

MENTAL **HEALTH YOUTH** WORK

INSPIRATIONAL EVENT

REPORT

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

FINNISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

PROJECT REPORT: MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUTH WORK - INSPIRATIONAL EVENT

The "Mental Health in Youth Work - Inspirational Event" held in the Algarve Region, Portugal, 22. – 25. May 2023 was a collaborative initiative aiming to inspire mental health promotion in youth work. In total, the event garnered participation from 116 individuals, comprising 14 representatives from the National Agencies, a team of 16 members, along with 54 young people and 32 dedicated youth workers.

Overview:

The event encouraged participation from youth workers and young people to explore methods and practices promoting mental health. Noteworthy aspects included:

- Mental Health Awareness: Participants gained insights into mental health skills, wellbeing practices, and support methods for themselves and others.
- Focus Areas: The project focused on raising awareness, enhancing mental health literacy among youth workers, enabling youth participation, and increasing mental health-themed projects in European Youth Programmes.
- Workshops and Peer Interaction: Various workshops catered to both youth workers and young individuals. Young people contributed by sharing insights on how mental health should be addressed by youth workers and organizations.

Organizers and Co-Creators:

National Agencies and Teams: Cooperation involved national teams, support facilitators, and National Agencies from Finland, Norway, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Belgium, Hungary, Slovenia, Portugal, Spain, Serbia, and Turkey.
Coordinators: The Portuguese and Finnish National Agencies for Erasmus+ Youth / Sports and European Solidarity Corps led the event coordination.
The Core3 facilitators: Jan Lai, Susie Green, and Nerijus Kriauciunas, managed the event program.
The Fab4 support facilitators: Buzz Bury, Mónika Bölcskei, Árpád Bárnai, Hannaneh Mahmoudian. Logistic support team: Gonçalo Santos, Nuno Rodrigues, Joana Vilela
Communication team: Hilma Ruokolainen and Laura Mellanen
Event reporter: Karmen Murn

Engagement and social media:

The communication team engaged actively on social media platforms, sharing insights, participant artwork, and daily questions. The event hashtag #MentalHealthLTA was used extensively across Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (@europeanyouthfinland, Youth in Action Finland, @EDUFI_youth).

Content of the Inspirational event:

The subsequent document is a summary of the collective thoughts, emotions, ideas, and experiences shared by participants throughout the program. These reflections stem from the extensive online sessions and the preparatory meeting held in Poland. It merges both direct contributions from individuals and insights derived from the program's content and participant experiences.

Programme:

	22.5.2023 Arrival day	23.5.2023 Day 1	24.5.2023 Day 2	25.5.2023 Departure
until 9.00		**Breakfast**		
9.30		Morning session 1 **Event opening Getting to know people**	Morning session 1 **Event opening Getting to know people**	**Participants departure**
11.00		**Comfort break**		
11.30		Morning session 2 **Team building Unpacking "Mental Health"**	Morning session 2 **Open Learning Spaces to Inspire Mental Health and Youth Work**	
12.30		**Lunch break**		
11.30		Afternoon session 3 **Parallel contributions on Mental Health by National teams**	Afternoon session 3 **Into the Future of Mental Health and Youth Work**	
16.00		**Comfort break**		
16.30	**Participants arrival** Optional activities at the venue for early arrivals	Afternoon session 4 **Learning islands to share and explore good practices on Mental Health and Youth Work**	Afternoon session 4 **Evaluation and goodbye rituals Closing**	
17.30	**Registration**	**Free time and informal activities**		
16.00	**Diner**			
16.00	**Welcome evening**	**Evening activities (optional)**		

INTRODUCTION

Mental Health in Youth Work: Inspirational Event was held in Albufeira, Portugal in May 2023. The event brought together around 110 young people, youth workers, administrators, and trainers in the field of youth to be inspired by ideas, methods and practices that promote mental health in youth work.

The participants asked themselves:

- What are mental health skills?
- How can we learn to take care of our wellbeing?
- How can we support other people's wellbeing?
- What kind of methods are used to promote mental health in youth work and young people's activities?

Space was given to young people to tell how mental health should be addressed by youth workers and youth organisations. Groups of young people from different countries prepared content for the event and involved other young people to explore, discuss and learn about promotion of mental health.

Participants came from Finland, Norway, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Belgium, Hungary, Slovenia, Portugal, Spain, Serbia, and Türkiye.

The event was organised by the Finnish & Portuguese National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. It was the opening activity of a larger project that aims to promote mental health in youth work.

This leaflet is the report from the event. It is divided into two parts: the first part contains information about young people and mental health and the second part is more practical with ideas, resources, methods, and tips to promote and develop mental health in youth work.

Get inspired with us.

To find out more, visit:

www.oph.fi /en/mental-health-in-youth-work



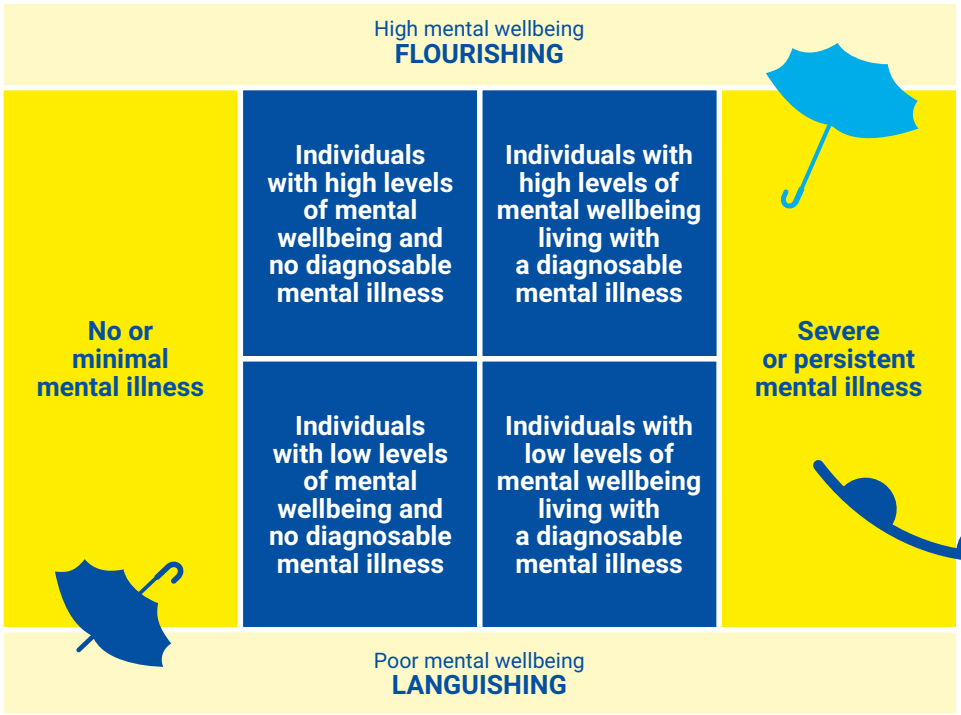
PART I

Mental health and mental wellbeing

When discussing mental health, we encounter various terms like mental health, mental disorders, mental wellbeing, wellness, illness, and more, which appear to alternate without a clear order or sense. According to the ”Small World of Words” [1] [2] project, mental health is primarily associated with words such as sickness, disease, depression, anxiety, and stress. Words associated with mental well-being include health, love, happiness, peace, and factors that may promote well-being, such as money or food.

To define the relationship between mental health and mental wellbeing, we can consider mental health as a term covering a range of interconnected mental states defined in two dimensions: mental illness and mental wellbeing.

How mental health and mental wellbeing are connected.



Adapted from Corey Keyes (American psychologist and sociologist, working on positive psychology in Emory University in Georgia). [3] [4]

The model explains that positive mental health is not merely the absence of illness but also the presence of wellbeing. However, mental health is closely correlated with physical health, meaning that good physical health enhances the likelihood of good mental health, and vice versa.

According to the Mayo Clinic (American academical medical center), [5] Mental illness (mental health disorders) refers to a horizontal dimension encompassing a wide range of mental health conditions that affect mood, thinking, and behaviour.

1 **Small World of Words Home**

2 **Mental Health ≠ Wellbeing** Pursuit by The University of Melbourne (unimelb.edu.au)

3 **Mental Health ≠ Wellbeing** Pursuit by The University of Melbourne (unimelb.edu.au)

4 **Mental Illness and Mental Health: The Two Continua Model Across the Lifespan** SpringerLink

5 **Mental illness - Symptoms and causes - Mayo Clinic**

Mental well-being represents the vertical dimension, seen as a quality of life as we perceive it ourselves. It can also be viewed as competence. Wellbeing is a set of skills, attitudes, and behaviours that contribute to a better quality of mental health. Mental wellbeing, according to Keyes, falls between two extremes: languishing and flourishing, with a moderate wellbeing in between.

Languishing [6] is referred to as low mental wellbeing without diagnosed mental health condition or mental illness.
Flourishing [7] is a metaphor for the peak state of mental health. This term describes a state we wish to reach. This is a state where we are thriving, growing, and unfolding, having vitality, energy, and strength.

As we learn to manage stress, handle our emotions and minds, cultivate good habits, solve problems, and communicate better, we improve our mental wellbeing. Good mental well-being means being confident in yourself, having a sense of purpose in your actions, being able to cope with everyday challenges, and being productive at home and work/school, enabling you to live life on your terms.

Young people often face stressful situations, but feelings of sadness, loss of motivation, self-doubt, or a sense of being stuck or lacking interest should not be immediately labelled as mental illness. Mental health concerns become mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms frequently cause stress and impair one's ability to function.

Not all distress can automatically be attributed to mental illness or disorder. Nevertheless, if the languishing phase remains unaddressed, it can potentially lead to mental illness, and this is where youth workers play a crucial role. Youth workers are not medical specialists equipped to treat mental illnesses, but youth work can support young people during their languishing period and help them develop positive wellbeing competencies and resilience.

Components of mental health

What does "mental" in mental health signify? According to various definitions and models of mental health, the concept of "mental" includes the following components:

- Psychological – It explains how we **think**. It is focused on the realisation of our own potential. It is described as self-acceptance, autonomy, strength of mind, personal growth, etc.
- Emotional – It explains how we **feel**. It is described as a feeling of happiness, satisfaction, kindness, and interest in life.
- Social – It explains our **relationship** with the world around us such as family, friends, work or school, community, politics. It also addresses the degree of our social integration, civic engagement, and belonging.
- Physical – It explains the **state and strength of our physical body** and includes information about sleeping regime and nutrition. This component may seem unfit, but maintaining good physical health helps maintain good mental health and vice versa.

Models also point out two complex aspects:

- **A sense of purpose** is described in terms of personal (who am I?), professional (career development), social (compassion and empathy) or spiritual (higher force) purpose.
- **A sense of safety** is described as a state of being protected from harm or other non-desirable outcomes. In Maslow's [8] Hierarchy of Needs, safety includes the security of body, of employment, of resources, of morality, and of health.

6 **Languishing: Symptoms, Meaning, Causes, and More** (verywellhealth.com)

7 **A Salutogenic Mental Health Model: Flourishing as a Metaphor for Good Mental Health - Health Promotion in Health Care** Vital Theories and Research - NCBI Bookshelf (nih.gov)

8 **Safety: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** IxDF (interaction-design.org)

The importance of free time in mental wellbeing

Youth work happens mostly within the young people's free time. Good quality free time activities of young people are positively linked to:

- **Social Development:** Engaging in activities that involve interaction with peers helps young people develop social skills, builds relationships, and strengthens their sense of belonging.
- **Academic Achievements:** Participating in structured free time activities positively influences academic performance, as it promotes responsibility, time management, and a balanced lifestyle.
- **Satisfaction with health:** Active free time activities contribute to better mental and physical health, leading to increased satisfaction and overall wellbeing.

Spending free time in inactive ways, such as excessive reading, rest, or excessive use of social media and the internet, is associated with lower mental health in young people. 9

The importance of balancing free time:

- Insufficient free time can lead to stress and hinder young people's wellbeing and productivity.
- Excessive free time can result in reduced productivity and potentially lead to unproductive or harmful behaviour.

Spending free time actively contributes to improved health and cultivates a sense of importance in staying active, leading young people to continue being active throughout adulthood. A population that remains active tends to be more satisfied and proactive in their lives.

Free time is influenced by parents, friends, school, and organisations existing in the local community. Spending free time in youth centres, youth clubs or other youth work related programmes is an investment in the future of young people regardless of the approach these programmes have. If the youth work offers quality and variety of programme, nurtures an inclusion and a degree of decision making of young people, reflection of the learning outcomes and the process, then every second of free time spent in such structures will never be a lost second.

9 **Leisure Time Use and Adolescent Mental Well-Being: Insights from the COVID-19 Czech Spring Lockdown**
PubMed (nih.gov)

Components of mental health

Puberty

Puberty is the process of sexual and physical maturation through hormone production.

Signs of female puberty:

- Normally starts between 8 and 13 years of age
- Ovaries begin to increase production of oestrogen and other female hormones
- Breasts development
- Growth of the body
- Widening of hips
- Vaginal secretion
- Armpit, pubic and leg hair growth
- Beginning of menstrual cycle
- Increased sweating, odor, and acne
- Sexual desire
- Mood swings, emotions, impulses

Signs of male puberty:
- Normally starts between 10 and 14 years of age.
- Testicles increase production of testosterone.
- Growth of body
- Widening of the shoulders
- Voice changes
- Armpit, pubic, leg and face hair growth
- Growth of the penis and testicles
- Nocturnal emissions
- Increased sweating, odour, and acne
- Sexual desire
- Mood swings, emotions, impulses

Most teenagers experience some discomfort in their bodies during puberty. However, physical changes, and especially not properly understanding or accepting those changes, can cause huge discomfort and even mental ill-being.

A small percentage of people are born intersex, i.e., with biological characteristics that don't fit inside the strict binary of female and male. What is more common, is being non-binary or transgender, meaning that the person falls outside the gender identities that are solely male or female or that the person identifies with a gender that is different from their sex.

It is very important to support young people during their puberty regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Adolescence

- Transitional stage between puberty and early adulthood (12 and 18 years of age)
- Physical maturation continues.
- Psychological and cognitive development increases.

In adolescence, the brain develops rapidly and will continue developing until mid-twenties. Psychological and cognitive development increases such as:
- More deductive (fact based) reasoning.
- Improved attention, memory, processing speed, organisation, social cognition, introspection, self-consciousness, intellectualisation – which encourages young people to question rules.
- Increased capacity for judgement (but still a tendency to engage in risky behaviours).
- Morals are not just black and white. Morals are not law (there are many different levels – young people will see that outside their families).

Brain development

In the adolescence, the brain is rapidly developing, which influences mental health and the perception of young people about their mental health.

Facts about teenage brain 10

- The size of the brain stops enlarging in adolescence, but the next ten years are dedicated to brain maturation. This process typically concludes around the mid-twenties. The last area to mature is responsible for skills like planning, prioritising, and making good decisions.
- The teen brain is ready to learn and adapt, especially when in new situations or experiences.
- The teenager's brain may respond to stress differently than that of adults. This could increase the likelihood of developing stress-related mental illnesses, such as anxiety or depression.

10 **The Teen Brain: 7 Things to Know**
NIMH (nih.gov)

- Most teens do not get enough sleep. The hormone melatonin functions differently in adolescents, allowing them to stay up late at night and experience difficulties in waking up in the morning. Insufficient sleep adversely affects their attention and impulse control, among other things.
- Mental illness may appear during adolescence, because teenagers experience physical, emotional, and social changes at the same time.
- The adolescent brain is resilient, meaning that, despite the stresses and challenges of adolescence, most teenagers ultimately grow into healthy adults.

Would you like to know more? Watch a short video about neuroscience behind the teenage brain. ›

Identity development

Young people typically question their own existence as well as the world around them with all its barriers, rules, and routines. They are interested in exploring and experiencing multiple possibilities. They might test limits, break rules, and rebel against authorities.

Young people are generally more prone to make risky decisions and behaviours which may cause physical or mental harm. Potential risks include, among other things, unintentional injuries and exposure to violence, sexual risk behaviour, and tobacco, alcohol, and illicit substance use. 11

Young people move further away from their parents – mentally and physically. Peer groups become more important.

To find a secure place in the world, a young person learns to tolerate peer pressure and consequently, stress which helps them form their own identity, become more autonomous and grow as a person.

A huge part of a young person's identity forms during the adolescent years. This process is influenced by parents, peers, and the society at large. Often these groups provide different answers to the same question or different solutions for the same task – a discrepancy that can lead to conflicts and confusion, which ultimately pushes young people to form their own belief system.

11 › **Factors associated with risk behaviors in adolescence: a systematic review** PMC (nih.gov)

Things that can negatively affect young people`s mental health and youth worker can be aware of

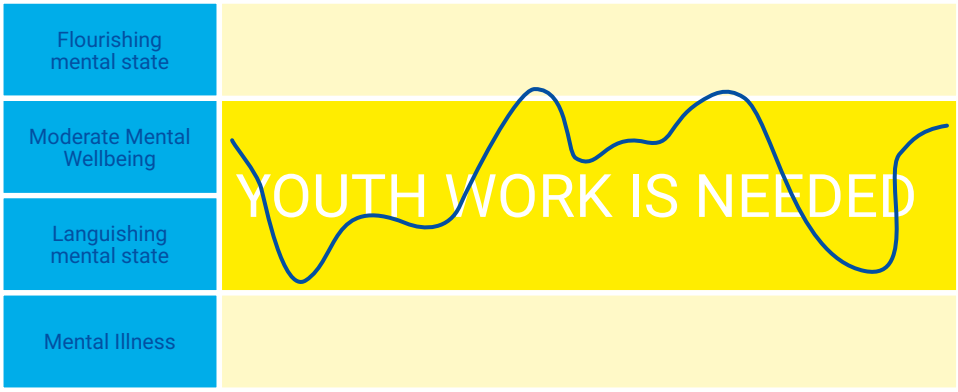
- Traumatic events
- Changes such as moving house, changing school, birth of a new sibling, divorce
- Physical changes and bad self-image
- Experimenting with alcohol and drugs
- Sexual orientation or gender dysphoria
- Genetics
- Long-term physical illness or disabilities
- Troublesome parents
- Death of someone close to them
- Bullying or other abuse
- Poverty
- Discrimination
- Caring for relatives, taking on adult responsibilities
- Long-lasting difficulties at school
- Homelessness and unemployment
- Discrimination
- Other diversities

Youth work can support young people's mental wellbeing

Changes in our mental health are experienced throughout our entire life. There are moments we feel on top of the world, while at other times, we might feel as if we have been left in a ditch. Both poles, along with everything in between, are considered normal. Some of these feelings may not be desired, but they are an inherent part of life. To achieve balance, it is important to learn to manage the lows and appreciate the highs.

Removing the risk factors is not the objective of a youth work or the role of the youth worker. Instead, young people should be supported in coping with the potential risk factors and avoiding risky behaviours before their challenges turn into problems.

Role of the youth worker in different states of mental health



Flourishing is a state where people are super happy and satisfied. Youth workers can include people in this state of mind to help as an inspiration and motivation for someone else when they are down.

Moderate Mental Wellbeing is a state where competence building happens so that the next languishing period does not feel so bad. This is a time for getting more understanding and to practice skills, habits and develop new attitudes that will help when a young person returns to the languishing state. Youth worker could help reflect and support the learning of young people.

Languishing is a state of mental health, where youth workers can offer guidance, support, compassion, advice etc. Youth workers can support young people in getting through this period.

Mental illness is something only a medical professional should address. That is not in the domain of a youth worker. You as a youth workers should learn to recognise some of the symptoms of mental illness, or disorder. Perhaps you are not qualified or competent to help a young person, but it is good to recognise that a person needs professional help. Find detailed information about mental illness and disorders in the *Glossary* on this was done by Mental Health Foundation (A mental health charity in the UK that provides information to the public, empowering people to look after their own mental health.). A job of a youth worker is not to try and set diagnose but to gather information about some mental disorders that can help to support young people.

PART II

In this part you will find practical ideas, resources, methods, and tips to promote and develop mental health in youth work. The content is generated by the people (young people, youth workers, trainers) who were involved in the Mental Health in Youth Work: Inspirational Event. The content was kept in its original form, meaning that the langue follows the authentic expression even if it is not "perfect English" or "perfectly politically correct" at all times.

Tips for supporting young people's mental health skills

Young people's mental health skill	Ways to support young people's mental health skills/objectives in youth work
Maintain good physical health by eating balanced diet and getting regular exercises and enough sleep.	When making an activity or a project, arrange a good quality and balanced food, not just fried or processed food and sweets. Offer plenty of water. Separate sleeping and socialising rooms, so that young people can get a good rest. Use energisers that also include some light physical activity and offer some physical activities in free time such as sports, walking or yoga.
Be a part of supporting and nurturing groups.	May your programme be a regular daily club, or you make projects, always create a nice and supportive atmosphere. This includes a welcome ritual, good communication, humour, sharing, gratitude, common rules etc. Define your own safe space as a group.
Take part is something that makes you happy.	Offer a variety of activities or support young people to try out something new. Maybe they do not know yet what makes them happy. Be aware that trying new things can take people out their comfort zone, which is where they learn. The more often they venture to the stretch zone, the more used they get to change. The more they do, the more they can do.
Manage your stress, recognise your triggers.	Organise stress management workshops where you address negative thoughts, recognising emotions, self-awareness, and relaxation techniques. Young people may not practice them regularly but might feel encouraged to use them occasionally. Create a library or a list of stress management tools young people can try out. This will help them a lot in moments of stress.
Take part in local activities.	Introduce the importance of civic engagement and encourage young people to do voluntary work, to participate in humanitarian or political activities. Cultivate and nurture any kind of active participation that is focused on the development of the community. By taking part in community, we contribute to the innovations and development, and we also nurture common values such as solidarity (more to read on solidarity), 12 13 which enhance the feeling of belonging and support. Solidarity activities help young people understand that they are not alone and puts their issues in some perspective, because there are people who experience more hardships. People who help others are also more likely to describe themselves as happy.

12 09__Dragan Atanasov.pdf (salto-youth.net)
13 4Thought-for-Solidarity.pdf (talkingsolidarity.eu)

Talk to your friend(s).	Youth workers can also take a form of a friend but help young people find friends in their peer group. Organise peer debates or peer buddies and support young people to talk about themselves.
Don't be afraid to tell people how you feel.	Make sure you are available for some one-on-one conversations. Ask young people if they wish to just be heard or do they seek your point of view? Do not impose your ideas or advice. Respect their privacy and acknowledge their emotions.
Learn how to solve problems.	Engage young people in project development. Include sessions with problem-solving activities such as escape room or puzzles. Debrief these activities by relating the learning and new skill to real-life.
Plan your work or school.	Introduce different planning techniques such as Pomodoro Techniques, Eisenhower Matrix, Time Blocking Method, Eat That Frog Technique etc.
Do not compare yourself to the others and do not strive for perfection.	Celebrate and promote the individuality of young people. Encourage self-reflection and understanding of identity - who the young person is, and what makes them them.
Reduce social media time.	Encourage young people not to use social media during activities.

Erasmus+ supports development of creative and innovative approaches and tools that help nurturing mental health in youth work. *Here* is a Padlet board with different tools created within and outside youth work that helps youth workers dealing with mental issues of their young people. You can find manuals that help you foster mental health in youth work reality, frameworks about mental health in youth work, card games to be used in youth activity, training course curriculums, and apps on this page.

Activity to try: “I am not alone”

This activity was used in the Inspirational Event to connect participants with the topic of mental health and with each other. There were several statements written on the poster indicating state of mind such as the ones bellow. Participants were then invited to add situations that responds to that statement. Reflection of this activity showed that this activity made participants them realise they were not alone with their feelings, difficulties, desires, or joys.

I am stressed:

- When I must write in English.
- About the school and life in general.
- When I receive too much news.
- I am in crowded and loud places.
- When things don't work as planned.

I am proud:
- When I complete stuff.
- When I take care of myself.
- I have done things well.
- When my dog behaves well.
- When I affect someone in a positive way.
- When I can manage my emotions.

I am calm:
- When I do sports.
- When I watch TV.
- When I do yoga.
- When I can do nothing.

I am overwhelmed:
- When I don't listen to instructions.
- When stressing over tasks.
- When I have a lot to do at the same time.
- When I want to help someone but don't know how.

What young people want:
- To be listened to and understood. Engage in conversation with young people, ask questions, don't be dismissive or preachy. Read more about conversation starters about mental health suggested by UNICEF *here* .
- To be taken seriously.
- Choice, information, and advice.
- Honesty. Tell young people what will come next.
- Continuity. If you as a youth worker invest yourself in the life of a young person, you should be ready to do it for a longer time. It does not feel good to have someone present a bit and then see disappear.
- Opportunities. Give young people opportunities to develop their own activities. Encourage them to make some decisions.

How to care for mental health in international youth events or projects?

In some countries, youth work is in the domain of education, while in others it falls under the umbrella of cultural or social work. Approaches and methods thus have different foundations. This variation makes youth work versatile and colourful – as well as sometimes a bit challenging.

Regardless of your foundations, it is worthwhile to question some of the international youth work conventions. We have listed below some fresh viewpoints and questions you might want to discuss with the young participants and your international partners. Caring for mental health means keeping your mind flexible and allowing expression of different opinions – as well as adjusting to cultural realities of the participating countries.

Accommodation
Accommodation is a sensitive topic. The participants will be interested to know if they will share bedrooms with others and if yes, will that person be from another country? For several years, it has been the norm to create international rooms for faster and more intensive communication as well as connection. The topic of mental health puts this practice under question. It is better to discuss the issue in advance to ensure that everyone can feel safe and relaxed when it comes to sleeping arrangements.

(Un)wanted behaviour

How to address unhealthy behaviours such as smoking and/or drinking for instance? Is simple prohibition always the best solution? Why not open this topic for learning? For example: Talk together with young people and group leaders about the topic (legislation, parents' expectations & youth workers' responsibility, cultural habits, leading by example, does having fun require alcohol) and write the rules together.

Food

Food can also be a sensitive topic because some people might have eating disorders or negative body image, while others might never have tried more exotic foods and want to stay in their comfort zone. This brings several things to consider:

- How to address possible eating disorders?
- Should eating disorders be an openly discussed topic?
- How to handle the eating arrangements?
- Is food used as a learning opportunity and should young people be prepared to an international activity, where food tastes different and they should be ready to explore it?
- Should we opt for international food that everyone knows and is liked by most young people? It might put pressure on the organisers of the event and opens doors to potential “junk food”.
- What is our approach to (un)healthy eating – keeping in mind the importance of physical health on overall wellbeing? Is it black and white? How to avoid judgement and promote healthy relationships to food?
- Could the young people be involved in deciding what type of food is served or could they even be involved in cooking food?

Programme

How to balance the programme to enable enough learning but also contribute to rest?

- There should be a balance between contributing, sharing, and giving back. Some young people want to contribute before, some after and some want to just participate. The question is how to encourage young people to open up.
- Young people's voices are to be heard, but they should not be forced to talk or participate.
- Safe place. The event itself can trigger some anxiety because it demands socializing, speaking in foreign language, eating, and sleeping away from the comfort of their home. Allow free time and rest, making sure the event is not packed with programme from morning till night.
- Manageable working parts with many shorter breaks.
- Recharging spaces and time, where it is acceptable to just hang out.
- A break from English language because for some young people, it might be the first time they will be communicating in foreign language outside of school. Each activity that does not have a debriefing or reflection with the big group such as diary writing for instance can be done in the native language.
- Some sort of anonymity. Opening demands certain degree of vulnerability and not everyone is willing to open up.
- Acknowledging that young people come with different kinds of issues and challenges that no-one else fully knows or understands.
- Finding a balance between cognitive, experiential, and expressional activities. Some topics need mind and words to be understood, while some need experience and emotions to be felt. Some young people are not able to put their emotions or thoughts to words and they need other ways to express themselves. They can be supported to do so, for example, through art may that be performing art or fine art.

Communication

- Social media about the event/project/activity needs to be addressed and presented beforehand. Young people should feel safe on social media, so the best way is to decide on a strategy for how to support those young people who do not wish to be in photos or videos.
- Make a communication plan and consider in advance what message you want to send and to which audience, for what reason and using which channels. Also, think of a strategy on how to protect young people`s privacy if there is published material. Strategy should include the rules, written in the GDPR 14 (General Data Protection Regulation) described on the website of the European Commission. You can also check a short *video* about GDPR that explains how GDPR might affect you. And here are some *thought* about GDPR written on the blog Teenagers and privacy and highlights the relationship young people have with the online data protection.
- Communication with the programme creators before the event should not be frantic, overwhelming, and unstructured. One point of contact to make it easy. One person should be assigned to communicate with the participants and the communication should not be too frequent.
- Communication at the event/project/activity should address different communication styles and channels. You should make a joint decision on where to communicate, how and to whom.
- Communication during the programme should always be available and offered on many channels. We could use old-school posters, but also some easily accessible online tools. Offer options for information, but also for chatting and sharing. Appoint the person who will oversee the communication.

Emotions

Will there be many emotions?
Young people often express their fear about addressing emotions. While some emotions are welcome and needed, it could be risky to guide young people to deeper emotional work, if you as a youth worker don't feel competent to also offer some professional support and counselling. To avoid going too deep and into the area of therapy, we could instead introduce the concept of emotional intelligence by Goleman (psychologist and the author of Emotional Intelligence) in a more cognitive way.

Introduce and practice the following topics: (1) Recognising my own emotions and understanding the function of each emotion. (2) Managing and handling my emotions the way to express my emotions in safe and proper way. (3) Understanding that other people go through the same process, hence nurturing empathy, and compassion.

When emotional rampage happens during your activities, offer space for the young person to express it in a non-judgmental space and in a safe way. Then have a conversation about the reasons behind these emotions, after the emotions reduce. Negative emotion should not be immediately confused with mental illness. There is no happiness without sadness. Don't be afraid of negative emotions. All emotions are equally important.

Emotions are important in all areas of human activity. For many, innovations and creations are full of frustration, confusion in the face of the unknown, enthusiasm for challenges and excitement for ultimate success. To increase creative achievement, two things are necessary – people must have an attitude of openness (looking at the world with interest and receptivity) and need to develop skills to manage emotions which inevitably accompany creative work. 15

14 **EU data protection rules** (europa.eu)

15 **Creativity, Emotions and the Arts** Centro Botin

Did you know?
Researchers have established that crying releases oxytocin and endogenous opioids, also known as endorphins. These feel-good chemicals help ease both physical and emotional pain. 16

Learning about mental health and wellbeing

Youth events funded by the Erasmus + Youth involve nonformal and informal learning. Here are some examples of how to integrate learning about mental health and wellbeing to yout international programme.

Cognitive learning about mental health and wellbeing could mean, for example, getting deeper understanding or gathering useful information. It will allow young people to recognise and assess their own wellbeing. Learning cognitively about mental health increases knowledge which can help to destigmatise and develop empathy and compassion for people who suffer from mental conditions. Try activities like debates, drawing infographics or posters, creating social media campaigns etc.

Experiential learning happens through practical activities, like bringing awareness or encouraging practices that support personal mental health and wellbeing. You can introduce young people to tools and practices that are beneficial for their mental health and wellbeing in everyday life. Try mindfulness or breathing exercises, cultivate ranting sessions and gratitude walls, encourage young people to recognise their emotions and speak about their day.

By participating in an international youth activity, young people learn about themselves and the world around them. They build competences, self-esteem, and resilience to become autonomous adults. Youth work should be a safe playground for young people to test their values and ideas, to make mistakes and succeed. It is the youth worker's responsibility to guide the process and make it safe, creative, structured, and supportive.

Safe space

Safe space seems like a staple food of youth work, but it is rarely defined. This is how the young people and youth workers at the Inspirational Event described a safe space:

- Attitude: There should be no judgement. It should be full of acceptance and respect, sharing, (common) understanding, trust, respecting time, fun and laughter.
- Physical space: The place should feel welcoming, cozy, and comfortable so that it also feels familiar. The place should encourage and motivate; display some artwork and offer music, but it should also be possible to chill and be quiet if needed. Create a Chill out Zone to just relax and talk to your friends or a Playful Plaza with board games, colouring books, play doe, puzzles, and other creative activities. Or you can also create a Mural to boost artistic expressions of young people. Art enables expression of emotions and thoughts that cannot be expressed with words.
- Social space: safe space enables spending time with other open-minded, approachable, and trustworthy people. People should know how to listen, should be reliable and have a high sense for empathy. They want to spend time with positive and active people, who wish to participate in real and honest conversations. Nonetheless, young people as well as youth workers, wish to balance social time with personal (calm) time.
- Youth worker: young people agree that safe space is a space without adults, but they also feel safety in the presence of the youth worker.

According to the Mental Health Commission in Canada 17, a safer space is defined as a supportive, non-threatening environment where all participants can feel comfortable to express themselves and share experiences without fear of discrimination or reprisal.

16 **Is crying good for you?** Harvard Health

17 **safer_space_guidelines_mar_2019_eng.pdf** (mentalhealthcommission.ca)

Mental Health Commission have developed guidelines for safer space:

- Respect others' physical and emotional boundaries.
- Respect others' identities and backgrounds, including pronouns and names.
- Do not assume or make judgments on anyone's gender identity, sexual preference, survivor status, health status, economic status, religion, background, beliefs, opinions, etc.
- Respect others' right to privacy both during this dialogue and beyond. Do not push anyone to answer questions they don't want to answer, and do not share anyone's personal stories outside of this dialogue.
- Be aware that your actions and words may have unintended effects on other people and that their feelings are valid, regardless of your intentions.
- Avoid raising your voice, interrupting, or talking over anyone else. And be aware of how much you're participating — make sure everyone gets a chance to speak.
- Assume positive intent. If someone does or says something that crosses a boundary, gently let them know, but do not assume they intended harm.
- Remember, we are all learning.
- Take care of your own safety. If you need to step out, feel free to do so. If you feel unsafe, let the facilitator know.
- If you witness any abusive or inappropriate behaviour, let the facilitator know.

Risk management

Incidents do not occur as a result of a linear sequence of events. They are caused by multiple risk factors in different domains.

When creating activities or events, make a risk assessment and a risk management plan. Share it with the team and with the young persons. Find an example of such assessment and plan created for the Inspirational event on Mental health in Portugal *here*. On this link, you will find several domains to be mindful of such as activity, participants, staff, external experts, transportation, equipment, culture etc.

Intercultural learning

This topic deserves its own book, so we will not go into details but do keep in mind that on the international event or activity, there will be many different cultures and nations present. How do we address cultural differences within the mental health topic? Are you aware of the differences in body language? How do we communicate and what do we understand? Some words simply do not exist in other languages. How do we perceive time? What personal distance means in intercultural context? How do we perceive conflict? How do we perceive power and hierarchy?

From the perspective of the learning zones created by Lev Vygotsky, 18 intercultural learning is way out of comfort zone and for some it stretches to the panic zone, which could cause stress and influences fall in mental health.

18 **safer_space_guidelines_mar_2019_eng.pdf** (mentalhealthcommission.ca)