



Erasmus+

Youth Mental Health

The activities portofolio



1. Introduction

About the Youth Mental Health portofolio

This booklet was created as part of our Erasmus+ project on youth mental health, with the goal of supporting youth workers in their everyday practice. It gathers tools, methods and reflections developed during our training courses, study visits and collaborative sessions.

The content focuses on how non-formal education can be used to promote mental wellbeing, build resilience and support young people facing emotional and psychological challenges. The booklet is designed as a practical resource—easy to use, adaptable and based on real experiences from the field.

About the Youth Mental Health project

The Youth Mental Health (YMH) Project was a small-scale KA2 strategic partnership led by **Gislaved Municipality, Sweden**, in partnership with:

Associazione di Promozione Sociale "Sabbeen Group", Italy

Zejtun Local Council, Malta

Senter for arbeidslivsforberedelse, ALF as, Norway

"Institute for Development and Innovation" Association, Romania



Why the project?

The Youth Mental Health (YMH) Project was a small-scale KA2 strategic partnership led by Gislaved Municipality, Sweden. It brought together five organizations with the shared goal of improving how youth workers and organizations respond to the growing mental health challenges faced by young people, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The project aimed to build the educational and organizational capacity of the partner organizations in supporting young people experiencing mental health difficulties. It focused on strengthening the competences of 30 youth workers by equipping them with practical, innovative tools, methods and non-formal education approaches. Another key goal was to improve how partners use Erasmus+ as a long-term strategy for youth mental health and international cooperation.

Over the course of the project, partners took part in a series of international activities, including study visits to Sweden, Romania, Norway and Ireland, as well as two training courses in Italy and Malta. These included hands-on learning, observation of local practices, exchange of experiences and the co-creation of educational tools. The project closed with a final workshop and evaluation meetings in Sweden and Italy, where results were finalized and future cooperation was discussed.

In this project we have had important contributions from:

Educational Centre of Targu Ocna city, Romania

"Constantin Brâncoveanu" National Penitentiary Police School, Târgu Ocna, Romania

Inclusive Education School Center NO. 2 Comanesti city, Romania

Cork Education and Training Board, Ireland

Sabbioneta Municipality, Italy

Erasmus Learning Hub, Italy



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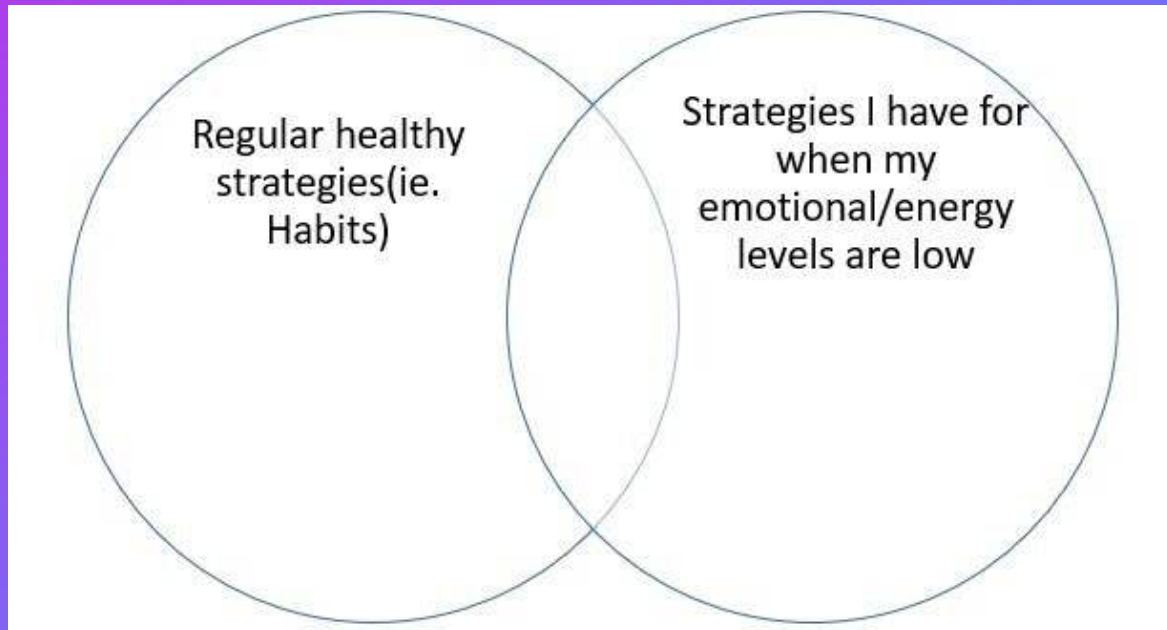
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**EMPOWERING THE
YOUTHWORKER/ RESPONSIBLE
ADULT/ CAREGIVER**

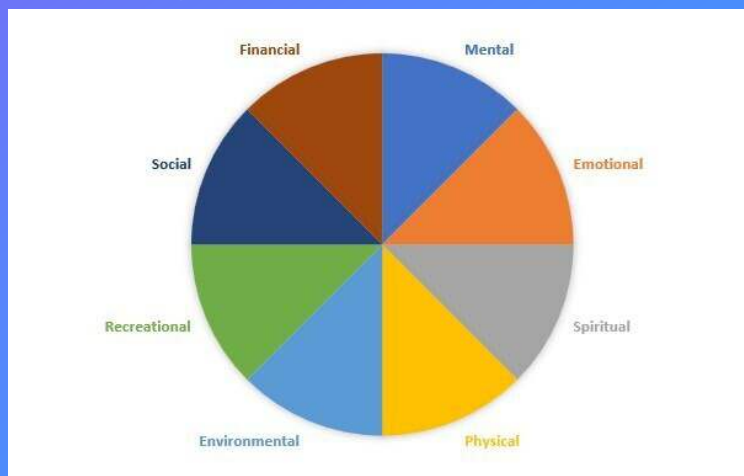
Self-Care

Self-Reflective Exercise

Introduction: Taking Care of Your Own Mental Health before Helping Others



Write down 3 activities you do for each aspect of self-care. For each activity, write from 1-5 how often would you like to do this activity AND write how often you actually do this activity.



Absorbing the Emotions of Others

Before Helping:

Keep in mind how empathic and sensitive you are. This is a strength and not a weakness.

Tune in with your emotions. Ask yourself:

How am I feeling today?

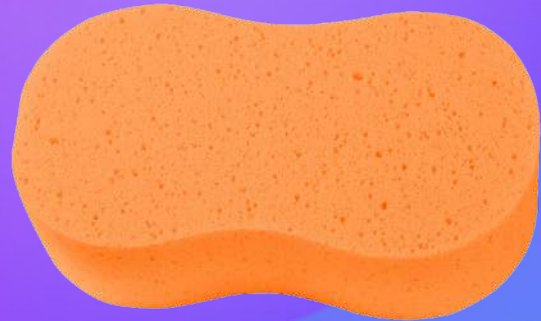
Establish healthy boundaries. A healthy boundary can look like:

Saying no

Establishing any topics that are off limits

Clarifying your role, limits, and responsibilities

Reducing social interaction



While Helping:

Notice any shift in emotions.

Ask yourself:

is this my emotion or am I feeling someone else's

If it is your emotion process it. If it's not your own emotion remind yourself that you can let it go.

Practice some of the mini-mindful tools including: take a couple of deep breaths or imagine a bubble between yourself and the other person and imagine the emotions bouncing off.

After Helping:

Revisit the strategies you use to take care of yourself and apply some of those strategies.

Process those emotions with a friend, a colleague, or a therapist.

Putting It into Practice

Practicing Gratitude

Write a letter to someone you are grateful for and explain in what ways has this person positively impacted your life. Describe the emotions you feel and anything else you would like to express. You can then give them this letter or keep it for yourself.

For 5 days, write 3 new things you are grateful for.

Dance to 2 or 3 songs. Bonus if they are your favourite songs.

Stretching Exercises

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zlwk82OM9Us>

Nature Walk

Go for a hike in nature.



03

EMPOWERING THE YOUTH



Mini-Mindfulness Tools

5 4 3 2 1

Look around the room and name five things you can see, then four things you can feel, then three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.

Items in a Category

Think of a category (Example: car brands, dog breed), name as many items in that category as you can think of.

Sensorial Experience

Put a blindfold on or close your eyes. Hold an object in your hand and describe how it feels. Is it heavy or light? Is it smooth or rough? Balances or unbalanced? Etc.

Visualisation

Imagine yourself in a place that feels relaxing and peaceful to you. Construct a picture of this place in your head and try to use as many of your senses as possible. Choose a word that will help you recall this scene.

Breathing Techniques

Breathe in through your nose counting for 4 seconds. As you breathe in imagine you have a balloon in your belly and you are inflating it.

Hold your breath for 4 seconds.

Exhale for 4 seconds. Exhale from your mouth as if you are gently blowing out a candle. Then inhale again

Pain Reliever in Hand

Acupuncturists say applying pressure in the fleshy area between the thumb and forefinger can calm anxiety as well as pain, particularly headaches and dental pain.

Hegu point

A dime-sized spot on top of the hand, located between the thumb and forefinger.



Applying pressure to the hegu

Put a thumb on top of the fleshy part between the thumb and forefinger of the opposite hand. Place your forefinger on the other side of the hand and squeeze until it hurts.



Source: Ting Bai, at the University of Maryland Marlene and Stewart Greenbaum Cancer Center
The Wall Street Journal

Muscle Relaxation

Hand massage: Squeeze and release the muscles in the hand and wrist.

Shoulder rolls: Shrug shoulders up to the ears and release.

Neck stretches: Gently tilt the head from side to side.

Self-Acceptance and Self-Love

What is one thing you like in yourself and another thing you would like to improve?

Speed dating for youths who know each other

Split the group into two. The person on the left has to spend 30 seconds complimenting the person in front of them. The person on the right does and says nothing except thank you. After thirty second pass the person on the right compliments the person on the left. After thirty seconds, the person on the left moves one chair forward.

Self-Talk.

First describe yourself mentioning the good and the bad. Look in the mirror and imagine you are talking to a friend who just described themselves with the words you used: What would you tell your friend?





Your Life Story

You can do this activity as a written task, an act, poster, or any form of expression.

Part 1: Where I am coming from.

Describe your past life, the challenges and obstacles you had to face, the strengths and skills you used, and the triumphs and successes.

Part 2: Where I'm at

Describe who you are now and in what ways have you changed. The new strengths you have built and new challenges you are facing

Part 3: Where I want to go

Describe your ideal future including what you want to achieve and in what ways will you be different.

Positive affirmation mirror

This activity will include the use of positive affirmations that can be used as a tool to foster mindfulness in youth with mental well-being challenges.

Aim:

To guide youth develop self-compassion and self-acceptance

To encourage positive self-talk and self-affirmations to counteract negative self-perceptions that are typically related to mental well-being challenges.

Objectives: Encourage positive thinking, Lowers stress and anxiety, Increase motivation, Enhance self-esteem, Cultivate gratitude

Guidelines:

Participants: Youth aged between 13 and 18

Space: Indoor/outdoor

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Mirror, feeling cards, sticky notes and pens

Method:

Join together in a space.

Ask participants to think about how they are feeling. Give them some time to think about their feelings in their present moment.

Pass around a sticky note and a pen to each participant and ask them to write down how they want to feel. Here they should write about 1-3 feelings or goals they want to achieve.

Ask the participants to turn those desirable feelings into statements in the present tense by adding “I am/can” in front of the feeling or goal they wish to achieve. For example, if the participant wishes to overcome a challenge he/she is facing, they can write “I am capable of overcoming challenges”.

Ask each participant to go in front of a mirror (ideally positioned at a distance from the group), stick the sticky note on the mirror, and read the positive affirmations.

Then, the participant can go back to the space and think about what he/she can do to achieve these goals/feelings while the other participants repeat the process of reading the positive affirmations in front of the mirror.

After each participant has read their positive affirmation/s in front of the mirror, the participants can gather back in the original space for the debriefing.

Debriefing questions:

Do you take time at home to reflect on how you feel? Why?

Did anything surprise you about the feelings or goals you wrote down?

How did it feel to take a moment to reflect on your current feelings and desires?

How did it feel to turn those desires into present-tense affirmations?

How are you feeling at the present moment?

Did you notice any changes in your mindset or feelings while reading the affirmations?

What was it like to read your affirmations in front of the mirror?

Did anything stand out to you about the process of creating and reading affirmations in a group setting?

Are there any affirmations or goals that you would like to revise or add after this experience?

What thoughts or actions came to mind as you considered how to achieve your goals?

How do you think practicing this activity regularly could impact your daily life?

How do you plan to incorporate this practice into your routine moving forward?

Conclusion: Explain the importance of self-reflection and encourage participants to carry out this exercise at home on a daily basis and to create new positive affirmations once they feel they reached the goals they set. One might suggest other ways how they can reflect: a diary, jar of thoughts/reflections, going for a walk, or one might ask participants to share suggestions and tips they would like to share with others on this matter. Each participant can take a suggestion that resonates with them at home.

Tips:

1. Depending on the group of youth you are carrying this activity with, one can opt to use feeling cards to carry out steps 2 and 3 of the activity.



2. For step 6, give the participants the option to choose whether they feel comfortable reading their affirmations out loud or prefer to read them silently.

Creating safe / comfortable spaces

Game: The Balance of Well-being

Introduction:

Mental well-being is like balancing on a beam—sometimes life challenges push us off balance, but with support and resilience, we can find stability again. This game helps young people reflect on their well-being, recognize factors that impact it, and learn ways to regain balance.



Objectives:

Encourage self-awareness about mental well-being.

Help young people identify stressors and positive coping strategies.

Promote peer support and active listening within the group.

Create a safe and fun space for open discussion on mental health.

Method:

Materials needed:

A rope, tape line, or chalk-drawn line on the floor.

Small objects (e.g., plastic cups, cards, or stones) to represent life challenges.

Pre-written scenario cards (see examples below).

A soft cushion (representing a "support system" when participants lose balance).

Instructions:

Setup:



Place a long rope (or draw a line) on the ground. This represents the "balance of mental well-being."

Each participant stands on the line with both feet.

The Concept:

Life is a balance of positive and negative experiences.

The game will simulate this by presenting different real-life situations that affect mental well-being.

Participants will step forward, backward, or lose balance based on the scenario.

The Challenge:

The facilitator reads out a scenario card one by one.

If the scenario is positive, participants step forward.

If the scenario is negative, they step back.

If someone loses balance (e.g., stepping too far back), they can either:

Sit out briefly.

Get back in with "support" from a peer who gives them a positive message or solution.

Scenario Card Examples:

You had a fun day with friends who support you. → Step forward

You feel overwhelmed with school/work and don't know who to talk to. → Step back

You ask for help when you're struggling. → Step forward

You argue with a close friend, and it makes you anxious. → Step back



You practice a hobby that helps you relax. →
Step forward

You spend too much time on social media
comparing yourself to others. → Step back

You receive encouragement from someone who
believes in you. → Step forward

You bottle up your emotions and feel like no one
understands. → Step back

Adding a "Support System":

If someone steps too far back and is close to
"falling off," they can receive a "support cushion"
(a real cushion or a peer's encouraging words).

Peers can suggest ways to help them regain
balance, like talking to someone, taking a break,
or practicing self-care.

This reinforces that no one has to face struggles
alone.

Debriefing Questions:

How did it feel to move forward and backward
during the game?

What situations made you feel the most
unstable?



Did the "support system" help? How does this apply to real life?

What are some small actions we can take to regain balance when we feel off?

How can youth centers be a safe space for mental well-being?

Conclusion:

Mental well-being is not a straight path—everyone experiences ups and downs. But with awareness, self-care, and support from others, we can maintain our balance. Youth centers can play a crucial role in creating safe spaces, building friendships, and providing resources for mental well-being.

💡 Final reflection:

Encourage participants to share one positive action they will take to support their well-being after this session.

Game Title: "The Garden of Wellbeing"

Introduction:

Mental health and wellbeing flourish when we nurture them, just like a garden. In this activity, participants will create a symbolic "wellbeing garden" by exploring personal and collective experiences of mental health in a safe, reflective, and creative way. Through storytelling, drawing, and discussion, they will identify the elements that support or challenge their mental wellbeing.

Objectives:

- To create a safe and comfortable environment for participants to express their emotions and thoughts on mental wellbeing.
 - To encourage reflection on personal and collective factors that influence mental health.
 - To strengthen group connection and trust through shared experiences.
 - To introduce the idea of self-care as an ongoing and intentional practice.
-

Method:

Materials:

- Large sheets of paper or flipcharts
- Colored markers, pencils, or crayons

- A set of printed or written "garden elements" (e.g., soil, water, sunlight, seeds, weeds, pests) with metaphorical meanings related to wellbeing

Steps:

1. Setting the Scene (10 min):

- o Invite participants to sit in a circle and close their eyes for a short guided visualization.
- o Ask them to imagine a garden. What does it look like? What is growing? Is it well taken care of or neglected?
- o Transition into thinking about mental health: "Our minds and emotions are like a garden. They need care, nourishment, and attention."

2. Creating the Wellbeing Garden (25 min):

- o Divide participants into small groups (3-5 people).
- o Give each group a large sheet of paper and ask them to draw a garden.
- o Introduce "garden elements" and their wellbeing metaphors:

□ Soil (foundation, values, and beliefs that support wellbeing)

□ Water (things that nourish us, e.g., support from friends, hobbies)

□ Sunlight (positive influences, e.g., encouragement, self-care)

□ Seeds (small habits or actions that promote wellbeing)

□ Weeds (negative habits, stressors, or unhelpful thoughts)

□ Pests (external challenges, societal pressures, toxic environments)

o Groups discuss and add these elements to their garden, writing or drawing examples from their own lives.

3. Gallery Walk (10 min):

- o Each group presents their garden and explains the elements they included.
- o Encourage participants to notice similarities and differences in perspectives.

Debriefing Questions:

- How did it feel to reflect on mental health in this creative way?
 - Which garden elements do you personally relate to the most?
 - Were there any surprises or insights in your group discussions?
 - What are some ways we can "take care" of our mental health gardens?
 - How can we support each other in our wellbeing?
-



Conclusion:

This activity highlights that mental health, like a garden, requires continuous care. Sometimes we need to remove "weeds" (unhelpful thoughts or habits) and plant "seeds" (new, positive practices). By recognizing the factors that impact our wellbeing, we can create a supportive environment for ourselves and others.

"The Wellbeing Compass"

Introduction:

Mental health and wellbeing are personal journeys, and each person navigates challenges and emotions differently. In this activity, participants will explore their own wellbeing through the metaphor of a compass, identifying what helps them find direction, what throws them off course, and how they can stay balanced.



This interactive exercise uses movement, personal reflection, and group discussion to create a safe space for participants to express their thoughts and feelings about mental health in a non-judgmental way.

Objectives:

- To create a safe and comfortable space for participants to explore their mental wellbeing.
- To help participants identify personal strengths, challenges, and coping strategies.
- To encourage self-awareness and collective support in navigating mental health.
- To promote empathy and active listening in a group setting.

Method:

Materials:



- Four signs labeled NORTH (Strengths), EAST (Support), SOUTH (Challenges), WEST (Coping Strategies) placed in different corners of the room.
- Open space for movement.
- A set of prompt cards with questions for each direction.

Steps:

1. Setting the Scene (5 min):

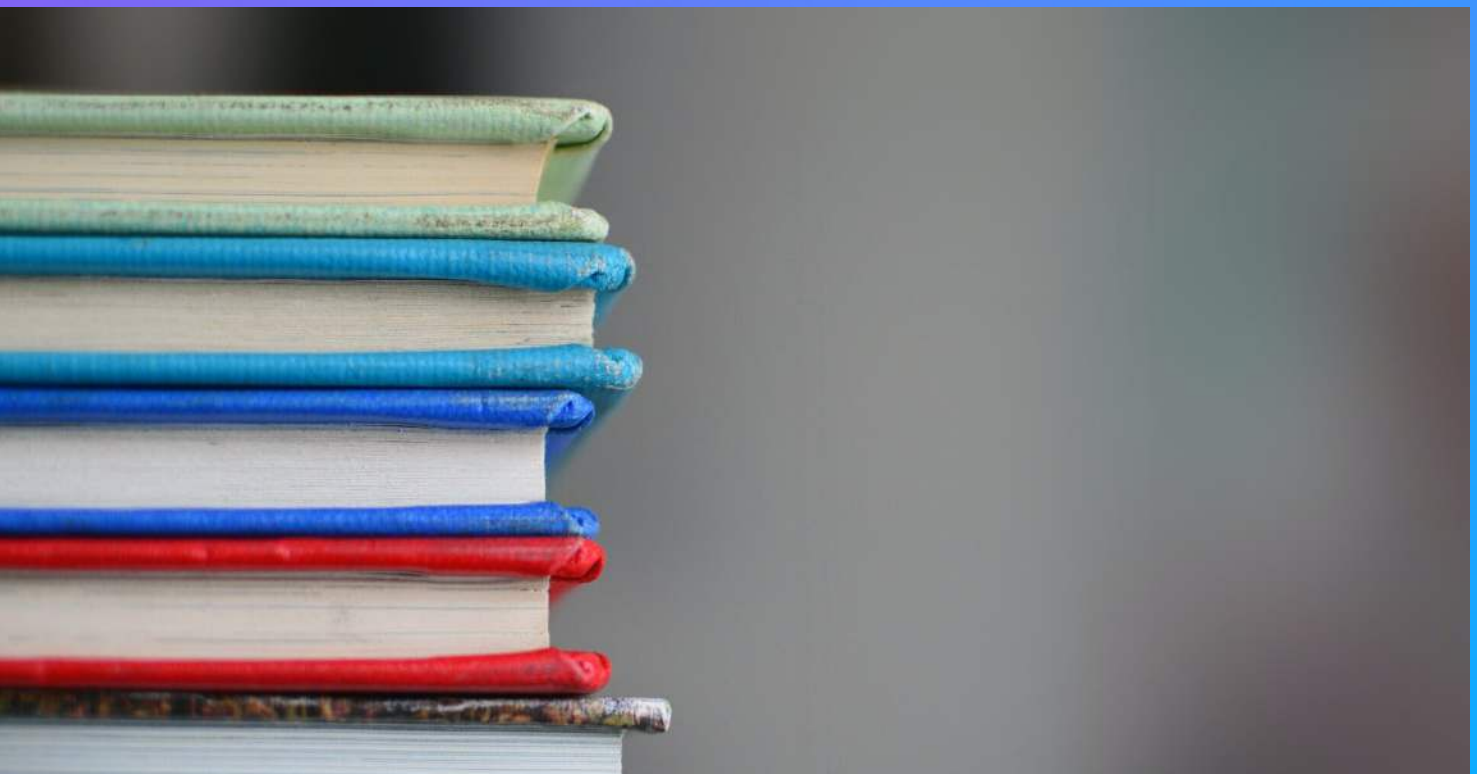
- o Gather participants in a circle and introduce the idea of a Wellbeing Compass.
- o Explain that, just like a compass guides us on a journey, we all have different internal compasses that help us navigate wellbeing.
- o Briefly introduce the meaning of each direction:

- NORTH = Strengths (What helps me feel strong and balanced?)
- EAST = Support (Who or what supports me when I need it?)
- SOUTH = Challenges (What difficulties or struggles impact my wellbeing?)
- WEST = Coping Strategies (How do I manage stress and difficult emotions?)

2. Exploring the Compass (20 min):

- o Participants move freely around the room as the facilitator reads different statements (see examples below).
- o When they hear a statement that resonates with them, they move to the direction they feel best represents their answer.
- o Once in place, they briefly discuss with others in their area why they chose that direction.

Sample statements:



Encourage participants to take a moment to think about their "true north"—one strength they will rely on in challenging times—and, if they feel comfortable, share it with the group.

Social media "Scroll for Wellbeing"

Introduction:

Social media can be a double-edged sword—it can either support mental health and wellbeing or contribute to stress and anxiety. This activity helps participants reflect on how they use social media and encourages them to explore positive and mindful ways to engage with online platforms to support their mental wellbeing.

Objectives:

To raise awareness about the impact of social media on mental health.

To encourage mindful and positive use of social media for wellbeing.

To identify strategies for creating a healthier digital space.

Method:

Materials:

Printed or written "social media posts" (both positive and negative examples).

A set of printed emojis (happy, sad, anxious, inspired, neutral).

Steps:

Warm-Up Discussion (5 min):

Ask participants: "How does social media make you feel?"

Gather quick responses and introduce the idea that social media can both support and harm mental wellbeing.

"Scroll & React" Activity (10 min):

Scatter pre-made "social media posts" around the room. Examples include:

Positive post: "Daily reminder: You are enough! 🧡"

Negative post: "Everyone else is doing better than me... 😞"

Informative post: "Did you know that deep breathing can reduce stress?"

Toxic comparison post: "Look at this perfect vacation... wish I had a life like this."

Participants walk around, read the posts, and place an emoji card next to each one based on how it makes them feel.

Group Reflection (10 min):

Discuss: Which posts made you feel good? Which made you feel uncomfortable? Why?

Ask: How can we make our social media feeds more positive?

Brainstorm ideas for using social media to boost mental health (e.g., following positive pages, setting screen time limits, engaging in uplifting conversations).

Debriefing Questions:

How does the content you consume on social media impact your mood?

What are some small changes you can make to improve your social media experience?

How can we use social media to promote mental wellbeing instead of harming it?

Conclusion:

Social media is a powerful tool, and we have control over how we use it. By being mindful about what we engage with and share, we can create a healthier digital environment that supports our mental wellbeing. Encourage participants to take one positive action—unfollow a negative page, follow a mental health resource, or start posting uplifting content!

Social MEDIA "Social Media Wellbeing Challenge"

Introduction:

Social media is a powerful tool that can influence our mental health, either positively or negatively. This team-based game challenges participants to critically evaluate online behavior and create strategies for using social media in a way that promotes wellbeing and mental health.



Objectives:

- To encourage critical thinking about how social media impacts mental wellbeing.
 - To promote teamwork in finding solutions for a healthier digital experience.
 - To inspire positive online habits that enhance mental health.
-

Method

Materials:

- Printed challenge cards with different social media scenarios.
- Large sheets of paper and markers for brainstorming solutions.
- A timer.

Steps:

1. Form Teams (5 min):

- o Divide participants into small teams (3–5 people per team).

- o Explain that each team will receive social media-related challenges and must come up with creative solutions.

2. Challenge Round (15 min):

- o Each team picks a challenge card (or is assigned one randomly).

- o They have 5 minutes to discuss and create a solution.

- o Example challenges:

- "Toxic Comparison Trap" – Your friend keeps comparing themselves to influencers online. What advice do you give them?

- "Endless Scrolling" – You notice you're spending hours mindlessly scrolling. How can you set better limits?

- "Spreading Positivity" – How can you use social media to make someone's day better?

- "Cyberbullying Response" – You see a negative comment on a friend's post. What's the best way to respond?





□ "Mental Health Content" – What are good examples of social media accounts that promote mental wellbeing?

3. Presentation & Discussion (10 min):

- o Each team presents their challenge and solution.
- o After each presentation, other teams can provide feedback or suggest additional ideas.

Debriefing Questions:

- What did you learn about the impact of social media on mental health?
- Did any solutions surprise you?

- What are some easy changes we can all make to use social media in a healthier way?
 - How can we support each other in maintaining a positive online experience?
-

Conclusion:

Social media is what we make of it! By being mindful and proactive, we can create a digital space that supports mental wellbeing instead of harming it. Challenge participants to take one positive action today—whether it's limiting screen time, following a wellbeing account, or sharing an uplifting message online.



ANXIETY MANAGEMENT

"The Anchor in the Storm"

Introduction:

Anxiety and panic can feel like a storm—sudden, overwhelming, and difficult to control. In this activity, participants will explore different grounding techniques and coping strategies to help them manage anxiety or panic moments. Through movement, breathing, and discussion, they will develop a personal "anchor" they can use when feeling overwhelmed.

Objectives:

To help youth recognize the signs of anxiety and panic.

To introduce simple, effective grounding techniques to regain control in overwhelming situations.

To promote self-awareness and resilience in managing stress.

To create a safe space for sharing and learning from each other's experiences.



Method

Materials:

Printed or written coping strategies (breathing exercises, sensory grounding techniques, positive affirmations, etc.).

Small objects (e.g., stones, stress balls, fidget items).

Music (calm instrumental sounds for relaxation).

Steps:

Setting the Scene (5 min):

Ask participants: "What does anxiety feel like in the body?"

Collect answers and validate experiences (e.g., racing heart, shaky hands, dizziness).

Introduce the idea that anxiety is like a storm, but we can find ways to anchor ourselves.

The "Storm" Experience (5 min):

Play fast, chaotic instrumental music.

Can you think of a time when you felt anxious—how could one of these techniques have helped?

How can we remind ourselves to use these strategies in real-life situations?

How can we support others who might be feeling anxious or panicked?

Conclusion:

Anxiety and panic are natural responses to stress, but we don't have to let them take control. By learning simple grounding techniques, we can anchor ourselves and ride out the storm.

Encourage participants to practice their chosen strategy over the next week and share their experience in a follow-up discussion.

Game Title: "The Calm Compass"

Introduction:

Anxiety and panic can make us feel lost, as if we're spinning in every direction without a sense of control. In this activity, participants will explore different strategies for managing panic or anxiety by creating a personal "calm compass." This compass will guide them to specific actions that can help them regain a sense of balance and calm.

Objectives:

To help youth identify and practice different coping strategies for managing anxiety and panic.

To create a personal toolkit (calm compass) for navigating moments of stress.

To promote self-awareness and resilience when facing difficult emotions.

To create a safe and supportive environment for sharing experiences and learning together.

Method

Materials:

Large sheets of paper, markers, and colored pencils.

Printed or written coping strategies (breathing exercises, grounding techniques, positive self-talk, physical activities).

Small pieces of paper or cards for writing down strategies.

Steps:

Setting the Scene (5 min):

Ask participants: "When you feel lost or overwhelmed, what helps you find your way back to calm?"

Collect answers and explain that everyone has different ways of coping, like using a compass to find direction.

Introduce the idea of creating a calm compass with four main directions: NORTH (Breathe), EAST (Ground), SOUTH (Move), WEST (Speak).

Exploring Strategies (15 min):



Introduce different strategies for each compass direction:

NORTH (Breathe): Breathing exercises like deep breathing, box breathing, or 4-7-8 breathing.

EAST (Ground): Grounding techniques like the 5-4-3-2-1 method, using a sensory object, or pressing feet into the ground.

SOUTH (Move): Physical actions like stretching, shaking out stress, or taking a walk.

WEST (Speak): Positive self-talk, using affirmations, or reaching out to a friend for support.

Allow participants to try each strategy and choose one they feel comfortable using in each direction.

Creating the Calm Compass (10 min):

Each participant draws a compass on a large sheet of paper.

In each direction (N, E, S, W), they write down one strategy they will use in moments of anxiety or panic.

Decorate the compass to make it personal and meaningful.

Compass Sharing Circle (5 min):

Participants sit in a circle and, if they feel comfortable, share one strategy from their compass.

Emphasize that everyone's compass is unique and that different strategies work for different people.

Debriefing Questions:

How did it feel to explore different coping strategies?

Which direction of your compass do you think you'll use the most? Why?

Can you think of a recent moment of stress where this compass could have helped you?

How can we support each other in using our calm compasses?





What can you do to remind yourself to use your calm compass during difficult times?

Conclusion:

When anxiety or panic strikes, having a personal calm compass can help guide us back to a place of balance and control. Remind participants that it's important to practice these strategies regularly so they become second nature. Encourage them to keep their calm compass somewhere visible or easy to access as a reminder in moments of need.

Game Title: "Steady Steps to Calm"

Introduction:

Anxiety can feel like losing your balance on a shaky path. This activity introduces grounding techniques to help youth regain their calm and steady themselves when faced with panic or overwhelming stress. Through movement, creative expression, and discussion, participants will explore simple steps to manage anxiety effectively.

Objectives:

To help youth identify the physical and emotional signs of anxiety and panic.

To introduce practical techniques for grounding and calming the mind and body.

To encourage self-awareness and resilience in stressful situations.

To promote empathy and mutual support within the group.



As they walk, the facilitator reads scenarios that might trigger anxiety (e.g., a stressful exam, social pressure, unexpected change).

If a participant feels “off-balance” (physically or mentally), they step off the path.

Steady Steps (10 min):

Introduce “Steady Steps” cards, each with a grounding exercise:

Breathe Deeply: Inhale slowly for 4 seconds, hold for 4, exhale for 4.

Feet on the Ground: Feel the floor beneath your feet, notice how it supports you.

Sensory Focus: Hold an object and describe its texture, color, and temperature.

Positive Affirmation: Repeat a calming phrase (“I am safe. This will pass.”).

Count Backwards: Count down from 10, focusing on each number.

Participants choose a “Steady Step” and practice it before trying to walk the path again.

Drawing Calm (5 min):

After practicing grounding techniques, participants draw a symbol or picture that represents calm and steadiness to them.

Debriefing Questions:

How did it feel to walk the balance path?

Which grounding technique helped you regain balance the most?

Can you share a time when you felt anxious? How could these techniques help in that situation?

What symbol did you draw for calm, and why?

How can you remind yourself to use these steps when feeling overwhelmed?

Conclusion:

Anxiety may throw us off balance, but with simple grounding techniques, we can steady ourselves and find calm. Encourage participants to practice their chosen “Steady Step” throughout the week and check in with each other for support. Together, we can help each other stay grounded in moments of stress.

Reading for resilience

Reading and discussing what you have read can be a very helpful tool for you to understand yourself, others and the world better. Reading can make you travel to other worlds, open your mind and mirror yourself in the life of another person. Discussing the book or poem will give it more depth and give you a chance to visit difficult situations without talking from a “me-perspective”. This can help us feel less alone, isolated, and give us empathy for others as well.

Even if you are a new reader or if you are a reluctant reader, you can always be a part of a group who discuss texts. Even if you don't like what you have read, you can discuss with the group why you don't like it and what memories this brings for you. In a discussion like this, you can walk from the group session with a smile on your face and with a deeper understanding of why you feel like you do. Talking in a small, safe group can encourage you to share your own experiences and make connections to other individuals.



We want to encourage you to use reading as a tool for you to work with mental health in your youth groups as a youth worker. Why not make into a game?

Preparation

How to do it?

Select 4–5 youths in a group. They don't have to know each other from before, but you have to know the youths and their histories. We want to create a safe space within the group, so choose carefully.



You have to have a colleague with you during the session so that if discussions comes to a stop, you can get it going again. In addition, while discussing texts people can react differently. If someone gets a “bad reaction”, the youth worker can take that youth to the side, calm him or her down, and talk it through.

What should we read?

I say “reading”, but reading comes in many forms. I propose that you use the poem “They should have asked my husband” by Pam Ayres. You can either print the poem from her website, or watch the author read it on her official YouTube channel. If you have a group that is reluctant to reading, the YouTube-video might be a smart choice. Also, print the poem so that you can follow the text while discussing.

I suggest this poem because Pam changes it every time she performs it so that it will be up to date with what is happening in the world. It is also fun, critical and it is easily discussed.



Preparations

We have prepared a couple of questions below that you can use. Read through them to exclude some if you think they would be triggering for the youths, it all depends on the group. Write the numbers on either popsicle sticks or on small pieces of paper.

If you choose popsicle sticks, place them with the numbers down in a cup on the table in front of you. Print the questions out and cut them out with a scissor, fold them so that the text does not show and write the numbers on the back.

If you choose small pieces of paper, print the questions out, but space the text out so you can cut it in equal pieces with the scissors. Write the numbers on the back of the paper and spread the papers on the table with the numbers up.

Game time!

Gather your youths around a table. Preferable sitting down.

Do an icebreaker to lighten mood in the room (optional).

Introduce them to the game.

Spread the numbers on the table/ put the popsicle sticks on the table.

Read the poem/ listen to the poem.

Draw a number on the paper/popsicle stick. The person drawing the number reads the question. Everyone answers. Choose another person to draw a new number, read, answer, repeat.



What do you think the characters do for a living?

How/where, did the characters grow up?

Do you relate in any way?

Final notes

If you want to use this method, I strongly recommend you to read Bibliotherapy toolkit by John Duffy, Jo Haslam, Lesley Holl and Julie Worker from Kirklees council. It can be read in full text on scribd, and is 32 pages long. Here is the link (working as of 2024-09-27).

[Bibliotherapy Toolkit | PDF | Mental Health Professional | Nursing \(scribd.com\)](#)

I have been inspired from the toolkit to make this game as a tool for youth workers to use even if they not are educated in Bibliotherapy. This game is more like the social model of Bibliotherapy with more flexibility than other models.

We've also received Pam's permission to print the poem for this assignment, and you can print it out if you have to.

This game was tested with the youths I work with, and we have modified the questions after feedback from the group.

When we tried the game, it took about two hours to finish all the questions, but it's not necessary for you to try all of them if you don't have time.

The youths did not know each other before, and they were a bit careful at first. One of the youths also have a history of severe anxiety and is insecure in new constellations of people, and creating a safe environment was key because of this.

The result was a group that bonded quite fast, laughing, sharing, and they did not want to stop! It really brought the group together and they insisted on doing this again. The youth with a history of anxiety also wanted to join us for more sessions with this group, which is the first group activity in years where the youth felt safe and comfortable.

THEY SHOULD HAVE ASKED MY HUSBAND

BY PAM AYRES

You know, this world is complicated and
imperfect and oppressed,
And it's not hard to feel timid,
apprehensive and depressed,
It seems that all around us, tides of
questions ebb and flow,
And people want solutions, but they
don't know where to go.

Opinions abound but who is wrong and
who is right?

People need a prophet, a diffuser of the
light,
Someone they can turn to as the crises
rage and swirl,
Someone with the remedy, the wisdom,
the pearl...

* Well they should have asked my
husband, he's a man who likes his say,
With his thoughts on immigration,
teenage mums, Theresa May,
The future of the monarchy, the latest
Brexit shocks,
The wait for hip replacements, and the
rubbish on the box.



Yes, they should have asked my
husband, he can sort out any mess,
He can rejuvenate the railways, he
can cure the NHS,
So any little niggle, anything you want
to know,
Just run it past my husband, wind
him up and let him go.

Congestion on the motorways, free
holidays for thugs,
The damage to the ozone layer,
refugees, drugs,
These may defeat the brain of any
politician bloke,
But present it to my husband, he will
solve it at a stroke.



He'll clarify the situation, he will make it
crystal clear,
You'll feel the glazing of your eyeballs
and the bending of your ear,
You may lose the will to live, you may
feel your shoulders slump,
When he talks about the President, Mr.
Donald Trump. *

Upon these areas he brings his intellect
to shine,
In a great compelling voice that's twice
as loud as yours or mine,
I often wonder what it must be like to be
so strong,
Infallible, articulate, self-confident and
wrong.

When it comes to tolerance, he hasn't
got a lot,
Joy riders should be guillotined, and
muggers should be shot,
The sound of his own voice becomes
like music to his ears,
And he hasn't got an inkling that he's
boring us to tears.



My friends don't call so often, they have busy lives I know,
But it's not every day you want to hear a windbag suck and blow,
Google? Safari? On them we never call,
Why bother with computers...when my husband knows it all.

Star Breathing

by Raisa Zammit

Introduction:

Star breathing is a mindfulness technique that involves visualising the shape of a star while practicing deep breathing exercises. Star breathing is an engaging way to use deep breathing to help calm the body and mind. It allows the participants to visualise their breathing. It helps youth develop mindfulness skills, regulate their breathing, and shift their focus away from distressing thoughts. Additionally, this technique can also serve as a helpful tool for redirecting and refocusing youths during tasks or activities. By engaging in star breathing, they can bring their attention back to the present moment and cultivate concentration.

Guidelines:

Participants: Youth aged between 13–18

Space: Indoor/outdoor

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper.



Tips:

1. Depending on the group of youth you are carrying this activity with, one can opt to use a printed template of a star.

Method:

Pass a piece of paper and a pen to each participant.

Ask the participants to draw a five-pointed star on the paper.

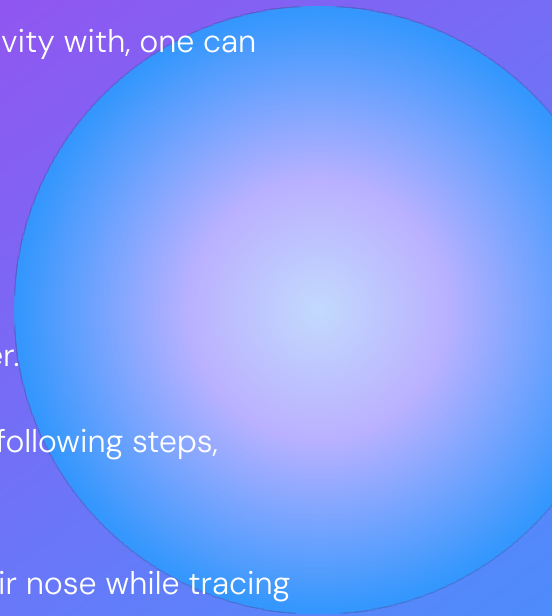
After they draw the star, guide the participants through the following steps, linking each step with a point of the star.

Inhale: Instruct the participants to inhale deeply through their nose while tracing the first line of the star.

Hold: Once they reach the end of the first line, have the participants hold their breath for a brief moment.

Exhale: Next, instruct the participants to exhale slowly and completely through their mouth while tracing the second line of the star. As they trace the line, they should imagine releasing any tension or stress from their mind and body.

Repeat the process, inhaling deeply through the nose while exhaling through the mouth with each line on the star until the participants reach the starting point.



FOUR ON THE COUCH

A teambuilding, indoor memory group game

A team-building indoor group game.

Fosters memory and communication skills.

Ideal for youths aged 12 + .

The aim of this game is to have only your teammates sitting on the couch/ chairs.

What do you need?

4 chairs / 1 bench / 1 couch

1 chair for every participant apart from those that are sitting on the couch.

The Setup:

Divide into Teams: Split all players into two teams of equal size. Each team should have at least three players.

Arrange the Playing Area: Place a couch or large enough seating area in the center of the room. This will serve as the "couch" for the game.

Assign Starting Positions: Each team decides which three players will start the game seated on the couch. The remaining players stand beside the couch.

The Method:

Starting the Round: One player from each team (not seated on the couch) is designated as the "caller." The caller counts down from three, and on "Go!" all players not on the couch rush to sit down. The goal is for each team to have all four of their teammates seated on the couch.

Seat Rotation: If a team successfully gets all four members seated on the couch, they

The Rush: Players must quickly scramble to find a seat on the couch. However, there are only four seats available, so players must race to secure a spot.

What part of the activity did you feel like it was the most challenging?

How did you feel when you saw the couch filling in with people of the opposing team?

Was it problematic to figure out the different names of your teammates?

What strengths did you observe in yourself and your teammates during the game?

How does the experience of playing this game relate to real-life situations or challenges?

Applying this activity in real life:

Meeting new people helps in gaining knowledge. This action gives more opportunities to the individuals as long as their compatible mates are chosen carefully and protected.

One of the main goals in this game is that, just like the youths will find it a tad difficult to figure out each other's names, it will be a challenge for us, youth workers, as well to remember the youth's name in a short time ... thus they shall not be offended if their name is not learnt immediately.

A YouTube tutorial:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hvWV0qzf-o>

Youth, Mental wellbeing and Erasmus+

My Wellbeing Roadmap: Navigating Mental Health in Life & Erasmus+

Mental wellbeing is like a journey—it requires planning, support, and the right tools to stay on track. This activity helps young people (ages 14–18 and 18–25) create a personal wellbeing roadmap, identifying strategies to support their mental health both in daily life and within Erasmus+ experiences.

Introduction:

For young people engaging in Erasmus+ programs (youth exchanges, volunteering, training courses, etc.), managing mental health can be even more important as they face new challenges, cultures, and environments.

Through this game, participants will reflect on their needs, set personal wellbeing goals, and explore how Erasmus+ can support their mental health and growth.



Objectives:

To help participants reflect on their personal mental wellbeing and daily challenges.

To develop personalized strategies for maintaining wellbeing in youth work, school, or Erasmus+ programs.

To encourage peer support and self-awareness in navigating mental health challenges.

To connect personal wellbeing to opportunities in Erasmus+ (travel, intercultural experiences, self-development).

Method:

Materials:

Large sheets of paper or printed "Wellbeing Roadmap" templates.

Markers, pens, sticky notes.



Pre-written "Wellbeing Stations" (checkpoints for reflection and planning).

A printed list of Erasmus+ opportunities related to personal growth and wellbeing.

Steps:

1. Setting the Scene (5 min)

Ask participants: "If your wellbeing were a journey, where would you be right now? Are you cruising smoothly, facing roadblocks, or feeling lost?"

Introduce the concept of a Wellbeing Roadmap, which helps them navigate mental health challenges and opportunities.

Mention that Erasmus+ is a powerful tool for growth and resilience—learning new skills, meeting diverse people, and gaining independence.

2. Building the Wellbeing Roadmap (20 min)

Participants receive a Wellbeing Roadmap Template divided into 5 key "Wellbeing Stations":



🌱 Station 1: My Starting Point (Where am I now?)

How do I currently feel about my mental health and wellbeing?

What areas of my life (school, relationships, self-confidence, Erasmus+ experiences) bring me stress or joy?

🤝 Station 2: My Support Systems (Who and what helps me?)

Who are the people (family, friends, youth workers, Erasmus+ peers) that support my wellbeing?

What activities help me feel relaxed and mentally strong?

🚧 Station 3: My Challenges & Roadblocks (What gets in my way?)

What personal struggles, habits, or external factors affect my mental health?

Have I experienced stress or anxiety in new environments (school, Erasmus+, travel, youth projects)?

 Station 4: My Action Plan (How do I move forward?)

What are 2-3 small actions I can take to improve my wellbeing? (Examples: setting social media boundaries, practicing self-care, joining a youth project to boost confidence).

If I were to join an Erasmus+ activity, how could I prepare mentally for the experience?

 Station 5: My Wellbeing & Erasmus+ (How can Erasmus+ help me grow?)

Which Erasmus+ opportunities could help my wellbeing?

For 14-18: Youth exchanges, cultural trips, online workshops, volunteering with youth organizations.



For 18–25: Erasmus+ Training Courses, volunteering through ESC (European Solidarity Corps), internships abroad, leadership roles in youth work.

What personal skills do I want to develop through Erasmus+ (resilience, communication, independence)?

3. Peer Sharing & Feedback (10 min)

Participants pair up and exchange their Wellbeing Roadmaps.

Each partner gives positive feedback and one suggestion on how the other can improve their wellbeing plan.

Encourage some volunteers to share key points with the group.

Debriefing Questions:

What did you learn about your own wellbeing needs?

Did anything surprise you when mapping your wellbeing journey?

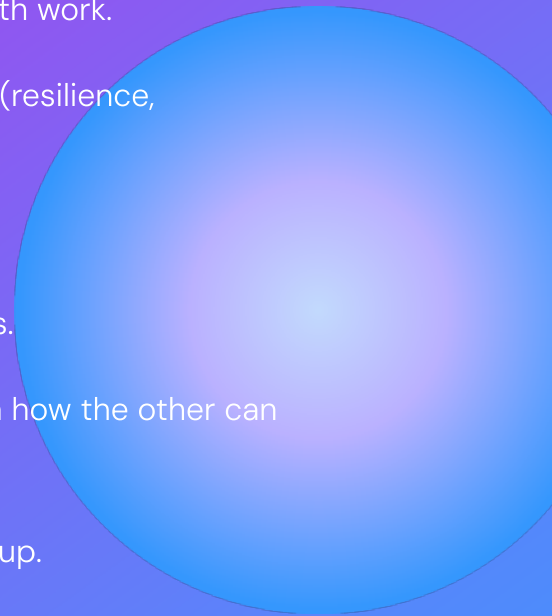
How can Erasmus+ experiences support mental health and self-growth?

What small action will you take immediately to improve your wellbeing?

Conclusion:

Mental wellbeing is an ongoing journey—sometimes smooth, sometimes challenging. But with support systems, personal strategies, and opportunities like Erasmus+, young people can build resilience and create meaningful experiences.

Encourage participants to choose one step from their roadmap and commit to it. Remind them that Erasmus+ offers life-changing opportunities to grow mentally, socially, and emotionally!



"The Wellbeing Backpack: Packing for a Healthy Erasmus+ Experience"

Introduction:

Preparing for an Erasmus+ youth exchange is exciting, but it also comes with new experiences, challenges, and emotions. Just like we pack a physical suitcase, we also need to "pack" mental wellbeing tools to help us navigate cultural differences, group dynamics, and being in a new environment.

This interactive game helps participants identify personal wellbeing needs, potential challenges, and coping strategies before they embark on their Erasmus+ journey.

Objectives:

To help participants reflect on what they need for a mentally and emotionally healthy Erasmus+ experience.

To identify potential stressors and coping mechanisms in a new cultural and group setting.

To develop self-awareness and support networks before departure.

To encourage participants to take responsibility for their own wellbeing during the exchange.

Method

Materials:

Printed backpack templates (drawn or printed image of an open backpack).

Small "item" cards with different emotional, social, and mental health tools (see examples below).

Blank cards and markers for participants to create their own "tools".

Steps:

1. Setting the Scene (5 min)

Ask: "If you were packing a backpack for a long journey, what would be essential?"

Explain that, in addition to clothes and travel items, we also need mental and emotional resources to ensure a positive Erasmus+ experience.

Introduce the Wellbeing Backpack: Participants will "pack" their personal wellbeing toolkit with strategies and support systems for their upcoming exchange.


2. Packing the Wellbeing Backpack (15 min)


Give each participant a backpack template.


Spread "item" cards around the room. These represent mental, emotional, and social wellbeing strategies that could help them during the Erasmus+ experience.


Participants choose at least 5 items for their backpack and write or draw them inside the template.


Examples of "Item" Cards:

 Mindfulness & Self-Care (taking breaks, journaling, meditation)


 Physical Wellbeing (sleep, movement, healthy eating)


 Communication & Connection (staying in touch with friends, reaching out to group leaders)

 Handling Cultural Differences (curiosity, open-mindedness, non-judgmental attitude)

 Group Support (making friends, active listening, asking for help)

 Adaptability (accepting change, being flexible)

 Goal-Setting (reminding myself why I joined the exchange)

 Personal Comfort Items (music, books, a small object that makes me feel at home)

⌚ Time for Myself (alone time to recharge)

😊 Positive Mindset (celebrating small wins, practicing gratitude)

After choosing their items, participants can add their own ideas by writing new strategies on blank cards.

3. Pair Sharing & Group Discussion (10 min)

Pair up participants and ask them to explain why they chose their specific items.

Then, open a group discussion with the following questions:

Which wellbeing tools do you think will be the most useful?

What challenges do you think you might face during the exchange?

How can you support others in maintaining good mental health during the program?

4. Emergency Wellbeing Plan (5 min)



As a final step, ask participants to write down one coping strategy for when they feel stressed or overwhelmed during the exchange.

Examples:

"If I feel anxious, I will go for a short walk and breathe deeply."

"If I have a misunderstanding with someone, I will talk to them calmly and ask for help if needed."

"If I feel homesick, I will remind myself why I came here and reach out to a friend."

Debriefing Questions:

How does it feel to think about wellbeing before the exchange starts?

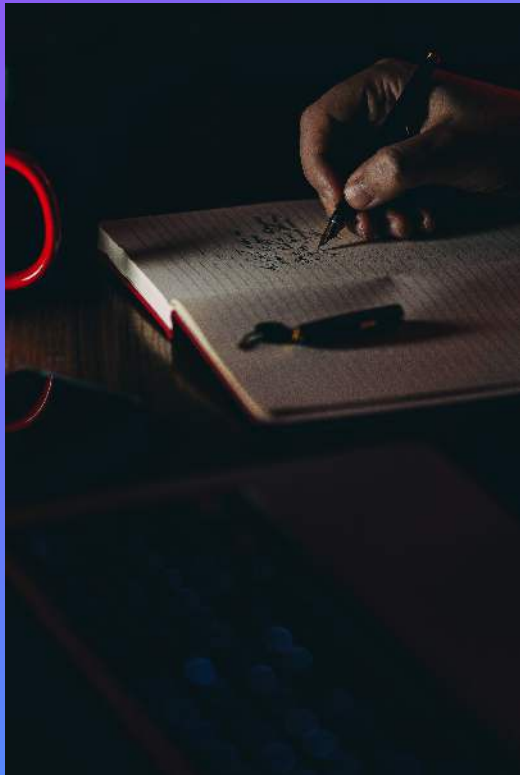
Which "items" in your backpack do you think you'll rely on the most?

How can you support each other's wellbeing during the exchange?

Conclusion:

Just like a real backpack, we carry our mental and emotional resources wherever we go. By identifying our needs, strengths, and support systems before the exchange, we can enjoy the experience fully while taking care of our mental wellbeing.

Encourage participants to keep their Wellbeing Backpack template and revisit it if they feel overwhelmed during the exchange.



Workshop Title: "Mindful Me: Building Healthy Mental Wellbeing Habits During Erasmus+"

Introduction

An Erasmus+ youth exchange is an exciting opportunity for learning, personal growth, and cultural exploration. However, being in a new environment, meeting new people, and stepping out of one's comfort zone can also be mentally and emotionally challenging.

This workshop will help participants develop healthy mental wellbeing habits that can support them during the exchange, allowing them to fully enjoy the experience while maintaining balance and self-care.

Objectives:

To raise awareness about the importance of mental wellbeing in a youth exchange.



The next person repeats that habit and adds their own.

Continue around the circle until everyone has contributed.

Debrief:

What did you notice about the habits shared?

Do they apply to an Erasmus+ setting?

2. Group Brainstorming: "What Affects Our Mental Wellbeing During Erasmus+" (15 min)

Activity:

In small groups, participants write down on sticky notes things that might affect their mental wellbeing during the exchange.

Examples: cultural differences, group conflicts, homesickness, new routines, fear of missing out, lack of personal space, language barriers.

Groups stick their notes on a flipchart labeled: Challenges to Wellbeing in Erasmus+.

Discussion:

Ask participants to share their biggest concerns.

Validate feelings and emphasize that these challenges are normal but can be managed with the right habits.

How do you feel after reflecting on your mental wellbeing?

Which habit do you think will be most useful for you?

How can we, as a group, support each other's wellbeing during the exchange?

Conclusion:

Mental wellbeing is key to having a positive and meaningful Erasmus+ experience. By practicing small, healthy habits, participants can navigate challenges, enjoy new experiences, and take care of themselves.

Encourage participants to check in with themselves and others throughout the exchange and remind them that wellbeing is a shared responsibility.

Workshop Title: "Balance in Motion: Staying Mentally Healthy During Erasmus+"

Introduction:

An Erasmus+ youth exchange is a time of excitement, growth, and learning, but it also comes with new challenges—adapting to a different environment, meeting new people, and stepping outside of comfort zones. This workshop will help participants develop balance in their mental wellbeing, recognizing how to manage stress, maintain self-care, and support each other during the exchange.

Using interactive activities, reflection, and movement, participants will gain practical strategies to stay mentally strong and enjoy their Erasmus+ experience fully.

Objectives:

To help participants recognize mental wellbeing challenges that can arise during Erasmus+.

How does this relate to mental wellbeing? (Some days we feel strong, other times we need support to stay balanced.)

2. "Wellbeing Balance Wheel" (15 min)

Show participants a large Wellbeing Balance Wheel, divided into six essential areas for a balanced Erasmus+ experience:

Social Connections (Making friends, feeling included)

Physical Wellbeing (Rest, food, movement)

Emotional Wellbeing (Managing stress, handling emotions)

Personal Space & Boundaries (Taking breaks, saying no)

Mindfulness & Relaxation (Being present, self-care)

Growth & Reflection (Learning, trying new things)

Activity:

Give participants stickers or markers and ask them to rate each area from 1 (low) to 5 (high) for how balanced they feel in their daily life.

Ask: Which areas feel strong? Which need more attention?

3. Erasmus+ Scenarios: "What Would You Do?" (20 min)

Participants split into small groups and receive a scenario related to mental wellbeing in Erasmus+.

They discuss and create solutions for handling the situation in a healthy way.

Example Scenarios:

How did it feel to explore wellbeing in a physical and interactive way?

Which part of the Wellbeing Balance Wheel do you think Erasmus+ will challenge the most?

What is one key takeaway from today's workshop?

Conclusion:

Mental wellbeing is all about balance—sometimes we feel strong, sometimes we need support. Erasmus+ is a fantastic opportunity for growth, but it's important to care for yourself and others along the way.

Encourage participants to check in with themselves regularly and remind them that taking care of mental health makes the exchange experience even better.

Why This Workshop Works for Erasmus+ Preparation?

- ✓ Uses movement-based learning to make wellbeing tangible.
- ✓ Helps participants identify real Erasmus+ challenges and prepare coping strategies.
- ✓ Encourages peer support and positive group dynamics.
- ✓ Leaves participants with practical tools they can use during the exchange.

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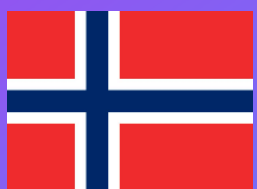
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