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# wExchange

Promoting mental well-being through online exchange in secondary schools

## Implementation Guide



# CONTENTS

ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE .....	3
1. INTRODUCTION .....	4
1.1. Mental Health Well-Being in Adolescence .....	4
2. FRAMEWORK .....	5
2.1. Peer Education Approach .....	5
2.2. Hand of Mental Health Framework .....	6
3. PEER-EDUCATION ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS .....	7
3.1. Rest and Relaxation .....	8
3.2. Nutrition and Eating .....	12
3.3. Exercise and Mindfulness .....	16
3.4. Hobbies and Creativity .....	20
3.5. Relationships and Emotions .....	24
4. CONCLUSION .....	28
REFERENCES .....	29

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

This guide was developed by the wExchange project, co-funded by the European Union (Erasmus+ 2022-1-FI01-KA220-SCH-000087764). The guide includes various activities, implemented and piloted in virtual camps and workshops, in which 80 students from European secondary schools took part. The aim of this guide is to present a set of activities that use peer methods to support mental well-being in schools.



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## HOW TO USE THE IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

Each topic in the guide is organised with a supporting theoretical presentation and the corresponding activities with the following images:



**AIM**



**KEY IDEAS**



**TIME**



**MATERIALS**



**ACTIVITIES**

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. MENTAL HEALTH WELL-BEING IN ADOLESCENCE

The well-being of mental health during adolescence has critical importance, as this developmental stage is accompanied by significant emotional, social and cognitive changes. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and stress due to academic pressures, peer relationships, and the influence of social media.

According to the World Health Organization (2021), 1 in 7 adolescents suffer from a mental health disorder, highlighting the need for early intervention and support systems. Promoting open communication, fostering positive relationships, and providing access to mental health resources are key to improving well-being during this critical period (Patton et al., 2016).

## 2. FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. PEER EDUCATION APPROACH

Peer education is a teaching and learning process in which adolescents and young people act as facilitators of actions and activities with and for other adolescents and young people, i.e. peers. It is used when a person is responsible for developing educational activities aimed at the group to which they belong. It is a process of interaction, in which teaching and learning takes place between the group of peers, with one member of the group being responsible for developing educational activities for the rest of the group.

In peer education, the concept of empowerment is central, as participants build and develop knowledge, attitudes and behaviours among themselves, by educating and learning through reciprocity (Carvalho & Pinheiro, 2019). It is an educational strategy that values intentionality and promotes a positive impact on knowledge building and skill development, providing opportunities for young people to care for one another. Peer groups are particularly important for the development of adolescent behaviour, as they provide role modelling and emotional support.

In the context of health promotion, peer education is a strategy used to promote greater health gains, as it aims to change behaviour through personal development, knowledge acquisition and emotional, cognitive and behavioural skills training (Dias, 2006).

## 2.2. HAND OF MENTAL HEALTH – FRAMEWORK

The hand of mental health is a way of describing the different parts of daily well-being: Rest and relaxation, Nutrition and eating, Relationships and emotions, Exercise and taking care of the body, as well as Hobbies and creativity. In addition, well-being is based on the issues at the wrist of the hand: Values and daily choices. Just as the hand needs all fingers to function, mental health is maintained by taking care of different aspects of well-being. If even one finger is out of play, it impairs the ability of the whole hand to function.

The hand of mental health is intended as a tool for encounters and discussions. There are different versions, e.g. for early childhood education and care, primary school and working life needs. The hand of mental health helps to pay attention to common everyday things that affect mental well-being. With the help of the hand, it is possible to reflect on what kind of choices have been made recently, for example, whether a particular area has been emphasised or completely forgotten. With the help of the hand, you learn to recognise factors that bring good mood and well-being into your everyday life.

For more information:

<https://mieli.fi/en/materials/hand-of-mental-health/>



## 3. PEER-EDUCATION ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

### 3.1. REST AND RELAXATION

- Board game
- Relaxing environment
- Sleep bingo

### 3.2. NUTRITION AND EATING

- Observing eating habits
- Know your food. What does food consist of?
- The most common eating habits

### 3.3. EXERCISE AND MINDFULNESS

- Tik Tok video
- Stretching and relaxation exercise
- Drawing: Your favourite exercise/sport

### 3.4. CREATIVITY AND JOY

- Be a poet for a day
- Frozen images
- What makes me happy?

### 3.5. RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONS

- Self-help group
- Relaxation
- Music playlist according to the emotions

## 3.1. REST AND RELAXATION

The transition from childhood to adolescence affects the quantity and quality of sleep. Adolescents fall asleep later in the evening and they sleep later in the morning. Changes related to sleep are caused by hormones. For that reason, sleep problems can increase during puberty.

An adolescent needs sleep 8-10 hours a day. Physical and mental activity increases the amount of sleep. Research has shown that adequate and good-quality sleep for young people is a very important factor for their mental well-being. Poor sleep is linked to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and stress in young people.

Adequate and high quality sleep helps young people maintain a positive mood and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. Brain reorganization and memory processes during sleep are important for all activities, especially learning. In addition, sleep affects growth, because growth hormones are secreted during sleep.

Some examples to promote good sleep:

- Go to bed and wake up around the same time every day, even on weekends
- Avoid screens (phones, tablets, TVs) at least an hour before bed, as the blue light can interfere with your sleep.
- Try to calm your mind before going to bed and avoid doing homework just before bedtime.
- Exercise improves sleep, but heavy exercise just before going to bed is not good
- Avoid caffeinated drinks such as coffee, energy drinks or colas or heavy meals before bedtime.



## 3.1. REST AND RELAXATION: Board game



Use of creativity,  
teamwork, processing



1 h planning  
3 h creating  
1 h playing



Creativity, sleep related  
to mental health,  
planning, playing



Cardboard, tape, scissors,  
dices, different pens,  
everything related to  
handcraft



Students will work in small groups (2-4). Their task is to design and create a board game related to sleep and rest. If that is too narrow of a topic, it can be expanded (like the whole field of mental health).

Students will first plan, what type of game they will want to create, rules, plot, tasks etc. After that, they will produce the game using different craftwork materials (most typically cardboard). After all the games are ready, students will play each others' games.



## 3.1. REST AND RELAXATION: Relaxing environment



Relaxation; sensing;  
describing feelings



10–15 min



Finding what relaxes  
you, describing  
relaxation, observing  
own feelings

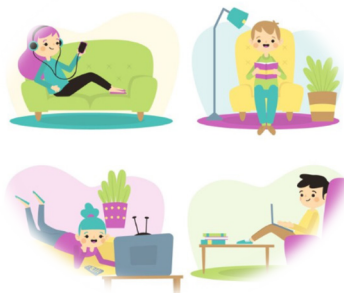


Paper, pens



Every student goes and finds a place, where they feel peaceful and calm. As they relax in their own space, they observe the different senses around them. They record three different things they can hear, three things they can see, three things they can smell, three things they can feel with their hands and skin.

Then all the students come back to the class and summarise the different places, senses and feelings. At this exercise the students find different ways to relax, what makes them relaxed and how they understand other students.



## 3.1. REST AND RELAXATION: Sleep bingo



Observing different things related to sleep and rest



30 min



Social skills, analysing sleeping and rest, observing different sleeping habits



Bingo grid (or paper and pens to do it), pencil



Each student receives a 4x4 (16 square) bingo grid.

Students must fill all the grids with different types of descriptions about to sleep and rest.

If the topic is too narrow it can be expanded (e.g. to include the whole area of mental health).

After the students have filled in their grid, they move around the classroom and ask each other questions. When they find a person who suits a description in their bingo grid, they can mark them on their grid. When they have completed all the 16 squares, they shout “Bingo” to indicate that they are finished.



## 3.2. NUTRITION AND EATING

"You are what you eat" is a common phrase, that almost everyone has heard.

The food we eat is a basic necessity for everyone's daily activities. If your food is low in good nutrients and high in sugar, fat, salt or caffeine, it does not provide us with the energy we need. This can lead to tiredness, impair social relationships, limit cognitive thinking and creativity and even cause depression. Proper eating habits create the foundation for people's daily physical and mental well-being.

Adolescents' nutrition has a very important impact on their physical and mental health. Certain nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids, B vitamins and antioxidants have been found to be important for mental health. Intestinal bacteria in our stomach secrete various fatty acids and hormones. For example, the "happiness hormone" serotonin is produced in the intestines.

To be able to study and play, you need sufficient energy. Without energy, your battery is empty and your mood is low. Eating is also a social event. Eating together makes you feel good. Eating treats also makes you feel good, especially when you do it with friends or family.

No food is right or wrong. Some nutrients support brain function more than others.

## 3.2. NUTRITION AND EATING: Observing eating habits



Observing eating habits and finding ways to improve them on a personal level



Several days or longer



Food challenge, healthy food, improve eating habits



No specific materials



Every student thinks about their dietary choices and eating habits and how they could improve them. This can be a change to a healthier dietary choices or eating together with someone, e.g. with the family.

The duration of the challenge is agreed on at the beginning. It can last a week, a month, or possibly can even be a permanent change. If possible, students can also track the effects of the challenge during it or after that.



## 3.2. NUTRITION AND EATING:

### Know your food. What does food consist of?



Getting to know your food. What does food consist of?



15–30 min



Calory content of food, ingredients, which choices are healthy, which are unhealthy



Pictures of different types of common foods and dishes



The teacher shows the students pictures of different foods to the students (food can also be brought to the class). Students have to guess, which ingredients the food contains. Students can also think about the amount of sugar, salt, fatt, carbohydrates, protein, etc.

The correct answers are then shown and analysed together. Which food or dish contains the most sugar? Did some of the foods contain surprisingly high/low amount of sugar? How accurate were the students' answers ?... After the exercise students should be more aware, what their food contains.



## 3.2. NUTRITION AND EATING: The most common eating habits



Recognizing the most  
common eating habits



20–30 min



Food quizz



Questions (6-10), paper,  
pen



Students will be asked different types of questions about food. The questions have no right or wrong answers as they are based more on opinions.

For example: “What is the best evening snack?” or “What to drink with food?”. Students are not allowed to give their own opinion in response, but, what they think is the most common opinion. They will get points based on how many of the other students have given the same answer. 6–10 is a good number of questions and points.



## 3.3. EXERCISING AND MINDFULNESS

Physical activity and mindfulness practices have also been shown to boost mental health in adolescents.

The benefits of practice of physical activity and mindfulness improve:

- \* Sleep quality
- \* Quality of life
- \* Self-esteem
- \* Well-being

Regular physical activity and mindfulness contribute to improve health and well-being throughout life. School age is therefore a unique opportunity to prevent sedentary habits, as this is when most unhealthy habits are developed.

Exercise and mindfulness contribute significantly to mental health well-being, providing both psychological and physiological benefits.

The combination of exercise and mindfulness can have a powerful, synergistic effect on mental health, improving emotional stability and overall well-being.



### 3.3. EXERCISING AND MINDFULNESS: TikTok video



Promoting overall  
well-being



15 min



Mental well-being; daily  
routines



Mobile phone; computer,  
digital tools, e.g. TikTok;  
Padlet



1. Go in small groups.
2. Use your smartphones.
3. Make a short, creative Tik Tok video to answer the questions:  
Question 1: How did you exercise during the day?  
Question 2: Did your smartphone affect your activity level?  
Question 3: What kinds of activities give you a spark?  
Question 4: What does a relaxed body feel like?
4. Upload it on a TikTok account.



### 3.3. EXERCISING AND MINDFULNESS: Stretching and relaxation exercise



Promoting overall  
well-being



15 min



Relaxation; mental  
well-being



Relaxing music  
(e.g. Spotify or Youtube)



1. Stand up.
2. Slowly roll your neck in a circular motion.
3. Lift your shoulders up to your ears and then roll them back down, repeat ten times.
4. Extend your arms out to the sides and make small circles, gradually increasing the size. Do this in each direction.
5. Listen to the music.
6. Close your eyes and imagine a peaceful place. Visualize the details of this place, focusing on the sights, sounds, and smells.
7. End the exercise with a few deep breaths, and slowly bring your awareness back to the present moment.
8. Sit up slowly and take a moment to reflect on how your body feels after the stretching and relaxation exercises.

### 3.3. EXERCISING AND MINDFULNESS:

## Drawing: Your favourite exercise/sport



Promoting overall  
well-being



15 min



Sports; exercise; self-  
expression

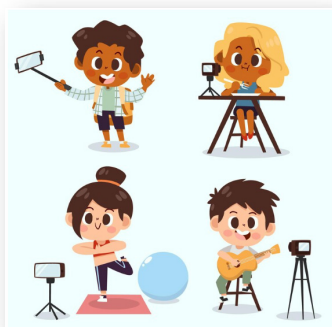


Paper and pencil/pen/  
marker; mobile phone  
and computer; digital  
tool: Padlet



#### MAKE A DRAWING

1. Draw an exercise/sport that you like (E.g. running, football, volleyball, dancing, singing, etc...).
2. Write the caption.
3. Take a photo of your drawing and post it on a padlet.



## 3.4. CREATIVITY AND JOY

Both creativity and joy are essential for promoting good mental health. Creativity and joy are powerful tools that provide emotional expression, enhance cognitive skills, and promote a sense of well-being, all of which are crucial for maintaining good mental health.

Creativity and joy help build emotional resilience, improve problem-solving skills, and give a sense of purpose and fulfillment, enriching various aspects of our lives. Engaging in creative activities like writing poetry, journaling, making art projects, or trying out a new recipe provides a healthy outlet for expressing emotions and thoughts, reducing stress and anxiety. Additionally, creativity and joy often complement each other. Creating new things, exploring new experiences, and fostering joyful environments build self-esteem and promote a positive outlook, combating feelings of depression and discontent.

Moreover, the process of creating something new and overcoming challenges in creative activities boosts confidence and self-esteem, contributing to better mental health. Creativity and joy are essential in school settings because they create a vibrant and engaging learning environment. When school students are encouraged to think creatively, they develop critical thinking skills and can approach challenges with enthusiasm and fresh perspectives. Joyful experiences in school boost motivation and participation, helping school students associate learning with positive feelings. This not only improves academic performance but also enhances mental well-being and resilience. By fostering creativity and joy, we create a nurturing atmosphere where school students feel inspired, valued, and actively engaged, laying the foundation for lifelong learning and personal growth.

## 3.4. CREATIVITY AND JOY:

### Be a poet for a day



Promoting mental health and well-being through creativity



30–45 min



Well-being, creative writing, poetry, collaborative activity



Computer or paper & pens/pencils



This activity can be implemented online or in the classroom, either individually or in groups.

The facilitator provides a list of words (e.g., healthy food, exercise, sleep, relationships, joy/happiness, hope, school, friends, emotions, creativity, etc.) and asks students, either individually or in groups, to write a poem using at least four of these words.

The written poems are then presented to other groups.

Alternatively, a contest can be organized.

At the end of the activity, discussion and reflection should take place in the whole group, in a non-judgmental manner.



## 3.4. CREATIVITY AND JOY:

### Frozen images



Promoting mental health and well being through creativity, and developing enquiry and communication skills



30–45 min



Well-being, creativity, drama techniques; emotions, collaborative activity



Paper, whiteboard



The facilitator, using a brainstorming approach, encourages the school students to identify positive emotions, which are listed on paper or on a blackboard.

**Individually:** Each school student chooses an emotion from the list, creates a visual representation of the emotion, and presents it to the plenary. The other school students then guess the emotion being presented.

**In groups:** The school students form groups of 4-5 members and choose a name.

Each group selects an emotion, creates a frozen image of a scene/situation that expresses the chosen emotion, and presents it to the plenary. The other teams should guess the emotion being presented.

The same process can be repeated while the facilitator keeps the score.

At the end of the activity, a discussion and reflection can take place about the impact of emotions on our lives, mental health, and well-being.

**Online:** Alternatively, this frozen picture activity can be adapted for a virtual platform where students, visible on camera, individually or in groups, create frozen images of emotions, present them to the others, and have their peers guess the depicted emotions.

### 3.4. CREATIVITY AND JOY: What makes me happy?



Promoting mental health  
and well being through  
creativity



30–45 min



Well-being, creativity,  
drama techniques;  
emotions, collaborative  
activity



Computers, digital photos  
OR flipchart paper or any  
large paper, markers, glue,  
printed photos



This activity can be implemented in groups, either online or in the classroom.

**Online:** The facilitator creates a Padlet board for each group.

The school students search online for photos of activities, things, and scenery that support and promote their mental health and well-being. Alternatively, they can use their own digital photos.

Then they upload the photos to Padlet and write a small text caption for the photos they selected.

**Classroom:** The school students bring printed photos of activities, things, and scenery that support and promote their mental health and well-being.

The facilitator will provide art materials, and each group will create a collage poster using their photos, along with drawings and written text.

Alternatively, they can create Photovoice videos (PowerPoint presentations with photos and a narrative explaining the content).

The activity ends with a non-judgmental discussion and reflection in the groups.

## 3.5. RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONS

A relationship is the connection between two or more people. It refers to the interaction between people. Since people are social beings, we live in families, we work in different teams, we have connections to different groups of people.

We have a need to express our thoughts, feelings and emotions. The lack of social connections can lead to loneliness and depression. Relationships are therefore, a must.

Emotions that are closely linked to relationships are mental reactions that are experienced as strong feelings directed towards a specific object and are accompanied by behavioural responses and a certain degree of joy or displeasure.

They give us information about what we are experiencing and help us to know how to react. People react differently to the same circumstances in which they find themselves, and these reactions can manifest themselves on a physical and/or mental level. Therefore, it is extremely important that we recognize these emotions and learn how to deal with them.



## 3.5. RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONS: Self-help group



Self-help, recognition of emotional states, team work



45 minutes (group work 15 min, 30 min reporting and discussion)



Recognizing emotional states, developing empathy and peer-to-peer help, team work



Paper, pens



A mentor/teacher prepares an example of a real-life situation that teenagers often find themselves in and which often causes anxiety and causes anxiety and psychological challenges.

The students are divided into small groups. Each group gets a sheet of paper with the situation. Within the group, the students discuss the emotions that the situation evokes in young people and give possible solutions to the problem.

At the end each group presents their solutions. The teacher leads and supervises the final discussion.



## 3.5. RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONS: Relaxation



Relaxation



20–45 min



Meditation, relaxation,  
mental relaxation



Quiet classroom or a gym,  
chairs or yoga mats, the  
internet, speakers



A mentor/teacher finds a recording online (e.g.: YouTube), the students either sit or lie down with their eyes closed. The teacher plays the recording and the students listen and try to relax.



## 3.5. RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONS: Music playlist according to the emotions



Identifying emotions,  
relaxation through  
music, team work



30–40 min



Playlist, emotions,  
music, team work



Internet access,  
phones/ computers



A mentor/teacher prepares a list of different emotions. The students are divided into small groups. Each group chooses five emotions and then decides which music/song they associate with that particular emotion. They make a playlist with these songs and present it to the others.



## 4. CONCLUSION

The wExchange project hopes that this guide will be a valuable tool for promoting mental health in schools for all those who will use it.

A peer education activity has an impact that goes far beyond the activity itself. It involves knowledge, confidence, autonomy, decisions and promotion of wellbeing and makes a lasting difference to peers' lives.

The wExchange project would like to thank everyone who uses this guide to promote mental health well-being and contribute to better mental health for adolescences in schools.

Further information at: <https://wexchange.turkuamk.fi/>

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PICTURES : <https://www.freepik.com/>