

**Let's  
TALK**

**LEARNING MATERIAL FOR  
YOUTH WORKERS AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE:  
Empowering Life Skills and Mental  
Health**

Project Reference: 2022-1-SE02-KA220-YOU-000087230

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## PROJECT "LET'S TALK": AN EFFECTIVE MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION, PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PROGRAMME TOWARDS POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21st CENTURY

Erasmus+, KA220 YOU Cooperation partnership in youth work

LetsTALK project's main objective is to develop a mental health promotion, prevention and intervention programme targeted to young people for supporting them comprehensively in coping with mental health disorders in adulthood through the enhancement of life skills as well as to promote the importance of positive mental health and well-being.

Furthermore, the project aims to :

- Improve young peoples' knowledge around Mental Health
- Equip young people with psychosocial skills for taking care and maintaining their Mental Health and wellbeing.
- End social stigma around mental health disorders by encouraging young people to speak about mental health disorders share their experiences and support others if needed
- Provide the needed material and practices to be adopted, to youth workers in order to raise their capacity to support young people with mental health disorders.
- Upgrade quality of youth workers through the development of an UPSKILLING TOOLKIT and an AR GAME, that will allow youth workers to use effective non formal methods in reaching out young people, and especially those who are experiencing mental health disorders and social stigma.
- Improve young peoples' self-esteem and resilience by promoting healthier attitudes and behaviors which will help young people to avoid any mental health issues during their transition from adolescence to adulthood.

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### **MORE INFO:**

<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2022-1-SE02-KA220-YOU-000087230>



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CONNECTING  
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VITATIM



## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Mental health promotion among youth is a crucial aspect of overall health and well-being. However, despite the increasing recognition of the importance of mental health, there is a lack of standardized frameworks for promoting mental health in youth, particularly in different regions and countries. In response to this need, a joint competence framework for mental health promotion in youth was developed, adapted to the realities and needs of young people in Sweden, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Cyprus, and Estonia. This framework is designed to provide guidance to professionals and stakeholders working with youth in promoting mental health and preventing mental health issues. The development of this joint framework represents a collaborative effort to address the unique needs and contexts of these five European countries, and to promote a more comprehensive approach to mental health promotion among young people.

Globally, it is estimated that 14% of 10-19 year-olds' experience mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression (WHO 2021). Undoubtedly, the COVID 19 crisis increased the number of YP with depression and anxiety. According to Youth & Covid-19 survey in 112 countries, worry and stress about their future career are emotions that YP are likely to have felt in the recent 2 years, which affected their mental wellbeing. UNICEF reported that, globally, suicide is the 4th most common cause of death among YP (aged 15-19) with Eastern Europe and Central Asia to have the largest percent of suicides.

Importantly, as most of MHD appeared during the transition to adulthood, a critical period YP are more vulnerable as they need to make important educational decisions, lifestyles choices and form interpersonal relationships, an early identification of such problems and early intervention is critically important. In the absence of appropriate support and intervention, MHD can have a



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major long-term negative impact on YP's social, intellectual and emotional development and consequently on their future.

In addition, most adolescents with MHD, while they recognise their situation, are often reluctant in seeking professional support because they feel embarrassed. In general, there is a lot of shame and fear associated with the idea of going to a psychologist and even more shame for going to a psychiatrist, as young people are afraid not to be stigmatized by others (social stigma). As a result, the people who perceive stigma often agree with these stereotypes and internalize them (self-stigma), a process which might lead to deeper mental processes, depression or even suicide. YP often underestimate the need for outside help and attempt to deal with their problems on their own. Therefore, they must be empowered through the provision of information on MHD and intervention techniques.

Even if YP overcomes stigma and seeks support from professionals, many national public health care systems cannot offer adequate treatments, according to an investigation by the Spanish Newsroom Civio. This treatment gap seems to be larger in some more recent EU member states where the waiting lines are longer, and the fees are higher.

Based on the above, and the fact that:

- Without effective prevention and treatment, MHD can have profound effects on people's ability to carry out their daily lives and often result in poorer physical health.
- Mental Wellbeing and end stigmatization of MHD, for achieving social inclusion of all YP, is one of the most important priorities of the EU YOUTH STRATEGY,
- COVID 19 pandemic still exists and could exacerbate these MHD as social distancing and quarantine situations need to be applied.

LetsTALK project needs to be funded as it will reduce social stigma and normalize conversation around MHD, by encouraging young people to talk about it, seek for help and/or adopt specific treatment strategies, and acquire LIFE SKILLS for maintaining their mental wellbeing.

## CONTENT INDEX

Module 1: Understanding Mental Health Disorders - TE

Module 2: Having MHD: The public and self-stigma of MHD - VitaTiim

Module 3: Techniques coping with MHD, Seeking help and finding support - BG

Module 4: Emotional Life skills for taking care and maintaining our MH - CD

Module 5: Social Life skills for taking care and maintaining our MH "Mindfulness" - PY



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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE LEARNING MATERIAL**

Welcome to our series of digital learning nuggets designed to enhance and deepen the knowledge and skills of young people aged 15-25 years old. This learning material focuses on three essential areas: Mental Health Literacy, Healthy Lifestyle, and Strategies/Techniques for Coping with Mental Health Disorders. Additionally, we will explore valuable Life Skills for taking care of and maintaining your Mental Health.

The Learning Material for Youth Workers and Young People aims to provide comprehensive support for youth workers in helping young individuals develop essential life skills and maintain their mental health. This digital learning resource consists of five modules or "nuggets," each focusing on a specific topic related to mental health and personal development. The modules include videos, PowerPoint presentations (PPTs), interactive activities, follow-up questions, and instructions for youth workers to facilitate engaging sessions.

## **GUIDELINES FOR USE**

- **Familiarize yourself:** Take the time to review and understand the content of each module. Familiarize yourself with the videos, PPTs, and interactive activities to effectively deliver the material to young people.
- **Facilitate interactive sessions:** Engage young people in discussions, activities, and reflection exercises during each module. Encourage them to participate actively and share their thoughts and experiences in a safe and supportive environment.
- **Adapt to the target audience:** Consider the unique needs and backgrounds of the young people you are working with. Modify the activities and discussions to suit their age group, cultural context, and individual preferences.
- **Encourage open dialogue:** Create a non-judgmental and inclusive atmosphere that promotes open conversations about mental health and personal development. Encourage young people to ask questions, seek clarification, and share their concerns.



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## TARGET GROUP

The Learning Material for Youth Workers and Young People is designed for youth workers working with young individuals aged 14 to 24. It is suitable for use in various youth work settings, including community centers, schools, and NGOs. The material can be adapted to accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds, educational levels, and individual needs.

## MODULE 1: Understanding Mental Health Disorders (TE)

Text: content to provide skills, knowledge and attitudes from framework

Video: Introduction to common mental health disorders and their impact on individuals.

PPT: Overview of different mental health disorders, including symptoms and prevalence statistics.

**Introduction:** A recent report by the UNICEF (2021) exposed some very alarming news across Europe: suicide is the second leading cause of death in Europe among young people. 19 percent of European boys aged 15 to 19 suffer from mental health disorders, while the number between girls of the same age is at 16 per cent. To put it in the numbers: a total of approximately nine million adolescents in Europe (aged 10 to 19) are living with mental health disorders, with anxiety and depression accounting for more than half cases, what do we actually know about the MHD? Are we able to recognize it in ourselves or in others?

### TOPIC 1: Main mental health disorders: how to recognize them.

#### Learning objectives

- To comprehend the most common mental health disorders (MHD).
- To present the symptoms of different MHD.
- To provide information on how to recognize different mental health disorders.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression, anxiety and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents. Other common MHD between young people - eating disorders and psychosis. These disorders can lead to self-harm and risky behavior as a strategy of unhealthy coping with the emotional difficulties and can severely impact an adolescent's mental and physical well-being.

It's important to note that mental health disorders are complex and each person's experience can



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be different. Diagnosis and treatment should be performed by qualified mental health professionals, depending on individual needs and circumstances. If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health issues, you should seek help from a mental health professional.

Recognizing mental health disorders can be complicated because symptoms can vary widely and can overlap with other conditions. However, there are common signs and signs that may suggest the presence of a mental health disorder. It is important to remember that only a trained mental health professional can make an accurate diagnosis. If you or someone you know is experiencing worrying behaviors or symptoms, it's important to seek professional help. Here are some general guidelines for recognizing potential mental health disorders:

Mental health disorders can manifest as changes in mood and emotions, changes in behavior, cognitive changes, unusual physical sensations, inability to cope with stress and relationships, a tendency to stop taking care of oneself, or even a desire to harm oneself.

## **TOPIC 2: What are the differences between mental health disorders?**

### **Learning Objectives**

- To differentiate main MHD by their characteristics.
- To recognize the main MHD diagnostic criteria.

Mental health disorders include a wide variety of conditions, each with its own characteristics, symptoms, and underlying causes. While there are differences between these disorders, it is important to note that many of them may also have some features in common.

It's important to realize that mental health disorders are complex, and some people can have symptoms that fall under multiple diagnostic categories. Accurate diagnosis and treatment planning requires the expertise of mental health professionals who can assess an individual's unique circumstances, symptoms, and needs.

The main diagnostic criteria for mental health disorders are described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), published by the American Psychiatric Association. The DSM-5 provides standard criteria and classifications for diagnosing various mental health conditions. Mental health professionals, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and clinical social workers, use the DSM-5 to guide the assessment and diagnosis of people with mental health problems. God.

Diagnostic criteria for each specific disorder can vary, but they generally include a set of



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symptoms and criteria that must be met for a definitive diagnosis. These criteria help ensure consistency and accuracy in diagnosis among different health care providers.

## TOPIC 3: Factors affecting mental health.

### Learning Objectives

- To analyze the main MHD risk factors and causes.
- To understand the origin and potential consequences of risk factors.

There is no single answer why some people are less resilient to the MHD than others, as there are so many factors that affect mental health. As adolescence is a crucial period for developing healthy social and emotional habits for mental well-being it is also the most risky one: the more risk factors they are exposed to, the greater is the potential impact on their mental health.

Mainly, you can divide the factors into 3 groups:

- Individual attributes and behaviors
- Social and economic circumstances
- Environmental factors



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Figure 1: factors contributing to the MHD

Source: [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/mental-health/risks\\_to\\_mental\\_health\\_en\\_27\\_08\\_12.pdf?sfvrsn=44f5907d\\_10&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/mental-health/risks_to_mental_health_en_27_08_12.pdf?sfvrsn=44f5907d_10&download=true)

- Factors that can contribute to the stress during adolescence:
- exposure to adversity,
  - pressure to conform with peers,
  - media influence on exploration of identity and gender norms,
  - disparity between an adolescent's lived reality and their perceptions or aspirations for the future,
  - quality of their life at home (living conditions, economical situation, harsh parenting ecc)
  - relationships with peers,
  - violence (especially sexual violence and bullying),
  - stigma, discrimination, exclusion,
  - lack of access to quality support and services,
  - chronic illnesses,
  - socioeconomic problems
- and many more.

The risks to mental health exist the whole life of the individual. However it interacts according the life of a person:

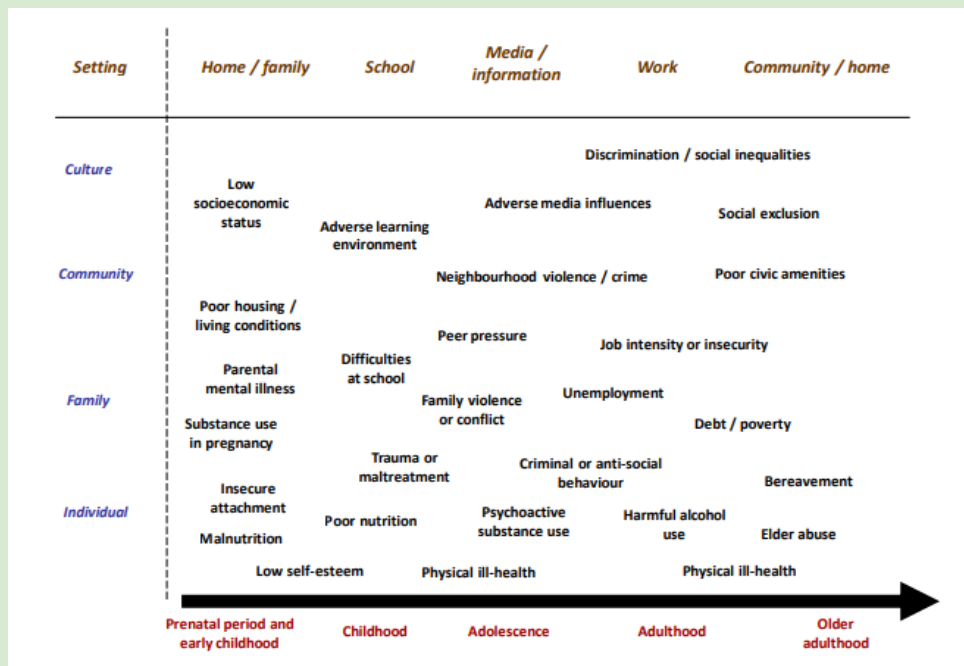


Figure 2 Schematic overview of risks to mental health over the life course

Source: [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/mental-health/risks\\_to\\_mental\\_health\\_en\\_27\\_08\\_12.pdf?sfvrsn=44f5907d\\_10&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/mental-health/risks_to_mental_health_en_27_08_12.pdf?sfvrsn=44f5907d_10&download=true)



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**Interactive Activity:** Group discussion on dispelling myths and reducing stigma surrounding mental health disorders.

Type of activity - Group discussion: World cafe

Duration - 10 min (Introduction 5min, 20min for each table, 10 min closure)

Participants number - 8-30

Needed materials - flipcharts, pens and pencils, post it papers, tables (at least 4) with chairs for every participant

Activity description step by step - Introduction

-Facilitator(s) welcome participants in the cafeteria and ask them to join a table. In order to encourage active participation, it's important to have groups of equal size per table. Once all the participants are sitting on their table, present the activity.

## 2. Main activity:

-In each table there is a relevant topic to discuss. The topics are not presented before in plenary, but the group members discover the new topic when they join the new table.

-Participants have 20 minutes to discuss the topic and write down their thoughts. If they feel more comfortable, they can write their thoughts on post it and put it on the flip chart without sharing their thoughts in a loud voice

-After 20 min, participants change table (can go as a group or randomly, the important thing they have to discuss all topics)

## 3. Closure

-Participants have a chance to walk around and see the finalized flipcharts and what other teams added.

Topics to discuss on different tables:

-Has anyone in the group experienced stigma or discrimination, related to mental illness or some other condition?

-Myths of the Mental health illnesses



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-What types of organizations or initiatives do you know that fight the mental health stigma?

-How to address Mental health stigma

You can change or add topics depending on the group: their knowledge, involvement or age.

Follow-up Questions: Individual reflection questions to deepen understanding.

1. Can I name the most common mental health disorders?
2. Are there risk factors in my daily life that could lead to mental health disorder?
3. What causes the stigma attached to mental health problems?
4. Can I name my country's statistics and compare them with other European countries? Can I compare different continents?

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## MODULE 2: Having MHD: The Public and Self-Stigma of Mental Health Disorders (VitaTiim)

Text: content to provide skills, knowledge and attitudes

Video: Personal testimonies from individuals with lived experiences of mental health disorders and their encounters with stigma.

PPT: Exploring public and self-stigma associated with mental health disorders, its effects, and ways to challenge stigma.

Interactive Activity: Role-play scenarios to develop empathy and understanding of stigma's impact.

Follow-up Questions: Discussion prompts to encourage critical thinking and personal reflection.

References:

Introduction:

The mention of Mental Health Disorders (MHD) often brings about an array of reactions from the public. Although much progress has been made in understanding and accepting MHD, stigma, whether self-inflicted or projected by others, remains a significant barrier. This document aims to delve into the facets of stigma associated with MHD, emphasizing the public and self-stigma dimensions, and provides a framework to cultivate a more empathetic and understanding society.

### 1. Understanding Stigma and its Origin:

#### a. Public Stigma:

Public stigma refers to the negative views and prejudices held by society towards individuals with MHD. It arises from misconceptions, myths, and general ignorance about mental health. The consequences include discrimination, isolation, and reluctance to seek help.



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## **b. Self-Stigma:**

This internalized stigma emerges when individuals with MHD start believing in the negative stereotypes about themselves. This can lead to feelings of shame, lowered self-esteem, and further isolation.

## **2. The Impact of Stigma:**

**Social Isolation:** Those with MHD often feel alienated due to the prejudices against them.

**Barriers to Treatment:** Stigma can discourage individuals from seeking help, worsening their conditions.

**Reduced Opportunities:** Discrimination can limit opportunities in education, employment, and relationships for those with MHD.

## **3. Combating Stigma - A Framework:**

### **a. Knowledge:**

**Education:** Equip the public with factual knowledge about MHD. This includes understanding that MHD is not a sign of personal failure.

**Awareness Campaigns:** Share real-life stories of those with MHD to humanize the conditions and challenge stereotypes.

### **b. Skills:**

**Effective Communication:** Promote open dialogue about mental health. Teach individuals how to discuss MHD without judgment.

**Crisis Intervention:** Equip individuals with skills to help someone in a mental health crisis, emphasizing empathy and active listening.

### **c. Attitudes:**



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Empathy Training: Encourage understanding and compassion towards those with MHD.

Challenge Negative Beliefs: Constantly question and challenge negative stereotypes about MHD within communities.

## **4. Personal Strategies to Combat Self-Stigma:**

Self-awareness: Recognizing one's value and worth beyond the disorder.

Support Groups: Finding solace in communities that understand and share similar experiences.

Positive Affirmations: Using affirmations to challenge and control negative self-perception.

## **5. Moving Forward:**

The journey to a society free from stigma surrounding MHD is long and ongoing. The framework provided serves as a roadmap to nurture a society where those with MHD can thrive without prejudice. It underscores the importance of collective effort, education, and empathy in creating an inclusive community.

### **Conclusion:**

Mental health disorders are a part of the human experience and should not be a cause for discrimination. By understanding the roots and manifestations of stigma and by actively working towards eradicating it, we pave the way for a more inclusive and compassionate society where everyone, irrespective of their mental health status, is treated with dignity and respect.

### **Activity: "Walking in Their Shoes"**

#### ***Objective:***

To help participants understand the impact of stigma on individuals with Mental Health Disorders (MHD) and to promote empathy and awareness.

#### ***Materials:***

- Index cards



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- Pens/markers
- A bell or chime
- A blindfold
- Large room or open space

## ***Instructions:***

Preparation: Write down various mental health disorders on individual index cards, one disorder per card (e.g., Depression, Anxiety, PTSD, etc.).

Introduction: Briefly discuss what stigma is and how it affects individuals with MHD. Emphasize the distinction between public and self-stigma.

## Activity Part I - Experiencing Public Stigma:

- Distribute the index cards randomly to participants, ensuring they don't show it to others.
- Blindfold a volunteer. They will be the "community member" for this round.
- Instruct the other participants (holding the index cards) to form a circle around the blindfolded individual.
- The "community member" will approach different individuals in the circle. Each person they approach will make a statement or ask a question based on the MHD they have on their card. However, they should not name the disorder. These statements/questions should be based on common misconceptions or stereotypes.
- After interacting with a few participants, ring the bell. The "community member" will then discuss how they felt during those interactions.

## Activity Part II - Overcoming Self-Stigma:

- Ask each participant to write on the back of their card a positive affirmation or truth that counters the misconception about the MHD they hold.



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- b. Participants will pair up and share the misconception and then the positive affirmation with their partner.
- c. Encourage open discussion on how these affirmations can help in combating self-stigma.

Debrief:

- a. Discuss the feelings and thoughts experienced during the activity.
- b. Highlight the importance of knowledge and understanding in combating stigma.
- c. Encourage participants to share one thing they learned from the activity that they will carry forward in their interactions.

Extension:

- a. Ask participants to create awareness posters or digital graphics based on what they've learned to promote understanding and dispel myths about MHD. These can be displayed in classrooms or shared on social media.

This activity engages participants in both understanding the weight of stigma and also in actively combating it. It's crucial to foster a safe space during such activities, ensuring participants feel comfortable sharing and expressing their feelings.

## **Activity: "The Stigma Web"**

### ***Objective:***

To visualize and understand the interconnectedness of various stigmatizing beliefs, attitudes, and misconceptions surrounding Mental Health Disorders (MHD) and to collaboratively identify strategies to challenge and combat these stigmatizing beliefs.

### ***Materials:***

- A large roll of string or yarn
- Index cards or sticky notes
- Markers



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- A large open space or room

## ***Instructions:***

Preparation: Write down various stigmatizing statements or misconceptions related to MHD on individual index cards or sticky notes.

Introduction: Begin with a brief discussion on stigma, emphasizing its pervasive nature and the way it intertwines with many aspects of society.

## Activity Part I - Constructing the Web:

- Place all the index cards with stigmatizing statements in the center of the room.
- Ask each participant to pick a card and stand in a large circle around the room's perimeter.
- Starting with one participant, they will read out the statement they've picked. After reading, they will hold onto the end of the string and toss the roll to another participant who thinks their statement is somehow related or has a common theme.
- This continues until everyone has read out their statements and the string has been passed around, forming a "web" of interconnected stigmatizing beliefs.

## Activity Part II - Challenging the Web:

- Participants are now asked to think of counter-statements or positive affirmations that challenge the stigmatizing belief they've read out.
- Write these positive affirmations on the back of their card or on a new sticky note.
- Participants will now take turns sharing their affirmations. After sharing, they will cut the string connecting their negative statement to another, symbolizing the breaking of that stigma.
- Continue until all the strings have been cut and all the stigmatizing beliefs have been challenged.



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Debrief:

- a. Reflect on the interconnectedness of stigmatizing beliefs and how one misconception can lead to another.
- b. Discuss the empowerment felt in challenging these beliefs and how collective action can make a difference.
- c. Ask participants to share their key takeaways and any action steps they're inspired to take after the activity.

Extension:

- a. Using the positive affirmations, participants can form small groups and develop mini-campaigns or projects to address a specific stigma. This could be in the form of posters, social media challenges, or community talks.

This activity emphasizes the interlinked nature of stigmatizing beliefs and the power of collective action in challenging and changing these beliefs. It promotes understanding, empathy, and active participation in combating stigma surrounding MHD.

## **Questions for reflections:**

*Understanding the Nature of Stigma:*

*Personal Implications:*

1. How might experiencing or internalizing such stigmas affect an individual's daily life or well-being?
2. Can you imagine ways in which you might react or feel if you were at the receiving end of such stigmatizing beliefs?
3. How do self-stigma and public stigma differ in their impacts on an individual's mental health journey?

*Challenging Stigma:*



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1. What strategies can we employ in our daily lives to challenge and combat these stigmatizing beliefs?
2. How important is open dialogue about mental health in reducing stigma? How can we initiate these conversations in our communities?
3. Think about your immediate circles (family, friends, school, or workplace). What can you do to foster a more understanding and inclusive environment for discussing mental health?

### *The Power of Collective Action:*

1. How did you feel when the group was collectively able to "break the web" of stigma?
2. In what ways can communities or groups amplify the efforts to combat mental health stigma, as compared to individual actions?
3. Can you think of any global or local movements, organizations, or campaigns that have effectively addressed mental health stigma? What strategies did they use?

### *Reflection and Forward Thinking:*

1. How has this activity changed or reinforced your existing perceptions about mental health?
2. What are some actionable steps you plan to take after today to address or raise awareness about mental health stigma?
3. How can we ensure that our efforts in combating stigma are sustainable and continuous?

### Recourses:

- NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)
- MentalHealth.gov
- Time to Change: UK based movement that aims to change the way people think and act about mental health.

## MODULE 3: Techniques for Coping with Mental Health Disorders, Seeking Help, and Finding Support (Walk Together)

Text: content to provide skills, knowledge and attitudes from framework

Video: Strategies and techniques for coping with mental health challenges and seeking professional help.



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PPT: Resources available for mental health support, including helplines, counseling services, and online platforms.

Interactive Activity: Creating personalized coping plans and discussing the importance of support networks.

Follow-up Questions: Individual goal-setting exercises to encourage proactive steps towards seeking help.

References

In this module young people will learn about many techniques and strategies that can help cope with mental health disorders. Among those techniques and strategies is seeking help and finding support from a mental health professional, from the community and the family of the individual, who is struggling with mental health disorders. The other topics that overview various mental health support methods are related to the development of a healthy lifestyle and self-care routine and the implementation of relaxation techniques into daily habits. Everyone's experience with mental health disorders is different and it is important to rely on an individualized plan for coping and management. Nevertheless, this module will offer to young people some generalized knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding techniques for coping with mental health disorders.

## 1. Seeking help and finding support

**Knowledge:** Understanding of what psychotherapy, a support system and a community support is and understanding about the importance of providing crisis support.

**Skills:** Being able to find supportive community entities, seeking treatment and encouraging access to it and fostering a supportive environment.

**Attitudes:** Not shying away from seeking help and finding support, when dealing with mental health issues; knowing that supporting individuals with mental health issues is not just the responsibility of mental health professionals, but also the responsibility of the entire community; advocating for policies that support mental health services and encouraging individuals to seek treatment.

## 2. Development of a healthy lifestyle and a self-care routine

**Knowledge:** Understanding the importance of exercise, self-care, healthy diet and the avoidance of substance use.

**Skills:** Cultivating skills to promote general wellness, having a set of skills for improving mental health by reducing stress levels, boosting mood, and improving sleep quality and enhancing personal motivation to develop a routine for self-care and a healthy lifestyle.

**Attitudes:** Maintaining a healthy lifestyle in order to achieve optimal physical and mental



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health, knowing that foods that are high in nutrients can help support brain function and provide sustained energy throughout the day and that regular physical activity is an effective way to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, remembering that the development of a routine is a process.

### 3. Relaxation techniques

**Knowledge:** Understanding that relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, and yoga can help manage stress and anxiety.

**Skills:** Applying some relaxation techniques alone or in combination with one another to help reduce stress and symptoms of anxiety and depression; enhancing personal self-awareness to become more attuned to the body and mind.

**Attitudes:** Knowing that relaxation techniques can have a significant positive impact on mental health; realizing that different relaxation techniques work better for different people, so it's important to experiment and find what works best for each individual; remembering that it is important to practice relaxation techniques regularly to reap the benefits and make them a regular part of the self-care routine, not just when the individual is feeling stressed or anxious.

#### Interactive activity:

##### Activity “A Self-Care Action Plan”

Step 1: The participants will watch an educational video about the importance of creating and maintaining a self-care action plan that supports mental health. How to Adult - *A Self-Care Action Plan*. YouTube, [A Self-Care Action Plan - YouTube](#)

Step 2: After watching the video, the participants will start brainstorming about various *positive daily activities* that make them feel good and boost their mood and energy, such as physical exercise, going for a walk, spending time with friends, family, pets, reading, drawing, doing their hobbies etc. Then they will brainstorm about different *relaxation techniques* that reduce their stress levels, such as meditation, deep breathing, doing yoga, spending time in nature, journaling etc. Each participant will make a list for him/herself with those two categories.

Step 3: The participants will draw a table on a blank sheet of paper with their most usual weekly daily routine, writing what they do hour by hour. Then they will be given a colorful pen/pencil/marker to include in the free spaces of their weekly schedule the positive daily activities and relaxation techniques that they have listed for themselves, so that they have at least once a day one of their listed relaxing and mood boosting



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activities. The participants will keep the updated schedule and try to implement it into their daily lives.

**Follow-up questions:** Individual goal-setting exercises to encourage proactive steps towards seeking help. The individual should answer the following questions:

## **Mental health self-assessment**

- How do I feel?
- What is my mental health condition at this moment?
- Do I show any mental health warning signs?
- Have I been taking good care of my mental health recently?
- Have I spoken about my mental health with a family member, a friend or a professional?
- Can I cope on my own with my mental health condition or I think I need help?

## **Finding help for my mental health**

- How to find a therapist?
- Will I pay for therapy from my own pocket or will I look for options that are covered by my health insurance plan?
- Who can I ask to give me a referral for a good specialist?
- Are there any mental health organizations in my country that have a reliable database with professionals?
- What do you want to accomplish in therapy?
- What is the right therapeutic method for me?
- Would I like to turn myself to a mental health app as a potential resource?
- Can I find other means of mental health support, such as school/university/workplace counseling center, local mental health support group, faith-based treatment through a worship center (church, synagogue, mosque etc.), healing through spiritual practices (reiki, crystals, shamanism etc.)?

## **References:**

How to Adult. *A Self-Care Action Plan*. YouTube, 3 May 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0iVTQS8ftg>.

Action Plan for Mental Health Patients | HealthyPlace. *Mental Health Support*, <https://www.healthyplace.com/alternative-mental-health/main/action-plan-for-mental-health-patients>.



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I'm Looking for Mental Health Help for Myself | Mental Health America. *Mental Health America*, <https://mhanational.org/im-looking-mental-health-help-myself>.

Joy, Rebecca. How to Find a Therapist That's Right for You: 9 Key Tips. *Healthline*, Healthline Media, 17 Aug. 2020, <https://www.healthline.com/health/how-to-find-a-therapist#takeaway>.

## MODULE 4: Emotional Life Skills for Taking Care and Maintaining Mental Health (CD)

### TOPIC 1. Introduction to Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to identify and manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. Emotional intelligence is generally said to include a few skills: namely emotional awareness, or the ability to identify and name one's own emotions; the ability to harness those emotions and apply them to tasks like thinking and problem solving; and the ability to manage emotions, which includes both regulating one's own emotions when necessary and helping others to do the same.

#### The Roots of Emotional Intelligence

The theory of emotional intelligence was introduced by Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer in the 1990s, and further developed and brought to the lay public by Daniel Goleman.

The concept, also known as emotional quotient or EQ, has gained wide acceptance. However, some psychologists argue that because EQ cannot be captured via psychometric tests (as can, for example, general intelligence), it lacks true explanatory power.

There are five key elements to EI: **self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills**. People with high EI can identify how they are feeling, what those feelings mean, and how those emotions impact their behavior and in turn, other people. It's a little harder to "manage" the emotions of other people - you can't control how someone else feels or behaves. But if you can identify the emotions behind their behavior, you'll have a better understanding of where they are coming from and how to best interact with them.



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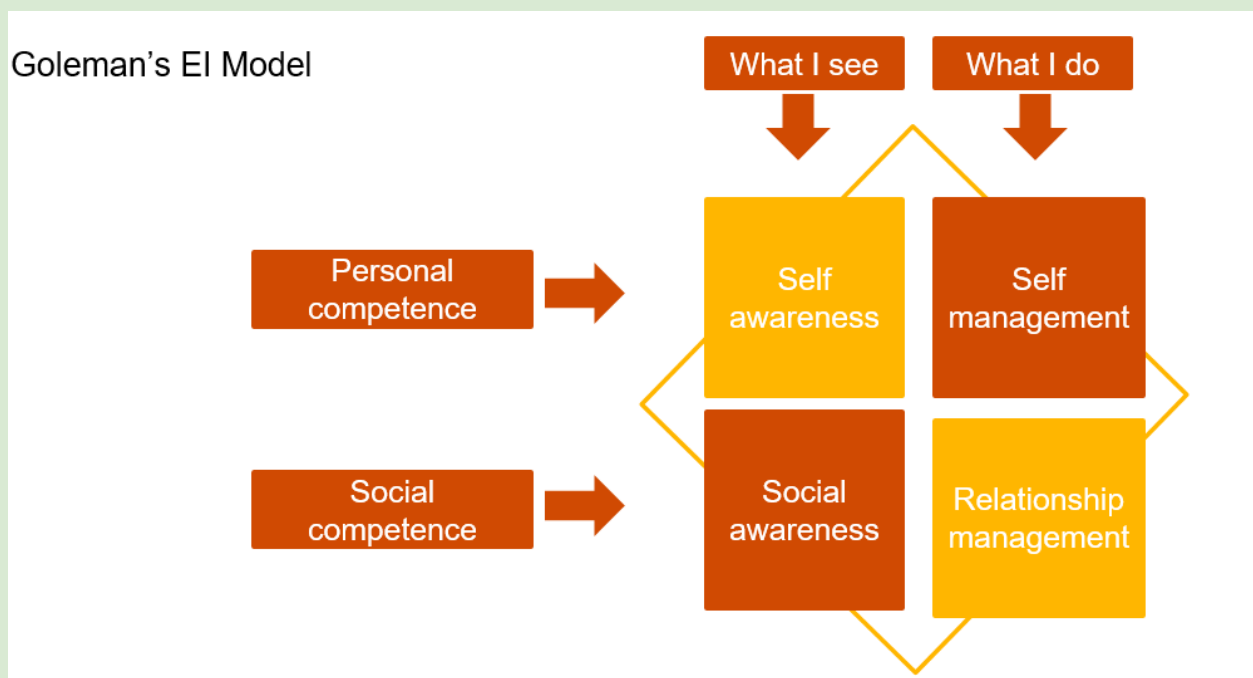
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In **MODULE 4: Emotional Life Skills for Taking Care and Maintaining Mental Health**, we will focus on what is in general emotional intelligence, in practicing self awareness, managing negative emotions and in motivation,

**Activity 1:** Think of an emotion that you've experienced within the past week: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and shame.

- How did this emotion affect your thoughts or actions?
- What “data” was this emotion giving you?
- If you had better understood the “data” of your emotion, would it have changed how you acted or viewed the situation?
- Why or why not?

According to **Daniel Goleman, 1995**, “**Emotional Intelligence is the ability to recognise and understand emotions in yourself and others, and your ability to use this awareness to manage your behavior and relationships**”.



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## 1. Self awareness



Your ability to accurately perceive your emotions  
and stay aware of them as they happen

- **Self-awareness** is your ability to accurately perceive your own emotions in the moment and understand your reaction patterns across various situations. It is also about accurately recognising our strengths and weaknesses.
- The only way to understand your own emotions is to spend enough time thinking through them to understand where they come from and why they are there – in other words, what makes you tick, what pushes your buttons and why.
- Self-awareness is a foundational skill; when you have it, it makes the other emotional intelligence skills much easier to use.
- As self-awareness increases, people's satisfaction with life defined as their ability to achieve meaningful goals skyrockets.



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The reason self-awareness is such an important skill is that when you are self-aware, you are far more likely to pursue the right opportunities, put your strengths to work and keep your emotions from holding you back.

## 2. Self management



Your ability to use awareness of your emotions to stay flexible and positively direct your behaviour

- **Self-management** is what happens when you act (or don't).
- It is your ability to use the awareness of your emotions to stay flexible and direct your behavior positively. This means managing your reactions to situations and people positively
- Self-management is more than resisting explosive or problematic behaviour. The biggest challenge that people face in that area is putting their short term needs on hold in order to pursue larger, longer-term goals.



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- It is about our ability to withstand the need for instant gratification, either by not reacting emotionally, or disciplining ourselves to follow an action plan that we set for ourselves to achieve a goal.

### 3. Social awareness



Your ability to perceive emotions of others and understand these emotions

- **Social awareness** is your ability to pick up on the emotions of others and understand what is really going on with them.
- This very often means perceiving and understanding what others are feeling although you are not feeling the same way.
- Social awareness ensure that you stay focused and absorb critical information from your environment
- Listening and observing are the most critical skills of social awareness.

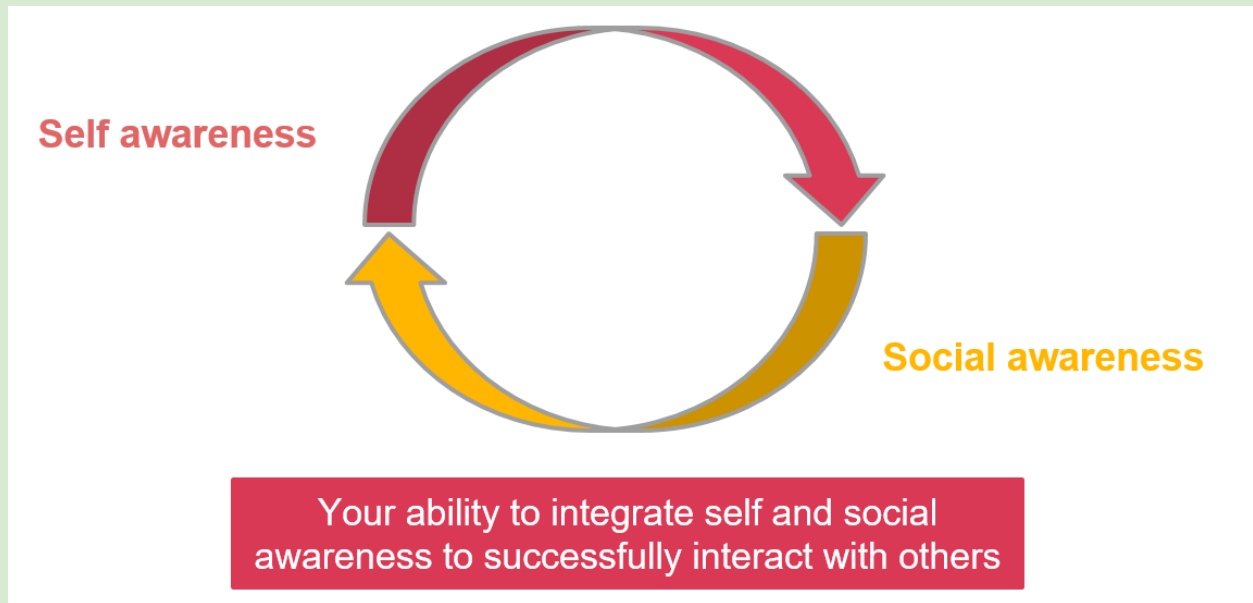


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- To be socially aware, you have to be able to spot and understand others' emotions while you are interacting with them.

## 4. Relationship management



- **Relationship management** usually taps into the three skills that we have already described. You could say that it integrates self and social awareness to successfully interact with others.
- People who manage relationships well have the ability to connect with others, even if they don't particularly like someone.
- Creating connections with others is of crucial importance if you ever intend to be successful in managing others: the stronger the connection with your team members, the easier it will be to get your point across.
- The difference between an interaction and a relationship is frequency. Relationships are a product of high quality, frequent interactions with others.
- Relationship management poses the biggest challenge to most people during times of high stress. In our everyday lives, some of the most challenging and stressful situations happen at work. A great percentage of staff within the organization doesn't cope with stress well. This will



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inevitably have implications to how relationships are created and developed within your organization.

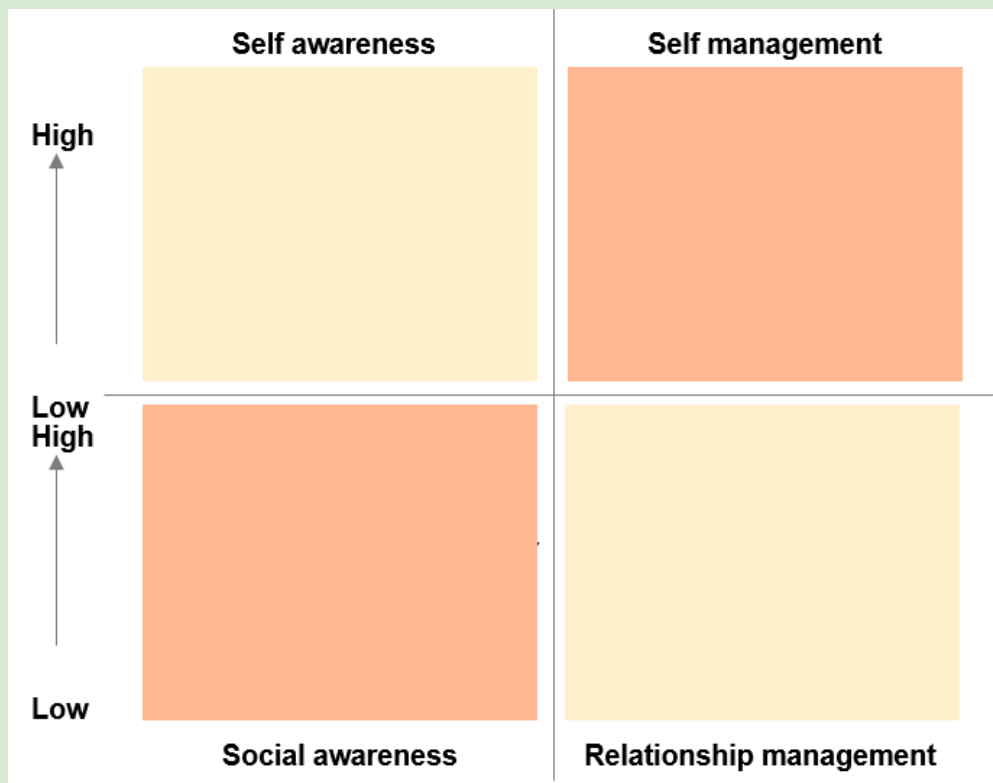
- Conflicts at work tend to develop when people either passively avoid problems or lack the skills to initiate a direct, constructive conversation.

## Activity 2:

In the scenarios that follow, read the profiles described and identify:

Which EQ skill is it related to?

Is it high or low?



### **Scenario 1:**

Sam has a rare talent to be able to read the emotions of others very well. He/she shows sincere interest in others and has made an effort to get to know people on a personal level. When announcing difficult news, he/she acknowledges other people's feelings and adapts his



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communication style to help reach a resolution. Sam is a great team-player, who strengthens bonds within the team. He/she motivates and inspires people.

Answer: High Social Awareness

## **Scenario 2:**

As a Manager, Ari is the kind of person who lets his/her emotions rule his/her behavior. He/she is constantly stressed, in a hurry and generally considers everything as urgent. Ari means well, but when in panic, he/she doesn't realize how his/her verbal outbursts sound and how this can affect his/her co-workers. Most of the things Ari stresses about, end up not being that important after all. As a result, Ari has started losing credibility in the eyes of her team members.

**The answer is: High Social Awareness**

## **Scenario 3:**

Alex has difficulty showing trust in people she doesn't know. During team meetings, Alex always reacts to people rather than respond to them, often dismissing their thoughts. This direct approach can be difficult for people to handle in most instances. Alex also concentrates on the negative aspects of every situation and does not miss the opportunity to pinpoint mistakes. As a result, Alex has been stigmatized with the characterisation that he/she is touchy, difficult to work for and unapproachable.

**The answer is: High Social Awareness**

## **Scenario 4:**

Jamie is the kind of person who will stay cool and reserved in any type of situation. His/her Manager may assign files to him/her at the last minute – something definitely frustrating – but will not let him/her self lose control and react in ways he/she may later regret. As a team member, Jamie is always open and authentic about his/her feelings with colleagues, whether these feelings are positive or negative. When faced with a difficult situation, he/she knows how to be firm/tough but still be collected/kind at the same time. The team trusts him/her.

**The answer is: High Social Awareness**

## **Scenario 5:**



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Jack is the kind of person who is considered as the “father-figure” of the team. He has the ability to empathize with others and create strong relationships. He is non-judgemental and this makes it easy for his team members to discuss various matters with him and trust him. Jack knows when to approach an issue sensitively, when to give praise and encouragement, when to give constructive feedback. He makes people feel like he relates to their issues and understands them, and therefore people value his input.

**The answer is: High Social Awareness**

**What does high EQ look like?**



- **Modify your emotions:** When you have the skills needed to modify your emotions and get the better out of you.
- **Think about your reactions:** When you are able, before you just react, give yourself the time to weigh up the pros and cons of a situation and think things through.
- **See situations as a challenge:** When you are able to recognise negative emotions in yourself and see difficult situations as a challenge focusing on the positives.
- **Put yourself in people's shoes:** When you understand, share and internalize another person's experiences and emotions, when you are able to extend these skills beyond your own personal functioning.

**Activity 3:**



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Test your EQ skills, and discuss the results and explain the EQ model as part of the training.

<https://www.mindtools.com/axbwm3m/how-emotionally-intelligent-are-you>

References:

- What is emotional intelligence and how does it apply to the workplace?:

<https://mhanational.org/what-emotional-intelligence-and-how-does-it-apply-workplace>

- Emotional Intelligence:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/emotional-intelligence>

- The 5 elements of emotional intelligence:

<https://www.icaew.com/insights/student-insights/the-5-elements-of-emotional-intelligence>

## TOPIC 2. Practicing self-awareness

### a) What is self-awareness and why is it important?

Do you want to be happier, have more influence, be a better decision-maker, and be a more effective leader? Self-awareness, then, is the most important muscle you need to develop. It's what will keep you on target to be the best version of yourself and the best leader you can be.

The benefits of self-awareness are as varied as each individual, and examples include increased influence, greater perspective, and stronger relationships. Let's dig into what self-awareness is, definitions, and ways to develop it.

Oxford Language defines self-awareness as "conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires."

*"Self-awareness is the ability to focus on yourself and how your actions, thoughts, or emotions do or don't align with your internal standards. If you're highly self-aware, you can objectively evaluate yourself, manage your emotions, align your behavior with your values, and understand correctly how others perceive you."*

Put simply, those who are highly self-aware can interpret their actions, feelings, and thoughts objectively.



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It's a rare skill, as many of us spiral into emotion-driven interpretations of our circumstances. Developing self-awareness is important because it allows leaders to assess their growth and effectiveness and change course when necessary.

## **Two states of self-awareness**

There are two distinct kinds of self-awareness, public and private.

Public self-awareness: Being aware of how we can appear to others. Because of this consciousness, we are more likely to adhere to social norms and behave in ways that are socially acceptable.

Private self-awareness: Being able to notice and reflect on one's internal state. Those who have private self-awareness are introspective, approaching their feelings and reactions with curiosity.

For example, you may notice yourself tensing up as you are preparing for an important meeting. Noticing the physical sensations and correctly attributing them to your anxiety about the meeting would be an example of private self-awareness.

When self-awareness tips into self-consciousness, we are reluctant to share certain aspects of ourselves. We develop a persona that lacks authenticity.

## **Why is self-awareness important?**

The Eurich group has researched the nature of self-awareness. Their research indicates that when we look inward, we can clarify our values, thoughts, feelings, behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses. We are able to recognize the effect that we have on others. Eurich's research finds that people with self-awareness are happier and have better relationships. They also experience a sense of personal and social control as well as higher job satisfaction.

When we look outward, we understand how people view us. People who are aware of how people see them are more likely to be empathetic to people with different perspectives. Leaders whose self-perception matches others' perceptions are more likely to empower, include, and recognize others.

## **Benefits of self-awareness**



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As we mentioned earlier, strengthening self-awareness has a variety of benefits. The specifics of each one depends on the individual.

Here are some examples of common benefits of self-awareness:

- It gives us the power to influence outcomes
- It helps us to become better decision-makers It gives us more self-confidence - so, as a result, we communicate with clarity and intention
- It allows us to understand things from multiple perspectives
- It frees us from our assumptions and biases
- It helps us build better relationships
- It gives us a greater ability to regulate our emotions
- It decreases stress
- It makes us happier

## **How do I know if I'm a self-aware person?**

**Activity 1:** Answer the below 12 multiple-choice questions that will tell you the level of your self-awareness and what you can do to improve it. The assessment is research-based and developed by Mike Bundrant, a neuro-linguistic trainer and life coach. Link: <https://inlpcenter.org/self-awareness-test/>

## **How to become a more self-aware person**

### **a) Envision yourself**

Visualize the best version of yourself. "Ideal selves reflect our hopes, dreams, aspirations, and speak to our skills, abilities, achievements, and accomplishments that we wish to attain." (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986.) As you lean into your strengths to become the better version of yourself, you can use this idealized self to keep moving in the right direction and not be distracted by setbacks and other obstacles.

### **b) Ask the "what" questions**

At the core of self-awareness is the ability to self-reflect. However, the Eurich group contends that most people are going about reflection in the wrong way. The trouble is, we ask ourselves the wrong questions. In our attempt to resolve internal conflict, we ask, "Why?" Yet there's no



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way to answer that question since we don't have access to our unconscious. Instead, we make up answers that may not be accurate.

The danger of the "why" question is that it sends us down the rabbit hole of our negative thoughts. We focus on our weaknesses and insecurities. Consider Amy, a new junior executive who has difficulty speaking up at meetings. She may explain her experience to herself by thinking, "I don't speak up at meetings because I fall too low in the corporate food chain. No one's going to listen to me."

Asking the "what question" puts us into the objective and open space of considering all the factors influencing a particular outcome. For example, instead of "Why don't I speak up at meetings?" we could ask:

- "What were the interpersonal dynamics in the room?"
- "What was I experiencing in my body at the time?"
- "What happened that caused me to go into my old story of not being good enough?"
- "What can I do to overcome my fear of speaking up?"

This kind of introspection allows us to look at behaviors and beliefs for what they are. With self-awareness, we can examine old patterns and stories that do not serve us, and then we can move on. Asking the right questions empowers us to make different choices that bring different results.

Amy decides to make a plan because now she understands that she has a chance at overcoming her problem.

She's going to find out more about the content and goals of an upcoming meeting to become more confident in how she can contribute.

Rather than being consumed by imagining what others are thinking about her, she'll actively listen for cues to ask meaningful questions that move the conversation forward.

With a heightened awareness of the cues her body is giving her signaling fear and anxiety, she'll name the emotion at the moment and choose not to be overwhelmed by it — one giant step to self-awareness.

## **Strengthen your brain**



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The amygdala, also called the primitive brain, was the first part of the brain to develop in humans. It functioned as a kind of radar signaling the need to run away or fight back. That part of the brain is skilled at anticipating danger and reacts before we can even name a negative emotion. Our heart races, our stomach tightens, and our neck muscles tense up.

Your body's reaction is a tripwire signaling the prefrontal cortex to register or name a negative emotion. If you bring awareness to your physical state, you can, at the moment, recognize the emotion as it is happening. Becoming skillful at this rewires your brain.

Naming your feelings is critical in decision-making. When we let our feelings overwhelm us, we can make bad decisions with unintended consequences. Naming your emotions allows us to take a "third-person" perspective to stand back and more objectively evaluate what's going on.

Let's bring this home with an example. You, a self-aware person, are having a conversation with someone and receiving some negative feedback. Your heart starts to race, and you're feeling threatened. You say to yourself, "I feel like this person is attacking me." But, before you cry or go ballistic, you stop yourself and hear the person out. You discover that this person had at least one good point and start up a different conversation, one that is mutually satisfying and productive.

## **Ask others about their perception of you**

Now that you've discovered that feedback doesn't have to be scary, ask other people how they perceive you in certain situations. Getting specific will help to give you the most concrete feedback. Get brave and ask them how they would like to see you behave.

**Activity 2:** Pick out a scenario(s) you would like to receive feedback on and list them.

Make two columns.

Column A: How I see myself

Column B: How others see me

In Column A make a list of words to describe your attitude and behaviors at the time.



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Then, ask your feedback partner to do the same and record those responses in Column B.

Look out for discrepancies. You may have some blind spots that need attending.

## **Keep a journal**

Journalling is a great way to pay attention to what's going on in your private and public self. It will also help you to recognize patterns that either serve you or not. You may use these prompts:

- What did I do well today?
- What challenges did I face?
- What was I feeling?
- How did I respond? In retrospect, would I have responded differently?
- What strengths did I use to keep me focused on the best version of myself?
- What is my intention for tomorrow?

## **Practice mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a practice. It helps you be aware of what's going on in your mind, body, and environment. Meditation is one of a few practices that you can insert into your daily life, and practicing mindfulness is a wonderful tool for developing greater self-control.

## **Here are some ideas of mindfulness activities to get you started:**

- Practice deep breathing
- Name your surroundings
- Organize your space
- Draw or paint

The road to self-awareness is a journey. The most self-aware people see themselves on a quest to mastery rather than at a particular destination. As you move forward in developing your self-awareness, ask yourself regularly, “How will you move toward the best version of yourself today?”

## **References:**

- What is self-awareness and why is it important?

<https://www.betterup.com/blog/what-is-self-awareness#:~:text=Psychologists%20Shelley%20Duval%20and%20Robert.aligned%20with%20your%20internal%20standards.>



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- What Self-Awareness Really Is (and How to Cultivate It)

<https://hbr.org/2018/01/what-self-awareness-really-is-and-how-to-cultivate-it>

- Developing Self-Awareness

<https://www.mindtools.com/awe5sru/developing-self-awareness>

## TOPIC 3. MANAGING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Negative emotions, such as fear, anger, and anxiety are all part of the human experience. While such feelings are often a normal reaction to certain experiences or events, we tend to fight, suppress or avoid them, because they are not pleasant to experience.

### Types of Negative Emotions

There are a number of different feelings that are often identified as negative emotions. Some common types of negative emotions include:

- Anger
- Anxiety or fear
- Apathy
- Contempt, hate, or disgust
- Jealousy
- Insecurity
- Regret or guilt
- Sadness, grief, or loneliness
- Shame

### Negative emotions are healthy to experience

These negative emotional states make us feel **uncomfortable** and can **cause extra stress** in our body and mind. Nobody likes to feel uncomfortable, so it is natural to want to escape these feelings, believing that they are something bad.

But what if we start perceiving negative emotions not necessarily as something bad, but as something that can be healthy to experience?



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Emotions aren't necessarily good or bad, they are just states and signals that allow us to pay more attention to the events and thoughts that cause them. Like most emotions, negative ones exist for a reason and can actually be quite useful to feel.

More often, these feelings are beneficial because they can provide information about ourselves and send us messages. For example:

- Anger and anxiety show that something needs to change and that perhaps our well-being has been threatened.
- Fear is an appeal to increase your level of safety
- Frustration or resentment motivates us to change something in a relationship.
- Basically, negative emotions are there to alert us that something needs to change and to motivate us to make that change.

## **When do negative emotions become problematic?**

These emotions become problematic when they are persistent and interfere with your ability to function in your normal daily life, your ability to accomplish goals and your well-being and relationships. For example, unmanaged anger can compel you to destroy important relationships if you allow it to and unmanaged stress, caused by negative emotions, could become chronic or overwhelming and lead to health issues.

In addition, negative emotions can become harmful, depending on what you think about them. Recent research suggests that while negative emotions can affect your well-being, your perspective on those feelings can play an even bigger role in your mental health.

In a study published in March in the journal *Emotion*, researchers found that people who habitually judge negative feelings -such as sadness, fear and anger- as bad or inappropriate have more anxiety and depression symptoms and feel less satisfied with their lives than people who generally perceive their negative emotions in a positive or neutral light.

*“Many of us have this implicit belief that emotions themselves are bad, they’re going to do something bad to us, but most of the time, emotions don’t do harmful things. It’s actually the judgment that causes, ultimately, the suffering.”*

*Iris Mauss, social psychologist  
at the University of California, Berkeley*



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## **Why can judging your feelings backfire?**

According to Emily Willroth, psychologist at Washington University in St. Louis, when we perceive our emotions as bad, we pile more bad feelings onto our existing ones, which makes us feel even worse. It is likely to increase both the intensity of our negative feelings and the amount of time we suffer from them. Instead of having a feeling naturally pass after a few minutes, “you might be ruminating on it an hour later,” she said.

Avoiding or suppressing feelings can be counterproductive, too. In a small clinical trial, researchers asked people to put one of their hands into an ice water bath and to either accept their feelings of pain or to suppress them. Those who tried to suppress their feelings reported more pain and couldn't endure the ice water for as long as those who accepted their discomfort. Other research has linked emotional suppression with an increased risk for mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety.

“What one resists, persists,” said Amanda Shallcross, a naturopathic physician who studies emotion regulation at the Cleveland Clinic. When you avoid your emotions, “you're bound to experience longer-term negative mental and physical health.”

Research also suggests that if you have a habit of negatively judging your emotions, you can become more upset when faced with a stressful situation. In a 2018 study, Dr. Mauss and her colleagues asked individuals whether they tended to accept their emotions or judge them as bad. Then they asked subjects to give a three-minute speech about their qualifications for a job -a task known to induce stress. Participants who said they didn't usually accept their emotions reported experiencing more negative feelings while they gave the speech. In a follow-up experiment, the researchers found that subjects who didn't usually accept their emotions reported worse psychological well-being and had more depression and anxiety symptoms six months later.

## **Managing negative emotions instead of avoiding them**

Taking the above into consideration, the **best approach to cope with negative emotions** is to embrace and manage them, instead of judging or denying them. Managing negative emotions, doesn't mean, of course, letting them wreak havoc on your life, your relationships, and your stress levels. It is possible to keep them under control without denying that you are feeling them.



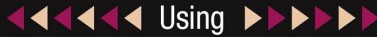
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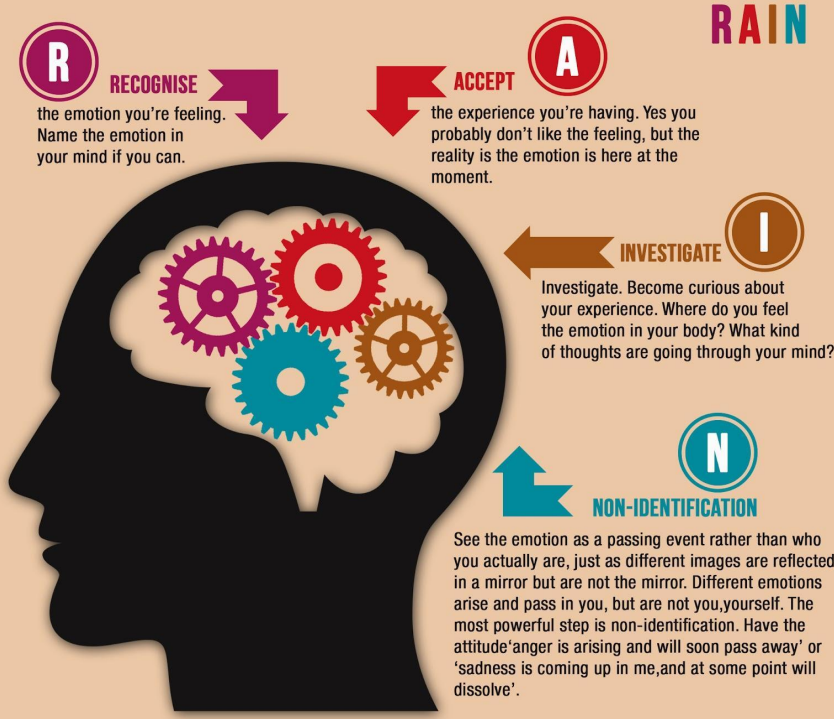
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Keeping negative emotions under control is more about accepting the fact that you are feeling them, determining why you are feeling this way, and allowing yourself to receive the messages that they are sending you before you release them and move forward. Although it may sound a little odd, your emotions act as messengers that have something to share with you. These messages can be very valuable if you just listen.

It's also important to note that accepting emotions is different from accepting the situations that cause bad emotions.

Using  **Mindfulness** to Cope with **Difficult Emotions**  
ShamashAlidina.com

We all have bad days; some are worse than others. When emotions become overwhelming, you can use this **RAIN formula** to help manage your feelings in a mindful way.



**R** **RECOGNISE**  
the emotion you're feeling. Name the emotion in your mind if you can.

**A** **ACCEPT**  
the experience you're having. Yes you probably don't like the feeling, but the reality is the emotion is here at the moment.

**I** **INVESTIGATE**  
Investigate. Become curious about your experience. Where do you feel the emotion in your body? What kind of thoughts are going through your mind?

**N** **NON-IDENTIFICATION**  
See the emotion as a passing event rather than who you actually are, just as different images are reflected in a mirror but are not the mirror. Different emotions arise and pass in you, but are not you, yourself. The most powerful step is non-identification. Have the attitude 'anger is arising and will soon pass away' or 'sadness is coming up in me, and at some point will dissolve'.

Sometimes you just need to do one step, whereas at other times you may want to work through the whole formula. Practise using the formula whenever you can, so when things become challenging for you, you'll find it easier to use.



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## **Steps for managing successfully negative emotions**

### **Step 1: Pause**

This step is crucial because instead of acting on feelings right away, you stop yourself and think things through. For achieving this you can count to 100 or say the alphabet backwards.

### **Step 2: Acknowledge your feelings**

Let's presume that you are mad at someone, or that you are sad because your feelings were hurt by what someone did to you. You have to stop for a moment and think that whatever it is that you are feeling, it is ok to feel that way.

### **Step 3: Think**

Now that you have taken a few moments to figure out what exactly it is that you are feeling, think about how you can make yourself feel better.

### **Step 4: Help**

Take action to help yourself based upon what you came up with in the "Think" step.

## **Examples of actions to manage negative emotions**

### **Hobbies / Stress relievers**

Learn something new – there are tutorials for all kinds of hobbies online

Create - try a craft project, color, paint, or draw. Invite a friend to join you for added fun

Write – you could write a story, a poem, or an entry in a journal

Get active - dance, run, or play a sport

Take care of your plants / get a plant/ start a garden

Reorganize your room

Play with an animal

### **Address your basic needs**

Eat a healthy snack

Drink a glass of water

Take a shower or bath

Take a nap

Process Feelings



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## **Embrace/express your feelings**

Punch a pillow

Scream

Let yourself cry

Rip paper into small pieces

Vent (Venting is not the same as asking for help, it's taking an opportunity to share your feelings out loud. You can also vent by writing a letter to the person who upset you. Keep the letter a couple of days and then tear it up)

## **Problem Solving**

Make a list of solutions to problems -it can help to brainstorm with a friend or a family member

Make a list of things you admire about yourself or your strengths. There are plenty of things about you that are awesome, no matter how down you are feeling at the moment.

If a person has upset you, talk with them directly. Fill in the blanks to this sentence – “I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when (this happens) because \_\_\_\_\_. Next time, could you please \_\_\_\_\_.” Example: “I feel left out when there is no room at the lunch table, because then I don't have friends to talk to. Next time can you please save me a seat?”

## **Volunteering/Acts of kindness**

Do something nice for someone you know

Help a stranger

Volunteer

## **Relaxation**

Practice belly breathing

Try muscle relaxation

Do yoga

Find guided meditation on YouTube

Take a relaxing bath

Go for a walk and focus on your senses - observe your surroundings, feel the ground under your feet and the air on your skin

Read a book

Listen to music

## **Incorporate laughing**



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Incorporating laughing exercises whenever you are experiencing negative emotions or into your daily routine can have many benefits. A good laugh has great short-term effects. When you start to laugh, it doesn't just lighten your load mentally, it actually induces physical changes in your body. It stimulates many organs, activates your stress response and soothes tension. Laughter also has many long term benefits: it improves the immune system, relieves pain, increases personal satisfaction, boosts your mood and energy levels, enhances social connections and communication skills.

A good way to incorporate laughter in your daily life is to:

- Do laughter yoga
- Watch a funny video on social media
- Watch your favorite comedy movie/ comedian

## **ACTIVITY 1 – Best Possible Self Exercise**

This activity involves envisioning your best possible self and what that would look like. This exercise has been shown to lift the mood and bring a sense of optimism, both of which bring lasting benefits. This exercise can be done as a journaling exercise or simply a visualization technique, but basically involves envisioning your life in the future and challenging yourself to imagine the best possible life you can live, the best possible version of yourself that you can be.

Research has shown that people who engage in envisioning their best self for five minutes a day for two weeks experience a more positive mood and an increase in optimism compared to people who spent the same amount of time simply thinking about activities in their day.

### **Exercise:**

-Grab a pen and paper and take a few minutes to imagine your best possible self in some kind of potential future, say a month, a year, five years, ten years from now, whatever works.

-Write down what happens when everything goes right in your relationship, in your leadership, business and career, when you achieve your goals. Keep it brief or go into detail, just make sure it includes a vision that is actually obtainable, over wild fantasy scenarios. Picture yourself in that successful future scenario, and consider how it feels.



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## **ACTIVITY 2 - “Naming your emotions” podcast**

This podcast is about how to make uncomfortable feelings feel more tolerable, by putting a label on your feelings. Research has shown that this technique decreases the intensity of negative feelings.

[Labeling your emotions](#)

## **ACTIVITY 3 - Laughter Yoga Exercises**

### **Warm-Up Laughter Yoga Exercise**

To start, stand up straight with your feet shoulder-width apart. Take a deep breath in and raise your arms above your head. As you exhale, bring your arms down to your sides and let out a big, hearty laugh. Repeat this exercise five times to warm up your body and get into the spirit of laughter yoga.

### **Silent Laughter Exercise**

Next, stand in the same position and take a deep breath in. As you exhale, start laughing silently. This means that you open your mouth and move your body as if you were laughing out loud, but without making any sound. Keep laughing silently for 30 seconds, then take a deep breath in and exhale. Repeat this exercise two more times.

### **Childlike Laughter Yoga Exercise**

For this exercise, imagine yourself as a child and allow yourself to laugh freely and joyfully. Start by taking a deep breath in and exhaling with a giggle. Then, start laughing like a child, with no worries or inhibitions. Keep laughing for 30 seconds, then take a deep breath in and exhale. Repeat this exercise two more times.

### **Lion Laughter Exercise**

The lion laughter exercise is a fun way to release tension and loosen up your facial muscles. Start by taking a deep breath in and exhaling while sticking out your tongue and making a “ha” sound. Then, take another deep breath in and exhale while making a “ha-ha-ha” sound like a lion’s roar. Repeat this exercise five times.

### **Belly Laughter Exercise**

The belly laughter exercise is a great way to work your abs and get a good laugh at the same time. Stand up straight and place your hands on your belly. Take a deep breath in and exhale with



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a “ho-ho-ho” sound. Then, start laughing from your belly, letting your laughter fill your whole body. Keep laughing for 30 seconds, then take a deep breath in and exhale. Repeat this exercise two more times.

## **Alphabet Laughter Exercise**

The alphabet exercise is a simple and fun way to incorporate laughter into your daily routine. Start by taking a deep breath in and exhaling with a giggle. Then, say the alphabet out loud, but instead of saying the letters, replace them with a laughter sound. For example, “A-ha-ha-ha, B-ho-ho-ho, C-he-he-he.” Keep going until you reach the end of the alphabet.

## **Fake Laughter Exercise**

Even if you’re not feeling particularly happy or amused, fake laughter can still provide many of the benefits of real laughter. Start by taking a deep breath in and exhaling with a “ha-ha-ha” sound. Then, start laughing in a fake, exaggerated way. Keep laughing for 30 seconds, then take a deep breath in and exhale. Repeat this exercise two more times.

## **Group Laughter Exercise**

Laughter is contagious, so why not share it with others? It doesn’t matter if your laughter is fake or genuine – the act of laughing with others can help to build bonds and create a sense of community. Start by taking a deep breath in and exhaling with a giggle. Then, start laughing together, looking into each other’s eyes and letting your laughter build and grow. Keep laughing for 30 seconds, then take a deep breath in and exhale. Repeat this exercise two more times.

## **Surprise Laughter Exercise**

The surprise exercise is a fun and unexpected way to incorporate laughter into your day. Start by taking a deep breath in and exhaling with a “ha-ha-ha” sound. Then, suddenly start laughing as if something has surprised you. Keep laughing for 30 seconds, then take a deep breath in and exhale. Repeat this exercise two more times.

References:

[How Negative Emotions Affect Us](#)

[How to deal with negative emotions](#)

[Quick and easy laughter yoga exercises](#)

[Imagine your best possible self](#)



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## **TOPIC 4. Building resilience**

Research over the past few years has highlighted the profound impact of resilience on mental health and overall well-being. It is an essential characteristic that forms the foundation of how we see, understand, and engage in the world around us, and it teaches us how to navigate the ebb and flow of life with confidence, adaptability, and strength.

### **What is resilience?**

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands (APA, 2022).

In other words, it's the ability to bounce back from setbacks, challenges, or stress. In some ways, it acts like a shield, protecting us from the negative effects of life's ups and downs and equipping us with the tools needed to seek solutions and process those experiences in healthy ways.

### **Why is resilience so important?**

Research over the past years has consistently shown that resilient individuals:

- are more equipped to handle stress
- Find it easier to maintain emotional stability
- are more hopeful and optimistic
- have higher levels of life satisfaction
- exhibit positive mental health outcomes. feel more connected to others
- Have greater motivation
- Are more resourceful

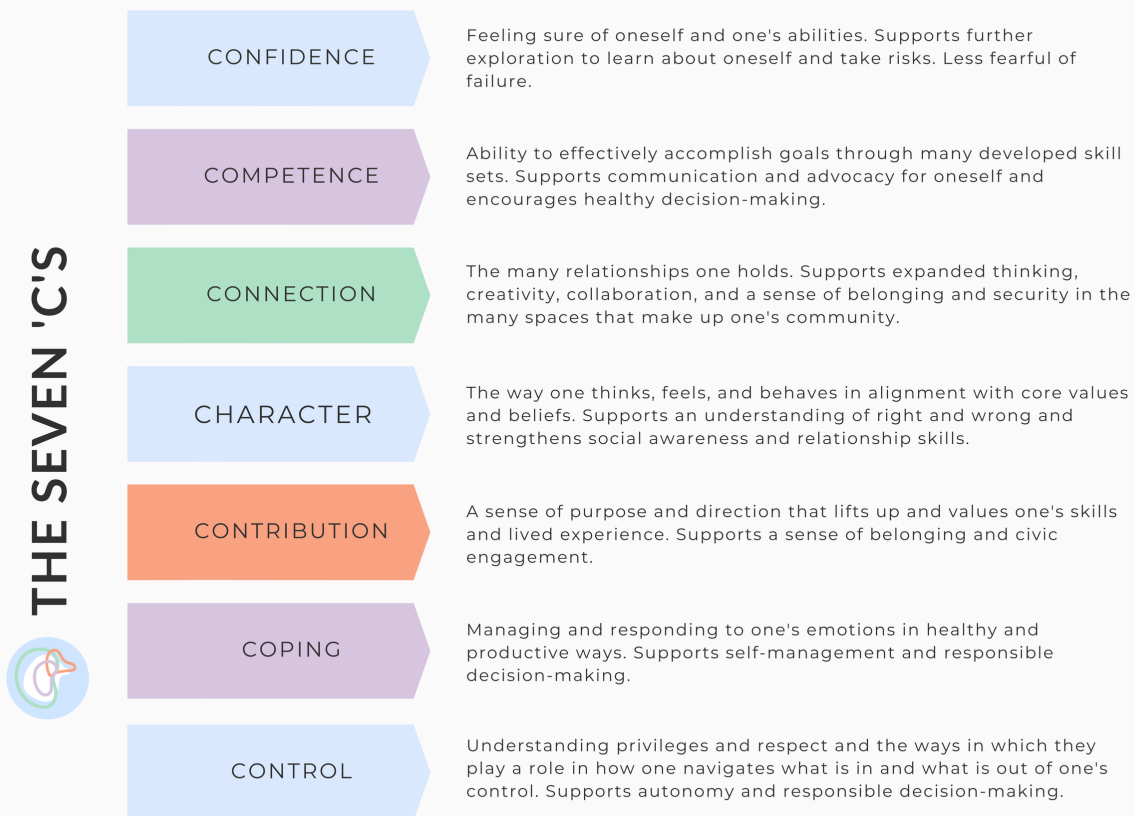
### **What makes up a resiliency in an individual?**

In 2006, the American Academy of Pediatrics shared the seven C's model of resilience. The inspiration for this model stemmed from a previous framework put forward by influential members of the positive youth development movement. This model included "coping" to help individuals recover and "control" to instill a sense of power in making impactful choices.



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Adapted from The Center for Parent and Teen Communication

## MODULE 5: Social Life Skills for Taking Care and Maintaining Mental Health - "Mindfulness" (PY)

Text: content to provide skills, knowledge and attitudes from

Interactive Activity: Developing empathy and active listening skills



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Follow up questions: Individual reflection questions to deepen understanding.

PPT presentation: Social skills for supporting mental health and how to develop them

Video: Identifying and expressing needs and emotions with compassion

Mental health is a complex construct comprising various factors, including emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Therefore addressing mental health is not always so easy, since the intervention might need to focus on various aspects of life. Nevertheless, the latest research is mentioning more and more the positive impact of a “revolutionary practice” on mental and physical health. This practice, known as **Mindfulness**, has been present for more than **2,500 years in Buddhist philosophy** but has been introduced quite recently in the Western world, through Jon Kabat-Zinn, widely referred to as the father of mindfulness. Since then it has received significant attention in the research field, where scientists try to understand why this simple technique is so beneficial for our health. From the latest studies, it has been shown that **mindfulness practices may reduce anxiety, stress and depression, may help people cope better with illnesses**, and help with physical problems like hypertension, heart disease and chronic pain. Also, results show **positive effects on several aspects of whole-person health, including the mind, the brain, the body, and behavior, as well as a person’s relationships with others**. Youths are not exempt from mental health problems, on contrary they (18-25 years) have the highest prevalence of serious mental illnesses (11.4%) compared to adults aged 26-49 years (7.1%) and aged 50 and older (2.5%), while suicide is the second leading cause of death among young adults. Environmental causes of mental illness at a young age are, most of the time, a result of stress. **The major sources of stress in adolescence are social stress, isolation, or substance abuse.**

Even though the word mindfulness is used many times interchangeably with meditation, mindfulness is not limited to it. It is **a state of mind - based on presence in the now and awareness**. The American Psychological Association defines mindfulness as “awareness of one’s internal states and surroundings. The concept has been applied to various therapeutic interventions—for example, mindfulness-based cognitive behavior therapy, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and mindfulness meditation—to help people avoid destructive or automatic habits and responses by learning to observe their thoughts, emotions, and other present-moment experiences without judging or reacting to them”. The mindful state can be developed through different practices, of course, one of them is meditation, but there are many others such as yoga, breathing exercises, walking, sports, creative expression and so on. Regardless of the practice chosen, **the key principles of mindfulness are:**



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- **non-judgment**
- **present-moment awareness**
- **acceptance**
- **patience**
- **non-striving**

## **Why is mindfulness good for young people?**

Healthy human development requires a constant balancing of the influences and demands of both nature and culture. In the case of adolescents and youth - providing the right conditions for their healthy development doesn't reside mostly on their parents as it is for younger children, but it becomes a responsibility of society as a whole. As mentioned before, the environment has a strong impact on young people, which is understandable since the following four basic needs **belonging, mastery, independence and generosity are crucial for their positive development.**

According to Bill Plotkin, specific for this age group is **the need to create a secure and authentic social self.** The aforementioned psychologist divides the need for belonging into three major parts:

- **psychological belonging**- knowing who you are, a feeling of personal authenticity
- **social belonging** - acceptance in a peer group or human community
- **ecological belonging** - communion with the more-than-human world, what you experience after Eco-awakening

Since young adults have to both find and express their authenticity and adapt to their environment and society, they might find themselves in a tense position. The potential conflict between the need for authenticity and belonging might be a source of stress and suffering for the young adult. At this stage, self-awareness provides the necessary understanding and acceptance to be able to move forward and to help them find their ways of being in the world. A major benefit of mindfulness is that it encourages one to pay attention to one's thoughts, emotions, actions and body, thus contributing to the increase of awareness of one's own experience. **Self-awareness can help them deal with the conflict between authenticity and belonging,** as they understand better themselves and their environment. For example, making decisions based on the knowledge of what are their needs, wants and values and those of the environment, can help find the win-win solution (between authenticity and belonging) and act from this state of alignment. Besides developing self-awareness, training for social skills can help create emotional and mental stability by also giving them a better understanding of themselves and others.



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Some of the social skills worth mentioning that can support healthy development for youth, and increase their well-being are:

- **Communication**
- **active listening**
- **being kind**
- **being authentic**
- **setting boundaries**
- **empathy**
- **developing healthy relationships**

Mindfulness, as it increases awareness of self and others, addresses all the mentioned social skills, facilitating their further development.

Humans are social beings, and there is no human activity that does not depend on a relationship. No matter where one lives, from an early age until death one is surrounded by people and significant others, and his/her life is enriched by social interactions and human connections. Young people are at an age where they search for their place in the world, their contribution and establishing a social role in their communities. Relationships are influencing one's satisfaction in life and well-being and even more, they are a key factor for peace and happiness in modern society. Relationships can be enhanced or hindered by language forms and communication. Unfortunately, many times our communication style impedes a true connection and the efforts to relate to one another with compassion are obstructed by a language that leads to defense, guilt, attack or humiliation. **Blaming, judging, criticizing, and comparing, are the major obstacles to healthy and empathic communication**, but nevertheless very present in current speech. These ways of thinking, speaking and acting, which are widely promoted by our culture, contribute to the violence in the world, and give rise to painful experiences in the relationship in which we hope to find peace. **A way to address this issue is to bring to consciousness the patterns of thought and speech** that are obstacles to having compassionate relationships based on empathic communication.

Building healthy relationships requires a good level of self-awareness and contact with one's emotions, needs and wants, as well as high empathic abilities and compassion. Communication is a fundamental aspect, and it has two sides - **“how I express myself” and “how I listen to the other person”**.



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As mindfulness helps one become aware of its inner experience it prompts an honest expression of oneself in communication. Furthermore, Non-violent communication developed by Marshall Rosenberg offers a simple golden formula for an honest, non-judgemental and non-violent way of expressing one's needs and feelings:

**When <observation on the behavior that affects us>, I feel <feeling> because I need some <universal needs>. Would you be willing to <request a specific action>?**

This way of expressing the needs, and emotions is bringing more compassion and connection in their lives. To build healthy relationships, one needs to create a safe space, based on trust, empathy and respect, for the other and for oneself. To respond to others they can learn to speak and act in ways that promote connection and compassion, instead of other habitual patterns of communication which separate and alienate one from the other. Active listening means being fully present while listening, being there for the other person, not to give advice or find solutions, but just to listen and to hold the space.

**Active listening requires:**

- **Eye contact, facing the speaker**
- **Not interrupting**
- **Listening without judging, or jumping to conclusions**
- **Not thinking of what to say next or to give solutions**
- **Paraphrase and summarize what has been told**

NVC and self-awareness create a bridge between honest and kind expression and empathic and respectful attention. The youth can listen to their deepest needs and act in alignment with their values, while opening to others and listening to their needs and requests, respecting both their freedom and the freedom of others. They can express themselves with clarity, honesty and kindness, while simultaneously paying attention to others and connecting authentically with others and themselves at all times and in any situation, whether pleasant or challenging. Thus they can take responsibility for their own well-being and quality of relationships.

Relationships can enrich one's life and can be a source of love, compassion, and affection, but they can also be toxic, destructive and add stress and tension. Nevertheless, the parties involved in a relationship bear 50/50 responsibility for it. By developing a healthy communication style,



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the quality of the relationship will change, which in turn will nurture their psychological well-being.

## **How to integrate mindfulness and social life skills into daily life?**

Awareness creates a space where one can choose instead of reacting or behaving in an automatic mechanical way. This space of choice reflects our free will but also gives us the opportunity to change and to try new, hopefully constructive, compassionate and loving ways of being and acting in the world.

To develop a personalized plan to integrate mindfulness and social life skills, answer the following questions:

### **1. What mindfulness practice do I want to integrate into my routine? When can I do it? For how long?**

Try different mindfulness practices and choose one that works best for you. Decide how often and for how long you want to practice, be realistic, and take baby steps instead of setting the bar too high. Choose a specific moment of the day and add it to your calendar. Make a contract with yourself.

### **2. Self-awareness - track your feelings, thoughts, and needs throughout the day**

Use a mindfulness practice throughout the day to check in with yourself. At the end of the day, use journaling to write about your experience.

### **3. What are the common forms of communication that block empathy in my life? How else could I express myself? What can I replace them with?**

Think of specific relationships and situations and find the obstacles in your communication, for example blaming, judging, criticizing, and comparing. Try to rephrase the way you express yourself, to promote acceptance, compassion, respect and empathy.

### **4. In which relationships do I want to bring more compassion? How can I do that?**

Find specific actions that you can do to take more responsibility for the quality of your relationships.



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## INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY

### Developing empathy and active listening skills

While we may not consider the way we talk to be “violent,” words often lead to hurt and pain, whether for others or ourselves. NVC is a way of communicating that leads us to give from the heart.

First, we need to develop a stronger sense of self-awareness. Using meditation and our senses to create this space of awareness:

Before starting find a comfortable position, with your back relaxed but straight, your feet on the floor and your arms relaxed in your lap. Take a moment of silence and become aware of your body and its position....notice what is moving inside your body... what is your inner state right now.....

#### 1. Look - for 1 minute

Become aware of what you see: notice the richly varied and vivid impressions –shapes, colours, movement, dimensionality, the entire visible world.

#### 2. Listen - for 1 minute

Become aware of what you hear: register the various sounds taken in by your ears – a diverse range of intensities, pitches, and tonal qualities, perhaps including the commonplace miracle of speech or the wonder of music.

#### 3. Feel - for one minute

Become aware of what you touch: texture (smooth, rough, dry, sticky, or wet), weight (heavy, light, solid, or empty), pleasure, pain, heat and cold, and the rest. Also note how your body feels right now and compare that to the many other ways it feels at other times, tired or energetic, stiff or limber, painful or pleasant, and so on.

#### 4. Taste - for one minute

Become aware of what it is like to taste: taste a number of different foods and substances, or remember and vividly imagine their tastes.

#### 5. Smell - for one minute



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Become aware of what you smell: the odor of warm bodies, earth, incense, smoke, perfume, coffee, onions, alcohol, and the sea. Remember and imagine as many of them as you can.

## 6. Breathing - for one minute

Attend your breathing. A moment ago you probably were not consciously aware of your breathing even though you have inhaled and exhaled fifty times while doing this exercise. Hold your breath for a few seconds. Let it out. Now take a deep breath. Notice that being conscious of your breathing allows you to alter it deliberately.

## 7. Emotions - for one minute

Become aware of your feelings. Remember the difference between anger and joy, serenity and excitement, and as many other emotions as you care to feel. How real do emotions feel?

## 8. Thoughts - for one minute

Become aware of your thoughts. What have you been thinking while doing this exercise? What are you thinking right now? How real do thoughts seem?

## 9. "I" - for one minute

Become aware of the fact that your world always includes you. You are not what you see, hear, think, or feel; you have these experiences. Perhaps most essentially, you are who is aware. You are always at the center of your multidimensional universe of experience, but you are not always consciously aware of yourself. Briefly repeat the exercise with the following difference: At the same time you attend to each of the various aspects of your experience, be aware that it is you who is noticing these things ("I see the light...").

## 10. Awareness of awareness

Finally, become aware of your awareness. Normally, awareness focuses on objects outside ourselves, but it can itself be an object of awareness. In the light of ordinary experience, we seem to be distinct and limited centers of awareness, each alone in our inner worlds. In the light of eternity, mystics tell us, we are ultimately all one – the unlimited awareness that is the source of being. Here, the experience cannot be adequately expressed by language.

## **Second part**



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Now the challenge is to maintain this type of awareness even when we are moving, working, eating, interacting with others, and even dreaming. Move through the room trying to maintain this connection with our senses and the body. Be also aware of what is moving inside you. (Move for 4-5 minutes)

## **Third part**

Recognizing and being fully conscious of your own subjectivity is, therefore, a major step in addressing relationships and understanding of the world around you. Acknowledging and accepting your subjectivity is far more productive than fearing and denying it.

Now choose a person with whom you want to work. Make pairs and one of you starts telling an important event from his/her life. They will for about 5 minutes without being interrupted.. The other has to listen, carefully, and have in mind these 4 - 5 things while you listen.

**What do I see?**

**What do I hear?**

**What do I feel?**

**What do I imagine?**

**What moves inside me?**

After the story, write down the answers to these questions. After this change places. One is speaking, the other one is listening.

Start again, one talking and the other listening, and now the listener has to focus on identifying the emotions and needs behind the story, **listening for the feeling and need behind each statement.**

After listening to the story twice, the listener has to paraphrase and summarize what the speaker said. The first speaker listens to his/her story as told by the listener and checks inside if he/she feels understood. Demonstrate understanding by telling back what you heard: “am I following you the way you want to be heard? Is this what you mean.....?”. Talk on what went well? What didn't? Did you feel understood or not? Why yes, why not?

**FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:** Individual reflection questions to deepen understanding.



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1. To create a socially accepted and authentic self, the youth can use self-awareness to find answers to certain questions such as what is meaningful for them? What is worth striving for? Who are the people I want to have in my life?
2. What social skills are important for you? And how can they promote mental health?
3. What is compassionate communication and how is it present in your life? What blocks compassionate communication?

## References

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Marshall B. Rosenberg (2015) Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life

Bill Plotkin (2021) The Journey of Soul Initiation: A Field Guide for Visionaries, Evolutionaries, and Revolutionaries

Psycentral

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## CONCLUSION

We hope these digital learning nuggets have provided you with valuable knowledge and practical strategies to enhance your mental health literacy, adopt a healthy lifestyle, cope with mental health disorders, and develop essential life skills for maintaining your mental well-being. Remember, taking care of your mental health is a lifelong journey that requires continuous learning, practice, and self-care. Embrace the knowledge and skills you have gained and apply them to create a positive and fulfilling life.



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