



SELF CARE  
for youth



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Testimonials from participants

# HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL, WHAT IS THE PROCESS, WHAT CAN YOU FIND WHERE?

This manual is designed as a practical, supportive guide that you can use for yourself, with colleagues in your organisation, and in your work with young people. It brings together the key learning from the Self Care for YOU(th) project into a collection of approaches that help you understand stress, reduce its impact, and strengthen wellbeing in simple everyday routines and practices.

You don't need to use this manual "perfectly" or in the "right order." Think of it as:

- a self-help resource for your own stress management and a tool to improve your wellbeing
- a toolkit for educators and youth workers to use in sessions, workshops, and classes
- and a collection of tested practices you can return to whenever you need a reset or a fresh idea.

## TWO WAYS TO READ IT

### 1 Step-by-step (learning journey)

If you want a structured process, follow the chapters in order. They build from understanding stress → to practicing tools → to applying them at work and with young people.

### 2 Toolbox (pick what you need today)

If you are short on time, jump straight to the section that matches your current situation — before a session, after a difficult day, or when you want ready-made activities for groups.

We created this tool as a way to support you, not to add another "should" to your workload. Start small:

choose one tool that feels realistic,



try it for a week,



and go further from there if it helps.

## WHAT WILL DEFINITELY HELP YOU TO MAXIMISE THE EFFECTS OF THIS MANUAL:

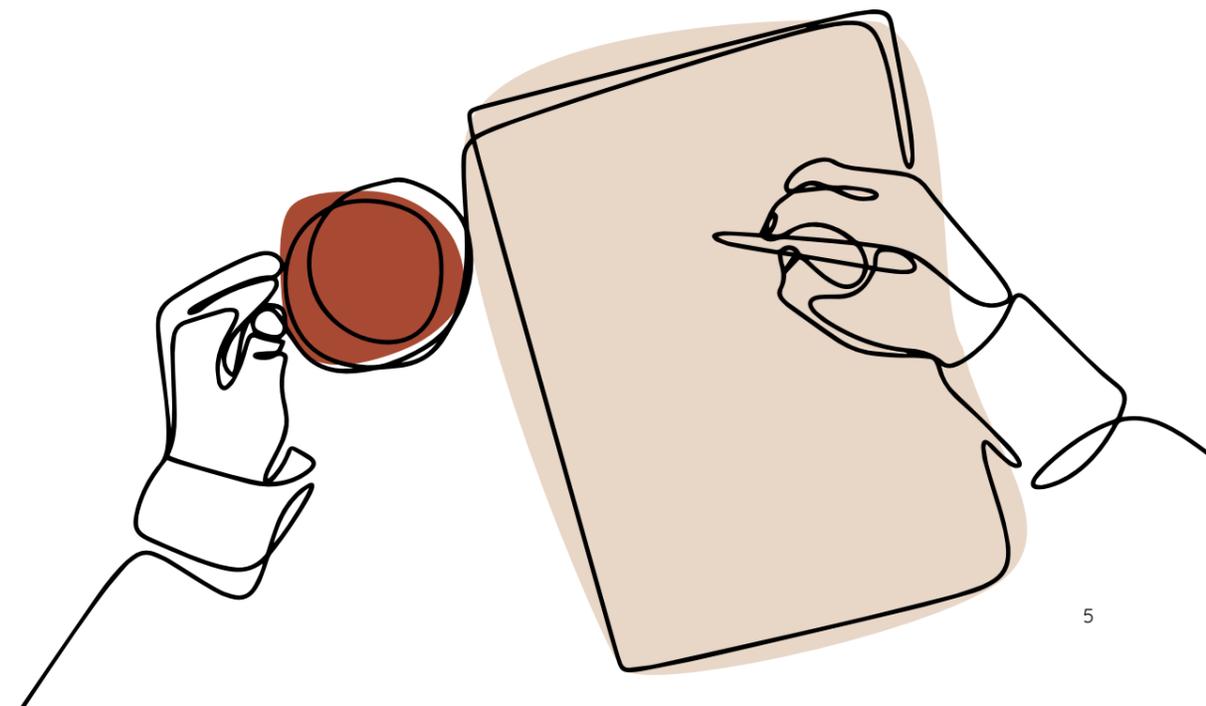
- Notice your experience and /or emotions without judging it
- use a notebook for the reflection and practices
- as much as we support your insights, more actions
- try things out and see what they bring you (or not)
- use your environment and your people to support you on this journey.

Small practices count — especially in times of ongoing uncertainty. You can involve colleagues, adapt activities for your group, and make the content your own.

The goal is not to eliminate stress completely, but to strengthen your capacity to notice it earlier, recover more often, and feel more supported while doing meaningful work.

Thank you for the work you do — and remember: caring for yourself is part of caring well for young people.

Enjoy!



# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 ABOUT THE SELF CARE FOR YOU(TH) PROJECT

Self Care for YOU(th) is a KA2 small scale partnership project in the field of YOUTH which gathered 4 organisations from Poland (Fundacja Młodzi Dla Europy), Greece (Hellenic Youth Participation), Slovenia (Mladinsko društvo Bakheros) and Turkey (Gürsu İlçe Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü). It was created to strengthen stress-management and self-care competences among youth workers and educators, and to translate these competences into practical support for young people in order to improve their wellbeing and resilience.

The project emerged from real challenges which we face in the field: partners from Poland, Greece, Slovenia and Turkey shared how stress is affecting not only personal wellbeing, but also the quality of youth work — patience, consistency, connection, and the ability to stay present with young people. The different contexts we, as partners work in, helped us realise the presence of this issue in both formal and non-formal environments, in urban and rural areas, among educators and young people from different backgrounds.

Self Care for YOU(th) responds to a reality many practitioners recognise: the last years have brought overlapping crises that intensify anxiety and a sense of uncertainty for both young people and the adults supporting them. The handbook you are reading is one of the project's key resources — aimed to be practical, accessible, and ready to use a collection of useful materials, practices and tools to support both young people and educators in different youth work contexts. If you are reading this, we hope it supports you too.

## 1.2 RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

### Why this project was needed?

In Europe and beyond, research and everyday practice point to increased stress, anxiety, and emotional strain linked to various local, regional, national and global events. Moreover, the decrease of mental wellbeing and lack of resilience keeps on rising throughout the recent years. If we are to mention just the span of key global 'shakes' in Europe in 2020-2025:

The COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted routines, relationships, learning, and feelings of safety and security.

The armed conflict in Ukraine, which contributed to an ongoing atmosphere of uncertainty, fear, helplessness, and worry about the future.

Rising inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, which increased everyday pressure on families and organisations — making basic needs, housing, transport, and planning for the future feel less stable.

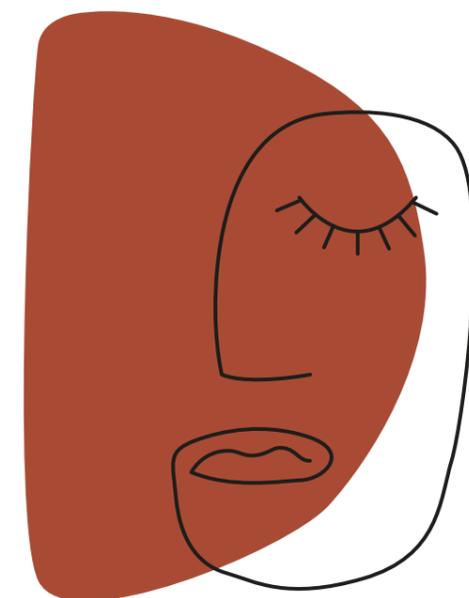
Increased arrival of migrants and refugees, which created urgent needs for inclusion, psychosocial support, language-sensitive strategies, and safe community spaces — often with limited resources and high emotional load for staff which hasn't been prepared for that.

Political instability and polarisation, which can heighten social tension, uncertainty, and mistrust, and may spill into classrooms, youth groups, and communities — making it harder to sustain a sense of safety and belonging.

Forest fires in Greece (and broader climate-related emergencies), which bring direct disruption and loss for some communities and a wider "climate anxiety" for many — reinforcing a sense that danger can be sudden and uncontrollable.

The earthquakes in Türkiye, which caused severe trauma for many people and also increased a broader sense of vulnerability and lack of safety — even among those not directly affected.

Young people are often among those most impacted. Many feel overwhelmed, lost, or unsure how to ask for help — especially when the adults around them are also stretched and exhausted. At the same time, youth work and education professionals report increased workload, blurred boundaries, and emotional pressure in supporting young people through prolonged uncertainty.



## Objectives of the project were to:

- identify the stress factors which influence youth workers in partner countries
- equip participants with the theoretical knowledge on the nature of stress
- to train youth workers in using stress-management tools in youth work in different contexts
- to share good practices in stress management in education and youth work
- to acquire concrete skills in time-management and learn how it can contribute to dealing with stress
- to learn about stress-management tools which can be used in work with young people in order to address their study-related stress and develop their emotional intelligence
- provide educators with accessible stress-management tools for personal everyday use in the form of a manual
- to learn how mindfulness can contribute to eliminating stress and learn about MBSR (mindfulness based stress reduction) techniques.

## 1.3 OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE OF A HANDBOOK

This handbook is designed as a tested, practical manual for youth workers, educators, and (in adapted form) young people. It offers a collection of methods and practices to address stress-related challenges and promote wellbeing on a daily basis.

A key promise of the project is that the methods in this handbook are not only theoretical: they were tested and evaluated during local phases to check that they are:

- realistic in everyday settings
- adaptable to diverse groups (especially youth from different backgrounds)
- and safe and easy to facilitate.

## WHAT WILL YOU FIND INSIDE

**Chapter 2 Core Concepts of Mental Wellbeing** focuses on some basic concepts around wellbeing and stress as well as some activities to support your journey in learning more about your own stress and factors that affect your wellbeing as well as various tools to support your wellbeing.

- 2.1 Defining Mental Wellbeing
- 2.2 State of mental health among young people in Greece, Poland and Slovenia
- 2.3 The Nature of Stress (Theory that Helps in Practice)
- 2.4 Assessing your state: where I am right now?
- 2.5 Everyday Self-Care Tools for Educators (Body, Breath, Art)
  - 2.5.1 Physical tools
  - 2.5.2 Art-based tools
  - 2.5.3 Small routines – big results.

**Chapter 3 Nature and Wellbeing** explores the role of nature in wellbeing and self-care and offers some practices to do in nature which could support you as well as offer some alternatives for urban environments.

- 3.1 The role of nature in wellbeing
- 3.2 Practices in nature for wellbeing
- 3.3 “Nature when you live in a city”
- 3.4 Using nature with groups.

**Chapter 4 Mindfulness & MBSR for Youth Workers** introduces mindfulness and MBSR-informed practices both for working environment and at home.

- 4.1 What mindfulness is (and isn't); ethics & safety
- 4.2 Practicing mindfulness: MBSR informed practices
- 4.3 Integrating mindfulness at work: brief practices, cues, common barriers
- 4.4 Mindful living in everyday life.

**Chapter 5 Time Management that Reduces Stress** offers some time-management tools which could support you to reduce unnecessary stress, linked to planning and boundaries.

- 5.1 Prioritising & planning: weekly map, batching, buffer time
- 5.2 Focus & attention hygiene: attention resets, boundaries with tech
- 5.3 Saying no & renegotiating commitments.

**Chapter 6** provides group tools you can use with young people which youth workers developed during the training “Self Care for You(th)”.

The final parts of this manual include some testimonials of participants as well as some resources for further reading/ exploration.

## 1.4 TARGET AUDIENCE AND USAGE

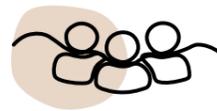
This handbook is written primarily for:



Youth workers, educators, trainers, facilitators, mentors



NGO staff and volunteers working with young people



Project coordinators and team leaders who want healthier life and work routines.

It is also suitable for adapting activities directly for young people (especially those aged roughly 13-19), with attention to safety and consent.

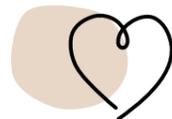
Where it can be used:



Schools and non-formal education programmes



Youth clubs and community spaces



NGO projects and activities



Staff training courses, peer-learning sessions, and supervision groups.

# 2

## CORE CONCEPTS OF MENTAL WELLBEING

### 2.1 DEFINING MENTAL WELLBEING

The WHO (2025) defines mental health as:

“A state of mental wellbeing in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

It emphasizes that mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders and is an integral part of overall health.

A respected English dictionary (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) definition states:

“Mental health is the condition of being sound mentally and emotionally, characterized by the absence of mental illness and adequate adjustment, reflected in comfort with oneself, positive feelings about others, and the ability to meet daily life demands.”

Another popular term ‘wellbeing’ is defined in the same dictionary as: the state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous.

In everyday language, wellbeing refers to how you are doing day to day in terms of your emotional and psychological functioning — things like feeling able to cope, having a sense of balance, maintaining relationships, and experiencing meaning or purpose. Mental health is the broader umbrella. It includes mental wellbeing, but also includes mental health difficulties and disorders.

## 5 STEPS TO MENTAL WELLBEING

1

### Connect with other people

Supportive relationships build belonging and self-worth, and they give space for both receiving and offering support.

**In youth work / education:** make time for real connection (even brief): a check-in question, a short team coffee, a buddy system, a “how are you really?” moment.

2

### Be physically active

Movement supports wellbeing and mood, and it does not have to mean intense exercise — what matters is finding something realistic and repeatable.

**In youth work / education:** walk-and-talks, movement breaks, stretching between sessions, or a short outdoor walk as a transition.

3

### Learn new skills

Learning boosts confidence, purpose, and connection, it also brings the feeling of fulfilment and growth — especially when it’s playful, relevant, and chosen freely.

**In youth work / education:** try a small new skill (a facilitation method, a creative tool, basic phrases in language young people use, a new recipe, a craft).

Alongside definitions, it can be helpful to have a simple, everyday framework for what supports mental wellbeing in practice. The UK National Health Service (NHS) summarises five steps that can strengthen mental wellbeing over time: connect, be active, learn new skills, give to others, and pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness).

4

### Give to others

Acts of kindness and giving can support wellbeing by creating positive feelings, purpose, and connection.

**In youth work / education:** gratitude messages, small helpful actions, peer support roles, volunteering, or simply listening with attention.

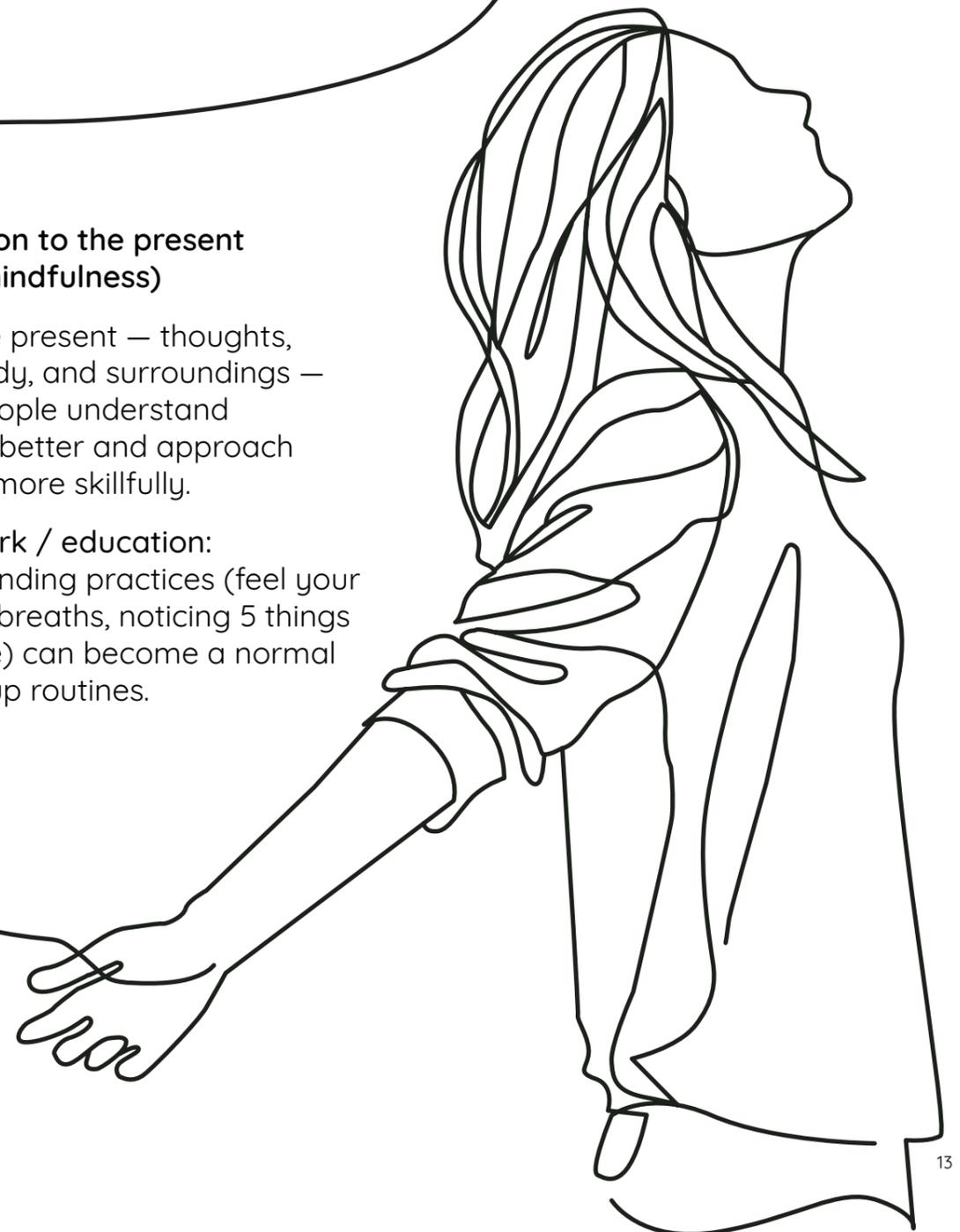
5

### Pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness)

Noticing the present — thoughts, feelings, body, and surroundings — can help people understand themselves better and approach challenges more skillfully.

**In youth work / education:** simple grounding practices (feel your feet, 3 slow breaths, noticing 5 things you can see) can become a normal part of group routines.

These steps are not a checklist to “do perfectly.” Think of them as five directions you can return to — small, regular actions that help people feel more grounded, connected, and capable.



## 2.2 STATE OF MENTAL HEALTH AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN GREECE, POLAND AND SLOVENIA

Recent research on the mental health and wellbeing of young people indicates a markedly negative trend in this field. The World Health Organization highlights that young people's wellbeing has become particularly problematic, especially in the period following the COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2022).

The situation is concerning across all EU Member States and beyond. According to the OECD report, the proportion of young people aged 18-29 experiencing anxiety or depression increased significantly during the pandemic in all EU countries (OECD, 2022). The findings of the Youth Survey 2020 among young people in Slovenia are therefore not surprising, as they show that young people in Slovenia were less satisfied with their mental health in 2020 than in 2010 (Lavrič and Deželan, 2021). Research conducted in Greece reveals a similarly concerning situation. According to the latest data, 38.9% of young people aged 17-24 and 25% of young people aged 25-39 report that poor mental health is the issue that worries them most (Koliastasis, 2022). Situation is especially worrying in Poland, as Polish children have one of the lowest rates of mental wellbeing and one of the highest rates of attempted suicides in Europe (WHO, 2022). Particularly vulnerable are young people with fewer opportunities, especially those from minorities, as well as young women and girls.

Unequal access to support resources remains a key challenge for young people's wellbeing. In 2021 and 2022, more than half of young people in the EU reported unmet needs in this field (OECD, 2022). Access to mental health and wellbeing services within public healthcare systems is limited due to increasing demand, while paid services are often less accessible to young people – especially those with fewer opportunities.

### EMOTIONAL & PHYSICAL RESPONSES: SIGNS, EARLY WARNINGS, BURNOUT FLAGS

In today's fast-paced lifestyle, many people face chronic stress, which over time can develop into burnout. Burnout manifests as a combination of emotional and physical responses that affect our wellbeing and effectiveness. Early recognition of warning signs is therefore crucial, as only then can we take timely action and prevent more serious consequences for our health and quality of life.

#### Risk Factors for Burnout

The cause of this condition is not only demanding work but is often linked to lifestyle and personality traits. Those who feel overwhelmed and undervalued are at greater risk. Burnout is also fueled by lifestyle patterns such as excessive work without rest, lack of meaningful relationships, taking on too many obligations, and chronic sleep deprivation. Personality traits such as perfectionism, a pessimistic outlook on the world and oneself, and a strong need for control also play an important role. Together, these circumstances increase the risk.

#### Early Warning Signs

Burnout often begins with small signs that we overlook until they become overwhelming. It appears as fatigue, irritability, a sense of meaninglessness, or detachment. If we notice these signals in time, we can act: take a break, speak up, seek support, and adjust our way of working and living.

#### Physical and Emotional Symptoms

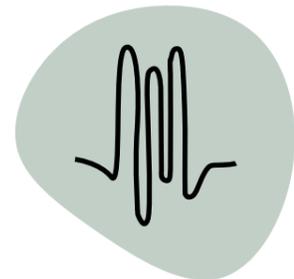
Symptoms manifest through a combination of physical and emotional signs that gradually worsen a person's wellbeing. On the physical level, chronic fatigue, insomnia, headaches, muscle pain, digestive problems, and frequent illnesses due to a weakened immune system may occur. Emotionally, burnout brings feelings of helplessness, entrapment, self-doubt, loneliness, loss of motivation and joy, and a negative outlook on work and life. Together, these signs create a state of exhaustion and hopelessness that strongly affects quality of life and requires timely recognition and intervention.



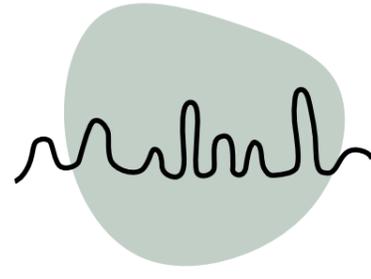
## 2.3 THE NATURE OF STRESS (THEORY THAT HELPS IN PRACTICE)

### 2.3.1 STRESS 101: ACUTE VS. CHRONIC, STRESS CURVE, WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Stress is a natural response of the body and mind to demanding circumstances, manifesting as worry or mental tension. Since every person experiences it, stress has become part of our everyday life and plays an important role in how we cope with challenges and threats. In certain situations, it encourages us to adapt and solve problems, but under excessive strain it begins to negatively affect our health and wellbeing. In small amounts, stress can be useful, as it motivates us to take action and overcome challenges, yet when it lasts too long, it becomes harmful. We distinguish between two main forms of stress:



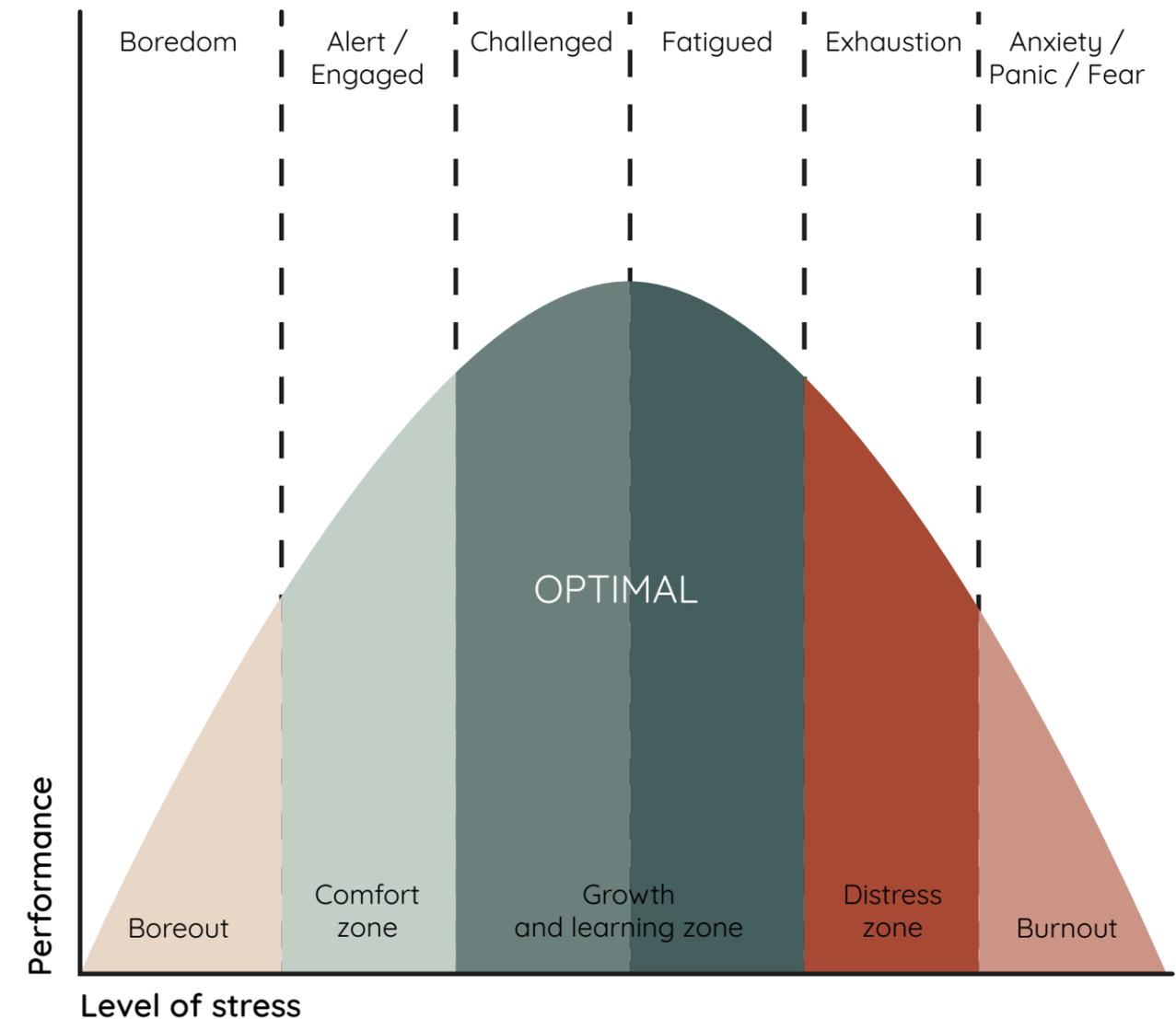
**Acute stress** is a short-term response that quickly passes and helps us manage sudden dangerous situations. If it occurs frequently, we speak of episodic acute stress.



**Chronic stress**, on the other hand, lasts for weeks or months and is linked to long-term difficulties such as financial worries, unsatisfactory relationships, or constant work-related burdens. Because we can become accustomed to it, we sometimes fail to recognize it as a problem, but over time it weakens our physical health and emotional balance and often leads to feelings of helplessness.

## THE STRESS CURVE

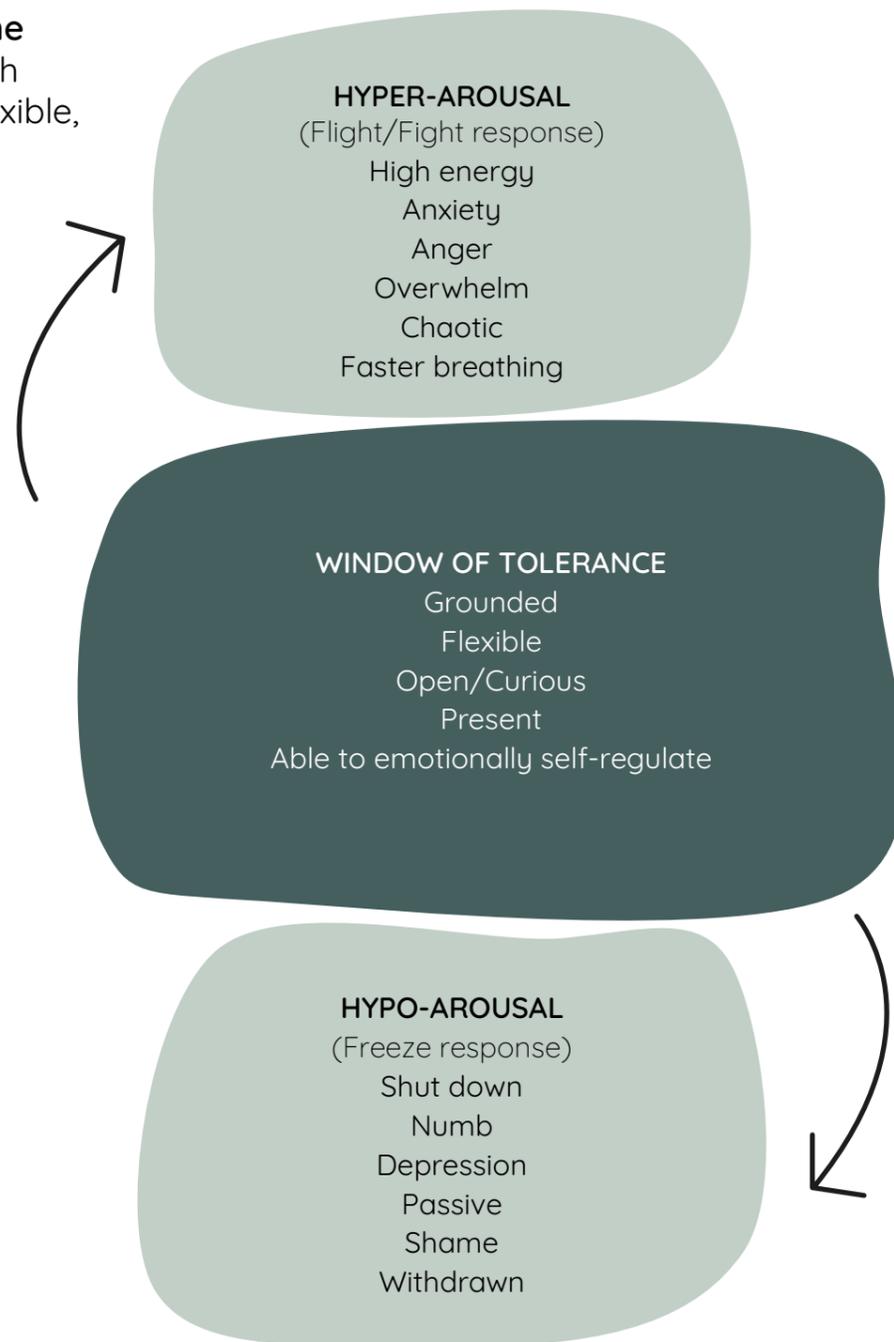
As early as 1908, **Yerkes and Dodson** described the curve that illustrates the connection between stress and performance. According to their model, a small amount of stress increases our effectiveness, while excessive stress causes it to decline. The stress curve shows how our performance changes depending on the level of demands. At low demands, we may feel boredom and a lack of motivation. As demands increase, our performance also rises until we reach the peak of the curve, where we function at our best. However, if the demands become too great, performance begins to drop, and fatigue, anxiety, and a sense of being overwhelmed appear, which can lead to burn-out. This model applies to various areas of life, from work and study to relationships and everyday concerns.



Source: <https://thepathfinder.org/yerkes-dodson-law/>

## WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Window of tolerance describes a state of balance in the nervous system in which we can remain calm, flexible, and connected to our surroundings. In this state, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems work in harmony, allowing us to effectively cope with challenges. The larger our window of tolerance, the more stress we can endure without losing balance, which means we have a more regulated nervous system.



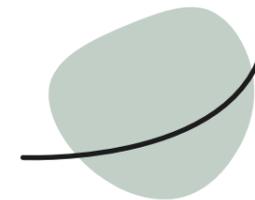
Understanding different forms of stress and models such as the stress curve and the window of tolerance helps us recognize when stress is beneficial and when it becomes harmful. In this way, we gain tools for better managing everyday challenges and for maintaining balance between health, wellbeing, and effectiveness.

## 2.3.2 PHYSIOLOGY: AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM, THREAT / SAFETY CUES

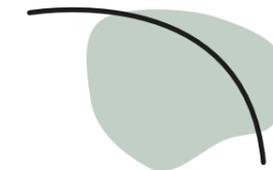
The autonomic nervous system (ANS) is the fundamental regulator of bodily functions that operate without conscious control. Its main task is to maintain homeostasis and adapt the body to changes in the environment. It consists of the sympathetic, parasympathetic, and enteric nervous systems, with the dynamic between sympathetic activation and parasympathetic calming being crucial for the experience of safety, connection, and regulation.

The sympathetic nervous system (SNS) is activated when a threat is perceived. It increases heart rate and blood pressure, triggers the release of adrenaline, and prepares the body for a fight-or-flight response. This is an evolutionary mechanism designed for survival. The parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), its counterpart, supports regeneration, digestion, reduction of arousal, and general calming, particularly through the ventral branch of the vagus nerve, which enables feelings of safety, social connection, learning, and emotional regulation.

Modern models, such as Stephen Porges' polyvagal theory, expand the understanding of parasympathetic nervous system function. The vagus nerve has two important functional directions:



**The ventral vagal pathway**, which enables states of safety, openness, social engagement, creativity, and emotion regulation.



**The dorsal vagal pathway**, which can be activated in response to extreme or inescapable threat, leading to a "freeze" reaction, resulting in slowing down, collapse, or dissociation.

A key mechanism in the functioning of the ANS is neuroception, the unconscious detection of signals of safety or danger. The body continually scans its environment, people, and situations, categorising them according to potential threat. Signals of threat include sudden noises, rapid approach, unpredictability, aggressive facial expressions, a high or harsh tone of voice, conflict, or a chaotic environment. These trigger sympathetic activation and a cascade of stress hormones. Signals of safety, such as warm prosody, friendly facial expressions, a stable and predictable environment, social support, physical comfort, and

rhythmic, soothing stimuli, activate the ventral vagus, enabling regulation, flexibility, and a sense of internal stability.

Understanding these physiological mechanisms is crucial in psychosocial, educational, and therapeutic contexts. A regulated ANS state is a prerequisite for learning, reflection, empathic responding, creative thinking, and establishing safe relationships. Approaches that strengthen signals of safety. For example, slow diaphragmatic breathing, compassionate presence, social connection, reducing sensory overload, stable routines, and conscious attunement in relationships, directly affect physiology and thus the individual's psychological resilience.

### 2.3.3 PROTECTIVE FACTORS & RESILIENCE BASICS

Resilience is an individual's ability to adapt, recover, and maintain psychological balance despite stress, challenges, or traumatic experiences. It is not an innate trait, but a dynamic process that arises from the interplay of biological, psychological, family, community, and broader societal factors. Protective factors act as buffers against stress. They reduce the impact of risks, increase the sense of control, and prevent burdens from becoming overwhelming.

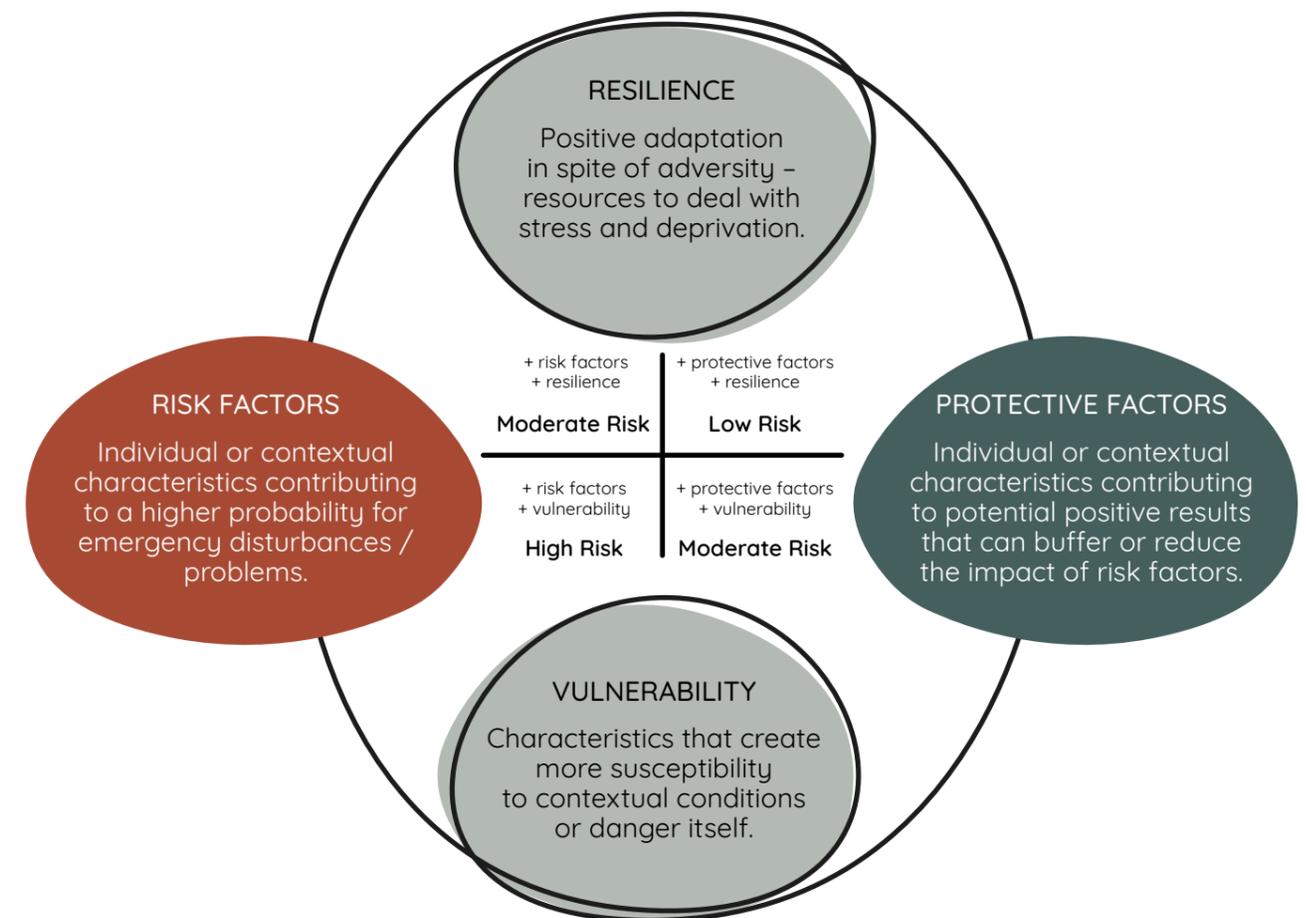
Among the most important individual protective factors are psychological flexibility, emotional regulation, self-soothing ability, optimism, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, and the development of inner coherence and meaning. People with higher resilience more easily recognise their inner states, accept unavoidable difficulties, and direct their behaviour according to their own values.

Family and interpersonal factors include safe and stable relationships, open communication, emotional attunement, and supportive attachment experiences. The presence of even one reliable and supportive person significantly reduces the impact of stress and increases feelings of safety, belonging, and competence.

At the community and environmental level, resilience is strengthened by a predictable, psychologically safe, and structured environment, access to education, social and health services, safe spaces, positive role models, and inclusive communities. Macro factors, such as social policies, economic stability, and cultural norms, form the broader framework that enables or restricts the development of resilience in individuals.

Research shows that a combination of micro factors (personal skills and internal resources) and macro factors (environmental and social support) is

the strongest predictor of long-term mental wellbeing. Thus, resilience does not mean the absence of stress, but rather the ability to cope with it in a balanced way.



Practical strategies for strengthening resilience include building supportive social networks, fostering a sense of meaning and realistic optimism, setting achievable goals, establishing routines, reflection (e.g., journaling), and developing regulation skills, from slow breathing, mindfulness, and somatic awareness to relaxation techniques. A safe relationship, orderly environment, and access to resources create a stable foundation on which an individual can effectively develop their internal competencies.

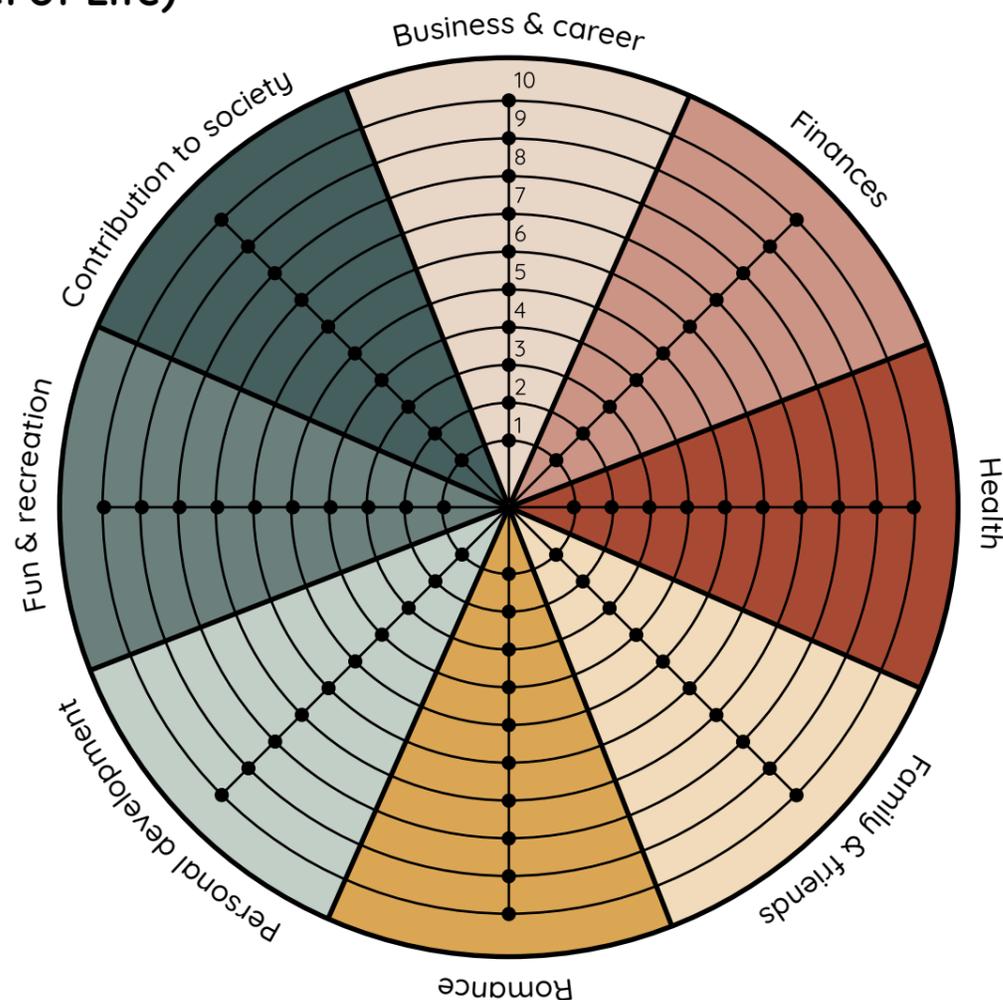


## 2.4 ASSESSING YOUR STATE: WHERE I AM RIGHT NOW?

Before we look at specific self-care tools, it can help to pause and assess your current starting point. In youth work, we often focus on others first – and only notice our own needs when we are already exhausted. A short self-check can make your wellbeing more visible and help you choose tools that fit your real situation as well as prioritise areas which need bigger focus from you in regards to self-care.

Below are two simple activities you can return to every few months. They work individually (as personal reflection) and also in teams (as a professional wellbeing check-in).

### WHEEL OF BALANCE (Wheel of Life)



### Purpose

to get a quick overview of what feels balanced and what needs attention.

### How to do it

- 1 Draw a big circle. Divide it into 8 slices (like a pizza).
- 2 Name the slices. You can use your own words, but here are the most common areas (feel free to adapt them though):
  - Business & career
  - Finance
  - Health
  - Family & friends
  - Romance
  - Personal development
  - Fun & recreation
  - Contribution to society
- 3 Rate each area from 0 to 10 (0 = very low / not okay; 10 = very good / satisfied).
- 4 Mark your score on each slice and connect the dots – your “wheel” will show where things feel smooth and where it feels bumpy.

### Reflect

- Which area looks most supported right now?
- Which area needs attention first (not all of them at once)?
- What is one small action that could move one area by “+1” this week?

## ACTIVITY 2: SELF-CARE ASSESSMENT

Self-care is not a one-time intervention; it's an ongoing set of habits that protect your wellbeing over time. The Life in Mind self-care tool highlights that self-care can include multiple areas (physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and workplace/professional) and reminds us that self-care is not an “emergency response plan,” not selfishness, and not adding more tasks — it often also involves letting go.

### How to do it

- 1 Look at the self-care categories below and rate how often you use strategies from each area. The original tool suggests a 1-5 scale: 5 = Frequently, 4 = Occasionally, 3 = Rarely, 2 = Never, 1 = It never occurred to me.
- 2 Go through each area and circle a few strategies you already do — and a few you rarely do.

✓	PHYSICAL SELF-CARE
	Eat regularly (e.g., breakfast and lunch)
	Eat healthy
	Exercise
	Lift weights
	Practice martial arts
	Get regular medical care for prevention
	Get medical care when needed
	Take time off when you're sick
	Get massages or other body work
	Do physical activity that is fun for you
	Take time to be sexual
	Get enough sleep
	Get away from stressful technology such as papers, telephones, e-mail, Facebook
	Take day trip, or mini vacations;
	Wear clothes you like
	Other:

✓	PSYCHOLOGICAL SELF-CARE
	Make time for self-reflection
	Go to see mental health professional or counsellor for yourself
	Write in a journal
	Read literature unrelated to work
	Do something at which you are beginner
	Let others know different aspects of you
	Practice receiving from others
	Be curious
	Spend time outdoors
	Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes
	Notice your inner experience — your dream, thoughts, imagery, feelings
	Engage your intelligence in a new area — go to an art museum, performance, sports event, exhibit, or other cultural event
	Other:

✓	EMOTIONAL SELF-CARE
	Spend time with others whose company you enjoy
	Stay in contact with important people in your life
	Treat yourself kindly (supportive inner dialogue or self-talk)
	Feel proud of yourself
	Reread favourite books, review favourite movies
	Identify and seek out comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places
	Allow yourself to cry
	Find things that make you laugh
	Express your outrage in constructive ways
	Play with children
	Other:

✓	SPIRITUAL SELF-CARE
	Make time for prayer, meditation, reflection
	Spend time in nature
	Participate in a spiritual gathering, community or group
	Cherish your optimism and hope
	Be aware of non-tangible (nonmaterial) aspects of life
	Sing
	Express gratitude
	Celebrate milestones with rituals that are meaningful to you
	Have experiences of awe
	Contribute to or participate in causes you believe in
	Read inspirational literature
	Listen to inspiring music
	Other:

✓	WORKPLACE / PROFESSIONAL SELF-CARE (can include volunteering)
	Take time to eat lunch
	Take time to chat with co-workers
	Make time to complete tasks
	Identify projects or tasks that are exciting, growth-promoting and rewarding for you
	Set limits with clients and colleagues
	Balance your caseload so no one day is “too much!”
	Arrange your workspace so it is comfortable and comforting
	Get regular supervision or consultation
	Negotiate for your needs
	Have a peer support groups
	Other:

### What to do with your results

- Notice which area has the fewest strategies (this is often where stress accumulates).
- Choose one item from each area to strengthen over time (the guide suggests doing this when revisiting the tool).
- Start small: one change for the next 7 days, then re-assess.

### Reflection questions:

- Which strategies already support me most?
- What do I avoid — even though it would help?
- What is one “letting go” action that would reduce pressure this week?
- Who or what can support me to follow through?

Adapted from: <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/lifeinmind/assets/src/user-uploads/Guide-to-self-care.pdf>

## 2.5 EVERYDAY SELF-CARE TOOLS FOR EDUCATORS (BODY, BREATH, ART)

After mapping stress and recognising the early warning signs, the next step is practical: what can you do in the moment — today, at work, in real conditions, for your own self-care and wellbeing?

Knowing the theory helps you understand what's happening. And we would like to offer you some tools that can help you respond.

Let's dive in!

### 2.5.1 PHYSICAL TOOLS: (E.G. BREATHWORK, MOVEMENT EXERCISES, SLEEP HABITS)

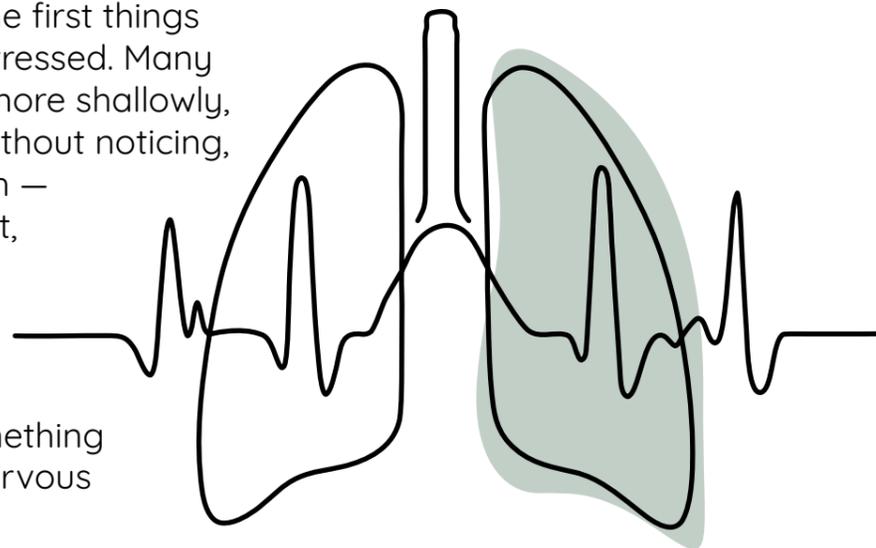
#### BREATHWORK

Breath is often one of the first things to change when we're stressed. Many people start breathing more shallowly, speed up their breath without noticing, or even hold their breath — especially during conflict, pressure, or when trying to “push through” a difficult moment.

This can send the body an extra signal that something is wrong, keeping the nervous system in alert mode.

The helpful part is that breathing is also one of the few body processes we can influence on purpose, because it's both automatic and controllable. Many people find that even a short practice helps them return to a steadier state.

We would like to offer you a few simple activities focusing on your breathing.



#### Physiological sigh

This is a very basic exercise which can help you to slow down a little bit and release. You can try out this small practice at work, public transport or during a heated discussion.

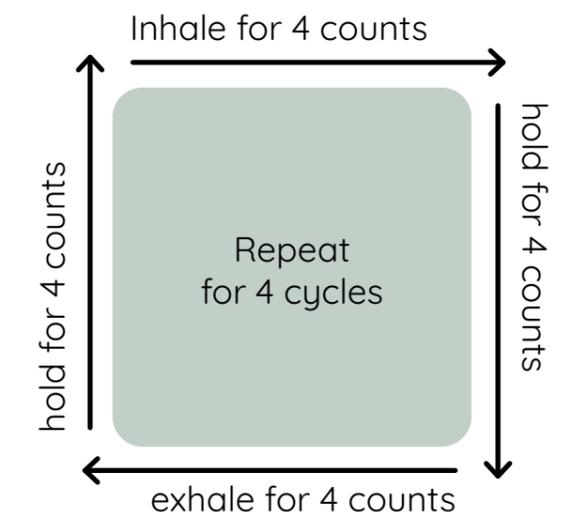
#### How to do it

1. Inhale gently through your nose.
2. Take a second, then take a small extra inhale (“top up”).
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth (or nose if that feels better). Repeat 2–3 rounds.

#### Box breathing

Here is the useful video to guide you:

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7uQXDkxEtM>



#### Variation:

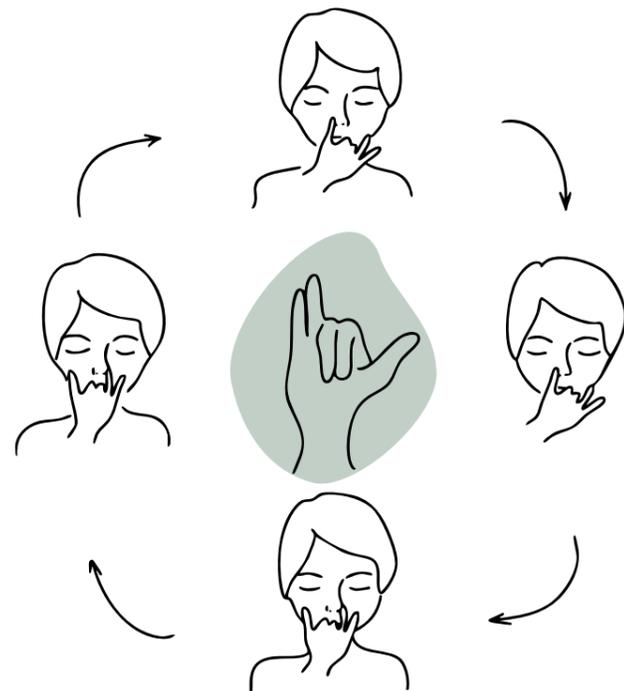
- If holding feels uncomfortable, you can transform this practice into 4-0-4-0 (no holds).
- If doing it on 4 counts feels too long, you can also transform it to 3-3-3-3.

Some people feel more anxious when focusing on breath. In groups, always offer an option: “You can just follow the count, or keep breathing normally and trace a square with your finger.”

## Pranayama (yogic breathing)

Pranayama is a set of breathing practices from the yoga tradition. We do not want to dive deep into the philosophy behind yoga and pranayama. If you are interested in learning more about it, there are dedicated professional resources for that. We would rather focus on pranayama practices as a way to support steadiness, energy, and emotional regulation.

We recommend you not to push yourself with these exercises and keep them gentle and easy. Avoid pushing, forcing deep breaths, or long breath holds — especially if you (or participants) are anxious, prone to panic, or have respiratory / cardiac conditions.



## Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shodhana)

1. Sit comfortably. Relax shoulders. Breathe normally for 2–3 breaths.
2. Use your right hand: thumb closes the right nostril; ring finger closes the left nostril.
3. Close right nostril → inhale slowly through left.
4. Close left nostril → exhale slowly through right.
5. Inhale through right.
6. Close right → exhale through left.

That's one cycle. Do 3–6 cycles, keeping the breath smooth and easy.

If you wish you can do it with a supportive video:

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l11qFpRqhIQ>

If you decide to facilitate pranayama exercises with the group, make sure people are able to withdraw from them if they do not want to do them. Also, you can let them know that they can open their eyes if they do not feel comfortable doing these exercises with their eyes closed.

## Humming Breath (Bhramari)

1. Inhale gently through the nose.
2. Exhale with a soft hum (“mmm”), long and steady — like a humming bee.
3. Repeat for 5 rounds.

If you wish you can do it with a supportive video:

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zqbrw5FtdKg>

## Three-Part Breath (Dirga)

1. Inhale gently into the belly (lower ribs expand).
2. Continue the inhale into the side ribs.
3. Finish the inhale into the upper chest (without forcing). Exhale slowly from chest → ribs → belly. Repeat 4–6 breaths.

If you wish you can do it with a supportive video:

▶ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xg\\_93mxxCnQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xg_93mxxCnQ)

## MOVEMENT EXERCISES

“Once you start approaching your body with curiosity rather than with fear, everything shifts.”  
— The body keeps the score,  
Bessel van der Kolk

The stress and pressures of everyday life do not only stay in our minds. In fact, our bodies act as a great storage and a memory card for our stress, traumatic experiences and worries.

The body reacts in various ways: tight shoulders, a clenched jaw, shallow breathing, restless legs, or that “buzzing” feeling that makes it hard to sit still. This makes sense — stress is a whole-body survival response, designed to prepare us to act. In modern work settings we often can't complete that action, so the body stays activated.

That's why physical tools for self-care are so effective. As Bessel van der Kolk reminds us in his book “The body keeps the score”, when difficult and traumatic experiences are “encoded in our senses, in muscle tension, and in anxiety... the body must also be involved in the healing process.”

The goal here isn't to “fix” yourself — it's to build a friendlier relationship with your body's signals and learn small ways to release tension and return to steadiness.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR): “Tense and release”

PMR works by helping you notice the difference between tension and relaxation. When you intentionally tense a muscle group for a few seconds and then release, the nervous system often follows the release signal.

PMR is especially useful when you feel irritable, overstimulated, or physically tight.

Stress makes muscles grip. PMR teaches your body how to let go again.

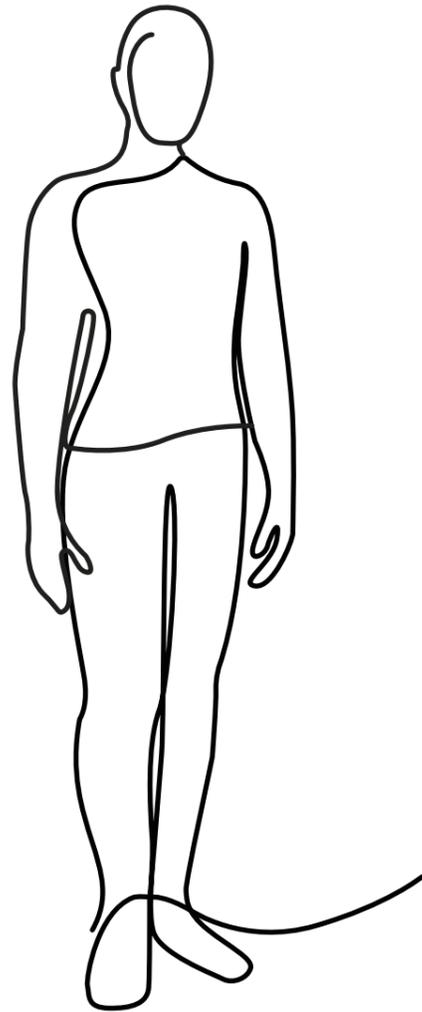
**Jaw:** press tongue to roof of mouth or gently clench → release (leave space between teeth).

**Shoulders:** lift towards ears → release and drop.

**Hands:** clench fists → release and open fingers wide.

**Feet:** press feet into floor or curl toes → release.

You can also do more extended version of PMR with a supportive video: ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihO02wUzgkc>.



## Movement warmups: tiny movements with big impact

Movement warmups are short bursts of movement (from 30 seconds to 5 minutes) that help your body shift states.

They are best used:

- between tasks to prevent build-up,
- when you sit for too long (especially in front of the laptop)
- when energy is low to reboot attention,
- when agitation is high to discharge and settle.

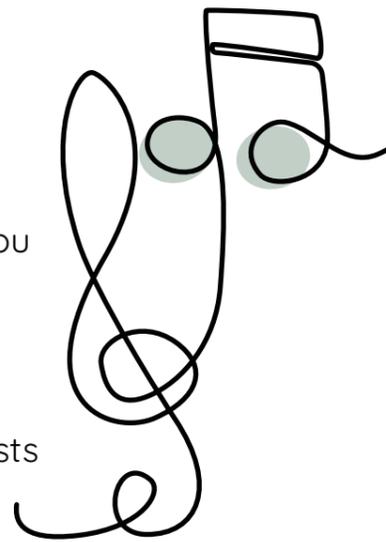
There are various activities you can do to reset your body, we would like to share with you some and you can choose what feels more suitable for you at the moment.

- ① 30–60 seconds. **Shake-out reset**  
Shake hands → arms → shoulders → legs gently. Then stop and feel your feet.
  - ② 1–2 minutes. **Wall push-ups**  
Hands on wall, slow push and return. Keep your breath steady.
  - ③ 1–2 minutes. **Chair squats**  
Stand up and sit down on a chair with control slowly. A small range is enough. Make a few repeats. 5-10 repetitions is more than enough.
  - ④ 1–2 minutes. **Shoulder rolls + neck release**  
Roll shoulders slowly; then tilt head gently side to side (no forcing).
  - ⑤ 2–5 minutes. **Walk reset**  
Slow walk, eyes open, longer exhales. If outside isn't possible, walk a corridor.
  - ⑥ 1 minute. **Cross-body taps**  
Cross your arms over your chest (like a gentle self hug). Tap left and right shoulders alternately. Keep the taps light and steady — like a calm metronome.
- Continue for 30–60 seconds, breathing normally. Pause. Notice your feet on the floor and take one slower exhale.

## ”Move with the music” conscious dance practice

Conscious dancing is a simple practice of moving to music with awareness. The focus is not on “dancing well,” and how you look while dancing but on feeling: noticing breath, sensations, emotions, and energy as they shift through the body. You're invited to follow movement prompts which we prepared — or ignore them completely. The only goal is to move in a way that feels safe and honest for you. Some facilitators use playlists designed to move through different “energy qualities” (for example, music associated with the chakra system). You can treat this as a creative structure — a way to vary rhythm, intensity, and mood — without needing to adopt any spiritual framework.

It's nice to have at least 10 minutes for this practice (but you can prolong it if you wish). You can do it alone or with others. It's nice to start in a private enough space where you don't have to worry that you are being watched.

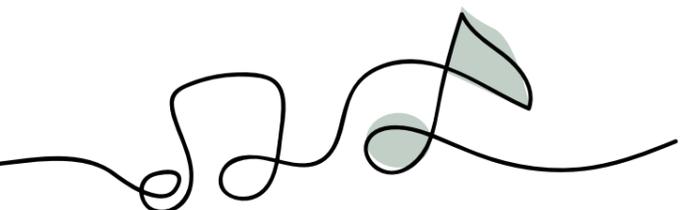


**1** Start with prepare the music — you can choose your favourite songs. Just make sure there are different tracks in terms of mood, rhythm, speed and vibe.

**2** Warm up: put on a slower, steady song. Start with tiny movements:

- shift weight from foot to foot
- soften shoulders and jaw
- let arms float a little
- keep your breath natural.

**3** Move through 3 songs with different “qualities”. Choose three songs (or let a playlist play). For each song, try one focus. If it helps, use these themes:



**Song 1. Grounding (stability)**

- Feel your feet
- Bend knees slightly
- Make movements heavier and slower, like you're settling.

**Song 2. Flow (release)**

- Let movement travel through your body like water
- Add circles, waves, spirals, shaking hands
- If emotion shows up, let it be there — keep it simple and safe.

**Song 3. Power or Joy (energy)**

- Let your movements get a little bigger (or imagine them bigger).
- Step, stomp lightly, reach arms up, shake out tension.
- If you feel self-conscious, smile at it and keep moving anyway.

**4** Cool down: play a slower song.

Let your movements gradually become smaller:

-sway → slow steps → stillness.

Place one hand on your chest or belly (optional) and take one longer exhale. Notice the changes in your body.

## TRE: Tension & Trauma Releasing Exercises

TRE® (Tension & Trauma Releasing Exercises) is a short series of body-based exercises developed by David Bercei that aims to help the body release deep muscular patterns of stress and tension by activating a natural reflex of shaking or vibrating (tremoring) (Bercei, 2005).

The idea behind TRE is simple and practical: when the body experiences stress, it often “holds” it through chronic muscle tightening. TRE uses gentle, structured movements to safely activate tremors in a controlled way — so the nervous system can downshift and the body can return closer to balance.

### What it can feel like

People often describe TRE as:

- gentle shaking in legs/hips (sometimes spreading)
- warmth, tingling, soft muscle release
- a feeling of “letting go” or calm afterwards
- sometimes emotional release (tears, laughter, feeling tender).

There is no “correct” intensity. In TRE, less can be more.

### Before you begin:

TRE can be powerful. If you have a history of severe trauma, panic attacks, seizures, serious injury, are pregnant, or have a medical condition that could be affected by involuntary shaking, it's best to learn TRE with a trained professional and / or consult a clinician first. In group settings, TRE is usually best offered only by someone with appropriate training.

**1** 1 minute  
Set up your environment

- Choose a quiet space where you feel safe and won't be interrupted
- Have water nearby
- Decide on a simple “stop signal”: If I feel overwhelmed, I stop immediately, sit up, and look around the room.

**2** 1 minute  
Warm the body gently

- Do small movements to prepare:
- slow ankle circles, knee bends, hip circles
  - shoulder rolls and a long exhale.

### 3 2-4 minutes Create light fatigue in the legs

TRE sequences typically use simple positions that gently tire the legs to invite tremoring. Choose one:

- a shallow wall-sit (very gentle, not to pain) or
- a standing mini-squat hold for 20-40 seconds, then rest, repeat once.

Stop before strain. TRE should not be painful.

### 5 Regulate intensity (this is the key skill)

You control the practice:

- To reduce tremors: move knees wider, straighten legs a little, or pause completely.
- To increase slightly: return to the position that invited tremors (only if it feels safe).

### 4 1-3 minutes Invite tremors

- Lie down on your back with knees bent and feet on the floor.
- Let your knees fall slightly inward / outward until you find a position where small tremors begin naturally (often in thighs / hips).
- Allow the tremors to happen without forcing them.
- Keep it short at first (30-90 seconds is enough).

### 6 2-4 minutes Close and integrate

- Stop the tremors, extend legs, and rest.
- Place one hand on your belly or chest. Take 3 slower exhales.
- Look around the room and name 5 things you can see (grounding).

If you wish, you can do it with a supportive video: ► <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeUioDuJjFI>

## SLEEP HABITS

“Sleep is the golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.”  
— Thomas Dekker

“The best bridge between despair and hope is a good night’s sleep.”  
— E. Joseph Cossman

Sleep is one of the strongest “protective factors” for stress resilience. When you sleep poorly, your nervous system tends to stay closer to the edge: emotions feel bigger, patience gets thinner, concentration drops, and even small problems can feel heavier.

In youth work and education, sleep is often disrupted by irregular hours, emotional load, screen time, and the simple reality that there’s always more to do.

Public health and sleep medicine sources consistently link insufficient or poor-quality sleep with worse mental health and mood, including higher levels of mental distress and difficulties with attention and behaviour (Blackwelder et al., 2021).

The relationship is also two-way: stress and anxiety can disrupt sleep, and disrupted sleep can increase stress reactivity the next day, creating a cycle that’s hard to break (Stewart et al., 2020).

This chapter is not about perfect sleep. We believe in the power of small steps, and that even small improvements in sleep habits can support better emotional balance and overall mental health.

We will focus on how to slowly build a more predictable sleep rhythm, make it easier for you to fall asleep, as well as get better rest while sleeping. First and foremost, we bring more awareness to this area of your life.



### Notice what sleep disruption looks like for you:

- What is the issue with the sleep you struggle with the most?
- Trouble falling asleep: mind racing, scrolling, worry loops
- Waking during the night: stress, temperature, noise, worries
- Waking too early: anxiety, anticipation, early shifts
- Non-restorative sleep: you slept, but don't feel recovered
- Weekend catch-up crash: irregular schedule, social jetlag.

### It's worth asking yourself a few questions:

- When did my sleep start getting worse?
- What is the most likely driver right now: stress, schedule, screens, caffeine, worry, environment?

## The foundation of your “sleep hygiene”

### A consistent wake time

Keeping a relatively steady wake time is one of the easiest ways to support your body clock — even if bedtime varies.

Habit to implement: choose a wake time you can keep at least 5 days a week. Set a regular alarm at this time.

If that feels impossible: try to keep it within a 60–90 minute range maximum.

### Light in the morning

Morning light tells your brain: “day has started,” which supports better sleep pressure later.

Habit to implement: stand by a window for 2 minutes soon after waking (even on cloudy days). If possible, step outside briefly (maybe a minute on the balcony, if you have one).

### A short ‘going to bed’ ritual

It's nice to have a simple ritual that signals: “we're closing the day.”

Habit to implement: try one of the following rituals — dim lights, warm drink, shower, stretch, calm music, journaling, a book, 3 slow exhales.

## Habits which could improve your sleep

You don't need to do all of these. Pick one and test it for 7 days.

### Phone away

If your phone is in bed, your brain stays “on call.”

Try: charge your phone across the room (or at least off the pillow). If you are courageous enough — leave it in the other room!

If you need an alarm: use a simple alarm clock or keep the phone face down away from reach.

### “Brain dump” to unload the anxiety

If your mind races through tasks at night, maybe it's a good idea to give it a container.

Try writing:

- “Tomorrow's tasks” (3 bullets)
- “Worries” (3 bullets)
- “One next step” (1 bullet)

Then close the notebook. That's the “switch off” button — you can come to these tasks tomorrow.

### Caffeine awareness

Caffeine can quietly reduce sleep quality, even if you “fall asleep fine.”

Try: no caffeine after early afternoon (or reduce by one coffee).

If that's hard: switch the last drink to decaf or tea.

**Airing the room before sleep**

Many people sleep better when the room is slightly cooler.

Try: air your room before going to bed for 5 minutes, remove one layer, or turn down a radiator slightly (in the winter season).

**"Same first step" bedtime routine**

If bedtime is unpredictable, anchor one step you can do anywhere.

Try: wash face → brush teeth → 3 long exhales. Even if you sleep late, the body learns the cue. Alternatively, you can end the day with a short self massage for 3-5 minutes.

## What to do when you can't sleep

The hardest part of insomnia is often not the insomnia itself but the second layer: frustration, pressure, and self-criticism around it.

Here are some suggestions that you could try out:

First of all — drop the fight. Acknowledge to yourself that your job is to rest and not to force sleep.

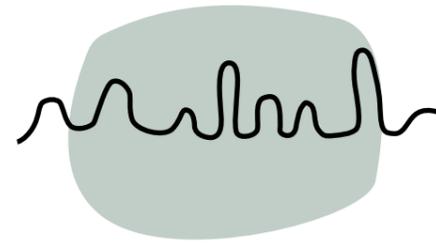
Soften the body: unclench jaw, drop shoulders, relax hands.

Use one of the calming exercises:

- longer exhales
- PMR release-only (shoulders, jaw, hands)
- body scan (very simple: feet → legs → belly → shoulders)
- short guided meditation.

If you're awake for a long time: get up briefly. Do something boring and low-light (water, toilet, a few pages of a book), then return to bed.

It's better to avoid checking the clock repeatedly (it fuels anxiety).

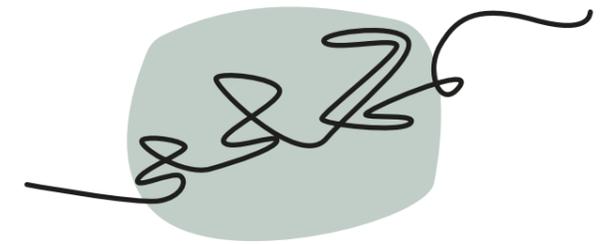


## Sleep during stressful periods

After emotionally heavy work, acute stress etc. your nervous system may stay alert at night. Instead of pushing yourself into calm, try another approach:

- reduce stimulation (news, intense conversations, heavy content)
- choose softer light (preferably warm) and slower calming music
- use a "closure" practice:
  - write one line: "What I carried today was..."
  - one line: "What can wait until tomorrow is..."
  - one line: "One thing I did well today was..."

This helps your brain stop scanning for unfinished business.



## My 7-day sleep experiment

This week I will try

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My going to bed ritual will be:

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My wake-time range will be:

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One tiny support when I wake at night:

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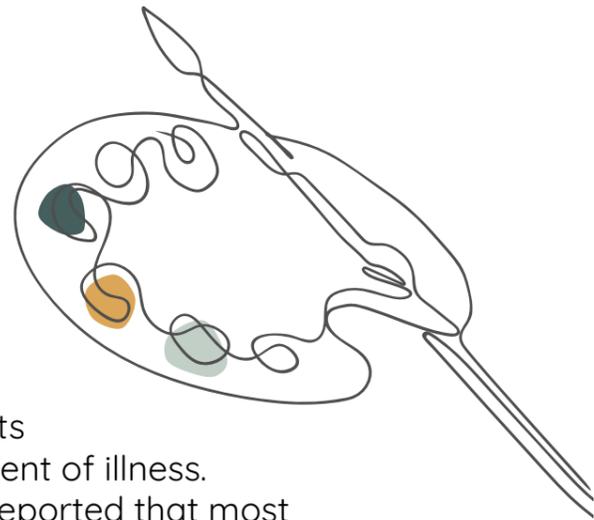
## 2.5.2 ART-BASED TOOLS

Research consistently shows that creative activities help reduce stress. A major scoping review by the World Health Organization, conducted by Daisy Fancourt and Saoirse Finn (2019), synthesised evidence from over 3,000 studies and found that arts engagement supports health, wellbeing, and prevention and management of illness. A systematic review by Martin et al. (2018) also reported that most creative arts interventions lead to reduced stress.

Creative activities are especially valuable in youth work and education because they support emotional regulation without requiring verbal expression. Approaches range from formal creative arts therapies (music, dance / movement, art, drama) to simple popular practices such as doodling, colouring, rhythm, or mindful music listening. These methods engage body and mind together, helping attention settle, increasing feelings of safety, and allowing stress to be processed in a gentle, nonverbal way — without needing to attend therapy.

### Why you should definitely try it

- It's very relaxing — you can really switch off your mind while trying to draw / copy / colour / glue things.
- It can calm the stress system without words. When you draw, colour, move, or listen intentionally, your attention anchors in the present. That can be especially helpful when talking feels hard or when you're "stuck in your head."
- It's "no talent required." Stress relief comes from the process, not the result.
- It boosts your creativity and your divergent thinking.
- It helps to acquire a habit — and even master the skill. It can be a reflective process — capturing the mood of the day or prevailing emotion etc.
- It gives the feeling of creating something — this unique feeling when out of nothing something made by you appears (which is very important general, and especially in the times of uncertainty).
- It helps to switch the attention from the result (I need to draw a perfect picture!) to a process (I'm just doing it for the sake of doing it and the result is not important!).



## ACTIVITIES (VISUAL ARTS)

### Collage

Take a few old magazines with different images inside, white A4 / A3 paper, scissors, glue and a few artistic tools (whatever you have at your disposal — markers, paints, crayons etc.).

Create a collage, which would represent something. Remember that this is not about creating something pretty but rather a way of expressing yourself and noticing what's important at this moment.

Put some nice and calming background music to support your process and dive right in!

For the topics, you can vary them the way you want, here are some ideas:

- My year
- My emotional state now
- A postcard which I will never send (choose to whom you will Not send this postcard)
- My image of a healthy relationships
- Me and my work
- What stress feels like lately
- My vision board
- What supports me / recharges me
- etc.etc.

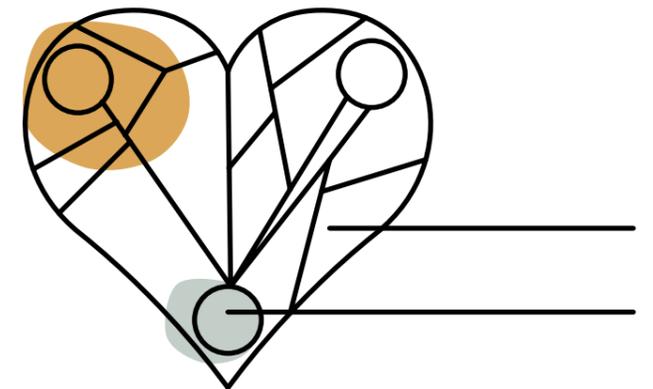
If you do this task individually, you can have a look at the result, remember the feelings you encountered during the creation process and any highlights appeared during the work.

What could be the learning from the experience you lived through? What are the positive sides in it?

If you do this task in a group, it's worth sharing and analyzing the results of the work with each other.

### Colouring tasks

Colouring mandalas has become a very popular hobby nowadays and, for some, a very effective stress-relief tool. You can easily find colouring books for adults in the majority of bookshops or download pages for colouring from open sources. (e.g. <https://mondaymandala.com/m/>)

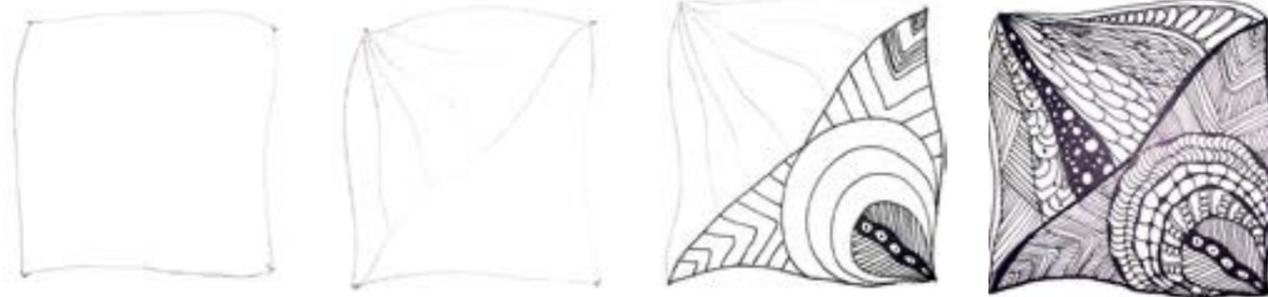


Colouring can also become a small reflective practice, like this small practice of giving gratitude:

<https://ru.pinterest.com/pin/247486942014249565/>

## Zentangle

It is a specific practice of creating structured designs through drawing various patterns. It's a specific way to draw various images, most often in black pen on white paper which is based on key steps:



Creating a shape (let's say a square).

Dividing this shape in the smaller 'containers-sectors'. Those sections can be of any shapes.

Tangle — filling in each of the 'containers' with various patterns.

Possible result.

Rick Roberts and Mary Thomas are the originators of the trademarked Zentangle method (see more: <https://zentangle.com>) and they claim that through Zentangle practice you can:

- Relax
- Focus
- Expand your imagination
- Trust your creativity
- Increase your awareness
- Respond confidently to the unexpected
- Discover the fun and healing in creative expression
- Enter a vibrant and supportive world-wide community
- Feel gratitude and appreciation for this beautiful world and all that you can do
- And perhaps most importantly . . . **Have fun!**

We agree with them and believe that this is a very interesting practice! You can start from copying the simplest shapes and patterns (there's a lot of inspiration on Pinterest!), you can create your own, it's all up to you.

## Doodling

It is a simple drawing while a person's attention is otherwise occupied.

If you ever attended a very boring lecture, had a long exhausting call, listened to an endless audio recording, watched a TV programme and while doing that were putting some images on a piece of paper — you were doodling!

In a way it's drawing in an unconscious, unfocused way.

In the past it was often considered a distraction to the main thing and something which actually hampers your concentration on the main action. But numerous researches actually proved that doodling is beneficial in many ways.

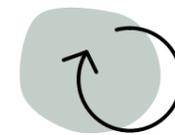
Here are some of the benefits of doodling:



It can improve your focus and problem-solving skills (for more, watch: ► [https://www.ted.com/talks/sunni\\_brown\\_doodlers\\_unite](https://www.ted.com/talks/sunni_brown_doodlers_unite))



It helps to relieve stress, increase positive emotions and unwind (for more, see <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07421656.2023.2192168>)



It can improve short-term memory. Thus, in one experiment (Andrade, 2010), doodles were found to aid the recall of a conversation, where non-doodlers couldn't recall the conversation as well.



It helps to stimulate creativity. According to S.Brown, doodling is thought to stimulate areas of the brain which normally remain dormant when you're just in linguistic mode. This can help you to analyze information differently, have more a-ha moments and come up with new ideas.

## How to practice?

Basically all you need is some basic shapes in order to start drawing simple images.

You could start with looking around the room and trying to draw all the objects around in these simple shapes. Or just let your mind rumble and draw whatever comes to your mind – without thinking of how nice it looks.

Alternatively, you can start from getting some inspiration online and copying a couple of doodle pictures (Pinterest is a great source) and then moving to your own.

In addition, don't allow your inner critic to get in the way. Nobody has to see your doodle, and you can just crumple it up and throw it away when you're done.

Give your mind and hand free rein. You can even try doodling in the dark not to let your inner perfectionist get in the way of your creative process.



**Tip:**  
Find an author or style that you like best and enjoy copying. Pic Candle Channel is definitely recommended:  
▶ <https://www.youtube.com/@piccandle>

## Neurographic drawing (or NeuroGraphica®)

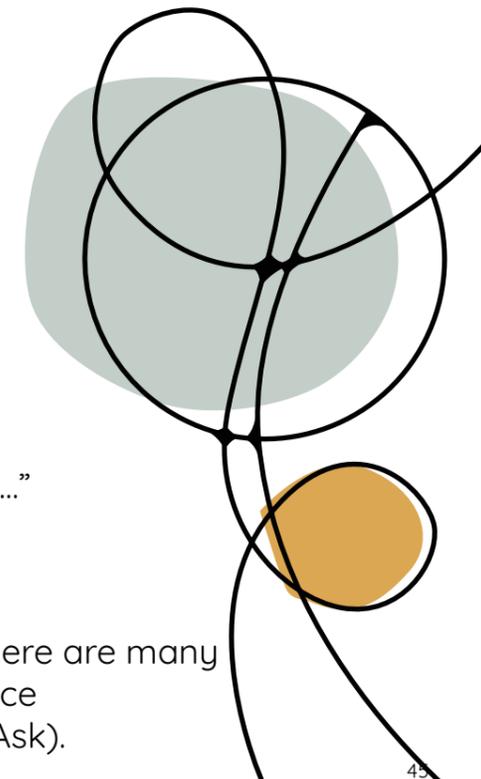
Neurographic drawing is a structured, meditative way of drawing that uses free-flowing lines and rounded connections to turn an inner “tangle” (thoughts, emotions, tension) into a clear visual form. It comes from the NeuroGraphica® method developed by Pavel Piskarev and shared through the Neurographica / Institute materials.

A key element is the “neurographic line”: a line you guide so that it doesn't repeat itself and moves in unexpected directions, followed by a characteristic step of rounding /conjoining intersections to remove sharp angles.

## The basic steps of the process:

- 1 Set a simple intention**  
Write one short phrase at the top of the page, e.g. “I want more steadiness,” “I want to release pressure,” “I want clarity.”
- 2 Draw the neurographic line**  
Draw one continuous line across the page, guiding it so it changes direction and doesn't repeat its path. Keep going until you feel a slight “exhale” in your body.
- 3 Add 3–7 circles**  
Place circles anywhere the drawing feels tense, crowded, or important. (Circles can represent “nodes,” resources, or points of attention)
- 4 Round every intersection**  
Wherever lines cross or touch, round the corners so there are no sharp angles. This is the core regulating part: slow down and smooth each junction.
- 5 Optional: “support lines”**  
Add a few new lines that connect circles or open up tight areas. Round those intersections too.
- 6 Optional: colour for regulation**  
Choose 2–3 colours:
  - one for “pressure” (lightly),
  - one for “support,”
  - one for “energy/hope.”Colour slowly – let it be a calming rhythm.
- 7 Close with one sentence (30 seconds)**  
Finish with: “Right now, my next small step is...” (keep it tiny and doable).

This is a general process, but you can also choose a neurographic drawing with a specific purpose – there are many step-by-step videos on YouTube to guide your practice (▶ e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzjELfPNAsk>).



## 2.5.3 SMALL ROUTINES — BIG RESULTS

There is already so much written about self-care and wellbeing that it can feel overwhelming. Ironically, even reading about self-care can sometimes create pressure — another list of things to do, another standard to meet, another reason to feel behind.

We really want to avoid the situation where self-care becomes a new task on your to-do list. You don't need to try everything, and you don't need to do any tool "perfectly." What matters is finding a few practices that genuinely help you — in your context, with your schedule, your energy level, and your reality.

Here we would like to share some routines which could support you in that.

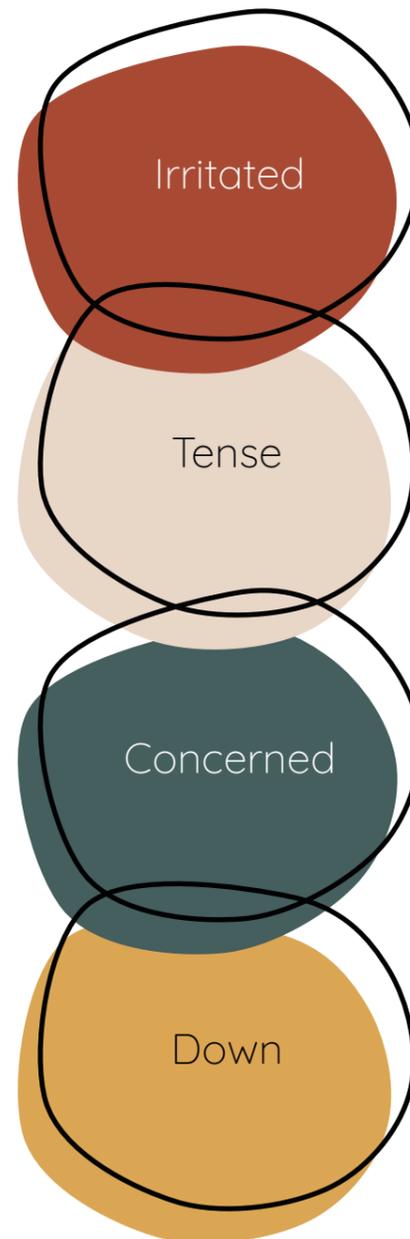
### Emotional awareness

Noticing and understanding our emotions is a core self-care skill — because emotions carry important information. They signal what matters to us, what feels safe or unsafe, what we need, and what we might need to change. When we can name what we feel, we usually find it easier to respond rather than react: we can choose a coping strategy, ask for the right kind of support, if needed, set a boundary, or even take a small break.

In youth work and education this matters even more. Our emotional state influences how we communicate, how we handle conflict, and how safe others feel around us. When emotions stay unnamed, they often show up indirectly — as irritability, tension in the body, overworking, withdrawal, or "switching off." Building emotional awareness helps us catch stress earlier and take small steps before it becomes overload or burnout.

One of the widely used tools to support emotional awareness is the emotions wheel, which, to be honest, can be very overwhelming especially if it's not very easy to identify your emotions.

We'd like to offer you a more friendly tool to support your journey of learning more about your emotions: the How We Feel app.



How We Feel is a free, science-informed app that helps you name emotions more precisely, notice patterns over time, and choose small coping strategies in the moment. It was created by a team of scientists, designers, engineers, and psychologists, and is linked to work from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (including the "Mood Meter" approach).

It uses a very simple approach to guide you in your self awareness and supports bringing your focus to the way you feel.

A simple way to use it:

- 1 Check in once or twice a day (e.g., arrival at work + end of day).
- 2 Choose the feeling that fits best (even if it's "close enough").
- 3 Add a short note (optional): What's driving this? What do I need?
- 4 If the app offers a strategy, try one small step and move on.

### Grounding

When we're stressed, overwhelmed, or triggered, our attention often gets pulled into worries, memories, or "what if" thinking. Grounding can help bring you back to the present moment by connecting with your senses and your body. It doesn't erase emotions — it helps you feel steadier while they're there.

Grounding is especially useful:

- before facilitating a group,
- after a difficult conversation or disclosure,
- when you notice panic, racing thoughts or shutdown,
- when you feel "not quite here" or scattered.

You can also use this app to tune in with your friends and family and see what other people in your network feel.



## Practice 1: 5-4-3-2-1 grounding

Purpose: reduce overwhelm, slow racing thoughts, reorient attention

Step by step:

Walk around or sit comfortably and focus your attention on the following:

- 5 things you can see (name them slowly)
- 4 things you can feel (feet on floor, fabric on skin, chair supporting you etc.)
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell (or two smells you like / imagine)
- 1 thing you can taste (or one slow sip of water).

Tip: Keep your eyes open. Go slower than you think you need to.

## Practice 2: Feet + exhale reset

Purpose: helpful if you need grounding during work moments.

Step by step:

- Press both feet into the floor for 5 seconds → release.
- Drop shoulders and unclench jaw.
- Take three longer exhales (inhale normally, exhale a little longer).

You can do this in a meeting, in a corridor, or right before entering a room.

## Practice 3: “Name the room” orientation

Purpose: helpful if you feel disconnected, frozen, or spacey.

Step by step:

Look around and say (silently or out loud):

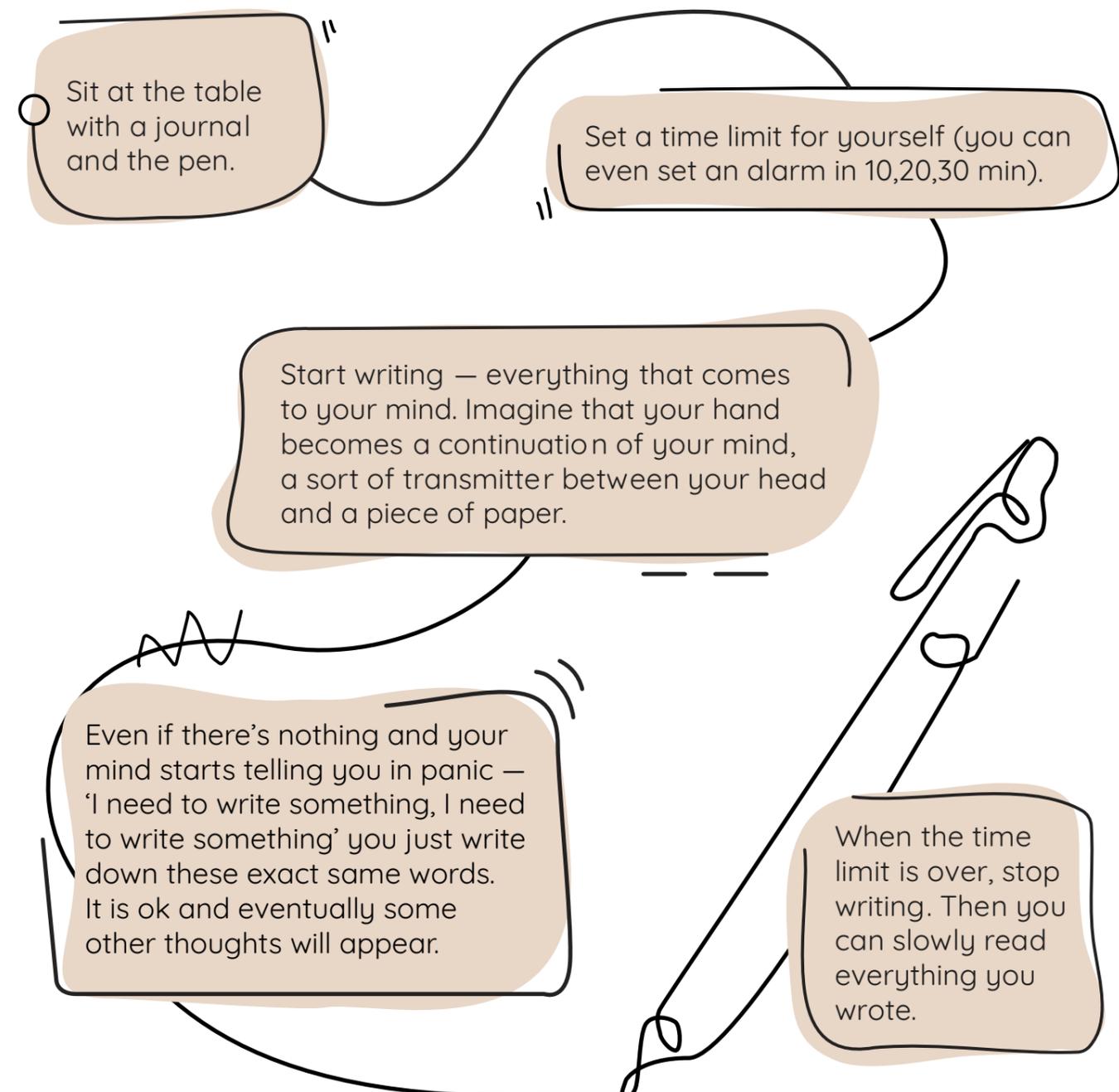
- “I’m in \_\_\_\_\_ (place).”
- “Today is \_\_\_\_\_ (day /date).”
- “I can see \_\_\_\_\_ (3 objects).”
- “I am safe enough right now.” (or “I’m here now”, If “I’m safe” feels too strong).

## Journaling

Journaling is another daily practice which can help to bring the focus back to ourselves and have some time to actually track our thoughts and feelings. Every morning or evening it’s worth taking 10-30 min and writing with a pen in the journal.

There are a lot of approaches and techniques on how to do journaling, we would like to suggest you 2, which we used and you can choose the one which is more appealing to you.

How to practice?



## Another way to start journaling

Rewind the last day in your head.

Sit at the table with a journal and the pen.

Use the journal to reflect and write about the following (you can focus just on 1 question or tackle a few of them, you can add the ones which are more relevant to you on this particular day).

- How was I feeling today?
- What I was thinking about?
- How am I now?
- How am I feeling now?
- How can I support myself?

- How can I take care of myself?
- What was good?
- When was the flow?
- What made me feel satisfied?
- Find a reason to be proud of myself today.

## Specific writing practices



### A letter to my future self

This practice will allow you to disconnect from the worries of the present moment and focus on your vision, aspirations, hopes and dreams.

1. Choose a time period: 3 months from now? 6 months? 1 year?

Write at the top: "Dear Me in \_\_\_\_." (Write the exact future date).

2. Write a letter to the version of you from that period, focusing on a few elements:

- describe where you might be and how you might feel
- who you are surrounded by
- wishes that you hope have come true by that time — describe as if you have already achieved them!

Optional:

You can add some of the statements like:

- here's what I hope you remember about this time...
- here's what I hope is different for you...
- here's what I hope you've learned...
- please don't forget to... (add a wish to yourself)

3. Send your letter!

You can use the services like:

<https://www.futureme.org/>

<https://theself.club/future-self/>



### A letter I'll never send

"A letter I'll never send" is a private writing practice that helps you release emotional pressure safely — without needing to confront anyone or create conflict. This exercise is not about being "nice" on paper. It's about being honest. The letter is for you, not for the other person.

1. Choose the target — decide who (or what) you are writing to:

- a person (colleague, family member, institution, "the system")
- a situation (the pandemic years, the war news cycle, the workload)
- even a part of yourself (your inner critic, your fear, your perfectionism)
- Start with: "Dear \_\_\_\_\_,"

2. Write without editing.

Set a timer and write continuously. Use "I" statements:

- "I'm angry because..."
- "I'm hurt because..."
- "I'm exhausted because..."
- "What I wish you understood is..."
- "What I needed then was..."
- "What I need now is..."

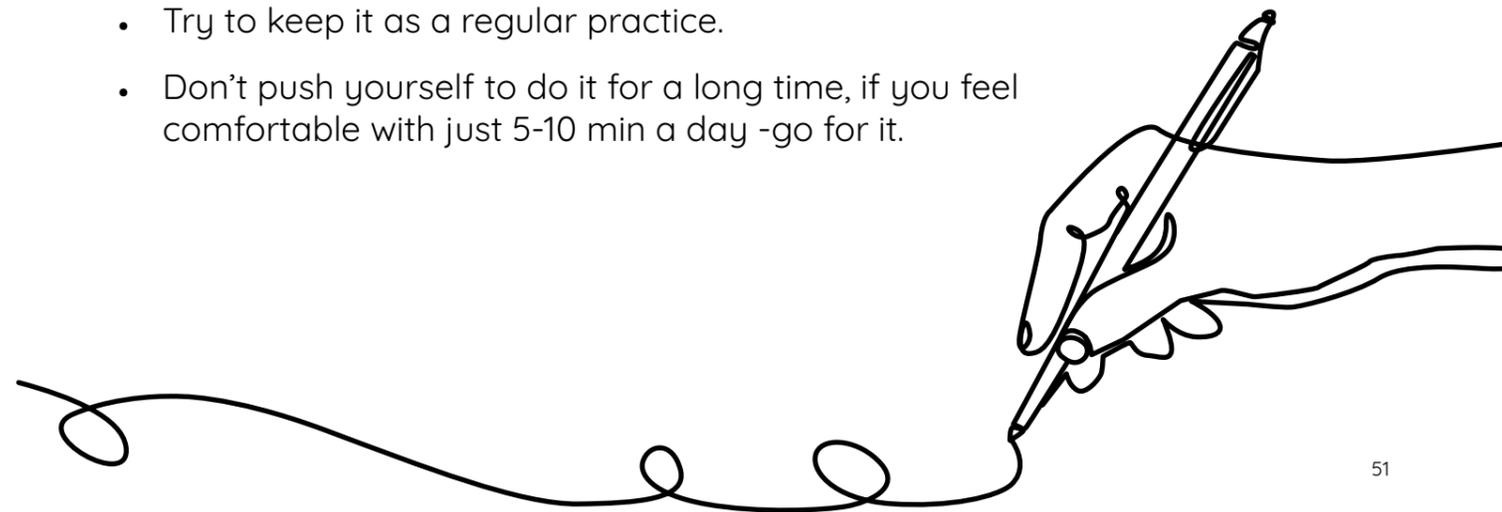
Take 10-20 minutes for that part, you don't need to follow the suggested tips, you can also just let your thoughts and feelings flow on the paper.

3. Write a final statement.

4. Take a letter and burn it in a safe place (bonfire, fireplace etc.).

### Tips for journaling:

- Write in the language which comes to your mind at the moment of writing, it can be also a mixture of languages -nobody will read what you write besides you and you will know exactly what you meant.
- Don't focus on grammar or being tidy
- Try to keep it as a regular practice.
- Don't push yourself to do it for a long time, if you feel comfortable with just 5-10 min a day -go for it.



At the end of this chapter, we want to share that there're many many ways to reduce stress based on different people, look at the variety of activities!

Watch a sunrise	Say a prayer	Watch fish swim	Go barefoot
Sing a song	Tell a story	Say "No"	Whistle
Hike in the woods	Give a compliment	Take a country drive	Focus on your senses
Give a hug	Make a list	Paint a picture	Tell a joke
Listen to music	Meditate	Stretch	Paddle a canoe
Dance	Make love	Smile	Play with a dog
Have a cup of tea	Take some photos	Sleep in	Talk to a friend
Take a break	Plant a flower	Clean something	Write a poem
Throw a ball	Go to the beach	Arrange flowers	See a movie
Keep a journal	Blow bubbles	Do a puzzle	Set limits
Get up early	Ask for help	Laugh out loud	Enjoy a reverie
Stroke a pet	Take a walk	Do Tai Chi	Walk a labyrinth
Lend a hand	Play with a child	Sit still	Write a letter
Complete something	Listen to a cat purring	Eat some chocolate	Practice kindness
Get a massage	Hum a tune	Take a nap	Watch a sunset
Play a sport	Play a drum	Pull some weeds	Have an idle chat
Walk in the rain	Prioritize	Run in the park	Indulge a "guilty pleasure".
Take a bubble bath	Read some fiction	Feed birds and squirrels	
Ask for what you need	Focus on the positive	Go to bed on time	
Watch a fire or candle burn	Lie in the sunshine	Take a deep breath	

(Adapted by Lisa D. Butler, Ph.D. from materials retrieved 6/22/2010 from <http://www.lessons4living.com/stresscat.htm>)  
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# 3

## NATURE & WELLBEING

### 3.1 THE ROLE OF NATURE IN WELLBEING

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.”  
—The Sense of Wonder (1965),  
Rachel Carson

In everyday life, nature is one of the most accessible ways to support mental wellbeing — and it doesn’t require special equipment, long training, or perfect conditions. It often happens that we search for complex solutions, very sophisticated programs and training in order to feel better and unwind, while the solution which ALWAYS helps is right next to us! Even brief contact with green space can support recovery from stress and mental fatigue.

Nature can support wellbeing on two levels at once: physiological recovery (your stress system settles) and psychological restoration (your mind gets a break from constant effort). The key point is that this isn’t only a “nice feeling” idea — large evidence reviews link contact with green space to measurable wellbeing and stress-related outcomes.

## Our bodies and minds are strongly attuned to nature

One useful explanation comes from the **biophilia hypothesis**, which suggests humans have an inherent tendency to seek connection with living systems and natural environments (Wilson, 1984).

In practice, this means that natural settings often provide cues (light, sounds, textures, rhythmic patterns) that our senses can process with less effort — supporting a calmer, more grounded state.

## There is hard evidence for stress-related benefits

A major WHO evidence review on urban green spaces concludes that green space can contribute to mental health and wellbeing, with likely pathways including **psychological relaxation and stress alleviation**, opportunities for physical activity, and social connection (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2016).

In addition, a large systematic review and meta-analysis found that greater greenspace exposure is associated with **lower salivary cortisol** (a common stress biomarker), alongside improvements in other stress-related indicators such as heart rate and blood pressure (Twohig-Bennett & Jones, 2018).

## Nature can also shift perspective: from “above nature” to “part of it”

Many nature-based learning approaches invite an **ecocentric perspective** — humans as part of an interdependent web of life — rather than an anthropocentric one in which nature is mainly a resource for human use. This matters for wellbeing because it can strengthen feelings of **belonging, responsibility, and connection**, especially in times when people feel isolated or powerless. When we begin to experience the natural world as a community we belong to, the relationship can become more reciprocal — supportive not only for the planet, but also for our sense of meaning and groundedness.

It can help us understand where we are coming from, our roots, connect to them, as well as find answers we are searching for. Nature is something that can teach us that solutions are actually simple and right out there. If you just allow yourself to notice the power of them, they will do wonders!

“In every walk with Nature one receives far more than he seeks.”  
— Steep Trails (1918),  
John Muir

## 3.2 PRACTICES IN NATURE FOR WELLBEING

As we mentioned above, we believe that nature has the power to make you feel better without any special practice — let yourself spend 20-30 minutes a day in nature and it'll already have an effect on you. If you spend these 20-30 minutes in nature mindfully — trying to be present and noticing things around you, not using your gadgets while being in nature, it can make a big change in your wellbeing!

Besides that, we would like to offer a few small activities that you can use yourself or with young people which can be useful for your wellbeing.

### 5-4-3-2-1 with nature

This is an outdoor version of a classic grounding tool (the classic version is also described in this manual in the previous chapter).

How to practice:

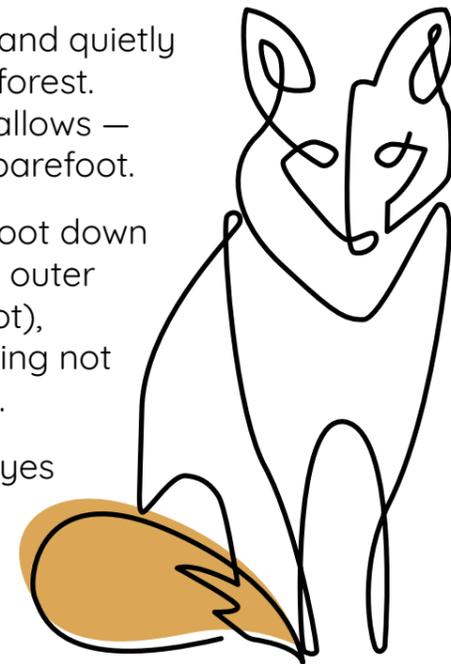
1. Sit somewhere in nature comfortably or slowly walk in the natural environment.
2. Without rushing, notice:
  - 5 things you can see
  - 4 things you can hear
  - 3 things you can feel on your skin (air, warmth, clothing, sun)
  - 2 things you can smell
  - 1 thing you can taste
3. Finish by asking: “What do I need for the next hour?” (one word is enough).

This activity helps to switch attention focus on the things around us (which we sometimes do not notice or take for granted) and being more mindful in the present moment.

### The “fox walk”

How to practice:

1. Walk slowly and quietly in the park or forest. If the surface allows — you can do it barefoot.
2. Place your foot down gently (heel → outer edge → full foot), as if you're trying not to snap a twig.
3. Keep your eyes soft and your breath steady.
4. Listen as much as you look. Notice sensations in your feet while making the steps.



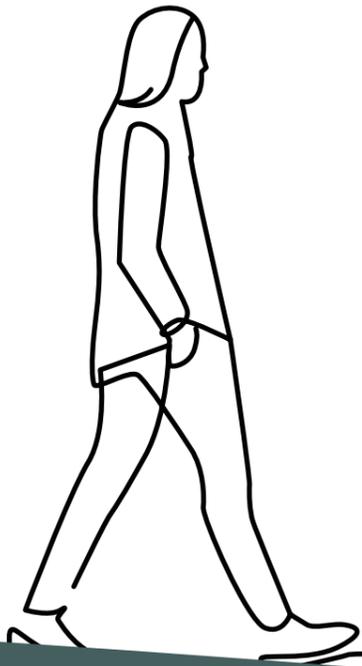
Alternatively you can develop this activity further and try to walk as if you are a different animal (e.g. tiger on a hunt, deer etc.).

## Solo walk

This activity helps to connect with nature and yourself at the same time.

### How to practice:

1. Choose an environment which is not very familiar to you (it can be in the forest, park or urban environment).
2. Switch off notifications in your phone and set alarm for 15-20 minutes.
3. Start walking in one direction, noticing things around you. It's important that you do it solo, without distractions from others / gadgets.
4. When the alarm rings, turn back and start your way back. Keep mindful presence on the environment, sounds and thoughts which are eventually crossing your mind.



## Coaching mini-HIKE

Go on an exploratory walk — with yourself!

### How to practice:

1. Take a screenshot of this task with you and read 1 question at a time — 6-7 minutes apart: before you start, you read the first question, then spend 6-7 minutes walking, while exploring what the questions unfold in you. After 7 minutes, you read the second question, and after 7 minutes the third one.
2. Make sure that you leave any distractions behind and you invest this time in yourself. What will the questions unravel?
3. Questions (it's nice that you make it visible for you one at a time, so your mind doesn't play tricks with you):
  - What do you want to explore during this hike?
  - What is your real question?
  - Why is solving this important for you?
  - If you had the answer, would you act on it? Would you work to make it a reality?

## “Rabbit ears” listening practice

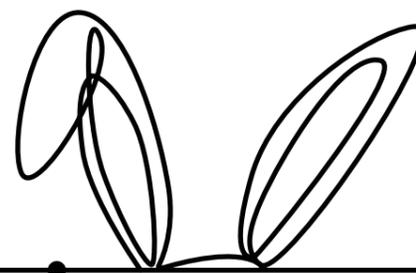
### How to practice:

Stand still.

Imagine your hearing “widening” in all directions (front, sides, behind).

Name (silently) 3 far sounds and 3 near sounds.

Notice how the sounds are filling in the space. End with one long exhale.



## Natural object that represents you

### How to practice:

1. Walk slowly and let one natural object “choose you” (leaf, stone, feather, shell — without harming nature).
2. Hold it and reflect:
  - What quality does this object represent right now?
  - What does it remind me I already have?
  - What do I need more of?
3. Optional journaling: write 5 lines beginning with “Like this object, I...”.

Group version: after choosing the object and reflection on it, participants are invited to share (as much as they feel comfortable sharing) their findings.

## Meditation with trees

This activity is aimed for you to connect with a tree as a living being and use it as a mirror for grounding and perspective.

### How to practice:

1. Walk in silence until you feel drawn to one tree.
2. Ask for “permission” in your own way (a moment of respect is enough).
3. Sit or stand near it. Observe details: bark, shape, leaves / needles, shadows.
4. Reflect in three parts:
  - Roots: What keeps me grounded? What supports me?
  - Trunk: What gives me strength right now?
  - Crown / branches: What am I growing toward? What is opening?
5. Before leaving, thank the tree (silently is fine).

## Nature Mandala

This is a beautiful regulation practice that combines hands on creativity, attention, nature and reflection.

How to practice:

- 1 Go somewhere remote, where you are not bothered by anyone. Dedicate at least 30 minutes to this activity. You have to have a situation in life that is keeping you busy nowadays. It can be related to work, your fears, relationships, finances, or anything else that is important to you at this moment.
- 2 While you are thinking about your situation, maybe ask a question, and start mapping out what elements are involved: which family members, maybe a boss, maybe your ex, etc. While you do this, collect dead materials from your surroundings: sticks, stones, leaves, fruits, seeds, dirt, whatever is inviting for you.
- 3 Now that you have the necessary building materials, think of how your situation looks, and start building a mandala as a representation of your situation: maybe different materials represent different elements, like people, money, love, etc. Or maybe the shapes that you are constructing speak to you, different layers of the mandala, different things.
- 4 Take your time with this activity. Don't rush, choose your materials, and the structure and the shape of your mandala with patience. Be curious of where this journey takes you, rather than just wanting to finish this activity.



## The river of life

How to practice:

This activity is using the metaphor of a river (plains, obstacles, waterfalls, calm waters) to reflect on your story and motivation.

- Find a place near water if possible (river, lake, fountain). If not, imagine it.
- Take 3 slow breaths and picture your life as a river.
- Draw your river on paper (simple shapes are enough). Add:
  - calm sections (what nourished you)
  - rocks/rapids (what challenged you)
  - tributaries (people/places that shaped you)
  - a “bend ahead” (what you hope for next).
- Look at your drawing and ask yourself: What has carried me this far, even when it was hard?

## The cleansing fire

Fire has a special metaphoric power. It can burn down what we are ready to release — old stories, heavy feelings, habits, fears — absorbing them into its flames. And at the same time, fire is also a symbol of renewal: what burns becomes ash, and ash can nourish the soil for something new to grow. In many cultures, fire marks a transition: an ending that creates space for a beginning.

This practice uses that symbolism in a grounded way. It can be done as a group ritual (powerful and emotional for shared closure and support) or as an individual practice.

How to practice:

- Prepare the fire in a space where it's safe to make. Let it burn steadily.
- Take a moment to reflect Ask yourself:
  - What am I ready to let go of?
  - What do I want to rebirth in a new quality?
- Keep it simple: choose one thing.
- Create a “letting go bouquet”.

While thinking about your intention, collect a few dry, fallen natural objects and arrange them into a small bouquet in your hands. Let the bouquet become a symbol — representing something you’re releasing.

Offer it to the fire.

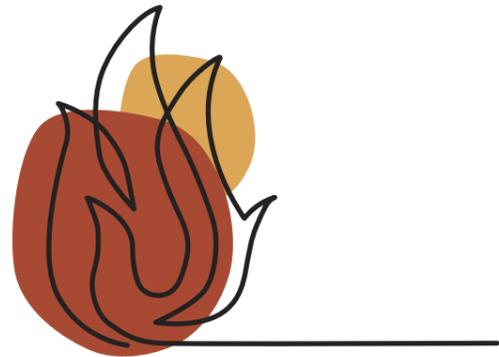
When you feel ready, step close enough to the fire safely and place your bouquet into the flames. You can do it in silence, or say one quiet sentence:

- “I let go of ...”
- “I release ...”
- “I make space for ...”
- “I choose ...”.

Pause and breathe. Watch the flames for a moment. Feel your feet on the ground. Take one slower exhale. Ask: What is one small step I can take to support what I want to grow?

If you do it with a group:

- Everyone makes their bouquet separately.
- You gather in a circle around the fire.
- People place their bouquets one by one (sharing is optional).



## 3.3 NATURE WHEN YOU LIVE IN A CITY

Living in a city doesn’t mean you have to give up nature-based self-care. We have created this chapter for those of us, who spend most of the time in urban environments. While one might think that cities are just about hustle and bustle, high buildings and ‘stone jungles’, in fact, most of them still contain many “doors back to nature”: street trees, small parks, courtyards, riversides, community gardens, even the sky above the rooftops. The goal isn’t to escape the city — it’s to learn how to notice and use the nature that’s already there.

Many practices from the previous section work perfectly well in urban spaces. A 5-4-3-2-1 sensory scan, a slow “fox walk”, or a one-minute nature anchor can be done on a tree-lined street, in a small park, or on your way to work.

The key is to shift from “getting somewhere” mode to “arriving where you are” and “being here and now” even for a few minutes.

## What might help you adapt ‘nature activity’ in urban space:



Swap “forest” for “tree.” One tree can become your whole practice.



Swap “silence” for “selective attention.” In a city, you practice noticing what supports you (wind, birds, leaves) alongside noise.



Swap “wide landscape” for “micro-nature.” Moss in a crack, patterns in bark, clouds between buildings, flowers in a flowerbed or leaf in a mowed bush — small still counts.

## Pocket Park Refresh

How to practice:

1. During your lunch break or on the way to work / home: step into the nearest green spot (park, courtyard, tree-lined street).
2. Do one slow lap or stand still.
3. Notice three different greens (or three textures) and three various sounds.
4. Try not to use phones, headphones or other gadgets.

## The Sky Break

Sometimes you can’t access a park, you’re stuck indoors but you need a rest quick!

1. Look up at the sky (through a window is fine).
2. Follow the movement of clouds / light for 30-60 seconds.
3. Take 3 slower exhales and soften your shoulders.

## Street Tree Sit Spot

1. Choose one tree you pass often (near work / home).
2. Stand or sit nearby.
3. Notice: bark pattern, leaf movement, shadows, seasonal change.
4. Ask: “What’s changing in me today?” (one word answer).

Repeat weekly — familiarity builds a sense of steadiness.

## Urban Sensory Map

1. Walk slowly for 5-10 minutes.
2. Mentally “map” your senses:
  - Where do you feel the wind?
  - Where do you hear birds vs. engines?
  - Where is it warmer / cooler?
3. At the end, stop and name one place that felt most supportive. Next time, intentionally choose that route.

## Street Wisdom

Street Wisdom is a free creative walking practice (and an APP) that turns ordinary streets into a space for reflection and fresh perspective. Their core idea is simple: take a question for a walk and let your environment help you see it differently. Street Wisdom describes this as a practice you can add to your everyday walk, often shared through their guided “Walkshops.”

How to practice:

### 1 Choose one question

Keep it open and practical. Examples Street Wisdom suggests include questions about life / work / values / community.

Examples you can use:

- “What do I need more of right now?”
- “Where am I over-carrying responsibility?”
- “What boundary would protect my wellbeing?”
- “What would ‘enough’ look like today?”

### 2 Walk without rushing (10–20 minutes)

Let yourself be slightly curious. Notice what draws your attention — colours, signs, people, textures, bits of nature, unexpected details.

Why it’s useful in cities: You don’t need “wild nature” to restore yourself. This practice uses the city itself — plus whatever nature is present — to support attention, creativity, and perspective.

Find out more about Street Wisdom: <https://www.streetwisdom.org/>

### 3 Collect “clues”

When something catches your eye, pause and ask:

- “What might this be showing me?”
- “How could this relate to my question?”
- Don’t force meaning — just collect impressions.

### 4 Finish with one small action (2 minutes).

Answer:

- “The message I’m taking is...”
- “My next small step is...”

Street Wisdom emphasizes turning the walk into active steps forward — not just reflection.

## 3.4 USING NATURE WITH GROUPS

“Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees.”

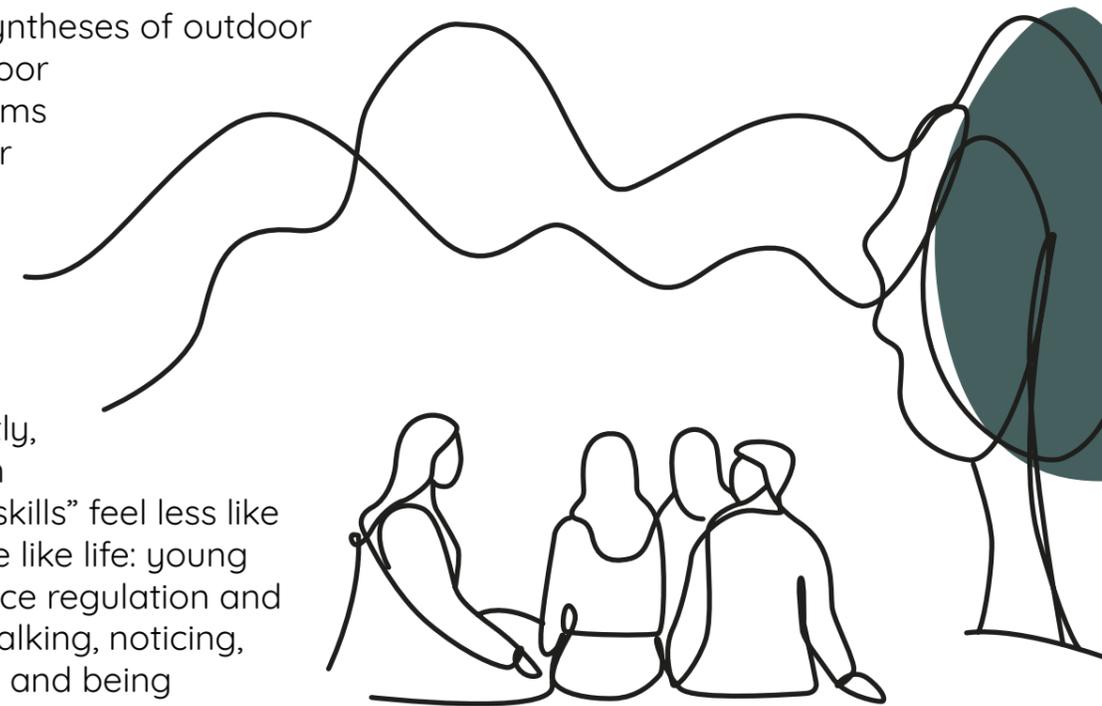
— John Muir

Working outdoors with young people can be a powerful (and often surprisingly simple) way to support wellbeing as well as bring an absolutely special sense of freedom and exploration. Even when you don’t do anything specifically designed to explore the outdoor environment, but you just move your standard workshop outdoors, it’ll bring a totally different feeling and vibe. Young people are cramped in the classrooms and strictly organised and regulated environments for the biggest part of their day, so when the walls disappear — it can create magic!

Furthermore, if you add elements of nature exploration, connection and mutual support, it can create additional opportunities for young people to learn more about themselves and the environment around them, connect to their peers and provide support to each other.

Nature-based activities tend to combine several protective elements at once: movement, sensory grounding, social connection, play, and a change of pace. Evidence reviews link green space contact with pathways such as psychological relaxation and stress alleviation, and syntheses of outdoor recreation / outdoor education programs report benefits for young people’s psychological wellbeing, social connection, and self-efficacy.

Just as importantly, outdoor work can make “wellbeing skills” feel less like therapy and more like life: young people can practice regulation and reflection while walking, noticing, building, creating, and being together.



## What to keep in mind when organising nature-based activities for wellbeing with youth:

**Safety first:** check weather, terrain, traffic / water risks, local rules, and have a clear risk management plan.

**Clear structure:** explain the purpose, steps, and timing simply; start with an easy warm-up and end with a clear closing.

**Consent and boundaries:** no touch unless clearly agreed; respect personal space; avoid “performing” or calling people out.

**Leave no trace:** collect only fallen objects (if at all), don’t damage living plants, and respect protected areas.

**Challenge by choice:** make the level of challenge in your activities optional to choose; allow “small participation” (observe, stand aside, take breaks).

**Monitoring safety:** make sure you have enough human resources to monitor safety in the group outdoors, ensure clear meeting points and boundaries.

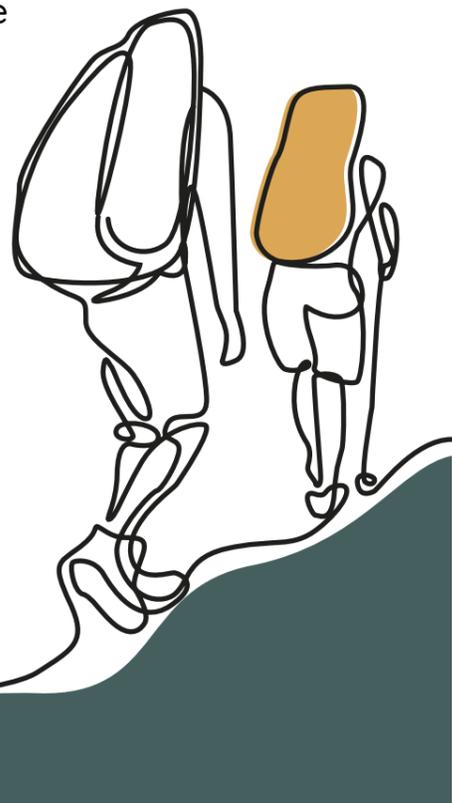
**Inclusion:** offer alternatives for the activities if it feels too overwhelming, consider mobility, sensory sensitivities, neurodiversity, and different fitness levels.

**Sensitivity:** avoid forcing eye-closing or deep personal sharing; yet create a welcoming and safe atmosphere for people to do so if they wish.

**Group agreements:** co-create simple rules (respect, no mocking, confidentiality where appropriate, phones policy).

**Preparation:** bring water, basic first aid, sunscreen / repellent, extra layers, and plan for toilets / snacks.

**Adapt to the setting:** “nature” can be a park, courtyard, tree-lined street, or even a window — use what’s available.



## References used in Chapter 3

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World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. (2016). *Urban green spaces and health: A review of evidence*. WHO Regional Office for Europe (<https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2016-3352-43111-60341>).

# 4

## MINDFULNESS & MBSR FOR YOUTH WORKERS

This chapter introduces mindfulness in a practical way for youth workers and educators. The aim is not to turn you into a mindfulness teacher, and it's not about "being calm all the time." Instead, it offers simple practices that can help you notice stress earlier, regulate in the moment, and respond more skillfully in emotionally demanding situations. It's also an invitation to bring more curiosity and awareness to what happens inside you — your thoughts, emotions, and body signals — so you can understand your patterns and support yourself more effectively.

We will also briefly introduce MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) as one of the best-known structured approaches to mindfulness practice. However, the focus here is on what matters most in everyday youth work: clear, safe, easy-to-apply practices, and ways to adapt them for young people.

Our hope is that this chapter will support you to learn more about mindfulness, try a few core practices, and use them to strengthen a culture of wellbeing in your organisation or learning environment. Mindfulness can support socio-emotional development by helping young people (and adults) cope with stress, burnout, emotional intensity, and everyday pressure — while building a more inclusive, safe, and compassionate culture of practice.

## 4.1 WHAT MINDFULNESS IS (AND ISN'T); ETHICS & SAFETY

### What is mindfulness? MBSR for Youth Workers

Mindfulness is the opposite of automatic pilot mode.

It is about experiencing the world that is firmly in the "here and now". It's also a lot about BEING rather than DOING. This being mode involves focusing your awareness on the present moment by paying attention to your sensations, feelings, thoughts, and environment in the here-and-now with an attitude of acceptance.

In other words; focusing on awareness of the present moment including what you are thinking, feeling, and sensing in the moment.

Mindfulness helps you build a small pause between a trigger and your reaction. In youth work, that pause can mean: less escalation, clearer boundaries, more compassion, and more stability in the room.

In the next sections, we will describe several MBSR-informed practices in an accessible way — so youth workers can try them for personal self-care and, when appropriate, adapt shorter, choice-based versions for work with young people.



#### What is MBSR?

MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) is a structured, educational approach developed in the late 1970s by Jon Kabat-Zinn. He defines mindfulness as "moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness". Non-judgment is a key element of the practice of mindfulness meditation.

MBSR programme teaches mindfulness through various practices (e.g. body scan, sitting meditation, and mindful movement). You do not need to join an 8-week programme to benefit from mindfulness, but MBSR is a useful reference because it offers a clear, safe foundation and practice vocabulary.

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is an educational program designed for learning mindfulness and discovering skillful ways to manage stress.

## What mindfulness is NOT (and common misunderstandings)

Mindfulness is not:

- ✗ a quick fix or instant solution
- ✗ emptying your mind
- ✗ forced positivity
- ✗ a “special experience” or being calm forever
- ✗ a religious requirement (it can be practiced in a secular way)
- ✗ a productivity tool used to tolerate unhealthy workloads

Mindfulness does include relaxation sometimes, but its goal is awareness, not chasing calm.

## A very short history (why mindfulness is everywhere now)

Mindfulness has deep roots in contemplative traditions, including meditation practices found in several Asian philosophies and cultures. While the word mindfulness is used in many ways today, the core idea — training attention and awareness — has been practiced in different forms for thousands of years.

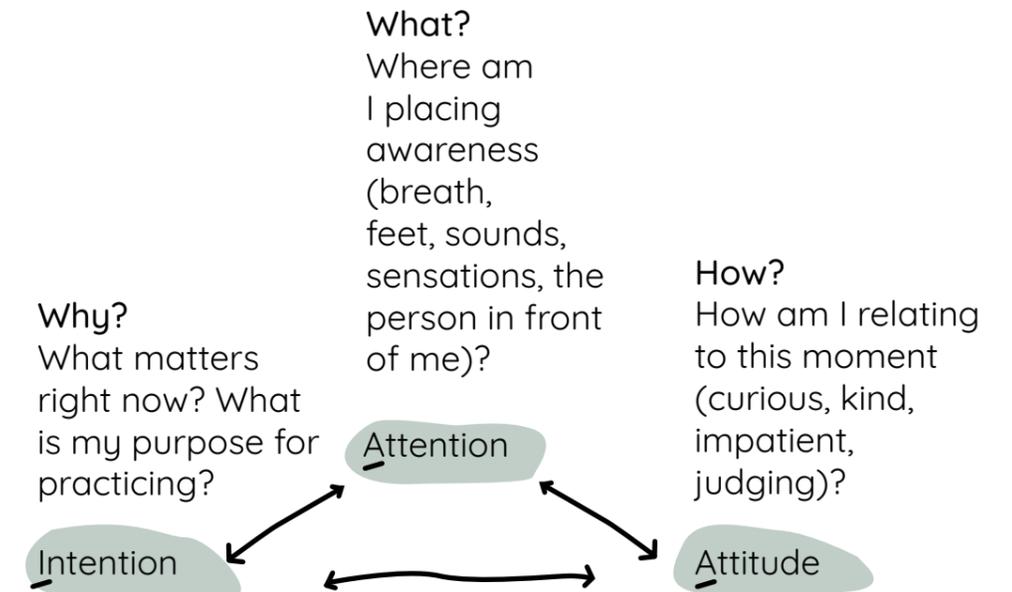
In the late 1970s, Jon Kabat-Zinn, a scientist and long-time meditation practitioner, began exploring how mindfulness could be offered in a secular and accessible way within mainstream healthcare. He developed MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, originally through the Stress Reduction Clinic (Kabat-Zinn, 2011; UMass Memorial Health, n.d.). His work was informed by his meditation background and by teachers who helped bring mindfulness into everyday life in a practical, human language — Kabat-Zinn has written, for example, about using Thich Nhat Hanh’s words with permission and drawing on his teachings in how he communicated mindfulness in medical settings (Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

In the early 1990s and onward, mindfulness and acceptance approaches also began to influence psychology more widely. What is sometimes called the “third wave” of cognitive and behavioral therapies placed greater emphasis on acceptance, mindfulness, values, and the relationship to thoughts and emotions rather than trying to change every thought’s content (Hayes, 2004).

Mindfulness became more visible in public culture as well — for example, MBSR was featured in Bill Moyers’ documentary series *Healing and the Mind* (Bill Moyers, n.d.). Since then, mindfulness practices have been adapted for many settings, including education and youth work. In this manual, we keep the focus on what matters most: mindfulness as a practical, choice-based skill that supports self-awareness, regulation, and more skillful responding — without requiring any religious or spiritual affiliation.

## The IAA model (Intention–Attention–Attitude)

A helpful way to understand mindfulness in everyday life is the IAA model, which describes three elements that work together: Intention, Attention, and Attitude (Shapiro, 2014; Shapiro et al., 2006).



30-second IAA check-in that you can do as a daily practice:

- |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| “What matters right now?” (one phrase). | “What’s my anchor?” (breath / feet / sounds). | “Can I bring 5% more kindness / curiosity?” | Then take one slower exhale and continue. |
|---|---|---|---|

## Core ethical principles regarding practicing mindfulness in Youth Work

- ✓ **Do No Harm (Non-Maleficence):** Mindfulness practices should never intentionally cause psychological or emotional distress. Practices must be appropriate to the participant’s context and capacity.
- ✓ **Informed Consent:** Participants should understand what mindfulness is, what it involves, and that participation is voluntary — especially in workplaces, schools, or institutions.
- ✓ **Respect for Autonomy:** Individuals must be free to opt out or adapt practices without pressure, judgment, or negative consequences.
- ✓ **Competence & Scope of Practice:** Facilitators should only teach within their training and experience and must not present mindfulness as therapy unless properly qualified.
- ✓ **Integrity & Transparency:** Mindfulness should not be used manipulatively (e.g., to increase productivity while ignoring unhealthy workloads).

## Safety Considerations

- ✓ **Psychological Safety:** Mindfulness can bring up strong emotions or memories. Practices should be gentle, optional, and adaptable.
- ✓ **Trauma-Sensitive Approach:** Avoid forced silence, prolonged eyes-closed practices, or body-focused exercises without alternatives. Choice is essential.
- ✓ **Cultural & Religious Neutrality:** Mindfulness should be presented in a secular, inclusive way – without imposing spiritual or religious beliefs.
- ✓ **Clear Boundaries:** Mindfulness is not a replacement for mental health treatment. Participants should be guided to professional support when needed.
- ✓ **Safe Environment:** A calm, respectful setting with clear guidelines (confidentiality, non-judgment, consent) supports safe practice.

## Benefits of practicing Mindfulness

A growing body of research suggests that mindfulness-based approaches can support stress reduction and psychological wellbeing for many people – especially when practiced regularly and in a choice-based way (Goyal et al., 2014; Keng et al., 2011). Mindfulness does not remove difficult situations, but it can change how we relate to them, which often reduces reactivity and supports better regulation.

Mindfulness practice may help by:



**Reducing stress** and emotional overload (e.g., feeling less “swept away” by thoughts and feelings) (Goyal et al., 2014).



**Supporting emotion** regulation, by noticing emotions earlier and responding with more choice (Keng et al., 2011).



**Improving attention** and clarity, especially when we practice returning to one anchor (breath, body, sounds) (Keng et al., 2011).



**Strengthening self-compassion** and resilience, which can be protective in high-emotional-demand work (Keng et al., 2011).

In education and youth work specifically, mindfulness-informed practice is often used to support:



lower burnout risk through short recovery pauses and better self-regulation,



more intentional communication, especially in tense moments,



and a calmer, safer group culture, when practices are offered inclusively and without pressure.



“The first and best victory is to conquer self.”

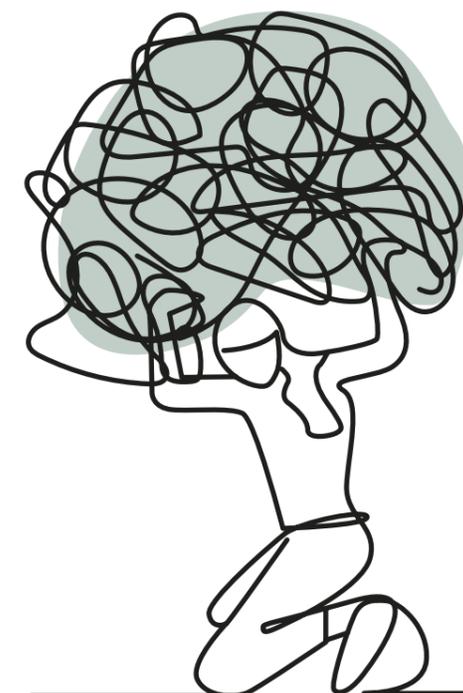
– Plato

It has also been concluded that MBSR helps teachers overcome their emotional reactivity to student behaviors that cause emotional and professional burnout in teaching (Chang, 2013; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Recent research has shown that MBSR leads to significant changes in the brain region responsible for learning and memory processes (Hölzel et al., 2011).

Of course, the benefits of mindfulness vary from person to person. Mindfulness is not a quick fix, and it is not a replacement for professional mental health support when needed. It works best as a small, consistent practice and as part of broader wellbeing support (Goyal et al., 2014).

## 4.2 MBSR-INFORMED PRACTICES

MBSR can be a helpful way to reduce stress levels. One review of the research found that mindfulness-based therapy was also effective in the treatment of anxiety. A 2016 study concluded that mindfulness was both a simple and cost-effective way to reduce negative emotions, stress, and anxiety. To lower stress, improve emotional regulation, boost cognitive abilities and strengthen relationships, daily mindfulness practices can help strengthen your “awareness” muscle. We would like to share a few basic practices which could support you:



## **A** 3-Minute breathing space

The purpose of the 3-minute breathing space is to help you step out of the automatic pilot, move into the present moment and slow down so you can respond more skillfully to stressful situations. Practice becoming more aware by focusing on your breathing when you're upset or anxious. Breathing techniques can have a calming effect and help you stay grounded in the present moment.

### Step by step:

1. Pay attention to what is happening now, observing everything including thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations; try to accept the current situation and release the tendency to think, "I wish things were different."
2. Focus on your breath; go down to your navel and feel your breath, gently returning to it even if your mind wanders.
3. Expand your full body awareness; notice all sensations and inner feelings throughout your body from head to toe, accept them as they are without trying to change them, and open yourself to your body with a feeling of "coming home."

Finally, move your fingers / toes and open your eyes or return to your daily activities; this three-minute breathing space is a way to break free from auto-pilot and reconnect with the moment or the present.

## **B** Body scan:

The purpose of the body scan is to further awareness of body sensations. The purpose is not to generate relaxation. There is no expectation that you will feel relaxed during or after the body scan. The body scan is an opportunity to connect to the body, this marvelous sensing instrument that can bring you closer to yourself, to the world, and to others.

### Step by step:

1. Begin with your breath, using it as a binding agent, feeling the movement of your chest and abdomen.
2. Bring your awareness from your toes to the soles, heels, and tops of your feet; affirm each area by saying, "I feel it here."

3. Legs — ankles, calves, knees, thighs; observe without rushing.

4. Pelvis, abdomen, and lower back; notice any sensation of weight, warmth, rhythm, or absence, and compare this to relaxation with a body scan.

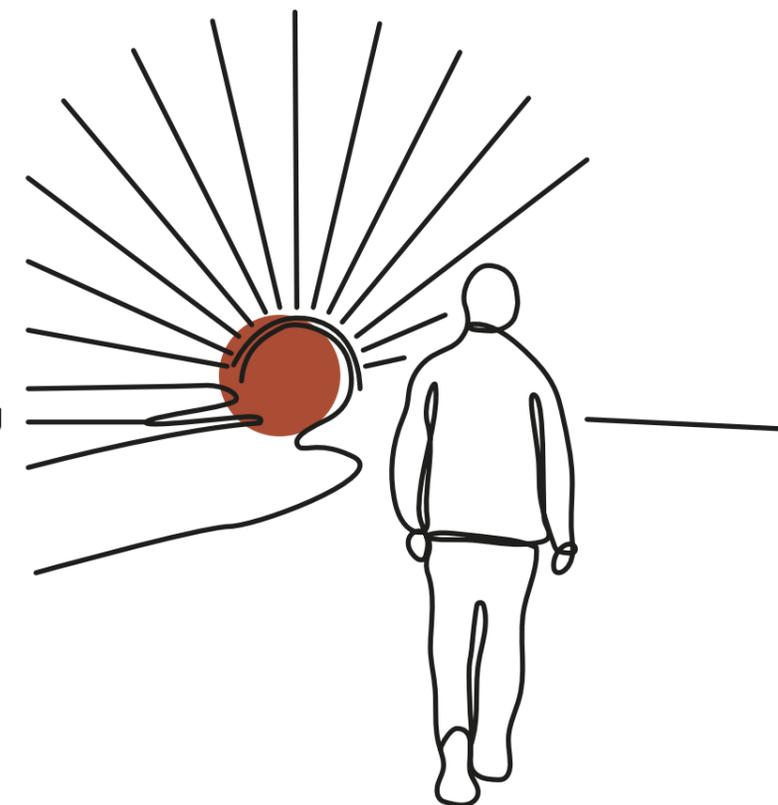
5. Feel the entire body with friendly awareness, encompassing the hands, arms, shoulders, chest/upper back, and head and neck, and remain in integrated awareness.

## **C** Mindful walking

The purpose of mindful walking is to practice bringing present-moment awareness to your surroundings and bodily sensations while walking. Mindful walking provides rich territory to practice mindfulness. Sensation abounds when you walk — from physical sensations, such as changes in your heart rate, the motion of your leg, or the press of your foot into the ground, to the sights, sounds, and smells you encounter along the way.

### Step by step:

1. Breath and steps. Focus on your breath; breathe in a steady rhythm and notice the contact of your steps.
2. Body awareness. Observe movement in your torso, back, shoulders, and arms; watch bodily sensations without judgment.
3. External stimuli. Listen to sounds; balance awareness with the outside world (e.g., birds, rustling leaves).
4. Light and appearance. Note how sunlight appears through the trees; observe changes in color and light.
5. Inner awareness and integration. Pay attention to inner thoughts and feelings alongside external stimuli; continue walking with integrated awareness without judgment.



## The Three Rs of mindfulness

A simple reminder to use when stress pulls you from the present.

How to use it:

**Release** the struggle with “too much thinking” or “what is...”

“I notice my mind is busy.”

**Relax** the body (especially shoulders/jaw) and notice the breath.

One longer exhale; soften shoulders.

**Return** to this moment — where you have at least some resources available.

Feel feet + name one next step.

## 4.3 INTEGRATING MINDFULNESS AT WORK: BRIEF PRACTICES, CUES, COMMON BARRIERS

### Integrating mindfulness at work

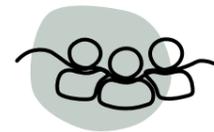
Mindfulness techniques are employed to reduce burnout, increase productivity and focus, reduce stress and support productivity and enhance communication. Major companies, including leading tech firms, have incorporated mindfulness into employee wellness programs, recognizing its impact on wellbeing and efficiency.

Mindfulness reminders built into devices encourage pausing and focusing on your breath, reducing tension and increasing mental clarity. Furthermore, awareness of your own abilities and limitations contributes to a more conscious, compassionate, and sustainable work environment.

Integrating mindfulness practices into teamwork creates a shared culture of mindfulness. Shared practices, such as short meditations or group breathing exercises, strengthen harmony in the workplace. Ultimately, mindfulness is a process focused on growth, not perfection, and positively impacts both individual performance and organizational culture.

### Brief practices

Simple practices like focusing on a single task, taking regular breaks, and breathing exercises refresh the mind, reduce sudden stress responses, and create a more balanced workflow.



### Mindful Break Practice:

Taking short 2-3 minute breaks at specific times during the day to practice deep breathing, stretching, or sitting quietly and focusing on the present moment.

### Single-Tasking:

Instead of multitasking, focus on only one task at a time to improve attention and work quality.

### Using Breathing Reminders:

Setting reminders on your phone or computer to pause several times a day and take 5 deep breaths to calm the mind and reduce stress.

### Starting Meetings with a Brief Mindfulness Moment:

Creating a more productive and calm communication environment by doing a 1-minute quiet breathing exercise or a brief moment of focus before meetings.

### Sharing Mindfulness Within the Team:

Encouraging team members to share mindfulness techniques that work well for them (such as short meditations, walks, breathing exercises).

### Common barriers

#### Time and workload perception:

The belief that there isn't enough time for mindfulness leads to postponing practices.



#### Misconceptions and prejudices:

The misconception that mindfulness is unnecessary, abstract, or limited to meditation only.



#### Distraction and multitasking habits:

Constant notifications and the habit of doing many things at once make it difficult to focus.



#### Insufficient organizational and management support:

Without a supportive culture, employees may be hesitant to participate in practices.



#### Impatience and difficulty changing habits:

Expectation of quick results and the difficulty of abandoning old work routines.



## Tips for making your working day more mindful

Start your day consciously: Before turning on your computer, pause for 1 minute, focus on your breath, and set your intention for the day.

Reduce notifications: Lighten your mental load by turning off constantly distracting notifications.

Take small steps: Mindfulness requires consistency, not perfection; a few minutes a day is enough.

Develop bodily awareness: When you realize you've been sitting for a long time, correct your posture and relax your shoulders.

Return to your breath during difficult moments: Instead of reacting immediately, take 3 deep breaths to build awareness.

Take breaks seriously: Instead of looking at the screen during breaks, stand up, breathe, or take a short walk.

Focus on one task at a time: Instead of multitasking, finish one task and move on to the next.

End the day with mindfulness: Ask yourself, "What did I do well today?" at the end of the day.

Listen actively in meetings: Focus on listening without interrupting the speaker or letting your mind wander.

Be kind to yourself: When you're distracted, instead of criticizing yourself, notice it and return to the present moment.

## 4.4 MINDFUL LIVING IN EVERYDAY LIFE (FOR YOU AND FOR YOUTH)

“Just as water reflects the stars and the moon, the body reflects the mind and soul.”  
— Rumi

Mindfulness becomes most helpful when it moves beyond “a practice you do sometimes” and becomes a way of returning to the present throughout the day. Teens and young adults today are facing greater mental health challenges than ever before. Whether sensory overload from electronic devices, cyberbullying, or academic pressures — they are in dire need of education in self-care. Practicing mindfulness can help youth develop more self-acceptance and esteem, and aspects of resilience including self-awareness, emotion regulation, and improved coping skills and relationships.

Short, practical mindfulness moments can support self-awareness, emotion regulation, and coping, without requiring long meditation sessions.

This section offers two things:

- ✓ a simple way to commit to self-care (without perfectionism)
- ✓ a set of mindful living micro-practices that fit everyday life.

### My Self-Care Promise

Self-care is not only a personal luxury — it supports health, resilience, and our ability to cope with challenges. When we have mental clarity, our mind is calm, clear and free of distractions. We have a sense of awareness about our life; we know where we are at the moment and where we want to be in the future. When we see our life mapped out, it allows us to really think about where we are and where we wish to be.



## 1 Let's pause and reflect...

- Are you treating your body well?
- Are you feeling energetic and full of vitality?
- Do you enjoy enough leisure time?
- Are you surrounding yourself with people that elevate you or drain your energy?
- Are you paying enough attention to your mental and emotional needs?

## 2 Write your self-care promise (2 minutes):

Complete this sentence:  
“For the next 7 days, I commit to...”  
Choose something small and realistic (2-10 minutes).

Examples:

- “...a 3-minute breathing space after work.”
- “...a short walk with my phone in my pocket.”
- “...one earlier bedtime this week.”
- “...pausing before replying to stressful messages.”

Tip: Choose something you can succeed with even on a busy week.

## Making a simple self-contract (if-then planning)

We often lose self-care when we are tired, overbooked, or emotionally overloaded. A self-contract helps you plan for those moments without guilt.

### 1 Identify a vulnerable moment

“When am I most likely to drop my self-care?”. E.g.:

- After conflict, after evening events, deadlines, when I scroll at night.

### 2 Create one “if-then” plan

If \_\_\_\_\_ happens, then I will \_\_\_\_\_. E.g.:

- If I notice I'm rushing, then I will do Release-Relax-Return for 30 seconds.
- If I feel overwhelmed after a session, then I will take 10 slow steps outside.
- If I start doom-scrolling at night, then I will put the phone away and do 3 slow exhales.

### 3 Choose a kind mantra (optional)

A simple sentence you can repeat without forcing positivity. E.g.:

- “Small steps count.”
- “I can pause.”
- “I'm doing my best with what I have.”

## Practices for mindful living

As you move from one activity to the next throughout the day, it can be tough to stay mindful. You can get back on track by pausing throughout the day to practice a few basic mindfulness exercises. You might make it a habit to spend a few minutes being mindful at certain times of the day.



**Cook Your Meals:** With full-time jobs and families to feed, it can be exhausting to cook healthy meals every time. Each day most of us are gifted with three wonderful opportunities to practice mindful living. To live mindfully, you need to be aware of the food you're putting into your body. And that means you'll have to invest in cooking homemade meals on a regular basis.



**Eat Slowly:** You'll want to taste your food thoroughly. At first, your mouth will be swirling with various flavors. Notice that sensation. Notice how it feels. Become aware of the resistance to keep chewing. Does the food taste different than how it usually does when you practice mindful eating?



**Look Up When You Walk:** Miss a lot of what happens in the world around you if your eyes are always staring at concrete and shoes. To experience mindful living, you'll need to change the direction of your gaze. It's okay to stop for a moment and look up to the sky. Watch life happening all around you simply by shifting the focus of your gaze.



**Listen to Others:** Mindful living is to focus on the present moment. And if someone is speaking to you, rather than coming up with the right words to respond with, focus on just hearing their words and listening for any subtle cues.



**Avoid multitasking:** When you do one of the above, refrain from doing something else and avoid checking your phone.

Mindfulness is a practice of returning — again and again — to what is happening now, with more kindness and choice. For youth workers, even a few minutes a day can strengthen your capacity to stay present in emotionally demanding situations. Choose one practice from this chapter and try it for a week. Keep what helps. Adapt what doesn't. The goal is not perfection — it's support. When you are more mindful yourself, you will be more open and eager to promote mindfulness among young people.

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# 5

## TIME MANAGEMENT THAT REDUCES STRESS

Time management is always an intriguing topic for any profession. Everyone has a soft spot for another tool or a methodology that can make us more productive. However, the approach of this manual is not to showcase how you can do more, be faster and better. Instead it focuses on how you can practise taking care of yourself in the process of accomplishing your tasks. This can be realised through the intention with which we plan, prioritise, focus and set boundaries, which has a direct impact on our stress levels, on our emotions and the quality of our services.

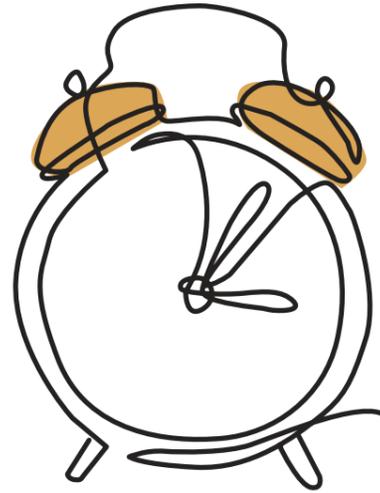
In *Self-Care for YOUth*, time management is not approached from the aspect of setting up systems of control but as a supportive framework that aims to reduce overload and prevent burnout. Although every profession has a complicated reality, it is true that youth workers, educators, and youth staff are expected to have the skills of a Swiss Army knife, juggling a variety of tasks from application writing to cleaning up after an event. This vast range of skills and tasks often feels overwhelming with competing priorities, blurred boundaries, emotional labour and unexpected demands. All these elements tend to support the accumulation of stress and undermine the presence, patience and resilience which are necessary for meaningful youthwork.

Therefore, in this chapter, we aim to make a shift in the perspective of “how do I fit everything in?” to “how do I organise my time in a way that is sustainable for myself, my limits and my values?” This shift is a fundamental one which needs significant time and dedication to eventually reduce friction in everyday routines. It emphasises on sustainability over speed, presence over constant availability and having the courage and the energy to have the tough conversations instead of pushing emotions and intentions under the youthwork rug.

We hope that by practising these tools, this framework will support you in creating more space for yourself, for young people and for meaningful youthwork, and if needed, help you recover from past challenges.

## 5.1 PRIORITISING & PLANNING

In a world where everything feels urgent and everyone can attract our attention at any moment, prioritising and planning is not as simple as in the past. Traditionally, they have been associated with efficiency and performance, but in our manual we will approach them as practices of care. When care is absent, time management becomes an act of self-extraction, squeezing more outputs from an empty cup. When care is present, planning becomes a way of protecting human capacity. This shift from urgency and squeezing to caring and creating is a significant one as it can allow youth workers to move from survival mode to stability and eventually thriving, building a mindset from “I can’t handle my day” to “what is possible”.

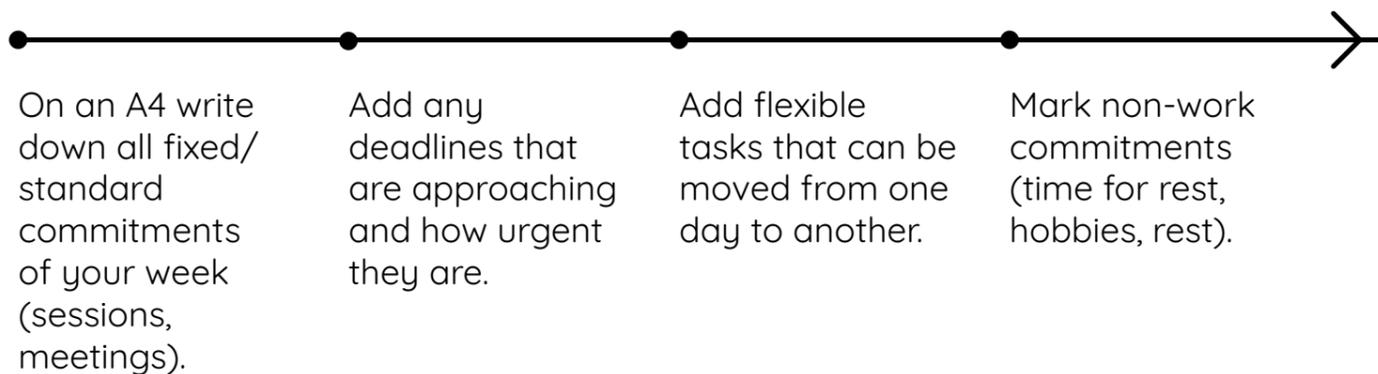


The shift starts from our approach to tasks. When tasks are invisible, unstructured, or constantly carried mentally, they increase cognitive load and keep the stress system activated. Making them visible — on paper, in simple structures, and realistic plans — allows the body and mind to unwind. It reduces decision fatigue (a major everyday stress factor), supports clearer communication about capacity, and creates intentional breathing space each week.

### ACTIVITIES

The following activities invite you to externalise your workload, experiment with different planning lenses and gently question habits that contribute to overload. None of the activities aim for the “perfect week”. Instead they support awareness, flexibility, and realistic prioritisation in the context of youth work, where unpredictability is part of our everyday reality.

#### Mapping the reality



Take a blank A4 sheet (or a flipchart) and draw a weekly grid (Monday to Sunday).

Add the tasks as you would usually do in your weekly plan.

Observe your plan and with a highlighter mark where the day feels “full” or “too much”.

Action: what changes can you make in your week from a space of care? Who can support you this week to make some days less full? How can you plan next week so that it doesn’t feel overloaded?

#### Reflection questions:

- What surprised you in the process?
- What did you see when you mapped your week visually?
- Which are the areas with the most pressure points or unrealistic expectations?
- What can you do about it next week?

### Batching in Practice

List your recurrent tasks (answering emails, preparing for sessions, communication). Group similar tasks together.

Assign specific time blocks in your week for each group.

Commit to doing only that type of task during the block and decide how you will tackle distractions (aeroplane mode, disclaimer).

Experiment with this approach for a week and take notes on how you can improve your batching.

#### Reflection questions:

- What changes in your energy and focus when you batch tasks?
- Which task types drain you most when they are scattered in the day?
- What feels easier / calmer with this approach?

## The weekly focus trio

Start by writing down in a brain dump process all the tasks that need to be done in the week without any order.

Set up the intention of the week (I want to close this chapter, I want to be proactive).

Set up 1-3 priorities for the week that truly matter and align with your intention (to finish the application, write the report, send the request to the youth council).

Write down in big letters the intention and then the priorities as explicitly as possible.

Match the tasks that fit these priorities from the brain dump process and assign the time for them.

Anything that doesn't support the priorities, consider postponing or renegotiating a new deadline.

### Reflection questions:

- How does it feel to limit priorities to three?
- What do you gain / lose by doing this activity?
- How does clarity and intention affect your stress levels?

## Design Buffer Time

Review your weekly map. Identify places where tasks or meetings are scheduled back-to-back.

Insert a 20-minute buffer time between selected activities.

Decide intentionally how buffers will be used to support your care (rest, notes, moving, drinking water, breathing).

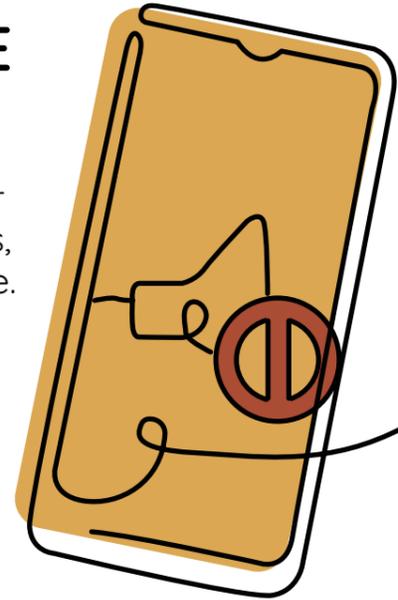
Protect these buffers as non-negotiable.

### Reflection questions:

- What becomes possible when you are not rushing?
- How does buffer time change your presence with others?
- How does it feel to prioritise yourself in small everyday moments?

## 5.2 FOCUS & ATTENTION HYGIENE

Focus is not only a cognitive skill but also a state of safety for the nervous system. Daily distractions from notifications, calls, and chats drain energy and push the body into survival mode. In youth work and education, attention is further stretched by emotional demands, urgent requests, and constant digital communication. Over time, this fragmented attention increases stress, reduces clarity and creativity, and makes it harder to stay present with tasks and people.



Focus and attention hygiene mean intentionally caring for where, how, and how often attention is used. Rather than relying on more tools to concentrate harder, this section encourages reducing unnecessary interruptions, adding short moments of reset, and setting clearer boundaries with technology. The aim is to choose when and how to engage so that attention becomes a resource, not a constant drain. The following activities help you notice attention patterns, try small proactive and protective habits, and create realistic boundaries that support both effectiveness and wellbeing.

### Mapping your attention leaks

Take a blank A4 page at the beginning of your day and start your working day as planned.

Throughout the day, mark the interruptions that occurred.

Categorise them as external or internal.

Look at the list at the end of the working day and circle the three most frequent attention leaks.

Reflect on its nature (is it internal or external? Why is it happening?).

Choose a leak that you are willing to address this week.

### Reflection questions:

- Which interruptions feel most draining?
- Which ones are within your control?
- How does it affect your mood?

## Single-Tasking Experiment

Choose a task you usually multitask (talk on the phone while answering emails, be in an online meeting while messaging your colleagues).

Remove all stimuli (close tabs, silence notifications).

Set a realistic time frame.

Focus only on that task until the time you have assigned ends.

Reflection questions:

- What was challenging about single-tasking?
- What felt easier / more satisfying?
- How does it affect your sense of completion?

## Designing Boundaries with Technology

Review how often you check emails, messages and reach out to your mobile phone.

Decide on specific time windows for digital communication in the working day and assign proper time in your agenda.

Adjust notification and sound settings accordingly.

Make sure tabs are closed, and your mobile phone is facing down or is out of sight.

Inform colleagues, if necessary, of your availability.

Test these boundaries every day and adjust accordingly.

Reflection questions:

- What fears come up when you think about limiting availability?
- What do you gain by protecting your attention?
- How do boundaries influence your emotional state?

## Attention as a value

Reflect on what or who deserves your best attention.

Write down these areas where your attention feels misaligned

Identify one concrete change to realign attention to your values

Commit to this change for the coming week.

Reflection questions:

- Where does your attention go by default?
- What does your attention say about your priorities (from the previous section)?
- How does aligning attention with values reduce stress?

## 5.3 SAYING NO & RENEGOTIATING COMMITMENTS

### Tools for Working with Young People

In youth work and education, saying yes is often the expected answer. Yes tends to be linked to eagerness to support, care, responsibility, and commitment. Many professionals enter the field and assume that in order to excel in our services, we need to be available and supportive in any setting. Especially for young people with fewer opportunities who may already experience instability or lack of support, saying no can have additional negative connotations. However, when yes becomes the default answer and boundaries are not defined or clearly communicated, it often leads to overload, emotional exhaustion, and even resentment.

“Saying no” and “Renegotiating Commitments” in this manual are viewed as **acts of responsibility**. Drawing clear boundaries is a crucial ingredient for self-care as they can protect not only the wellbeing of youth workers and educators, but also the quality, consistency, and safety of the support offered to the beneficiaries. Learning to communicate limits with clarity and respect helps prevent burnout and models healthy boundary-setting, an essential skill for young people themselves.

The following activities invite you to explore personal patterns around overcommitment, practise boundary-setting language, and develop realistic ways to renegotiate responsibilities.

## Mapping Your Automatic Yes

Next time you are asked to contribute, take over, lead, take a note where you say yes without hesitation.

Write down what you agreed to and why.

Notice the underlying patterns of this yes (guilt, urgency, fear of disappointing others).

Circle one situation you would like to handle differently next time.

Reflection questions:

- What usually drives your automatic yes?
- What might change if you paused before responding?
- How does it feel in your body when you overcommit?

## The Pause Before the Answer

Next time you are asked to contribute, take over, lead, try not to respond immediately and take a neutral pause.

2. Respond with some phrases that resonate with you like “Let me check and get back to you”, “Give me a bit to consult my agenda”, etc.

3. Notice what is the response of the person that receives your answer and how you feel internally.

4. Create a pattern to pause intentionally during the week.

Reflection questions:

- What emotions arise when you don’t answer immediately?
- How do others react to your pause?
- How does this practice affect your sense of control?

## Renegotiation Script Practice

Choose a real commitment that feels unsustainable for your week.

Write a short script to renegotiate it, focusing on your needs, not excuses.

Practice the script in a role play alone or with a colleague.

Make any changes to the wording so that it feels authentic and respectful.

Reflection questions:

- What feels hardest about renegotiating?
- What fears show up when you imagine the conversation?
- How does clarity affect your stress levels?

## Boundary Statements for Youth Work

Create 3-5 clear boundary statements relevant to your role (availability, response times, appropriate tasks).

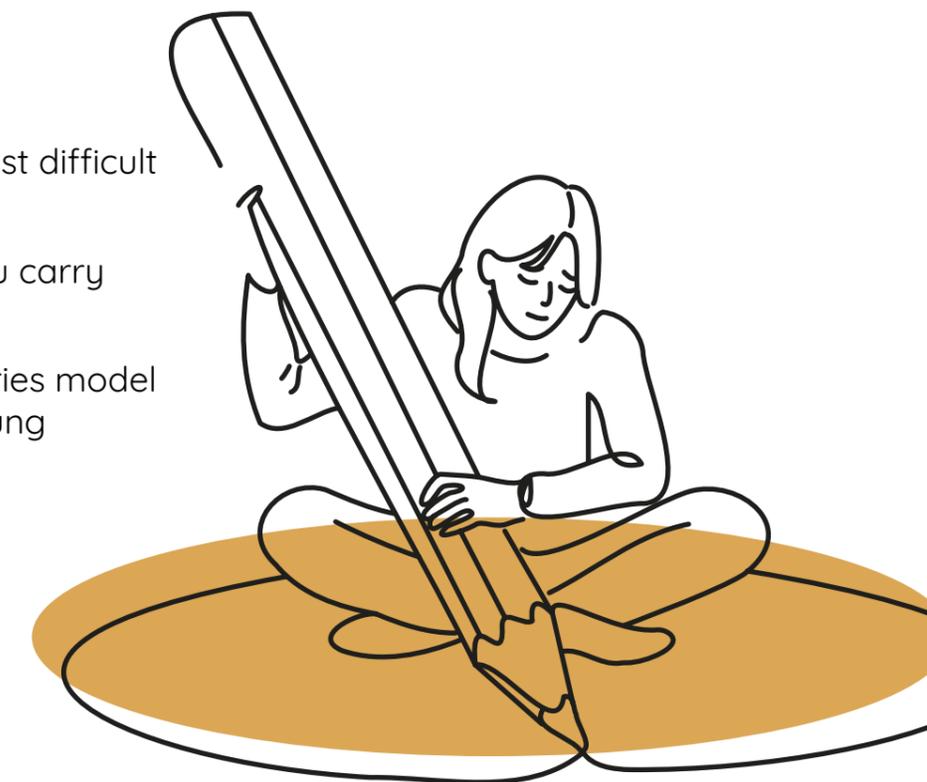
Write them in simple, non-defensive language.

Reflect on where and how they could be communicated.

Keep them accessible as reminders and use them in combination with the previous activities.

Reflection questions:

- Which boundary feels most difficult to state?
- What assumptions do you carry about being “available”?
- How could these boundaries model healthy behaviour for young people?



## Tips and tools from participants of the training course

During the training course, we have collected some of the time management tips and tricks from the youth workers. Check them out and maybe you will find something useful for you:

“I start my day with an easy task to boost my confidence and after I finish I take a break and then start with the most difficult one. In the afternoon I finish my day with an easy task to feel good about myself.”

Productivity apps like: Trello, Miro etc

Visible TO DO list (ex.: on the fridge)

Less than 10 minutes? Do it right away

Forest App

Eisenhower matrix

Rest your brain/ breaks

Kanban method

Reward yourself for committing the tasks

“If you only have the capacity of energy of 10% and you give it your all you didn't give 10% but 100%.”

”

Using pomodoro technique

Celebrate accomplishments

Notifications off, focus on

Done is better than perfect.

“If it's hard for you to start things make a deal with yourself to start your task only to 10% of it and if you still have the energy and motivation after you accomplished the 10% of the task you can continue.”

TimeTree app

# 6

## COLLECTION OF TOOLS FROM THE TRAINING “SELF CARE FOR YOU(TH)”

Good Practices Exchange & Peer Learning  
[tools from the training course]

Workshop 1  
by Sara Gradišnik,  
Nuša Detiček,  
Panos Anagnostou,  
Zeliha Yur

## Mindfulness through 5 senses



**Aim:** To support mutual learning and reflection among participants through the exchange of good practices in mindfulness-based youth work, to apply and adapt tools from the 5 Senses workshop as practical and everyday mindfulness skills and to create a safe and comfortable space for personal reflection and shared experiences.



**Target Group:** Youth workers, educators, trainers, facilitators, and youth leaders working with young people (12–30 years), as well as participants of the training course interested in mindfulness, wellbeing, and experiential learning methods.



### Objectives:

- Understand what mindfulness is.
- Try 4 mindfulness activities using the senses.
- Notice which sense helps them feel most present.
- Reflect and share their experiences.

### ACTIVITY Introduction

The youth worker (YW) welcomes participants and asks them how they are to set the mood and make them comfortable. The YW tells them what mindfulness is with definition and examples. The introduction part finishes with the explanation that we can also use our 5 senses to practice mindfulness and use them as a tool.

The YW outlines the process of the workshop as 4 activities (taste and smell are combined), every activity will be explained and led by a facilitator. The YW invites them to try everything in their own way; do not be stressed about the right way to do it, because there is no right or wrong way; just see what works for participants. And at the end there will be a space for reflection and sharing the experiences.

#### 1. Taste and smell exercise

The YW suggests participants to close the eyes for this activity and offers them to pick a piece of food — e.g. chocolate (alternatively — nuts, raisins, as chocolate might melt) to the participants and leads the session as follows;

- Take a piece of chocolate and hold it in your hand.
- Don't eat it yet — just hold it.

- Pause for a moment.
- Notice that you are here, at this moment.
- Feel your breath.

#### Smell Part

- Bring the chocolate close to your nose and smell it gently.
- Notice the scent.
- Does it feel familiar?
- What does it remind you of?
- What kind of feelings does this smell bring up?
- It doesn't have to be good or bad — just notice it.

#### Taste Part

- Place it on your tongue (but don't chew yet):
- Let the chocolate rest on your tongue.
- Notice the way it feels in your mouth.
- Is it warm or cool? Smooth or rough?

#### Exploration Eating a Chocolate Mindfully:

- Move the chocolate gently around in your mouth.
- Feel how much space it takes up.
- Notice the flavor spreading.
- Does this taste feel familiar?
- Are any thoughts or emotions showing up?
- Whatever arises, just allow it — and gently bring your focus back to the present experience.

#### Now slowly chew it

- Chew slowly and with full attention.
- Observe how the flavor changes.
- If your mind wanders, kindly bring it back to the taste, the texture, the moment.

## 2. Sight (speaker with music)

The YW invites participants to stand up, close their eyes and then asks them to open their eyes slowly and look around the room to find a pair of eyes and make a couple / pair with this person. Participants work in pairs to do the mirroring while maintaining eye contact. It is also important to build mutual communication. So not to surprise the other and be precise with the movement are important details.

There are three sessions:

- a) person A leads; B follows;
- b) person A follows, B leads;
- c) co-leading (freestyle).

In the freestyle part they should just go with the flow. The YW reminds them not to think that somebody has to lead, just go with the flow. Someone has to be proactive.

## 3. Hearing

The YW starts the activity to make a circle where everybody sits close together. It is a broken telephone game where a message is relayed down in a line of people by whispering. The last person says the message aloud, showing how much it has been changed from the original message. The YW explains the rules and the activity begins.

Using words connected to mindfulness would be preferable.

Also using different sentences / positive mantras, like “I am capable of great things ...” as an alternative.

#### 4. Touch

For the last exercise, the YW tells participants that they are going to activate touch sense and movement with their hands. Participants sit on the floor and choose some easy origami models. Then, one by one, participants lead their origami session step by step making sure that everybody follows the instructor with clear instructions and checking if everyone is ready for the next step or no one left behind.

At the end participants may write messages on their origamis and share them with each other.

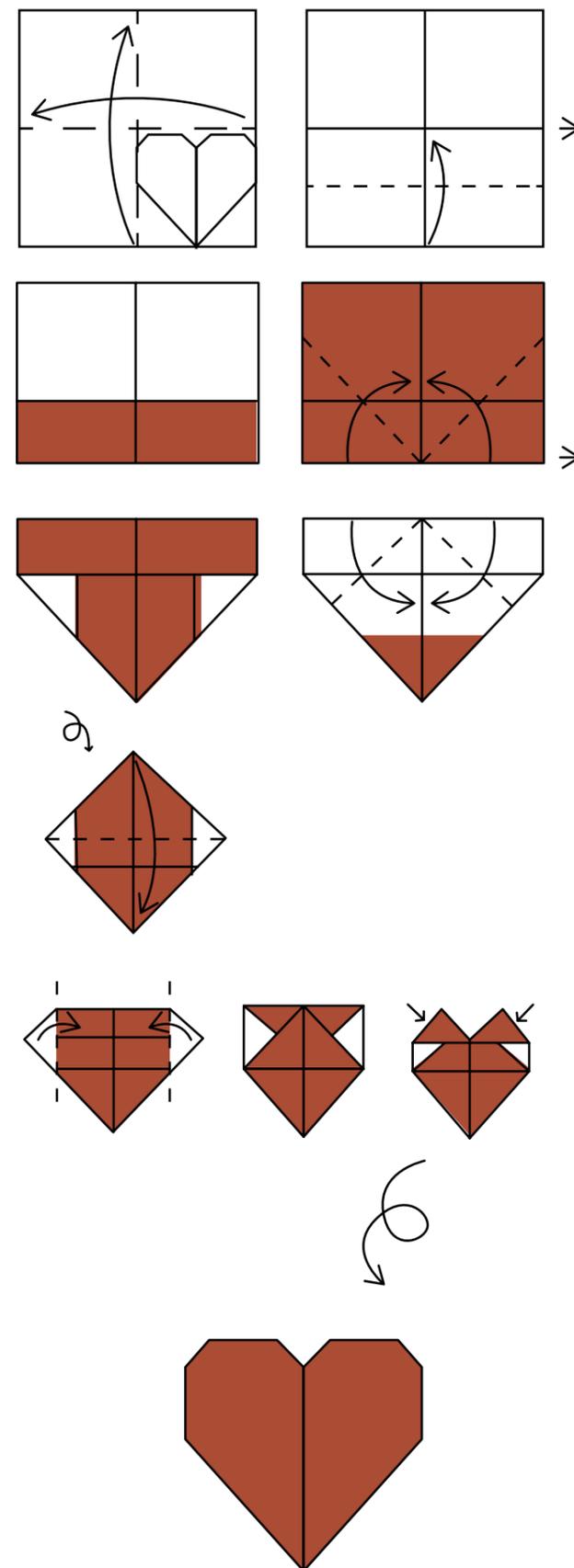
#### Conclusion and reflection

The YW asks participants to answer some questions in small groups or in plenary:

- Which moment made you feel the most in the moment / most mindful?
- Which sense helped you feel most present and grounded?
- Which sense was easiest for you to focus on during the activity?
- Which sense had the strongest impact on your thoughts or feelings?
- Which sense would you like to use more in your daily life or youth work practice?

Participants reflect on their experiences by sharing which sense helped them feel most present and grounded, and how they can apply these mindfulness insights in their daily lives and youth work practice.

#### Handout for origami part:



#### Stress Management From a Physiological Point of View



**Target group:**  
10-15 years old  
young people



**Materials and handouts needed:**



**Safety Disclaimer:**  
tell everybody that if during any part of the activity, they are too overwhelmed with anxiety, stop listening, open their eyes and try the anxiety reducing activity (on the flip chart).



**Duration:**  
60-75 minutes



**Objectives:**

- Identifying stressors and stress in body.
- Introduce stress and effects, and how it influences the body.
- Reduce stress with activities.

- Chairs in a semi-circle + open space for movement (pairs).
- Flipcharts + a flipchart with an anxiety reducing activity visible at all times.
- Music ready: one calm track + one intense track (e.g. heavy metal).
- Print/prepare the "Body Map" sheet (one per participant or one large poster).

Anxiety reducing flipchart  
(what should be on it):

If you feel overwhelmed:

- Open eyes, look around and name 5 things you see
- Feel both feet on the floor
- Take 3 slow exhales
- If the above does not help: step out / ask facilitator for support.

## ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

### 1. Intro (3 minutes):

Invite everyone to take a seat, introduce the workshop and short overview of the workshop: you can mention aims, brief description of activities and the fact that we will address feelings on the body.

### 2. Stress Speedrun mini-experience + body map (8-12 minutes):

#### A: Calm listening (2 minutes)

- Play calm music softly.
- Ask people to close their eyes.
- Read a short “relaxing” text slowly and gently (meditation text).

#### B: Mood shift (30-60 seconds)

- Transition to a more intense tone and switch to the stronger music (e.g. heavy metal).

Important: keep the intense part short, and do not shout at participants. The goal is “contrast,” not distress.

#### C: Body map (3-5 minutes)

- Stop the music. Invite everyone to mark on the body map where they felt tension (jaw, shoulders, chest, stomach, hands, etc.).

Facilitator language:

“Mark where you noticed tension or stress energy. There are no right answers, just try to be attentive to your body.”

#### D: Grounding reset (2-3 minutes)

Guide:

- both feet on the ground, notice the contact,
- breathe slowly for 1 minute,
- gently open eyes and orient to the room.

#### E: small reflection (2-3 minutes)

Ask:

- “How did that feel?”
- “Scan your body — what do you notice now?”
- “Does anyone want to share one stress point they marked?” (sharing in the group)

### 3. Theoretical input (10 minutes):

Goal: To help participants understand what stress is, how it works in the brain and body, and how they can consciously influence their response through simple tools.

Keep this talk in 5 mini-blocks (use visuals, questions, and examples):

#### a) What is stress?

Explained that stress is not bad — it’s an alarm system that starts in the amygdala (the brain’s “security guard”) and triggers the fight-flight-freeze response.

Described the role of adrenaline (quick energy) and cortisol (keeping the system on alert).

#### b) Acute vs. chronic stress

Used analogies: acute stress = useful alarm that turns off; chronic stress =

fire alarm that never stops ringing.

Emphasize how constant stress affects sleep, memory, mood, and health.

#### c) The good news: the brain can learn

Explain that we can train our nervous system to switch from “threat mode” to “safe mode.”

Introduce regulation tools (briefly, ~1 minute each):

- Naming emotions → engages the thinking brain (prefrontal cortex)
- Slow breathing → helps calm the body
- Movement → helps use up stress hormones
- Singing/drawing → rhythm + focus can create safety cues
- Social connection → support calms the system

Transition to the embodiment part of the workshop:

“Now that you understand how stress works and how to shift it — we’re going to try it with our bodies. First, we’ll explore emotions through movement, music and naming them.”

### 4. Embodied activities (20-25 minutes):

Mirror activity

Goal: Notice our emotions and how they build up physically on our bodies

#### 3-4 minutes

##### Stage 1: Gentle, neutral mirroring:

Divide the participants into pairs. One

of them becomes the leader and the other one the follower. Ask them to make space by moving their chairs back and face each other. After establishing a steady eye contact for half a minute ask for the leader to perform some gentle, subtle and neutral movements. The follower mirrors as precisely as possible anything that their partner does. They change roles.

#### 3-4 minutes

##### Stage 2: Emotion-based movement:

The participants are now doing the mirror activity based on specific emotions. The facilitator gives a context for different kinds of emotions so that the participants are delving into and really feeling the instructed emotions. After each context is given, participants each have some time to move, look at their partner and walk around themselves.

**Fear-anxiety:** imagine you are in the forest all alone. It’s night and you suddenly see a bear running in your direction.

**Calm-support:** you wake up in your bed all sweaty and you realise it was all just a bad dream. Your partner is right beside you and comforts you in the sweetest way possible.

**Confidence-strength:** you’re into your thoughts and start thinking that even if something bad happened you’re not alone and you start feeling stronger and more confident.

**Joy-fun:** you laugh at yourself with all this emotional rollercoaster. It is really funny after all and you get out of bed in a really good and joyful mood.

The participants are asked to do the mirroring activity after each context-feeling in turns.

4-5 minutes

Stage 3: Engage the participants into a reflection by asking them questions:

- What emotions were easy / hard to recognise?
- How did your body feel when mirroring stress?
- Do you mirror/portray stress the same way your partner did?

Emotion Walk

Goal: how emotions feel in the body and become acquainted with a calming movement response

4-5 minutes

Stage 1: Instruct participants into moving around in the space.

Call out emotions (stress, joy, fear, anger, sadness, calm) and ask for the participants to change their posture, pace, tension, facial expression depending on the feeling. While doing that their partner watches them and then they change roles.

5-6 minutes

Stage 2: De-stress movement

The facilitator calls out a stressful emotion (anxiety, anger) and asks participants to portray that through their body. Then their partner is instructed to come up with a movement response that can help calm the energy and release the tension in their partner's body. It could be opening up their arms, helping them breathe better or unclenching their fists or jaws. They then switch roles.

## 5: Reflection on the workshop / grounding (5 minutes)

Invite participants to sit in the circle and share:

- What calming movement felt best to you today?
- What is the 1 thing you have learnt today?
- Can you remember it as a tool for next time you feel stressed?

End with 30 seconds of feet-on-floor grounding.

Tips for facilitators:

Stress Speedrun might seem like a joke, so set your boundaries clear with participant and make sure they feel safe to take leap of faith with your meditation.

About the theoretical part:

- It's important to make it interactive: ask questions during the talk (e.g. "Who's ever felt their heart race before a test?"), give life examples.
- The main message: Stress isn't bad — it's designed to protect you. Emphasize: «you're not broken — your brain is doing its job, but you can help it shift.»
- It's good to include some activities during the lecture (about hormones, reactions etc). Or just change places, make some warm-up etc.

## Self-Forgiveness and Stress Relief



Target group: 15-20 young people



Duration: 60 minutes



Objectives:

- Exploring the way people react to stress,
- Identifying the reasons they feel stress.
- Provide healthy ways to handle stress.



Materials and handouts needed:

- cards with instructions
- examples of the activities
- art material
- paper and pens.

### ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

#### 1. Intro (15 minutes):

Invite participants to take a piece of paper and create a mindmap.

They can start by writing their name in the middle of the paper. Then they can divide their mindmap to two sides, one for writing their stress factors (ex. family, bullying, studying) and one for what helps managing stress (ex. activities, sport, objects).

#### 2. Write and Share your Stress Story (30 minutes):

Participants are now invited to create a story about a stressful day in their lives using their stress mindmap from the first stage. They can include the words from the mind map into their story, write in third or first person or even from the P.O.V of an object that they use when stressed.

Ex. Suzan woke up at 7 in morning, she got ready to go to school. Her mother was angry because she was already late for school. Her father said he was upset because her grades were low. After hearing this, she left the house angrily, she started running while walking on the road. She was stressed because her family didn't understand her and she was

smoking too much. She had come to school but her mind was still on what her family had said. She entered the classroom and sat next to her friend. Her friend told her that a girl in her class was saying bad things about her and posting her pictures online without her permission. After what her friend said, she quietly went out to garden and ran away from the school. She didn't know what to do. Her anger and stress continued to increase. Then she decided to go to her best friend to relax.

The facilitators ask the team to share their stories in pairs or trios if they wish. Then they invite the team to reflect individually on “what is it like to share their stress story” and “How did the story made them feel”.

### 3. Movement (15 minutes):

Participants are invited to dance in a group which is a healthy way to relieve stress. Dancing is part of human nature. It energises people and it is a tool of self-expression.

The facilitators prepare 1-2 fun choreographies for the team and reminds them that it doesn't matter how well they dance or follow the steps. The purpose is to have fun and let be.

Workshop 4  
Eva Stojanovski,  
Kubra Calis Gurgul,  
Zoitsa Vasi, Tine  
Šteger

## Imaginary Country Exercise



**Target group:**  
young people  
between 15-29



**Duration:**  
45-60 minutes



**Main objectives:**

- To promote self-reflection and emotional awareness.
- To support self-care, relaxation, and emotional regulation through creative expression.
- To strengthen group connection, empathy, and communication (if used in a group).



**Materials and handouts needed:**

For this exercise, you only need a sheet of paper and a pen.

You may also use colours, watercolours, or any other artistic technique you enjoy.

## ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

1. Draw a map of an imaginary country — a place you would like to visit or an imagined safe place.
2. Include the natural and geographical elements you wish this country to have, such as rivers, mountains, animals, or the sea.
3. Add elements of social life and leisure: buildings, landmarks, people, cities, or meeting places.
4. Give your country a name (for example, Intrusive Hope or Land of Kindness). Feel free to be creative and to blend geographical features with emotional or symbolic elements.
5. You are invited to take a moment for self-reflection after completing your drawing. The following questions may help guide your reflection:
  - What part of your country feels most important to you?
  - Where would you feel safest in this country?
  - What emotions does this place bring up for you?
  - Which element of your country would you like to bring into your real life?
  - Where do you imagine yourself spending most of your time in this place?

### Group Facilitation

If the exercise is carried out in a group, present the steps to participants gradually, step by step.

After participants have finished drawing, invite each participant to present their imaginary country in as much detail as they wish. Encourage other participants to ask questions about the country. After all participants have presented their countries, invite the group to reflect together. You may choose to use some of the questions listed above, or the questions below, which are designed to support group reflection.

- In which imaginary country would they like to live?
- How do they imagine daily life in that country would feel?
- What helps a place feel safe and welcoming, based on what we've seen?
- What can we learn from each other's countries?
- What did you enjoy or find interesting about the different countries?
- How did it feel to present your country and to listen to others?
- One thing you're taking with you from today?



## Stress Management Through the Senses



### Aim:

To support stress regulation by reconnecting with body sensations and exploring soothing sensory experiences (through rhythm, sound, touch, smell, taste, sight)



### Duration:

60 minutes



### Target group:

young people, or mixed groups interested in stress management and relaxation techniques



### Materials and setup

- Phone or device connected to a speaker (music / audio)
- A4 papers with the names of the five sensory stations (Smell, Sound, Taste, Touch, Sight)
- Large sheets of paper (one per station) with the guiding question written in the middle: “What makes you feel calm?”
- Comfortable seating and enough space for standing in a circle and rotating in groups
- Sensory items for each station (examples below – adapt to what you have):

Smell: essential oils (lavender / citrus), tea bags, herbs, coffee beans

Sound: calming music samples, nature sounds, small instruments (optional)

Taste: small wrapped chocolate / raisins / crackers (check allergies)

Touch: soft fabric, stress ball, smooth stones, textured paper

Sight: calming images / photos, colours, nature postcards, small objects.



### Main objectives

- Increase awareness of sensations in the body and how they relate to stress and calm.
- Explore soothing sensory inputs through the five senses and identify what personally supports regulation.
- Co-create a collective “calm toolbox” of sensory-based strategies participants can reuse in daily life and in youth work / education settings.

## ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

### 1: Welcome + framing (0–5 min)

- Welcome participants and name the topic: stress management through sensory awareness.
- Set the tone: this is not performance, but exploration.
- Offer a clear opt-out option: “If anything feels uncomfortable at any point, you can pause, sit down, or simply observe.”

### 2. Grounding through breath and voice (5–15 min)

- Keep this warm-up short and simple.
- Invite participants to sit or stand comfortably.
- Guide 3 slow breaths (no forcing, eyes open or closed).
- Add a gentle voice element to bring vibration into the body (choose one):
  - a soft hum on the exhale (“mmm”), or
  - a long sigh out, or
  - a simple “voo” sound (low and steady).
- Close with a short check-in question: “What do you notice in your body right now?” (no sharing required).

### 3. Body Orchestra (15–35 min)

Purpose: build regulation through rhythm, movement, connection, and play.

- Participants stand in a circle.
- One person starts a simple body rhythm (clap, stomp, snap, chest tap, etc.).
- Moving around the circle, each person adds their own rhythm layer.
- Once everyone is contributing, invite participants to make eye contact with someone and swap places – without stopping the rhythm.
- After a few minutes, invite an optional variation: add a sound / voice, change tempo, or simplify.
- Gradually slow the rhythm down together and end in stillness (one long exhale).

### Mini-reflection (2–3 min):

- What helped you stay present – rhythm, eye contact, moving, sound?
- Did your stress level change (up / down / neutral)?
- What did you notice in your body?

### 4. Sensory Stations: “What makes you feel calm?” (35–60 min)

Purpose: explore soothing stimuli through the five senses and build a shared list of calming strategies.

#### Setup:

Create 5 stations: Smell, Sound, Taste, Touch, Sight.

At each station, place:

- sensory items
- one large paper with the same question: “What makes you feel calm?”

### Instructions:

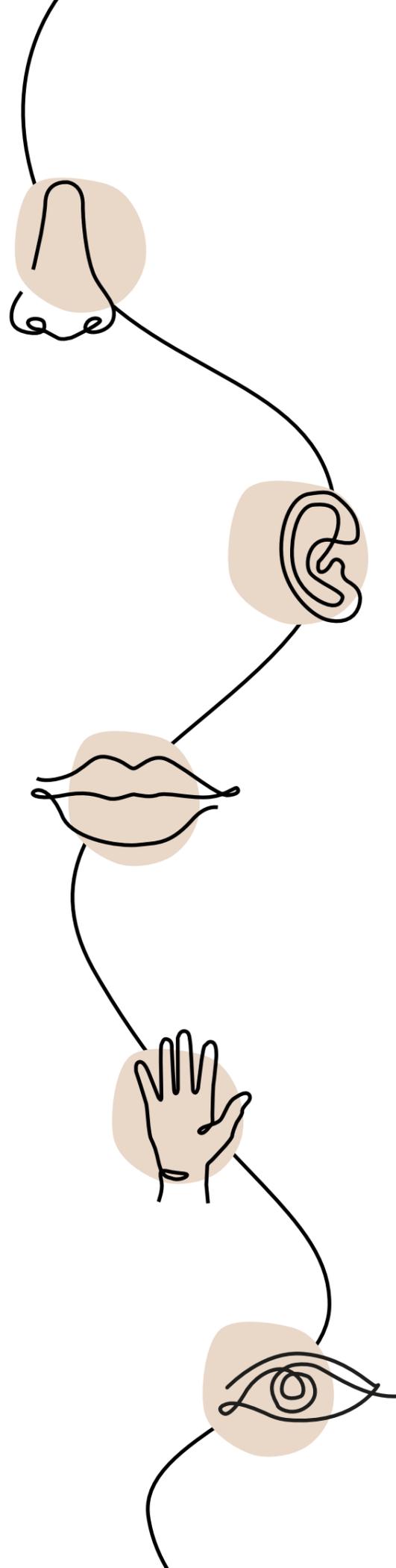
- Divide participants into 5 small groups (one per station).
- Each group spends 5 minutes at a station: explore the materials, briefly share impressions, then write / draw answers on the paper.
- Rotate groups to the next station. Groups can read what previous groups wrote and add new ideas.
- At the end, invite participants to walk around and read all station pages (gallery style).

### Closing reflection (last 3–5 min):

- Invite participants to choose and share (in pairs or plenary):
- Which sense supported calm most for you today?

### Tips for facilitators

- Keep the breathing warm-up short; avoid pushing or long breath holds.
- Remind participants they can stop, opt out, or do the exercise differently at any moment.
- During Body Orchestra, encourage simplicity (“less is fine”) and keep the mood supportive.
- In Sensory Stations, manage time tightly and keep instructions clear.
- Practical safety: check allergies / food restrictions for the Taste station; offer a “no tasting, just observing” option.



## RESOURCES TO FURTHER EXPLORE THE TOPIC

Check out mini manual on self-care which we developed in the predecessor KA1 training in 2020: <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/self-care-for-you-th-methods-and-practices-for-stress-management-and-self-care.2962/>

Check out how to incorporate breathing into youthwork in a KA1 training in 2025: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Qf25ybWL8bL16qw166Y\\_OWi6trCaOqZa/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Qf25ybWL8bL16qw166Y_OWi6trCaOqZa/view)

Check out how to incorporate activities on wellbeing in a KA2 strategic partnership (2020-2022): <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jbMdWuu9yt2EHs-blytKEuVUA0qQNTxy/view>

Check out more nature-based activities from a KA1 training in 2022: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iYXc6qaTe\\_OV-r3irHYWYQuak-jF5bma/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iYXc6qaTe_OV-r3irHYWYQuak-jF5bma/view)

Check out more mindfulness activities in a KA2 strategic partnership (2016-2018): [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LSL3jLgaCJIO1aR\\_ipoLO\\_f4RmdTdsmE/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LSL3jLgaCJIO1aR_ipoLO_f4RmdTdsmE/view)

DK. (2015). Practical mindfulness: A step-by-step guide. DK (Dorling Kindersley): [https://books.google.pl/books/about/Practical\\_Mindfulness.html?id=oylwCgAAQBAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.pl/books/about/Practical_Mindfulness.html?id=oylwCgAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y)

Dienstmann, G. (2018). Practical meditation: A simple step-by-step guide. DK (Dorling Kindersley): [https://books.google.pl/books/about/Practical\\_Meditation.html?id=XVtaDwAAQBAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.pl/books/about/Practical_Meditation.html?id=XVtaDwAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y)

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1982). An outpatient program in behavioral medicine for chronic pain patients based on the practice of mindfulness meditation: Theoretical considerations and preliminary results. *General Hospital Psychiatry*, 4(1), 33-47. This study examines the effects of a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program on patients with chronic pain. The results showed that the program was effective in reducing pain and stress associated with this pain.

Teasdale, J. D., Segal, Z. V., Williams, J. M., Ridgeway, V. A., Soulsby, J. M., & Lau, M. A. (2000). Prevention of relapse/recurrence in major depression by mindfulness-based cognitive therapy. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 68(4), 615. This research shows that Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is effective in preventing the recurrence of depression in individuals with a history of major depressive disorder.

Jha, A. P., Krompinger, J., & Baime, M. J. (2007). Mindfulness training modifies subsystems of attention. *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience*, 7(2), 109-119. This study examines the effects of mindfulness training on

attention. The results showed that mindfulness practices can improve attention processes.

Sinan Canan, Azize Şahin. *Discovering Myself. Neuroscience-Based Exercises for Children.*

*Emotion, Mindfulness, and Attention Exercises.* Young Tuti.

Daniel J. Siegel. *The Whole-Brain Child.* Diyojen Publishing.

Daniel J. Siegel. *The Whole-Brain Child Application Guide.* Diyojen Publishing.

Eline Snel. *Calm and Attentive Like a Frog.* Pegasus Publishing.

Eline Snel. *Mindfulness Meditation in Adolescence.* Pegasus Publishing.

Jon Kabat-Zinn. *Mindfulness for Beginners.* Pegasus Publishing.

Jon Kabat-Zinn. *The Healing Power of Mindfulness.* Diyojen Publishing.

Amber Hatch. *Mindfulness for Parents.* Sola unitas.

Gibson, L. C. (2002). *Who you were meant to be: A guide to finding or recovering your life's purpose.* New Horizon Press.

Yalom, I. D. (2016). *Creatures of a day: And other tales of psychotherapy.* Basic Books.



## Story Books

Dr. Lauren Rubenstein. *The Child Who Befriended His Feelings.* (Reading Koala)

Lemniscates. *Silence.* (Reading Koala)

Marc Nemiroff, Jane Annunziata. *The Kitchen of Feelings.* (Reading Koala)

Susan Verde — Peter H. Reynolds. *I Am Human — I Am Love.* (Golden Books)

Sepin İnceer. *Noa the Hedgehog and Yellow.* (Abm Publishing)

Sepin İnceer. *Noa the Monarch Butterflies and Everything.* (Doğan Egmont Publishing)

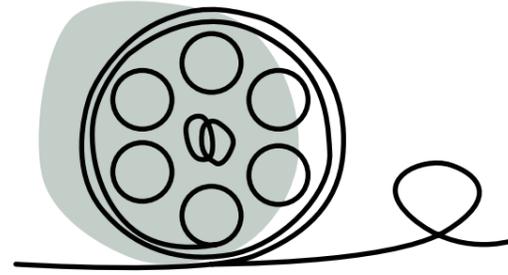
İlksen Utlu. *Sadness and Joy Always Walk Hand in Hand.* (Doğan Egmont Publishing).

## Films

Be Here Now (2016)

Inside Out (2015 & 2024).

Walk With Me (2017)



## Short Videos

What is Mindfulness? / Prof. Dr. Zümra ATALAY:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGBcYcjMyvE>

Mindfulness Training for Children (Eline Snel Metodu)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Y4RM0svFac>

Mindfulness for Children | What are the Benefits  
of Mindfulness in Children?: [https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=kO5I0p3luiQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kO5I0p3luiQ)

The Power of Mindfulness / Shauna Shapiro |  
TEDxWashingtonSquare: [https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=leblJdB2-Vo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leblJdB2-Vo)

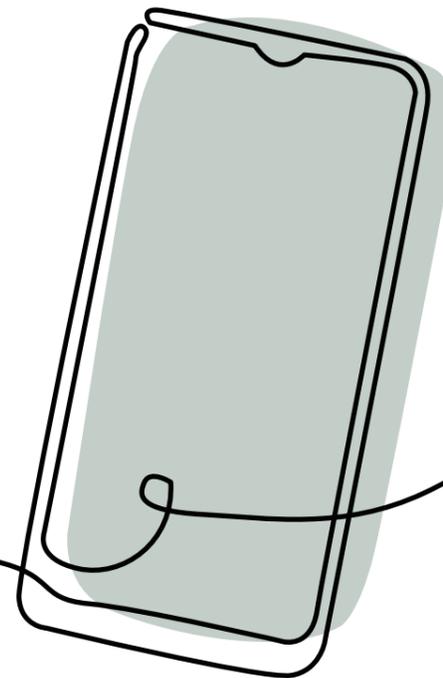
## Audio recordings and phone applications to support the exercises

Mindfulness for Children App

Headspace Mindful Meditation App

How we feel App

Street Wisdom App



# TESTIMONIALS FROM PARTICIPANTS OF THE TRAINING COURSE

"I really liked it (Zentangle and Neurographics Workshop) because I was able to be creative in my own way."

— Nina, secondary school student, Slovenia.

"I used to colour something like this (Zentangle and Neurographics) many years ago, and it was just as calming then as it was today. After a long time, I coloured again — it was relaxing."

— Lucijan, youth worker, Slovenia.

"Very relaxing, especially when you work in a group and hear the sound of coloured pencils and pencils on paper. I will definitely use this technique (Zentangle) to maintain concentration."

— Stella, university student, Slovenia.

"The workshops (Zentangle and Neurographics) felt very relaxed to me, as I was able to express myself. I could unwind after a demanding day at school."

— Miha, secondary school student, Slovenia.

"This experience gave me the opportunity not only to relax, but also to gain new ideas, diverse approaches, and tools for developing my favorite topic — wellbeing!"

— Viktorija Zakirava, youth worker, Poland

"The training was very useful and full of activities during the week. We focused on mindfulness, time and stress management with supported activities. After the training, I learnt

to be at the moment and be kinder and more caring to myself."

— Kübra, English teacher-youth worker, Türkiye

"The training was fantastic for me, like a psychology camp. I discovered the effect of neurography and individual dance on stress management. After the training, I'm giving myself a chance to slow down compared to before the training."

— Zeliha, psychological counselor-youth worker, Türkiye

"Through this training, I gained a greater awareness of the impact of stress on me. I learned stress management techniques that I can easily apply in daily life. Learning to slow down and respect my own rhythm was my biggest gain."



I acquired skills that I can integrate into my life, both behaviorally and cognitively."

— Dilek, guidance teacher-youth worker, Türkiye

"The training provided a meaningful and active learning environment filled with well-structured activities. With a strong focus on mindfulness, time management, and coping with stress, the supported practices allowed for both personal and professional growth. After completing the training, I became more aware of living in the present moment and developed a more gentle and self-caring perspective toward myself."

— Halil, guidance teacher-youth worker, Türkiye

"This training was a once in a lifetime experience. We have learned invaluable information about the nature of stress, how to deal with it, how it affects our daily lives. I have learned some key habits like meditation and journaling. I keep all those habits as much as I can and it helps me wind down even the toughest days at school."

— Alperen, English teacher-youth worker, Türkiye

"A breath of fresh air for both body and soul. Morning yoga and evening meditation brought me a rare sense of inner calm. We reconnected with nature, hiked through forests, and expressed ourselves through art, dance, and collaboration. A special moment for me was one morning when I opened the window and saw the forest. The peaceful stillness reminded me how simple life can be."

Every participant and trainer gave me something valuable that I carry with me."

— Zoi, educator, Greece

"My participation in the Erasmus+ Training Course "Self Care for You(th)" has undoubtedly been a personal highlight and a great present to myself. The program was very well prepared and thought of to the very last detail, while communication both with the sending organization (HYP) and with the facilitators during the program was made feasible throughout. If I were to choose only one favourite activity, which I cherish and have incorporated in my life, this would definitely be the early morning yoga!"

— Danae, educator, Greece

"It was a week full of interesting activities and knowledge about mental calmness and stress management. An excellent place that offered contact with nature, combined with relaxed people open to communication and collaboration. I will very vividly remember the circle around the fire in which we threw dry materials symbolizing things we wanted to leave behind. I learned a lot during this project and would definitely apply what I learned to my daily life. An amazing experience!"

— Panagiotis, university student, Greece.



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