliberately broaden our attention and train our brain to pick up even the smallest sparks.

**Materials needed:** a notebook and something to write with.

**Instructions:**

Get into the habit of writing down in the evening what you can define as a good experience or event from the past day. Get yourself a notebook that will be your GRATITUDE JOURNAL. Every day before bed, write down what was neutral or good.

These don't have to be spectacular events. They can be small activities or experiences, e.g., the sun was shining beautifully today, today I drank white tea for the first time and really liked it. What is important is to notice the little things, not necessarily to feel strong gratitude.

**Effect:** this exercise allows you to look for small activities that bring joy, which counteracts feelings of total hopelessness. It allows you to build new thinking habits.

# Challenge No. 3:

# LONELINESS

## Brief description

Loneliness is a subjective feeling of isolation and disconnection from others, regardless of the actual number of social contacts. It involves a perceived lack of meaningful relationships and emotional closeness. Unlike solitude, which can be chosen and restorative, loneliness is accompanied by sadness, emptiness, or a sense of exclusion that affects mental and emotional well-being.

## Why it matters for young people

Loneliness often intensifies during adolescence and early adulthood, when young people are shaping their identity, seeking belonging, and forming relationships. A lack of social connection can lead to low self-esteem, withdrawal, and a sense of being “different” or unwanted. Chronic loneliness increases the risk of depression, anxiety, and self-destructive behaviour. Supporting young people in building authentic, supportive connections and expressing their emotions helps prevent long-term mental health challenges and strengthens empathy and community bonds.

## Signs and symptoms

- feelings of isolation or being misunderstood
- sadness, hopelessness or emptiness
- lack of meaningful relationships
- withdrawal from peers and activities
- difficulty trusting others
- negative self-perception
- pessimism and loss of motivation
- physical symptoms such as fatigue

## What a youth worker can do

A youth worker can support lonely young people by showing genuine interest, empathy, and understanding. Creating a safe, non-judgmental space encourages them to share feelings and experiences. The youth worker should promote social activities that foster teamwork, belonging, and shared interests, such as group discussions, creative projects, or outdoor activities. Encouraging young people to explore their passions helps them connect with like-minded peers and regain a sense of purpose. When necessary, the youth worker can guide them toward professional or community-based support while maintaining regular, caring contact.

## What a youth worker should not do

A youth worker should not treat loneliness as a trivial or temporary phase. Avoid dismissing the young person’s feelings or offering superficial reassurance such as “everyone feels lonely sometimes.” Do not pressure them into large social settings before they are ready, as this can reinforce discomfort. Avoid labelling or making comparisons, which may deepen their sense of inadequacy.

# LONELINESS EXERCISES

## 1. GALAXY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Objective: Loneliness often goes hand in hand with the feeling that relationships are broken, that we have no one close to us. This exercise helps to free ourselves from the pressure of having many friends and to realize what steps need to be taken to restore a sense of agency in building relationships. The exercise involves mapping existing relationships and becoming aware of your real situation.

Materials needed: sheets of paper or card stock, colored pencils, markers, something to write with.

Instructions:

Draw a galaxy on a piece of paper (several circles representing the planets of your relationships). The circle in the center represents you. You can color it in to personalize it and show yourself through colors. The other circles represent planets such as family, friends, work environment, old friends, classmates, etc. On each planet, write the names of at least two people who are kind and friendly to you, in whose company you feel relatively comfortable and safe.

Think about how each person can be helpful to you. Consider activities that you can initiate to build and strengthen relationships. This could be, for example, calling a friend, asking for advice, liking an activity on social media, smiling, saying something nice, doing a good deed, etc.

Effect: realizing that even if we don't have many friends, we can still talk about a social network; the exercise reduces feelings of isolation and encourages active seeking of contact. This exercise also shows that small activities do not require a lot of effort to establish contact and builds a sense of agency.

## 2. LETTER TO THE INNER CRITIC OF MY LONELINESS

Objective: Loneliness is often accompanied by negative, automatic thoughts, e.g., I am boring, I am not socially attractive, nobody cares about me, nobody thinks about me. The exercise helps to identify and separate oneself from that inner voice that discourages reaching out to people and distorts the perception of social situations.

Materials needed: a piece of paper and something to write with.

Instructions:

When you feel lonely, write down the thought that accompanies you on a piece of paper, e.g., "Nobody likes me," "Nobody wants to be with me." Name this thought, e.g., BULLY, NO FRIEND, DISLIKED. Then, on the same piece of paper, write a letter to this thought, questioning its arguments, write what you feel and why. Write about your strengths.

Effect: this exercise helps you realize that these are not facts, but thoughts in your head, and supports your sense of control and building self-compassion. This exercise focuses on breaking down internal and external barriers.

# Challenge No. 4:

# LOW SELF-ESTEEM

## Brief description

Low self-esteem is a negative perception of one's worth and abilities, leading to insecurity, self-criticism, and avoidance of challenges. It often develops through negative experiences, comparison with others, or excessive criticism from the environment. Persistent low self-esteem affects relationships, performance, and emotional well-being.

## Why it matters for young people

Self-esteem strongly influences how young people see themselves, make decisions, and handle challenges. During this stage of life, they are developing identity and confidence, making them particularly sensitive to evaluation and rejection. Healthy self-esteem supports resilience, motivation, and openness to learning, while low self-esteem increases vulnerability to stress, anxiety, and dependence on others' approval. Supporting young people in recognising their strengths and achievements helps them build self-worth and develop balanced self-acceptance, which is essential for long-term well-being and success.

## Signs and symptoms

- lack of confidence and self-belief
- excessive self-criticism
- fear of failure or judgment
- avoidance of new experiences
- perfectionism and high self-demands
- feelings of guilt or shame
- difficulty expressing needs
- dependence on external approval
- negative self-talk and focus on flaws

## What a youth worker can do

A youth worker can help by offering consistent encouragement, positive feedback, and realistic goal-setting. It is important to emphasise strengths and acknowledge progress, even small steps, to reinforce a sense of competence. Creating opportunities for participation and success helps young people experience achievement and self-efficacy. Encourage self-reflection and daily positive habits, such as noting successes or practising gratitude. Youth workers should model acceptance, teach boundary-setting, and promote the idea that mistakes are opportunities for learning, not failure.

## What a youth worker should not do

Youth workers should avoid criticism, comparison, or unrealistic expectations, as these can deepen self-doubt. Do not dismiss the young person's insecurities or pressure them to "be more confident." Avoid focusing solely on weaknesses or using praise that feels insincere. Negative feedback should never target the person's worth, only behaviour or actions, if necessary, and always constructively.

# LONELINESS EXERCISES

## 1. MY STRENGTHS

Objective: to become aware of one's own strengths and competencies, to reinforce a positive self-image.

Materials needed: a sheet of paper and something to write with.

Instructions:

On a piece of paper, write down at least 8 of your strengths, character traits, or skills (e.g., I am creative, I am a good listener, I am a good cook). Next to each trait, write examples of situations in which this trait has manifested itself. Read the list several times, preferably every day for a few days, to reinforce positive beliefs about yourself.

Effect: this exercise allows you to focus on your strengths, reducing your focus on your weaknesses and comparing yourself to others.

## 2. SUCCESS CHRONICLE

Goal: to build a sense of self-efficacy and appreciate small achievements.

Materials needed: a notebook and something to write with.

Instructions:

In a specially prepared notebook, write down at least one small achievement, success, or positive experience from the past day every day. This could be, for example, completing a task, having a nice conversation, or going for a walk in the park. Pay attention to what you have done on your own. Think about your emotions related to it. At the end of the week, summarize your achievements and take a close look at how many things you have accomplished on your own.

Effect: reinforces awareness of your own effectiveness, strengthens your sense of control over your life, and helps you appreciate yourself.

# Challenge No. 5:

# DIGITAL OVERLOAD

## Brief description

Digital overload is a state of mental and physical exhaustion caused by excessive exposure to digital devices and information. Constant notifications, multitasking, and social media engagement overwhelm brain, reduce focus, and impair emotional regulation. Over time, it leads to fatigue, irritability, and decreased productivity, affecting both mental health and daily functioning.

## Why it matters for young people

Young people spend much of their time online for learning, communication, and entertainment. While technology offers opportunities, its overuse can disrupt concentration, sleep, and emotional balance. Constant comparison on social media and the pressure to always be available can lead to anxiety, low self-esteem, and loneliness. Digital overload reduces real-world interaction and increases dependence on online validation. Supporting young people in developing healthy digital habits helps them regain control, build balance between online and offline life, and protect their overall well-being.

## Signs and symptoms

- difficulty concentrating
- chronic fatigue and low motivation
- irritability or frustration
- sleep disturbances and headaches
- eye strain and physical discomfort
- social withdrawal
- low mood and emotional instability
- fear of missing out (FOMO)
- constant message checking

## What a youth worker can do

A youth worker can help young people recognise early signs of overload and reflect on their online habits without judgment. Encourage open conversations about emotions linked to technology use and promote awareness of how constant digital engagement affects mood and focus. Introducing alternative activities such as art, sports, or outdoor time can help restore balance. The youth worker can also guide discussions on mindful technology use, setting screen-time limits, and taking regular digital breaks. In cases of significant stress or withdrawal, referral to professional support may be necessary.

## What a youth worker should not do

A youth worker should not criticise or shame young people for their digital habits, as this can create defensiveness or guilt. Avoid comparing them to peers who “use technology better” or imposing strict rules without discussion. Do not ignore signs of distress or assume that technology is only a “phase.” Avoid oversimplifying the issue — balance, not prohibition, is the key.

# DIGITAL OVERLOAD EXERCISES

## 1. DIGITAL AWARENESS

**Objective:** This exercise helps to break the automatic habit of reaching for your phone, computer, or social media and gives purpose to each online session. It is about quality, not the amount of time spent in front of the screen.

**Instructions:**

Before you open an app or browser, think about the purpose of this activity. What is it for? What will you achieve by using the internet or social media? Set a time limit for using modern technology.

When the time is up, consider whether you have achieved your goal. How do you feel? What emotions do you experience? How does this affect the rest of your day, your life? What are your conclusions and thoughts?

**Effect:** the exercise helps to transform uncontrolled scrolling into conscious use of modern technologies and supports the development of intentionality. It is important to gradually regain control over the time spent online.

## 2. TWO WORLDS: ONLINE AND OFFLINE

**Objective:** To become aware of your own emotions, experiences, and feelings related to technology and to find balance in the real world through creative expression.

**Materials needed:** a sheet of paper or cardstock, markers, crayons.

**Instructions:**

Divide the sheet of paper in half. On one half, depict your digital world as you perceive it, what you associate with it, symbols, emotions, memories, experiences. On the other half, draw the real world and its advantages and disadvantages. Refer to things and events that bring you joy, relationships, good experiences, but also draw what is difficult, what you cannot cope with. Artistic talent is not important, but rather the emotions expressed, creativity, imagination, and diversity.

When you are done, look at your work and answer the questions: which side is more attractive to you and why? Which world is bigger and why? What do I like and what do I realize needs to be changed? And why?

**Effect:** this exercise allows you to safely express emotions related to digital overload, facilitates distance from modern technologies, and creates a space of balance between offline and online.

# Challenge No. 6:

# FEELING OF HELPLESSNESS

## Brief description

Helplessness is a mental state in which a person feels unable to influence their situation, leading to passivity, resignation, and loss of motivation. It often arises after repeated failures or uncontrollable experiences. Over time, this belief that “nothing will change” can limit problem-solving, reduce self-efficacy, and contribute to emotional exhaustion or depression.

## Why it matters for young people

Young people may experience helplessness when facing constant evaluation, academic stress, or difficult personal circumstances. Feeling powerless undermines confidence, discourages initiative, and hinders emotional and cognitive development. Persistent helplessness can lead to withdrawal, anxiety, and avoidance of new challenges. Supporting young people in recognising their abilities, fostering a sense of control, and celebrating small achievements strengthens self-belief and resilience. Helping them see that mistakes and setbacks are opportunities for learning, not proof of failure.

## Signs and symptoms

- lack of motivation or initiative
- feelings of pessimism
- belief that actions have no impact
- chronic fatigue and apathy
- difficulty concentrating
- withdrawal from activities or peers
- self-blame and guilt
- physical tension or discomfort

## What a youth worker can do

A youth worker can help by gently challenging limiting beliefs and highlighting the young person’s strengths and past successes. Encouraging small, manageable steps restores confidence and a sense of agency. It is important to use supportive language, focusing on what can be changed rather than what cannot. Guided reflection, problem-solving tasks, and celebrating even minor progress can help rebuild motivation. The youth worker can also introduce cognitive techniques to test the accuracy of negative thoughts and promote a more balanced outlook.

## What a youth worker should not do

A youth worker should not tell the young person to “snap out of it” or blame them for feeling helpless. Avoid criticism, sarcasm, or dismissive comments that may deepen hopelessness. It is also unhelpful to take over tasks for them, as this reinforces dependency. Instead, guide them toward gradual self-discovery and independent decision-making, ensuring they feel heard and capable of progress.

# HELPLESSNESS EXERCISES

## 1. MY SUPERPOWERS IN COLOUR

Objective: To strengthen awareness of personal strengths, rebuild confidence, and visualise one's own inner resources.

Materials needed: a sheet of paper, crayons, markers, or coloured pencils.

Instructions:

Draw yourself in the centre of the page, it can be a simple stick figure or outline. Around your figure, add colourful symbols representing your personal “superpowers”: qualities, skills, or supports that help you face challenges (for example, creativity, patience, humour, courage, family, friends). Next to each symbol, write a few words about how this strength helps you in everyday life. When finished, look at your drawing and reflect on which strengths you rely on most often, which ones you would like to develop further, and how they help you overcome difficulties. You can also share your reflections with a trusted peer or in a group discussion to gain new perspectives.

Effect: this exercise helps visualise and rediscover inner strengths, fostering positive self-perception and reminding participants that they have the ability to influence their circumstances.

## 2. POWER LADDER

Objective: To rebuild a sense of agency by setting realistic goals and breaking them into small, achievable steps.

Materials needed: a sheet of paper and a pen or pencil.

Instructions:

Draw a ladder with five or more steps. At the top, write down one goal you would like to achieve — something realistic yet meaningful (for example, “feel more confident at school,” “complete a project,” or “ask for help when needed”). On each step, write one small action that brings you closer to this goal. These steps should be specific and manageable, such as “talk to one classmate,” “ask a teacher a question,” or “spend 10 minutes studying.” As you complete each step, tick it off or colour it in. At the end, review your ladder and reflect on what helped you succeed, what you learned about yourself, and how your confidence has changed.

Effect: this exercise transforms abstract goals into visible, manageable steps, strengthens motivation, and restores a sense of control and self-efficacy.



# GOOD PRACTICE

In today's world, young people aged 15-25 very often experience low mood, chronic stress, anxiety, emotional tension, and difficulty coping with everyday challenges. The educational environment, pressure to perform, fast pace of life, constant comparison on social media, and changing social expectations have a negative impact on an individual's overall well-being and mental health.

Appropriate help and support are fundamental to coping with mental disorders. They can take many forms: from professional psychological and psychiatric help, through therapeutic programs, support groups, activities using alternative forms of therapy, including art therapy, ecotherapy, and zotherapy, to peer and family support and relaxation training. Young people experiencing disorders such as depression, anxiety, or chronic stress often struggle with feelings of isolation, misunderstanding, or shame.

Support for young people should not be limited to crisis intervention. Systematically building a sense of security and acceptance is essential in coping with everyday difficulties, and the presence of people who offer a safe space to express emotions, listen and understand is crucial. Regular and consistent support contributes to reducing stress levels, improving well-being, strengthening self-esteem, and developing effective coping strategies. As a result, it supports the development of mental resilience and translates into an improved quality of life for young people. Creating an environment where young people feel valued and understood requires a collective effort from educators, parents, and the community. Schools can play a pivotal role by integrating mental health education into their curriculum, promoting awareness and destigmatizing mental health issues. Encouraging open dialogues about feelings and mental health challenges can foster a culture of empathy and support.

Additionally, incorporating mindfulness practices and stress management techniques into daily routines can empower young people to manage their emotions more effectively. Facilitating access to mental health resources, such as counseling services and hotlines, ensures that help is readily available when needed.

Parents and guardians can contribute by maintaining open lines of communication, actively listening to their children's concerns, and modeling healthy coping mechanisms. Encouraging a balanced lifestyle that includes physical activity, adequate sleep, and time for hobbies can further enhance mental well-being.

Ultimately, the goal is to create a nurturing environment where young people feel equipped to face life's challenges with resilience and confidence, knowing they are not alone in their journey. By investing in their mental health today, we pave the way for a brighter and more fulfilling future.

# ART THERAPY

## as a good practice in dealing with mental health issues


Creativity and art have a beneficial effect on human health and well-being. They influence the proper biological, mental, emotional, and social functioning of individuals, enabling a better understanding of reality and the development of a positive attitude towards the world. They stimulate reflection, engage emotions, teach values, and emphasize the importance of contact with other people. Creative activities become a way of searching for meaning, support the process of personal development, and allow difficult emotions to be tamed and dealt with.

The diversity of artistic techniques makes it possible to identify and name problems, understand them more deeply, and express feelings in a way that would be difficult to describe in words. Creating helps us get to know ourselves better, our values and needs, our interests and abilities, and how we perceive the world and other people. It stimulates activity, encouraging us to overcome limitations resulting from low self-esteem or lack of confidence in our own abilities.

Creative activities trigger sensory experiences, including visual perception, touch, movement, smell, hearing, and taste, which contribute to the formation and course of many mental processes and the overall development of the individual. What is more, they influence cognitive processes such as concentration and creativity, as well as the understanding of emotions and the development of memory. The creative process supports brain function and has a positive impact on building self-esteem, shaping identity, and establishing interpersonal relationships.

Creativity strengthens the sense of agency and gives satisfaction, which translates into an increase in positive emotions and the development of a more constructive way of thinking. The development of intuition and imagination promotes a better understanding of oneself and the formation of a positive self-image. Art encourages multisensory exploration of the world, facilitates contact with the environment, and develops social skills. The creative process gives you the opportunity to experience the joy of creation, allows you to pause in the rush of life, experience satisfaction from your own actions, and regain a sense of meaning. Creativity reduces stress and tension, promotes relaxation, supports the discovery of talents, and develops new skills. It strengthens motivation and increases energy for action.

Art therapy is one of the basic forms of art therapy. This form of creative activity plays an important role in supporting the mental health and emotional and social development of young people. The main premise of art therapy is to use the creative process as a tool for expressing experiences, emotions, and needs that cannot always be expressed in words. Thanks to the simplicity of the materials used and the natural human tendency to create, art therapy is accessible to people without artistic experience, which significantly increases the value of this method in preventive and therapeutic work.



Artistic activities help reduce mental tension, improve concentration, and support the process of emotional self-regulation. Creating works in a safe, supportive atmosphere allows participants to better understand themselves, their reactions, and their needs. Materials such as paints, paper, and pastels facilitate contact with one's inner world and enable symbolic processing of difficult content. Art therapy strengthens psychosocial competencies, supports the development of mental resilience and adaptive skills.

An important element of art therapy activities is naming, understanding, expressing, and releasing emotions, reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, increasing self-esteem, improving concentration, and increasing life satisfaction.

Another interesting form of art therapy is phototherapy or photography therapy. In this case, we use photographs (both our own and random ones) to explore and get to know ourselves, work on our emotions and memories, and reflect on our own history and identity. Phototherapy influences the development of self-acceptance and self-esteem, facilitates work on internal experiences and communication with others, supports the building of a positive narrative about oneself, reduces stress, and has a positive effect on overall well-being.

Writing is an equally effective and widely available method for expressing emotions and building self-awareness. This form of therapeutic work supports the release of emotions, enables reflection on one's own history and self-discovery. Writing increases creativity, reduces stress, and utilizes the natural human ability to create narratives and organize internal chaos. The process of writing down thoughts and feelings allows us to look at them from a distance, making them more understandable and easier to work through.

Considering the diversity of art therapy methods and their ease of use, it can be concluded that carefully planned art therapy activities have the potential to become an effective tool for prevention and to support therapeutic processes in health education. Appropriately selected methods or a set of methods can also serve as a vehicle for pro-health content. The proper use of these forms, at the right time and in the right context, individually or in groups, can initiate positive changes in both individuals and entire teams. For this reason, art therapy can be treated as a tool supporting the exploration, development, and strengthening of an individual's mental, physical, and social resources at every stage of their development.

# FOREST THERAPY

## as a good practice in dealing with mental health issues

Forest therapy is a form of therapy that involves consciously spending time in the forest to improve mental and physical health. It is a method that supports treatment and prevention, using contact with nature to reduce stress levels, improve mood, lower blood pressure, and strengthen immunity and concentration.

Forest therapy stimulates our senses, improves our concentration, increases energy levels, and helps combat stress. The sounds, smells, and colors of the forest help us disconnect from everyday stress and tension. During forest therapy, our body and mind immerse themselves in a natural environment that provides a range of stimuli to stimulate the senses. The light filtering through the treetops, the sounds of nature, the scents of plants, and contact with the textures of nature have a soothing effect and put the body into a state of deep calm. This type of experience helps to reduce stress levels, improve concentration, and enhance overall well-being. Regular practice of this form of therapy can bring long-term benefits such as improved sleep, increased immunity, and a general sense of happiness and satisfaction.

Forest bathing is a simple and natural way to improve health, based on the therapeutic power of the forest environment. Shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing, involves consciously spending time surrounded by trees and enjoying the beneficial effects of nature on the body, using all the senses. This method does not require any special preparation. All you need to do is choose a quiet place in the forest, calm down, and let nature work its magic. As a result, forest bathing becomes an easily accessible, natural, and effective way to support physical and mental health and well-being. Opening yourself up to the sounds of the forest, the smell of resin, the softness of moss under your feet, and the coolness of tree bark promotes deep relaxation and mindfulness.

Shinrin-yoku is available to virtually everyone, regardless of age or fitness level. All you need to do is go to a forest or park and then take a moment to calmly and consciously commune with nature. It is not about brisk walking or physical activity – the key is to immerse yourself in the atmosphere of the forest.

Incorporating elements of forest therapy into your daily life does not have to be complicated. All it takes is a small change in habits, such as a daily walk in the park, a short break in the fresh air during educational activities, or a moment of mindful breathing among the trees. Forest therapy offers a unique combination of natural stimuli and mindfulness that affects the body, mind, and emotions.

# JACOBSON'S RELAXATION TECHNIQUE

## as a good practice in coping with mental health issues

Jacobson's progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is based on alternating tension and conscious relaxation of successive muscle groups, which results in the gradual release of accumulated tension and a reduction in stress levels. This exercise has a beneficial effect on the nervous system, strengthening the sense of control over one's own body and helping to become aware of which areas of the body react with tension. With regular practice, you can calm your agitated mind and experience deep relaxation on both a physical and mental level.

Regular use of Jacobson's relaxation training is one of the most accessible and effective tools for supporting both physical and mental well-being. This technique, based on alternating tension and relaxation of selected muscle groups, allows you to gradually reduce accumulated tension and regain the natural rhythm of the entire body. Introducing it into your daily routine can become an important element of mental health prevention, especially in educational environments and projects aimed at young people, where pressure, stress, and the fast pace of life pose a challenge to emotional balance.

Systematic practice of this method results in a marked reduction in tension and stress levels. Progressive muscle relaxation calms the nervous system, slows down the mind, and helps restore a sense of inner peace. As a result, the quality and quantity of sleep improves and the intensity of anxiety symptoms in everyday situations, such as school stress, time pressure, social and adaptation difficulties, decreases.

Along with improved physical well-being, there is also better concentration and greater resilience to everyday challenges. A calmed mind works more effectively, and a body free of unnecessary tension allows you to focus on tasks that require attention and commitment. All this translates into increased mental resilience and better functioning both in the school environment and in personal life.

Increased body awareness is also important. Jacobson's training teaches you to recognize the first signs of fatigue or overload, allowing you to react more quickly and use calming techniques before tension turns into severe stress.

# FACILITATION GUIDE AND WORKSHOP AGENDA

This training is part of the RECOVER – Youth Wellbeing Recovering Kitproject, funded by the Erasmus+ Programme. The project responds to the growing challenges young people face regarding mental health, stress, and resilience. It equips youth workers with practical non-formal education tools and strategies to promote wellbeing in their daily practice.

## The training aims to:

- Build youth workers' capacity to support mental health and wellbeing among young people.
- Provide hands-on experience with creative and reflective methods such as body mapping, journaling, mindfulness, roleplay, and group discussions.
- Strengthen youth workers' own resilience and self-care practices to prevent burnout.
- Transfer learning into concrete action plans and locally implementable wellbeing activities.

## Expected outcomes for participants:

- Increased knowledge of wellbeing and mental health challenges in youth work.
- Practical skills in empathetic communication, mindfulness, and creative self-reflection tools.
- The ability to design and implement short wellbeing activities for youth.
- Personal action plans for integrating wellbeing practices into their organisations and communities.

## Format:

3–4 training days (approx. 4-6 hours/day).

## Methodology:

Experiential learning cycle, group work, creative methods, and guided reflection.

## The training is designed for:

- Youth workers, educators, and trainers working directly with young people in non-formal or community settings.
- Participants with an interest in mental health, resilience, and wellbeing, regardless of previous formal experience in the field.
- Individuals open to experiential learning, group reflection, and peer exchange.
- A balanced group of participants from partner organisations, ensuring diversity of experience and perspectives.

## TRAINING OUTLINE

### DAY 1 – BUILDING TRUST & EXPLORING MENTAL HEALTH

- Icebreaker: Human Bingo (30 min)
- Take a Step Forward – Mental Health & Inequalities (75 min)
- Group Agreement & Safe Space Guidelines (45 min)
- Reflection Circle (30 min)

### DAY 2 – AWARENESS & SELF-CARE TOOLS

- Body Mapping (90 min)
- Mindfulness Practice (30 min)
- “Where Do You Stand?” (60 min)

### DAY 3 – SKILLS FOR SUPPORTING YOUTH

- Roleplay – Responding to Youth in Crisis (90 min)
- “Memory Line” (60 min)
- Closing Reflection – Journaling: “My role in youth wellbeing.” (30 min)

### DAY 4 – INTEGRATION & FUTURE ACTION

- Designing Wellbeing Activities (90 min)
- Action Planning (60 min)
- Closing Circle (45 min)

DAY 1	Human Bingo	<p>Method: Interactive movement game</p> <p>Objectives: Getting to know each other, building trust, opening communication</p> <p>Process: Participants circulate to find others matching bingo statements; share discoveries</p>
	Take a Step Forward – Mental Health & Inequalities	<p>Method: Roleplay walk activity</p> <p>Objectives: Explore inequalities in access to wellbeing support, develop empathy</p> <p>Process: Participants act in roles, step forward when statements apply, reflect in circle</p>
	Group Agreement & Safe Space Guidelines	<p>Method: Group brainstorming and consensus building</p> <p>Objectives: Co-create safe space, agree on rules for respect &amp; participation</p> <p>Process: Collect guidelines on flipchart, discuss, finalise list, display in room</p>
	Reflection Circle – “How do I take care of myself as a youth worker?”	<p>Method: Circle with talking piece</p> <p>Objectives: Self-awareness, sharing self-care practices, building trust</p> <p>Process: Each speaks in turn, optional sharing, group closing</p>
DAY 2	Morning Centering: Guided Meditation	<p>Method: 5-min breath awareness + short intention setting</p> <p>Objectives: Grounding, relaxation, preparing for deeper reflection</p> <p>Process: Participants practice guided breathing and set a personal intention for the day.</p>
	Body Mapping – Recognising Stress & Resilience in the Body	<p>Method: Creative drawing in pairs</p> <p>Objectives: Increase body awareness, identify stress &amp; strengths</p> <p>Process: Draw outlines, map stress points, map energy sources, share in pairs</p>
	Mindfulness Practice – Breathing & 5-Senses Grounding	<p>Method: Guided mindfulness exercise</p> <p>Objectives: Learn practical stress management tools, transfer into youth work</p> <p>Process: Guided breathing, 5-senses reflection, group sharing</p>
	Creative Journaling – My Stress & Strength Diary (shorter version of journaling practice)	<p>Method: Reflective writing + optional sharing</p> <p>Objectives: Encourage personal reflection, introduce journaling tool for youth</p> <p>Process: Write to prompts, volunteers share, group close</p>

DAY 3	Roleplay – Responding to Youth in Crisis	Method: Triads roleplay + feedback Objectives: Practice empathetic communication, balancing support & boundaries Process: Scenario cards, rotate roles, observers feedback
	Peer Discussion – Boundaries & Self-Care for Youth Workers	Method: Small group discussions Objectives: Reflect on boundaries, share practices for resilience Process: Guiding questions, group reporting
	Memory Line – Reflecting on Resilience	Method: Shared timeline with rope and notes Objectives: Identify moments shaping resilience, learn from each other Process: Place positive/negative moments on line, silent walk, small group reflection
	Reflection Journaling – My Role in Youth Wellbeing	Method: Individual writing + optional sharing Objectives: Integrate learning, clarify personal role in supporting youth Process: Journaling prompts, volunteers share, collective closing
DAY 4	Morning Centering: Gentle Stretch & Breathing	Method: Movement + breath Objectives: Set calm, focused tone for last day Process: Participants do light stretches combined with deep breathing to begin the day with focus.
	Designing Wellbeing Activities – Transfer to Practice	Method: Small group design work + presentations Objectives: Apply methods, create 20–30 min youth wellbeing workshops Process: Groups design, present, peer feedback
	Action Planning – Individual Commitments	Method: Peer accountability buddies Objectives: Commitment for follow-up Process: Fill action plans, buddy exchange, plenary sharing
	Closing Circle – Guided Reflection & Evaluation	Method: Circle with talking piece, evaluation forms Objectives: Emotional closure, feedback, celebration of group Process: Reflection prompts, evaluation, closing ritual
	<b>FAREWELL COFFEE</b>	

## ICEBREAKER 1: HUMAN BINGO

**Themes:** Getting to know each other, building trust, group dynamics

**Level:** Easy

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Group size:** 12-30 participants

**Materials:**

- “Bingo” sheets with a 5x5 grid (or 4x4 for shorter time). Each square contains a statement.
- Pens or markers for each participant.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Preparation (5 min)

- Prepare and print enough “Bingo” sheets for all participants.
- Each sheet should have 16–25 statements (depending on grid size).

#### Introduction (3 min)

- Explain that the goal is to mingle and find participants who match the statements.
- When they find someone, they should ask the person to sign their name in the relevant square.
- Each person’s name can appear only once per sheet.

#### Activity (15–20 min)

- Participants circulate around the room, introducing themselves and asking questions.
- The aim is to complete a row, column, or the full sheet (depending on time).
- Encourage participants to be curious and ask follow-up questions, not just collect names.

#### Wrap-up (2–3 min)

- Gather participants back into a circle.
- Ask a few to share fun or surprising facts they discovered.
- Optionally, celebrate the first few who completed a line/column.

#### Debriefing & Reflection (5 min)

- How did it feel to approach and talk with many new people?
- Did you discover anything surprising about others?
- What commonalities did you notice in the group?
- How can finding shared experiences help us work better together in this training?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Adapt the statements to the theme of the training (e.g., mental health, wellbeing, youth work).
- Use a mix of light/funny and serious/relevant questions.
- If participants are shy, model the activity by walking around first and asking questions.
- Keep energy high with background music.

## ACTIVITY 1: TAKE A STEP FORWARD MENTAL HEALTH

**Themes:** Mental health, wellbeing, equality, access to support

**Level:** Medium

**Time:** 60-75 minutes

**Group size:** 12-20 participants

**Materials:**

- Role cards (“Youth worker in a rural school,” “Young refugee,” “Teacher with high workload,” “Teenager with supportive parents,” etc.)
- Large open space (line marked with tape or rope)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Preparation (10 min)

- Prepare 15–20 role cards, each describing a different character with varying access to mental health resources.
- Mark a starting line on the floor with tape or rope.

#### Introduction (5 min)

- Explain that participants will step into another person’s shoes and reflect on how circumstances affect access to wellbeing and mental health support.

#### Role Assignment (5 min)

- Hand out role cards randomly. Participants should not reveal their character yet.

#### Activity (20–25 min)

- All participants stand on the starting line.
- The facilitator reads statements aloud, one at a time (examples below).
- If the statement applies to their role, they take one step forward; if not, they stay still.
- Continue until 15–20 statements are read. Sample Statements (adapted to wellbeing):
  - You can easily access therapy in your area.
  - You feel safe discussing stress or depression with your peers.
  - Your organization provides regular supervision or mental health support.
  - You can take time off when you feel overwhelmed.
  - You have access to outdoor or cultural activities for relaxation.

#### Discussion in Roles (5 min)

- Ask participants to look around at where they are standing compared to others.
- Still in the role, invite them to share how they feel in their position.

#### Debriefing & Reflection (15-20 min)

- How did it feel to step forward or stay behind?
- What did you notice about the differences between roles?
- How do inequalities and privilege affect mental health in real life?
- What can youth workers do to help reduce these gaps?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Ensure a safe and respectful space; this activity can surface sensitive topics.
- Emphasize that the goal is not guilt, but awareness and empathy.
- During debrief, allow participants to step out of role and speak from their own perspective.

## ACTIVITY 2: SAFE SPACE GUIDELINES

**Themes:** Group building, participation, safety, respect, mental wellbeing

**Level:** Easy

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Group size:** 12-30 participants

**Materials:**

- Flipchart paper and markers (for writing group agreement)
- Sticky notes (optional)
- Prepared examples of safe space principles (optional, to inspire ideas)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (5 min)

- Explain that a group agreement helps ensure that everyone feels comfortable, respected, and able to participate fully.
- Stress that the agreement is created by the group, not imposed by the facilitator.

#### Brainstorming (10–15 min)

- Ask participants: “What do you need from others in order to feel safe and supported here?”
- Collect responses in one of two ways:
  - Open brainstorm: participants call out ideas, facilitator writes them on flipchart.
  - Silent brainstorm: participants write ideas on sticky notes, then post them on the wall.

#### Discussion & Agreements (15 min)

- The group reviews the list, clarifies unclear points, and combines similar ideas.
- Aim for 6-10 key guidelines.
- Examples: “Confidentiality – what is said here stays here,” “Respect different opinions,” “One person speaks at a time,” “Phones on silent,” “Right to pass.”

#### Finalisation (5-10 min)

- Ask participants if they agree to commit to these guidelines.
- Write the final agreement clearly on flipchart and hang it in the training room.
- Optionally: all participants sign the agreement as a symbolic act.

#### Debriefing & Reflection (5–10 min)

- How do you feel about the agreement we created together?
- Which points are most important for you personally?
- How can we remind ourselves of this agreement if it is forgotten during the training?
- How does co-creating rules differ from having them imposed?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Encourage participants to phrase guidelines positively (e.g., “Respect each other” instead of “Don’t be rude”).
- Allow participants to challenge or refine points - this builds ownership.
- Revisit the agreement during the training if conflicts arise.
- For sensitive topics (personal sharing), highlight confidentiality and respect.

## ACTIVITY 3: HOW DO I TAKE CARE OF MYSELF?

**Themes:** Self-care, wellbeing, reflection, sharing experiences

**Level:** Easy

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Group size:** 12-30 participants

**Materials:**

- Talking piece (e.g., stone, ball, object that can be passed around)
- Flipchart with a guiding question written: “How do I take care of myself as a youth worker?”

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (5 min)

- Introduce the activity: “This is a reflection circle. We will listen to each other and share our experiences about self-care.”
- Explain the rule: the person holding the talking piece has the floor, others listen without interruption.

#### Reflection Round (20 min)

- Place the guiding question at the center.
- Pass the talking piece around the circle. Each participant answers briefly (1–2 minutes each). Possible prompts:
  - What helps me recharge after stressful work?
  - How do I set boundaries to protect my energy?
  - What habits or rituals keep me balanced?

#### Closing (5 min)

- Thank participants for sharing.
- Highlight that self-care is diverse - there is no “right” way.
- Optionally, collect 2–3 key practices on flipchart as a group “self-care ideas.”

#### Finalisation (5-10 min)

- Ask participants if they agree to commit to these guidelines.
- Write the final agreement clearly on flipchart and hang it in the training room.
- Optionally: all participants sign the agreement as a symbolic act.

#### Debriefing & Reflection (5–10 min)

- How did it feel to share openly and listen to others without interruption?
- Did you hear any self-care strategies you might want to try yourself?
- Why is talking about self-care important for youth workers?
- How can we better support each other in practicing it?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Comfortable seating arrangement (chairs in a circle)
- Emphasize confidentiality and respect - what is shared stays in the circle.
- Keep time balanced so everyone has a chance to speak.
- If someone doesn’t want to share, they can “pass” and the circle continues.
- Maintain a calm, non-judgmental atmosphere.

## ICEBREAKER 2: GUIDED MEDITATION

**Themes:** Relaxation, grounding, focus, intention setting

**Level:** Easy

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Group size:** Any (individual or full group)

**Materials:**

- Comfortable seating (chairs or mats)
- Quiet space (indoors or outdoors)
- Optional: soft background music or a bell sound

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (2 min)

- Invite participants to sit comfortably, feet on the ground, hands resting on laps.
- Explain: “We will start with a short meditation to center ourselves and set an intention for today.”

#### Breath Awareness (5 min)

- Guide participants to close eyes or lower their gaze. Possible prompts:
  - “Take a deep breath in... and exhale slowly.”
  - “Notice the natural rhythm of your breathing.”
  - “With each exhale, allow your body to relax more deeply.”
  - “Let go of any tension in your shoulders, neck, or face.”

#### Intention Setting (3-5 min)

- Invite participants to reflect silently on:
  - “What do I want to give to the group today?”
  - “What do I want to receive from today’s sessions?”
- Allow quiet space for reflection.

#### Closing (5 min)

- Gently invite participants to return to the space.
- Suggest they stretch arms or take a deep breath before opening eyes.
- Transition: “We begin the day grounded and ready for deeper reflection.”

#### Debriefing & Reflection (Optional)

- How do you feel now compared to before the meditation?
- How can a short centering practice change the atmosphere of a group?
- Could you use this with young people in your work?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Keep tone calm and slow; leave pauses for silence.
- Normalize distraction: “If your mind wanders, gently return to the breath.”
- Keep it short and light for mornings - aim to refresh, not exhaust.

## ACTIVITY 4: RECOGNIZING STRESS AND RESILIENCE

**Themes:** Stress awareness, resilience, self-reflection, wellbeing

**Level:** Medium

**Time:** 90 minutes

**Group size:** Pairs (12–30 participants)

**Materials:**

- Large flipchart sheets (one per participant)
- Crayons, colored pencils, markers
- Masking tape
- Optional: calming background music

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (10 min)

- Explain that our bodies carry both stress and strength.
- Invite participants to use drawing, symbols, and colors (not artistic skill) to explore where stress and resilience live in their bodies.

#### Body Outline (10-15 min)

- In pairs, one participant lies on the paper while the other traces their outline (or use a pre-printed body outline template if space is limited).
- Switch roles so each person has their own outline.

#### Mapping Stress (20 min)

- Individually, participants mark on their outline where they usually feel stress (e.g., tension in shoulders, headaches, stomach pain).
- Use colors, symbols, or words to represent sensations.

#### Mapping Resilience (20 min)

- Next, add areas of strength and energy (e.g., strong legs for walking, heart for connection, hands for creativity).
- Highlight resources that give them energy (symbols for music, nature, friends, etc.).

#### Sharing in Pairs (10 min)

- Participants share their maps with their partner if they feel comfortable.

#### Gallery Walk & Group Reflection (15 min)

- Hang body maps around the room (voluntary).
- The facilitator guides short reflection on similarities and differences observed.

#### Debriefing & Reflection (15-20 min)

- How did it feel to represent stress and resilience in this way?
- What did you learn about yourself through this activity?
- How does the body give us signals about our wellbeing?
- How could this method be useful when working with young people?
- What adaptations would you make in your own practice?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Stress that drawings do not need to be artistic - use symbols and colors.
- Provide a quiet, supportive atmosphere.
- Remind participants they may keep their maps private if they wish.
- Handle sensitive sharing with care - some may disclose personal struggles.

## ACTIVITY 5: GUIDED BREATHING & 5-SENSES

**Themes:** Stress management, presence, emotional regulation, resilience

**Level:** Easy

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Group size:** Any (individual or group)

**Materials:**

- Comfortable seating or mats
- Quiet space (indoors or outdoors)
- Optional: bell, calm background music

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (5 min)

- Explain that mindfulness is about paying attention to the present moment, without judgment. Share that these practices are simple and can be used anytime, especially in stressful moments.

#### Guided Breathing (10 min)

- Invite participants to sit comfortably, close eyes or soften gaze.
- Guide them through breathing exercise:
  - Inhale deeply for 4 counts.
  - Hold for 2 counts.
  - Exhale slowly for 6 counts.
  - Repeat for several minutes.
- Encourage awareness of breath moving in and out, noticing thoughts without clinging.

#### 5-Senses Grounding (10 min)

- Transition: “Now let’s connect to the present through our senses.” Guide step by step:
  - Notice 5 things you can see.
  - Notice 4 things you can touch/feel.
  - Notice 3 things you can hear.
  - Notice 2 things you can smell.
  - Notice 1 thing you can taste.
- Pause gently between each sense for reflection.

#### Closing (5 min)

- Slowly invite participants to open their eyes and stretch.
- Ask them to silently reflect on how they feel compared to before the practice.

#### Debriefing & Reflection (5-10 min)

- How did your body and mind feel during the practice?
- Was it easy or difficult to stay present?
- How could you use these techniques in your daily life as a youth worker?
- How might you adapt this exercise for young people?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Speak slowly, in a calm tone, leaving pauses.
- Normalize distraction: “If your mind wandered, just gently return to your breath.”
- Offer variations (e.g., walking meditation) for participants who find sitting still difficult.

## ACTIVITY 6: ATTITUDES TO MENTAL HEALTH

**Themes:** Attitudes, beliefs, mental health, dialogue, critical thinking

**Level:** Medium

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Group size:** 12-30 participants

**Materials:**

- Large space where participants can move freely
- Tape, rope, or paper to mark a line across the floor

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Set up (5 min)

- Mark a clear line across the room with tape or rope.
- Label one end “Strongly Agree” and the other “Strongly Disagree.”

#### Introduction (5 min)

- Explain that participants will respond physically to statements about mental health by positioning themselves on a line from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.”
- Emphasize: there are no “right or wrong” answers.

#### Statements & Positioning (25 min)

- Read one statement aloud at a time.
- Sample Statements (mental health focus):
  - Meditation is better than therapy.
  - Mental health problems are mostly caused by personal weakness.
  - Talking openly about mental health makes you look vulnerable.
  - Work-life balance is more important than career success.
  - Youth today are more stressed than previous generations.
- Participants choose their position on the line.
- Invite a few to explain why they chose their spot.

#### Discussion (15 min)

- After several statements, invite a whole-group reflection on patterns noticed.
- Ask: “Were there statements where most of us agreed? Where were we divided?”

#### Closing (5-10 min)

- Summarize the importance of respectful dialogue and understanding diverse views.
- Link to youth work: “The way we see mental health influences how we support young people.”

#### Debriefing & Reflection (15-20 min)

- Did hearing others’ views change your perspective?
- Why do people sometimes avoid discussing mental health openly?
- How do young people reflect or challenge adult attitudes to mental health?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Choose statements carefully - balance between provocative and respectful.
- Allow participants to “pass” if they prefer not to share a statement.

## ACTIVITY 7: MY STRESS & STRENGTH DIARY

**Themes:** Self-reflection, stress awareness, creative expression

**Level:** Easy

**Time:** 45-60 minutes

**Group size:** Any (individual or group)

**Materials:**

- Notebooks or sheets of paper
- Pens, markers, or colored pencils
- Flipchart with journaling prompts written down
- Optional: calming background music

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (5 min)

- Explain: “Journaling is a private tool that can help us reflect, process emotions, and find clarity. Today we will try a short creative journaling exercise.”
- Highlight that writing is personal - no one has to share unless they want to.

#### Individual Journaling (20 min)

- Provide prompts on flipchart/board:
  - One thing that causes me stress is...
  - When I feel stressed, my body reacts by...
  - One thing that gives me strength is...
  - A resource I can rely on when I struggle is...
- Invite participants to write freely, using words, drawings, or symbols.

#### Optional Sharing (10-15 min)

- Invite volunteers to share one sentence, word, or drawing from their journal.
- Group listens respectfully, no interruptions.

#### Closing Reflection (5 min)

- Ask: “How did it feel to put your thoughts on paper?”
- Encourage participants to keep their journals for ongoing use after the session.

#### Debriefing & Reflection

- What did you discover while writing?
- Was it easier to express stress or strength? Why?
- How could journaling help young people in everyday life?
- In what ways might you continue this practice personally?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Emphasize that spelling, grammar, or writing skills don't matter - it's about expression.
- Allow silence for writing - don't rush participants.
- Respect privacy: make clear that no one has to share.
- Adapt prompts for specific age groups or themes.

## ICEBREAKER 3: SKILLS FOR SUPPORTING YOUTH

**Themes:** Movement, laughter, wellbeing

**Level:** Easy

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Group size:** Any (individual or full group)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (2 min)

- Ask participants to stand behind the chairs.
- Explain: “We’ll play a fun movement game to wake up the body and introduce wellbeing themes.”

#### Assigning Categories (2 min)

- Instead of fruit, assign wellbeing-related identities such as:
- “Exercise,” “Sleep,” “Friends,” “Relaxation.”
- Make sure each identity is given to several participants.

#### Basic Rules (3–4 min)

- One person stands in the centre and becomes the Caller.
- The Caller shouts a category → everyone with that identity must quickly swap seats.
- The Caller also tries to sit down.
- One person will always remain standing and becomes the next Caller.

#### “Wellbeing!” Round (3–4 min)

- When the Caller shouts “Wellbeing!” everyone must change seats.
- Encourage big movements and laughter.

#### Closing (2–3 min)

- End once the energy feels lifted.
- Transition: “Great — now that we’ve moved our bodies, let’s move into today’s session with fresh energy.”

#### Debriefing & Reflection (Optional)

- What did you notice in your body after moving and laughing?
- Did the wellbeing identities make you think about your own habits?
- How can physical energisers support mental health in group settings?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Keep movement safe and inclusive; allow walking instead of running.
- Use humour and simple instructions.
- Invite participants to contribute their own wellbeing categories.

## ACTIVITY 8: ROLEPLAY - YOUTH IN CRISIS

**Themes:** Empathy, communication, crisis response, boundaries

**Level:** Medium–Advanced

**Time:** 90 minutes

**Group size:** Groups of 3; for 12–24 pax

**Sample Scenarios:** A young person is..:

- anxious about exams and cannot sleep.
- constantly arguing with peers.
- does not want to join activities.
- shares hopelessness about the future.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (10 min)

- Explain that roleplay is a safe way to practice responding to sensitive situations.
- Stress confidentiality and respect.
- Divide participants into triads: youth worker, young person, observer.

#### Round 1 – Roleplay (15 min)

- Each triad receives one scenario card. Roles:
  - Youth worker → practices responding.
  - Young people → act out scenarios realistically.
  - Observer → notes what worked well and what could improve.
- Roleplay runs for 5–7 minutes, then short feedback.

#### Rotate Roles (30 min)

- After each round, participants switch roles until everyone has been a youth worker once.
- New scenarios can be given each round.

#### Group Reflection (15 min)

- Triads discuss what was challenging and effective.
- Write down key lessons on flipchart.

#### Plenary Sharing (10–15 min)

- Each group shares one insight or strategy.
- The facilitator highlights themes: listening skills, empathy, setting boundaries, not overpromising.

#### Debriefing & Reflection (15–20 min)

- What strategies worked best in building trust and empathy?
- How did it feel to be in the role of the young person?
- What was challenging about setting boundaries?
- How do you know when to support directly and when to refer to professionals?
- How can these roleplays be adapted into your real youth work practice?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Remind participants this is practice, not perfection.
- Encourage role realism but stop scenarios if they become overwhelming.
- Debrief observers carefully - their role is to support, not criticize.
- Choose scenarios relevant to the group's real context.

## ACTIVITY 9: MEMORY LINE – REFLECTING ON RESILIENCE

**Themes:** Resilience, wellbeing, personal history, reflection

**Level:** Medium

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Group size:** 15–20 participants

**Materials:**

- Long rope/string (to serve as a timeline, fixed on the floor or wall)
- Paper strips or sticky notes (two colors)
- Markers/pens
- Tape to attach notes to rope or wall

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (5 min)

- Lay out a rope/string across the room: one end = past, the other = present.
- Explain: “We will reflect on important moments that influenced our wellbeing - both challenges and strengths.”
- Emphasize participants can choose what to share; personal privacy is respected.

#### Individual Reflection (20 min)

- Each participant receives several paper strips (2 different colours).
- On one: write positive/resilience-building experiences (e.g., supportive mentor, finding a hobby, overcoming a challenge).
- On second: write difficult/challenging wellbeing experiences (e.g., burnout, stress, discrimination).

#### Placing on the Timeline (15-20 min)

- Participants attach their strips onto the rope in chronological order.
- Result: a shared “memory line” of group experiences.
- The group walks along the line, reading the moments in silence.
- Invite them to notice patterns and emotions.

#### Small Group Sharing (15 min)

- In groups of 3–4, participants discuss:
  - How did these moments shape your personal resilience?
  - What strengths or lessons came from them?

#### Plenary Reflection (10–15 min)

- Ask for volunteers to share insights (not personal details unless they wish).
- Facilitator summarizes: resilience is built through experiences.

#### Debriefing & Reflection (15–20 min)

- How did it feel to look back at these experiences?
- What patterns did you notice across the group’s timeline?
- How do our past challenges strengthen our empathy and ability to support youth?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Remind participants they decide what to share - no pressure to reveal deeply personal experiences.
- Be attentive to the emotional atmosphere; allow time for grounding if needed.
- Adapt length depending on group openness and available time.

## ACTIVITY 10: JOURNALING—MY ROLE IN YOUTH WELLBEING

**Themes:** Reflection, integration, personal commitment, self-awareness

**Level:** Easy

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Group size:** Any (individual + optional sharing)

**Materials:**

- Notebooks/journals for each participant (or plain paper)
- Pens/markers
- Calm music (optional)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (5 min)

- Invite participants to take time for quiet reflection.
- Explain that journaling is private - they may choose to share insights, but the writing itself will not be collected.
- Write the guiding question on flipchart: “What is my role in youth wellbeing?”

#### Individual Journaling (20 min)

- Encourage participants to write freely in response to prompts such as:
  - What have I learned about myself as a youth worker?
  - How do I already support the wellbeing of young people?
  - What new practices do I want to bring into my work?
  - What boundaries or self-care strategies will help me sustain this role?
- Remind them: there are no right or wrong answers, just honest reflection.

#### Optional Sharing (5-7 min)

- Invite volunteers to read a sentence or phrase they feel comfortable sharing.
- Emphasize that listening respectfully is part of closing the circle.

#### Closing the Session (3-5 min)

- Thank participants for their openness.
- Suggest they keep their notes as a reminder of their commitments.
- Transition: “Our reflections today are seeds for continued growth as youth workers.”

#### Debriefing & Reflection

- How did it feel to put your thoughts into writing?
- Did anything surprise you about your reflections?
- What is one concrete action you will take after this training?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Provide a calm environment (soft music, silence, or outdoor space).
- Encourage participants to use words, drawings, or symbols - whichever feels natural.
- Avoid pressure - journaling is personal; sharing is optional.
- End on a positive, forward-looking note.

## ICEBREAKER 4: MORNING ENERGISER – ZIP, ZAP, ZOP

**Themes:** Energy, focus, playfulness, group connection

**Level:** Easy

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Group size:** 10–25 participants (works best in medium-sized groups)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (2 min)

- Ask participants to stand in a circle.
- Explain: “We’ll play a fast-paced game to wake up our brains and bodies. The goal is to pass energy around the circle using three simple words.”

#### Teaching the Sequence (3 min)

- Demonstrate the rhythm:
  - Point to someone and say “Zip.”
  - That person points to another and says “Zap.”
  - The next person points to another and says “Zop.”
- The sequence continues: Zip → Zap → Zop → Zip → Zap → Zop, and so on.

#### Practice Round (2–3 min)

- Start slowly so everyone understands the order.
- Remind participants to make eye contact and clear gestures.

#### Main Game (5–7 min)

- Increase speed gradually.
- If someone makes a mistake (wrong word, hesitation), the group cheers and continues without punishment.
- Variations to add fun:
  - Reverse the order (Zop → Zap → Zip).
  - Add physical gestures (jump, clap, spin) along with words.
  - Play elimination style if the group prefers competition.

#### Closing (2–3 min)

- End with a group clap, cheer, or funny gesture.
- Transition: “Now that our energy is up, let’s focus it into today’s work.”

#### Debriefing & Reflection (Optional)

- How did it feel to start the day with quick reactions and laughter?
- Did you notice your focus improving as the game sped up?
- How could playful energisers like this change the atmosphere in youth work sessions?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Keep the pace fun, not stressful - mistakes are part of the joy.
- Encourage big gestures and eye contact to build group energy.
- If the group is shy, model playfulness by exaggerating your own moves.

## ACTIVITY 11: DESIGNING WELLBEING ACTIVITIES

**Themes:** Transfer of learning, creativity, youth work practice, wellbeing

**Level:** Medium/Hard

**Time:** 90 minutes

**Group size:** Small groups of 3–5 participants

**Materials:**

- Flipcharts and markers
- Planning templates
- Post-it notes
- Timer/clock for group work and presentations

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (10 min)

- Explain the purpose: “Now that we’ve explored various tools and methods, you will design a short wellbeing workshop (20–30 minutes) that you could realistically implement with youth in your context.”
- Present possible formats: mindfulness, journaling, group discussion, creative arts, or other methods.

#### Group Work (30–35 min)

- Each group chooses one method and develops a mini-workshop using the template:
  - Title and aim of the activity
  - Target group (age, setting)
  - Step-by-step process (20–30 min)
  - Materials needed
  - Expected outcomes for youth wellbeing

#### Presentations (25–30 min)

- Each group presents their workshop idea (5 min per group).
- After each presentation, peers give short feedback:
  - Is it clear and realistic?
  - What impact could it have?
  - How could it be improved or adapted?

#### Wrap-Up (10–15 min)

- The facilitator summarizes common themes and creative ideas.
- Highlight practical next steps: participants are encouraged to test their mini-workshop in their local context after the training.

#### Debriefing & Reflection (15 min)

- How easy or difficult was it to design a wellbeing activity?
- How can these activities be adapted to diverse youth contexts?
- What will be your first step to bring your design into practice?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Provide clear templates to structure group work.
- Encourage groups to think realistically (time, resources, youth needs).
- Balance creativity with feasibility.
- Offer supportive but constructive feedback.

## ACTIVITY 12: INDIVIDUAL & PEER ACCOUNTABILITY

**Themes:** Transfer of learning, accountability, follow-up, personal development

**Level:** Medium

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Group size:** Any (individual + small groups)

**Materials:**

- Action planning templates (worksheet with 3 sections: My Commitment, Steps I Will Take, Support I Need)
- Pens/markers
- Flipchart with guiding prompts

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Introduction (10 min)

- Explain: “Action planning helps ensure what we learned here will be applied in real life
- Today you will define your personal commitments and find a peer to support your progress.”

#### Individual Reflection (15 min)

- Participants complete their action planning template:
  - What do I want to change or introduce in my practice?
  - Which steps will I take in the next 3 months?
  - What support or resources do I need?
- Encourage them to write SMART commitments (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).

#### Peer Exchange (20 min)

- Pair up with a “commitment buddy.”
- Each person shares their plan in 5 minutes.
- Buddy asks clarifying questions and offers suggestions.
- Partners agree to check in with each other (e.g., by message or call) after 1–2 months.

#### Plenary Sharing (10–15 min)

- Volunteers share one action they plan to take.
- Facilitator notes common themes on flipchart (e.g., introducing journaling, using mindfulness, strengthening self-care).

#### Closing (5 min)

- Option: participants seal their written commitment in an envelope, which the facilitator mails back to them after 2–3 months as a reminder.
- Thank the group for taking responsibility for follow-up.

#### Debriefing & Reflection

- How did it feel to turn ideas into concrete actions?
- How can peer support make it easier to follow through?
- What might be the first small step you can take already next week?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Stress realism: better to commit to one small, achievable change.
- Encourage honest discussion about barriers and needed support.
- Highlight that accountability buddies are there for encouragement, not pressure.

## ACTIVITY 13: CLOSING CIRCLE & EVALUATION

**Themes:** Closure, reflection, evaluation, group connection

**Level:** Easy

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Group size:** Any (works best with 12–25 pax)

**Materials:**

- A “talking piece” (stone, ball, or symbolic object)
- Flipchart with 2–3 reflection prompts
- Evaluation forms (paper or digital link)
- Optional: candle or small symbolic centerpiece for the circle

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### Setting the Circle (5 min)

- Arrange chairs in a circle.
- Place a symbolic object in the middle (candle, flower, stone) to mark the closing ritual.
- Explain: “This circle is to reflect, celebrate, and close our shared learning journey.”

#### Guided Reflection (15 min)

- Facilitator leads short prompts for reflection:
  - “One thing I am taking with me...”
  - “One thing I will do differently in my practice...”
  - “One moment from this training I will remember...”
- Participants speak in turn, passing the talking piece. Sharing is optional (“pass” is allowed).

#### Group Evaluation (15 min)

- Hand out evaluation forms (or share online link if digital).
- Ask participants to complete individually.
- While they write, play soft background music.
- Option: Quick participatory evaluation (e.g., each person places a sticker on a scale: “How useful was this training?”).

#### Closing Ritual (5–10 min)

- Invite each participant to share a single word or gesture that symbolizes their experience.
- End with a collective clap, gesture, or group photo.
- The facilitator thanks participants and acknowledges their contributions.
- Debriefing & Reflection (Optional)
- How did it feel to reflect together in the circle?
- What does closure mean for you at this moment?
- How can we carry the energy of this training forward into our work?

#### Tips for Facilitators

- Keep the atmosphere warm and supportive.
- Avoid rushing - give enough space for silence and emotions.
- Make sure evaluations are collected but do not dominate the closing ritual.
- Use symbolic closure (lighting/blowing out a candle, collective gesture, sharing an object) to mark the end.

# LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Local Implementation Plan is part of the RECOVER – Youth Wellbeing Recovering Kit project, funded by the Erasmus+ Programme. The project responds to the increasing challenges young people face with mental health, stress, and resilience.

This plan provides practical guidance for organising and delivering local pilot workshops with young people. Through creative and reflective non-formal education methods, such as mindfulness, journaling, body mapping, and roleplay, the workshop will create safe spaces where young people can explore wellbeing, strengthen resilience, and develop coping strategies together

## Objectives of the local pilot:

- To introduce young people to creative and reflective methods for strengthening mental health and wellbeing.
- To empower youth with practical coping tools such as mindfulness, journaling, body mapping, and group discussions.
- To provide a safe and inclusive space where young people can share experiences and build resilience together.
- To test and validate the RECOVER training tools and adapt them for local youth contexts.
- To collect feedback from participants for improving the toolkit and training approach.

## Participant selection:

- Target group: 15 young people per partner organisation (aged 16–25).
- Inclusion priority: Ensure gender balance, geographical diversity (urban/rural), and the active involvement of youth with fewer opportunities.
- Criteria: Motivation to learn about wellbeing, willingness to participate in group activities, openness to creative and reflective methods.
- Process: Each partner develops a transparent selection call (application form or nominations through local youth centres/schools).

## Practical tips for implementation:

- Use icebreakers and group agreements to build a safe learning space.
- Adjust activities to age, cultural background, and wellbeing experience.
- Balance reflective, creative, and physical exercises to maintain engagement.
- Be mindful that wellbeing activities may trigger emotions and ensure space for support.
- Actively involve young people with fewer opportunities and aim for gender balance.
- End with journaling or action planning so young people can apply their learning.
- Collect feedback and brief reflections to assess results and improve practice.

# PILOT WORKSHOP OUTLINE

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## DAY 1 – INTRODUCTION & TRUST BUILDING

- Icebreakers & team building
- Group agreement & safe space guidelines
- Workshop: “Take a Step Forward – Mental Health Inequalities”
- Reflection circle: “How do I take care of myself?”

## DAY 2 – SELF-AWARENESS & WELLBEING TOOLS

- Energiser (movement or meditation)
- Body Mapping – recognising stress and resilience
- Mindfulness practice – guided breathing & 5 senses grounding
- Journaling: “My stress and strengths diary”

## DAY 3 – COPING STRATEGIES & PEER SUPPORT

- Energiser (playful activity)
- Roleplay: Responding to stress & conflict in youth settings
- Group discussion: Boundaries & peer support
- Memory Line – reflecting on resilience experiences

## DAY 4 – TRANSFER & CLOSING

- Designing a mini wellbeing activity in groups
- Presentations and peer feedback
- Action planning: “What I will do after this pilot”
- Closing circle & evaluation

# FACILITATOR CHECKLIST

## BEFORE THE PILOT

- Prepare the training space to be comfortable, safe, and inclusive (seating, lighting, accessibility).
- Print or prepare all materials (body outlines, role cards, planning templates, evaluation forms, markers, flipcharts).
- Arrange safeguarding measures (emergency contacts, first aid kit, clear rules for confidentiality and support).
- Review activity instructions from the toolkit and adapt to the group.
- Prepare energisers and opening activities to set the right atmosphere.
- Coordinate logistics (schedule, meals, transport, breaks).
- Communicate clearly with participants in advance (agenda, time schedule, expectations).

## DURING THE PILOT

- Start with icebreakers and group agreement to establish a safe learning environment.
- Use energisers daily to maintain energy and focus.
- Balance active methods (games, roleplay, creative work) with reflective moments (journaling, discussions).
- Monitor group dynamics and ensure equal participation - support quieter voices and prevent domination by a few.
- Offer flexible adaptations for participants with different learning styles or special needs.
- Be mindful of sensitive issues - pause if emotions arise and provide grounding activities.
- Keep a facilitator reflection log after each session (notes on progress, challenges, adjustments).
- Capture photos/videos (with consent) for reporting and dissemination.

## AFTER THE PILOT

- Collect all feedback forms, creative reflections, and evaluation outputs.
- Hold a short debrief session with co-facilitators to share observations.
- Prepare a summary report including highlights, challenges, recommendations, and participant quotes/testimonials.
- Share results and feedback with project partner organisations.
- Reflect personally: what did I learn as a facilitator, and what would I improve?

## EXTRA SECTION: SELF-CARE FOR FACILITATORS

- Take breaks and manage your own energy levels throughout the pilot.
- Debrief with a co-facilitator or colleague if sensitive issues affect you personally.
- Set boundaries - you are not a therapist, your role is to guide learning.
- Celebrate achievements with your team after the pilot.

# PARTICIPANT MONITORING

Monitoring is a key part of successful local pilot implementation. It helps youth workers not only ensure that the agenda is followed, but also track the progress, wellbeing, and learning of participants throughout the process (Council of Europe, 2020). Effective monitoring means observing how young people feel, how they engage in different activities, and what they take away from the experience.

Continuous monitoring allows facilitators to adapt activities to the group's needs in real time, ensure that all participants are included and feel safe, identify challenges or sensitive moments at an early stage, and collect valuable insights that can be used to improve future sessions (Kolb, 1984).

## MONITORING TOOLS

### Facilitator reflection log:

A reflection log is a short written note made after each session. It helps facilitators keep track of the group's progress, highlight moments of success, and identify challenges.

- What to record: Group dynamics, participation levels, energy, and any adaptations made.
- Tips:
  - Use a simple template with guiding questions (e.g., What worked well? What challenges appeared? What will I do tomorrow?).
  - Write notes immediately after the session while the experience is fresh.
  - Keep it concise - 5 minutes of writing is enough to capture key insights.

### Observation of Participation:

Careful observation during activities is one of the most effective ways to monitor the group. This is about noticing patterns of engagement rather than assessing performance.

- What to observe: Who speaks often, who stays quiet, which activities energise or disengage the group.
- Tips:
  - Observe discreetly so participants don't feel they are being judged.
  - Gently encourage quieter voices with invitations such as "Would you like to add something?" but avoid forcing anyone to share.
  - Balance attention across the group to ensure inclusivity.



### Daily Reflection Circles:

A short reflection at the end of each day helps participants process their experiences while giving facilitators useful feedback. This can be structured or simple, depending on the group's mood and energy.

- Examples: One-word round (“How are you leaving today?”), mood cards, journaling, or symbolic closing activities.
- Tips:
  - Keep it brief (5–10 minutes) to avoid fatigue.
  - Rotate methods each day so the practice stays fresh and engaging.
  - Respect that some participants may prefer to share less verbally - alternative forms (writing, drawing) can be included.

### Why Monitoring Matters:

- Promotes youth wellbeing by ensuring that sensitive topics are handled carefully.
- Strengthens inclusivity, as youth workers can adapt activities to diverse needs.
- Improves learning outcomes, because reflection and adaptation make methods more effective.
- Builds a valuable record of insights that can inform future pilots and organisational practice.

# PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Feedback ensures that young people's voices are not only heard but also actively shape improvements in the pilot. It provides valuable insight into how activities are experienced, which methods resonate most, and where adjustments may be needed. Collecting feedback throughout the pilot also makes participants feel respected, valued, and included, reinforcing the idea that their opinions matter and contribute to the success of the programme (European Commission, 2019).

Combining both quantitative tools (such as rating scales, checklists, or quick votes) and qualitative tools (open comments, creative outputs, testimonials) allows youth workers to assess the overall impact of the pilot in a well-rounded way (Patton, 2015). Feedback is therefore more than just evaluation - it is an empowerment tool, giving young people ownership of the process and helping facilitators improve their practice continuously (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

## FEEDBACK TOOLS

### Feedback Forms:

Short written forms are a simple but effective way to gather structured insights. They should be used at least once during the pilot (midpoint) and at the end.

- What to include: Ratings on clarity, relevance, and usefulness of activities, plus 2–3 open questions.
- Tips:
  - Keep forms short - maximum 5 questions to avoid fatigue.
  - Use emojis, symbols, or simple scales for younger groups.
  - Allow space for anonymous answers to increase honesty.
  - If possible, digitise forms (Google Forms, Mentimeter) to save time.

### Final Evaluation:

A comprehensive evaluation at the end of the pilot brings together both numbers and stories.

- What to collect: Scores on key criteria (clarity, relevance, facilitation, usefulness) alongside personal reflections, testimonials, or creative expressions.
- Tips:
  - Offer more than one format - written answers, drawings, “letters to myself,” or symbolic feedback.
  - Make it engaging: use colours, stickers, or participatory voting walls.
  - Summarise the results and share highlights back with the group to close the feedback loop.



### Peer Feedback Sessions:

These sessions give participants the chance to exchange perspectives with one another. They help normalise constructive feedback as part of learning.

- What to do: Ask participants to share what they appreciated and what could be improved about the group process, activities, or facilitation.
- Tips:
  - Use structured methods such as “Two Stars and a Wish” (two positives, one suggestion).
  - Keep the atmosphere supportive, focusing on improvement rather than criticism.
  - Encourage everyone to give and receive feedback respectfully.

### Why Feedback Matters:

- Builds a youth-centred approach where young people shape the process.
- Ensures continuous improvement of methods and facilitation.
- Validates young people’s experiences and opinions.
- Creates a culture of trust, inclusion, and ownership in youth work.

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Youth engagement ensures that participants are active contributors rather than passive recipients of the pilot, supporting empowerment and ownership through inclusive and youth-informed engagement models (Bailey et al., 2024). When young people are meaningfully involved, they develop a stronger sense of ownership, motivation, and connection to the process. Engagement goes beyond simple participation - it offers opportunities for youth to influence decisions, shape content, and contribute their own strategies (UNICEF, 2021). When youth are involved in co-facilitation, creative feedback, and action planning, they are empowered to see themselves not only as learners but also as leaders and changemakers. Strong engagement makes the pilot more relevant, inclusive, and impactful while also building participants' confidence and transferable skills to carry into their daily lives (Council of Europe, 2015).

## FEEDBACK TOOLS

### Suggestion Box / Wall:

Provide a space, physical or digital, for anonymous input throughout the pilot.

- Tips: Check the box daily and respond to suggestions where possible. Acknowledging contributions shows participants that their voices matter.

### Youth Co-Facilitation:

Invite participants to lead energisers, group discussions, or daily reflections.

- Tips: Encourage volunteers early, but also invite participants who may benefit from confidence-building. Offer clear guidance so they feel supported in their role.

### Creative Feedback:

Allow participants to express experiences and emotions through drawings, metaphors, collages, or symbolic objects

- Tips: Provide a variety of materials (coloured pens, paper, magazines, stickers). Emphasise that creativity is about expression, not artistic skill.

### Action Planning:

Help participants create commitments or group pledges to apply their learning.

- Tips: Encourage SMART actions (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound). Pair participants with “accountability buddies” for follow-up and motivation.

### Why Engagement Matters:

- Builds ownership by giving youth responsibility and voice in the process.
- Increases motivation and makes the learning more meaningful.
- Strengthens inclusion, as all contributions are valued.
- Builds active citizenship skills: leadership, cooperation, decision-making.



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# CONCLUSION

The RECOVER Toolkit brings together a comprehensive set of concepts, methods, and practical activities designed to strengthen youth workers' capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people. Throughout the chapters, the toolkit emphasises that wellbeing is not a separate topic but an essential foundation of youth work. Young people today face growing pressures, academic expectations, social comparison, digital overload, uncertainty about the future, and many of these challenges manifest as stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, loneliness, or a sense of helplessness. Youth workers are often the first trusted adults to notice early signs of distress, and their role in creating supportive, stigma-free environments is crucial.

The toolkit shows that effective wellbeing support does not depend on clinical expertise, but on human-centred, empathetic approaches integrated into everyday practice. Tools such as weekly mood tracking, stress jars, self-reflection sheets, creative activities, and grounding exercises help young people recognise emotions, identify patterns, and develop personalised coping strategies. The thematic challenges, fear, depression, loneliness, low self-esteem, digital overload, and helplessness, illustrate how youth workers can respond with patience, validation, and practical guidance while knowing when referral to professional help is needed.

Another core contribution of the RECOVER Toolkit is the emphasis on experiential and participatory learning. Art therapy, forest therapy, journaling, mindfulness, and body-based methods offer safe, accessible, and non-verbal pathways for expression. These practices foster emotional literacy, resilience, and self-awareness, and they can be easily adapted for group or individual work. The training programme further equips youth workers with skills for facilitating sensitive conversations, recognising hidden distress, and designing wellbeing activities that can be applied in their organisations and communities.

Ultimately, RECOVER promotes a preventive, strengths-based approach to mental health in youth work. By building trust, reducing stigma, and integrating wellbeing practices into regular activities, youth workers contribute to safer, more inclusive environments where young people feel valued and supported. The toolkit encourages organisations to continue this work, adapt the tools to their local contexts, and embed wellbeing as a long-term priority rather than a one-off intervention. Through consistent care, reflective practice, and meaningful connection, youth workers play a vital role in helping young people navigate challenges, build resilience, and move toward healthier, more confident futures.

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