

Mind Matters: A Practical Guide to Well-being and Resilience

The *Mind Matters: A Practical Guide to Well-being and Resilience* was created during the Erasmus+ youth exchange project **"Mind Matters: Promoting Well-being and Resilience"** (Project Number: **2025-3-LV02-KA152-YOU-000370033**), which took place from **14 to 22 September 2026** in **Saulkrasti, Latvia**.

Introduction

The youth exchange brought together **24 young participants and 5 group leaders (29 people in total)** from five European countries, representing the following organisations:

- Biedrība "Youth Line" (Latvia) - Applicant organisation
- ASSOCIAÇÃO YOUTH LINE PORTUGAL (Portugal)
- Youth Line Sweden (Sweden)
- Creators of the future (North Macedonia)

- All For One & One For All (Greece)

Mental well-being plays an important role in young people's lives. However, many face challenges such as stress, loneliness, emotional difficulties, discrimination, and social exclusion. These challenges can be even greater for refugees, migrants, and young people with fewer opportunities, who may face additional barriers to participation and belonging.

The project aimed to address these challenges by creating a supportive environment where young people could share experiences, learn from one another, and discover practical ways to improve their well-being. Through non-formal education, participants explored emotional awareness, stress management, resilience, active listening, social inclusion, and intercultural understanding. The programme included interactive workshops, group discussions, movement and relaxation exercises, creative activities, and daily reflections.

As one of the project's main outcomes, **this open-source guide brings together practical methods, useful tips, and experiences shared during the youth exchange**. Developed with contributions from participants, it includes:

- practical tips for mental well-being and self-care,
- techniques for understanding emotions and managing stress,
- yoga, meditation, breathing, and relaxation exercises,
- tools for improving communication, empathy, and active listening,
- activities promoting inclusion and respect for diversity,
- and workshop methods, creative ideas, and reflections from the exchange.

The guide aims to:

- help young people better understand their mental well-being and emotional needs,
- share useful techniques for managing stress and building resilience,
- encourage open communication and supportive relationships,
- raise awareness of stereotypes, inequality, and social exclusion,

- provide youth workers with practical tools for creating safe and inclusive learning spaces,
- and inspire young people to use and share their knowledge in their communities.

The learning experience does not end with the youth exchange. The activities, ideas, and methods collected in this guide can be used in schools, youth centres, local organisations, and everyday life. By making these resources freely available, we hope to support young people's well-being and encourage more inclusive and understanding communities.

This project is co-funded by the Erasmus Plus programme of the European Union.



Understanding Mental Health and Well-being

What Is Mental Health?

Mental health is an important part of our overall well-being. It affects how we **think, feel, and behave**, how we deal with everyday challenges, and

how we build relationships with others.

Just like physical health, mental health needs care and attention. Having good mental health does not mean feeling happy all the time. It means being able to understand our emotions, manage stress, build healthy relationships, and ask for support when we need it.

Our mental health can change over time. It can be influenced by different factors, such as:

- **Life experiences:** Changes, challenges, and important events in our lives.
- **Relationships:** The support and connections we have with family, friends, and other people.
- **Daily habits:** Sleep, physical activity, nutrition, and time for relaxation.
- **Our environment:** School, work, social media, and the communities we live in.
- **Personal challenges:** Stress, discrimination, loneliness, or difficult situations.

Everyone experiences good and difficult days. Feeling sad, worried, angry, or stressed sometimes is a normal part of life. However, when these feelings become too strong or continue for a long time, it is important to seek support.

▼ Why Mental Well-being Matters

Mental well-being influences many parts of our daily lives, including our motivation, confidence, learning, and ability to enjoy different experiences. It also plays an important role in how we see ourselves and our place in society.

For young people, taking care of mental well-being is especially important. Growing up often brings new experiences and responsibilities, such as finishing school, starting a career, becoming more independent, and making decisions about the future. These changes can be exciting, but they can also create pressure and uncertainty.

Why should we pay attention to our mental well-being?

- **Personal growth:** It helps us discover our strengths, develop confidence, and become more independent.
- **Learning and motivation:** Feeling mentally well can make it easier to stay motivated, explore new interests, and participate in activities.
- **Making decisions:** A balanced state of mind can help us think more clearly and make thoughtful choices.
- **Physical health:** Mental and physical well-being are closely connected. Our emotional state can influence our energy, sleep, and overall health.
- **Social participation:** Feeling accepted and supported can encourage us to join activities, meet new people, and become active in our communities.
- **Quality of life:** Looking after our well-being can help us find more satisfaction and enjoyment in everyday experiences.

Mental well-being is not something we should only think about when difficulties appear. It deserves regular attention, just like our physical health.

Small everyday choices can support our well-being and help us build a healthier, more balanced life.

▼ Understanding Emotions

We experience many different emotions throughout the day. Some make us feel comfortable, while others can be difficult to handle. However, every emotion has a purpose and can help us understand what is happening around us.

Different Emotions and What They Tell Us

- **Happiness:** Often appears when we enjoy something, achieve a goal, or spend time with people we care about.
- **Sadness:** Can appear after a disappointment, loss, or difficult experience.

- **Anger:** May show us that something feels unfair or that our personal boundaries have been crossed.
- **Fear:** Helps us recognise possible danger and prepare for challenging situations.
- **Surprise:** Happens when something unexpected takes place. It can be pleasant or unpleasant.
- **Frustration:** Often appears when things do not go as planned or when we face obstacles.

It is also possible to experience several emotions at the same time. For example, starting a new job or joining a youth exchange can make us feel both excited and nervous.

How to Deal with Difficult Emotions

We cannot always control how we feel, but we can learn to choose how we respond.

1. **Pause before reacting.** Give yourself a moment to understand the situation.
2. **Identify what is bothering you.** Try to understand what caused the emotion.
3. **Choose how to respond.** Think about what would help you handle the situation without hurting yourself or others.
4. **Find a way to express yourself.** Talking, writing, drawing, or moving your body can help you process your feelings.
5. **Give yourself time.** Some emotions take longer to understand, and that is completely normal.

What Our Participants Learned

During the youth exchange, participants explored how emotions influence our behaviour and interactions with others.

In their creative work, they highlighted the importance of **feeling connected, seen, and respected**. They also shared three important

lessons:

- Listen to others.
- Show respect.
- Take initiative.

One of their reflections was **“not to hide”**, highlighting the value of being open about our feelings instead of keeping everything inside.

A Moment for Reflection

Think about a recent situation when you experienced a strong emotion.

- What happened, and how did you feel?
- How did you react?
- Would you respond differently next time?

> 💡 **Remember:** We cannot avoid every difficult emotion, but we can learn healthier ways to respond to what we feel.

▼ The Connection Between Body and Mind

Our body and mind are closely connected. What happens in our body can influence how we feel mentally, and our thoughts and emotions can affect our physical health.

For example, when we are nervous before an important event, our heart may beat faster, our hands may become sweaty, or we may feel tension in our stomach. On the other hand, after a good night's sleep or a relaxing walk, we may feel more energetic and ready to face the day.

How Our Mind Affects Our Body

Our mental state can create different physical reactions. Some common examples include:

- **Muscle tension:** Worry or pressure can make our shoulders, neck, or back feel tight.

- **Headaches:** Emotional tension can sometimes contribute to headaches.
- **Stomach problems:** Nervousness may cause stomach pain or discomfort.
- **Low energy:** Emotional difficulties can leave us feeling physically tired.
- **Changes in sleep:** Worries may make it harder to fall asleep or get enough rest.

These physical signs can have different causes and do not always mean that someone is experiencing emotional difficulties.

How Our Body Affects Our Mind

Our physical condition also plays an important role in how we think and feel.

- **Sleep:** Getting enough rest helps our brain work well and supports our mood and attention.
- **Movement:** Physical activities such as walking, dancing, or cycling can improve our mood and reduce tension.
- **Nutrition:** Eating regular, balanced meals gives our body and brain the energy they need.
- **Rest:** Taking time to recover from physical activity or a busy day can help us feel refreshed.
- **Physical comfort:** Pain, illness, or feeling physically uncomfortable can affect our mood and ability to concentrate.

What We Explored During the Youth Exchange

During the youth exchange, participants visited the **Riga Stradiņš University Anatomy Museum**, where they learned more about the human body.

After the visit, they took part in a reflection activity called *“Connecting Physical and Mental Well-being”*. This encouraged them to think about how the body and mind influence each other and why both deserve attention.

Try It Yourself: Body and Mind Check-In

Take two minutes to notice how your body feels right now.

1. Sit comfortably and pay attention to your body.
2. Notice whether your shoulders, hands, or jaw feel relaxed or tense.
3. Think about your current mood and energy level.
4. Ask yourself: "Is there a connection between how my body feels and how I feel emotionally?"
5. Consider one small thing your body might need right now, such as water, movement, or rest.



Remember: Our physical and mental well-being work together. Paying attention to both can help us better understand our health and everyday needs.

▼ Stress Management and Resilience

▼ Understanding Stress

Stress is a natural reaction to situations that make us feel under pressure or challenged. It can happen when we have too many responsibilities, face unexpected changes, or feel unsure about what will happen next.

Not all stress is bad. A small amount of stress can help us stay focused, motivated, and ready to take action. For example, feeling nervous before an exam, a job interview, or a public presentation can encourage us to prepare better.

However, when stress becomes too strong or continues for a long time, it can become difficult to manage and affect our everyday responsibilities.

What Causes Stress?

Stress can have many different causes, and what feels stressful for one person may not be stressful for another.

Some common sources of stress among young people include:

- **Education and work:** Exams, deadlines, difficult tasks, and high expectations.
- **Financial difficulties:** Worries about money, housing, or finding a stable job.
- **Social pressure:** Feeling the need to fit in, meet expectations, or compare ourselves with others.
- **Relationships:** Conflicts with friends, family members, or partners.
- **Life changes:** Moving to another country, starting a new school, or becoming more independent.
- **Uncertainty about the future:** Not knowing what to study, which career to choose, or what comes next.

Different Types of Stress

Stress does not always feel the same. Two common types are:

- **Short-term stress:** Appears during a specific situation, such as an important exam or a difficult conversation. It usually decreases when the situation is over.
- **Long-term stress:** Continues for weeks or months, especially when problems or pressures remain unresolved. Over time, it can become harmful to our well-being.

How Can We Recognise Stress?

Stress can influence our thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Some common signs include:

- Feeling overwhelmed or easily irritated.
- Having trouble making decisions.
- Finding it difficult to relax.
- Losing interest in usual activities.
- Avoiding responsibilities or social situations.
- Feeling constantly worried about unfinished tasks.

Everyone reacts to stress differently. Understanding our personal warning signs can help us notice when pressure is becoming too much.

A Moment for Reflection

Think about a recent situation that made you feel stressed.

1. What was the main cause of your stress?
2. How did it affect your thoughts or behaviour?
3. Was the stress temporary, or did it continue for some time?
4. What could have made the situation easier?

> 💡 **Remember:** Stress is a normal part of life, but it should not control our everyday experiences. Recognising its causes and warning signs is an important first step towards managing it.

▼ What Is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to **adapt to difficult situations, deal with challenges, and move forward after setbacks**. It helps us face unexpected changes and find solutions when things do not go as planned.

Being resilient does not mean being strong all the time or never feeling upset. Everyone experiences difficult moments, and it is normal to feel disappointed, worried, or unsure about what to do next.

Resilience is not something we are simply born with. It is a skill that can develop over time through experiences, learning, and personal growth.

Why Is Resilience Important?

Resilience can help us in different areas of life:

- **Solving problems:** Looking for possible solutions when facing difficulties.
- **Adapting to change:** Staying flexible when situations or plans change unexpectedly.

- **Learning from mistakes:** Understanding what went wrong and using that knowledge to improve.
- **Building confidence:** Developing trust in our abilities through experience.
- **Staying motivated:** Taking small steps towards our goals, even when progress is slow.

What Does Resilience Look Like in Everyday Life?

Resilience can appear in many situations, sometimes through small actions.

For example:

- **At school or university:** After receiving a disappointing exam result, a student looks at what went wrong and tries a different learning method.
- **At work:** When a job application is unsuccessful, a young person asks for feedback and continues exploring other opportunities.
- **In a new environment:** Someone who moves to another country gradually becomes familiar with their surroundings and learns how to manage daily challenges.
- **During a disagreement:** Instead of reacting immediately, two friends give each other time to calm down before discussing the problem.

These examples show that resilience is not always about making big changes. Sometimes, small decisions and actions can help us overcome difficult situations.

A Moment for Reflection

Think about a challenge you have faced in the past.

1. What made the situation difficult?
2. How did you respond to it?
3. What did you learn from the experience?
4. What would you do differently if you faced a similar situation again?

💡 **Remember:** Building resilience takes time. Every challenge is different, and progress does not always happen quickly. What matters is giving yourself the chance to learn, grow, and try again.

▼ Practical Tips for Managing Stress

Stress is not always something we can avoid, but there are simple ways to make stressful situations easier to handle. Finding the right approach depends on our personal needs, daily routines, and the challenges we face.

Here are some practical strategies you can try when life feels overwhelming.

1. Organise Your Tasks

Having too many things to do at once can make even simple responsibilities feel difficult.

- Make a list of tasks and decide which are most important.
- Break large tasks into smaller, more manageable steps.
- Focus on one task at a time instead of trying to do everything at once.
- Set realistic deadlines and avoid planning too many activities for one day.

2. Take Regular Breaks

Working or studying for long periods without rest can make it harder to stay focused.

- Take short breaks between tasks.
- Step away from your desk or change your environment.
- Spend a few minutes doing something enjoyable.
- Make time for activities that are not connected to school or work.

3. Set Healthy Boundaries

Sometimes stress comes from accepting too many responsibilities or feeling pressure to meet other people's expectations.

- Learn to say "no" when you already have too much to do.
- Be realistic about how much time and energy you have.
- Communicate your limits clearly and respectfully.
- Remember that you do not need to be available to everyone all the time.

4. Focus on What You Can Control

Not every situation has an immediate solution. Spending too much time worrying about things outside our control can increase stress.

Try dividing your worries into two groups:

- **Things I can control:** My actions, preparation, decisions, and daily choices.
- **Things I cannot control:** Other people's opinions, unexpected events, and decisions made by others.

Choose one small action you can take instead of trying to solve everything at once.

5. Challenge Unhelpful Thoughts

During stressful situations, we sometimes imagine the worst possible outcome or become too critical of ourselves.

When this happens, ask yourself:

- Is this thought based on facts or assumptions?
- Am I expecting too much from myself?
- Is there another way to look at this situation?
- What advice would I give a friend facing the same problem?

These questions can help you look at challenges from a different perspective.

6. Make Time for Enjoyable Activities

Stressful periods can make us forget about activities that bring us happiness and satisfaction.

Try to make space for hobbies, music, creative activities, time in nature, or other interests that help you disconnect from daily responsibilities.

You do not need to spend hours on these activities. Even a short moment doing something you enjoy can make a difference.

Try It Yourself: The 3-Step Stress Plan

The next time you feel overwhelmed, try this simple exercise:

1. **Identify:** Write down the situation that is causing you stress.
2. **Choose:** Think of one practical action that could make the situation easier.
3. **Act:** Take that small step and notice whether it helps.

If your first approach does not work, try another one. Different situations may need different solutions.

> 💡 **Remember:** Managing stress is not about doing everything perfectly. It is about finding realistic ways to reduce pressure and making space for what matters most. If stress continues to affect your daily life, consider talking to someone you trust or a mental health professional.

▼ Building Resilience in Everyday Life

Building resilience is a continuous process. It develops through the way we approach everyday situations, respond to difficulties, and learn from our experiences. Small actions and positive habits can help us become better prepared for future challenges.

Here are some practical ways to strengthen resilience in daily life.

1. Set Small and Achievable Goals

Big goals can sometimes feel difficult to reach. Setting smaller goals allows us to see our progress and develop a sense of achievement.

- Choose one goal you would like to work towards.
- Divide it into smaller steps that you can complete.
- Notice your progress, even when it seems small.
- Celebrate your achievements without comparing yourself to others.

2. Develop a Growth Mindset

A growth mindset means believing that our abilities and skills can improve through learning and practice.

Instead of thinking, "I'm not good at this," try saying, "I haven't learned how to do this yet."

- Be open to trying unfamiliar activities.
- Ask questions when you do not understand something.
- Accept feedback as a chance to improve.
- Recognise the effort you put into learning, not only the final result.

3. Practise Self-Compassion

Self-compassion means treating yourself with kindness and understanding, especially when things go wrong.

- Avoid judging yourself too harshly after making a mistake.
- Speak to yourself as you would speak to a good friend.
- Accept that everyone has different strengths and limitations.
- Allow yourself to have difficult days without feeling guilty.

4. Build Your Independence

Learning to manage everyday responsibilities can strengthen your confidence and help you become more independent.

- Try making small decisions on your own.

- Take responsibility for tasks that match your abilities.
- Learn practical skills, such as planning a budget or organising a journey.
- Recognise when you can manage something independently and when you need guidance.

5. Stay Curious and Open to New Experiences

New experiences can help us discover abilities we did not know we had.

- Try an activity outside your usual interests.
- Meet people with different perspectives and experiences.
- Explore new places or participate in community events.
- Be willing to learn something, even when the result is uncertain.

For example, participating in an Erasmus+ Youth Exchange can encourage young people to become more independent, communicate in an international environment, and discover new personal strengths.

Try It Yourself: My Resilience Toolkit

Create a small personal toolkit by answering these questions:

1. **My strengths:** What are three personal qualities that help me in difficult situations?
2. **My achievements:** What is something I have done that I am proud of?
3. **My learning goal:** What is one skill I would like to improve?
4. **My motivation:** What helps me continue when something feels difficult?
5. **My next step:** What is one small action I can take this week to strengthen my resilience?

You can write down your answers in a notebook or save them on your phone. Return to your toolkit whenever you want to reflect on your personal growth.

💡 **Remember:** Resilience grows through everyday experiences, not only during difficult moments. Being patient with yourself, recognising your progress, and staying open to learning can help you develop it over time.

▼ Self-Care and Healthy Habits

▼ Daily Habits for Better Well-being

Self-care means looking after our physical and mental needs through everyday actions. It does not require expensive products or complicated routines. Simple habits can help us maintain our energy, feel more comfortable, and take better care of ourselves.

Everyone has different needs, so it is important to find habits that fit our lifestyle and personal circumstances.

1. Maintain a Balanced Daily Routine

Having a regular routine can help us create a sense of stability in everyday life.

- Try to wake up and go to bed at similar times.
- Eat meals at regular times when possible.
- Find a balance between daily responsibilities and personal needs.
- Allow some flexibility when unexpected situations happen.

A healthy routine does not need to be strict. It should make everyday life easier rather than create additional pressure.

2. Build Healthy Sleep Habits

Sleep allows our body and brain to recover and prepare for the next day. Most adults need around 7-9 hours of sleep each night, although individual needs may vary.

Here are some ways to improve sleep quality:

- Keep your bedroom dark, quiet, and at a comfortable temperature.
- Avoid drinking caffeine too close to bedtime.
- Try to go to sleep and wake up at similar times.
- Avoid heavy meals just before going to bed.
- Create a comfortable sleeping environment.

Getting enough sleep regularly can support our energy, memory, and ability to concentrate throughout the day.

3. Pay Attention to Nutrition and Hydration

Our body needs enough food and water to function properly. Regular meals and good hydration can help maintain energy levels and support our general health.

Some useful habits include:

- **Eat a variety of foods:** Include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and sources of protein in your meals.
- **Stay hydrated:** Drink water regularly, especially during physical activities or hot weather.
- **Avoid skipping meals:** Try to eat regularly, even during busy days.
- **Listen to your body:** Pay attention to when you feel hungry, thirsty, or full.
- **Enjoy your meals:** When possible, take time to eat without rushing.

Healthy nutrition is about balance and variety, not following strict diets or avoiding all your favourite foods.

4. Take Care of Personal Hygiene

Personal hygiene is an important part of looking after our health. Simple hygiene habits can help prevent illness and make us feel more comfortable in everyday life.

For example:

- Wash your hands regularly, especially before eating.

- Brush your teeth twice a day.
- Shower or wash your body according to your needs.
- Wear clean clothes and take care of your personal belongings.
- Keep your living and sleeping spaces reasonably clean.

Personal care routines can look different depending on someone's needs, abilities, and living conditions.

5. Recognise When Your Body Needs Rest

Our energy levels are not the same every day. Sometimes we may feel tired even after completing simple activities.

Learning to recognise tiredness can help us avoid pushing ourselves too hard.

Some signs that you may need more rest include:

- Feeling tired throughout the day.
- Finding it difficult to stay awake or pay attention.
- Feeling physically exhausted after normal activities.
- Not feeling refreshed after sleeping.

Rest can take different forms, such as getting enough sleep, reducing physical effort, or allowing time for recovery after a demanding day.

If unusual tiredness continues for a long time, it may be helpful to speak with a healthcare professional.

Try It Yourself: My Daily Habits Check-In

Think about your daily habits over the past week and answer these questions:

1. Do I usually get enough sleep?
2. Do I eat regularly and drink enough water?
3. Which personal care habits are already part of my routine?
4. Do I notice when my body needs rest?

5. Is there one habit I would like to improve?

You can write down your answers and return to them after a week to see whether anything has changed.

> 💡 **Remember:** Healthy habits do not have to look the same for everyone. What matters is finding a balance that supports your health and fits your everyday life.

▼ Yoga and Physical Activity

Physical activity is not only about improving fitness or building strength. It can also help us feel more relaxed, release tension, and become more aware of our bodies.

There are many ways to stay active, including walking, dancing, stretching, swimming, and playing sports. The important thing is to find activities that we enjoy and that match our abilities.

Why Try Yoga?

Yoga combines physical positions, gentle movements, and body awareness. It can help improve flexibility, balance, and coordination while also supporting relaxation.

You do not need to be very flexible or experienced to practise yoga. Beginners can start with simple positions and gradually become more comfortable.

Some benefits of yoga include:

- **Better flexibility:** Helps improve movement in different parts of the body.
- **Improved balance:** Supports coordination and body control.
- **Less muscle tension:** Gentle stretching can help relax tight muscles.
- **Body awareness:** Encourages us to notice how different parts of our body feel.

- **Relaxation:** Offers an opportunity to slow down and take a break from daily activities.

Simple Yoga Poses for Beginners

Cat Pose

Cat Pose is a gentle movement that helps stretch the back and improve movement in the spine.



How to practise:

1. Start on your hands and knees.
2. Place your hands below your shoulders and your knees below your hips.
3. Slowly round your back towards the ceiling.
4. Gently lower your head towards your chest.
5. Hold the position briefly, then return to your starting position.

Repeat the movement a few times at a comfortable pace.



Downward-Facing Dog

Downward-Facing Dog is a yoga position that stretches the back, shoulders, and legs while helping develop balance and strength.

How to practise:

1. Start on your hands and knees.
2. Place your hands firmly on the floor.

3. Slowly lift your hips upwards, creating an upside-down V shape with your body.
4. Keep your knees slightly bent if needed, and let your heels stay above the floor.
5. Hold the position for a few moments, then slowly return to your knees.

Important: Yoga should not feel painful. Move gently, respect your body's limits, and adjust the positions when needed.

Movement During the Youth Exchange

Physical activity was included in different parts of the youth exchange. Participants explored how movement can support their well-being through activities such as:

- **Body and Mind Awakening - Move Your Body:** Starting the day with physical movement and body awareness.
- **Stretch and De-Stress:** Using simple stretching exercises to release tension.
- **Move Your Body - Work Out and Work In:** Combining movement with attention to personal well-being.
- **Shake It Out:** Exploring dance and free movement as ways to release tension and express energy.

These activities encouraged participants to discover different ways of staying active, without focusing on physical performance or competition.

What Our Participants Experienced

During the project, participants shared their thoughts and feelings about practising yoga.

How did they feel during the activity?

- Peaceful
- Relaxed
- Connected
- Energised

One of their learning points was that yoga can help us feel relaxed even when some positions are challenging. They also discovered that certain poses require more effort and practice than expected.

Their experiences showed that yoga can be both relaxing and physically demanding, depending on the movements and each person's abilities.

Try It Yourself: A Short Yoga Break

This simple activity can be done individually or with a small group.

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Materials: Comfortable clothes, enough space to move, and an optional yoga mat.

1. Begin with gentle movements of your shoulders and arms.
2. Practise Cat Pose a few times at a comfortable pace.
3. Try Downward-Facing Dog if the position feels comfortable.
4. Return to a relaxed sitting or standing position.
5. Notice how your body feels after the activity.

Participants should be free to adjust the movements, choose easier options, or skip positions that are not suitable for them.

Questions for reflection:

- How did you feel before and after practising yoga?
- Which position felt more comfortable or challenging?
- What did you learn about your body's abilities?

💡 **Remember:** Yoga is not about performing every position perfectly. It is about exploring movement, respecting your body's limits, and improving through regular practice. Even a few minutes of gentle activity can be a useful part of your day.

▼ Mindfulness, Meditation, and Breathing Exercises

Our minds are often busy with thoughts about the past, plans for the future, and everyday responsibilities. Sometimes, we become so focused on these thoughts that we forget to pay attention to what is happening around us.

Mindfulness, meditation, and breathing exercises can help us slow down, improve our attention, and create moments of calm. These practices do not require special equipment and can be adapted to different needs and situations.

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment without judging what we experience. Instead of thinking about what happened yesterday or worrying about tomorrow, we focus on what is happening right now.

Mindfulness can be practised during ordinary activities, such as eating, walking, or listening to music.

Here are some simple ways to practise mindfulness:

- **Mindful eating:** Notice the taste, smell, and texture of your food instead of eating in a hurry.
- **Mindful walking:** Pay attention to your steps, the ground beneath your feet, and the sounds around you.
- **Mindful listening:** Focus on the different sounds in your environment without trying to identify every one immediately.
- **Mindful observation:** Choose an object and spend one minute noticing its colours, shapes, and details.

The purpose is not to stop thinking, but to become more aware of the present moment.

What Is Meditation?

Meditation is a practice that helps us develop attention and awareness. It often involves focusing on something simple, such as our breathing, a sound, or the present moment.

Meditation can support relaxation, concentration, and emotional balance. It does not mean that our minds must be completely empty. Thoughts will naturally appear, and that is normal.

During the youth exchange, participants explored meditation and shared several important learning points:

- Learning how to focus on breathing, thoughts, and intentions.
- Discovering ways to calm themselves and their thoughts.
- Paying attention to their bodies without forcing themselves to change anything.
- Understanding the importance of slowing down and listening to personal needs.

Their reflections highlighted that meditation is not about doing everything correctly, but about becoming more aware of ourselves and our experiences.

Try It Yourself: A Short Meditation

Duration: 3-5 minutes

Materials: A quiet space and a comfortable place to sit.

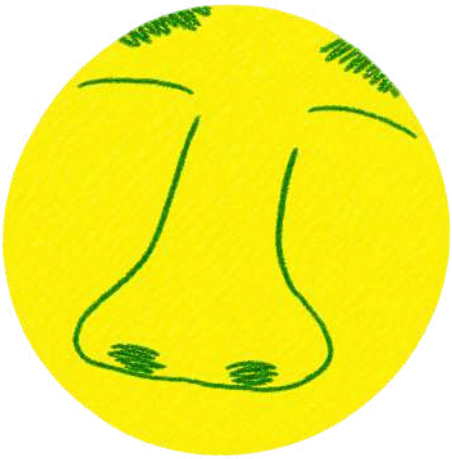
1. Find a comfortable sitting position.
2. Close your eyes or keep them open with a relaxed gaze.
3. Bring your attention to the present moment.
4. Notice your thoughts without trying to stop or change them.
5. If your mind wanders, gently return your attention to the activity.

6. After a few minutes, slowly look around and notice how you feel.

It is normal to find meditation difficult at first. You can begin with just one or two minutes and gradually increase the time if you enjoy the practice.

Breathing Exercises for Relaxation

Breathing is something we do naturally, but when we pay attention to it, we can become more aware of how our body feels.



In their learning materials, participants highlighted the importance of **directing attention towards the body before an activity and using breathing to calm the mind**.

Here are two simple techniques you can try.

1. Slow Breathing

This exercise focuses on creating a gentle and comfortable breathing rhythm.

1. Sit comfortably and relax your shoulders.
2. Breathe in gently through your nose.
3. Slowly breathe out without forcing the air.
4. Continue at a comfortable pace for one or two minutes.
5. Notice how your body feels afterwards.

2. Box Breathing

Box breathing follows four equal steps and can help create a steady breathing rhythm.

1. Breathe in gently for 4 seconds.
2. Hold your breath for 4 seconds.

3. Breathe out slowly for 4 seconds.
4. Pause for 4 seconds.
5. Repeat a few times if comfortable.

If holding your breath feels uncomfortable, skip the pauses and breathe naturally. Stop the exercise if you feel dizzy or unwell.

What Our Participants Experienced

During the youth exchange, participants explored relaxation and meditation through practical activities, including **“Memory Techniques and Breathing Exercises”** and **“Laughter and Joy - Guided Meditation”**.

What did they learn?

- To focus on their breathing and thoughts.
- To calm themselves and become more aware of their emotions.
- To slow down and pay attention to what their bodies need.
- To explore relaxation techniques that can be used outside the youth exchange.

What did they want to continue practising?

- Taking things more slowly.
- Listening to their body's needs.
- Using meditation and relaxation techniques in everyday life.

Their contributions show that these practices can become useful personal tools beyond the project.

Try It Yourself: The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Exercise

Grounding is a technique that uses our senses to bring our attention back to the present moment.

Duration: 2-5 minutes

Materials: None

Look around you and identify:

1. **5 things you can see.**
2. **4 things you can feel or touch.**
3. **3 things you can hear.**
4. **2 things you can smell.**
5. **1 thing you can taste.**

If you cannot identify something for one of the senses, simply move to the next step.

This exercise can be useful when your thoughts feel too busy or when you want to focus on your surroundings.

A Moment for Reflection

After trying one of these exercises, ask yourself:

1. Which practice felt most comfortable?
2. Was it easy or difficult to focus my attention?
3. What did I notice about my thoughts or feelings?
4. Which technique would I like to practise again?

> 💡 **Remember:** Mindfulness and meditation are personal experiences. There is no need to practise them perfectly, and different techniques work for different people. The important thing is to explore what feels comfortable and useful for you.

▼ Memory and Concentration Techniques

Memory and concentration are important skills that we use every day. They help us learn new information, complete tasks, follow conversations, and remember important details.

Memory is our ability to store information and remember it later, while **concentration** is our ability to focus our attention on a specific activity.

Both skills can improve through practice. By using different learning techniques, we can make information easier to understand, remember, and use.

How Does Memory Work?

Our memory helps us collect and use information from our experiences. There are three main steps involved:

1. **Learning:** We receive new information through reading, listening, observing, or practising.
2. **Storing:** Our brain keeps some of this information for future use.
3. **Remembering:** We bring the information back when we need it.

For example, when learning a new language, we first discover new words, practise them, and later use them in conversations.

Practical Techniques to Improve Memory

Different methods can help us remember information more effectively.

1. Connect Information with Images

Our brains can remember visual information more easily when it is connected to something meaningful.

- Create simple drawings or symbols to represent ideas.
- Use mind maps to connect related topics.
- Imagine a picture that reminds you of a new word or concept.

For example, when learning the word "sun" in another language, imagine a bright yellow sun in the sky.

2. Divide Information into Smaller Groups

This technique is called *chunking*. It means organising large amounts of information into smaller parts.

For example, remembering the number 20260914 may be easier when divided into 2026 – 09 – 14.

You can use this method for phone numbers, important dates, or lists of information.

3. Practise Active Recall

Active recall means trying to remember information without looking at your notes.

You can practise it by:

- Reading a short text and then explaining its main ideas from memory.
- Asking yourself questions about what you have learned.
- Testing your knowledge before checking the correct answers.

This helps strengthen your ability to remember information independently.

4. Repeat Information Over Time

Instead of studying everything in one session, review the information several times over a longer period.

For example:

- Learn something new on Monday.
- Review it briefly on Tuesday.
- Check what you remember on Thursday.
- Return to it again the following week.

This technique is called *spaced repetition* and can support long-term memory.

Simple Ways to Improve Concentration

Concentration can be difficult when we have many distractions around us. Making small changes to our learning environment can help us stay focused.

Here are some useful techniques:

- **Choose a suitable environment:** Find a place where you can work with fewer interruptions.

- **Remove unnecessary distractions:** Keep unrelated materials and notifications away while completing a task.
- **Use a focus timer:** Try working for 25 minutes, followed by a 5-minute break. This is known as the Pomodoro Technique.
- **Change your learning method:** If reading becomes difficult, try explaining the topic aloud or creating a visual summary.
- **Stay actively involved:** Ask questions, take notes, or discuss information with another person.

Not everyone concentrates in the same way. Some people prefer quiet spaces, while others work better with soft background sounds.

Memory and Concentration During the Youth Exchange

During the session **“Memory Techniques and Breathing Exercises”**, participants explored ways to improve attention, support learning, and practise concentration.

The activity connected memory skills with the importance of focusing on one task and becoming more aware of our attention.

These skills can be useful during youth exchanges, where participants often learn new names, work in international groups, follow workshops, and discover unfamiliar information.

Try It Yourself: The Memory Challenge

This simple activity can be used individually or in a group.

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Materials: Paper, a pen, and a list of 10 unrelated words.

1. Ask someone to prepare a list of 10 words.
2. Look at the list for 30 seconds.
3. Cover the list and write down as many words as you remember.
4. Check how many words you remembered correctly.

5. Try again using a memory technique, such as connecting the words through a short story or imagining pictures.

Questions for reflection:

- How many words did you remember the first time?
- Did using a memory technique make a difference?
- Which method felt easiest for you?
- Where could you use this technique in everyday life?



Remember: Improving memory and concentration takes practice. Different techniques work for different people, so experiment with several methods and discover which ones help you learn most effectively.

▼ Digital Well-being

Technology is part of our everyday lives. We use smartphones, computers, and social media to communicate, study, work, and entertain ourselves. While digital tools offer many opportunities, the way we use them can also influence our mental well-being.

Digital well-being means having a healthy and balanced relationship with technology. It is about using digital tools in ways that support our needs, without allowing them to take too much control over our time and attention.

How Does Social Media Affect Our Well-being?

Social media allows us to stay connected, discover new ideas, and share experiences. However, it can also create challenges, especially when we spend too much time online or compare ourselves with others.

Some common challenges include:

- **Social comparison:** Seeing carefully selected photos and posts can make us feel that other people's lives are more successful or exciting than ours.

- **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):** Feeling worried that others are enjoying experiences without us.
- **Information overload:** Receiving too much information can make it difficult to decide what deserves our attention.
- **Online pressure:** Feeling the need to respond immediately, stay active, or receive likes and comments.
- **Negative online experiences:** Cyberbullying, hateful comments, and harmful content can affect our confidence and sense of safety.

It is important to remember that social media usually shows only selected moments of people's lives, not their full experiences.

Recognising Unhealthy Digital Habits

Sometimes, technology becomes such a normal part of our routine that we do not notice how much we depend on it.

Here are some signs that your digital habits may need attention:

- Checking your phone automatically, even without notifications.
- Spending more time scrolling than you originally planned.
- Feeling uncomfortable when you cannot access your phone.
- Frequently comparing your appearance or achievements with others online.
- Finding it difficult to enjoy activities without checking social media.
- Using your phone late at night even when you want to sleep.

These behaviours do not automatically mean that someone has a serious problem. However, they can be useful signs to reflect on how we use technology.

Practical Tips for a Healthier Digital Balance

Developing healthier digital habits does not mean giving up technology. Instead, we can learn to use it more consciously.

1. Check Your Screen Time

Look at your phone's screen time statistics to understand which applications you use most often.

Ask yourself whether the time you spend on these applications matches what you want to get from them.

2. Manage Your Notifications

Not every message or update needs your immediate attention.

- Turn off notifications from applications that are not important.
- Use "Do Not Disturb" mode when needed.
- Choose specific times to check social media.

3. Be Selective About Online Content

The content we follow can influence how we see ourselves and the world.

- Follow accounts that provide useful information or inspiration.
- Unfollow or mute content that regularly makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Remember that edited photos and videos do not always represent reality.
- Think carefully before believing or sharing information online.

4. Create Phone-Free Moments

Choose certain activities where you can put your phone aside.

For example, you could keep your phone away during meals with friends, group activities, or face-to-face conversations.

5. Use Technology With a Purpose

Before opening an application, ask yourself: "Why am I using this right now?"

Are you looking for information, contacting someone, or simply opening it out of habit?

This small question can help you become more aware of your digital choices.

Digital Well-being During the Youth Exchange

During the session **“Detoxing the Digital Mind: Mental Health in the Age of Social Media”**, participants explored how online habits can influence their thoughts, behaviour, and well-being.

The topic encouraged them to think about the role of technology in their lives and how they could develop a healthier relationship with social media.

The Youth Exchange also showed that digital tools can have a positive purpose. Participants used technology to communicate, collaborate, and share their learning experiences.

The goal was not to see technology as something negative, but to understand how to use it in a more balanced and responsible way.

Try It Yourself: My Digital Habits Check-In

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials: A smartphone and a notebook or piece of paper.

1. Open your phone's screen time settings.
2. Identify the three applications you used most during the past week.
3. Write down approximately how much time you spent on each one.
4. Think about how you usually feel after using these applications.
5. Choose one small change you would like to try over the next few days.

For example, you could turn off unnecessary notifications, avoid checking social media immediately after waking up, or introduce a phone-free activity.

Questions for reflection:

- Which application takes up most of my time?
- Does using it make me feel informed, connected, entertained, or something else?
- Are there moments when I use my phone without a clear reason?
- What would a healthier digital balance look like for me?

💡 **Remember:** Technology should be a tool that supports your life, not something that controls it. Being aware of your online habits can help you make better choices about when, why, and how you use digital devices.

▼ Communication and Social Connections

▼ Active Listening and Empathy

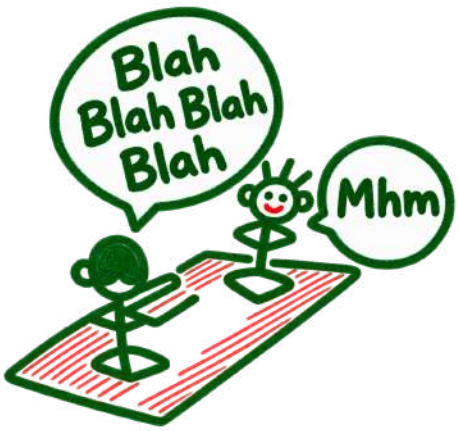
Communication is an important part of our relationships with others. However, good communication is not only about expressing our own thoughts. It also means paying attention to what other people are saying and trying to understand their experiences.

Active listening means giving someone our full attention while they speak. **Empathy** is the ability to understand how another person might feel, even when their experiences are different from our own.

Together, these skills can help us avoid misunderstandings, build trust, and create stronger connections with others.

How to Practise Active Listening

Active listening is a skill that we can develop through everyday conversations.



Here are some useful techniques:

- **Give your full attention:** Focus on the person speaking instead of checking your phone or thinking about your next response.
- **Avoid interrupting:** Allow the other person to finish their thoughts before asking

questions or sharing your opinion.

- **Use comfortable eye contact:** Show that you are interested, while respecting that eye contact may feel uncomfortable for some people.
- **Ask questions:** Use open questions to understand the person's experiences better.
- **Show that you understand:** Briefly repeat or summarise what you heard to make sure you understood correctly.
- **Be patient:** Give people enough time to express themselves, especially when discussing personal or difficult topics.

Active listening does not mean that we must agree with everything someone says. It means giving their words attention and respect.

Understanding and Showing Empathy

Empathy helps us look at situations from another person's point of view.

For example, imagine that a friend is upset because they did not get a job they wanted. Instead of immediately offering advice or saying that it is not a big problem, we can first acknowledge their disappointment.

Simple ways to show empathy include:

- **Listen without judging:** Avoid making assumptions about someone's situation.

- **Recognise their feelings:** Let the person know that you understand why the experience may be difficult.
- **Respect different reactions:** Remember that people do not always respond to situations in the same way.
- **Ask what they need:** Sometimes people want advice, while other times they simply want someone to listen.
- **Be open to different perspectives:** Our personal experiences are not the only way to understand a situation.

Empathy is especially valuable in international youth activities, where people may have different cultural backgrounds, experiences, and ways of communicating.

What Our Participants Experienced

During the youth exchange, participants took part in an **active listening** activity in pairs.

They sat facing each other on yoga mats. One person shared their thoughts while the other listened without interrupting. The aim was to practise attention and eye contact. The listener could only respond or ask follow-up questions after the speaker had finished.

How did participants feel?

At first, some participants found the activity a little awkward. Maintaining eye contact, sharing personal thoughts, and listening without speaking were not things they were used to doing for a longer period.

What did they learn?

- The importance of listening without interrupting.
- Being patient while another person is speaking.
- How sharing similar experiences can help people learn from one another.
- The value of allowing someone to finish before responding.

Try It Yourself: The Active Listening Challenge

This activity is based on the exercise practised during the youth exchange. It can be used with friends, classmates, or participants in a youth workshop.

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials: A quiet space and a comfortable place to sit.

1. Divide participants into pairs and ask them to sit facing each other.
2. Choose a simple topic, such as a memorable experience or something that makes you happy.
3. One person speaks for two minutes while the other listens without interrupting.
4. The listener pays attention and avoids preparing their own response while the other person is talking.
5. When the speaker finishes, the listener can ask follow-up questions.
6. Switch roles and repeat the exercise.
7. Finish by discussing how the experience felt for both people.

Questions for reflection:

- Was it difficult to listen without interrupting?
- How did it feel to have someone's full attention?
- Did you notice anything new about your partner?
- How could you use active listening in everyday conversations?

Participants should feel comfortable choosing how much they want to share. Eye contact is optional, and nobody should feel pressured to discuss personal experiences.



Remember: Good communication is not only about finding the right words. Sometimes, the most valuable thing we can offer another person is our attention, patience, and willingness to understand.

▼ Building Healthy Relationships

Healthy relationships are an important part of our social lives. They can develop between friends, family members, romantic partners, classmates, or colleagues. Although every relationship is different, healthy relationships are built on **mutual respect, trust, honesty, and equality**.

A healthy relationship does not mean that people always agree or never have problems. It means that everyone involved feels valued, has the freedom to be themselves, and can work through difficulties without fear or pressure.

What Makes a Relationship Healthy?

There are several important qualities that help relationships grow and remain positive.

- **Trust:** Feeling confident that someone will be honest and keep their promises.
- **Mutual respect:** Accepting each other's opinions, choices, and personal differences.
- **Honesty:** Being open about important matters instead of hiding information or misleading others.
- **Equality:** Making decisions together and ensuring that everyone's needs and opinions matter.
- **Independence:** Having the freedom to enjoy personal interests, friendships, and activities outside the relationship.
- **Shared effort:** Understanding that maintaining a relationship is the responsibility of everyone involved.

Healthy relationships require time and effort, but they should not make someone feel constantly afraid, controlled, or unimportant.

Understanding Personal Boundaries

Personal boundaries are the limits we set to protect our comfort, privacy, time, and personal space. They help other people understand what we are

comfortable with and what we do not accept.

Boundaries can be different for everyone. For example:

- **Physical boundaries:** Deciding whether we are comfortable with hugs or other physical contact.
- **Emotional boundaries:** Choosing when and with whom we want to share personal experiences.
- **Time boundaries:** Having time for personal activities without feeling guilty.
- **Digital boundaries:** Deciding what personal information we share online and when we are available to respond to messages.

Setting boundaries does not mean rejecting other people. It helps create relationships where everyone's needs and choices are respected.

How to Handle Disagreements

Disagreements are normal, even in strong relationships. People have different opinions, expectations, and ways of doing things.

Here are some ways to handle conflicts in a healthier way:

1. **Focus on the problem:** Discuss the situation without attacking the other person's character.
2. **Use "I" statements:** Explain your own experience instead of blaming someone. For example, say, "I felt disappointed when our plans changed without telling me."
3. **Avoid insults and threats:** Strong emotions do not justify hurtful or aggressive behaviour.
4. **Look for fair solutions:** Consider what both people need and whether a compromise is possible.
5. **Take responsibility:** Acknowledge your mistakes and make changes when necessary.
6. **Recognise when to step away:** Not every disagreement can be solved immediately, and some situations require distance or outside support.

A healthy solution should respect both people's rights and boundaries. Nobody should feel forced to accept harmful behaviour just to avoid conflict.

Recognising Unhealthy Relationship Patterns

Sometimes, relationships can negatively affect our well-being. It is important to recognise behaviours that may indicate a relationship is becoming unhealthy.

Some warning signs include:

- **Controlling behaviour:** Someone tries to decide who you can meet, where you can go, or what you can do.
- **Disrespecting boundaries:** Your personal limits are repeatedly ignored.
- **Manipulation:** Someone uses guilt, threats, or pressure to influence your decisions.
- **Constant criticism:** You are regularly made to feel inadequate or unimportant.
- **Lack of equality:** One person makes all the important decisions without considering the other.
- **Isolation:** Someone tries to separate you from friends, family, or other important connections.

Everyone makes mistakes, but repeated harmful behaviour should not be ignored. If a relationship makes you feel unsafe or controlled, consider seeking support from someone you trust or a qualified professional.

Try It Yourself: My Relationship Values

This reflection activity can help you identify what matters most to you in your relationships.

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Materials: Paper and a pen, or a digital notebook.

1. Write down five qualities that you consider important in a healthy relationship.

2. Choose the three qualities that matter most to you.
3. Think of examples of how these qualities can be shown through everyday actions.
4. Identify one personal boundary that is important to you.
5. Reflect on how you can respect both your own boundaries and those of other people.

Questions for reflection:

- What makes me feel respected in a relationship?
- Which behaviours help me build trust?
- Am I comfortable expressing my personal boundaries?
- What would I do if someone repeatedly ignored my boundaries?



Remember: Healthy relationships should be based on respect, trust, freedom, and shared responsibility. You have the right to express your needs, set boundaries, and be treated with dignity.

▼ The Importance of Social Support

Social support means having people in our lives who we can turn to for help, encouragement, or companionship. These people may include friends, family members, classmates, colleagues, youth workers, or members of our local communities.

Having social support can make a difference in how we experience everyday life. It reminds us that we are part of a community and that we do not have to face every situation alone.

Social support is not about having a large number of friends. What matters most is having meaningful connections with people we can rely on.

Different Types of Social Support

Support can take different forms depending on the situation and our needs.

- **Emotional support:** Having someone who offers comfort, encouragement, or understanding during difficult moments.
- **Practical support:** Receiving help with everyday tasks, such as moving, travelling, or completing an important responsibility.
- **Information and advice:** Getting useful guidance from someone with knowledge or experience.
- **Social companionship:** Spending time with others through shared interests, activities, or community events.
- **A sense of belonging:** Feeling welcomed and accepted as part of a group.

For example, when a young person moves to another country, they may need practical information about local services, opportunities to meet new people, and encouragement while adjusting to their new environment.

How to Build a Social Support Network

A social support network includes people and communities we can connect with when we need company, guidance, or assistance.

Here are some ways to develop your own support network:

1. **Join activities that interest you:** Youth exchanges, volunteering, sports, and creative workshops can offer opportunities to meet people with similar interests.
2. **Stay connected:** Make an effort to keep in touch with people who are important to you, even when you live far apart.
3. **Explore local communities:** Look for youth centres, student organisations, cultural events, or community groups.
4. **Share your interests:** Common hobbies and activities can make it easier to start conversations and develop friendships.
5. **Be willing to offer help:** Supporting others can create stronger connections and encourage cooperation.

Building meaningful connections takes time. Some friendships develop quickly, while others grow through regular contact and shared experiences.

The Role of Community and Belonging

Feeling part of a community can have a positive influence on our well-being. It can help reduce feelings of loneliness and create opportunities for participation, learning, and personal development.

Communities can take many forms, such as neighbourhood groups, sports teams, volunteer organisations, or international youth networks.

During an Erasmus+ youth exchange, young people from different countries have the opportunity to live, learn, and spend time together. Shared activities and intercultural experiences can help participants develop new connections beyond their usual social circles.

These experiences can be especially valuable for young people who have recently moved, live in isolated areas, or find it difficult to access social activities.

How to Ask for Support

Sometimes, we may need assistance but feel unsure about how to approach someone.

Here are some simple steps that can make asking for support easier:

1. **Identify what you need:** Think about whether you need practical help, information, encouragement, or simply company.
2. **Choose someone appropriate:** Consider who may have the time, knowledge, or ability to help.
3. **Be clear about your request:** Explain what you need without expecting the other person to guess.
4. **Respect their availability:** Understand that people may not always be able to help immediately.
5. **Explore other options:** If one person cannot help, consider reaching out to another trusted person, organisation, or service.

Asking for support is a normal part of life. We all need different forms of assistance at different moments.

Try It Yourself: My Support Network Map

This activity can help you understand which people and communities are part of your life.

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials: Paper and coloured pens, or a digital drawing tool.

1. Draw a circle in the centre of the page and write "Me" inside it.
2. Around it, draw smaller circles for people or groups you feel connected to.
3. Use different colours to show the kinds of support they may offer, such as emotional, practical, or information-based support.
4. Look at your map and think about which connections you would like to maintain or strengthen.
5. Consider whether there are new communities or activities you would like to explore.

Questions for reflection:

- Who can I turn to when I need encouragement or practical help?
- Which groups or communities make me feel welcome?
- Are there people I would like to reconnect with?
- What opportunities could help me meet new people?

This exercise can also be used in youth workshops. Participants should be free to keep their maps private, especially when they include personal information.



Remember: A strong support network is not measured by the number of people we know. Meaningful connections, shared experiences, and a sense of belonging can make a positive difference in our lives.

▼ Inclusion and Intercultural Understanding

▼ Stereotypes and Discrimination

We meet people from different cultures, communities, and backgrounds every day. Sometimes, we form opinions about others before getting to know them. These opinions may be influenced by what we see, hear, or learn from our families, friends, media, and society.

Understanding stereotypes and discrimination can help us question unfair assumptions and treat people with greater respect.

What Are Stereotypes?

A stereotype is a general belief or assumption about a group of people. It often suggests that everyone in the group has the same characteristics, behaviours, or interests.

Our brains naturally organise information into categories to help us understand the world. However, when we use these categories to judge people, we may overlook their individual personalities and experiences.

Some common examples of stereotypes include:

- **Gender:** Assuming that boys are better at technology or that girls are more emotional.
- **Age:** Believing that all young people are irresponsible or that older people cannot use technology.
- **Nationality:** Thinking that everyone from a particular country behaves in the same way.
- **Religion:** Making assumptions about someone's beliefs or lifestyle based on their clothing.
- **Appearance:** Judging someone's education, personality, or abilities based on how they look.

Stereotypes can appear positive, negative, or neutral, but they can still create unfair expectations and limit how we see others.

From Stereotypes to Discrimination

Although these terms are connected, they have different meanings.

- **Stereotype:** A general belief about a group of people.
- **Prejudice:** A negative opinion or attitude towards someone, often formed without knowing them personally.
- **Discrimination:** Unfair treatment of someone because of characteristics such as their nationality, gender, religion, disability, or background.

For example:

A person may believe that young people are not responsible enough to lead important projects. This is a stereotype.

If they develop a negative attitude towards young people because of this belief, it becomes prejudice.

If they refuse to give a qualified young person a leadership opportunity only because of their age, this becomes discrimination.

Discrimination can happen in schools, workplaces, public spaces, and online communities. It can prevent people from accessing opportunities and feeling accepted in society.

Looking Beyond First Impressions

First impressions are often based on limited information. We may notice someone's appearance, clothing, language, or behaviour and immediately create assumptions about them.

For example, seeing a person wearing a hijab might lead someone to assume that they have very strict religious beliefs. However, clothing alone cannot tell us everything about someone's personality, values, or experiences.

Here are some ways to challenge stereotypes:

- **Question your assumptions:** Ask yourself whether your opinion is based on facts or general beliefs.
- **Avoid generalisations:** Remember that people from the same group can have very different personalities and experiences.

- **Learn from different perspectives:** Explore cultures, traditions, and experiences beyond your own.
- **Be aware of language:** Avoid jokes, labels, or comments that may reinforce harmful stereotypes.
- **Challenge unfair behaviour:** Speak up respectfully when you notice someone being judged or treated unfairly.

The goal is not to ignore differences but to understand that no single characteristic can fully describe a person.

What We Explored During the Youth Exchange

During the session **“Stereotypes - Guess the Label”**, participants explored how stereotypes develop and influence the way we see other people.

The session began with a discussion about how our brains organise information and why this can sometimes lead to incorrect assumptions.

Participants then took part in an interactive game called **“Guess the Label”**. Working in groups, they created situations based on common stereotypes. These situations were placed on the backs of chairs so that each participant could see the others' situations but not their own.

Participants had to discover their assigned situation by asking questions that could only be answered with "yes" or "no."

The activity encouraged participants to notice how quickly we form conclusions when we have limited information.

Key learning points from the activity included:

- Understanding how stereotypes are created.
- Recognising how easily assumptions can influence our opinions.
- Exploring the connection between stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.
- Becoming more aware of our own first impressions.
- Learning to look beyond labels and respect individual differences.
- Developing curiosity and a more open-minded attitude towards others.

The group also reflected on how categorising information can sometimes be useful, but applying general assumptions to individuals can lead to misunderstanding and exclusion.

Try It Yourself: Question Your First Impression

This short reflection activity can help you become more aware of everyday assumptions.

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Materials: Paper and a pen, or a digital notebook.

1. Think about a situation when you formed an opinion about someone before getting to know them.
2. Write down what influenced your first impression.
3. Consider whether your opinion was based on facts or assumptions.
4. Think about what additional information might have changed your perspective.
5. Reflect on how you could approach a similar situation differently in the future.

Questions for reflection:

- Have I ever judged someone based on their appearance or background?
- Where do some of my beliefs about other groups come from?
- How might stereotypes affect someone's opportunities or sense of belonging?
- What can I do to challenge unfair assumptions in everyday life?



Remember: Every person has their own experiences, abilities, and identity. Looking beyond stereotypes helps us understand people as individuals rather than judging them by the groups they belong to.

▼ Understanding Inequality and Social Exclusion

Not everyone has the same opportunities in life. Some people have easier access to education, employment, healthcare, and social activities, while others face barriers that make participation more difficult.

These differences can be influenced by a person's financial situation, family background, disability, geographical location, or other circumstances.

Understanding inequality and social exclusion helps us recognise these barriers and think about how to create fairer opportunities for everyone.

What Is Inequality?

Inequality means that people do not have equal access to resources, opportunities, or support. It can affect different areas of everyday life.

Some common examples include:

- **Economic inequality:** Some people cannot afford educational materials, transport, or activities that others can easily access.
- **Educational inequality:** Young people may have different learning opportunities depending on their financial situation, location, or available support.
- **Geographical inequality:** People living in rural or remote areas may have fewer opportunities to join events, training courses, or youth programmes.
- **Social inequality:** Family circumstances, social connections, or personal backgrounds can influence the opportunities available to someone.
- **Accessibility barriers:** People with disabilities may face difficulties accessing buildings, information, transport, or activities.

These barriers can sometimes overlap, making everyday challenges even more difficult for certain individuals.

What Is Social Exclusion?

Social exclusion happens when people are unable to participate fully in society or community life. This may happen because they lack resources, opportunities, support, or access to activities.

For example:

- A young person cannot join an international project because they cannot afford the travel costs in advance.
- Someone living in a rural area has difficulty attending youth activities because public transport is limited.
- A newcomer struggles to participate in local events because information is available only in a language they do not understand.
- A person with a disability cannot attend a workshop because the venue is not accessible.

Social exclusion is not always intentional. Sometimes, activities are planned without considering the different needs and circumstances of participants.

Equality and Equity: What Is the Difference?

Equality and equity are two important ideas when discussing fair opportunities.

- **Equality** means giving everyone the same resources or opportunities.
- **Equity** means recognising that people have different needs and providing suitable support so they can participate fairly.

For example:

Imagine that a youth organisation invites 20 young people to an international training course.

With equality, everyone receives the same information and instructions.

With equity, the organisation also considers individual needs. Some participants may receive extra language support, accessible materials, or help with travel arrangements.

The aim is not to give everyone exactly the same support, but to make participation possible for people with different circumstances.

Understanding Privilege

Privilege means having certain advantages that make some parts of life easier. These advantages may come from our family situation, education, financial resources, social environment, or other circumstances.

Having privilege does not mean that someone has never experienced difficulties. It means that they may not face certain barriers that other people experience.

For example, a young person who lives near a university and has reliable public transport may find it easier to access education than someone living in a remote village with limited transport options.

Recognising privilege can help us better understand why people may experience the same situation differently.

The Privilege Window: Learning Through Experience

During the youth exchange, participants explored inequality through an interactive activity called **“The Privilege Window - Understanding Inequality.”**

The activity encouraged participants to reflect on how personal circumstances can influence people's opportunities, experiences, and participation in society.

It also introduced an important idea: **people do not always begin with the same resources or face the same obstacles.**

This perspective is especially relevant in international youth projects, where participants may come from different economic, geographical, cultural, and social backgrounds.

Try It Yourself: Different Starting Points

This short activity can help young people explore how different circumstances influence access to opportunities.

Duration: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Paper, pens, and prepared situation cards.

1. Divide participants into small groups.

2. Give each group a fictional character with a different background or life situation.
3. Present a common opportunity, such as joining an international youth exchange.
4. Ask each group to identify possible barriers their character might face.
5. Invite groups to suggest practical solutions that could make participation easier.
6. Share the ideas and discuss how different kinds of support can improve access.

Example characters:

- A student living in a small village with limited public transport.
- A young person who cannot afford to buy travel tickets in advance.
- A newcomer who is still learning the local language.
- A young person with a physical disability who needs an accessible venue.

Use fictional characters rather than asking participants to reveal their own financial situation or personal difficulties.

Questions for reflection:

- Did all the characters have the same opportunities?
- Which barriers were the most difficult to overcome?
- What kind of support could make participation easier?
- How can youth organisations make their activities more accessible?



Remember: Fair opportunities do not always mean giving everyone the same things. Understanding people's different needs and removing barriers can help more young people participate fully in society.

▼ Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces

A safe and inclusive space is an environment where people feel welcome, respected, and comfortable participating. It allows individuals from different backgrounds to learn, share ideas, and take part in activities without fear of being judged, embarrassed, or treated unfairly.

In youth work, creating this kind of environment is especially important. Young people may have different levels of confidence, communication styles, abilities, and personal experiences.

An inclusive space does not mean that everyone must participate in the same way. It means creating conditions where everyone has a fair chance to take part.

What Makes a Space Safe and Inclusive?

A positive group environment depends on several important elements:

- **Respect:** Everyone's opinions, identities, and personal experiences are treated with care.
- **Clear expectations:** Participants understand what behaviour is acceptable and how they should treat one another.
- **Freedom of choice:** People can decide how much they want to share or participate in personal activities.
- **Privacy:** Personal stories and sensitive information are not shared outside the group without permission.
- **Accessibility:** Activities, materials, and spaces are adapted to different needs and abilities.
- **Shared participation:** Everyone has opportunities to contribute, not only the most confident or experienced participants.

These elements help create an environment where people can participate without unnecessary pressure.

Creating Group Agreements

One useful way to build a positive learning environment is to develop group agreements together.

Unlike rules decided only by organisers, group agreements allow participants to discuss what they need to feel comfortable and respected.

Examples of group agreements include:

1. Respect different opinions and experiences.
2. Avoid offensive language, personal attacks, and hurtful jokes.
3. Give everyone an opportunity to contribute.
4. Do not share another person's private information without permission.
5. Respect someone's decision not to answer a personal question.
6. Ask for permission before taking or sharing photographs.
7. Inform a group leader or facilitator if something makes you feel unsafe.

Group agreements should be clear, realistic, and understood by everyone. They can also be reviewed during the activity if the group's needs change.

Creating a Supportive Environment During the Youth Exchange

At the beginning of the youth exchange, participants took part in activities focused on getting to know one another, sharing expectations and fears, and creating group rules.

These activities helped establish a shared understanding of how the group wanted to work together throughout the project.

The programme also included daily reflection sessions, giving participants regular opportunities to share their experiences, express concerns, and provide feedback.

A midterm evaluation offered another opportunity to review the learning experience and identify possible improvements.

These methods are useful for youth workers because they encourage participants to take an active role in shaping their learning environment.

Try It Yourself: Our Group Agreement

This activity can be organised at the beginning of a youth exchange, training course, or local workshop.

Duration: 20-30 minutes

Materials: Flipchart paper or a whiteboard, markers, and sticky notes.

1. Ask participants to think about what helps them feel comfortable and respected in a group.
2. Invite everyone to write down two or three ideas.
3. Collect the ideas and group similar suggestions together.
4. Discuss which agreements are most important for the group.
5. Create a shared list using clear and simple language.
6. Ask participants whether they agree with the final version and if anything is missing.
7. Keep the agreement visible throughout the activity.

Participants can contribute anonymously if they prefer not to speak in front of the group.

Questions for reflection:

- What helps me feel comfortable participating in a group?
- Are there different ways people might prefer to contribute?
- How can we respond when someone feels excluded or uncomfortable?
- What can we do to make sure our group agreements are followed?



Remember: A safe and inclusive environment is created through everyday actions, not only through written rules. Everyone has a role in making sure that people feel respected, welcomed, and able to participate in their own way.

▼ Learning from Different Experiences

Every person has a unique story shaped by their culture, family, community, and life experiences. When we meet people from different backgrounds, we have the opportunity to discover new perspectives and learn things we may not have considered before.

Intercultural learning means learning about and from people with different cultural backgrounds. It helps us become more curious, open-minded, and aware of the many ways people experience the world.

We do not need to travel abroad to experience intercultural learning. It can happen in schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods, and local communities.

Why Are Different Experiences Valuable?

Learning from people with different backgrounds can help us:

- **Discover new perspectives:** Understand that people may approach the same situation in different ways.
- **Expand our knowledge:** Learn about traditions, languages, customs, and everyday life in other communities.
- **Develop new ideas:** Explore different ways of solving problems by sharing experiences.
- **Become more adaptable:** Feel more comfortable in unfamiliar situations and international environments.
- **Challenge our expectations:** Discover that our own experiences are not the only way of seeing the world.

For example, young people from different countries may have different experiences with education, family traditions, or community activities. Sharing these experiences can help them understand both their differences and what they have in common.

Intercultural Learning in Everyday Life

Intercultural learning is not only about discovering traditional food, music, or national celebrations. It also includes understanding how people

communicate, make decisions, and experience everyday situations.

Here are some ways to learn from different experiences:

1. **Show curiosity:** Ask respectful questions about traditions, experiences, and personal perspectives.
2. **Share your own experiences:** Explain what life is like in your community without assuming that everyone from your country has the same experience.
3. **Explore cultural activities:** Join international events, language exchanges, or community celebrations.
4. **Be open to unfamiliar situations:** Try new activities and learn about customs that are different from your own.
5. **Accept that differences exist:** People do not need to have the same values, habits, or opinions to learn from each other.

It is also important to remember that no single person can represent an entire country or culture. Everyone has their own identity and experiences.

Intercultural Learning During the Youth Exchange

During the youth exchange participants from Latvia, Portugal, Sweden, North Macedonia, and Greece had opportunities to learn from each other throughout the programme.

One important part of the experience was the **intercultural evenings**, where national teams introduced different aspects of their countries and cultures.

The intercultural evenings included:

- **Latvia and Portugal**
- **North Macedonia and Sweden**
- **Greece**

These activities allowed participants to discover cultural traditions, share knowledge, and spend time together in an informal environment.

Intercultural learning also happened during workshops, group discussions, and shared activities. Participants worked with people from different

countries, exchanged ideas, and discovered how personal experiences can influence different points of view.

Try It Yourself: A Cultural Exchange Circle

This activity can be used during youth exchanges, international training courses, or local community workshops.

Duration: 20-30 minutes

Materials: Paper and pens (optional).

1. Divide participants into small groups with different backgrounds or experiences.
2. Ask each person to share one tradition, habit, or experience that is meaningful to them.
3. Encourage the others to ask respectful questions.
4. Invite participants to identify something they found surprising or interesting.
5. Ask each group to discuss whether they discovered any similarities between their experiences.
6. Finish with a short group reflection.

Participants can share cultural traditions, family experiences, community activities, or personal interests. Nobody should feel pressured to share private information or speak on behalf of an entire culture.

Questions for reflection:

- What new perspective did I discover?
- Did I find something in common with someone whose background is different from mine?
- Was there anything that surprised me?
- How can I continue learning from people with different experiences?

> 💡 **Remember:** Intercultural learning is not about knowing everything about another culture. It is about being curious, staying open to new perspectives, and recognising that every person has something valuable to share.

▼ Practical Activities and Methods

▼ Activities for Mental Well-being

The following activities are based on sessions from the youth exchange. They provide practical methods for exploring emotions, relaxation, and the connection between physical and mental well-being.

Each activity includes suggested instructions, materials, and reflection questions that youth workers can adapt for their groups.

Activity 1: Emotions - Learning to Name and Manage Feelings

Aim: To help participants recognise different emotions, understand situations that may cause them, and explore ways to express their feelings.

Duration: 45-60 minutes (suggested)

Materials: Flipchart paper, coloured markers, sticky notes, and pens.

Instructions:

1. **Introduction:** Ask participants to name different emotions they know. Write their answers on a flipchart.
2. **Group discussion:** Talk about situations that can lead to different feelings. Explain that people may react differently to similar experiences.
3. **Creative activity:** Divide participants into small groups. Ask each group to choose three or four emotions and create simple examples of situations where someone might experience them.

4. **Finding solutions:** Invite each group to suggest healthy ways of responding to these emotions.
5. **Group presentations:** Let participants share their ideas with the others.
6. **Final reflection:** Discuss what participants discovered about their own feelings and the experiences of others.

Questions for reflection:

- Which emotions were easiest or most difficult to describe?
- Can two people experience different emotions in the same situation?
- What did you discover about expressing your feelings?
- How can this knowledge be useful in everyday life?

Tips for facilitators: Avoid asking participants to share personal or painful experiences. Allow them to use fictional situations and remind everyone that sharing is voluntary.

Activity 2: Laughter and Joy - Guided Meditation

Aim: To explore how positive experiences, laughter, and guided relaxation can support mental well-being.

Duration: 30-45 minutes (suggested)

Materials: A quiet space, comfortable seating, and optional background music.

Instructions:

1. **Introduction:** Invite participants to think about activities or situations that bring them joy.
2. **Positive memories:** Ask participants to remember a happy or funny moment. They can keep the memory private or share it voluntarily.
3. **Guided relaxation:** Invite everyone to sit comfortably. Guide them through a short exercise in which they imagine a peaceful or enjoyable place.
4. **Creative expression:** Ask participants to describe their experience using one word, a short sentence, or a drawing.

5. **Group discussion:** Explore how people experience joy differently and what role enjoyable moments can play in their everyday lives.
6. **Final reflection:** Invite participants to think about how they could create more opportunities for joy in their daily routines.

Questions for reflection:

- How did you feel during the activity?
- Was it easy to think of a positive memory?
- What activities or experiences bring you joy?
- What did you discover about the importance of positive experiences?

Tips for facilitators: Allow participants to keep their eyes open and choose a comfortable position. Avoid forcing laughter or expecting everyone to feel happy. Offer a quiet alternative for anyone who does not feel comfortable with the guided exercise.

Activity 3: Connecting Physical and Mental Well-being

Aim: To encourage participants to explore connections between physical health, personal experiences, and mental well-being.

Duration: 30-45 minutes (suggested)

Materials: Flipchart paper, markers, and sticky notes.

Instructions:

1. **Introduction:** Ask participants to think about something new they have recently learned about the human body.
2. **Individual reflection:** Invite each person to write down one interesting fact or observation and one question it raises about well-being.
3. **Small-group discussion:** Divide participants into groups and ask them to exchange their ideas.
4. **Connecting ideas:** Each group creates a simple mind map showing connections between physical health, emotions, and everyday experiences.

5. **Sharing results:** Invite groups to present one interesting connection they identified.
6. **Final reflection:** Discuss how learning about the body can encourage people to become more aware of their health.

During the youth exchange participants explored this topic following a guided visit to the **Riga Stradiņš University Anatomy Museum**. The activity can also be organised after a health workshop, educational video, or another learning experience about the human body.

Questions for reflection:

- What new information did you discover?
- Did anything change the way you think about your body?
- Which connections between physical and mental health did you find interesting?
- How can this knowledge be useful in everyday life?

Tips for facilitators: Avoid making assumptions about participants' health or physical abilities. Focus on general learning and allow participants to choose how much they want to share.

> 💡 **Remember:** Mental well-being activities are opportunities for learning, reflection, and connection. They are not a replacement for professional mental health care. Participants should always be able to choose how they take part and what they feel comfortable sharing.

▼ Activities for Stress Relief and Resilience

These activities offer practical ways to explore stress relief and resilience through movement, teamwork, and creative challenges.

The suggested activity plans can be adapted to different group sizes, abilities, and learning environments.

Activity 1: Stretch and De-Stress

Aim: To help participants release physical tension and explore how gentle stretching can support relaxation.

Duration: 15-20 minutes (suggested)

Materials: Comfortable clothes, enough space to move, and optional yoga mats.

Instructions:

1. **Introduction:** Explain that the activity focuses on gentle movement rather than physical performance.
2. **Warm-up:** Invite participants to slowly move their shoulders, arms, and wrists.
3. **Stretching:** Guide the group through simple stretches for the neck, shoulders, back, and legs.
4. **Individual choice:** Allow participants to choose movements that feel comfortable for their bodies.
5. **Cool-down:** Finish with a few moments of stillness, allowing everyone to notice any changes in physical tension.
6. **Group reflection:** Invite participants to share their experiences if they wish.

Questions for reflection:

- Which movements felt most comfortable?
- Did you notice any changes in physical tension?
- How could you adapt this activity for someone with limited mobility?

Tips for facilitators: Demonstrate movements slowly and offer seated alternatives. Avoid forcing stretches or making physical contact without permission.

Activity 2: Shake It Out

Aim: To encourage participants to release tension and explore creative movement as a way to respond to stressful moments.

Duration: 10-15 minutes (suggested)

Materials: Music, a speaker, and enough space to move.

Instructions:

1. **Introduction:** Explain that there are no correct or incorrect movements in this activity.
2. **Starting slowly:** Invite participants to gently shake their hands and arms.
3. **Adding movement:** Encourage participants to move their shoulders, legs, or other body parts at a comfortable pace.
4. **Music and creativity:** Play an energetic song and invite everyone to create their own movements.
5. **Changing the pace:** Gradually lower the music volume and encourage participants to slow their movements.
6. **Final reflection:** Ask participants to describe the experience using one word.

Questions for reflection:

- How did you feel during the activity?
- Was it easy or difficult to move freely?
- Did the music influence your energy?
- Could this activity be useful during a busy or demanding day?

Tips for facilitators: Do not require participants to dance in front of others. Offer alternatives such as seated movements, and allow participants to observe if they prefer.

Activity 3: The Resilience Challenge

Aim: To practise teamwork, flexibility, and finding solutions when unexpected difficulties appear.

Duration: 30-40 minutes (suggested)

Materials: Paper, tape, scissors, and simple building materials such as straws or recycled cardboard.

Instructions:

1. **Introduction:** Divide participants into small groups of four or five people.
2. **The challenge:** Ask each group to build a free-standing tower using the available materials.
3. **Time limit:** Give participants 10 minutes to plan and begin building.
4. **Unexpected change:** Halfway through, introduce a new challenge. For example, remove one type of material or ask groups to change their original design.
5. **Adapting:** Give groups another 10 minutes to adjust their plans and complete their towers.
6. **Sharing results:** Invite each group to explain how they responded to the unexpected change.
7. **Final reflection:** Discuss how the experience connects to adapting to challenges in everyday life.

Questions for reflection:

- How did your group react when the rules changed?
- What helped you find another solution?
- Did everyone have an opportunity to contribute?
- What would you do differently in a similar situation?

Tips for facilitators: Focus on cooperation and learning rather than choosing a winning team. Make sure the unexpected change is challenging but achievable.

Activity 4: My Strengths in Action

Aim: To help participants recognise how their personal strengths can be useful in challenging situations.

Duration: 20-30 minutes (suggested)

Materials: Paper, pens, and prepared situation cards.

Instructions:

1. **Introduction:** Explain that everyone has different strengths, including creativity, patience, organisation, humour, and determination.
2. **Situation cards:** Divide participants into small groups and give each group a fictional challenging situation.
3. **Finding strengths:** Ask groups to identify which personal strengths could help someone manage the situation.
4. **Planning a response:** Invite each group to suggest two or three possible actions.
5. **Sharing ideas:** Groups present their situations and explain the strengths they selected.
6. **Final reflection:** Ask participants to think about a strength they would like to use more often.

Example situations:

- A student must prepare a group presentation, but the team has difficulty working together.
- A young person joins an international project and feels unsure about speaking English.
- A volunteer helps organise an event, but an important part of the plan changes unexpectedly.

Questions for reflection:

- Which strengths were useful in different situations?
- Can the same challenge be solved in several ways?
- Did you discover a strength you had not considered before?
- How can people with different strengths work well together?

Tips for facilitators: Encourage participants to recognise different kinds of strengths. Avoid comparing people or suggesting that one personal quality is more valuable than another.

> 💡 **Remember:** Practical activities can help young people explore different ways of responding to challenges. The goal is not to perform perfectly, but to create opportunities for learning, cooperation, and personal development.

▼ Tips for Youth Workers and Facilitators

Organising activities for young people involves more than preparing a programme. A good facilitator helps participants stay interested, take an active role in learning, and connect their experiences with real-life situations.

In non-formal education, **the facilitator's role is to guide the learning process rather than provide all the answers**. Participants should have opportunities to explore topics, share ideas, and learn through experience.

Here are some practical tips for planning and leading meaningful youth activities.

1. Set Clear Learning Goals

Before preparing an activity, think about what participants should learn or practise.

- Choose one or two main learning goals.
- Select methods that match these goals.
- Explain the purpose of the activity in simple language.
- Focus on what participants will learn, not only on completing tasks.

For example, if the goal is to develop teamwork skills, choose an activity where participants need to cooperate and make decisions together.

2. Choose the Right Methods

Different learning goals require different approaches. Non-formal education offers many methods that can make learning more active and interesting.

Method	When to use it
Group discussions	To exchange opinions and explore different perspectives
Role-playing	To practise responding to real-life situations
Creative workshops	To explore ideas through art, writing, or other forms of expression
Simulations	To understand situations through practical experience
Team challenges	To develop cooperation and problem-solving skills
Individual reflection	To think about personal learning and experiences

Combining different methods can help maintain participants' interest and make the programme more engaging.

3. Encourage Participant-Led Learning

Young people often have valuable knowledge, experiences, and creative ideas to share.

Instead of leading every activity yourself, give participants opportunities to take responsibility.

For example, they can:

- Prepare and facilitate a short workshop.
- Lead an energiser or team-building activity.
- Suggest discussion topics or creative methods.
- Share skills with other group members.
- Help prepare learning materials or project results.

During the youth exchange participants contributed to the learning process and helped develop practical resources for this guide.

4. Manage Time and Group Energy

A well-planned activity needs enough time for instructions, participation, and reflection.

- Prepare a realistic schedule with some flexibility.
- Consider the group's energy when choosing activities.
- Use short energisers when participants become tired.
- Avoid giving too many instructions at once.
- Be ready to shorten or adjust an activity when necessary.

Sometimes, an interesting discussion may need more time than expected. A facilitator should recognise when it is useful to continue and when it is better to move forward.

5. Ask Questions That Encourage Learning

Good questions can help participants think more deeply about their experiences.

Instead of asking only whether they liked an activity, explore what they discovered.

Examples of useful questions:

- What happened during the activity?
- What was easy or difficult?
- Did anything surprise you?
- What did you learn from the experience?
- Where could you use this knowledge outside the project?

Try to avoid questions that suggest there is only one correct answer. Allow participants to express different opinions and conclusions.

6. Use Feedback to Improve Activities

Feedback helps facilitators understand whether their methods are useful and what could work better.

You can collect feedback through:

- Short anonymous questionnaires.
- Sticky notes with suggestions.

- Individual written comments.
- Group evaluation discussions.
- Simple rating scales.

During the Youth Exchange, participants took part in daily reflections, a midterm evaluation, and a final evaluation. These activities provided opportunities to review the learning process and share suggestions.

Feedback should not only be collected. Whenever possible, facilitators should use it to improve future activities.

7. Connect Learning with Real Life

An activity becomes more valuable when participants can understand how to use what they learned outside the workshop.

At the end of a session, encourage participants to identify one practical action they could take.

For example:

- After a communication activity, participants could practise a new skill during their next group meeting.
- After a well-being workshop, they could share a useful technique with their classmates.
- After an intercultural activity, they could organise a similar discussion in their local community.

These small follow-up actions can help the learning continue beyond the project.



Remember: A successful youth activity is not measured only by how smoothly it runs. What matters most is whether participants have opportunities to learn, contribute, reflect, and use their new knowledge beyond the workshop.

Mental Health Support and Useful Resources

When to Ask for Help

Everyone experiences difficult moments in life. Sometimes, problems become too difficult to manage alone, and additional support may be needed.

Asking for help does not mean that we are weak or unable to handle our problems. **It means recognising when a situation requires more attention and taking steps to protect our well-being.**

Mental health difficulties can affect anyone, regardless of age, background, or personal circumstances. Knowing when to seek support can help prevent problems from becoming more serious.

Signs That You May Need Support

It is not always easy to recognise when we need help. Some changes may happen slowly, while others can appear suddenly.

Here are some signs worth paying attention to:

- **Persistent sadness or anxiety:** Feeling sad, worried, or hopeless for a long time.
- **Loss of interest:** No longer enjoying activities that previously brought happiness or satisfaction.
- **Changes in daily functioning:** Finding it difficult to attend school, work, or complete everyday responsibilities.
- **Social withdrawal:** Avoiding contact with people or activities that were previously important to you.
- **Feeling overwhelmed:** Experiencing problems that seem too difficult to manage.

- **Unusual changes in behaviour:** Acting very differently from usual or finding it difficult to control reactions.
- **Thoughts of self-harm:** Thinking about hurting yourself or feeling that life is no longer worth living.

Experiencing one of these signs does not automatically mean someone has a mental health condition. However, **if these difficulties continue, become stronger, or affect everyday life, seeking professional advice is important.**

Thoughts of self-harm or suicide should always be taken seriously, even if they have only appeared recently.

What Can Stop Young People from Asking for Help?

Sometimes, young people recognise that something is wrong but still find it difficult to reach out.

There can be several reasons for this:

- **Fear of judgement:** Worrying about what others might think.
- **Mental health stigma:** Believing that emotional difficulties are something to hide.
- **Lack of information:** Not knowing where to find suitable support.
- **Financial barriers:** Being unable to afford certain services.
- **Cultural or language barriers:** Finding it difficult to explain personal experiences or access services in a familiar language.
- **Fear of not being understood:** Worrying that other people will not take their concerns seriously.

These barriers can make reaching out more difficult, especially for young people with fewer opportunities.

Taking the First Step

If you feel that you need support, you do not have to explain everything perfectly or know exactly what is happening.

Here are some steps that may help:

1. **Recognise your concerns:** Think about what has been difficult and how long you have been experiencing it.
2. **Choose someone to contact:** This could be a trusted adult, school counsellor, family doctor, psychologist, or another qualified professional.
3. **Explain what is happening:** You can start with a simple sentence, such as "I haven't been feeling well emotionally, and I would like some support."
4. **Ask about available options:** Find out what services, appointments, or other forms of assistance are available.
5. **Continue seeking help if needed:** If the first person or service cannot provide suitable support, explore another option.

You do not need to wait until a situation becomes serious before asking for professional advice.

When Is Immediate Help Needed?

Some situations require urgent attention.

Seek immediate assistance if you or someone else:

- Is in immediate danger of self-harm or suicide.
- Has seriously injured themselves.
- Is experiencing a mental health crisis and cannot stay safe.

If there is immediate danger, contact your local emergency services or go to the nearest emergency department. In European Union countries, **112** is the emergency number.

If possible, stay with a trusted person while arranging urgent help.

A Moment for Reflection

You do not need to share your answers with anyone.

1. Would I recognise when my emotional difficulties are affecting my daily life?

2. Do I know which local services offer mental health support?
3. What might make it difficult for me to ask for help?
4. What could make reaching out feel easier?

> 💡 **Remember:** You do not need to face serious mental health difficulties alone or wait until they become overwhelming. Seeking appropriate support early can help you understand what you are experiencing and find the assistance you need.

▼ How to Support Others

Supporting someone who is going through a difficult time can make a meaningful difference. We may not always know what to say or how to help, but showing care, understanding, and patience can help someone feel less alone.

Supporting others does not mean solving all their problems. It means being present, respecting their needs, and helping them find suitable support when necessary.

1. Notice Changes Without Making Assumptions

Sometimes, we may notice that a friend, classmate, or family member is behaving differently than usual.

Instead of assuming what is wrong, approach the person with kindness and curiosity.

For example, you could say:

- "I've noticed you've been quieter lately. How are you doing?"
- "You seem to have a lot on your mind. Would you like to talk?"
- "I'm here if you need someone."

Remember that people experience difficulties differently. Avoid making conclusions about someone's mental health based only on their behaviour.

2. Offer Support Without Pressure

Not everyone feels comfortable talking about personal difficulties immediately.

Some people may prefer to share their feelings, while others need more time or space.

Here are some ways to offer support:

- Let the person know that you care about them.
- Ask whether they would like company or some time alone.
- Avoid forcing them to explain their situation.
- Respect their decision if they are not ready to talk.
- Remind them that they can reach out when they feel comfortable.

Sometimes, simply spending time together through an ordinary activity can be supportive.

3. Choose Your Words Carefully

The way we respond to someone's difficulties can influence whether they feel comfortable opening up.

Avoid comments that minimise their experiences, even when your intention is to help.

Instead of saying...	Try saying...
"You're overreacting."	"I can see this is important to you."
"Other people have bigger problems."	"What you're going through matters."
"Just think positively."	"What would be helpful for you right now?"
"You should be over it by now."	"Everyone needs different amounts of time."
"I know exactly how you feel."	"I may not fully understand, but I care."

You do not need to find the perfect words. A kind and thoughtful response is often more valuable than giving immediate advice.

4. Offer Practical Help

When someone is having a difficult time, even ordinary responsibilities may feel challenging.

You could offer support through small actions, such as:

- Helping them prepare for an important appointment.
- Offering to accompany them somewhere if they feel uncomfortable going alone.
- Assisting with a task they are struggling to complete.
- Sharing information about services or activities that may be useful.
- Inviting them to join a relaxing activity without expecting them to participate.

Before taking action, ask whether the person would welcome your help.

5. Encourage Professional Support When Appropriate

Friends and family can offer valuable care, but some situations require professional knowledge and experience.

If someone is experiencing serious or continuing difficulties, you can encourage them to contact a qualified professional.

You might offer to help them find contact information, prepare questions for an appointment, or accompany them if they would find that helpful.

Avoid trying to diagnose someone or suggesting that you know exactly what treatment they need.

If someone is in immediate danger, contact emergency services. Do not promise to keep dangerous situations secret.

6. Respect Privacy and Your Own Limits

When someone shares personal information, treat it with care.

- Do not share their story with others without permission, unless doing so is necessary to protect someone from serious harm.
- Avoid discussing their difficulties in public or group conversations.
- Be clear about what kind of help you can realistically provide.

- Recognise when a situation is beyond your knowledge or abilities.
- Seek guidance from a qualified professional when needed.

Supporting another person can sometimes be emotionally demanding. You can care about someone while also recognising your own limits.

Try It Yourself: How Would You Respond?

This short activity can be used individually or in a youth workshop.

Duration: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Paper, pens, and prepared situation cards.

Read the following situations and think about how you could respond.

Situation 1: A friend tells you they have been having a difficult week but does not want to explain why.

Situation 2: A classmate shares a personal problem, and another person makes a joke about it.

Situation 3: Someone you know seems overwhelmed by their responsibilities but refuses every offer of help.

For each situation, consider:

1. What could I say to show that I care?
2. What should I avoid saying or doing?
3. How can I respect the person's choices?
4. When might additional support be necessary?

If working in groups, invite participants to compare their ideas and discuss different ways of offering support.



Remember: You do not need to have all the answers to support someone. Small acts of care can be meaningful, but respecting the person's choices and recognising when professional help is needed are equally important.

▼ Useful Resources and Further Reading

Learning about mental health and well-being does not end with this guide. Many European, international, and national organisations offer free information, practical tools, and support services for young people and youth workers.

Below are some useful resources for further learning and finding mental health support.

International and European Mental Health Resources

1. World Health Organization (WHO)

The WHO provides reliable information about mental health, including challenges faced by young people, prevention, and ways to support well-being.

- Mental Health of Adolescents

2. UNICEF - Adolescent Mental Health Hub

UNICEF offers educational materials, practical tools, and guidance for young people and professionals working with them. The platform covers mental well-being, resilience, and emotional support.

- UNICEF Adolescent Mental Health Hub

3. United Nations - Youth Mental Health and Well-being

The United Nations provides information about youth mental health challenges, international initiatives, and ways to improve support for young people.

- Youth Mental Health and Well-being

4. Find A Helpline

An international platform that helps people find emotional support services in different countries, including telephone and online support options.

- Find A Helpline

Mental Health Support in Partner Countries

The following organisations and services offer mental health information and support in the five countries represented during the youth exchange.

🇱🇻 Latvia - Skalbes Crisis and Counselling Centre

Skalbes provides emotional support, crisis counselling, and psychological assistance.

- Website: Skalbes – Get Help
- Emotional support helpline: **116 123** (24/7)

🇵🇹 Portugal - SNS 24 Psychological Counselling

Portugal's national health service offers psychological counselling and guidance for people experiencing emotional difficulties.

- Website: SNS 24 – Psychological Counselling
- Telephone: **808 24 24 24** (select option 4 for psychological counselling, available 24/7)

🇸🇪 Sweden - Mind Sweden

Mind is a non-profit organisation offering emotional support, information, and services for people experiencing mental health difficulties.

- Website: Mind Sweden
- Suicide support line: **90 101** (24/7)
- Online chat support is also available.

🇲🇰 North Macedonia - Red Cross Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

The Red Cross of North Macedonia provides psychological first aid, mental health information, and psychosocial support through its programmes and services.

- Website: Red Cross – Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

🇬🇷 Greece - 10306 Psychosocial Support Line

A national service offering free and anonymous psychological support, information, and guidance about mental health difficulties.

- Website: 10306 Psychosocial Support

- Psychological support helpline: **10306** (24/7)

Service availability, languages, and contact details may change. Check the official websites for the latest information. In an immediate emergency, contact local emergency services.

Resources for Youth Workers and Educators

5. SALTO-YOUTH - Toolbox for Training and Youth Work

The SALTO-YOUTH Toolbox offers educational methods, workshop activities, and practical resources for youth workers, facilitators, and organisations. Topics include mental well-being, inclusion, intercultural learning, and youth participation.

- SALTO-YOUTH Toolbox

6. European Youth Portal - Erasmus+ Opportunities

The European Youth Portal provides information about Erasmus+ youth exchanges, international learning opportunities, and youth participation activities across Europe.

- Erasmus+ Opportunities

How to Choose Reliable Information

When exploring mental health information online:

- Choose recognised health organisations and official services.
- Check who created or published the information.
- Look for information supported by research.
- Check whether the information is up to date.
- Be careful with websites or social media accounts promising quick solutions to mental health problems.
- Remember that online information cannot replace personal advice from a qualified healthcare professional.

💡 **Remember:** Reliable resources can help us continue learning about mental health and discover support services when needed. European and international organisations offer valuable knowledge, while national organisations can provide information and assistance closer to home.

▼ Final Reflections and Acknowledgements

▼ Closing Thoughts

Every journey has an ending, but the experiences and connections we make along the way can stay with us much longer.

Mind Matters was more than a series of workshops and activities. It was an opportunity for young people from different countries to come together, share their experiences, challenge themselves, and discover the value of learning from one another.

This guide is one of the results of that journey. It brings together the ideas and contributions of our participants, with the hope that they will reach more young people, youth workers, and educators across Europe.

We hope these resources encourage you to explore new approaches, organise meaningful activities, and create positive experiences in your own community.

The end of this guide is not the end of the learning journey. It is an invitation to continue exploring, sharing, and making a difference.

▼ Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all **24 young participants and 5 group leaders** who contributed to the youth exchange. Their creativity, openness, active participation, and willingness to share made this experience possible.

Special thanks go to the five partner organisations for their cooperation, commitment, and support throughout the project.

We also thank everyone who helped with the preparation, organisation, and implementation of the activities.

We would like to express our gratitude to the Latvian National Agency **(JSPA)**, for approving and supporting this project through the Erasmus+ programme.

This project is co-funded by the Erasmus Plus programme of the European Union.

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Co-funded by the European Union

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