

MENTAL HEALTH YOUTH GUIDE



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WELCOME TO THE MENTAL HEALTH YOUTH GUIDE

A guide created by young people, for young people.

This guide was created during the Erasmus+ Youth Exchange **SMART Minds – Empowering youth for mental well-being**, held between **14–20 July 2026** in **Predeal, Romania**. For one week, young people from **Romania, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Portugal** came together with a shared purpose: to learn, reflect, grow, and create something meaningful that could continue making a difference long after the project ended.

Although we come from different countries and cultures, we soon discovered that many of our experiences were surprisingly similar. We talked openly about *stress, anxiety, self-confidence, loneliness, social pressure*, and the *everyday challenges* of growing up in a fast-changing digital world. We listened to one another, shared our stories, questioned stereotypes, and realized that mental health is something that connects us all.

This guide is the result of that journey.

It brings together our ideas, reflections, experiences, and the knowledge we gained throughout the project, transforming them into a practical and accessible resource for young people everywhere.

**We created it with one mission:
to support, to uplift, to empower
young people across Europe
and beyond.**

Living in today's world comes with unique pressures. Academic expectations, social media, relationships, uncertainty about the future, and the silent battles we often keep to ourselves can sometimes feel overwhelming. We know these challenges because we have experienced many of them ourselves.



Our goal is to help break the stigma surrounding mental health, encourage empathy and open conversations, and remind every reader that asking for help is a sign of strength—not weakness.



We hope these pages will help you better understand yourself, recognize the importance of emotional well-being, and discover simple tools that can support you in everyday life.

As you continue reading, you will explore the language of mental health, learn about common mental health challenges, challenge myths and stereotypes, discover healthy coping strategies and well-being techniques, and find space for self-reflection through guided journaling.

More than anything, we hope this guide becomes a safe space—a place where you feel seen, understood, and encouraged.

Whether you are looking for answers, reassurance, or simply a moment to pause and reflect, remember this:

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF OUR MINDS

Understanding our minds begins with understanding the words we use. These key concepts are the first steps to recognizing emotions, navigating challenges, and getting the most from the chapters ahead.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is about the way we think, feel, and respond to the world around us. Just like our physical health, it needs care, attention, and kindness every day.

MEDITATION

Meditation is a way of training your mind through breathing, focus, or guided relaxation. It doesn't mean stopping your thoughts—it means learning to observe them without letting them take over.

MENTAL ILLNESS

A mental illness is a health condition that can affect the way a person thinks, feels, or behaves. Like physical illnesses, mental illnesses can be treated, and people can recover or learn to manage them with the right support.

JOURNALING

Journaling is the habit of putting your thoughts onto paper. Writing can help organize emotions, reduce stress, notice patterns, and celebrate personal growth.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand your own emotions, recognize how others may be feeling, and respond with empathy, kindness, and self-awareness.

MOTIVATION

Motivation is the inner spark that encourages us to begin, continue, and believe in our goals—even on the days when the journey feels difficult.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness means slowing down and paying attention to the present moment with curiosity instead of judgment. Sometimes, simply noticing your breath can be the first step toward feeling calmer.

STIGMA

Stigma is created by misunderstanding. It appears when people judge, stereotype, or treat someone unfairly because of their mental health. The more we learn and talk openly, the smaller stigma becomes.

BREATHWORK

Breathwork is the practice of using intentional breathing to calm your mind and body. A few slow, deep breaths can reduce stress, ease anxiety, and help you reconnect with the present moment.

WHEN THE WEATHER CHANGES

Mental health challenges are more common than many people realize. According to the World Health Organization, nearly 1 in 7 people around the world live with a mental disorder. Anxiety and depression are among the most common conditions, yet millions of people still struggle in silence because of stigma, lack of information, or limited access to support. Understanding these challenges is the first step toward replacing fear with empathy and helping ourselves and others seek the support they deserve.

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE MOST COMMON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES INCLUDE:

* **Anxiety Disorders:** Anxiety disorders are the **most common mental health conditions**, affecting more than **359 million** people worldwide. They involve excessive fear and constant worry that can interfere with daily life and may also cause physical symptoms. Although they are highly treatable, **only about one in four people** receives the support they need.

* **Depression:** More than **280 million people** live with depression worldwide. It is more than feeling sad—it involves persistent sadness, loss of interest in everyday activities, and low energy for **at least two weeks**. Depression affects **8–10%** of adults and is about **50% more common in women than in men**.

* **Eating Disorders:** Eating disorders include conditions such as **anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder**. They affect both physical and mental health and can have serious consequences if left untreated. Among them, **anorexia nervosa has one of the highest mortality rates of any mental illness**.

* **Burnout Syndrome:** Burnout is recognized by the **World Health Organization (ICD-11)** as an **occupational phenomenon** rather than a mental disorder. It results from **chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed** and is specifically linked to work-related environments.



LOOKING BEYOND THE MASKS

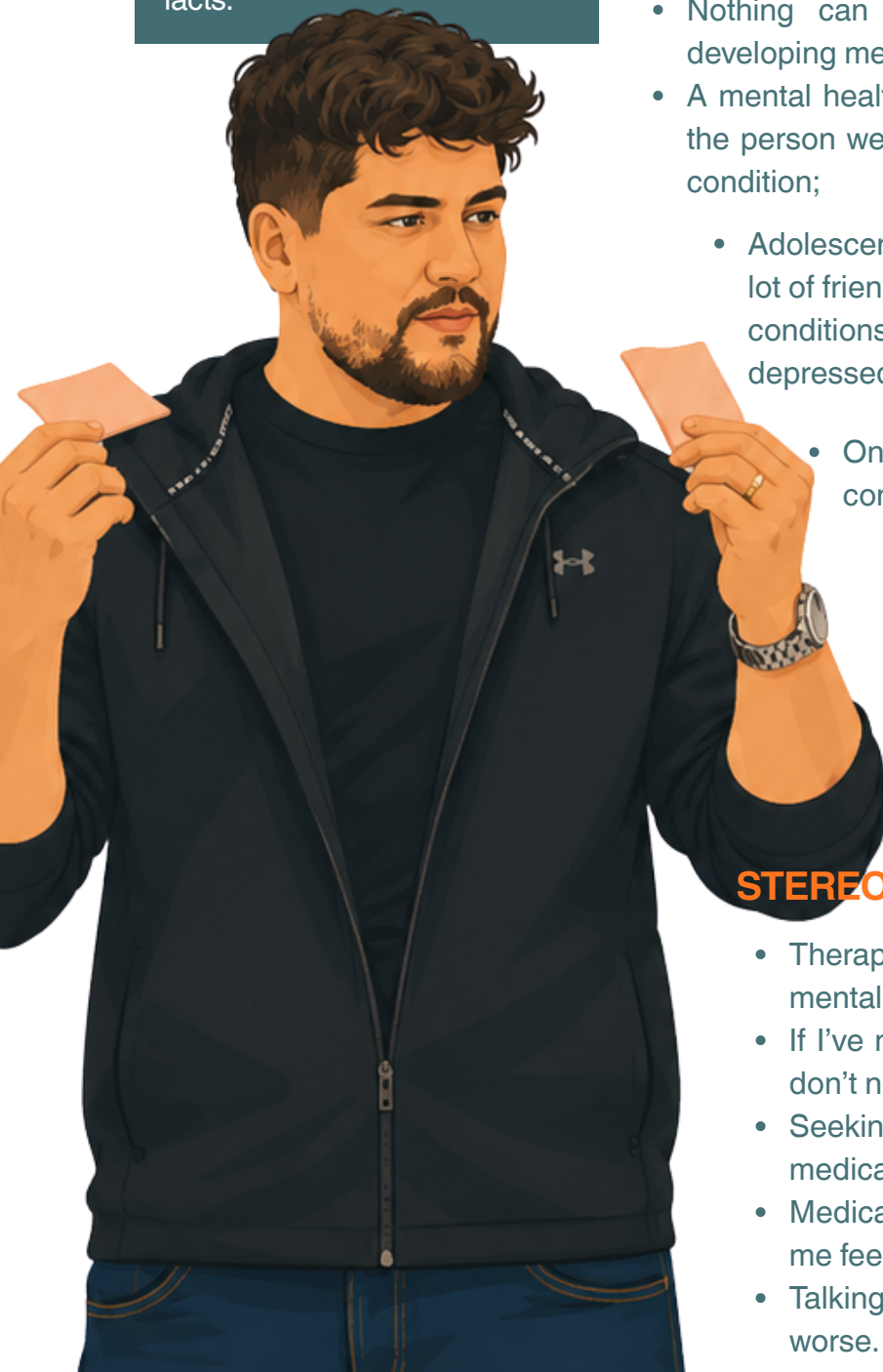
Sometimes, what hurts the most isn't the mental health challenge itself—it's the misunderstanding surrounding it. Myths and stereotypes can prevent people from asking for help, speaking openly, or supporting others. Let's replace misconceptions with facts.

7 MYTHS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH BY UNICEF:

- If a person has mental health condition, it means the person has low intelligence;
- You only need to take care of your mental health if you have a mental health condition;
- Poor mental health is not a big issue for teenagers. They just have mood swings caused by hormonal fluctuations and act out due to a desire for attention;
- Nothing can be done to protect people from developing mental health conditions;
- A mental health condition is a sign of weakness; if the person were stronger, they would not have this condition;
- Adolescents who get good grades and have a lot of friends will not have mental health conditions because they have nothing to be depressed about;
- Only bad parenting causes mental conditions in adolescents.

STEREOTYPES ABOUT THERAPY:

- Therapy is only for people with serious mental illness;
- If I've managed my emotions alone before, I don't need help now;
- Seeking help means I'll have to take medication;
- Medications will change who I am or make me feel unlike myself;
- Talking about mental health makes things worse.



Finding your way again

There are days when everything feels easy, and there are days when even the smallest tasks seem overwhelming. **Stress, sadness, anxiety, frustration,** or **self-doubt** are emotions that everyone experiences at some point in life. They do not define who you are, and they do not mean you have failed.

When life feels difficult, it's easy to believe that you have to face everything alone. The truth is that you don't. Taking care of your mental health doesn't require perfect solutions—it starts with small, intentional actions. Just like **every journey begins with a single step**, improving your well-being often begins with one simple choice.



STEP BY STEP

Step 1 – Talk to someone you trust

Share your thoughts with a friend, family member, teacher, or counselor. Talking about your feelings can help you feel supported and remind you that you are not alone.

Step 2 – Take care of your body

Get enough sleep, eat balanced meals, drink plenty of water, and stay physically active. A healthy body supports a healthy mind.

Step 3 – Take a break from social media

Remember that social media often shows only the highlights of people's lives. Disconnect for a while and spend time doing activities that help you relax and recharge.

Step 4 – Be kind to yourself

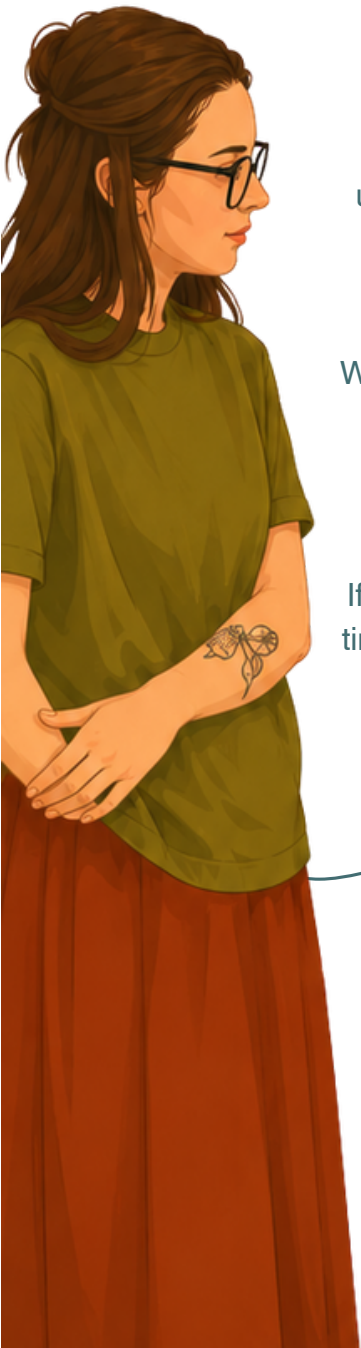
Nobody is perfect. Treat yourself with the same patience, understanding, and compassion that you would offer to a close friend.

Step 5 – Take one small step at a time

When everything feels overwhelming, don't try to fix everything at once. Focus on one small action today. Small steps lead to meaningful progress.

Step 6 – Ask for help when you need it

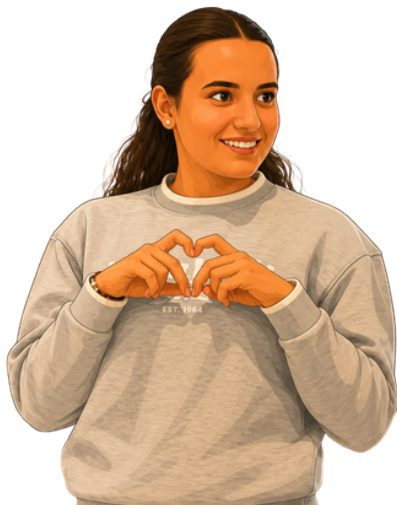
If your feelings become difficult to manage or continue for a long time, speaking with a mental health professional is a positive and responsible choice. Asking for help is a sign of courage, not weakness.



SMALL HABITS, BIG CHANGES

Lasting change rarely happens overnight. It grows through small, intentional habits that we practice every day. Just a few minutes of self-care can help you feel calmer, more focused, and better prepared to face life's challenges. Here are three simple techniques you can start using today.

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE



Psychological resilience isn't something you're born with—it's something you build over time. Every small healthy habit, every challenge you overcome, and every moment you choose to keep going makes you stronger.

One of the most valuable skills you can develop is learning how to regulate your nervous system. When stress feels overwhelming, take a moment to pause, breathe, and reconnect with the present instead of reacting automatically.

MINDFUL JOURNALING

Your journal doesn't have to be perfect.

Forget about grammar, spelling, or beautiful handwriting. Simply write whatever comes to your mind.

Putting your thoughts on paper helps move worries out of your head, making them feel lighter and easier to understand. Over time, journaling can also help you recognize patterns, identify your stress triggers, and better understand your emotions.



GUIDED MEDITATION



If sitting in complete silence feels difficult, you're not alone.

Guided meditation offers gentle instructions that help keep your attention on your breathing, body, or calming visualizations. It can interrupt racing thoughts, slow your heart rate, reduce stress hormones like cortisol, and help you feel more relaxed—even after just a few minutes.

YOUR STORY CONTINUES

Every story deserves to be heard—including your own.

Before you close this guide, we invite you to pause for a moment. Take a deep breath, pick up a pen, and spend a little time with the person you know best... yourself.

Journaling isn't about writing perfectly or finding the right words. It's about creating a safe space where your thoughts can exist without judgment.



WHAT IS JOURNALING?

Journaling is one of the simplest yet most powerful tools for supporting your mental well-being. By writing down your thoughts and emotions, you give your mind the chance to slow down, reflect, and better understand what you're experiencing.

Imagine your mind as a tangled ball of yarn. At first, everything feels mixed together—thoughts, worries, emotions, and questions. Journaling is like finding the first loose thread. With every sentence you write, you slowly untangle the knot until your thoughts become clearer and easier to understand.

You don't need to write a lot. You don't need perfect grammar or beautiful handwriting.

You just need to be honest.

CREATING YOUR JOURNALING SPACE

Before you begin, make yourself comfortable.



- Find a quiet and private place.
- Keep your journal and a pen nearby
- Put your phone away and reduce distractions.
- Create a calming atmosphere with music, tea, or a candle.
- Turn journaling into a small daily routine—even five or ten minutes can make a difference.



WHERE SHOULD I START?

There are many different ways to journal, but in this guide we've chosen one of the easiest and most effective methods: guided questions.

Sometimes, all we need is the right question to discover an answer we didn't know was already inside us.



The questions on the following pages are designed to help you:

- understand yourself better;
- reflect on your emotions;
- build self-awareness;
- practice gratitude;
- recognize positive moments;
- set meaningful goals;
- make thoughtful decisions.

There are no right or wrong answers.

There is only your story.

And it is worth writing.

YOUR JOURNAL

HOW DO I FEEL TODAY?

TODAY I LEARNED....

SOMETHING I DISCOVERED ABOUT MYSELF....

WHAT ARE THREE THINGS I AM GRATEFUL FOR TODAY?

WHAT IS ONE SMALL STEP I CAN TAKE TOWARD MY GOALS?

WHAT EMOTION IS TAKING UP THE MOST SPACE IN MY MIND RIGHT NOW?

THE JOURNEY DOESN'T END HERE

If you've reached this page, thank you for sharing this journey with us.
We hope this guide has helped you understand that mental health is not something to fear or hide—it's a part of being human. Every emotion, every challenge, and every step of growth is part of your story.

As young people from different countries, we came together with different experiences, cultures, and perspectives. Yet, we discovered something powerful: no matter where we come from, we all need kindness, understanding, and someone who listens.

Remember that you don't have to have all the answers today. It's okay to take things one step at a time. Celebrate your progress, be patient with yourself, and never be afraid to ask for help when you need it.

If this guide reminds you of just one thing, let it be this:

You are not alone.

You are stronger than you think.

Your story matters.

Thank you for walking this journey with us.

With kindness,
The participants of SMART Minds – Empowering Youth for Mental Well-being
Predeal, Romania | 14–20 July 2026



YOU'RE NEVER ALONE

Everyone needs support sometimes. If you are struggling, remember that reaching out is a sign of strength. Whether you need someone to listen, professional guidance, or reliable information, these resources are here to help.

INTERNATIONAL RESOURCES

UNICEF – Mental health resources - <https://www.unicef.org>

Mind (UK) – Practical mental health information and self-help resources - <https://www.mind.org.uk>

Every Mind Matters (NHS) - <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/>

YoungMinds - <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

HELPFUL APPS

Medito – Free guided meditation and mindfulness.

Insight Timer – Meditation, sleep, and relaxation.

Calm – Mindfulness, breathing exercises, and sleep stories.

Daylio – Mood tracking and journaling.

BOOKS TO EXPLORE

The Happiness Trap – Russ Harris

Reasons to Stay Alive – Matt Haig

The Gifts of Imperfection – Brené Brown



**Your story continues beyond these
pages.**

Take what you've learned. Keep growing. Keep supporting
yourself and those around you.

**SMART Minds: Empowering Youth for
Mental Well-being
An Erasmus+ Youth Exchange Project
14–20 July 2026 | Predeal, Romania**

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