



# Healthy Youth Guid

## ▼ Introduction

The Healthy Youth Guide was created during the Erasmus+ Youth Exchange “Healthy Youth: Physical and Mental Wellbeing”, which took place in Portugal in September 2025.

This guide was developed by young people aged 18 to 23 from five European countries. During eight days of activities, workshops, discussions and reflection sessions, we explored what it really means to be healthy – not only physically, but also mentally and socially.

We learned that wellbeing is not only about sport or healthy food. It is also about emotional balance, safe relationships, inclusion, respect and feeling accepted. Many of us come from different backgrounds, including rural areas and communities with fewer opportunities. This diversity helped us better understand the importance of inclusion and empathy in youth work and everyday life.

Throughout the project, we worked together in international teams to collect practical tools, exercises and ideas that helped us improve our own wellbeing. Step by step, we transformed our learning into this guide. Each chapter reflects our shared experiences, discussions and reflections.

This guide is designed for young people and youth workers who want to promote physical health, mental wellbeing and inclusive communities. It

includes simple methods, practical exercises and ideas that can be used in schools, youth centres or local initiatives.

We hope that this guide will inspire others to take care of themselves, support their peers and create safe and healthy environments in their communities.

Healthy youth means strong communities. And strong communities start with informed, aware and active young people.

## ▼ Why Healthy Youth Matters

### ▼ The link between physical and mental health

During the youth exchange, we discovered that physical health and mental health are closely connected. They are not separate areas of life. What happens in our body affects our mind, and what happens in our mind affects our body.

When we move regularly, sleep well and eat balanced meals, we usually feel more focused, calm and motivated. Physical activity can reduce stress and improve mood. Even simple actions such as walking outdoors, stretching or breathing exercises can help us feel better emotionally.

At the same time, mental health influences physical health. When we feel stressed, anxious or overwhelmed for a long time, it can affect our sleep, energy levels and even our immune system. We learned that ignoring emotional problems can lead to physical exhaustion or burnout.

Through practical workshops and daily reflection, we understood that taking care of our body is also a way of protecting our mental wellbeing. Healthy habits are not about perfection. They are about small, consistent actions that support balance.

For us, healthy youth means understanding this connection and making conscious choices every day. It means listening to our body, recognising our emotions and asking for support when needed.

Physical and mental wellbeing grow together. When one improves, the other improves too.

### ▼ Why inclusion is essential for wellbeing

During the youth exchange, we understood that wellbeing is not only personal. It is also social. Our mental and emotional health is strongly influenced by how we are treated by others and whether we feel accepted.

When young people feel excluded because of their background, financial situation, nationality, gender, or personal challenges, it affects their confidence and mental wellbeing. Feeling isolated or judged can increase stress, anxiety and insecurity.

In our group, we had participants from different countries and different life situations. Some came from rural areas, some had fewer opportunities, and some had experienced social barriers. Through discussions and activities, we realised how important it is to create safe and inclusive spaces where everyone can speak freely and feel respected.

Inclusion means more than simply being present in the same room. It means being heard, valued and supported. It means creating environments where diversity is seen as strength, not as a problem.

We learned that when young people feel included, they are more confident, more active and more motivated. They participate more, share their ideas and support others. Inclusion helps build stronger communities and improves both individual and collective wellbeing.

For us, healthy youth also means inclusive youth. Without inclusion, wellbeing cannot be complete.

#### ▼ European values and youth participation

During the project, we also reflected on the importance of European values in our daily lives. We discussed values such as human dignity, equality, respect, solidarity, democracy and non-discrimination. These values are not only written in official documents. They should be visible in how we treat each other and how we build our communities.

We understood that wellbeing and inclusion are directly connected to these values. When we respect diversity, promote equality and stand against discrimination, we create safer and healthier environments for young people. European values help us build trust and cooperation across different cultures and backgrounds.

Youth participation is an important part of this process. Young people should not only receive information or attend activities. We should have the opportunity to express our opinions, contribute ideas and take responsibility. During the youth exchange, we were actively involved in discussions, group work and in the creation of this guide. This made us feel empowered and respected.

We learned that participation increases confidence and motivation. When young people are involved in decision-making, they feel that their voice matters. This strengthens both personal wellbeing and community development.

For us, promoting European values and encouraging youth participation are key steps towards building inclusive, healthy and active societies.

#### ▼ The role of young people in creating healthy communities

Young people are not only beneficiaries of wellbeing initiatives. We are active creators of our communities.

During the youth exchange, we realised that healthy communities do not appear automatically. They are built through daily actions, attitudes and cooperation. Each young person can contribute to creating safer, more inclusive and supportive environments.

We learned that small actions can have a big impact. Listening without judging, supporting a friend who feels stressed, promoting inclusive language, or organising a simple outdoor activity can improve the wellbeing of others. Healthy communities grow from empathy, respect and active participation.

Youth participation plays a key role in this process. When young people are involved in planning activities, leading discussions or creating resources — like this guide — they develop responsibility and confidence. Participation strengthens leadership skills and encourages civic engagement.

We also understood that creating healthy communities requires awareness. It means recognising social barriers, challenging stereotypes and ensuring that young people with fewer opportunities are included in activities and decision-making.

## **Practical steps young people can take:**

- Start peer support groups in schools or youth centres
- Organise wellbeing workshops or outdoor activities
- Promote inclusive behaviour in everyday interactions
- Use social media responsibly to spread positive messages
- Encourage open conversations about mental health
- Apply the tools from this guide in local initiatives

Healthy communities begin with informed and active young people. When we take responsibility for our own wellbeing and support others, we contribute to stronger and more inclusive societies.

### ▼ **Understanding Mental and Physical Wellbeing**

#### ▼ **The body–mind connection**

During our youth exchange, we explored how closely connected our body and mind are. We understood that wellbeing is not divided into “physical” and “mental” parts. They influence each other every day.

When we are physically active, our body releases chemicals that improve our mood and reduce stress. Even simple movement, such as walking, stretching or dancing, can increase energy and concentration. After physical activities during the project, many of us felt calmer and more focused.

At the same time, our mental state affects our body. When we feel stressed or anxious for a long period, we may experience headaches, muscle tension, sleep problems or low energy. Emotional pressure can turn into physical discomfort.

Understanding this connection helped us realise that taking care of our body is also taking care of our mind. Healthy sleep, regular movement and balanced nutrition support emotional stability. Likewise, managing stress and expressing emotions can prevent physical exhaustion.

## **Practical tips to strengthen the body–mind connection:**

- Start your day with light movement or stretching.
- Take short walking breaks during long study or work sessions.
- Practice deep breathing when you feel overwhelmed.
- Pay attention to how your body reacts to stress.
- Create a regular sleep routine.

Small daily habits can improve both physical and mental wellbeing.

For us, recognising the body–mind connection was an important step towards building healthier lifestyles. When we listen to our body and understand our emotions, we are better prepared to maintain balance in our lives.

#### ▼ Stress and emotional awareness

During the youth exchange, we spoke openly about stress and emotions. Many of us realised that we often feel stressed without fully understanding why. We may think it is “normal” to feel tired, overwhelmed or under pressure, especially because of studies, work, social expectations or online life.

Stress is a natural reaction of the body to challenges. In small amounts, it can help us stay focused and motivated. However, long-term or intense stress can affect both mental and physical health. It can lead to sleep problems, difficulty concentrating, irritability or low energy.

Emotional awareness means recognising and understanding our feelings instead of ignoring them. When we can name our emotions — for example, frustration, anxiety, sadness or excitement — we are better able to manage them.

During the project, we learned that emotions are not “good” or “bad”. They are signals. They tell us that something needs attention. For example, stress may signal that we need rest, support or better time management.

### **Practical tools for managing stress:**

- Pause and take five slow, deep breaths.
- Ask yourself: “What am I feeling right now?”

- Write your thoughts in a journal.
- Break large tasks into smaller steps.
- Talk to someone you trust.
- Take short breaks from screens and social media.

We also learned that creating safe spaces to talk about emotions reduces stigma around mental health. When young people feel accepted and listened to, it becomes easier to share concerns and ask for help.

Understanding stress and developing emotional awareness helps us respond instead of react. It supports better decision-making and healthier relationships.

Managing stress is not about eliminating all challenges. It is about building resilience and learning how to care for ourselves in difficult moments.

#### ▼ Sleep, nutrition and movement

During the youth exchange, we realised that many young people underestimate the importance of basic habits such as sleep, balanced nutrition and regular movement. However, these three elements strongly influence both physical and mental wellbeing.

## Sleep

Sleep is not a luxury. It is essential for concentration, emotional balance and energy. Lack of sleep can increase stress, reduce focus and make it harder to manage emotions.

We discussed how irregular sleep patterns, late-night screen use and academic pressure often affect young people. Even small improvements can make a difference.

Practical tips for better sleep:

- Try to go to bed and wake up at similar times each day.
- Reduce screen use at least 30 minutes before sleeping.
- Avoid heavy meals late at night.

- Create a calm bedtime routine (reading, breathing exercises, stretching).

Good sleep supports memory, mood and productivity.

---

## **Nutrition**

Food gives us energy, but it also affects our mood and concentration. During the project, we reflected on how balanced meals can stabilise energy levels and reduce irritability.

We learned that healthy eating does not mean strict diets. It means balance and awareness.

Simple habits that support wellbeing:

- Eat regular meals instead of skipping them.
- Drink enough water.
- Include fruits and vegetables in daily meals.
- Avoid excessive caffeine, especially during stressful periods.

Small changes in nutrition can improve daily energy and emotional stability.

---

## **Movement**

Movement is one of the most effective natural ways to improve mental health. Physical activity reduces stress hormones and increases positive emotions.

During the exchange, morning activation sessions and outdoor activities showed us how even light exercise improves mood and group energy.

Movement does not have to mean intense sport. It can include:

- Walking outdoors
- Stretching
- Dancing
- Team games

- Cycling

Regular movement improves sleep, reduces anxiety and strengthens self-confidence.

#### ▼ Recognising signs of burnout

During the youth exchange, we discussed how many young people feel constantly tired, pressured and emotionally drained. Sometimes we call it “just stress”, but in reality it can be the beginning of burnout.

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. It does not happen suddenly. It develops gradually when we ignore our limits and do not allow ourselves to rest.

We learned that recognising early signs is very important.

#### **Common signs of burnout include:**

- Constant tiredness, even after sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of motivation
- Feeling overwhelmed by simple tasks
- Irritability or emotional numbness
- Sleep problems
- Headaches or muscle tension
- Loss of interest in activities that used to bring joy

Burnout can affect students, young workers, volunteers and youth leaders. High expectations, academic pressure, social comparison and financial stress can all contribute.

One important lesson from the project was that burnout is not a sign of weakness. It is a signal that something needs attention and change.

#### **What can you do if you notice early signs?**

- Slow down and review your responsibilities

- Prioritise rest without feeling guilty
- Talk to someone you trust
- Reduce unnecessary commitments
- Spend time outdoors
- Practice relaxation or breathing exercises
- Seek professional support if needed

We also discussed the importance of community support. Safe spaces, open conversations and peer understanding can prevent young people from feeling isolated in difficult periods.

Recognising burnout early allows us to take action before it becomes more serious. Protecting our energy is part of protecting our mental health.

Healthy youth means knowing our limits and respecting them.

#### ▼ Building healthy routines

During the youth exchange, we realised that wellbeing is not built in one day. It is created through small, consistent habits. Healthy routines give structure to our daily life and help us feel more balanced and in control.

Many young people live with irregular schedules due to studies, work or social activities. While flexibility is normal, a lack of routine can increase stress and reduce energy levels.

Building healthy routines does not mean creating a strict timetable. It means introducing simple daily practices that support physical and mental wellbeing.

### **Why routines matter**

- They reduce decision fatigue.
- They create stability during stressful periods.
- They improve sleep and energy levels.
- They support emotional balance.
- They increase productivity and focus.

During the project, we discussed how routines can help prevent burnout and emotional overload.

## **Simple routines to start with**

### **Morning routine:**

- Wake up at a similar time each day.
- Do light stretching or breathing exercises.
- Avoid checking social media immediately.

### **Study or work routine:**

- Break tasks into smaller steps.
- Use short focused working blocks with breaks.
- Stay hydrated.

### **Evening routine:**

- Reduce screen time before bed.
- Reflect on one positive moment from the day.
- Prepare for the next day to reduce anxiety.

Healthy routines should be realistic and adapted to personal needs. It is better to start with one small habit and maintain it consistently rather than trying to change everything at once.

We learned that routines support discipline without pressure. They create a foundation for long-term wellbeing.

Healthy youth is not about perfection. It is about balance, awareness and gradual improvement.

## ▼ Practical Tools for Everyday Wellbeing

### ▼ Breathing and mindfulness exercises

During the youth exchange, we practiced different breathing and mindfulness exercises. Many of us discovered that even a few minutes of conscious breathing can reduce stress and improve focus.

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment without judgement. It helps us slow down and become more aware of our thoughts, emotions and physical sensations.

We learned that these techniques are simple and can be used anywhere — at school, at home or before an important event.

---

## 1. The 5–5 Breathing Technique

This exercise helps calm the nervous system.

How to do it:

- Sit comfortably and keep your back straight.
- Inhale slowly through your nose for 5 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 5 seconds.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for 5 seconds.
- Repeat for 5 cycles.

This technique can reduce anxiety and improve concentration.

---

## 2. Grounding Exercise (5-4-3-2-1 Method)

This method helps when feeling overwhelmed or anxious.

Look around and identify:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

This exercise brings attention back to the present moment and reduces racing thoughts.

---

## 3. Body Scan

The body scan increases awareness of physical tension.

How to do it:

- Close your eyes and take a few slow breaths.
- Focus on your feet and slowly move your attention upward (legs, stomach, chest, shoulders, head).
- Notice tension without trying to change it.
- Breathe into areas that feel tight.

This exercise helps connect the mind and body.

---

#### **4. One-Minute Pause**

This simple tool can be used anytime during the day.

- Stop what you are doing.
- Take one slow breath.
- Ask yourself: "How am I feeling right now?"
- Continue your activity with awareness.

Even one minute can improve emotional regulation.

---

During the project, many participants shared that these exercises helped them sleep better, feel calmer and manage stress more effectively.

Mindfulness does not require special equipment or long sessions. It requires consistency and willingness to pause.

Small daily breathing practices can create long-term positive effects on wellbeing.

#### **▼ Grounding techniques**

Grounding techniques help us reconnect with the present moment when we feel anxious, overwhelmed or emotionally overloaded. During the youth exchange, we practiced different grounding methods and many participants shared that they felt calmer and more stable after using them.

Grounding works by shifting attention away from racing thoughts and bringing focus back to the body and surroundings.

These techniques are simple, practical and can be used anywhere.

---

## **1. The 5-4-3-2-1 Method**

This is one of the most effective grounding exercises.

Look around you and identify:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

This method helps interrupt anxious thinking and brings attention to the present environment.

---

## **2. Physical Grounding**

When emotions feel intense, physical sensations can help stabilise the body.

You can:

- Place both feet firmly on the floor
- Press your hands together
- Hold a cold object
- Splash your face with cold water
- Stretch your arms and shoulders

These actions activate body awareness and reduce emotional intensity.

---

## **3. Naming the Emotion**

Sometimes grounding means simply recognising what we feel.

Pause and ask:

- What emotion am I experiencing?
- Where do I feel it in my body?
- What might have triggered it?

Naming emotions reduces their intensity and increases control.

---

## 4. Slow Counting

Focus on counting slowly from 1 to 10 while breathing calmly.

If your thoughts wander, gently return to counting.

This simple technique helps slow down mental activity.

---

Grounding techniques are especially helpful:

- Before presentations or exams
- During conflicts
- When feeling anxious
- When experiencing emotional overload
- After receiving stressful news

We learned that grounding is not about ignoring emotions. It is about creating stability so we can respond calmly instead of reacting impulsively.

Practicing grounding regularly increases emotional resilience and self-awareness.

Small techniques can make a big difference in difficult moments.

### ▼ Managing anxiety and procrastination

During the youth exchange, many participants shared that anxiety and procrastination are common challenges in their daily lives. Exams, deadlines, social pressure and uncertainty about the future can create stress. Sometimes this stress leads to procrastination, which then increases anxiety even more.

We learned that anxiety and procrastination are often connected. When we feel overwhelmed or afraid of failure, we may avoid starting a task. Avoidance gives temporary relief, but later it creates more pressure. Understanding this cycle is the first step to breaking it.

---

## **The Anxiety–Procrastination Cycle**

1. A task feels difficult or stressful.
2. Anxiety increases.
3. We delay or avoid the task.
4. The deadline gets closer.
5. Anxiety becomes stronger.

Recognising this pattern helps us respond differently.

---

## **Practical Strategies to Reduce Anxiety**

- Break large tasks into small, manageable steps.
  - Focus on starting, not finishing everything at once.
  - Set realistic goals for the day.
  - Limit distractions during focused work time.
  - Practice breathing exercises before beginning a task.
  - Remind yourself that progress is more important than perfection.
- 

## **The 10-Minute Rule**

One technique we practiced is the “10-minute rule”.

Tell yourself:

“I will work on this task for only 10 minutes.”

Often, starting reduces anxiety and builds motivation. After 10 minutes, it becomes easier to continue.

---

## Managing Fear of Failure

We discussed how fear of making mistakes increases procrastination. During the project, we created a safe environment where mistakes were part of learning.

It is important to remember:

- Mistakes are part of growth.
  - No task needs to be perfect.
  - Learning happens through action.
- 

## When Anxiety Feels Strong

If anxiety feels intense:

- Pause and breathe slowly.
- Ground yourself using the techniques from this guide.
- Talk to a friend or mentor.
- Seek professional support if needed.

Managing anxiety does not mean eliminating stress completely. It means building tools to face challenges calmly and confidently.

By taking small, consistent steps, we reduce pressure and increase self-confidence.

Healthy youth means learning how to act despite fear, not waiting until fear disappears.

### ▼ Reflection and journaling tools

During the youth exchange, daily reflection was an important part of our learning process. At the end of each day, we met in small groups to discuss what we had learned, how we felt and how we could apply new knowledge in our lives.

We realised that reflection helps transform experience into learning. Without reflection, activities remain just activities. With reflection, they become meaningful growth.

Journaling is a simple but powerful tool to increase self-awareness and emotional balance.

---

## Why Reflection Matters

- It helps us understand our emotions.
- It increases self-awareness.
- It strengthens critical thinking.
- It supports personal development.
- It helps identify learning outcomes.

Reflection creates space to slow down and observe our inner processes.

---

## Daily Reflection Questions

You can use these questions at the end of the day:

- What did I learn today?
- How did I feel during the activities?
- What challenged me?
- What inspired me?
- What will I apply in my daily life?

Answering these questions regularly builds emotional awareness.

---

## Simple Journaling Methods

### 1. Three Good Things

Write down three positive moments from your day.

This practice increases gratitude and positive thinking.

### 2. Emotional Check-In

Complete the sentence:

“Today I feel... because...”

This helps recognise emotional patterns.

### **3. Brain Dump Method**

Write freely for 5–10 minutes without stopping.

Do not worry about grammar or structure.

This helps release mental pressure.

### **4. Weekly Reflection**

At the end of the week, ask yourself:

- What improved this week?
  - What was difficult?
  - What can I change next week?
- 

## **Reflection in Groups**

During the project, we used reflection circles. Speaking in a safe space allowed us to share experiences and feel supported. Group reflection builds empathy and strengthens inclusion.

Youth workers can use reflection groups to help participants connect activities with learning outcomes.

---

Reflection and journaling do not require special skills. They require honesty and consistency.

Taking 10 minutes to reflect can prevent stress, clarify goals and support long-term wellbeing.

Healthy youth is not only about action. It is also about awareness.

#### **▼ Personal wellbeing checklist**

During the youth exchange, we understood that wellbeing is not only a theory. It requires regular attention and small daily actions. To help young people monitor their habits, we created a simple personal wellbeing checklist.

This checklist can be used weekly or monthly as a self-assessment tool.

---

## Physical Wellbeing

- I sleep at least 7–8 hours most nights.
  - I have a regular sleep routine.
  - I move my body several times per week.
  - I eat regular meals.
  - I drink enough water.
  - I take breaks when I feel tired.
- 

## Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

- I can recognise my emotions.
  - I use breathing or grounding techniques when stressed.
  - I give myself time to rest without guilt.
  - I speak to someone when I feel overwhelmed.
  - I limit negative self-talk.
  - I celebrate small achievements.
- 

## Social Wellbeing

- I feel supported by at least one person.
  - I respect others' differences.
  - I create space for open conversations.
  - I ask for help when needed.
  - I support friends who may be struggling.
- 

## Digital Wellbeing

- I manage my screen time consciously.
  - I take breaks from social media.
  - I avoid comparing myself constantly to others online.
  - I protect my personal boundaries in digital spaces.
-

## Reflection

After completing the checklist, ask yourself:

- Which areas are strong?
- Which areas need more attention?
- What small change can I start this week?

Wellbeing is not about being perfect. It is about balance and awareness. This checklist is a tool to help young people take responsibility for their health step by step.

Small improvements lead to long-term positive change.

### ▼ Inclusion and Safe Spaces

#### ▼ Understanding marginalisation

During the youth exchange, we discussed what marginalisation means and how it affects young people across Europe. Marginalisation happens when individuals or groups are excluded from full participation in society because of social, economic, cultural or personal factors.

Young people may experience marginalisation for different reasons, such as:

- Living in rural or remote areas
- Having limited financial resources
- Belonging to a minority group
- Migrant or refugee background
- Facing discrimination based on gender, disability or identity
- Limited access to education or opportunities

Marginalisation is not always visible. Sometimes it appears through lack of access, lack of support, or lack of representation. It can lead to lower self-confidence, social isolation and reduced participation.

During our activities, we realised that exclusion affects mental wellbeing. When young people feel ignored, judged or undervalued, it increases stress and insecurity. Inclusion and wellbeing are closely connected.

Understanding marginalisation requires empathy and awareness. It means listening to different experiences and recognising that not everyone starts from the same point.

## **Why it matters for young people**

- Marginalisation can limit access to opportunities.
- It can reduce motivation and self-belief.
- It can affect mental and emotional health.
- It can prevent young people from participating actively in society.

Creating inclusive spaces helps reduce these negative effects. When young people feel respected and accepted, they are more confident and more engaged.

Understanding marginalisation is the first step towards building inclusive and healthy communities. Awareness allows us to act responsibly and support those who face barriers.

Healthy youth includes all young people — not only those with easy access to opportunities.

### ▼ Barriers faced by young people

During the youth exchange, we explored the different barriers that young people can face in their daily lives. We understood that opportunities are not equally accessible to everyone. Some young people have to overcome additional challenges before they can fully participate in education, mobility projects or community life.

Barriers can be visible or invisible. They can be temporary or long-term. Recognising them is the first step towards inclusion.

## **Common barriers faced by young people**

### **Economic barriers**

Limited financial resources can restrict access to education, travel, cultural activities or health support. Some young people may need to work while studying, which increases stress and reduces free time.

### **Geographical barriers**

Living in rural or remote areas can limit access to youth centres, cultural events or international opportunities. Transportation and infrastructure can also be a challenge.

### **Social barriers**

Discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability, religion or identity can reduce confidence and participation. Social stereotypes may limit how young people see their own potential.

### **Educational barriers**

Different learning needs, language difficulties or lack of academic support can create additional pressure and exclusion.

### **Psychological barriers**

Low self-confidence, fear of judgement, anxiety or previous negative experiences may prevent young people from participating in activities.

### **Digital barriers**

Limited access to technology or digital skills can reduce opportunities for learning and communication.

---

## **Why understanding barriers is important**

When we ignore barriers, we risk creating activities that are only accessible to a limited group of young people. When we recognise barriers, we can adapt our methods and provide additional support.

During the project, we learned that inclusion requires active effort. It means:

- Providing clear information
- Creating safe spaces
- Encouraging participation
- Being flexible
- Offering emotional support

Barriers do not define a person's potential. With the right support, young people can overcome challenges and develop their strengths.

Healthy communities are built when we reduce barriers and increase equal access to opportunities.

#### ▼ Breaking stereotypes

During the youth exchange, we discussed how stereotypes influence the way we see others and ourselves. Stereotypes are simplified and often inaccurate ideas about a group of people. They can be based on nationality, gender, religion, social background or other characteristics.

Sometimes stereotypes are unconscious. We may not realise that our assumptions affect our behaviour. However, stereotypes can lead to misunderstanding, exclusion and discrimination.

We learned that stereotypes can limit opportunities and harm mental wellbeing. When young people are judged based on assumptions instead of their individual qualities, it reduces confidence and participation.

Breaking stereotypes requires awareness and openness.

## **Steps to challenge stereotypes**

### **1. Question your assumptions**

Ask yourself:

- Where did this belief come from?
- Is it based on real experience or generalisation?

### **2. Listen to personal stories**

Hearing real experiences helps us understand complexity beyond labels.

### **3. Focus on individuals, not categories**

Every person has a unique story and identity.

### **4. Use inclusive language**

Words matter. Respectful communication builds safer environments.

### **5. Create mixed groups and intercultural dialogue**

Working with people from different backgrounds reduces prejudice and increases empathy.

---

During the project, intercultural evenings and inclusion workshops helped us see diversity as a strength. When we worked in international teams, we realised that differences can enrich cooperation and creativity.

Breaking stereotypes does not happen in one discussion. It is an ongoing process that requires reflection and willingness to learn.

Inclusive communities are built when young people actively question prejudice and promote respect.

Healthy youth means embracing diversity and supporting equality.

#### ▼ Creating safe and inclusive spaces

During the youth exchange, we experienced how important it is to feel safe, respected and accepted. A safe and inclusive space is an environment where everyone can express themselves without fear of judgement, discrimination or exclusion.

Safety is not only about physical security. It is also emotional and social. Young people need spaces where they feel heard, valued and supported.

We learned that creating such spaces requires intentional effort. It does not happen automatically.

## **Key elements of a safe and inclusive space**

### **1. Clear group agreements**

At the beginning of the project, we created shared rules together. This helped build trust and responsibility. Examples include:

- Respect different opinions
- Listen without interrupting
- Maintain confidentiality
- Avoid discriminatory language

When participants are involved in creating the rules, they feel ownership and commitment.

---

## **2. Active listening and empathy**

Inclusive spaces require listening without judgement.

Simple practices include:

- Making eye contact
- Allowing others to finish speaking
- Asking clarifying questions
- Acknowledging different experiences

Feeling listened to reduces anxiety and builds confidence.

---

## **3. Encouraging participation**

Some young people speak easily. Others need more time.

Facilitators and group leaders can:

- Use small group discussions
- Offer different ways to express opinions (writing, drawing, speaking)
- Gently invite quieter participants to share

Equal participation strengthens inclusion.

---

## **4. Addressing conflicts respectfully**

Conflicts may happen in diverse groups. What matters is how they are handled.

- Focus on behaviour, not personality
- Encourage calm dialogue
- Promote mutual understanding

Managing conflict constructively strengthens trust.

---

## **5. Accessibility and flexibility**

Inclusive spaces consider different needs. This may include:

- Clear communication

- Flexible schedules
- Emotional support
- Adjusting activities when needed

Small adjustments can make a big difference.

---

During the project, daily reflection sessions helped maintain emotional safety. Participants could express concerns and share experiences in a supportive environment.

Creating safe and inclusive spaces is a continuous process. It requires awareness, empathy and responsibility from everyone.

Healthy youth environments are built on respect, participation and equality.

#### ▼ Supporting peers with empathy

During the youth exchange, we learned that young people often turn first to their friends when they feel stressed, anxious or overwhelmed. This means that peer support plays an important role in wellbeing.

Empathy means trying to understand how another person feels, without judging or immediately giving advice. It is about being present and supportive.

We realised that supporting someone does not require professional knowledge. Small actions can make a big difference.

---

## What does empathy look like in practice?

### 1. Listening without interrupting

Sometimes people do not need solutions. They need someone who listens.

### 2. Avoiding judgement

Statements like "It's not a big problem" or "You are overreacting" can increase stress. Instead, it is better to say:

- "I understand that this is difficult for you."
- "Thank you for sharing this with me."

### 3. Asking open questions

- “How are you feeling about this?”
- “What do you think would help?”

Open questions encourage reflection and trust.

---

## Offering support without pressure

It is important not to force advice. Instead of saying,

“You should do this,”

we can say,

“Would you like to hear an idea?”

Respecting boundaries strengthens trust.

---

## Knowing your limits

Supporting peers does not mean solving all their problems. If a friend shows signs of serious emotional distress, burnout or mental health difficulties, it is important to encourage professional support.

Empathy also means taking care of your own wellbeing. You cannot support others if you are emotionally exhausted.

---

During the project, reflection circles helped us practice empathy in a safe environment. Sharing experiences reduced stigma around mental health and strengthened group connection.

Supporting peers with empathy builds stronger and more inclusive communities.

Healthy youth means standing together, listening and supporting one another with respect.

### ▼ Nature, Sustainability and Healthy Lifestyle

#### ▼ Outdoor wellbeing practices

During the youth exchange, we experienced how spending time in nature positively affects both physical and mental wellbeing. The outdoor learning

day in Nazaré helped us disconnect from daily stress and reconnect with ourselves and the group.

Nature creates space for calmness, reflection and movement. Being outdoors reduces mental fatigue and increases focus. Even short time in natural environments can improve mood and lower stress levels.

We learned that outdoor wellbeing does not require special equipment or expensive activities. Simple practices are enough.

---

## **Benefits of Outdoor Activities**

- Reduced stress and anxiety
- Improved mood and emotional balance
- Increased energy and motivation
- Better group connection
- Improved concentration

Nature helps slow down racing thoughts and encourages mindfulness.

---

## **Simple Outdoor Wellbeing Practices**

### **1. Mindful Walking**

Walk slowly and focus on your surroundings. Notice sounds, colours and smells. Avoid using your phone during the walk.

### **2. Nature Reflection Pause**

Sit quietly for 5 minutes and observe your breathing. Pay attention to how your body feels in the natural environment.

### **3. Group Movement Activities**

Cooperative games, stretching or light physical exercises outdoors strengthen both physical health and team spirit.

### **4. Gratitude in Nature**

Name three things you appreciate in your surroundings. This simple activity improves emotional awareness.

---

## Outdoor Practices in Youth Work

Youth workers can include outdoor elements in workshops, reflection sessions or team-building activities. Even a short break outside can refresh participants and improve learning outcomes.

During our project, outdoor experiential learning helped us feel more connected and open during discussions. Nature supported inclusion by creating a relaxed and neutral space.

Outdoor wellbeing practices remind us that mental balance is closely linked to our environment.

Healthy youth means staying connected not only to ourselves and others, but also to nature.

### ▼ Nature-based reflection

During the youth exchange, one of the most powerful experiences was reflecting outdoors. Being in nature created a calm and open atmosphere that made it easier to share thoughts and emotions.

Nature-based reflection means using natural environments as a space for thinking, feeling and connecting. Unlike indoor discussions, outdoor reflection often feels less formal and more authentic.

We realised that natural settings reduce pressure and help young people express themselves more freely.

---

## Why Reflect in Nature?

- Nature reduces stress and mental fatigue.
- Open spaces create a feeling of freedom.
- Natural sounds and fresh air improve concentration.
- It becomes easier to speak honestly and openly.

Nature supports emotional safety and group trust.

---

## Simple Nature-Based Reflection Methods

### 1. Silent Observation

Spend 5–10 minutes in silence observing your surroundings.

Afterwards, reflect on:

- What did I notice?
- How did I feel during the silence?

## **2. Walking Reflection in Pairs**

Walk in pairs and discuss a guiding question, such as:

- What have I learned about myself this week?
- What habit would I like to change?

Walking side by side often feels less intimidating than sitting face-to-face.

## **3. Reflection with Natural Objects**

Ask participants to choose a natural object (stone, leaf, shell) that represents how they feel.

They can explain their choice in a small group.

This method encourages creativity and emotional expression.

## **4. Circle Sharing Outdoors**

Sit in a circle outside and invite each person to share one word or one sentence about their experience.

---

During the project, nature-based reflection helped strengthen group connection and deepen learning. It supported empathy and inclusion by giving everyone equal space to speak.

Nature provides a neutral and peaceful setting where young people can reflect without distractions.

Healthy youth development benefits from connecting not only with people, but also with the natural environment.

### **▼ Green habits for daily life**

During the youth exchange, we discussed how environmental responsibility is connected to wellbeing. A healthy lifestyle is not only

about taking care of ourselves, but also about taking care of our surroundings.

We realised that living sustainably can reduce stress, increase awareness and create a sense of responsibility. Small environmentally friendly actions can improve both personal wellbeing and community life.

Sustainability does not require drastic changes. It starts with small, daily habits.

---

## **Why Green Habits Matter**

- A clean environment supports physical health.
- Spending time in green spaces improves mental wellbeing.
- Sustainable choices create a sense of purpose.
- Responsible behaviour strengthens community values.

When young people feel that they contribute positively to the environment, it increases motivation and self-confidence.

---

## **Simple Green Habits to Start Today**

### **1. Reduce Waste**

- Use reusable bottles and bags.
- Avoid single-use plastics when possible.
- Recycle correctly.

### **2. Save Energy**

- Turn off lights and devices when not needed.
- Reduce unnecessary charging of electronics.

### **3. Choose Sustainable Transport**

- Walk or cycle when possible.
- Use public transport.

### **4. Be Mindful of Consumption**

- Avoid unnecessary purchases.
- Support local products when possible.

## **5. Connect with Nature Regularly**

- Spend time outdoors.
- Participate in community clean-up activities.

---

During the project, we understood that sustainability and wellbeing are connected. Caring for the environment can create a sense of balance and responsibility.

Green habits do not need to be perfect or extreme. Even small consistent actions can make a difference.

Healthy youth means caring for ourselves, our communities and our planet.

### ▼ The connection between environment and mental health

During the youth exchange, we reflected on how our surroundings influence our emotions, stress levels and overall wellbeing. We realised that mental health is not shaped only by personal factors. It is also influenced by the environments in which we live, study and work.

Natural environments often have a calming effect. Spending time near the sea in Nazaré, walking outdoors and participating in nature-based activities helped many of us feel more relaxed and present. Open spaces, fresh air and natural light reduce mental fatigue and support emotional balance.

At the same time, crowded, noisy or polluted environments can increase stress and tension. Lack of green spaces, constant noise or limited access to safe public areas may negatively affect mood and concentration.

The digital environment also plays a role. Constant notifications, social comparison and information overload can create mental pressure. Creating healthier physical and digital environments supports emotional stability.

---

## **How the environment affects mental health**

- Green spaces reduce anxiety and improve mood.
- Natural light supports better sleep and energy levels.
- Clean and organised spaces increase focus.
- Noise and overcrowding can increase stress.
- Digital overload can reduce attention and emotional balance.

Understanding this connection helps us make conscious choices about where and how we spend our time.

---

## Practical steps to improve your environment

- Spend time outdoors regularly.
- Keep your study or work space organised.
- Reduce unnecessary noise when possible.
- Take breaks from digital devices.
- Add plants or natural elements to indoor spaces.

Small environmental changes can create noticeable improvements in mood and productivity.

Healthy youth development is not only about inner work. It is also about shaping supportive environments that promote calmness, safety and inclusion.

When we care for our surroundings, we also care for our mental health.

### ▼ Digital Wellbeing and Balanced Online Life

#### ▼ Healthy social media habits

Social media is an important part of young people's lives. It helps us stay connected, share ideas and express ourselves. However, excessive or unbalanced use can negatively affect mental wellbeing.

During the youth exchange, we discussed how constant comparison, online pressure and endless scrolling can increase stress and reduce self-confidence.

Healthy social media habits help create balance between online and offline life.

---

## **Practical tips for healthy social media use**

- Set daily time limits for social media apps.
  - Avoid checking your phone immediately after waking up.
  - Take regular digital breaks during the day.
  - Unfollow accounts that negatively affect your mood.
  - Follow content that inspires and educates.
  - Turn off non-essential notifications.
- 

## **Protecting Your Emotional Wellbeing Online**

- Remember that social media shows edited highlights, not full reality.
- Avoid comparing your progress to others.
- Think before sharing personal information.
- Respect others in online communication.

Creating healthy digital habits supports concentration, sleep quality and emotional balance.

Social media should support your life, not control it.

Healthy youth means using digital tools consciously and responsibly.

### **▼ Managing screen time**

Screens are part of our daily life. We use them for studying, working, communication and entertainment. However, too much screen time can affect sleep, concentration and emotional balance.

During the youth exchange, we reflected on how constant digital stimulation can increase stress and reduce attention span. Managing screen time does not mean avoiding technology completely. It means using it consciously.

---

## Simple Strategies to Manage Screen Time

- Set specific times for checking social media.
  - Avoid screens at least 30–60 minutes before sleep.
  - Use “do not disturb” mode during study or work sessions.
  - Take short breaks every hour when using a computer.
  - Keep your phone away during meals or conversations.
- 

## Create Digital Boundaries

- Do not feel pressured to reply immediately to every message.
- Turn off unnecessary notifications.
- Designate screen-free moments during the day.

Managing screen time improves focus, sleep quality and emotional stability.

Digital tools should support productivity and connection, not create constant pressure.

Healthy youth means finding balance between online and offline life.

### ▼ Digital boundaries

In today's digital world, it is easy to feel constantly available. Messages, notifications and online expectations can create pressure to respond immediately. Without clear limits, this can increase stress and reduce personal time.

During the youth exchange, we discussed the importance of setting digital boundaries to protect mental wellbeing. Digital boundaries mean deciding when and how we use technology instead of letting it control us.

---

## What Are Digital Boundaries?

Digital boundaries are personal rules that help manage online communication and screen use. They protect time, energy and emotional balance.

Examples include:

- Not answering messages late at night.
  - Turning off work or study notifications after a certain hour.
  - Keeping the phone away during face-to-face conversations.
  - Limiting social media use during stressful periods.
- 

## Why Digital Boundaries Matter

- They reduce constant pressure to be available.
- They improve focus and productivity.
- They support better sleep.
- They protect emotional energy.

Setting boundaries does not mean ignoring others. It means respecting your own limits while communicating clearly.

Healthy digital habits require awareness and self-discipline. When we manage our online presence consciously, we create more space for rest, reflection and real-life connection.

Healthy youth means using technology wisely, not living permanently online.

### ▼ Preventing online stress

The digital world offers many opportunities, but it can also create pressure. Constant notifications, social comparison, negative comments and information overload may increase anxiety and emotional fatigue.

During the youth exchange, we reflected on how online stress affects young people. Many participants shared that they sometimes feel overwhelmed by the need to stay connected, respond quickly and keep up with trends.

Preventing online stress starts with awareness.

---

## Common Sources of Online Stress

- Comparing yourself to others' achievements or appearance
- Fear of missing out (FOMO)
- Negative comments or online conflicts
- Pressure to respond immediately
- Continuous exposure to negative news

Recognising these triggers helps reduce their impact.

---

## **Practical Ways to Reduce Online Stress**

- Limit exposure to accounts that create insecurity.
- Take regular social media breaks.
- Curate your online feed to include positive and educational content.
- Avoid reading comments that increase negativity.
- Do not engage in online conflicts when feeling emotional.
- Turn off notifications that are not essential.

It is also important to remember that online content often shows idealised versions of reality. Comparing daily life to curated images can damage self-confidence.

Taking control of digital habits reduces emotional pressure and improves focus.

Healthy youth means protecting mental wellbeing both offline and online.

### ▼ From Learning to Action

#### ▼ Personal Wellbeing Action Plan

During the youth exchange, we learned that knowledge alone is not enough. Real change happens when we apply what we have learned in our daily lives.

A Personal Wellbeing Action Plan helps transform ideas into concrete steps. It does not need to be complicated. It should be realistic and adapted to your own needs.

---

## **Step 1: Self-Assessment**

Ask yourself:

- What area of my wellbeing needs more attention?  
(Physical, emotional, social, digital?)
- What habits are already working well for me?
- What causes me the most stress?

Being honest with yourself is the first step.

---

## **Step 2: Choose One Priority**

Instead of trying to change everything at once, choose one focus area.

Examples:

- Improve sleep routine
- Practice breathing exercises daily
- Reduce screen time before bed
- Spend more time outdoors
- Set clearer digital boundaries

Small changes are more sustainable.

---

## **Step 3: Define Concrete Actions**

Write down 2–3 specific actions.

For example:

- I will go to bed before 23:30 at least four days per week.
- I will practice 5 minutes of breathing every morning.
- I will limit social media use to 1 hour per day.

Make goals measurable and realistic.

---

## **Step 4: Monitor Progress**

At the end of each week, reflect:

- Did I follow my plan?
- What helped me succeed?
- What obstacles did I face?
- What can I adjust?

Flexibility is important. Plans can evolve.

---

## **Step 5: Share and Stay Accountable**

If possible, share your goal with a friend or peer group. Supporting each other increases motivation and responsibility.

---

A Personal Wellbeing Action Plan is not about perfection. It is about consistent effort and awareness.

Healthy youth means taking responsibility for our wellbeing and supporting long-term positive change.

### ▼ Applying inclusion in local communities

During the youth exchange, we understood that inclusion is not only a concept discussed in workshops. It must be practiced in our schools, universities, youth centres and local communities.

Inclusion starts with everyday actions. Young people can actively contribute to creating environments where everyone feels respected and accepted.

---

## **Practical Ways to Promote Inclusion Locally**

### **1. Create Safe Spaces for Dialogue**

Organise small group discussions where young people can speak openly about their experiences without fear of judgement.

### **2. Encourage Equal Participation**

During group activities, make sure everyone has the opportunity to contribute. Invite quieter participants to share their ideas.

### **3. Challenge Stereotypes**

Promote conversations about diversity and respect. Use inclusive language and correct discriminatory comments respectfully.

### **4. Support Young People with Fewer Opportunities**

Share information about mobility projects, scholarships or local initiatives. Encourage participation from those who may hesitate.

### **5. Organise Inclusive Activities**

Plan events that are accessible, affordable and welcoming to different groups of young people.

---

## **Small Actions Make a Difference**

Inclusion does not require large projects. It can start with:

- Listening actively
- Respecting different perspectives
- Offering help when someone feels excluded
- Standing against discrimination

During the project, we experienced how inclusive environments increase confidence, participation and wellbeing.

Applying inclusion locally strengthens communities and supports equal opportunities.

Healthy youth means building communities where everyone has a voice and a place.

#### **▼ Using this guide in youth work**

The Healthy Youth Guide was created by young people, but it can also be used by youth workers, facilitators and youth leaders in different settings.

This guide is designed as a practical resource. The tools and methods included can be adapted to workshops, youth exchanges, school activities or local initiatives.

---

## How Youth Workers Can Use This Guide

### 1. As a Workshop Resource

The breathing exercises, grounding techniques and reflection methods can be integrated into wellbeing workshops or training sessions.

### 2. For Daily Reflection Activities

The journaling questions and reflection tools can be used at the end of youth activities to help participants connect experience with learning.

### 3. To Promote Inclusion

Sections on safe spaces and breaking stereotypes can support discussions about diversity and participation.

### 4. In Outdoor or Experiential Learning

Nature-based reflection and outdoor wellbeing practices can be adapted for camps, exchanges or community projects.

### 5. As a Starting Point for Action Plans

Youth workers can encourage participants to create personal wellbeing action plans and follow up on progress.

---

## Flexibility and Adaptation

The guide does not provide strict rules. It offers ideas that can be adjusted to different ages, cultural contexts and group sizes.

Youth workers are encouraged to:

- Adapt exercises to participants' needs
- Combine activities creatively
- Ensure emotional safety and inclusion
- Encourage active participation

This guide aims to support practical youth work that promotes physical health, mental wellbeing and inclusive values.

Healthy youth development requires cooperation between young people and those who support them.

## ▼ Continuing European cooperation

The Healthy Youth Guide was created through international cooperation between young people from different European countries. Working together allowed us to exchange experiences, understand different realities and learn from diverse perspectives.

European cooperation strengthens youth development by promoting dialogue, solidarity and shared values. Through intercultural learning, we realised that challenges related to wellbeing and inclusion are similar across countries. At the same time, solutions can be enriched by cultural diversity.

The Erasmus+ programme provides opportunities for young people to meet, learn and cooperate beyond national borders. These experiences increase tolerance, empathy and active citizenship.

Continuing European cooperation means:

- Sharing this guide with partner organisations
- Promoting international youth exchanges
- Supporting mobility opportunities
- Building long-term partnerships
- Encouraging young people to participate in European programmes

Our project does not end with the publication of this guide. It continues through new initiatives, collaborations and local actions inspired by this experience.

Healthy youth development benefits from international dialogue and cooperation. By working together across borders, we build stronger, more inclusive and more resilient European communities.

## ▼ **Conclusion**

The Healthy Youth Guide represents the shared learning journey of young people who explored physical health, mental wellbeing and inclusion together.

During the Erasmus+ youth exchange, we discovered that wellbeing is not only a personal responsibility. It is also a collective effort. Healthy communities are

built through empathy, participation, respect and active cooperation.

This guide combines practical tools, reflection methods and inclusion strategies that can be applied in daily life and youth work. It encourages young people to take small, consistent steps towards healthier habits and more inclusive environments.

Wellbeing is not about perfection. It is about balance, awareness and continuous learning. Inclusion is not a one-time action. It is an ongoing commitment to equality and respect.

We hope this guide will inspire other young people and youth workers across Europe to promote healthy lifestyles, safe spaces and meaningful participation.

Healthy youth means active youth.

Active youth build strong and inclusive communities.

The journey continues beyond this project.

[Instagram](#)

[Web site](#)

