

## Digital transformation of inclusive Youth Work

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Udruga Studio B



YOUTH POWER  
Germany



YOUTH POWER  
Austria



YOUTH  
POWER

## HANDBOOK WITH THE CURRICULUM

# “FROM STRESSED OUT TO STRESS LESS”

FOR DEVELOPING COMPETENCES OF YOUTH WORKERS TO DESIGN  
STRESS AWARENESS AND STRESS REGULATION EDUCATIONAL  
ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



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## PROJECT SUMMARY

Name of the project: “DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF INCLUSIVE YOUTH WORK”

Number: 2022-2-HR01-KA220-YOU-000096214

„Digital transformation of inclusive Youth Work” is an Erasmus+ KA2 Cooperation partnership project whose coordinator is the Association for the Promotion of Active Participation Udruga Studio B; from Croatia, while the project consortium consists of organisations Youth Power German e.V., Youth Power Austria and Ung Kraft Sweden.

The project is co-financed by the European Union through the Erasmus+ program, it was approved by the Agency for Mobility and Programs of the European Union, in the total grant of €250,000.00. The duration of the project is 24 months, from January 1st 2023 to December 31st 2024.

All organisations in the partner consortium work with young people who face various obstacles, from economic and geographical to social and cultural, which prevent them from active participation and the benefits gained through participating in youth work activities. All of these obstacles were further strengthened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which directed us towards the digitalization of our work. However, the above also had one positive effect - we discovered that with the digital transformation of youth work, we can reach those young people who are otherwise excluded from any type of youth work (out-of-reach youth).

The project aims to digitally transform inclusive youth work at the international level, which means that all objectives and activities of the project are directed towards the inclusion of digital tools in our work. By adopting innovative digital teaching methods, we will increase the quality of youth work and encourage the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, and by disseminating the results, we will reach a large number of actors and strengthen transnational and intersectoral cooperation.

The above will be achieved by implementing the following work packages:

- Development of 4 local strategies for the digital transformation of inclusive youth work;
- Development of 5 multilingual non formal training programs for youth workers in traditional and digital form;
- Development of the Virtual Inclusive Center (VIC) for the digital transformation of youth work.

According to the set objectives and implemented activities, we will achieve the following outcomes and outputs:

- Innovations to increase the quality of inclusive YW, applicable at the local (Strategy) and international level (non formal inclusive programs, VIC) developed;
- Marginalised youth empowered to learn in a virtual environment;
- 25 - CSOs strengthened for the digitalisation of Youth Work;
- Transnational and intersectoral cooperation achieved;

Contribution in the creation of solutions for the green transition in accordance with the European Green Plan realised.



# HANDBOOK

## CHAPTER 1: OUR APPROACH TO LEARNING ABOUT STRESS MANAGEMENT

Adolescence is a period marked by a series of turbulences for both adolescents and their social environment. Unfortunately, exposure to everyday micro-stressors (dissatisfaction, fear, conflicts, misunderstandings, career choice, college commitments) is something that has become almost inevitable.

How and in what way young people deal with stress and how visible this exposure is today are best told by the data on the importance and significance of stress prevention itself.

Young people set mental health as goal number 5 of the Youth Agenda (2019-2025). One of the proposed strategies is to provide young people with education that builds emotional skills and the ability to manage their mental health.

If we take into account the definition of positive mental health as a state of well-being in which "an individual realizes his own abilities, can manage normal life stresses, can work effectively and is able to play a role in his or her community" then teaching children and young people about stress management is a factor protecting their mental well-being and health.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, the consequences of the pandemic on youth in the global crisis became even more visible. Social isolation, loss of will and motivation to carry out daily activities, insecurity and fear for one's future, the development of numerous psychological disorders (anxiety, depression) are all consequences that the pandemic had a significant contribution to.

Mental health providers very often use the approach to remove/lessen these consequences. What we have learned from that period is that young people need to be supported in different ways before diversity and difficult times challenge their resilience or character strengths. They need to have an opportunity to learn about stress in life and how to cope with it as a way to promote their mental health. This is why we prefer the emphasis on prevention, preventing the appearance of symptoms, and therefore the consequences that these symptoms bring with them, so early intervention above all.



As a team of psychologists who work with young people and youth work trainers for whom mental health is an integral part of the agenda of any work with young people, we designed this learning program about and for stress management. Through the methodology of non-formal education in youth work, psychologically educational topics related to stress can be brought closer to young people in a comprehensive way, because such programs cover the physical, emotional, social and cognitive aspects of dealing with stress problems.

Through such youth psychological prevention programs, young people have the opportunity to discover their identity, their own inner values, to practise emotional strategies or conflict resolution skills, to strengthen personal capacities and strengths (knowledge, skills), to create a safe social environment within the group in order to in the future, be able to deal with stress and stressful situations in a healthier and more efficient way.

Therefore, it is very important to convey to young people the importance and significance of using the acquired skills through workshops in order to reduce the possibility of the appearance of symptoms and consequences of stress.

This manual contains all the topics necessary for running a training program according to our curriculum. The program follows the logic and principles of non-formal education, and after the introductory part, which is indispensable when it comes to psychological experiential workshops, comes the conceptual parts about stress and stress management. After the educational part, the participants practically act and design future workshops to increase the resilience of the young people they work with.



## CHAPTER 2: CREATING THE GROUP, CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Mental health is still somewhat connected with certain stigmatisation and is not easy to talk about and to share about personal mental health either with friends or strangers.

The goal of non-formal education (NFE) activities in this curriculum is to develop youth workers, trainers, educators' competencies needed to increase strengths of young people to become more resilient and able to mitigate stress in daily life and take active care of their mental health. Stress management, like any other skill, is developed through practice and application. A theoretical basis is necessary to know what it is about, but it is not enough to just read and think. It is essential to apply and try it in practice. It implies trial and error, it implies clumsiness and frustration in beginning, it is an integral part of every learning. In order to go beyond just theoretical knowledge about stress management, to explore and share personal experiences related to stress, feelings and behaviours when under stress and to practice tools and techniques that help dealing with stress, young people need to feel safe, respectful and equal. In these activities young people need to take themselves out of their comfort zone in order to learn how to manage stress, be vulnerable, admit weaknesses, be themselves, and for this they need a safe environment. Creating a safe space for learning is one of the main principles of non-formal education. A safe space is a space which, either technically or emotionally, is meant to provide equal opportunities, representation and communication outlets for young people in an environment of respect and understanding, that eliminates oppressive behaviours, recognises struggle and cultivates dialogue. This is especially important when we tackle "sensitive" topics and attitudes of participants.



Beside the safe space as one of the principles of the NFE there are also some others that we as youth workers/facilitators/trainers need to be aware of.

This can sound like common sense, but your activities need to be **learner-centred**, which means they need to be based on the specific (learning) needs of your youngsters. You need to know and understand their situation and challenges they face, so you could adapt methods to their needs, give them theoretical input about stress they can understand and especially select tools and techniques that can help them in dealing with stress.

Objectives and activities need to be planned but don't forget to be flexible as each youngster has different needs. There is always a variety of learning styles and learning needs in the group, so you need to be flexible and adjust your approach to each specific group and also choose a variety of methods. Some youngsters prefer to reflect on their own, some like sharing in the group, some will prefer to talk about their stress and some will prefer to draw it or express it in some other form. Keep in mind that not all participants will have vocabulary to express how they feel under stress, here is where different creative methods can help.

Participation in NFE activities needs to be **voluntary**, youngsters themselves need to choose to participate in any part of the activity. We as youth workers/facilitators/trainers can motivate and encourage them, but it is up to them to decide if they want to participate or not. Have this in mind in some of the proposed activities, when you invite them to share something personal and vulnerable about themselves, give them an opportunity to share but also let them know that they can share as much as they feel comfortable.

They can also decide not to share and that's ok. Youngsters need to have an **active** role in this learning process, they need to have the opportunity to share, explore, discuss in order to take responsibility for their own learning and the learning of the group. When talking about stress management, we can give input about stressors, but they will need to share for instance their individual stressors and how stress influences them personally. By encouraging sharing and exchanging in the group, participants will have an opportunity to learn empathy and how other people deal with stress, which can improve their own personal stress management skills and attitudes.

In NFE the **group is a source of learning**, as the group serves as a source of motivation, diverse knowledge and experiences, empathy, creativity, and fun. Together as a group, participants have the opportunity to experiment, act and reflect together in order to learn. Having peer support and feeling connected to a group gives young people a sense of belonging and being valued, which helps them develop confidence. Belonging to a positive and supporting peer group also helps youngsters learn important social and emotional skills, like being sensitive to other people's thoughts, feelings and wellbeing. All this plays an important role in learning how to reduce stress and negative consequences of stress on youngsters.

Beside the great influence of peer groups, don't forget that young people search for support and positive role models in adults. The role of parents or caregivers is important here, but also you as a youth worker/facilitator/trainer, especially if they don't have support from their parents/caregivers. They will learn from your example, so show them empathy and respect, be supportive and open with them.





In the proposed activities you will notice several mindfulness activities as according to the concept of **experiential learning**, participants learn by doing. They will have a chance to practise different techniques that can reduce stress, and reflect what are most useful for them.

NFE has a **holistic approach** to learning, as it is focused on cognitive, emotional and physical levels of learning, and for this reason is a great environment to tackle the topic of stress and stress management on all three levels.

No matter the content or the topic of NFE activities, it should always be **based on values** that enable participants to acquire critical competences which contribute to their personal or professional development, social inclusion, active participation and citizenship, and human rights values.

Therefore, it should be open and accessible to all young people, no matter their social, cultural, economic, educational, or religious background and possibilities. Mental health is affecting all young people but especially ones that face challenges and difficulties, like discrimination or economic obstacles, so NFE activities should be focused on them especially.



For creating a safe environment you need to have a consistent approach throughout the training course, but it is essential to make the foundations on the first and second day. From the initial Welcoming evening to the Introduction to the TC, Getting to know each other and Team building, we selected activities that contribute to building trust, openness and acceptance in the group.

Having in mind learning is a long-term process, and when it comes to dealing with stress there is no magic wand or instant success. All proposed tools and techniques need to be practised over a period of time to have long-term impact. Motivate and encourage your youngsters, as whatever their situation can be, stress management is a skill that can be learned. As well as growing a positive attitude, focusing on gratitude and positive aspects of life as well as living in the present moment - this all helps in dealing with stress and we can learn it by practising. Because, is there life without stress? 😊

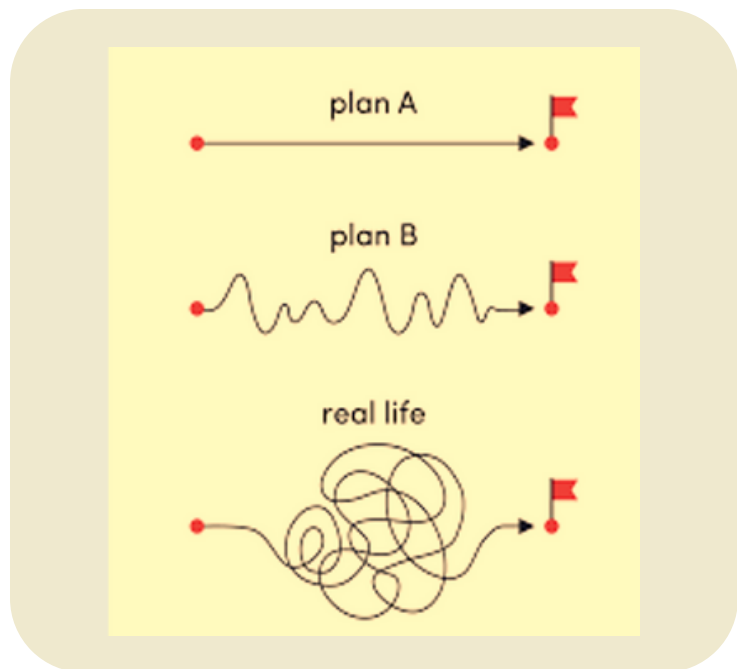
## Chapter 3: What is stress?

Stress is an integral part of human life. It is almost impossible to imagine everyday life without it. Although the concept of stress is associated with something negative, something that should be avoided, it is impossible to prevent it from entering one's life. Stress has always been viewed as something without which human existence, development, and progress would be questionable because it compels a person to change, be productive, and take a step forward.

Stress is defined as the natural phenomenon of the organism adapting to a specific life challenge, event, or situation, a condition that leads to altered balance and requires adaptation. The response to stress and the stress reaction itself depend on the magnitude of the change a person experiences and the individual assessment of how and in what way to adapt

In everyday life, stress appears as a threatening situation to which an individual has an appropriate or less appropriate response. In some situations, the state of stress can be observed as any condition in which a person feels threatened in a psychological, physical, or social way.

Additionally, an individual may assess and experience a situation as stressful when the physical, psychological, or social security of a person close to them (family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances) is compromised.



(Image source: Freepik.com)

The concept of stress and its usage can be identified in three ways, and these are:

- Stress as internal state of organism;
- Stress as an external event;
- Stress as an experience arising from the interaction between an individual and their environment (Lazarus and Folkman, 2004).



When referring to stress as an internal state of the organism, it entails a series of physiological and psychological reactions that are directed towards and related to the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems within the body. In this context, stress is characterised as a negative phenomenon, carrying a range of inappropriate consequences for the human organism. However, an essential characteristic exists even in this aspect, and that is that different individuals experience and react to stress in varying ways.

Stress as an external event, in the present contemporary era, is viewed more as a situation that may not be highly traumatic but rather as an everyday occurrence that is present in the lives of all individuals. This includes issues related to employment, choosing a field of study, academic responsibilities, societal pressures, and relationships with romantic partners.



Stress as the interaction between an individual and their environment relates to the personal experience of one's surroundings. In this context, there are two types of assessments of environmental demands: primary and secondary, depending on the individual's cognitive assessment. In the primary assessment, the individual evaluates the demands of a particular situation, considering its impact and significance.

Sometimes, situations may be perceived as entirely irrelevant, positive, or stressful. The secondary assessment involves the individual's evaluation of what they can do in a specific stressful situation, how much control they have over the situation, whether they will seek support from their environment, whether they have established ways to cope with challenging situations (psychological aspect), or if they have other methods to solve the problem to ensure their well-being.

From this, one can freely conclude that control over a stressful situation is determined by the level of demand in the situation, coping resources, and the ability to apply specific coping strategies in such a situation.

When it comes to the classification of stress, its simplest division is into **distress**, which represents negative stress—essentially, the type of stress most commonly referred to when saying that an individual is "under stress." On the other hand, there is **eustress**, which is positive stress, stress that has a positive impact on motivation, contributes to personal growth, increases satisfaction and motivation, and enhances productivity and energy.

Distress indeed has various negative consequences for a young person, ranging from difficulties with concentration and chronic fatigue to challenges in daily responsibilities (such as attending college, preparing for exams, and maintaining a social life). This type of stress can be a complete hindrance to the functioning of a young person on multiple levels, and therefore, intervention with psychological assistance and support is sometimes necessary for this type of stress.

In contrast to distress, eustress is explained in scientific literature as genuinely desirable stress. Examples of the positive impact of this type of stress include career advancement, achieving personal goals, academic success, and employment.

However, it is important to emphasise and consider the thin line between these two types of stress; what is distress for one person may be eustress for another and vice versa. In other words, **the experience is entirely individual** because cognitive assessments of stress are subjective. The same situation or stressor does not have to be the same for everyone.

Experiences and consequences resulting from stress depend on individual capabilities, coping strategies, the level of support in the social environment of the young person, personal values, and personality traits. Regarding personality traits, it is clear that young individuals who are more open, sociable, optimistic, and assertive exhibit greater resilience to stress.

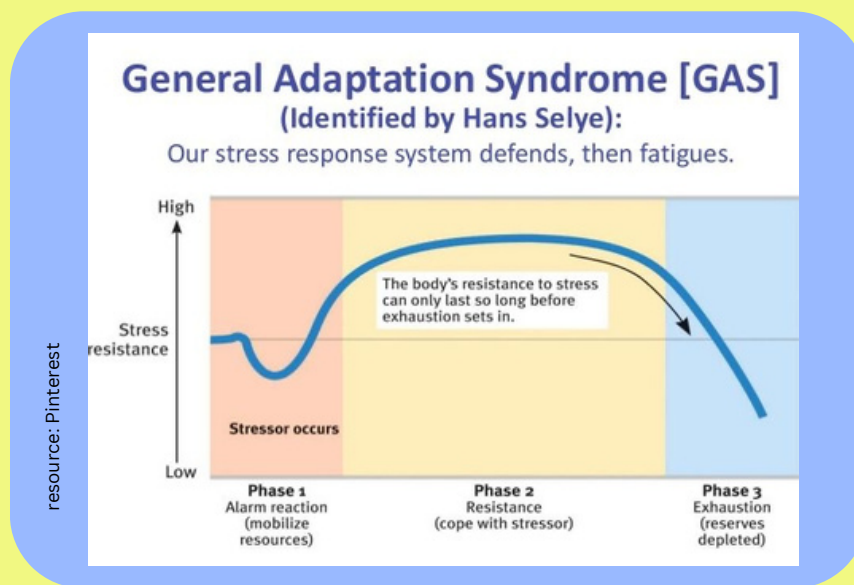
They show more positive emotions in stressful situations and believe they have control over them. In contrast, young individuals who are more withdrawn, insecure, pessimistic, and impulsive tend to experience stress and stressful situations in a much greater capacity than the situation itself warrants. Their perception of control over stressful situations is reduced.



When it comes to ways of reacting to stress, it has been discovered that the human organism responds to threats with a consistent set of nonspecific reactions known as GAS (General Adaptation Syndrome). An interesting fact is that this syndrome represents a response to various types of stress stimuli, has a general effect on almost all bodily systems, and activates and initiates the defence and protection mechanisms of the organism (Havelka, 2002).

The GAS (General Adaptation Syndrome) can be explained through three phases, and these are:

- The alarm or fight-flight phase;
- The resistance phase;
- The exhaustion phase - burnout.



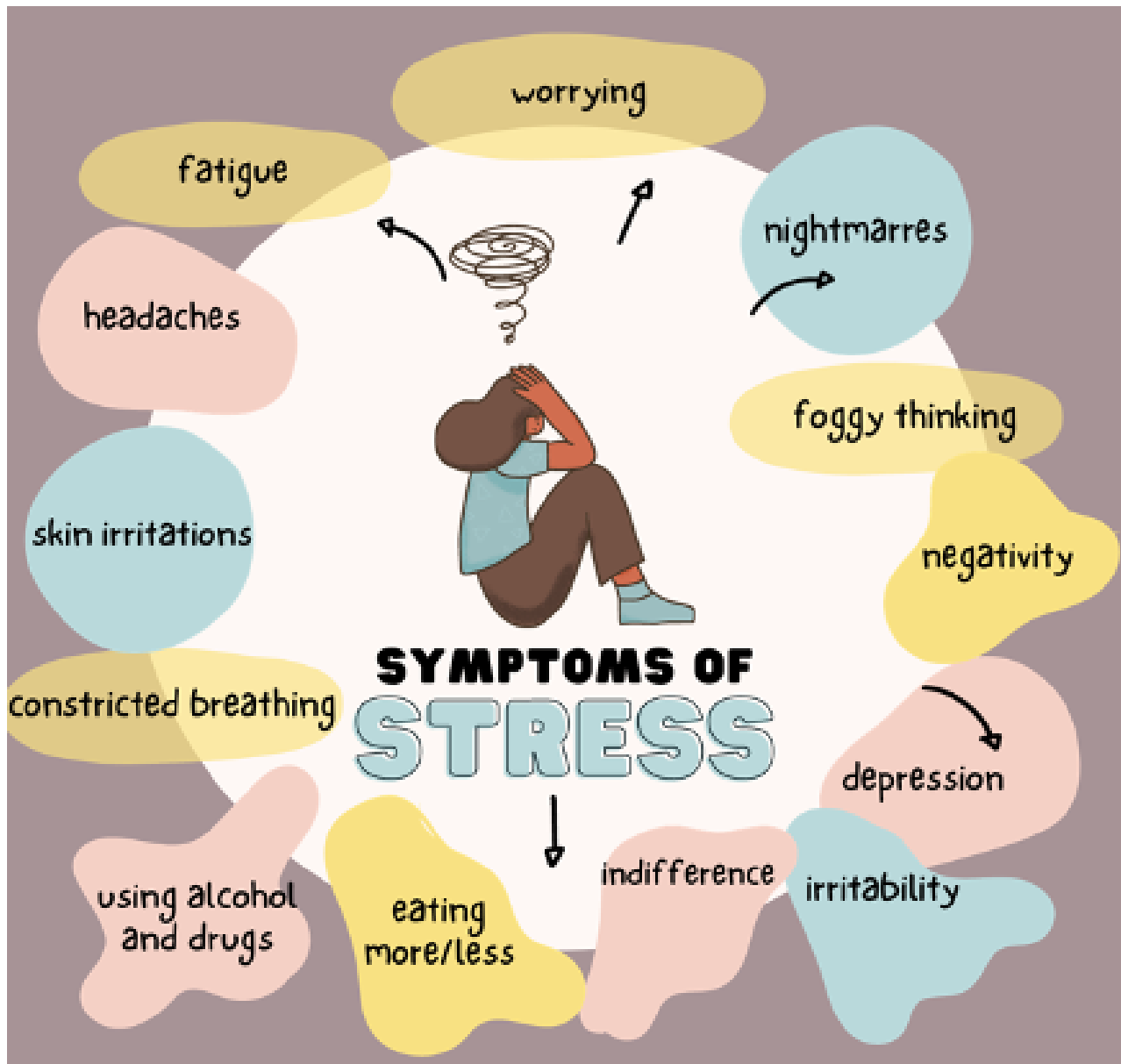
The first phase, the alarm phase, can last from several hours to several days. In this phase, the body prepares (release of adrenaline, accelerating heart rate, muscle tension) for fight or flight.

The second phase, the resistance phase, involves all processes that enable the body to cope with stress. In this phase, the organism adapts, utilising all reserves of physical and mental energy to confront the stressor.

The third phase, better known as burnout, is characterised by a diminishing ability for normal daily functioning. It involves pronounced mental and physical exhaustion, which can later result in various illnesses.



Stress, in addition to its types and modes of operation, brings along numerous symptoms that can be categorised into physical, emotional, psychological, cognitive, and behavioural.



## 3.1 Stressors

Stressors represent any physical, psychological, or social stimulus that puts a person in a state of stress (Petz, 1992). Stressors can be simplest observed as stimuli that demand satisfaction, require an immediate problem-solving response, or necessitate increased activity and adaptation.

In the case of external stressors, threatening situations that a person experiences are characteristic of acute stress conditions.

These are situations that immediately disturb us, have a strong intensity, and can be quickly brought under control (i.e. fireworks we hear from our apartment can produce a high amount of stress, but can easily be put under control: by closing the windows or playing louder music on speakers).

On the other hand, internal stressors are more associated with chronic stress conditions, which are longer-lasting and lead to persistent feelings of helplessness, guilt, and anxiety because the person cannot find adequate ways to cope with stress and stressful situations.

Besides the division into external and internal stressors, which is marked as the main classification, there are additional subdivisions, namely:

- physical stressors;
- psychological stressors;
- social stressors (Havelka, 1990).

**Physical stressors** refer to various external influences (temperature variations, painful conditions, noise, clamour, sensory deprivation).

**Psychological stressors** are characterised by social conflicts. This type of stressors are one of the most common among young people. Conflicts that young individuals face occur in the context of family relationships, social connections with peers, romantic partners, and work colleagues. Triggers for psychological stress also include:

- major life changes (completion of school, weddings);
- chronic stressful events (unemployment, family conflicts);
- traumatic events;
- everyday stressors (traffic, lack of time, human rudeness, etc.).

The intensity of psychological stressors can vary from mild to extremely high.

**Social stressors** refer to all conflicts, disasters, and crises that affect the entire social environment. The best examples of this type of stressor are economic crises and sudden changes in social relationships (one of the examples that we all can remember from recent years is Covid-19 pandemic).



Stressors that cause stress often have several characteristics. Initially, young people may perceive them as extreme, completely overwhelming, and unbearable. On the other hand, they can cause mixed feelings, meaning that individuals are not sure what they want and don't want at the same time, which is a very common occurrence among young people, especially when it comes to choosing a career or selecting romantic partners.

Finally, what is always alarming is the moment when stressors are events considered to be completely beyond control and individual power.

Here also, it is crucial to emphasise the cognitive appraisal of stressors, that is, how individuals assess whether a particular situation is stressful for them and in what manner. Dedication to a specific way of thinking and the mere belief in it is the main factor in this assessment.

This is particularly pronounced in young individuals, adolescents in whom the process of personality formation is not yet complete a period in which the search for an answer to the question 'Who am I?' is ongoing.

Can I respond to all the demands and expectations placed upon me? Can it respond and fulfil all its desires, and can it find its role and meaning? Adolescents during this period of maturation struggle significantly with stress and stressful situations because their value system and self-image are greatly shaken and dependent on the opinions of others, especially peers.

It is important to emphasise the depth of that commitment as well because, on the one hand, it can drive a person to seek a solution to improve the situation, while on the other hand, it may lead to maintaining the same level of exposure to stress. All of this depends on the individual assessing the situation.

When defining stress and stressors, the key element is the personal experience that the stressor is threatening. This personal perspective is of crucial importance, because there is no social consensus neither about the quality nor about the quantity of stressors.





This means that two people of the same age, sex, education and social status, who have been brought up similarly, perform similar work and have similar life goals, do not necessarily have the same stressors, but neither do they have the same reactions to a specific stressor.

Stress reactions, which put a person in a state of stress, occur in three forms:

- changes in behaviour;
- psychological reactions;
- physiological reactions (Havelka and Krizmanić, 2004).

In behavioural changes (behavioural manifestations), observable alterations in a person's behaviour are evident (excessive food intake, arguments, excessive consumption of tobacco products, alcohol, withdrawal, lack of interest in daily activities). Such behavioural changes are sometimes challenging to understand, and very often, a young person may not be aware of them.

Even if they are aware, it can be difficult to control them because they lack adequate ways to do so. Some young people often consider stress as something inevitable, something that must happen, and they completely surrender to it.

Therefore, they do not seek ways to cope with it.

Examples include academic obligations or job hunting. Although these situations may be of high-intensity stress for someone, they are viewed as something that must be endured, will eventually pass, and will not leave behind unwanted consequences.

However, with chronic exposure to stress, the undesirable consequences can become quite evident (antisocial behaviour, self-aggression, aggression towards others, addiction to drugs, alcohol, etc.).

The psychological manifestations can be divided into two groups:

- emotional reaction;
- cognitive reaction.



Every stressful situation triggers a myriad of emotional reactions in an individual. Emotions arising from stressful situations can range from anger, hatred, fear, and rage to the other extreme, such as sadness, apathy, anxiety, helplessness, or a sense of guilt. Such reactions often completely paralyse young individuals from any additional response that could calm or resolve the situation. Coping with stressful situations in such ways can be extremely dangerous and deepen symptoms, leading to their worsening. While expressing emotions as they truly are is perfectly fine, when it becomes the only defence against stress and there are no specific coping mechanisms, showing emotions can become problematic.

However, what is significant for the response to stress and stressful situations, on the other hand, is emotionally intelligent individuals, or emotional intelligence. Emotionally competent individuals are more successful in coping with stress because they recognize and use the most effective coping strategies, actively confronting the problematic situation (acceptance of the problem, working on it), compared to emotionally incompetent individuals mentioned earlier, who use passive coping strategies, resorting to giving up and escaping. Examples of active problem-solving in emotionally competent individuals involve awareness and understanding of emotions, overcoming them, using emotions to facilitate and assessing emotions that arise in a specific problematic situation.



Another important characteristic of emotional intelligence for overcoming stress is the creation of positive self-evaluation, positive mood, and increased self-esteem. These individuals, thanks to their good understanding of emotions, are able to overlook negative events and their consequences.

Cognitive reactions can be of great importance for overcoming stress in young individuals who have developed judgement skills, enhanced concentration and focus, expressed creativity, and logical thinking ability. On the other hand, for individuals lacking these qualities, the process of coping with stress can be truly challenging and quite exhausting.

In this section of the manual, we will only mention physiological reactions as an example of the connection between mental and bodily occurrences, and we will delve into it in more detail later.



## 3.2. Body's Response to Stress



The impact of stress on our body can have both positive and negative effects. For a long time, stress was considered to have exclusively negative consequences for the human organism and body. However, numerous studies later revealed its positive influence as well.

Short-term stress and stressful situations can act as a form of protection for the body, strengthening resistance to various situations that may throw a person off balance.

Some of the positive benefits of the impact of short-term stress include boosting immunity and the distribution of immune cells from the blood to various organs (Hudek-Knežević and Kardum, 2005).

It is important to emphasise the different effects of stress on different individuals. In other words, for some people, stress can indeed have a positive, motivating impact (preparing for exams, adequate preparation for a job interview, the tension felt before a sports competition can enhance our focus and energy).

But, let's focus more on the negative effects that stress leaves behind. Prolonged exposure to stress significantly affects the functioning of the immune system, resulting in a higher susceptibility to infections and malignant diseases. However, how and in what way stress affects the human body can be best explained through the fact that stress is caused by hormones necessary for survival: adrenaline, noradrenaline, and cortisol.

The moment the brain perceives a certain threat to an individual, it automatically signals the release of these hormones to activate and prepare the body to face the danger. Today, survival situations are not as common, but illness in a family member, job dissatisfaction, poor social relationships, difficulties with a partner, unemployment these are all still perceived as threats that the brain recognises and reacts to by releasing these three hormones.

The autonomic nervous system plays a crucial role in mobilising bodily resources under stress. This system has two important components: the sympathetic and parasympathetic pathways that control bodily functions such as breathing, heart rate, and more. The sympathetic nervous system is responsible for the fight-or-flight response when a person encounters a stressful situation, providing the body with sufficient energy to react.

This system also acts on adrenaline, which is directly released into the bloodstream, causing a rapid heartbeat, accelerated breathing, faster blood pumping, and an increase in blood pressure. In those moments, the lungs require more oxygen, and this additional oxygen is sent to the brain, increasing alertness, and sharpening the senses of vision and hearing. These changes in the body happen very quickly, almost unnoticed by the individual.

On the other hand, the parasympathetic nervous system operates in the opposite manner to the sympathetic system. After the threat has passed, it ensures that the body calms down. Its action begins when the adrenaline levels start to decrease, and the person continues to assess the situation as dangerous.

At that point, the hypothalamus starts producing hormones that stimulate the release of cortisol, allowing the body to remain in a state of readiness and alertness. As the danger subsides, cortisol levels decrease, and the parasympathetic nervous system aids the body in calming down and relaxing (Burchfield, 1979).

Under elevated stress levels, some additional physical symptoms of stress include excessive nervousness, dry mouth, headaches, dizziness, muscle tension, pain and pressure in the chest, fatigue, loss or increase of appetite, stomach problems, and sleep disturbances.



## 4. Stress management

The contemporary way of life is characterised as the "ailment" of the 21st century human. The current lifestyle, marked by digitization, excessive dedication to work obligations, a constant craving for availability to everyone and everything, a desire for more than necessary, imposes demands on individuals that keep them in a constant state of stress without providing the space and opportunity to return to their natural balance, a state of peace and relaxation.

Unfortunately, the environment in which the entire generation of the 21st century has grown up almost does not recognize the concept of "disconnect" and self-devotion, which contributes to the current prevalence of stress.

However, it must be acknowledged that there is a significant difference between what a person genuinely cannot control and what is within their sphere of influence, or at least can be reduced in terms of stress levels. The chosen reaction in stressful situations can influence an individual's perception of stress and its impact.

Stress management involves learning and acquiring skills and knowledge to recognize stressful states and handle stressful situations by controlling and reducing their effects (Zvizdić, 2009). Acquired skills enable a person to feel better and regain control over their life, returning to a state of balance. Stress management is not one-size-fits-all. Therefore, it's important to experiment and discover what works best for each individual.

### **Some of the following tips can be helpful in dealing with stress and stressful situations:**

Recognizing the source of stress - to identify real stressors in a person's life, it is crucial to examine their habits, attitudes, and excuses. It is important to consider one's own thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that contribute to the daily level of stress (perhaps young individuals sometimes overly focus on academic obligations, unaware that procrastination rather than learning, preparing for exams, attending exams, collecting study materials, etc., is their issue).

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Rejection of unhealthy stress coping mechanisms - using such coping strategies can only provide short-term relief and escape from stress; however, in the long run, they can cause additional harm (alcohol consumption, withdrawal from social and family environments, excessive sleeping, procrastination). It is necessary to consider whether these ways of dealing with stress contribute to improving emotional and physical health, as well as overall life satisfaction.



Stress management exercises - it is necessary to consider which strategy is chosen for dealing with stress. These strategies can be directed towards calming the body and physical reactions, understanding emotions and beliefs that influence human behaviour, and learning skills that can help respond to stress and stressful situations in a healthier way (protecting personal boundaries, seeking comfort and support in the social environment, managing one's own time, cultivating positive thinking habits).

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Get moving - although it is very difficult to push oneself to engage in any activity during a state of stress, it is essential in overcoming and calming symptoms. Physical activity can be beneficial in diverting attention from daily concerns and worries.

Connecting with others/social support - for young people, a particularly soothing and supportive strategy can be the social environment and spending quality time with others. Among friends, family, loved ones, and colleagues, young individuals often feel secure and understood, and they usually turn to them for help and a listening ear. In fact, communication with close ones is considered non-judgmental, full of understanding, and helps stimulate hormones that counteract the experience of stress.

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Give yourself the opportunity for rest and relaxation - consistently finding time for relaxation and rest is certainly a crucial aspect of coping with stress. Engaging in activities that bring joy, setting aside leisure time during the day for oneself is sometimes of invaluable significance.



## 4.1 Coping styles and adolescence

There are many different reactions people have when they experience stress. There are even more ways people have to try to manage themselves in stressful situations. "Coping mechanisms are cognitive and behavioural approaches that we use to manage internal and external stressors" (Algorani and Gupta, 2021 Berkeley Wellbeing article by Rekhy).

Our response to stressors is closely connected with our general well being. Before continuing with coping styles let's for a moment take a look at what are the different **aspects of wellbeing** which may influence our vulnerability both how we react to potential stressful situations and how we regulate ourselves to mitigate negative effects of experienced stress and become more resilient overall.

Imagine your health and wellbeing as a state representing a person in wholeness. All the following questions can help in creating personal map of wellbeing:

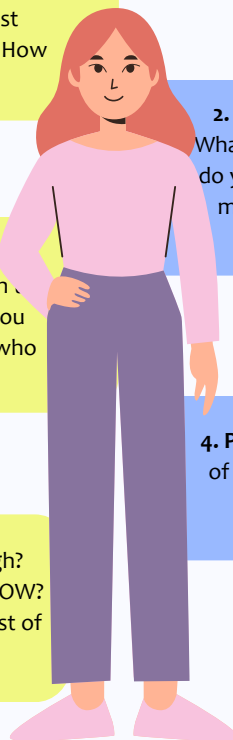
**1. Quality of sleep and rest** - Where is your phone when you go to sleep? What's your most frequent mood? Do you easily fall asleep? How many resting hours do you have?


**2. Nutritive habits** - Is eating a time for pleasure? What kind of eating habits do you have? With whom do you usually eat? How often do you eat with your mind full and with an awareness? Where is your phone when you eat?

**3. Social and emotional relationships** - Who is your person for emotional support? Who do you listen to? How do you spend your free time? Where do you feel you belong without trying to fit in, just for who YOU are?

**4. Physical activity** - How do you answer the need of your body to move? What do you do for body and mind relaxation?

**5. Creativity and fun** - What makes you laugh? What makes you forget all... you are in the FLOW? Do you have a hobby? How do you spend most of your free time?





Besides having healthy habits, how we respond to stress depends on self-evaluation of personal resources, abilities, and strengths to cope with the specific situation. Resilience as a personal trait that can help a young person to adapt to negative stress is very much associated with their self-esteem. High self-esteem protects resilience on one hand, and on the other when a young person successfully manages challenges and difficulties, resilience promotes and positively affects one's self-esteem.

For young people to grow up into resilient adults, having social support is proven coping resource:

“As an important coping resource, social support can improve adolescents’ self-evaluation, help them form a good self-image, and promote their self-esteem. Social support can not only directly protect mental health but can also indirectly affect mental health by improving self-esteem. Social support can also be considered one of the most important external resources to buffer the negative effects of stressors, and some studies have indicated the positive effect of social support on resilience” (Liu, 2021).

In general, non-formal learning in youth work aims to empower young people by establishing a supportive and collaborative social environment . Often it is an offer that includes exactly what adolescents need - a safe environment to experiment and explore themselves, to learn what they like and with whom they like to spend time, to develop life skills and competences, to engage actively in simple local actions for better life in the community and as showing solidarity fulfil the need to belong, be accepted and proud. Most importantly, if they fail or make mistakes, they will not be judged but facilitated to learn from the experience and become even stronger and more confident.

Specifically, as offered in our curriculum, young people can as well explore and learn more about different ways of taking care of themselves and cope with difficult periods throughout their lives. And, as said earlier, there are different coping styles which are preferable.

BASICPh model by prof. Mooli Lahad is just one of the models for presenting a variety of personal preferences in relieving the effects of stress. It represents our “natural” coping mechanisms. Good to know is that a person can choose to try different ones if she realises something is “not working” any more. Here is the reason why young people can benefit from knowing about different ways of coping.





## Six coping styles are:

### B – belief

Belief can be a powerful factor in resilience. This can be through faith or any other shared beliefs and relies on inner core values. Shared beliefs are particularly helpful as they also provide external support

### A – affect

Feelings or emotions. By expressing through emotions we are able to share fear, anger, sorrow etc. and have these emotions validated externally to make us feel less alone.

### S – social

Via support-seeking through friendships or organisations we can gain a sense of responsibility within a group which can help us to stay grounded. A decrease in isolation alongside an increase in social responsibility can restore emotional security.

### I – imagination

Creativity is a method of coping with trauma which children are particularly adept at utilising. Expression of thoughts and feelings in a creative manner can allow a safer feeling release of expression through art, writing, drama or music.

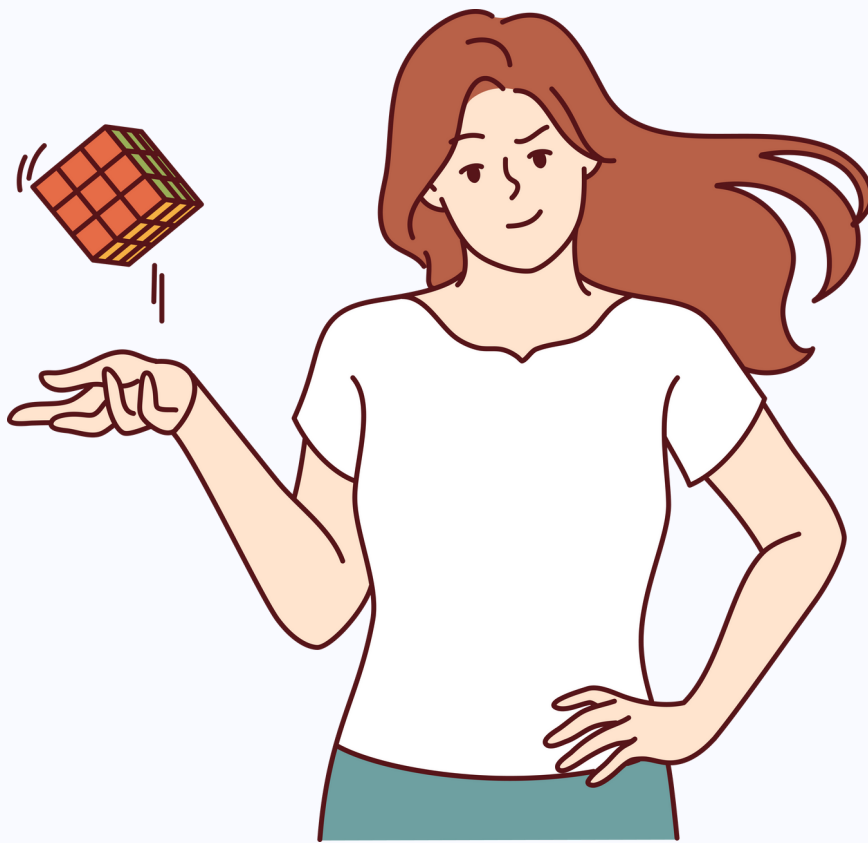
### C – cognitive

Cognitive coping skills utilise problem solving and a direct approach to the issue. Strategizing with others can make people feel less alone, and more in control of their situation.

### Ph – physical

Physical activity takes us back to our mammalian routes. It has the dual benefit of providing informal processing of a situation alongside a release of feelings in an indirect way.

The more of these styles we are able to utilise, the more resilience we are able to harness in order to regain a sense of control. It is good as well that young people now can have more coping styles and shift between them according to time available or intensity of stressors they are exposed to.



## 5. Body based strategies and stress management

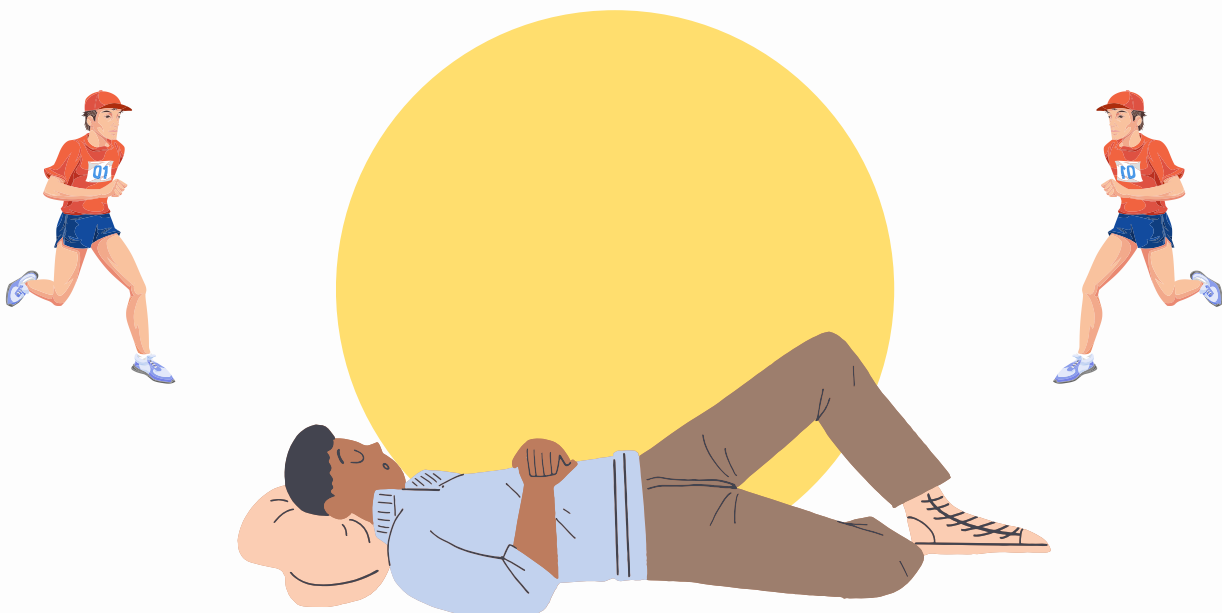
Our general wellbeing is conditioned on how we take care of our body and our physical health. But this does not mean only knowing that exercising, balanced rest and nutrition, is the best prevention and helps us lessen stress effects. It means becoming aware and learning to listen to the wisdom in the body. Our life experiences, and presence, is stored in the body as well in our minds. On one hand, the body “speaks” to us sends us non verbal signs/sensations when emotions rise.

On the other hand, we can use it to regulate those same emotions and thoughts that caused it. Now more than ever, psychologists and neuroscientists talk about rewiring... changing our “emotional brain” through body movement.

More and more regular physical movement (can be just walking in the park) becomes an integrative part of depression treatment, and it is the same with anxiety attacks (Craft and Perna, 2004). Body on the move increases moments of simple happiness and mitigate whatever burden a person holds.

Some practices, such as breathing exercises or mindfulness meditation can help us calm down in acute stress situations as well strengthen our emotional and cognitive functioning to cope with chronic stress better. Physical exercising is often used to try to “control” some emotions but it’s often just a short effect of steam off. Any kind of movement which brings more joy or social connection is wellcome: hiking with friends, yoga or walking in nature.

Equally important for our wellbeing is how we sleep and rest as how we keep our body active and strong. All of the above can strengthen our abilities to deal both with daily or acute stress. But, from time to time we will need somebody else to comfort us. This means that our relation to our body is the basis of body based stress management strategies but sometimes it is not enough. Then we can always look for a hug. Physical connection with others is an important part of our resilience as well.



## 5.1. Breathing and stress

Breathing is an automatic operation. We are usually not aware of our breathing as we talk, walk, drive, learn, and play. And that's fine as long as we breathe in a natural, harmonised way. But when we are stressed and pressured with time, tasks or our thoughts which happens often, we tend to breathe differently - faster, shallow, paused, through the mouth. Normal breathing is so important for our mental and physical wellbeing and ability to deal with both acute or daily and chronic stress, that it is the first aid strategy every person needs to keep in mind and practice, practice whenever it is possible.

From our work we have noticed that today's teenagers and young people, living under pressure of many expectations to do well and manage their responsibilities and look "cool" along the way, are breathing like they are constantly stressed. This is the reason why educating them about the importance of conscious breathing is the basic stress-reducing practice.

Young people with overwhelming schedules can practise conscious breathing just to have a break, but with regular exercising plus some practices for prolongation of breath or visualisations, they can improve thinking in general, their attention, concertation, perception, higher up stress tolerance, lessen down anxiety and improve sleep and general mood. All this lessens their vulnerability in stressing situations.

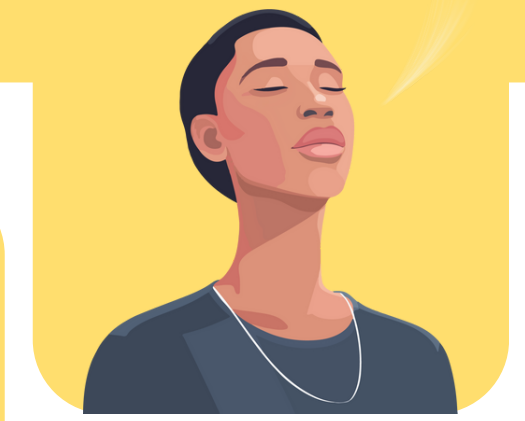


## Conscious breathing - stress first aid

Our body can be one super attuned machine. When we INHALE we actually activate that machine with engagement of the sympathetic nervous system. Breathing in energises us and we are ready to fight or run or whatever is necessary. When we EXHALE we relax because our other nervous system turns on - parasympathetic, and we feel safe, we rest, let go and digest.

With every breath we SWITCH between activation and relaxation. We take in oxygen for energy, we breathe out carbon dioxide. “When we pay attention to our breath, when we take a deeper inhale and an extended exhale, this rest-and-digest system can override our fight-or-flight system, sending the message to parts of the body readying stress defences that all is, in fact, fine.” (Garret, 2022).

Balance between two is what the organism needs and it's called NATURAL breathing. Consciously breathing means to keep this natural rhythm even under stress when there is tendency to shallow and uneven breathing. Some practices go further if we need to lessen anxiety attacks and suggest prolong exhaling - which brings more calmness. Deep (abdominal) and conscious breathing harmonises the work of the whole organism and that way has a positive effect not only on our physic as well on our emotions, thinking and behaviour.



**BODY:** Divining with awareness into our body while consciously breathing in and out relaxes the body zones with higher tension, brings more oxygen with more blood stream, nutrition to organs and consequently better health.

**THOUGHTS:** Conscious breathing expands awareness, improves attention and memory, takes the energy of draining thoughts and brings revitalisation by acknowledging them and letting go of them, brings clarity to our mind.

**EMOTIONS:** Balanced breathing calms down the body, reduces emotional reaction to feelings by acknowledging their presence and accepting all feelings as integral part of us without suppressing them which usually causes some psychosomatic or psychological problems

**BEHAVIOUR:** Relaxed body, clear positive thoughts and emotional calmness improves general well being, healthy attitude toward ourselves and supportive relation toward others.



## Different breathing exercises:

**A.** Conscious breathing to calm down: This practice aims to lessen intensive emotions such as anxiety or anger so it needs to be adapted for individual formulas. For some it will be four seconds inhaling, five for holding and 7 for exhaling for others maybe 5-5-8 or 4-7-8. What is important is that the person feels comfortable and repeats the exercise at least 4 times.

*“Put one hand on your chest and other on your belly, start taking deep breaths, inhale through your nose, exhale through the mouth (like you are blowing the candle) and feel the air raising your stomach and your chest. Count less for breath in, make a pause and take a longer breath out.”*

**B.** Mindful breathing to relax and clear your mind - The more you practise, the better effects this type of relaxation has. If repeated regularly (minimum 4-5 times a week at the beginning and then less for 4-6 weeks) it can improve cognitive functions, awareness and general mood.



*“Sit or lay down, relaxed, notice the sound of your breathing and focus on the air coming through your nose, mouths, going down inside feeling in your lungs and raising up your stomach. Slowly exhale through your mouth and repeat this 7-10 times. I*

*t is possible to count down from 10 to 0 with each inhale and exhale you go the number down. With numbers going down, you can practise becoming more and relaxed. If any thought interrupts us just notice it and wait till your attention goes back to breathing.*

*Then you continue. When you reach 0 you can say “I am relaxed and calm. My body is relaxed and I feel peaceful.”*

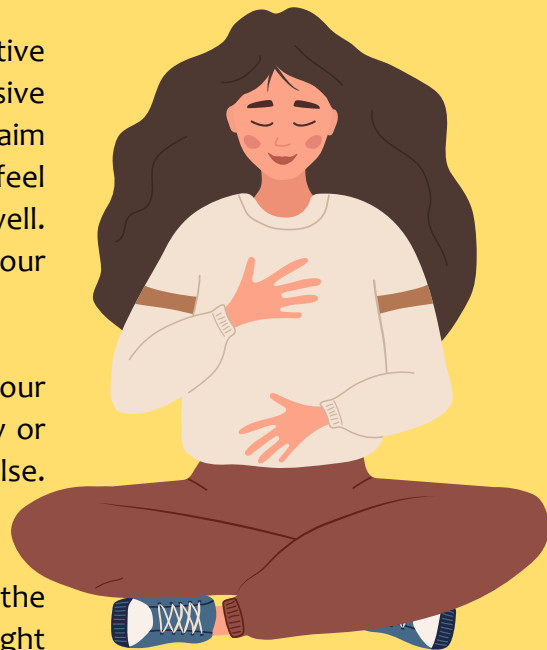


## 5.2. Body relaxation techniques (meditation, soothing senses)

There are many different ways of self-care meditative practices. Some of them are: autogenic training, progressive muscle relaxation, quick or deep mindful relaxations. They aim at calming us down through relaxing the body but we feel deeply rested after them because they clear our mind as well. It is a combination of conscious breathing and focusing on our body in different ways.

What actually happens is that while we bring to our awareness the way we breath and feel or sense our body or what surrounds it, our mind cannot think of anything else. Back in 19.

William James brought the far east philosophy into the western scientific approach to the human mind as he thought that when we direct our attention to one simple mental or sensual content it calms down our thoughts as we can not have other (complex or provoking) thoughts in our mind at the same time. And it is that simple why meditations work.



**A.** Body (scan) meditations-bringing awareness to any single part of a body, noticing any aches, pains, tension, or general discomfort. Staying present with and breathing into these sensations can help bring relief to our minds and bodies by evolving our relationship to pain, aches, and discomfort.

When practised on regular bases it is not only that it reduces stress and teaches us to be grounded in presence, meditations bring greater levels of mindfulness. This means that by focusing on our body we practise our cognition such as observing thoughts and feelings and not reacting to them stressfully.

*“With your eyes closed, start at the top of your head and mentally “scan” down your body. Bring your awareness to your head and neck, and notice if you feel any feelings, sensations, or discomfort. Does that area feel relaxed or tense? Comfortable or uncomfortable? Energetic or tired? Repeat this practice for your shoulders, arms, hands, chest, back, hips, legs, feet, and so on — taking about 20-30 seconds to focus on each body part.*



When you encounter areas of tension during the scan, don't struggle. Instead, focus your attention on them and breathe. Try to visualise the tension leaving your body. Take note of your observations and when thoughts or feelings arise, return to the area of the body where you last left off. Don't try to change anything — you are simply building a picture of how the body feels right now, in the moment.”- from Headspace

**B.** 5 senses soothing meditation or self care practice-in stressful situations when we have difficulties to cope with emotions we try to calm ourselves down to bring us back to a calmer and balanced state. Our five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch can be an effective means to manage stress because it is our primary way of reaching comfort and safety.

People can have a Self care tool box in their room with objects that they like to smell, watch, music they like to hear or material to touch.

Sometimes it is just important to know that taking a warm bath or petting a cat is actually your self care ritual. If you can not reach for “objects” to soothe your senses, it is always possible to do a meditation.

*Put some music behind, something different, new. Breathe deeply. Notice the air entering in and going out of your body. Release the tension out of your body. When you encounter a tightness in your body, relax. Starting from the top, acknowledge each of your senses. Eyes: Consider if you see anything with your eyes closed.*

*Do you see colours? Shapes? An image? If so, what does it mean to you? Nose: Soak in the room's aroma.*

*What do you smell? Is it only one thing or a combination of many? Skin: How do your clothes feel on your body? What about the thing you put in your lap? What other things feel like that?*

*Ears: Is the meditation music affecting you? Can you parse the different notes? Do you feel it flow through your body? - inspired by Mindful Zen*

### 5.3. Body posture (and physical contact)

A hug is a universal human thing. All around the world we hug each other when we feel good and even more when we feel down. No matter if we share happiness or sadness with someone, hugging both sides benefits almost equally. Receiving hugs when we experience something painful reduces stress through support by touch. But, when we touch others, by giving a hug stress level reduces in us, as well.

Since Covid-19 pandemic this behaviour of ours has been most deprived. Keeping the social distance made some (young) people much more vulnerable to cope with stress. Solitary, online learning and communicating reduced what we naturally need-a human touch.

Not only Pandemic, some modern social conventions often keep people at a “safe” distance from each other. And that’s ok. But, we can always start with our friends and family, people we trust. Science says we need “4 hugs a day for survival... 8 hugs a day for maintenance and...12 hugs a day for growth.” It is possible that there is no precise number, but as much as we can get and give has a positive effect on our brain and body. It reduces pain, fears, improves communication, and makes us happier and healthier.

In cases when we are alone and experience intense stress symptoms or anxiety attacks overwhelmed by thoughts and emotions, it is possible to “hold” yourself for a moment or two. This can sound weird, especially when you share this technique with young people but embracing yourself improves self confidence that our body can hold whatever we feel and think in that moment. And from that point, the person starts to calm down, breathe and move.



**A. Self-embrace position:** put your right hand under the left pitfall, your left hand on the right shoulder and gently hug yourself. You can feel your heart beating more evenly, you can feel you breathe in...and continue with conscious breathing exercise...

**B. Calming down position:** put your hand on the forehead, other hand on chest - focus on hands, what goes on between two, change of temperature, wait for some kind of shift...Breathe...Then lower your right hand on your stomach and focus on breathing...





## 5.4. Body movement (and nature)

We all know that regular exercise prevents and regulates many mental and physical health problems and that is the most helpful for stress reduction. Some people really enjoy it, some not that much so it is important to find your own way of keeping the body active no matter if it is kick-boxing or yoga.

However, what you can always recommend to young people is that when feeling stressed or anxious at the moment and want to calm down immediately, if possible not to stay in that situation and just go out for a walk. 10 minutes will serve to relieve the stress.

Half an hour walk in nature with paying attention to the breathing, observing paths and shapes around, can have a meditative, stress reducing, even healing effect.

Our positive response being connected with nature is evolutionary, it is a place where we have evolved. There we feel safe enough to be curious again, playful, free from judging ourselves or others.



## 6. Emotional intelligence as stress management strategy

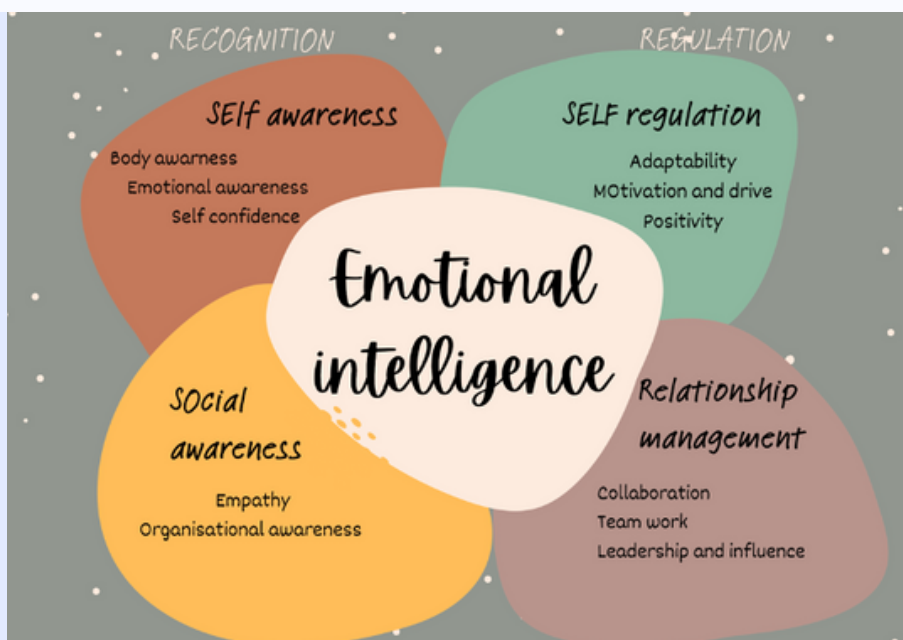
Faced with situations we perceive as stressful and as a threat, we react, mostly unconsciously emotionally.

Emotional reactions to stress come before we have “time to think”. It is because our “emotional brain” thinks faster. Often emotions arise before we are conscious of them, before our “higher brain” tunes in and we can think - rationally. As long as we are not aware enough about our emotions, we can not influence them and regulate them. To manage our emotional world and not control it or be controlled by it, it is necessary to cultivate our awareness about emotions. Only if we name them and know them, it is possible to “get the message” they carry to us.

This can be a lot for a generation of young people who think the need to look “cool”, feel “fine” and have a fear of showing anything else but their “perfect” self that does not allow anger, sadness, loneliness... When these emotions pile up they can grow so big to become real “stress monsters”, a creature of frustrations, rage, anxieties, disappointments, depression...all non-functional emotions. By developing the emotional intelligence of young people through social and emotional learning (SEL) they become more resilient and better equipped to manage their emotional world and more. What is SEL about?

SEL is a facilitated process that helps individuals, children, young people, adults, to develop their essential skills and competences to be able to understand and manage their emotions, build positive relationships, make responsible decisions and effectively navigate the challenges of life. SEL provides the bases for emotional wellbeing, social interactions and overall success including educational, professional or personal.

Daniel Goleman, in the book “Emotional intelligence” describes emotional intelligence through four dimensions:



Based on his model there are several SEL strategies that can be thought of and all have positive effects on persons' ability to cope with stress.

**1**

### **SELF AWARENESS**

Includes knowing how to recognize and understand your own emotions, strengths and weaknesses, values and goals. Means to be attuned with how you are feeling and why did that emotion appear.

**2**

### **SELF REGULATION**

Includes the ability to manage own emotions, impulses, behaviour. Means all possible strategies (body, emotional, cognitive) for dealing with stress and anxiety, frustrations and anger in healthy and constructive ways.

**3**

### **SOCIAL AWARENESS**

Includes the ability to recognize emotions of others with empathy. Means showing efforts to understand perspectives of others, respecting diversity and act attuned in human solidarity.

**4**

### **SOCIAL-RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT**

(including responsible decision making)  
Includes all skills applicable to establish healthy and meaningful relationships. Means being able to communicate in assertive way, listen actively, collaborate in teams, resolve conflicts, make ethical decisions and choices that prioritise own wellbeing as well as wellbeing of others

All of the above are equally important but self awareness is a first step to go. It is good to know that in challenging situations when we are faced with problems, conflicts or situations perceived as an attack, if we are not able to recognize and regulate our emotions, we can not understand others. Our empathy decreases in alarm stress mode. This is why it is so important to become emotionally literate to be able to respond in a positive, functional and healthier manner.

Goleman explains that the emotional mind saves valuable memories of what's important to us. It is like an "inner compass" which guides us, almost automatically, when something meaningful to us, something we believe in or we need, is endangered. "Compass" activates the body and emotional signals as messengers that we need to deal with something that kicks us out of our core and balance. Our emotions are trying to tell us different things and it is not intelligent to silent them.





Image:WholeHearted Resources

Emotional intelligence as an operational “cooperativa” between emotional, red (limbic) and rational, blue (prefrontal-neocortex) brains, make two minds humans have. These two minds can learn and create emotional and thinking habits which consequences can be as healthy as well unhealthy for us.

The good news is that emotional, as well as our social or creative intelligence, can be learnt through life and with age it can actually get better.

And it is not only that it gets better, with more emotionally intelligent responses to everyday life challenges, positive thinking habits and consequently more joy we get even healthier. As everything in life, the best is to start on time so it would be great if education, formal or non-formal, integrates social and emotional learning of children and young people. Activities that aim at discovering personal strengths or soft spots, help identity to develop, raise emotional-body awareness, enrich emotional vocabulary all lead to better self-compassion and empathy toward others.

By having deep self and social awareness, we create relationships and communities more interconnected, supportive and available for their members. This kind of environment raises back the resilience of individuals. Because resilience as our capacity to recover from adversities “is related to our inner strengths (self-confidence, problem solving and positive mind set) as with having support networks around us (warmth and empathy in relationships, expressiveness in friendships) (Ilić and Pejovic, 2021).



The essence of our approach around which we have developed elements of the curriculum regarding emotional intelligence and especially SEL for self strategies can be described by the acronym RAIN. RAIN appeared around 20 years ago as a form of meditation presented by Michele McDonald to help deal with difficult emotions (Bastos, 2022). Today, it can be found in variations but it is still used as a meditative practice. In our design of social and emotional learning activities (SEL) aiming to develop the emotional intelligence of young people we used the logic of RAIN to work on and raise emotional awareness and regulation of any particular emotion.

What we communicate with it is that young people need to be taught and encouraged to embrace emotions without judgement if they are good or bad but as a fundamental part of life experiences carrying us some message we should listen and then they transition. Important message to remember is **“IT IS OK TO FEEL, but YOU ARE NOT WHAT YOU FEEL”**. There is a difference between:” I feel sad” and “I am sad (person)”.

### **R - RECOGNIZE**

What feeling is coming up? This mental process although seems simple is of great importance because by labelling emotions it is possible to regulate our responses. All those emotions left unnamed beneath our conscious level influence our moods and thoughts but can't be changed. So, first to do with young people enable them to: Name it.

### **A - ACKNOWLEDGE**

Accept any feeling that's coming. This is a place where we learn that all emotions, negative ones as well, are normal to experience. It does not mean that we like to feel that way. It does not mean that just because we feel frightened or anxious we automatically need to behave from this state. Pause. In case we do not accept the existence of some emotions, ignore them or press them they can become destructive. As well, once we acknowledge them, we will know it will pass just like the previous one and that we can handle them. “Yes, that is the anger I feel”. Create an environment for young people to realise life is full of ups and downs and be there when they share their “downs” so: Experience.

### **I - INVESTIGATE**

Look at your feeling with great curiosity as a detective or scientist would do with its subject - follow it through the body, what feelings it makes and where, what thoughts it provokes, when it is coming, in what situations? Why do I think I feel this way? What is my need that is left unsatisfied? What do I believe in, value and see as may be endangered? Guide young people in this search and help them learn about needs to be able to understand the story behind the emotions. Observe all.

### **N - NON-IDENTIFICATION**

Let go with these feelings and thoughts you have witnessed. They are just feelings and thoughts. As we created them, we can create different ones. Become aware of all that is happening inside you but let other things enter your awareness. Emotions do not last long if they rise up on a conscious level. Come back to the present moment.



Having in mind this kind of flow young people can be offered with activities in different areas that all aim at increasing their emotional intelligence, skills and abilities such as:

1. Enable exploration of young peoples' identities by answering such questions as "What makes me me?" This introspective and explorative work can start with simple things like what young people like to do, what is always easy for them, who they admire, what they dream about, what are their strengths and their weaknesses, what makes them proud about themselves, what they believe about the world... The more young people become aware of their uniqueness, strengths and weaknesses they can more accurately evaluate themselves and make plans on how to gain different skills and abilities. Having realistic smaller steps to achieve goals, finish the job or overcome adversities, brings small victories and raises confidence.

The more young people get to know themselves, the less can other people's opinion or peer pressure influence their decisions. They will have their "inner compass" to navigate personal, social or professional life aligned with their core beliefs and be better equipped to deal with stressors.

2. Enlarge emotional vocabulary - Start with primary emotions happiness, sadness, fear and anger then enlarge the vocabulary. For this it is interesting to explore the Robert Plutchik Emotional wheel model for identification of many different emotions. Plutchik believed that humans experience eight primary emotions, and each of these emotions has a polar opposite that is also included on the wheel:

## EMOTION WHEEL



- Joy, and its opposing emotion, sadness.
- Fear, and its opposing emotion, anger.
- Anticipation, and its opposing emotion, surprise.
- Disgust, and its opposing emotion, trust.

3. Raise emotional awareness - offer activities in which young people can be “emotional detectives” on the task to create “body maps” of emotions. Offer them to imagine how they are investigating in detail everything concerning When, Where, How and Why regarding any emotion. It can be anger or fear as well as joy. It is important for them to become aware of what kind of situations trigger particular emotion, how they sense it in their body, recognise different levels of intensity in emotion, different words they use to name it, what they are thinking when they feel that way and how they behave or verbalise.

This is just an example of guided visualisation for exercising emotional awareness of anger based on which then regulation follows:

Where do you feel anger starts, the first sensations appear? Draw the first signs of distress? Visualise it, its shapes, colour.

Follow it closely. How does it change, is it growing, changing colour, shape, where does it move through the body?


If it changes, can you associate it with different terms? Your anger vocabulary sounds like:....

When it hits your mind - what thoughts do you have?

What happened at the end? Does it stop inside or outside? Implode or Explode.

When it moves out - how do you look? What is the sentence that goes out?





4. Practise emotional regulation - many exercises for emotional regulation are focused on learning how to keep physical signs of distress on a manageable level through breathing and body relaxation. Mindfulness meditations such as “Body scan” turns out to be great not only for exercising our awareness and focus but as well for “discovering” our early body signals of uncomfortable emotions. This gives a person more time to respond before emotion overwhelms and strong reactions govern behaviour. Consequently, how we regulate our emotional response affects relationships with others.



**I SPEECH**

**When** ( I see, hear...describe the situation)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**I feel...**

\_\_\_\_\_

**because I need**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Can you/I..What if?** (suggestion...)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Besides regulating our body and mind, emotional regulation relies on a deeper look and understanding the meaningful connection between the emotion and unsatisfied need beneath our feelings. Discovering that need, gives a person freedom to think about different ways to fulfil the need and feel better.

Knowing our needs or beliefs from where our emotions originate, we can motivate ourselves to stay gritty, come up with a plan or calmly and clearly communicate our standpoints to others. Very often this kind of communication is called I-speech or I-statement. But, to make it loud, people first need to practise it as a way of self compassionate inner talk, with no judgement, no good or bad emotions. Self compassion and empathy are two sides of the same coins.





6. Enable participation in discussions, teamwork or problem solving activities so young people can see how others react to them, practise collaboration, showing solidarity, offering support, asking for help, listening and expressing themselves, accepting different opinions, being frustrated and staying tolerant, practice leading.

These topics are often covered at the beginning of every training when it is important to build a group. Activities used as ice breakers, cooperative or team problem solving exercises usually give enough for experiential learning about team roles, individual differences and diversity, affective communication, decision making.

7. Learn communication skills and how to give empathy - working together in a group already enables practising communication but specific topics to strengthen young people in this area can be: saying NO and keep my boundaries safe, understand how our emotions are connected with our needs as well to try associate feelings and needs of others, understand difference between wishes and needs, explore different ways how the same need can be satisfied in many ways, practice understanding other people paying attention to nonverbal communication, use words for emotions both for own and other people's feelings or just simple ask others how they feel concerning some situation, communicate with understanding how people feel and what emotions are important in their decision-making process.



*“Young people who are supported in their emotional literacy tolerate frustration better, get into fewer fights and engage in less self-destructive behaviour than the ones who do not have a strong foundation. These young people are also healthier, less lonely, less impulsive, more focused, and have greater academic achievement. Safe, caring, and well-managed learning environments are critical components of this emotional learning”. (Atanasov D., 2021)*

## 8. Stress Management Cognitive strategies

Key concepts in stress management skills include the ways in which an individual assesses stressors and their own coping sources. Because variations in different forms of coping with stress can have different consequences on the adaptation process, it is important to consider and use models and approaches that encompass the multidimensionality of the coping concept.

This suggests that coping and coping methods should never be isolated from the whole that includes **emotions-cognition-social relationships** (Lazarus, 1991), especially in adolescents whose intense developmental changes require it. Some aspects of an individual's personality (temperament, self-esteem, problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills) and aspects of the social environment (adult support, access to information) are of significant importance for coping. Essentially, all cognitive strategies involve strengthening the individual's personal response to the situation.

In a state of stress or experiencing a stressful situation, the human brain does not function in the way it is 'used to.' Therefore, it is often said that individuals in a state of stress feel a 'fog' in their heads, a sense of being lost, absence, lack of concentration and attention, negativity, loss of objectivity, precisely due to the overload of information or events that have befallen them.

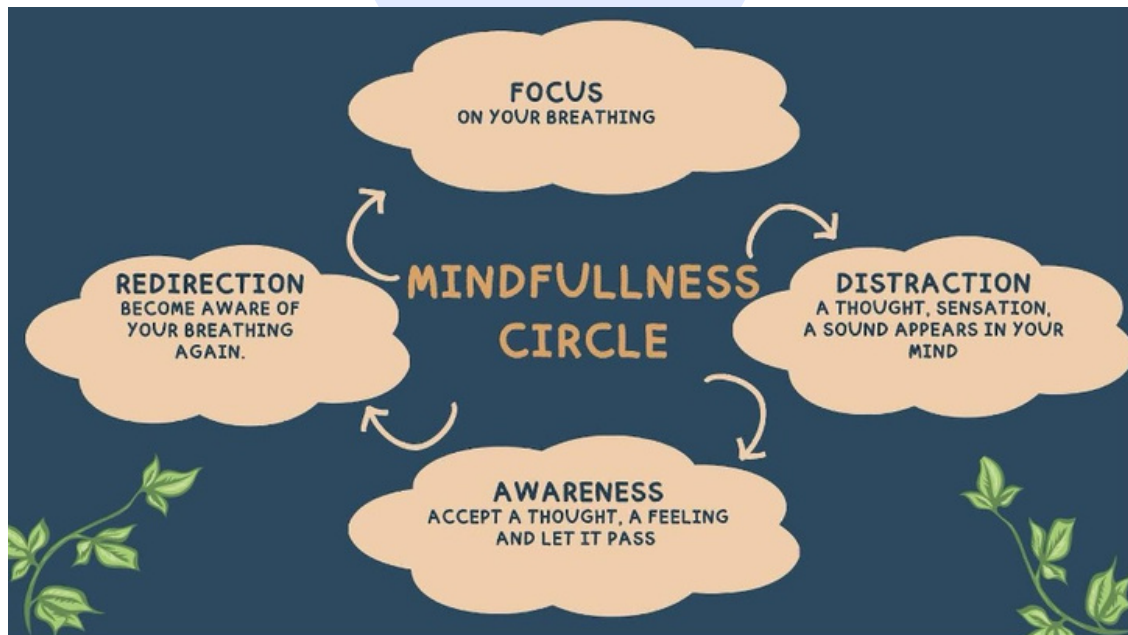
Typically, alongside cognitive symptoms of stress, physical and emotional responses of the body occur, which need to be initially calmed and brought to a level of normal functioning in order to implement other strategies to reduce stress symptoms.

### Cognitive coping strategies help in:

- recognizing and changing maladaptive, dysfunctional thoughts into functional ones, re-evaluating them in reality to reduce or completely eliminate the emotional and physical discomfort caused by these thoughts;
- gaining a better understanding of one's own behaviour;
- acquiring adequate skills for problem-solving;
- developing a greater sense of confidence in one's own abilities;
- confronting fears instead of avoiding them;
- learning skills to calm the mind and relax the body.



**Mindfulness technique** - used to maintain psychological well-being. By practising this technique, which contributes to stress reduction, an individual's concentration and focus are increased, awareness deepens, and the capacity for control over thought processes expands. Full awareness implies a person's ability to be fully conscious of themselves and the situation they are in, while avoiding being overly affected by everyday events.



**Recognizing and Resolving Negative Thoughts** - write down all your thoughts that you consider negative on paper, ask yourself if they are realistic. Once you evaluate these negative thoughts, try to replace them with more positive or realistic ones. An example of this coping method could be: 'This is really too hard for me, and I don't think I have the capacity to handle it anymore,' try replacing it with 'Yes, it's difficult, but I can do it, I will do my best to cope with it.' By regularly practising such positive thoughts, you train your brain to think in a positive and productive way.



**Practising Assertiveness** - by practising assertiveness, you help control your own life and strengthen the feeling of empowerment by reducing the impact of external stress. The first step of this exercise involves recognizing situations where assertiveness is needed (demands from the environment, neglecting your own needs and boundaries). In such situations, when you recognize a specific situation, it is necessary to be direct and clear in setting your own boundaries. Feel free to say NO when you feel the need to do so in order to protect yourself and your needs.

Practising self-care involves prioritising your needs and demands, ultimately reducing stress levels.



**Practising Reframing** is used to change perspective, i.e., looking at the situation in which a person finds themselves. This method helps to view the situation from a positive perspective because, in a state of stress, individuals usually focus on a negative view of the situation. Try to examine the situation that is causing you stress.



Write down everything that comes with that situation, thoughts, feelings (which are usually negative). Ask yourself what other, more useful and productive explanations of the situation could be, what you can say to yourself that sounds more positive about the given situation or thought.

Try to verbalise the situation in a positive and realistic language. By practising new perspectives daily through verbalization, writing, or visualisation, we enable ourselves to cope more easily with stressful situations or events.

What is very important to mention regarding cognitive coping strategies for stress is also self-confidence in one's own strengths, as well as the values and principles that guide us.

These two concepts fall under an individual's **internal compass**, which needs to be raised to consciousness because it is what guides the person. An individual's awareness of the importance of possessing personal strengths and competencies, abilities, and their achievements is extremely important for easier navigation and response in a stressful situation. The further an individual is from their "internal compass," the less aware they are of their capabilities and values, the greater the chance that the experience of a stressful situation and the response to it will be poorer.

This part about owning and being aware of one's strengths is inversely proportional to the fear of making mistakes. The fear of making mistakes and everything that follows from that error can be extremely stressful for a person, especially for an adolescent who, during that period, seeks confirmation and approval from the social environment. It is crucial to understand that mistakes are welcome, that they need to be accepted, and that they are part of human experiential learning. This helps reduce the level of stress associated with mistakes and ensures a more positive and appropriate response.



# CURRICULUM

## Objectives:

### Overall objectives of the training course based on proposed curriculum:

- To explore and get to know different realities regarding existence of positive educational mental health programs and stress management activities for young people in our communities;
- To promote youth work setting and NFE values and principles as an empowering environment for strengthening resilience of young people and learning different coping emotional and cognitive skills;
- To explore and discuss causes of stress young people are facing today;
- To learn, discuss and understand basic concepts behind stress management;
- To promote and introduce concept of emotional intelligence and how to build it through social and emotional learning (SEL) of young people;
- To raise the competences of youth workers to be actively engaged in designing and implementing residential/virtual activities for enhancing emotional and body awareness and regulation;
- To raise the competences of youth workers to be actively engaged in designing and implementing residential/virtual activities for enhancing cognitive strategies for coping with stress young people face;
- To share concrete relaxation practices and techniques useful for prevention of burn out and enhancing wellbeing both of youth workers and young people they work with;
- To raise competences for adaptation of coaching or psychology based tools for NFE/youth work for stress management skills development of young people from different background;
- To plan, design and apply concrete workshops related to topic of stress for youth workers and youngsters using SEL activities;
- To build a community of youth workers, educators, trainers for seeking support and building resilience of each other.



## Agenda of the curriculum of the Training Course

- Agenda for one day training.

### Training course session outlines

- Stress management and Emotional Intelligence (EI) - Virtual environment

Name of the session	Stress management and Emotional Intelligence (EI)
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To increase participants understanding of emotional intelligence and how SEL (social emotional learning) relates to stress management</li><li>• To introduce Daniel Goleman model of emotional intelligence, skills and competences represented by 4 dimensions</li><li>• To point out at importance of SEL activities offered to children and young people (emotional literacy and vocabulary development)</li><li>• To introduce RAIN logical flow for emotional regulation (not only mindfulness practice)</li><li>• To enable practising emotional self awareness as a bases of emotional management</li><li>• To bring understanding about mechanisms of primary emotions in particular anger or fear and enable personal investigation of it</li><li>• To practise emotional regulation through self compassion (connecting feelings and needs)</li><li>• To practise social awareness skill through giving empathy</li></ul> <p>To make connection between body relaxation and emotional regulation in the situations of acute stress</p>
Duration (in minutes)	180 min (90 min session, 30 min coffee break, 90 min session)

<p><b>Min and Max number of participants</b></p>	<p>10-20</p>
<p><b>Resources/materials/equipment needed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoom or Gather Town</li> <li>• Padlet, or Google Drive, or JamBoard</li> <li>• Feelings and needs cards (from Marshall Rosenberg: Non-violent communication)</li> <li>• Drawings of shapes of human figures (as handouts to sent to participants)</li> <li>• Jam Board with drawing of an Anger Iceberg</li> <li>• Markers and pens</li> <li>• Presentation of Emotional intelligence 4 dimensions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rules and description step-by-step (content elements, methods)</b></p>	<p><b>1. How are you feeling today? - 20 min</b></p> <p>Share on Padlet or in the folder in Google Drive Feelings and needs cards. One folder contains Feelings cards and other Needs cards. Or you can make 2 Jam Boards - one with Feelings cards and other with Needs cards. Trainer asks participants to go through them and invites everyone to finish the following sentence: “I feel today ... because my need for ... is fulfilled” by choosing cards that are true for them.</p> <p>One by one we share in plenary.</p> <p><b>2. True or Not true - Emotional intelligence - 30 min</b></p> <p>Trainer prepares statements in the Mentimeter (or Socrative or Slido). There are several options on Mentimeter, but we often use the Paragraph slide and turn on only the like and dislike buttons: like is for agree and dislike for disagree with each statement. Trainer also reads the statements aloud and according to personal opinion participants choose to TRUE (agree or like button) or NOT TRUE (disagree or dislike button). A short expression of standpoints follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotions need to be kept under rational control.</li> <li>• When we make big decisions, the mind needs to go before the heart.</li> <li>• Emotional learning is a key to who we are (identity)</li> </ul>



**Rules and description  
step-by-step  
(content elements, methods)**

- An emotionally intelligent person is a very good person
- Daniel Goleman, author of the book “Emotional intelligence” invented EI.
- Emotional intelligence is so important that it influences 80% of our professional success.
- Emotionally intelligent people are better equipped to fight stress.
- Environment equally affects both persons' IQ and EQ.
- Emotional intelligence model has four dimensions and 12 competences.

**3. Introduction to Daniel Goleman model of emotional intelligence - 10 min**

Trainer shortly introduces all 4 EI dimensions:

Self and Social Awareness and Self regulation and Relationship Regulation (management). In addition, she gives a brief explanation about the need for balance and “cooperation” between emotional and rational “brains” in stress situations and how learning different emotional-social skills affects our “toolbox” to deal with daily or other types of stress.

**4. Emotional alphabet competition - 30 min**

Participants are divided into 4 groups/teams. Trainers divide participants in teams before the session and make a google word document for each team. For this exercise put each team in one breakout room and send them the link for their google word. Assignment: teams have a task to make an alphabet of feelings - finding for each letter one emotion.

Presentations with the whole group .

Debriefing:

- Why is it important to develop emotional vocabulary?
- How many are there universal feelings or primary emotions?
- Let’s get to know some...

**COFFEE BREAK 30 min**



**Rules and description  
step-by-step  
(content elements, methods)**

**5. [Copy of Ice breaker Say the colour](#)**

You can use this exercise or choose another that is about impulse control.

Open the link with the exercise in Slideshow mode and share your screen with participants.

What does this exercise have to do with anger management?

What are the factors that influence what we do with feelings in our lives?

What can be the difference between the words emotional reaction/control/respond/regulation/management?

**6. Anger detective - 60 min**

After introducing anger management as something we learn from childhood through play and watching adults' behaviour, the trainer explains that anger is the “most” potent emotion often “shows” in the acute fight/flight stress phase... This activity aims to detect and follow how energy flows through the organism all the way until it, usually “explode” or “implode”, depends on a person.

**Guiding questions:**

Can you remember the last time you could not control your anger? Try to go back in your mind and look at yourself as if you spy yourself with some supereyes or some detective toolkit.

Each participant gets a human figure drawing (as a handout sent in the chat which participants can print or write and draw on their computer) and “investigates” how anger moves through their body. After each question, the trainer waits a few minutes so people can write and draw what they have become emotionally aware of...

Describe the trigger situation for you.

Where do you feel anger starts, the first sensations appear? Draw the first signs of distress? Visualise it, its shapes, colour.

Follow it closely. How does it change, is it growing, changing colour, shape, where does it move through the body?

If it changes, can you associate it with different terms? Your anger vocabulary...

**Rules and description  
step-by-step  
(content elements, methods)**

When it hits your mind - what thoughts do you have?  
What happened at the end? Does it stop inside or outside?  
Implode or Explode.

When it moves out - how do you look? What is the sentence  
that goes out? How do you behave in anger?

Why do you think your anger appeared? What was  
endangered? Why do these types of defence mechanisms  
arise?

**Anger Iceberg Debriefing:**

Participants are divided in breakout rooms in pairs.  
Participants present their drawings in pairs trying to listen  
to each other carefully.

Trainer collects different words used after the  
conversations in pairs and writes them in the Google Jam  
Board where the drawing of Iceberg is.

What different feelings have you used for describing this  
emotion? Maybe it has a different name when it just started  
and then at some moment becomes something else...?

Those words we write above the surface.

What's the first sign of anger you sense?

If you could take some action at that moment, how would  
that look, what would you say?

If you could react "on time", acknowledging your emotion,  
how would this change your situation from what happened  
at the end in reality?

Participants go back to the Padlet of Google Drive or Jam  
Board with the Needs cards, so everybody can check them  
and look for the one they think fits in their partner's  
story... My pair felt angry... because he believed/needed...  
Looking for the story behind the emotion often leads to  
better understanding of a person and others.

Trainer now again uses Anger Iceberg and writes on space  
beneath the surface where primary emotions and beliefs  
are.

**Rules and description  
step-by-step  
(content elements, methods)**

Let's look for the need behind the primary emotion and see the difference... Participants share their cards - the needs they selected for their partner.

What can be behind or below the anger? We write on Iceberg.

Trainer summarise about:

Emotional awareness - Recognize early signs.

Emotional management - Breathing and body movement.

Take a pause.

Regulation strategies - R.A.I.N.

**7. List What to do and What not to do when working on a topic? - 20 min**

Divide participants in breakout rooms in small groups of 5 persons. Participants discuss what are their personal/professional limitations in relation to work on development of skills and knowledge in the area of emotional intelligence of young people. Participants brainstorm and freely share their fears and dilemmas.

Based on previous sharing, groups get the task to make a list of All to do and Not to do as a facilitator, trainer or a youth worker when dealing with the topic?

Presentations follow.

**Questions for additional  
debriefing and reflections**

1. What were some common themes or insights that emerged during your group discussions about personal and professional limitations in relation to emotional intelligence development?

2. How might you navigate situations where your own emotions become activated while working with young people on stress management? What strategies could you employ to regulate your own emotions in those moments?

3. In what ways can you ensure inclusivity and cultural sensitivity when implementing stress management and emotional intelligence activities with diverse groups of young people?

### **Modifications for virtual environment**

- Utilise online platforms like Kahoot!, Mentimeter, or JamBoard for interactive activities.
- Use Zoom chat to facilitate activity such as Emotional alphabet- Choose the letter and see who will be your fastest participant that writes the emotion beginning on the same letter in the chat.
- For True or false about emotional intelligence (or any other topic) you can write a statement per page in the Jamboard. Each page is separated with a line on the left and right side and invites the participants to post their names on the TRUE or FALSE side of the page depending on their standpoint about the statement.
- Use breakout rooms or virtual environments like GatherTown for group work and discussions.
- Adapt presentation materials and resources for digital sharing.

### **Tips for trainers/facilitators**

- Participants will get the opportunity to clarify their beliefs and discuss standpoints about emotional intelligence and how important it is for the achievements and attitudes toward different aspects of life.
- Understand well all 4 dimensions of the Goleman model and allow participants to ask questions after presentation for any clarifications.
- Have as many breaks as your group needs or energisers especially if it is indeed after Anger detective activity before you summarise.
- For an explanation of emotional regulation read about R.A.I.N. method of meditation because it will give you the bases for understanding both self compassion and empathy.



### Expected outcomes

- Participants will expand their emotional literacy and understand the reasons behind it and the importance of emotional vocabulary development.
- Participants will know about the Daniel Goleman model of Emotional intelligence.
- Participants will be able to practise different methods for raising emotional awareness and will be inspired to develop new ones.
- Through understanding the connection between feelings and needs, participants will realise how emotional regulation happens as a consequence of deeper understanding of one's needs (by giving empathy to yourself).
- Raised understanding of anger and practice anger management.
- Feel more comfortable when young people show angry behaviour. Participants will be able to recognize these signs of anger and help young people to regulate it.
- Participants will understand better the dynamic of anger and the importance of early recognition of its body signs to be able to accept the feeling as any other and regulate it to avoid further tension.

### Other comments



➤ **Stress management and cognitive based strategies I and II - Virtual environment**

<p><b>Name of the session</b></p>	<p><b>Stress management and cognitive based strategies I and II</b></p>
<p><b>Objectives</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To raise awareness about importance of exercising positive (growth) mindset</li> <li>• To explore “inner compass” of persons’ values, beliefs, character strengths</li> <li>• To increase readiness for change in mental habits toward ones which strengthen resilience and lead to healthier responds to the adversities in life</li> <li>• To offer space for observing negative thoughts (self observations) in a mindful way and practice not to react on them</li> <li>• To practise reframing of negative thoughts and say NO to yourself when we think “unhealthy”</li> <li>• To challenge personal attitudes toward making mistakes and perfectionism (which can lead to stress and burnout)</li> <li>• To practise how to “hold“ personal boundaries with saying NO in an assertive way</li> <li>• To discover how “miswantings” in 21st century society influences well being and how “science of happiness” can raise resilience to stress and in a long run keep our physical and mental health</li> </ul>
<p><b>Duration (in minutes)</b></p>	<p>180 min (90 min session, 30 min coffee break, 90 min session)</p>
<p><b>Resources/materials/equipment needed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toilet paper and pens</li> <li>• Cards of feelings and needs</li> <li>• Printed <a href="#">Growth mindset and reframing.jpg.jpg</a></li> <li>• Printed <a href="#">My-Core-Values-Worksheets.pdf</a></li> </ul>

**Rules and description  
step-by-step  
(content elements, methods)**

**Toilet paper game - 20 min**

First round: Say to participants to get a roll of toilet paper and ask everyone to tear as many paper parts they want. Wait while everyone decides and acts upon instruction.

Observe people's reaction.

Second round: Everyone takes a pen and must write one of his/her/their strengths/abilities/powers per paper they took. They can think what makes them proud of themselves.

Debriefing:

- How would you describe your attitude when we started with activity?
- What do you usually think when faced with something that comes as a surprise?
- What would you say after this experience are curiosity or open mindedness some of your strengths?
- What else is there in your papers?

In plenary participants present what they think are their strengths.

- How often do we have opportunities, especially in educational settings, to explore our strengths or weaknesses?
- In what way are these beliefs about US connected with stress management?

**2. “It’s not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are.” - Roy Diseny - 20 min**

Share with participants on Padlet or Google Drive or chat worksheet My core values.

Participants work individually on the worksheet My core values. They need to look for their most important values, discover their “moral compass” and try to recognize it in some decisions they have made. Additionally, they are asked to think how they can use these core values for future decisions to guide them.

**Rules and description  
step-by-step  
(content elements, methods)**

Following this, split participants into breakout rooms in a group of 3 where they need to share the top 5 values they have written and the one which is their soft spot especially when working with young people. When back in plenum ask a discussion question: How is one's "moral compass" connected with persons' resilience?

**3. 1,2,3 celebrate mistakes - 15 min**

Trainer divides participants into breakout rooms in pairs. Instruction is very simple: To count in pairs till 3 one following another. Every time a pair makes a mistake, they need to yell very loudly and show the movements of celebration.

Second round, they stay in the same pairs, but this time need to swap number one with sound.

Third round, they stay in the same pairs, but this time need to swap number two with a hand gesture.

Fourth round, they stay in the same pairs, but this time need to swap number three with a sound and a hand gesture.

Trainers go into the breakout rooms to check if participants are celebrating their mistakes.

Debriefing:

- How was it to celebrate mistakes?
- Why do mistakes need to be celebrated?
- Have you ever done that in real life? Why yes? Why not?
- How can we help young people unlearn to be afraid from making mistakes?

**4. INPUT You are not your thoughts - 15 min**

Trainer explains that cognitive self regulation starts with a belief that we are not our thoughts just as we are not our feelings. There is a distinction between "I feel sad" and "I am sad".



**Rules and description  
step-by-step  
(content elements, methods)**

The same analogy goes with thoughts. An average person thinks a lot of thoughts but they still remain to be just the products of our rational mind - not the reality itself. For us it is much better to think more positively because then we feel better. Still, many automatic negative thoughts about who we think we are appear as well and can do wrong to our self respect. How we feel about ourselves influence perception of stressful situation.

[Mindfulness: Observing A Train of Thoughts](#)

**5. Practising MINDFULNESS observation for managing negative thoughts - 20 min**

Trainer guides the meditation or play it:

[Leaves on a stream: Manage negative thoughts with this meditation exercise - Flow](#)

**6. Practising REFRAMING - 20 min**

Trainer gives explanation of difference between fix and growth mindset. Having in mind that these are results of learning, a fixed mindset can be unlearned.

Participants can choose what they prefer: to write one or two negative thoughts they had during meditation on separate papers and try to reframe them or use the Growth mindset worksheet.

Guiding questions:

- Describe the situations and the mood in which these thoughts pop up?
- Think of the evidence that supports that thought? How reasonable is this evidence?
- Now, look for evidence that contradicts this thought? Something that your good friend would tell you or a person you perceive as wise?
- Reframe: Look at the situation in a more positive and helpful way. For example “A mistake I made is my opportunity to learn.....”

**Rules and description  
step-by-step  
(content elements, methods)**

**7. ASSERTIVE NO - 50 min**

Divide participants into small groups of 4-5 people and assign each group to a breakout room.

1. In their small groups, participants share work-related situations that have caused stress or may lead to conflict with colleagues, clients, or young people coming to their activities.
2. Choose one situation from your small group and set a dialogue (scene) that describes the issue and relations. A person whose example you have chosen is a director and can not play him/her/they. Dialogues can last up to 2 min and need to stop at the moment of conflict arising.
3. Trainer asks each director: How do you feel and what would you like to say at this moment out loud? "Actor" performs. How does this sound to you?
4. Everybody who wants try to formulate assertive NO using I message:

When you ... (your observation of the situation)

I feel (or think) ... (emotion, thought)

I am saying NO because I need... (reason to say NO).

I would prefer that...

**8. Science of happiness and practising gratitude - 20 min**

[How to be happier in 5 steps with zero weird tricks | Laurie Santos](#)

After watching the video, participants make a gratitude card from the materials they have at home. List a minimum 10 things you are grateful for at the moment. Think of everything from this training that makes your abilities stronger to work on the topics of stress management with young people?

### Questions for additional debriefing and reflections

1. What cognitive strategies are closest to your thinking habits?
2. How can you transfer what you have practised to your daily work with young people?
3. What do you find difficult and can you think how to overcome that?

### Modifications for virtual environment

- After watching the video, facilitate discussion related to positive thinking, what does it mean, how to foster growth mindset and constructive thinking in young people [What to do if your inner voice is cruel | Ethan Kross](#)
- Examine reframing practices and mindful questions offered in following video [Examining Your Inner Critic For Young People](#)
- After watching the video facilitate the discussion around Misbeliefs about happiness in contemporary society and offer time for journaling about gratitude in life [How to be happier in 5 steps with zero weird tricks | Laurie Santos](#)

### Tips for trainers/facilitators

- For further understanding of Fix and Growth Mindset, you may offer this video summary of the book of Carol Dweck, author of the concepts [Growth Mindset by Carol Dweck \(animated book summary\) - Growth Mindset and Fixed Mindset](#)
- Changing thinking habits is not easy and takes weeks of practising. Additional reframing exercises can be offered. Participants can think of something they worry about. To practise positive thinking which can motivate us forward, one can instead of asking: What if this goes wrong? Ask: “What if this goes right”?
- Saying “yes” when we really mean “no” can lead to stress, resentment and anger.

### Tips for trainers/facilitators

- Example of I message:

Instead of “I hate it when you keep yelling at our volunteers.” - conflict arises with a fellow colleague.

When you yell at our volunteers, I feel angry because I believe everyone in the organisation needs to be treated with respect. I would prefer that you not raise your voice in my presence or in general at the office.”

Example of assertive setting of boundaries:

“I can see that this is important to you and I really want to help, but your shouting is making it difficult for me to do that. If you can stay calm, I will do my best to help”.

- If you do not have enough time to practise all techniques keep in mind that positive thinking can be done just by journaling for example. It is recommended to lead the whole session with a positive attitude and nice dose of humour.

### Expected outcomes

- Participants will develop a deeper understanding of the importance of maintaining a positive (growth) mindset in managing stress and overcoming challenges. They will recognize the role of mindset in shaping attitudes and responses to adversities, both personally and professionally.
- Participants will identify and articulate their core values, beliefs, and character strengths through self-reflection exercises. They will gain insights into how their values and strengths can serve as guiding principles in decision-making and problem-solving, enhancing resilience in the face of difficulties.
- Participants will acquire practical skills and strategies for reframing negative thoughts, promoting self-compassion, and fostering a growth mindset.
- Participants will gain insights into the science of happiness and well-being, including the role of gratitude, positive thinking, and meaningful connections in promoting mental health.

**Expected outcomes**

- Participants will reflect on their own thinking habits, attitudes toward mistakes, and approaches to self-care and stress management.
- They will identify areas for personal growth and development, as well as strategies for overcoming challenges and barriers to positive change.

**Other comments**



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