mind
REINFORCE MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICES

Co-funded by
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PEDAGOGICAL GUIDE
ON MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION PRACTICES

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THE MIND PROJECT

MIND (Mental health matters: **IN**novative **D**evelopment for VET organizations) **is an Erasmus+ KA2 project designed to address the growing need for mental health support among young people, particularly those involved in international mobility projects.**

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, awareness of mental health issues became evident among the population, especially among young people. According to the EU's 2023 report on youth mental health, the shift to online learning, reduced access to social and recreational activities, and interrupted interpersonal relationships have led to increased emotional stress. Young people are now 30% to 80% more likely to experience a mental health disorder. Therefore, addressing their mental health and well-being is more crucial than ever[1].

In this context, to **strengthen the capacities of professionals to reinforce their mental health practices and to promote socio-emotional well-being for young people,** five partners from European countries created the MIND project. By informing, guiding and training professionals and young people on mental health, young people will be more equipped with the right knowledge and skills, and will be able to confidently face challenges and thrive both during and beyond their mobility experiences.

The 5 European partners are coming from different geographical areas (Spain, Estonia, Slovakia, Macedonia, and France) to share various practices and points of view and to create innovative tools for professionals and young people:
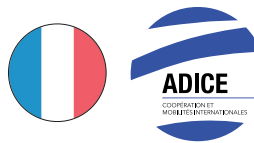
ADICE (France)

Association for volunteerism volonterski centar Skopje (Republic of North Macedonia)

Fundación Plan B Educación Social (Spain)

Občianske združenie KERIC (Slovakia)

Johannes Mihkelsoni Keskus (Estonia)

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[1] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of young people – Policy responses in European countries, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

INTRODUCTION

The MIND project recognizes the vital role of mental health in ensuring the well-being and success of young people, particularly those engaged in international mobility projects. Mental health issues have lasting negative impacts on education, employment, or personal relationships. Young people are particularly affected as it can prevent them from continuing their education and training or can lead them to drop out. Young people participating in mobility projects are included, as changes in environment and culture lead to needing more emotional support.

In response to the growing challenges in this area, the project has developed two complementary pedagogical guides: one focus on **mental health promotion** and the other on **mental health prevention**.

Together, the objective of these guides is to equip professionals with mental health prevention and promotion practices to implement in their organisation and everyday work.
The guides provide a comprehensive framework to support professionals in addressing the mental health needs of young people, equipping them with knowledge, strategies, and tools tailored for their specific contexts:

> The **Promotion Guide** focuses on fostering a supportive environment that enhances psychological well-being. It emphasizes building resilience, raising awareness, and encouraging activities that strengthen emotional, social, and cognitive skills.

> The **Prevention Guide,** on the other hand, help professionals identify and mitigate risks that may lead to mental health challenges. It provides strategies for early detection of distress and actionable interventions to address these risks before they escalate.
>
> **The Prevention Guide can be found here:**
> https://adice.asso.fr/mind-guide-en

While these guides can be used independently, their true strength lies in their complementarity. By combining prevention and promotion approaches, professionals can provide holistic support, ensuring that young people not only overcome challenges but also thrive in their personal and professional lives. By integrating these practices into their work, professionals can create environments where mental health is prioritized, well-being is nurtured, and young people are empowered to reach their full potential.

After the definition and presentation of **Mental Health and Well-Being**, this pedagogical guide is divided into 5 parts:

1. How and why to talk about mental health?
Highlighting the importance of open discussions to reduce stigma and promote awareness.

2. The creation of a safe and open environment
Offering strategies to foster supportive spaces where individuals feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and emotions.

3. The importance of emotional regulation
Exploring techniques to help individuals manage and balance their emotional responses effectively.

4. The promotion of coping strategies for well-being
Introducing actionable strategies to build resilience and maintain mental health daily.

5. Mental health challenges in international mobility
Addressing the unique stressors and needs associated with cross-cultural experiences.

The pedagogical guide is closely linked with the findings of the transnational study carried out under the MIND project, so it is designed to address the identified needs of the study's participants.

MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

Understanding mental health and well-being is essential to be able to address this issue with young people and help them achieve and maintain good mental health.

Mental health

The WHO defines mental health as:

A state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community.
It has intrinsic and instrumental value and is integral to well-being[2].

Mental health is the ability to maintain this state of mental well-being, essential for overall health. It helps in coping with challenges, learning well, working efficiently, and contributing positively to communities. Everyone has mental health, and it is as important as physical health.

Mental health is often associated with psychological disorders that affect well-being, but it is also the search for a balance between all dimensions of life in order to maintain this state of permanent well-being.

Hence, there are several dimensions to mental health mental, conceptualized as a continuum:

- **Positive mental health** postulating personal fulfilment and well-being.
- **Psychological distress** induced by stressful situations and existential difficulties. It may be **transient** - occasional feelings of anxiety or the "blues" - or **persistent**.
- **Mental health disorders,** conditions of varying duration and severity, associated with distress, impairing functioning and requiring medical attention[3].

The Mental health Continuum[4]

Positive & Healthy

Less able to deal with stresses

Suffering from severe mental illness

At one end is good mental health, and at the other end in severe mental illness, which significantly restricts functioning. Everyone is situated somewhere in between and in reality, very few people exist at the extreme ends of the continuum.

If everyone constantly seeks for balance, it is because mental health is repeatedly influenced by living conditions and fluctuates in response to major events.

Three types of factors influence mental health:

- **Individual** factors: specific to the individual (physical health, emotional intelligence, genetics, etc.)
- **Economic and social** factors: related to the **standard of living and social relationships** (education, income, employment and working conditions, family, friends, community, etc.)
- **Societal** factors: encompassing **living environments** (infrastructures, spaces, environments, etc.), **politics** (economy, health, rights, etc.), **culture** and **living conditions** (housing, services, security, etc.)[5].

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[2] https://who.int/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_1

[3] https://mcommemutuelle.com/magazine/votre-bien-etre-passe-aussi-par-votre-sante-mentale/#:~:text=Le nouveau dispositif gouvernemental "Mon Soutien Psy",et la mutuelle à 100%.

[4] https://humanfocus.co.uk/blog/understanding-mental-health-continuum-model/

[5] Sebbane, D., De Rosario, B., & Roelandt, J. L. (2017). La promotion de la santé mentale: un enjeu individuel, collectif et citoyen. La santé en action, 439, 10-13

These factors can be either resources or obstacles for mental health. On the one hand, there are resources that have positive influence on mental health as:

- **Internal resources** (emotional management, ability to ask for help, stress management, etc)
- **External resources** (supportive family, stable employment, leisure activities, etc.)

On the other hand, there are obstacles that have a negative influence on mental health:

- **Individual obstacles** (devaluation, denial, withdrawal, etc.)
- **Collective obstacles** (exclusion, precariousness, etc.)

Some major events, happening throughout all life, will also have negative impact on the search for good mental health, such as illnesses, losing someone, dismissal, or sometimes even a positive event.

These events can have an impact in both the short and long term. If a person faces more obstacles than have resources to help them cope with these events, it can be difficult to maintain good mental health. However, resilience may be strengthened over time, transforming these experiences into sources of strength. Positive events will also strengthen mental health over time.

Factors and events are unique to each individual and variable, which is why mental health is fluctuating as well. Some days, we might feel great, and other days we might struggle more. However, mental health is not a fix state and can be taken care of daily to achieve a state of mental well-being.

Well-Being
Well-being is defined by the WHO as:

A positive state experienced by individuals and societies.
Well-being encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose.
Focusing on well-being supports the tracking of the equitable distribution of resources, overall thriving, and sustainability[6].

Mental health and well-being are interconnected and both essential for a fulfilling life because they aid in coping with challenges, achieving goals, and enjoying life.

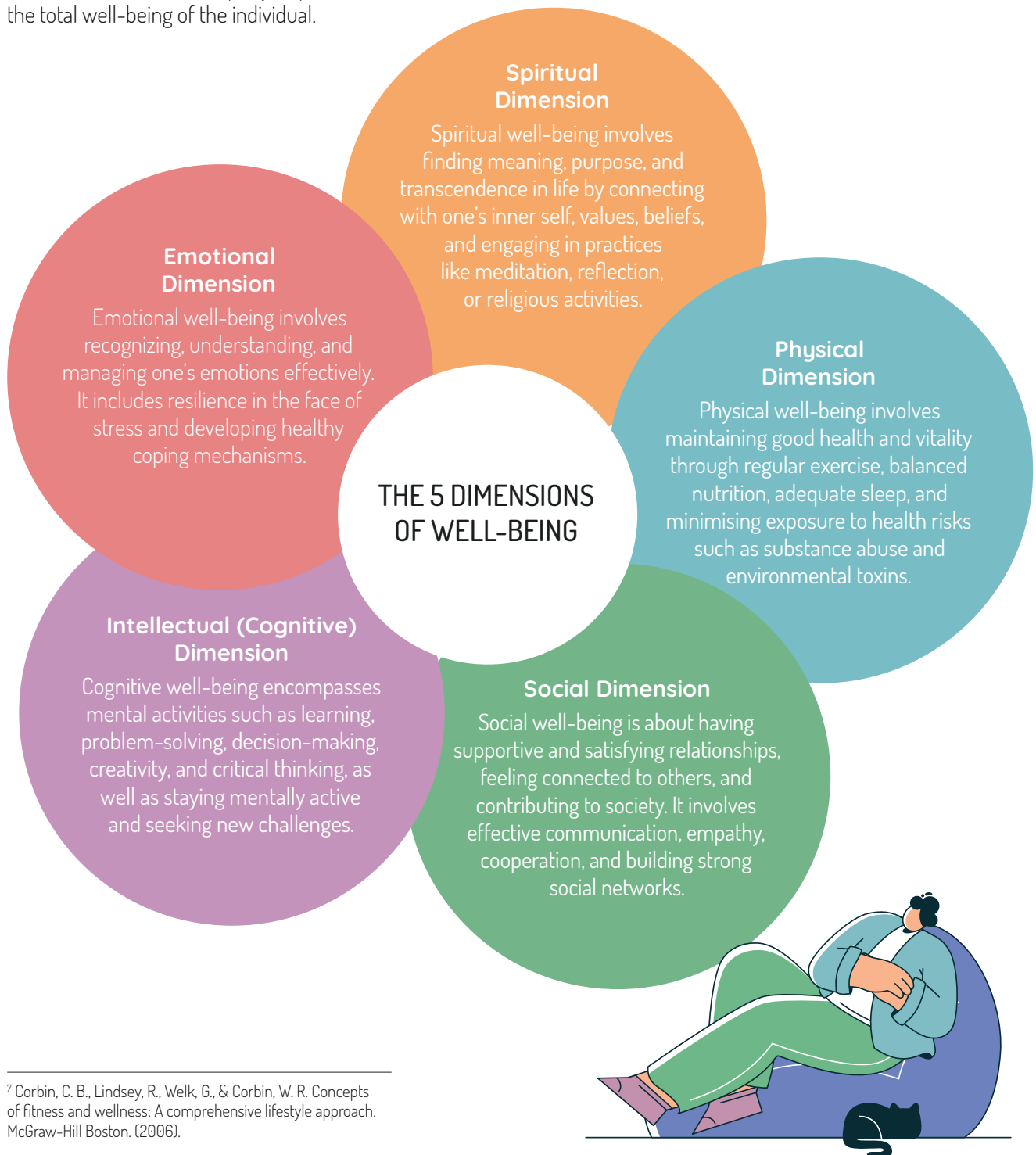Mental health specifically focuses on the emotional and psychological condition, whereas well-being is a broader concept that includes overall happiness and satisfaction with life. Well-being is part of mental health as it includes factors as having good relationships, feeling satisfied with life, and having a sense of purpose.

[6] Glossary of Terms, 2021.
https://who.int/activities/promoting-well-being

The 5 dimensions of well-being

According to Corbin's Theory of Wellness[7], there are 5 dimensions equally important for the total well-being of the individual.

Each of the 5 dimensions has their respective roles for each individual to maintain and achieve well-being.

Spiritual Dimension
Spiritual well-being involves finding meaning, purpose, and transcendence in life by connecting with one's inner self, values, beliefs, and engaging in practices like meditation, reflection, or religious activities.

Emotional Dimension
Emotional well-being involves recognizing, understanding, and managing one's emotions effectively. It includes resilience in the face of stress and developing healthy coping mechanisms.

Physical Dimension
Physical well-being involves maintaining good health and vitality through regular exercise, balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, and minimising exposure to health risks such as substance abuse and environmental toxins.

THE 5 DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING

Intellectual (Cognitive) Dimension
Cognitive well-being encompasses mental activities such as learning, problem-solving, decision-making, creativity, and critical thinking, as well as staying mentally active and seeking new challenges.

Social Dimension
Social well-being is about having supportive and satisfying relationships, feeling connected to others, and contributing to society. It involves effective communication, empathy, cooperation, and building strong social networks.

[7] Corbin, C. B., Lindsey, R., Welk, G., & Corbin, W. R. Concepts of fitness and wellness: A comprehensive lifestyle approach. McGraw-Hill Boston. (2006).

The importance of mental health for finding balance in life

Mental health is necessary, and it isn't just about managing stress or coping with challenges, it is also about creating a foundation for a fulfilling, balanced life. When mental health is strong, it becomes possible to effectively juggle work, personal commitments, and leisure activities without feeling overwhelmed. By prioritising mental health, potential problems are addressed, but above all, a state of mind that supports happiness and productivity is cultivated.

Nurturing mental health doesn't just improve daily functioning, but it also helps control — or at least combat — some of the physical health problems directly linked to mental health conditions. By managing stress effectively, a healthier lifestyle can be achieved.

For young people, understanding and addressing mental health is essential. It builds resilience, helps break down the stigma around mental health issues, and allows for early intervention when needed. This is also important when young people participate in an international mobility, and they are removed from their usual daily life. New factors and major events are going to take place during international mobility, and they need to be taken into account.
By openly addressing these issues, professionals create a supportive environment where learning, growth, and emotional well-being are valued.

Promotion vs. Prevention of mental health

It is important for professionals to recognize and understand the distinction between **mental health promotion** and **mental health prevention.** They are closely related but serve different purposes, and together, they provide a more complete approach to supporting well-being.

Mental health promotion focuses on **specific actions and strategies that improve psychological well-being and build resilience.** It works to create supportive environments, increase awareness and empower people to improve and maintain their mental health. It opens the discussion on mental health and encourages taking part in activities that are beneficial for mental well-being.

On the other hand, mental health prevention aims to **reduce the risk of mental health problems by addressing specific factors** that could contribute to developing mental health disorders. This might involve targeted strategies to help those who are experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, or other factors that can contribute to mental health difficulties. These actions go one step further by anticipating triggers for poor mental health and providing tools and strategies to mitigate the risks[8].

It is essential to explain to young people mental health promotion and prevention because it equips them with the knowledge and skills to maintain their well-being in demanding and challenging environments.

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[8] https://who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response

PROMOTION OF MENTAL HEALTH

To support and enhance the mental well-being of young people, different essential strategies and practices can be used to make a significant difference in fostering a positive and supportive environment.

Talking about mental health

Effective communication is the cornerstone of mental health promotion. Understanding how to use inclusive and respectful language when discussing mental health with young people may help reduce stigma and create a more supportive dialogue.

WHY LANGUAGE MATTERS

How to talk about mental health has a significant impact on how young people perceive it. Using the right words and tone make mental health conversation feel safe and supportive, while the wrong language can create misunderstandings, reinforce stigma, or discourage openness. As professionals, it's essential to be mindful of the language used, ensuring it's inclusive, respectful and easy.

Language Guidelines

Starting discussions about mental health can be challenging, but using supportive and empathetic language makes a significant difference. **Using clear, simple and appropriate language** is key to making mental health more accessible and comfortable. A good starting point is to use our own personal experience on mental health management.

When discussing mental health with someone, keep the following tips in mind:

- Show the other person that you are available. Be a safe space for them.
- Never force them to talk if they don't want to.
- It's always more important to listen than to try to give advice[9].

- Listen with empathy. te their feelings and don't judge them.
- Be aware of different beliefs, cultures and ideas.
- Acknowledge gender diversity as gender stereotypes can affect the expressions of emotions.

Below are examples you are able to use to initiate and guide conversations about mental health:

1. "How have you been feeling lately?"
2. "I'm here to listen and help if you need"
3. "I noticed some changes lately; do you want to talk about it?"
4. "It's okay not to be okay, how can I support you?"
5. "This must be difficult"
6. "I can imagine why it is hard for you"
7. "If talking about your mental health seems too stressful, you can also send your thoughts on paper (journal, letter, e-mail)."
8. "If you've been hurt by sharing your feelings-thoughts-experiences, don't give up."
9. "Talking to others about your mental health is one way of helping yourself."
10. "Thanks for sharing your experience, how do you look after yourself? What support do you have in place ?[10]"

In a discussion about mental health, it is sometimes not necessary to ask too many questions. Once a person is ready to be open about a topic, it is more significant to actively listen by giving them attention.

TESTIMONY

"As a trainer and psychologist, I always work on emotional education in all of my training courses. We always make time for participants to share how they're feeling. During the training, we make sure that they have a space where they feel comfortable enough to tell others if they are doing well or not. The group accompanies and supports them".
Cristina, Psychologist, Fundación Plan B Educación Social

[9] https://lamenteesmaravillosa.com/como-ayudar-a-otra-persona-cuando-esta-deprimida/
[10] https://peaasi.ee/kuidas-raakida/

GOOD PRACTICE

@OCCIMORONS / Using art to talk about mental health

Created by Spanish psychologist Pablo R. Coca, this Instagram account aims to combine art & psychology in order to destigmatize mental health and encourage people to talk about it more openly. Through the characters Occi and Moron, Coca addresses topics such as loneliness, coping with grief, bullying, suicide, emotional intelligence, depression and many others related to mental health and well-being in his sketches.

Coca also organises training courses, workshops, and other in-person events, and has published free guides on mental health topics. He has appeared in interviews and podcasts and published two books about asking for help and accompanying someone emotionally when they are going through a mental health crisis. His work is targeted at all audiences -from children to adults and the elderly- and aims to destigmatize the conversation on mental health[11;12].

> SUMMER IS THE TIME OF YEAR WHEN I FEEL THE LONELIEST, YOU KNOW?
>
> @OCCIMORONS

Talking openly and empathetically about mental health is one of the most effective ways to combat stigma and stereotype. When a dialogue is free from judgement and full of understanding, harmful misconceptions are dismantled.

STIGMATISATION OF MENTAL HEALTH

Discussing mental health will often be burdened with stigma, making it a challenging topic for many young people. Stigma often arises from misunderstandings, lack of knowledge, or cultural beliefs that view mental health issues as weaknesses or moral failings.

Stigma refers to **unfair and negative beliefs** society holds about someone. It is the act of treating someone or something unfairly by publicly disapproving of them or it[13].

Stigma is related to mental health, but also to things like physical disability, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or illness.

In 2023, data collected by Ipsos revealed significant stigma against mental health patients in the EU. About 77% of respondents believe mental health patients are judged differently than others by society. This belief is prevalent across all EU countries, especially in educational and professional settings[14].

The Lancet Commission on "Ending stigma and discrimination in mental health"[15] reported that many people describe stigma as being worse than the condition itself. Individuals with mental health conditions face a dual challenge: the effects of their condition and the negative impact of stigma and discrimination.

[11] https://www.instagram.com/occimorons/?hl=es

[12] https://occimorons.com/

[13] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/stigmatization

[14] European Commission, Brussels (2023). Flash Eurobarometer 530 (Mental Health). GESIS, Cologne. p.27.

[15] Thornicroft, Graham et al. The Lancet Commission on ending stigma and discrimination in mental health, The Lancet, Volume 400, Issue 10361, 1438 - 1480
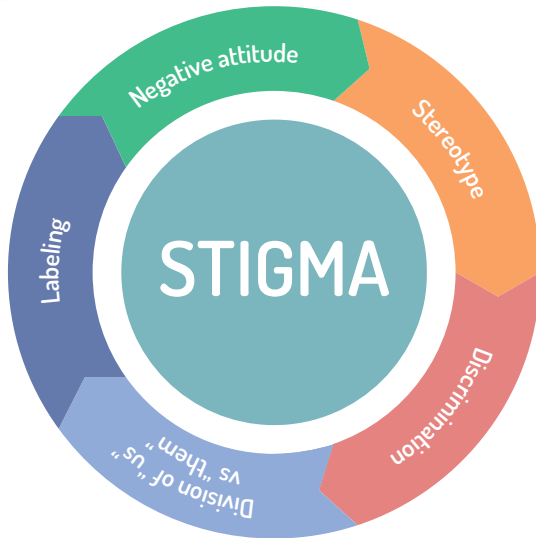
These impacts include limited job and educational opportunities, as well as difficulty accessing healthcare and mental health services[16].

Young people experience stigma through different settings:

Labelling
Categorising someone by their mental health condition, which influences how others perceive and treat them. People may internalise those labels and start identifying with them[17]. It is important to prioritise the individual over their mental health condition. For example, "a person with a mental illness" instead of "a mentally ill person".

Negative attitude
A negative feeling or opinion about someone, or a way of behaving that is caused consequently[18]. For example, if someone holds a negative view of people with mental illness, they might avoid them or treat them unfairly.

Stereotyping
When set ideas, often incorrect, are applied to people[19]. In the case of mental health problems, it could mean assuming that people with certain conditions are violent, which is a harmful and false generalisation.

Prejudice
An unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge[20]. Having prejudices against someone can lead to excluding, avoiding or biased treatment of this person. For example, assuming that people with mental health issues are incapable of leaving independently.

Discrimination
Occurs when someone is treated unfairly because of their mental health condition.
It can be direct (treating someone worse because of their condition) or indirect (having policies that unfairly disadvantage people with mental health issues)[21].

Division of "us" versus "them"
People tend to divide others into groups, such as those with or without mental health conditions. This creates a sense of division, where those without mental health issues see themselves as "better" or more accepted, leading to exclusion of those with mental health concerns[22].

[16] Thornicroft G, Sunkel C, Alikhon Aliev A, et al. The Lancet Commission on ending stigma and discrimination in mental health. Lancet 2022; published online Oct 9.

[17] https://psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/escaping-our-mental-traps/202307/rethinking-mental-health-challenging-the-dangers-of-labels

[18] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/attitude

[19] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/stereotype

[20] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/prejudice

[21] https://mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/stigma-and-discrimination

[22] https://dictionary.apa.org/us-versus-them-effect

Common misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding mental health

Understanding and addressing misconceptions and stereotypes will help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for those affected by mental health issues. Table 1 presents common misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding mental health that are used to discuss the topic further with young people.

Misconception/Stereotype	Reality
Mental health disorders are rare	Mental health disorders are common. In 2019, 970 million people globally were living with a mental disorder, with anxiety and depression being the most common (WHO[23]).
Depression is just sadness	Depressive disorder is a medical condition with persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of pleasure or interest in activities for long periods of time (WHO[24]).
A mental health condition is a sign of weakness	Mental health disorders are medical conditions, not a reflection of personal strength or weakness.
People with mental health issues are violent and dangerous	The majority of people with mental health conditions are not violent and are more likely to be victims of violence due to discrimination.
Children don't experience mental health issues	Mental health disorders affect individuals of any age, including children and teenagers. It is estimated that approximately 11.2 million children and young people (aged 19 and under) in the EU suffer from a mental health condition[25].
Seeking help is a sign of failure	Seeking help is a sign of strength and a proactive step towards better health.
Recovery from a mental disorder is impossible	People with mental health conditions recover completely or manage their symptoms effectively with proper treatment.
A mental health condition defines a person's identity	A person's mental health condition is just one aspect of their identity and does not define their abilities.

Tips to fight against stigmatisation:

❥ **Speak positively.** Mental health is often discussed in a negative way, which contributes to stigmatisation. It's important to talk about it with a positive vision, focusing more on people's abilities and less on the limitations their mental condition may cause. Do not use words like "crazy", "broken", or "weak", instead opt for non-judgemental language.

❥ **Speak naturally.** Keep it casual, talking about mental health doesn't always need to be a serious or formal conversation. Bringing it up naturally in everyday discussions makes the topic less intimidating.

[23] https://who.int/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_2

[24] https://who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression

[25] POLICY BRIEF 2: Child and adolescent mental health. The State of Children in the European Union 2024, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), February 2024

Examples of positive and Inclusive Language

Instead of saying	Try saying
"You're overreacting"	I understand this is hard for you.
"Snap out of it"	It's okay to take your time to feel better.
"You have a problem"	You're going through a tough time, but there are ways to get through this.
"You're being too sensitive"	I understand this situation is really affecting you. Let's talk about how you're feeling.
"Just calm down"	It seems like you're feeling overwhelmed. Let's take a moment to breathe together.
"You need to toughen up"	It's okay to feel like this. We can work through this.

GOOD PRACTICE

> **"Mind the Mind" campaign for destigmatisation of mental disorders / Macedonia**

The European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations (EFPSA) conducts the "Mind the Mind" campaign, aimed at destigmatising mental disorders by educating students aged 15 to 18, along with the general population, about mental health issues. The campaign, implemented in various European countries including Macedonia, involves workshops in schools where students learn about conditions such as autism, schizophrenia, anxiety, depression, and anorexia. Local psychology student associations and organisations, such as "Psihesko" and "Youth Can" lead these workshops, translate EFPSA materials and collaborate with schools to reach a wide audience to promote the campaign[26-27].

[26] http://periodica.fzf.ukim.edu.mk/psnp/psnp4(2019)/PsNP04.08 Tushevska, I. - A campaign to combat the stigma of mental disorders.pdf

[27] https://instagram.com/mindthemind_macedonia/

[28] https://consaludmental.org/sala-prensa/extremadura-juego-mesa-sensibilizar-estigma/

> **Anti-stigma board game**

FEAFES Salud Mental Extremadura, the Extremadura regional branch of the Spanish Mental Health Confederation, created a free downloadable board game that breaks down stereotypes and challenges the stigma regarding mental health. The game consists of a board with 41 squares, each of which has a question related to common mental health stigmas, such as: "what is self-stigma"? If you answer correctly, you stay where you are, but if you don't, you go back 2 spaces. The first person who reaches the last space wins. Although the game is tailored more for children and youth, it's a good resource to use with all ages to tackle the stigma regarding mental health in a fun educative way[28].

Addressing stigmatisation is fundamental to creating a safe and open environment for mental health discussions.

When stigma is present, young people may feel hesitant or fearful about sharing their struggles.

By actively challenging misconceptions and promoting understanding, professionals will help create spaces where young people feel safe to express themselves without judgement.

Creating a safe and open environment

A safe and welcoming environment is essential for encouraging open conversations about mental health. Professionals are able to implement strategies that make young people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences without fear of judgement or discrimination.

WHAT IS A SAFE SPACE?

"Safe space – a place where vulnerable individuals and marginalised groups can feel secure and respected[29]."
Oxford Dictionary

The definition of a safe space is not limited. It is also an environment free from judgement or discrimination, where people can:

- Express themselves openly
- Share personal experiences
- Discuss sensitive issues without fear of retribution or ridicule.

For young people, a safe space promotes both **physical safety** – protection from physical harm or danger – and **emotional safety** – freedom from psychological or emotional harm or threat. This fosters an atmosphere of trust and support that is conducive to engage in discussions about mental health.

TESTIMONY

Creating a 'safe space' is the key to a relationship of trust between a participant to mobility and their mentor, and therefore to the success of their support. By asking an open question such as "What specific needs should be taken into account?".
Don't be afraid to leave a silence to allow the person to find their words, and above all, don't hesitate to ask the question again during another meeting.
They will have thought about it and so it is important to leave an 'open door' to revisit the topic. Inclusion for one will benefit everyone.

Cyrielle Bertoletti, Mobility Coordinator at ADICE association, France

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[29] Chandler, D. et Munday, R. (2020). safe space. Dans A Dictionary of Media and Communication, Oxford University Press.

HOW TO CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?

Several guiding principles and rules can be applied and serve as a roadmap for professionals, outlining key strategies to promote an atmosphere of respect, understanding, and growth.

1 Create the space, pace and atmosphere

- Directly ask young people how they would envision a safe space.
- Use comfortable seating, soft lighting, and calming colours.
- Add plants and natural elements to create a soothing environment.
- Ensure privacy by using screens or dividers and soundproofing the room.
- Consider alternative settings, such as walking with young people.
  This can ease the pressure of direct eye contact and make the conversation flow more naturally.
- Set clear guidelines for communication, such as no interruptions and respectful language.

2 Prioritise well-being

by ensuring that the young people feel valued and supported.

- Regularly check in with to see how they are feeling and offer support.
- Create a feedback loop where they can express their needs and suggestions.
- Provide resources such as counselling services, helplines, and mental health workshops.
- Respect the confidentiality or specify which information you are required to share.

3 Promote inclusivity and diversity

Celebrate the unique backgrounds and experiences of all youngsters.

- Put signs and posters that promote inclusion regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or abilities.
- Use inclusive language in all communications and materials.
- Promote tolerance of different opinions, ways of life, and perspectives.
- Encourage sharing of personal stories and experiences.

4 Encourage curiosity and growth

in understanding mental health among young people

- Build an understanding of young people's experiences, exercising self-reflection, recognizing their power and privilege for a better cultural humility.
- Create a resource library with books, articles, and videos on mental health.
- Encourage young people to ask questions and explore topics that interest them.

5 Coach rather than preach

Adopt a coaching approach, empowering young people to explore their own perspectives and solutions.

- Use open-ended questions to guide discussions and help young people think critically.
- Propose self-reflection and journaling as tools
- Offer guidance and support but allow young people to make their own decisions and learn from their experiences.

6 Train yourself!

- Stay updated with the latest research and best practices in mental health education.
- Start examining biases and recognise where they may come into play when interacting with others.

By incorporating these practices into a framework for creating safe spaces, organisations can create environments that prioritise the well-being and learning experiences of all young people.

To go further, professionals can do the following activity with young people:

Peer support group for young people

The goal of this activity is to create a safe space where young people can listen to each other, share their experiences, and offer support. This should be offered as an optional activity after class hours or training. The professionals' role is to facilitate the activity, create a safe environment and encourage young people present to share.

- **Setup:** This should ideally be done indoors, in a closed room where confidentiality and comfort can be ensured. It should be decided in advance whether it will be an open or closed group.
  Chairs will be placed in a circle so that everyone can see each other and is on an equal level. A set of rules should be made with the group before each session to ensure mutual respect, active listening and empathy.

- **Activity:** A short introduction to the activity should be made. A quick check-in round with young people will follow. Each participant should say how they are feeling today.

  Next, a theme will be introduced for the day's sharing and feedback (for example: a challenge I'm facing related to my training, things that concern me about my professional future, something I feel proud of, etc.).

  Those who want should feel free to share. Each participant should speak for no more than 2-3 minutes. The professional facilitating the activity should not participate directly, but rather guide the conversation and ensure that all participants are able to share and that no one interrupts.

  After each person shares, other participants are encouraged to provide advice and feedback. The group may also be asked to use their problem-solving skills to suggest possible solutions.

  There should be a short debriefing at the end of the activity and a date should be set for the next meeting.

GOOD PRACTICE

Mental health cafés/ Estonia

Since 2021, the NGO Peaasjad (Head Matters, in English) has organised so-called mental health cafés all over Estonia. The NGO has trained mental health first aid volunteers, who meet people for example at cafes or libraries and encourage people, who feel they would like to share their mental health concerns or who are concerned about the mental health of a loved one and would like to ask for advice. The dates and locations of the cafés are announced on social media and on the NGO's website.

Volunteers wear a white T-shirt with the message "Olen olemas", meaning "I am here" in English, referring to their availability to be your supportive listener. The silent presence of this message also implies that there are always people around who are ready to listen and provide support. There are also thematic workbooks e.g. depression, anxiety, etc. (both in Estonian and Russian) and one that you can take home with you[30].

Creating a safe and open environment for discussing mental health lays the foundation for open communication and trust, essential for addressing mental health challenges. However, fostering well-being extends beyond external conditions. It also involved equipping individuals with the tools to navigate their internal experiences. This is where emotional regulation becomes important. By promoting curiosity, and encouraging self-reflection, professionals can foster discussions with young people.

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[30] https://peaasi.ee/vaimse-tervise-kohvik/

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is the **ability to recognize, process and manage emotions.** It allows individuals to navigate complex situations with greater clarity and balance. It is important since emotions are closely connected to how everyone thinks and feels.

All emotions are useful and deserve to be experienced; there are no "good" or "bad" emotions. Effective emotion regulation has been linked to a range of positive outcomes, including improved well-being, and enhanced resilience.

Resilience is the **ability to adapt and recover from stress, adversity, and life's inevitable challenges.** Cultivating resilience is crucial, particularly for young people preparing to face new experiences. Imagine mental health as a wheel travelling on a road.
Resilience can be thought of as the strength of that wheel. When the road is smooth, everything is good, but when it gets rough, resilience is tested.
The stronger the wheel, the easier it is to cope. Mental resilience is all about building a stronger wheel.

The key to building resilience lies in understanding **how to effectively regulate emotions,** which are central to maintaining mental well-being.

Emotional regulation refers to the processes individuals use to **manage and respond to their emotional experiences in appropriate and adaptive ways.**

Emotions are natural reactions triggered by both external and internal events. Each emotion serves a purpose by addressing a specific need.

Primary emotions - joy, anger, fear, disgust, surprise, and sadness- are universal and experienced by everyone. However, the way people express these emotions can differ widely due to various factors.

In addition to primary emotions, there are **secondary emotions**, which are more nuanced and often shaped by the environment and social interactions.

No emotion is inherently positive or negative, though individuals may prefer experiencing certain emotions over others.
All emotions have value and are essential to human experience. However, when emotions become overwhelming in their intensity, expression, or role in one's life, they may lead to discomfort or suffering[31].

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[31] https://nightline.fr/kit-de-vie/identifier-ses-emotions

the feelings wheel

I feel...

surprised: energetic, thrown, words, confused, excited, amazed, startled, eager, awestruck, astonished, shook, stunned, interested, peaceful

scared: threatened, terrified, inadequate, inferior, worried, overwhelmed, excluded, alienated, vulnerable, worthless, panicked, uneasy, fearful, insecure, anxious, rejected, weak, nervous

happy: curious, inquisitive, loving, thankful, hopeful, inspired, passionate, thrilled, respected, fulfilled, important, confident, relieved, content, open, sensitive, optimistic, enthusiastic, accepted, proud, joyful, trusting

mad: offended, aggressive, frustrated, angry, hateful, let down, salty, humiliated, skeptical, insulted, provoked, hostile, annoyed, heated, furious, rage, resentful, violated, betrayed, disrespected, bitter, not heard, ridiculed, embarrassed

sad: lonely, tired, guilty, in my feelings, depressed, hurt, left out, abandoned, don't care, numb, remorseful, ashamed, powerless, grief, undervalued, empty, disappointed, forgotten

disgusted: avoiding, grossed out, awful, outraged, loathing, judgmental, uncomfortable, detest, appalled, nauseated, hesitant, repelled

All events will lead to a range of emotions experienced. In this case, emotional reactions may vary in intensity:

- In some instances, emotions can be overwhelming. An **emotional wave** can come through the body, making it difficult to keep one's head above water.
- At times, it may also feel as a **fire of emotions** that last indefinitely and never diminishes. In this situation, while the emotion is at its peak, negative thoughts about oneself, others, or the world may trigger another emotional wave.
- And sometimes, emotions are avoided but comes back stronger, **an emotional boomerang**, an unpleasant emotion might be set aside by distracting oneself.

All of this can happen and challenge someone's well-being but regulating emotions can be learned[32].

[32] https://nightline.fr/kit-de-vie/reguler-ses-emotions

There are strategies to amplify, maintain, or decrease one's emotional responses:

- ✅ **Identifying emotions** being experienced and focusing on how they affect the individual.
- ✅ **Let the emotion take its course** and remember that it won't last.
- ✅ **Validating emotions** by accepting their presence without self-judgement: emotions do not need to be justified to exist.
- ✅ **Identifying triggers:** Understanding personal triggers and what contributes to emotional well-being or distress.
- ✅ **Talking through emotions:** Engaging in conversation about emotions can help with processing them.
- ✅ **Using meditation, mindfulness or relaxation** for supporting mental health due to their ability to provide a sense of calm and peace, promote emotional balance and enhance overall well-being.
- ✅ **Journaling** which encourages self-reflection and emotional release, helping individuals clarify complex emotions and return to the present moment.
- ✅ **Noticing when to take breaks:** recognising when to rest is necessary, particularly to avoid emotional intensity.
- ✅ **Prioritizing sleep and hygiene**[33].
- ✅ **Cognitive Behavioral techniques** which help to reduce negative thoughts and feelings with positive ones, improving overall mood and perspectives.

Sometimes, it can feel that the brain is working against us, that it will process information and makes us feel emotions that are not justified. And indeed, everyone has around 60 to 80 thoughts a day. To make sense of it all, our brains simplify and interpret all of them, enabling us to understand our surroundings. Most of our thoughts are going to be negative and it is called **cognitive distortions**.

These distortions are **ways of processing information that lead to errors of thought, transform reality and provoke emotional reactions that are often negative**[34]. They occur every day and it is a common and normal experience.

For example: *when we think that everyone is going to remember a thing we said at a specific moment and we overestimate the seriousness of the event when people usually don't remember.*

By learning to identify these thought patterns, one can become aware of how they influence emotions and perspectives. This awareness allows to address and adjust any inaccuracies in thinking, leading to more balanced emotional responses, such as experiencing more positive emotions or reducing the intensity of negative ones.

TESTIMONY

Hello, I'm Nur. I come from Turkey. I lived in Slovakia for a year for the ESC project and worked as a volunteer. Slovakia is my first experience abroad. I've never been abroad before and I've never lived away from my family. So, everything I was involved in was so new to me.
Normally I am very social person in Turkish. However, since my English was not good, I had difficulty in establishing close contact with my volunteer colleagues. That's why there were times when I felt lonely. The problem was not only the language barrier, but also our perspectives on life. I accepted the situation I was in with my volunteer friends and spent more time with other people around me.
I have always gotten along better with people who are older than me. At this point, the opportunities provided by my host organization were very good for me. My coordinator, mentor, psychologist and host family were mature and caring people. We made great friendships with them. At this point, when I told them that I felt lonely, they supported me.
Nur Ergin, ESC volunteer in KERIC 2023/2024, Turkey

[33] https://simplypsychology.org/emotional-regulation.html

[34] https://nightline.fr/kit-de-vie/comprendre-mes-biais-de-pensee

ACTIVITIES TO DO

1. Stress management traffic light tool

A helpful tool for self-regulation in stressful situations.

Count to 10, take deep breaths and try to calm down.

Why do you feel like this? What has upset you?

Speak to a person you trust about the issue.

Professionals can share this tool with young people to show them how to self-regulate and remain calm in stressful situations. Young people should think of a situation that makes them stressed or angry. Then, they should imagine a traffic light in their heads. If the light is "red", that means they feel this more intensely, so they should stop, take deep breaths, and try to calm down. Once they feel calmer, the light will turn "yellow".

They should continue taking deep breaths and start thinking about the situation and its causes and consequences. This will help them rationalise the situation and put things into perspective, thus bringing them close to a "green" light.
When the light is "green", they can move forward with the situation and perhaps share it with a person who they trust.

2. The Mood Metre

Developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, the purpose of the Mood Metre is to help people recognise and label their emotions, thus helping them understand and regulate them. Although it is primarily used in educational settings, it can be applied in many different contexts. It can be done individually or in groups to help young people with managing stress and other emotions that can affect their well-being.
It is divided into 4 different coloured quadrants, each of which represents a different set of emotions. While the y-axis represents the level of physical energy you feel (i.e. tired), the x-axis corresponds to the level of pleasantness, or positive or negative energy (i.e. calm or sad). When explaining this to young people, you can give concrete examples, such as saying that the red quadrant represents unpleasant high energy and sharing a time when you felt mad about something.
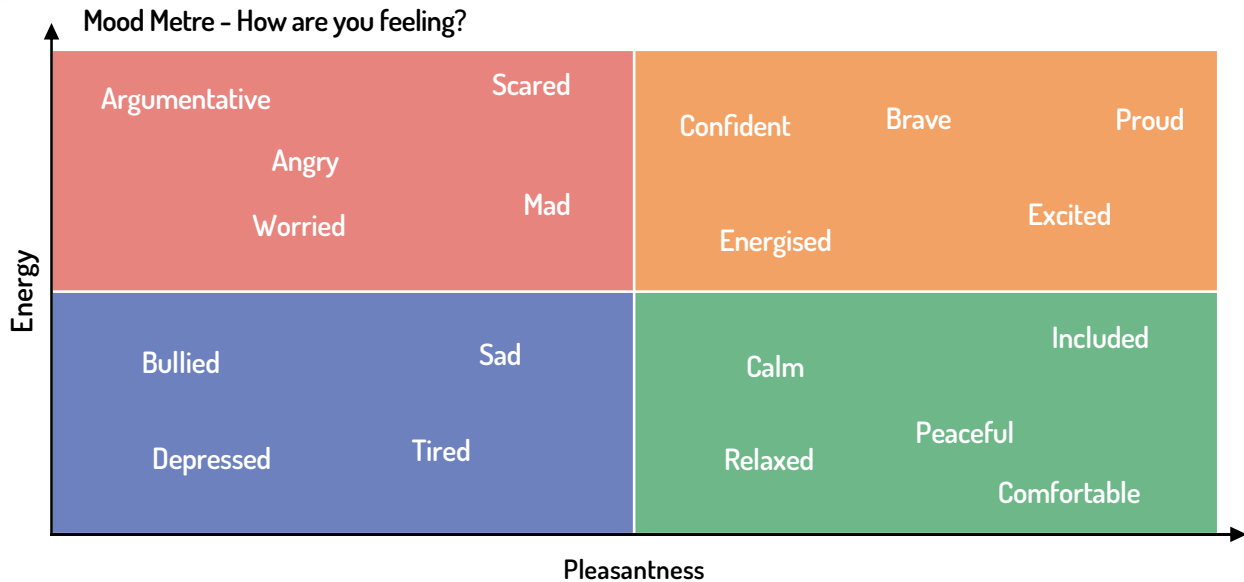
The mood metre is part of the larger RULER approach, also developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence[35]. It is the first step in this approach to emotional regulation and once individuals recognise where they are on the mood metre, they can move on to the subsequent steps.

These are the 5 steps to the RULER approach:
- Recognising where you are on the mood metre.
- Understanding both the causes and the consequences of this emotion.
- Labelling the emotion with words by choosing the best word to describe what you are feeling.
- Expressing emotions (How are you doing this? How does this affect those around you?).
- Regulating emotions with helpful strategies (What strategies can you use to stop feeling this way? To feel better? To continue feeling this way? To cope?).

Young people should then be divided into small groups where they can practise this together. This is a chance to also practise active listening while they support their peers.

[35] https://www.rulerapproach.org/

Mood Metre – How are you feeling?

Energy (vertical axis) / **Pleasantness** (horizontal axis)

Argumentative, Scared, Angry, Worried, Mad	Confident, Brave, Proud, Energised, Excited
Bullied, Sad, Depressed, Tired	Calm, Included, Relaxed, Peaceful, Comfortable

3. Checklist

Reflecting on well-being help young people and professionals achieve balance and fulfilment in both personal and professional life. While not exhaustive, a checklist serves as a foundational tool for identifying needs and areas for improvement.
A checklist can be created especially for an audience and the points they would need to take care of. To try our suggestion of checklist, see Annex 2. The checklist suggested can be used as it is or can be adapted to your own audience.

There are no correct or incorrect responses on a checklist. It aims to help the user reflect on their well-being and identify areas where they can improve to achieve greater balance and fulfilment.

To effectively use this checklist, it is recommended to follow below action steps:

Action steps

Begin by reviewing your responses to identify both strengths and areas for improvement in your well-being.

Use questions above for reflection.

> Which areas of well-being are you satisfied with and with which are you not?
> Which areas would you like to improve?

Then, develop a plan with actionable steps, e.g. if you are not managing stress well, you can practise mindfulness or meditation.
At last, implement these steps into your daily routine, ensuring they become habits and regularly review your checklist to track progress and make adjustments as needed.

REFLECT → PLAN → IMPLEMENT → REVIEW
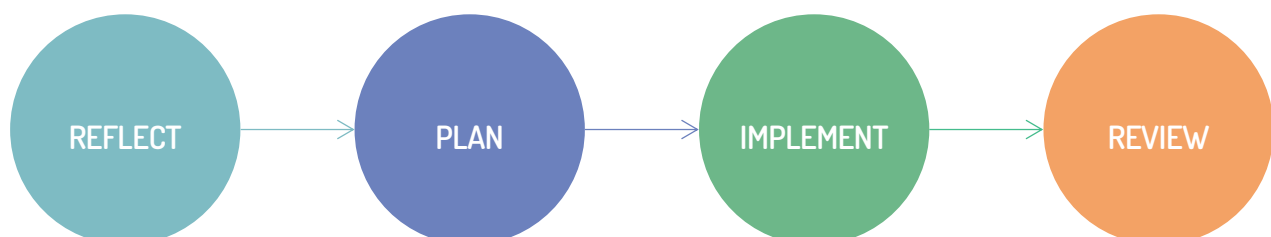
4. Well-being journal

The purpose of this activity is for each learner to reflect on their current well-being, identify factors that can be improved, and think about what they need.

The idea is for each learner to have their own individual journal; they are not required to share their thoughts unless they want to. This is their private space where they can work on their well-being and personal growth.

When facilitating this individual self-care activity, professionals may encourage young people to do automatic writing - writing everything that pops into their heads - or they want to provide question prompts to help them write. **Here are some examples:**

- What am I grateful for? Why?
- What emotions have I felt today? Why? What were the causes and consequences of them?
- What have I learned today? How will this help me in my future?
- What inspires me?
- What stresses me out? What brings me calm?

Depending on the situation, you may want to ask generic questions or ones more specific. It's a chance for young people to reflect on their current situation, things that have gone well, and things that can be improved.

While the idea is that professionals facilitate this individual self-care activity, young people should feel like this is their personal space where they feel comfortable writing- or even drawing- whatever they need to and it should serve as a space where they can assess their well-being.
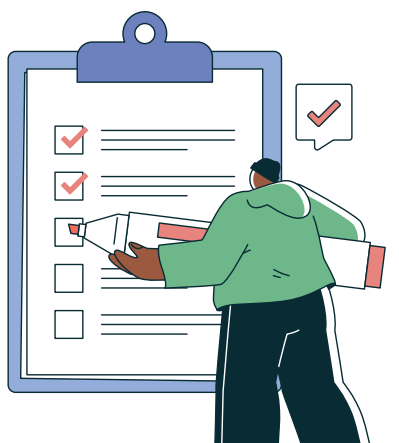
GOOD PRACTICE

El Festival de las Emociones/The Festival of Emotions
Organised by life coach Hansel Walden from Vigo (Galicia, Spain), the purpose of this festival is to provide tools for managing emotions and removing the emotional mask that prevents expression of feelings. After recovering from a brain tumour in 2022, he decided to share his story in public and this inspired him to organise the festival.

At the festival, ten people who overcame difficult situations in life shared their stories and explained what emotional management tools they used to deal with these situations.
The inaugural version of the festival in February 2024 was a success, and Walden plans to organise more[36-37].

Emotional regulation is a crucial skill for managing the ups and downs of life, allowing individuals to better process and respond to their emotions. However, emotional regulation works best when paired with effective coping strategies that provide additional tools for navigating stress and adversity. By learning how to manage emotions and building a set of practical coping techniques, individuals can create a more comprehensive approach to maintaining well-being. Promoting specific coping strategies can further enhance resilience and support mental health.

[36] https://farodevigo.es/gran-vigo/2024/02/17/festival-quitarse-mascara-emociones-98284393.html

[37] https://instagram.com/festivaldelasemociones

Promoting coping strategies for well-being

Prioritising well-being can significantly enhance emotional resilience, help manage stress and anxiety, improve relationships, and boost productivity.

While achieving true well-being is a process that entails balance, constant growth, and acceptance, small steps can be taken every day to improve the state of well-being and thus take care of mental health.

One of the challenge that has to be tackled by young people is stress, which can significantly impact the confidence, motivation, and concentration of someone.

It can be **'good stress', a source of dynamism and energy** to rise to challenges and take initiatives, or **'bad stress' caused by fears or worries**, which more often than not leads to inaction and unhappiness.

Going through these states in succession is perfectly normal. In the short term, prolonged stress can lead to burn-out or even aggravate existing health problems (hypertension, eczema, mental illnesses, etc.).
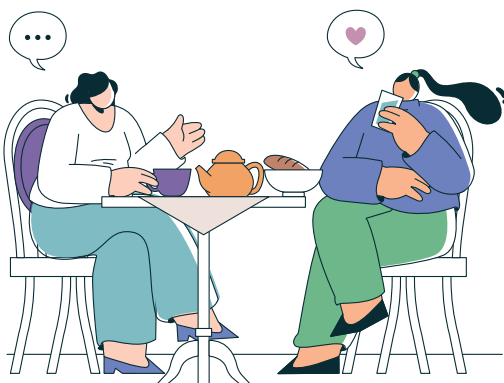
INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE GOOD MENTAL WELL-BEING

The "MRR" system is essential to manage stress: **Meals, Rest, Relationships**

✔ **MEALS: Eating healthy**
It's important to maintain a balanced diet. Taking the time to cook, with local ingredients, can reduce stress and improve food quality. A nutritious diet provides the brain with the necessary nutrients to improve cognitive function and help to regulate emotions.

✔ **REST: Ensure adequate sleep**
It's sometimes difficult to find time to rest or get a proper night's sleep. Physical or mental well-being can be greatly affected by the lack of sleep. Relaxation techniques, soothing music or reducing screen time before bed can be used to improve the quality of sleep.

✔ **RELATIONSHIPS: Seek support from friends, family or support groups**
Being with friends and family provides emotional support and a sense of belonging. Support groups are also excellent resources for extra comfort during tough times.

Other self-care strategies can be used to manage mental health in everyday life. Some of these strategies were recommended by the **MIND Transnational Study** on mental health needs as effective coping strategies for young people.

Participating in hobbies and interests
It's important to find time for enjoyable activities, whether it is manual activities, drawing, gardening or playing music. Engaging in activities that bring joy foster a more positive and resilient mindset.

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance
Achieving balance can prevent burnout, stress and boost overall well-being. This can be done by managing time effectively and setting priorities through tools like to-do lists.

Setting personal boundaries
Establishing healthy boundaries is essential for managing stress and energy. Learning to say no to demands that exceed one's capacity can preserve mental and emotional resources.

Practising mindfulness
It involves staying present and fully engaging with the here and now. It can be practised through meditation, mindful breathing, or simply being aware of your surroundings and sensations.

Practising self-care
Engaging in activities that nurture the mind, body, and soul, such as taking a warm bath, enjoying a cup of tea, or reading, is important for mental well-being.

Focusing on a task
When feeling overwhelmed, focusing on manageable tasks, such as cleaning or cooking, can create a sense of accomplishment and control, reducing feelings of helplessness.

Using relaxation strategies
Simple relaxation techniques, such as playing with a pet, doing breathing exercises, enjoying aromatherapy or using a relaxation app, can help reduce stress.

Practising positive thinking
Reframing negative thoughts into positive ones can enhance problem-solving abilities and improve mental outlook without ignoring challenges[38].

Connect with nature
Spending time in green space or bringing nature into your everyday life can benefit both your mental and physical well-being. It can be gardening, exercising outdoors or being around animals[39].

TESTIMONY

"Promoting students' mental health is a key priority in our school. This is achieved through policies that protect and improve mental health, supporting caregivers and implementing school-based programmes. Among the most effective strategies are school-based social and emotional learning programmes.

The special educator, the psychiatrist and the pedagogy who are employed in our school cope with different mental health issues among the students, such as bullying and cyberbullying, depression and anxiety, stress, panic attacks and difficulties in learning processes.

They organise workshops for students on preventing mental health risks. The school also offers regular activities to help students relax, such as sports, karaoke, debates, fashion shows, litter collection, tree planting, and art exhibitions on hate speech to raise awareness. Competitions are designed to focus on positivity, build self-confidence, and boost self-esteem. Additionally, we organise nature walks, promote a healthy lifestyle, and participate in Erasmus+ projects on topics like bullying, cyberbullying, critical thinking, and healthy living, all of which can contribute to reducing mental health problems. We collaborate with the Volunteers Centre Skopje and include students of various nationalities – Macedonians, Albanians, and Turks. Engaging students in diverse activities and encouraging them to step out of their comfort zones can significantly reduce the risk of mental health issues."

Ilina, teacher at the Secondary Vocational School "OSTU – Gostivar", Macedonia

[38] https://calm.com/blog/coping-strategies

[39] https://mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/how-nature-benefits-mental-health/

GROUP ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE GOOD MENTAL WELL-BEING

1. Well-being circuit activity

A group fitness activity that can be done with young people to promote well-being and teamwork. It can be done as an initial icebreaker activity, or at any point during the school year. It can be done during class time and adapted according to the group itself.

- **Setup:** Find a suitable location with enough space to carry out the relay race in a safe and comfortable setting. This activity can be done either inside or outside.
- **Prepare each station** that is presented below.
- **Separate the participants into equal groups:** Try to encourage diversity and gender parity in groups if possible.
- **Warm-up:** Start with some stretching and short warm-up activities to get everyone ready.
- **Race:** Each group will spend 5 minutes in each station. The professional facilitator will set a timer and notify groups when it is time to finish and move on the next station.
- **Station 1 – Physical exercise:** In this station, participants should do physical exercise, such as jumping jacks, sit ups, push ups, running in place- something that will get their heart pumping and boost their mood. These activities should be adapted to the group itself and made accessible to all. Modifications may need to be made according to fitness level, accessibility, etc.
- **Station 2 – Yoga station:** In this station, participants will be given a set of yoga poses to do. They will be poses that are not too complicated to do, or that can be adapted to all levels.
- **Station 3 – Mindfulness:** Mindfulness activities, such as deep-breathing and meditation meant to enhance focus and reduce stress.

- **Station 4 – Team-building:** In this station, young people will participate in a short team-building exercise in which they will have to create something together. Depending on what materials are available, participants may make a tower, or perhaps tell a story together. The final result will be shared with the professional facilitating the activity and the rest of the group.
- **Station 5 – Emotional intelligence:** Participants will sit in a circle and there will be cards, face-down, in the centre. Each of these cards will depict a different emotion. Each member of the group will pick up a card and take turns sharing with the group a time when they felt this emotion and how they dealt with it. Another variation could be to pick up the card and imagine that another person feels this emotion and give them advice on how to cope.
- **Finish:** Once all groups have finished, there should be a cool down and some stretching, as well as 5 minutes to debrief and reflect on the experience.

2. Buddy programme

Connecting young people with peers in their host country. The purpose of this activity is to assist young people in their social adaptation in their host country and to foster mutual understanding between different cultures. These sorts of activities are organised on university campuses across the globe, so it would be interesting to propose a similar initiative for organisations that host international students. Both international young people and locals should participate in this on a volunteer basis.

You can either choose to organise a large group meeting and allow people to get to know each other naturally and choose their "buddy" that way, or have potential participants fill out a questionnaire beforehand and match them. The idea would be to organise some group activities to "break the ice" and help get things started, and encourage individual meetings between buddies. The focus should not be so much on education and training, but more on the social and cultural aspects of the experience.

This would provide young people on international mobility with social support in the country, and access to a larger network through the organisation of buddy programme group activities. Meeting with someone close to their age could help them feel more comfortable and open up about things that they may find challenging during their stay abroad.

3. Reflection group

Similar to the peer support group for young people, the activity is focused on the international mobility experience and how it affects participants. It focused on the personal, professional, and cultural impact of being abroad and encourages open discussion about the challenges, rewards, and lessons learned during their time in a foreign context. This activity offers a voluntary and supportive environment where participants can openly discuss their experiences abroad. This group is centered around the shared understanding of mobility's profound impact on individuals, both personally and professionally. Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their unique experiences.

The activity encourages a collaborative reflection process, where individuals can share their thoughts on the rewarding aspects of their mobility as well as the challenges they encountered. It helps participants process their international experiences and navigate the emotional, social, and practical adjustments that come with being in a new cultural environment or reintegrating back into their home country.

Examples of questions:

- What were your initial expectations before going on your international mobility experience? How did the reality compare?
- What cultural differences did you encounter? How did you adapt to these differences?
- What new skills or strengths have you discovered in yourself through this experience?
- Can you share a particular achievement or moment that made you feel proud during your time abroad?
- What were the most rewarding aspects of your international mobility experience?
- How has your international mobility experience influenced your career or future aspirations?
- How did your experience abroad affect your social interactions?
- How can the skills or lessons learned abroad be applied to your everyday life now that you are back?
- What kind of support did you receive during your time abroad? Was it enough?
- What advice would you give to someone preparing for an international mobility experience based on your own journey?
- What would you do differently if you had the chance to go abroad again?

These strategies not only provide immediate relief from stress but also empower individuals to face life's challenges with confidence and balance, However, when individuals embark on international mobility, they often encounter unique stressors that require tailored mental health support.

GOOD PRACTICE

Mental Health Mural / France
Created by the Nightline listening service for students, the mental health mural is a workshop inspired by the climate mural model and the ability to mobilise collective intelligence to tackle complex issues.

The aim is to equip everyone, young people in particular, to take responsibility for their own mental health and the one of others by:

- Raising awareness of mental health issues through discussion forums.
- Informing people about the resources available to them for themselves and for others.
- Suggesting courses of action to promote mental health on a collective scale.

The mental health mural takes the form of a 3-hour workshop, with 8 to 10 participants, run in pairs by people trained by the Nightline association[40].

Hedgehog Therapist/ Slovakia
An initiative that uses a plush hedgehog as a therapeutic tool for children and adults. Learn more at Hedgehog Therapist.
https://www.facebook.com/ipcko/posts/209492508102497/

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[40] https://nightline.fr/la-fresque-de-la-sante-mentale

Mental health challenges during international mobility

Many young people want to gain experience abroad to enrich their career paths or get involved in local communities. Typically, these activities take place in a variety of geographical, cultural and linguistic contexts, involving living in another country for a period of time for internships, studies, work or volunteering.

International mobility will bring new factors and major events that needs to be taken into consideration to find a balance of good mental health and having a successful experience. These experiences enable people to gain independence, acquire new skills, discover different cultures and forge meaningful social links.
They contribute to the development of self-confidence, cultural awareness and empathy. However, despite these benefits, living abroad can also represent a source of stress and mental distress.

Although it's impossible to completely eliminate potential difficulties, it is possible to considerably reduce the mental burden by preparing properly. Good preparation is not limited to logistical and administrative aspects; it also includes mental and emotional preparation.
It is also about raising awareness on the possibility to raise difficulties and the help they can ask if necessary. Still, remaining attentive to their well-being and to changes in their behaviour is necessary.

BEFORE THE DEPARTURE

The challenges of going abroad for international mobility

Fear of the unknown/leaving familiar surroundings
Change in environment is often a source of anxiety, especially for those moving abroad. Leaving familiar surroundings to immerse in a new culture can be destabilising.
This transition involves adapting to a new environment, which can increase fears and uncertainties. Separation from family, friends and familiar places can lead to feelings of loneliness and anxiety.

Doubts about the decision to leave and the pressure to succeed
Moments of doubt can arise, when young people may question their decision to leave. The pressure to succeed and meet expectations, whether personal or professional, can add to the sense of stress and uncertainty.

Unresolved problems before departure
It is crucial that any significant personal or professional issues are addressed before departure. Leaving with unresolved concerns can negatively affect the experience of young people abroad. Encourage young people to resolve major concerns before departure.

WARNING SIGNS TO LOOK FOR BEFORE DEPARTURE
If these signs are constantly, excessively and/or intensely present, it may be useful to take extra time to reflect, to consult professionals, and to reinforce preparations before embarking on the adventure of living abroad.
It doesn't necessarily mean that the person should never go abroad, but they do indicate that certain preparation or support steps still need to be put in place before taking the plunge.
It's important to assess one's ability to manage the potential challenges of international mobility, and to respond proactively to ensure a positive and enriching experience.

Preparing to go abroad

Setting realistic goals
To ensure the success of an international mobility project, it's essential to set realistic goals. Expectations that are too high can lead to disappointment, both personally and professionally. Integrating a new organisation and adapting to a new environment takes time. Setting goals helps young people stay focused and get through the tough times.

Finding out about the host country
Good preparation involves finding out about the host country, so as to better understand the environment in which they will be living in. This includes the economic and geopolitical context, the historical heritage, the geography of the region, the climate, the local culture, the customs, the language, and even the preferred clothing. Preparation can ease the adjustment and reduce culture shock.

Learning about daily life
It's vital to understand the practical aspects of daily life in the host country, such as hygiene conditions, food, availability of drinking water and accommodation. This helps young people prepare for a smoother transition and advise them on what to bring to adapt more easily.

Taking a local language course
If possible, recommend a language course before departure, as this can help integration and reduce the stress of communication challenges.

Reviewing specific needs
Encourage young people to identify any special needs to better anticipate challenges and put in place suitable accommodations or support, whether in terms of medical needs, dietary requirements, psychological assistance or specific working conditions.
Proactive planning can help avoid unpleasant surprises and allow them to focus on adapting to their new environment.

Health check-up
Advise consulting a healthcare professional before departure, to ensure that all vaccinations and current treatments are up to date. It is essential to have the necessary medication and to know what medical services are available in the host country.

Creating a checklist
A pre-departure checklist can help structure and visualise tasks to be completed, such as administrative formalities (visa, insurance), logistical preparations (luggage, travel documents), and specific actions (health check-up, financial preparation, reservations). This can ease organisation, reduce unexpected stress, and ensure nothing essential is overlooked.

**Participating in a pre-departure training**
Attending training sessions organised by the sending organisation can answer many questions and prepare young people mentally and practically for their stay. Discussing the stigma and misconceptions surrounding mental health can make the subject more accessible.

Having a mentor
Suggest a mentorship or sponsorship program. A mentor who has already had a similar experience abroad can provide invaluable support, answer questions and share personal experience, helping to alleviate anxieties linked to the unknown.

Planning a long-distance support system
Recommend setting regular appointments (calls, messages) with loved ones, and ensure young people are aware of the support services available online or in the host country.
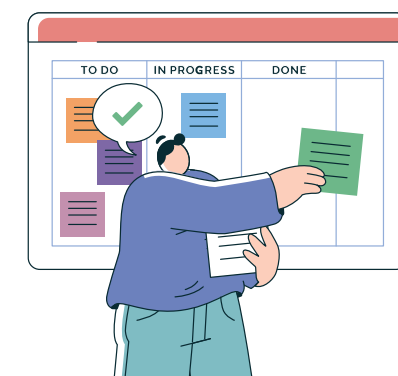
DURING THE STAY

The challenges of living abroad

A stay abroad often means leaving one's comfort zone, which can lead to feelings of vulnerability. This emotional vulnerability can make young people more reactive to events, whether positive or negative, as they are constantly faced with new situations. They are forced to question their habits and reactions in a different cultural context, and have to find solutions on their own, without "ready-made" models drawn from their past experiences. Participants must constantly adapt, which can be destabilising and lead to misunderstandings. These situations contribute to culture shock, a frequent reality of international mobility.

Culture shock

Culture shock refers to the disorientation experienced when confronted with a foreign way of life. This is known as "adjustment stress", and can last from a few days to several months, depending on the individual.
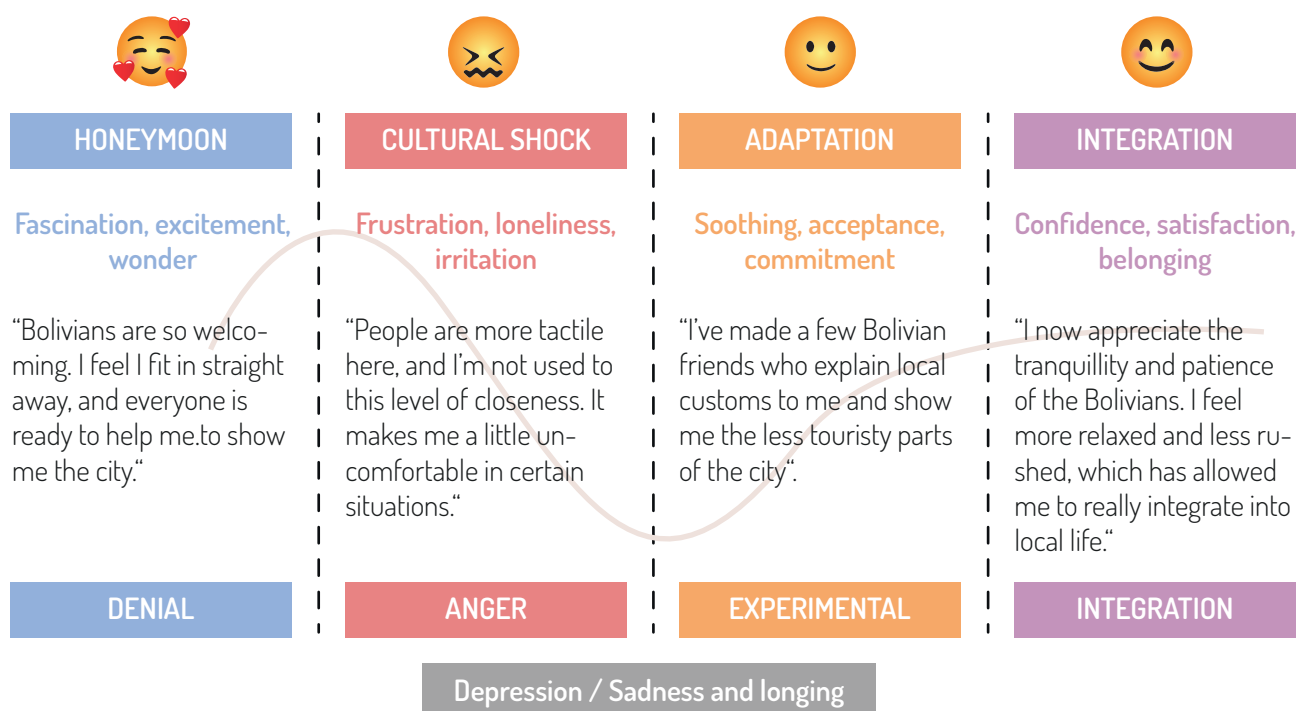
Since the 1950s, cultural adaptation has often been described in terms of a U-shaped curve, allowing us to understand the different phases of adaptation:

- **Honeymoon:** The person is excited by change. Everything seems new, fascinating and full of possibilities. It's a phase of discovery and curiosity, where cultural differences are perceived positively.
- **Crisis:** The reality of change begins to set in. The first difficulties appear, such as language barriers, different social norms, or discomfort with the local pace of life. This phase is often marked by feelings of resistance, frustration and even isolation.
- **Adaptation:** The person begins to accept the situation and looks for ways to adapt. They explore new strategies for integrating into the local culture, whether by learning the language, forging links or adopting new habits.
- **Mastery:** The person feels at ease in the new culture and has integrated local elements into their own way of life. They are at peace with cultural differences and feel confident in their daily interactions.

Culture shock can be exacerbated by many small everyday changes, such as dietary differences, unusual work rhythms or difficult integration, leading to stress and frustration.
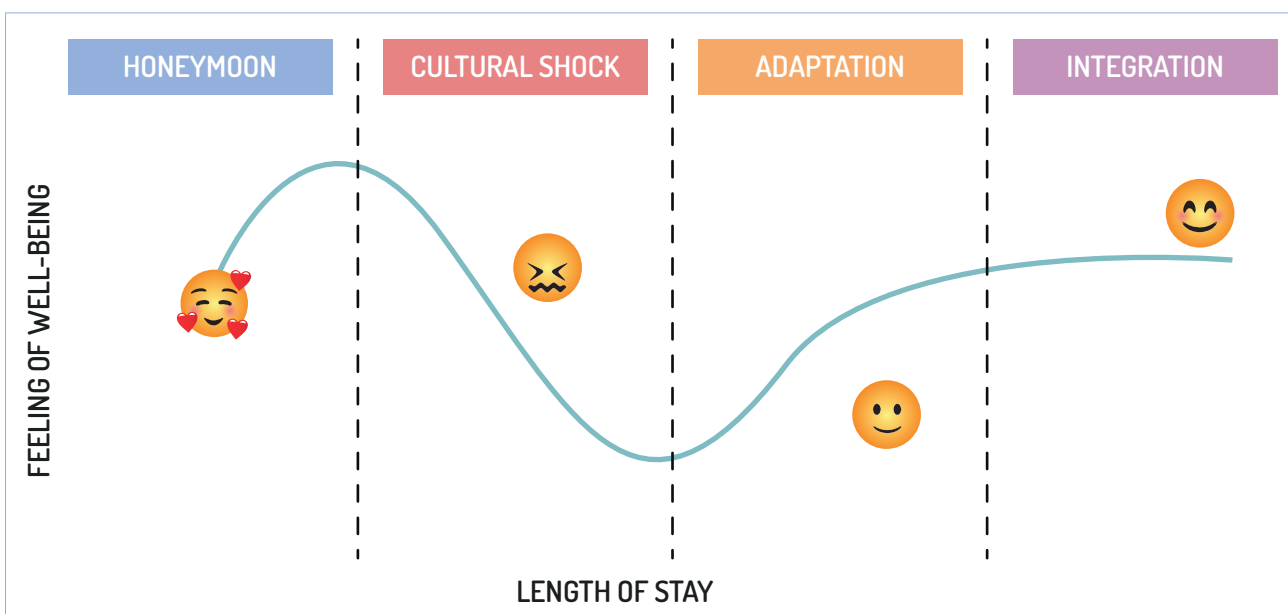
Steps	Perceptions of the new culture	Emotions
1. Honeymoon	Stimulating, exciting	Fascination, excitement, amazement
2. Crisis	Intrusive, unfamiliar, problematic	Frustration, loneliness, irritation, isolation, anger, fatigue, depression
3. Adaptation	Becomes easier to understand, more predictable	Soothing, acceptance, commitment
4. Mastery	Better than the original culture on some points, but not on everything	Confidence, satisfaction, belonging.

HONEYMOON	CULTURAL SHOCK	ADAPTATION	INTEGRATION
Fascination, excitement, wonder	**Frustration, loneliness, irritation**	**Soothing, acceptance, commitment**	**Confidence, satisfaction, belonging**
"Bolivians are so welcoming. I feel I fit in straight away, and everyone is ready to help me.to show me the city."	"People are more tactile here, and I'm not used to this level of closeness. It makes me a little uncomfortable in certain situations."	"I've made a few Bolivian friends who explain local customs to me and show me the less touristy parts of the city".	"I now appreciate the tranquillity and patience of the Bolivians. I feel more relaxed and less rushed, which has allowed me to really integrate into local life."
DENIAL	ANGER	EXPERIMENTAL	INTEGRATION

Depression / Sadness and longing

Contrary to what one might assume, culture shock doesn't always appear immediately after arrival. It can occur at any time, weeks or months later, sometimes even when you think you're well integrated. It can be triggered by specific events (e.g. a misunderstanding, a cultural misunderstanding) or by an accumulation of small frustrations. This unpredictability is part of the adaptation process, and it's important to be prepared for it. There is no single solution or immediate cure for culture shock.

The adaptation process requires time, patience and flexibility.

Rather than looking for a "magic bullet", it's often more effective to adopt a gradual approach:understand the local culture, build relationships, remain open to new experiences and accept moments of weakness.

The important thing is to take time, and young people should not judge themselves too harshly during this period of transition.

Common challenges faced abroad

Language barriers / Linguistic assimilation

Language barriers represent a major challenge during a stay abroad. Inadequate language skills make it difficult to interact with locals or colleagues, slowing down day-to-day integration. An aspect often overlooked is the mental fatigue associated with the constant use of a foreign language.

Thinking, speaking and understanding in another language requires sustained effort and concentration, and can be exhausting, especially at the start of a stay.

Integration into a new environment

On a cultural and social level, the stress of adapting to new norms, customs and behaviours can be significant. The difficulty of making new friends in a foreign environment adds to this stress. Practical issues, like infrastructure problems, lack of public transport or difficulties in establishing relationships can complicate integration.

Acceptance and understanding of cultural differences and values

Accepting and accepting cultural differences is crucial to successfully integrating into a new environment. It's not just a matter of observing local customs, but also of being open-minded about ways of thinking, behaving and values that are often very different.

Every culture has its own codes, and learning to respect them without judgement is essential. This requires observation, active listening and dialogue to overcome stereotypes and prejudices.

Homesickness

Homesickness is a common phenomenon that can profoundly affect the mental health of people living abroad. This feeling stems from the lack of family, friends and familiar landmarks, and can lead to profound loneliness. Culture shock, lifestyle differences and the absence of loved ones can accentuate this feeling of nostalgia and disconnection. This malaise often manifests itself in idealisation of the home country and constant comparison with the host country, which can lead to disappointment and withdrawal.

Self-discovery

By being confronted with a new environment, young people can better understand their own values, strengths and limitations. This confrontation with the unknown reveals aspects of oneself that were previously unknown, whether hidden strengths or unexpected vulnerabilities. Successes, failures and new encounters become opportunities to learn more about ourselves. This introspection can give rise to a variety of emotions, from pride and personal satisfaction to moments of self-doubt and questioning, and redefining one's life goals.

Carrying out the activities

Most of the time, a host organisation welcomes the participant to carry out an internship or voluntary service. The working style of new colleagues may be completely different from what young people are used to. Tasks and responsibilities may lack clarity because of the language barrier, generating stress and anxiety about not being up to the job. This feeling of inadequacy can be compounded by the perception that, in one's home country, these tasks would have been carried out more easily and without problems.

RETURN FROM INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

Challenges to return home after international mobility

Reverse culture shock

Returning home after an extended period abroad can be accompanied by unexpected and often underestimated challenges, including what is known as reverse culture shock. This phenomenon occurs when a young person, accustomed to a different way of life, values or norms, has difficulty re-adapting to their initial environment. The personal changes experienced abroad can create a disconnect with loved ones or the everyday life they left behind.

The young people may also feel misunderstood or frustrated at not being able to fully share their experience with those around them, which can accentuate a feeling of isolation. It's common for behaviours or cultural norms that were once familiar to now seem strange, inappropriate or even superficial. The period of readjustment may therefore require time and patience to regain a sense of belonging and comfort in what was once perceived as "home".

COPING STRATEGIES DURING INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

✔ **Developing routines to reduce daily stress**
Creating daily routines can offer reassuring stability in an unfamiliar environment. Planning one's day, incorporating moments of relaxation such as sports, reading or relaxation, and allowing oneself time to discover the local culture at one's own pace are effective ways of reducing stress.

✔ **Setting small, achievable goals**
Breaking down big challenges into smaller, more attainable steps helps maintain motivation and reduce feelings of overwhelm. For example, learn one local word or phrase a day, or commit to interacting with locals once a week.
This will also help in building self-confidence to counter feelings of incompetence.

✔ **Exercising to release stress**
Regular exercise, such as yoga, walking, hiking or recreational sport can improve mood, reduce stress, and enhance mental well-being by releasing endorphins. Simple movements such as stretching, can already offer health benefits.

✔ **Breaking out of isolation by seeking social support**
It's important to strive to stay connected with others. Join expatriate groups, participate in local activities.
Don't hesitate to ask for help or talk about your difficulties with your peers, friends, colleagues or support groups which can alleviate feelings of loneliness.

✔ **Keeping a diary to express your thoughts**
Writing a diary is an effective way of managing emotions, clarifying thoughts and tracking personal development.
It's a personal space where young people can express their feelings without judgement, free themselves from anxieties and find meaning in experiences.

✔ **Take a vacation and explore new places**
Taking a break from the usual environment by travelling or exploring other parts of the host country can bring a breath of fresh air and renewed motivation.
A change of environment, even for a short time, can help recharge the batteries, discover new landscapes and be detached from the stresses of everyday life.

CONCLUSION

Coping strategies upon return

To meet the challenges of rehabilitation, it is essential to cultivate **resilience**. Developing strategies to manage this change helps the youth positively integrate their experience and enrich themselves personally. Here are some recommended practices:

✔ **Taking a step back from the experience**
Reflecting on what they have learned from their mobility, the challenges they have overcome and the new skills they have acquired, enables them to fully appreciate the personal transformation they have undergone and value it in their life.

✔ **Maintaining links with the host country**
Keeping in touch with friends or colleagues met abroad helps preserve a sense of continuity and eases the shock of returning home. These exchanges also reinforce the intercultural richness acquired during mobility.

✔ **Establishing new routines**
Incorporating elements of the foreign culture into everyday life (cooking, habits, social practices) helps to retain some of this experience in everyday life. It also helps to channel feelings of nostalgia in a positive way.

✔ **Participate in groups of former participants**
Joining groups or associations of former participants in mobility programs is a way of finding support from people with similar experiences. These exchanges foster mutual understanding and provide a space in which to express and value the changes experienced.

This pedagogical guide has been designed to empower professionals with the knowledge, tools, and strategies needed to create supportive environments, recognize early signs of mental health issues, and take proactive steps towards fostering emotional well-being.

By integrating mental health promotion practices into daily interactions with young people, professionals help them navigate the unique challenges of life and international mobility.
From addressing the anxieties associated with cultural adaptation to managing the pressures of personal growth in new contexts, each strategy outlined in this guide plays a crucial role in building resilience and promoting a positive mental health culture.

The success of international mobility projects hinges not only on academic or professional achievements but also on the emotional and psychological support provided to participants.
Through open dialogue, safe spaces, and early intervention, professionals significantly impact the overall experience and long-term well-being of young people.

Let this guide serve as a guide and reminder that the well-being of young people is a collective effort-one that requires patience, empathy, and a commitment to continuous learning.
In efforts to enhance the mobility experience, prioritising mental health as a cornerstone of personal and professional success is essential, ensuring that every young person returns not only with new skills and experiences but also with the emotional resilience to thrive in a complex world.

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ANNEX 1 - TEST YOURSELF!

1. What is stigma in the context of mental health?

a. A positive reinforcement of mental health issues.

b. A set of negative and often unfair beliefs that society has about someone.

c. A neutral attitude towards someone.

d. A supportive reaction to mental health condition.

2. Which of the following is a common misconception about mental health?

a. Mental health disorders are rare.

b. Mental health conditions are a sign of weakness.

c. Depression is just sadness.

d. All of the above.

3. True or False

About 77% of respondents believe mental health patients are judged differently?

4. What is a recommended approach for talking about mental health to reduce stigma?

a. Using negative language and focusing on limitations.

b. Keeping the conversation formal and serious.

c. Using positive and inclusive language, and speaking naturally.

d. Avoiding discussions about mental health.

5. Which of the following would be an example of indirect discrimination?

a. A teacher treats a student with bipolar disorder differently than the rest of their students.

b. A company's strict policy only allows workers to take sick leave for physical illnesses.

c. A person with social anxiety disorder is excluded from group activities because they avoid social interactions.

d. A person with ADHD is given a low mark on an evaluation because they were distracted during hands-on training.

6. True or false

A mental health condition is a sign of weakness?

7. Approximately how many children and young people (19 and under) suffer from a mental health condition in the EU:

a. 1 million.

b. 10 million.

c. 11 million.

d. 12 million.

8. Which of the following would NOT be a good way to prioritise well-being in a safe space?

a. Check in with young people regularly to see how they feel.

b. Put a suggestion box in the room where young people can express their needs and suggestions privately.

c. Enforce mandatory group discussion on sensitive topics.

d. Provide mental health resources to young people.

9. Which of the following would be an example of coaching rather than preaching?

a. A professional tells all young people they need to do deep breathing exercises for 15 minutes every day to cope with anxiety.

b. A professional encourages young people to avoid talking about negative feelings or emotions.

c. A professional uses open-ended questions to guide discussions and encourage young people to think critically.

d. A professional requires all young people to share their mental health progress with the group.

10. True or false

All participants in a peer support group must share their well-being concerns.

11. What elements would you incorporate into your safe space?

....
....
....
....

12. What is the primary connection between emotional regulation and resilience?

a. Resilience decreases emotional regulation.

b. Emotional regulation strengthens resilience in challenging situations.

c. They are independent of each other.

d. Resilience replaces emotional regulation.

13. What is an "emotional boomerang"?

a. An emotion that keeps returning in a milder form.

b. An avoided emotion that returns even stronger.

c. A positive emotion turned into a negative one.

d. A strategy to amplify positive emotions.

14. True or False

All emotions, even negative ones, have value and deserve to be experienced.

15. Which activity promotes mental and emotional well-being?

a. Engaging in personal hobbies and interests.

b. Focusing only on professional tasks.

c. Avoiding social interactions.

d. Ignoring physical needs to focus on mental ones.

16. Why is sleep essential for stress management?

a. It prevents all emotions.

b. It helps restore emotional balance and reduces mental fatigue.

c. It eliminate long-term stress.

d. It replaces other forms of self-care.

17. True or False

Coping strategies should only be used in extreme stress situations.

18. What is a common warning sign before departure?

a. Excessive excitement.

b. Persistent doubts about the decision to leave.

c. A complete lack of preparation.

d. Disinterest in the host country's culture.

19. What advice is recommended to manage homesickness?

a. Ignore emotions and focus on work.

b. Constantly compare the host country to your home country.

c. Create daily routines and maintain social connections.

d. Return home as soon as possible.

20. True or False

Homesickness is an uncommon experience during international mobility.

Answers: 1.b, 2.d, 3. True, 4.c, 5.b, 6. False, 7.c, 8.c, 9.c, 10. False, 12.b, 13.b, 14. True, 15.a, 16.b, 17. False, 18.b, 19.c, 20. False

ANNEX 2 - MENTAL HEALTH CHECKLIST

Question	Perfectly	Moderately	Not at all	Notes Actions
Emotional well-being				
Do you feel generally happy and content with life?				
Are you able to manage stress effectively?				
Are you motivated and enthusiastic about your school/job?				
Do you feel valued and recognized at your school/job?				
Can you focus and concentrate effectively?				
Are you able to make decisions confidently?				
Do you engage in activities that stimulate your mind (e.g. reading, puzzles)?				
Do you have hobbies and interests that make you happier?				
Social well-being				
Do you maintain healthy and supportive relationships?				
Are you able to communicate openly and honestly with others?				
Do you feel a sense of belonging within your community?				
Are you able to collaborate and work well in a team?				
Physical well-being				
Do you have time for relaxation and leisure activities?				
Do you engage in regular physical exercise or activities?				
Are you able to get enough sleep on a regular basis?				

Question	Perfectly	Moderately	Not at all	Notes Actions
Spiritual well-being				
Do you feel a sense of purpose and direction in your life?				
Are you able to balance school/work responsibilities with personal life?				
Do you feel a sense of inner peace and satisfaction in your daily life?				
Do you take time to reflect on your life and personal growth?				

Intellectual well-being				
Do you set and achieve personal goals?				
Do you engage in activities that improve your knowledge and skills (workshops, trainings)?				
Do you enjoy engaging in creative activities (writing, painting, music)?				
Are you curious about different cultures and perspectives?				

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