STRONGER YOU(TH)

Learning Material

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PROJECT INFORMATION

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ACTION TYPE: KA220-YOU - Cooperation partnerships in youth (KA220-YOU)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **Creativity & Music – Using Sound and Imagination to Support Mental Wellbeing**
(*Partner: SMART eco power, Poland)*
1.1. Music and Mental Wellbeing p.4
1.2. Creativity and Emotional Expression p.9
1.3. Voice, Rhythm, and Sound as Tools of Expression..... p.10
1.4. Music and Community – Connecting with Others.....p.11
1.5. Integrating Creativity and Music into Daily Life p.12
1.6 Key Learnings p.13
1.7. Glossary p.14
1.8. Bibliography p.15

2. Mindful Use of Social Media and Digital Detox
(Partner: University of Rome Tor Vergata, Italy)
2.1. The psychology of digital engagement and addiction..... p.21
2.2.Responsible use of technology and digital wellbeing p.24
2.3. The impact of digital overload on mental health p.26
2.4. Establishing healthy digital boundaries and routines p.28
2.5. Creating encouraging digital environments..... p.31
2.6. Key Lessons Learned p.34
2.7. Bibliography p.35

3. Promoting Self-Acceptance and Self-Esteem
(Partner: CET Platform Lietuva, Lithuania)
3.1. Understanding Self-Acceptance and Self-Esteem p.39
3.2. The Inner Critic and Self-Compassion p.40
3.3. Identity, Body Image, and Social Comparison p.41
3.4. Tools to Build Self-Esteem p.42
3.5. Integrating Self-Acceptance into Daily Life p.43
3.6. Key Learnings p.44
3.7. Glossary p.45
3.8. Bibliography p.46

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4. Yoga and Meditation
(Partner: Association WalkTogether, Bulgaria)
4.1. Introduction to Yoga and Meditation p.51
4.2. Yoga and Mental Health p.52
4.3. Meditation and Mental Health p.53
4.4. Scientific Research and Case Studies p.54
4.5. Integrating Yoga and Meditation into Daily Life p.55
4.6. Key Learnings p.56
4.7. Glossary p.57
4.8. Bibliography p.58

5. Creativity & Upcycling – Using Green Methods to Support Mental Health
(*Partner: ARCHE, Poland)*
5.1. Introduction to Upcycling and Creativity p.64
5.2. Materials as Mediums for Emotional Expression p.65
5.3. Hands-On Upcycling Techniques p.66
5.4. Collaborative and Community Upcycling Projects p.67
5.5. Integrating Upcycling Practices into Daily Life p.68
5.6. Key Learnings p.69
5.7. Glossary p.70
5.8. Bibliography p.71

6. Emotional Life Skills for Taking Care and Maintaining Our Mental Health
(Partner: Connecting Dots, Cyprus)
6.1. Building Resilience p.82
6.2. Healthy Relationships & Communication p.83
6.3. Stress and Anxiety Management p.85
6.4. Lifestyle Practices for Mental Well-being p.87
6.5. Key Learnings p.89
6.6. Bibliography p.90

7. Mental health lexicon.....p. 91

CREATIVITY & MUSIC - Using Sound and Imagination to Support Mental Wellbeing

Partner Organisation Name	SMART eco power
Country	Poland

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MODULE DESCRIPTION & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

CREATIVITY & MUSIC - This module supports young people in exploring how creativity and music can improve mental wellbeing. Music allows self- expression, emotional regulation, and building connections with others. By using sound, rhythm, and imagination, participants will discover how creative practices strengthen resilience, reduce stress, and improve self-awareness.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES - By the end of the module, learners will:

- Understand the role of music and creativity in supporting mental health.
- Explore emotional expression through sound, rhythm, and lyrics.
- Gain confidence in using music as a tool for stress relief and self-regulation.
- Strengthen creative thinking and imagination as protective factors for wellbeing.
- Develop personal strategies to integrate creativity and music into daily life.

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Module Topics & Structure

1. **Music and Mental Wellbeing**
2. **Creativity and Emotional Expression**
3. **Voice, Rhythm, and Sound as Tools of Expression**
4. **Music and Community Connecting with Others**
5. **Integrating Creativity and Music into Daily Life**

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge & Understanding

Learners will beable to:

- Define creativity and explain its impact on wellbeing.
- Describe how music influences emotions, stress, and self-perception.
- Recognize the value of improvisation, songwriting, and active listening.
- Identify social and psychological benefits of shared musical experiences.

Skills

Learners will be able to:

- Use music as a tool for self-expression and relaxation.
- Apply active listening and reflective techniques to explore emotions.
- Create simple sound-based or lyrical improvisations.
- Design a personal action plan to integrate music and creativity into daily routine.

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SECTION 1: Music and Mental Wellbeing

1. Theoretical Concept

Description: Music impacts emotions, cognition, and wellbeing. It reduces anxiety, improves mood, and enhances focus.
Key Theoretical Input: Music therapy research shows that sound influences the nervous system, releasing dopamine and reducing cortisol. Regular musical engagement supports resilience.

Multimedia Links:

- Video: How Music Affects Your Brain (YouTube)
- Article: American Psychological Association – Music and Stress

2. Practical Activity Structure

- **Name of Activity:**MyEmotionalPlaylist
- **Focus:** Build awareness of how music influences emotional states.
- **Materials Needed: Phones/headphones, paper/pens.**
- **Duration:** 20 minutes.

Instructions:

1. Learners select 3 songs: one that calms them, one that energizes, and one that reflects sadness/struggle.
2. Write down emotions felt during listening.
3. Share in small groups.

Reflection: Discuss how choosing music intentionally can regulate mood.

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SECTION 2: Creativity and Emotional Expression

1. Theoretical Concept

Description: Creativity is the ability to produce ideas, images, or expressions that reflect inner states. It fosters self-awareness and reduces psychological tension.

Key Theoretical Input: Creative activities activate brain areas linked to flow, motivation, and resilience.

Multimedia Links:

- TED Talk: The Art of Being Yourself – Caroline McHugh
- Article: Creativity as a Protective Factor in Mental Health

2. Practical Activity Structure

- **Name of Activity:** Drawing Sound
- **Focus: Transform music into visual expression.**
- **Materials Needed:** Paper, crayons/markers, music.
- **Duration:** 15–20 minutes.

Instructions:

1. Play an instrumental track.
2. Participants draw shapes, colors, or patterns reflecting what they hear.
3. Share drawings in pairs.

Reflection: Discuss how sound translates into feelings and symbols.

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SECTION 3: Voice, Rhythm, and Sound as Tools of Expression

1. Theoretical Concept Description: The body is an instrument. Voice and rhythm allow direct emotional release and reduce stress.

Key Theoretical Input: Group rhythm (drumming, clapping, chanting) synchronizes heart rate and increases a sense of belonging.

Multimedia Links:

- Video: The Healing Power of Drumming
- Article: Singing and Mental Health: Psychological Benefits of Vocal Expression

2. Practical Activity Structure

- **Name of Activity:** Sound Circle
- **Focus:** Foster group connection and release emotions through sound.
- **Materials Needed:** Percussion instruments or improvised objects (tables, bottles, hands).
- **Duration:** 20 minutes.

Instructions:

1. Participants form a circle.
2. Each person adds a simple rhythm, clap, or vocal sound.
3. The group builds a collective improvisation.

- **Reflection:** Discuss how it felt to contribute and be part of a collective sound.

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SECTION 4: Music and Community – Connecting with Others

1. Theoretical Concept Description: Music strengthens bonds, reduces loneliness, and builds collective identity.
Key Theoretical Input: Shared singing or music-making creates oxytocin release, increasing trust and empathy.
Multimedia Links:

- Video: Choirs and Mental Health
- Article: Group Singing and Wellbeing Research

2. Practical Activity Structure

- **Name of Activity:** Collective Songwriting
- **Focus:** Build collaboration, creativity, and self- expression.
- **Materials Needed:** Paper, pens, instruments (optional).
- **Duration:** 30 minutes.

Instructions:

1. In small groups, participants write short lyrics about a chosen theme (e.g., hope, resilience).
2. Add rhythm or melody.
3. Present to the group.

- **Reflection:** Emphasize that the process, not the quality, matters.

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SECTION 5: Integrating Creativity and Music into Daily Life

1. Theoretical Concept Description: Regular creative practices build resilience. Even 5-10 minutes daily with music reduces stress.

Key Theoretical Input: Small habits, like mindful listening, journaling with lyrics, or humming, improve mental wellbeing over time.

Multimedia Links:

- Video: Daily Music Habits
- Article: Mindful Music Listening

2. Practical Activity Structure

- **Name of Activity:** My Creative Action Plan
- **Focus:** Help participants apply tools in everyday routines.
- **Materials Needed:** Paper, pens.
- **Duration:** 30 minutes.
- **Instructions:**

1. Each learner identifies one daily habit with music (e.g., playlist for morning energy, singing before bed).
2. Write 2–3 small goals for the next month.
3. Share with a peer for accountability.

- **Reflection:** Discuss how to maintain motivation and adapt practices to personal needs.

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KEY LEARNINGS

- Creativity and music are powerful tools for emotional regulation, stress reduction, and resilience.
- Music provides a universal language that builds community and self-expression.
- Practical exercises such as playlists, drawing sound, drumming, or songwriting make emotional exploration tangible.
- Small daily actions involving music help maintain long-term mental wellbeing.

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GLOSSARY

- **Creativity:** The ability to generate original solutions.
- **Music Therapy:** The clinical use of music to support emotional, cognitive, and social health.
- **Improvisation:** Creating sound or rhythm spontaneously without preplanning.
- **Active Listening:** Paying close attention to music, focusing on emotional and physical responses.

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- MacDonald, R., Kreutz, G., & Mitchell, L. (Eds.). (2012). Music, Health, and Wellbeing. Oxford University Press.
- American Psychological Association. (2019). The power of music to reduce stress. Retrieved from https://www.apa.org TEDx Talks and YouTube resources on creativity, music, and wellbeing.

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MINDFUL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

AND DIGITAL DETOX

Partner Organisation Name	University of Rome Tor Vergata
Country	Italy

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In an increasingly interconnected world, social media and digital technologies have become integral to our daily lives, shaping how we communicate, work, learn, and entertain ourselves. While these advancements offer unprecedented opportunities for connection and information access, their pervasive presence also presents significant challenges to our mental health and well-being. The constant influx of information, the pressure to maintain an online persona, and the addictive design of many platforms can lead to digital overload, anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of presence in the real world.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This educational framework is designed to equip individuals with the knowledge and practical strategies necessary to navigate the digital landscape mindfully. It aims to foster a healthier relationship with technology, promoting intentional use over habitual consumption, and empowering individuals to reclaim their attention and well-being. By understanding the psychological underpinnings of digital engagement and implementing effective digital detox strategies, participants will learn to harness the benefits of technology while mitigating its potential harms.

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Topics & Structure

1. The Psychology of Digital Engagement and Dependency
2. Mindful Technology Use and Digital Well-being
3. The Impact of Digital Overload on Mental Health
4. Establishing Healthy Digital Boundaries and Routines
5. Cultivating Supportive Digital Environments

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge & Understanding

- Identify various types of digital wellness practices, detox strategies, and mindful technology approaches with their specific mental health benefits.
- Discuss scientific evidence supporting the mental health benefits of mindful technology use, digital detox, and balanced social media consumption.
- Analyze how social media algorithms, design features, and usage patterns influence behavior, mood, and psychological well-being.

Skills

- Apply mindful browsing, conscious consumption, and digital boundary-setting techniques to manage stress, anxiety, and emotional states triggered by social media.
- Implement practical strategies for reducing screen time, creating tech-free zones, and establishing healthy digital routines.
- Integrate digital wellness practices into daily life in a sustainable and balanced way.
- Adapt learned techniques to specific contexts such as work, study, social interactions, and leisure time for optimal mental health outcomes.

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1. The Psychology of Digital Engagement and Dependency

Theoretical Concept

This subtopic explores the intricate psychological mechanisms that underpin social media engagement and the development of digital dependency. It delves into how platforms leverage principles of behavioural psychology, such as variable-ratio reinforcement schedules, to foster habit formation and sustained use. The discussion also encompasses the role of social validation, the release of dopamine in response to likes and notifications, and the neurobiological pathways implicated in the development of digital addiction. Understanding these psychological underpinnings is crucial for recognizing the addictive potential of digital technologies and for developing effective strategies for mindful use.

Key Theoretical Input:

Digital engagement and dependency are deeply rooted in psychological principles, particularly those related to reward systems and habit formation. Social media platforms are designed to provide intermittent positive reinforcement, a powerful mechanism for behavioral conditioning. Each 'like,' 'share,' or 'comment' acts as a variable reward, making users continually check their devices for the next positive stimulus. This creates a feedback loop that can lead to compulsive checking and overuse [1]. Furthermore, the desire for social validation plays a significant role. Humans are inherently social beings, and social media offers a readily accessible avenue for seeking approval and belonging. The positive feedback received on these platforms can trigger the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward, further reinforcing the behavior [2].

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Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Digital Habits Awareness
Goals: To increase self-awareness regarding personal digital engagement patterns; To identify triggers and rewards associated with social media use; To recognize the emotional and psychological impact of digital interactions
Materials Needed: A notebook or digital journaling app; Pen or keyboard; Access to personal digital devices (smartphone, computer).
Duration: 15-20minutes(ideally: daily for one week)

Step-by-step Instructions:
Introduction (Day 1): Explain the purpose of the journal – to observe and understand digital habits without judgment. Introduce the concept of triggers (what makes you pick up your phone?), behaviours (what do you do?), and rewards (how do you feel afterwards?).
2.**Daily Logging (Days 1-7):** For one week, instruct participants to log their social media and digital device use at least 3-5 times a day. For each entry, they should note:

- **Time:** When did you start using the device/app?.
- **Trigger:** What prompted you to pick up your device? (e.g., boredom, notification, stress, habit, specific emotion).
- **Activity:** What specific app or activity did you engage in? (e.g., scrolling Instagram, checking emails, watching YouTube).
- **Duration:** How long did you engage in the activity?.
- **Feeling Before:** How were you feeling before engaging? (e.g., anxious, bored, curious, happy).
- **Feeling After:** How did you feel immediately after? (e.g., relieved, more anxious, informed, distracted, guilty, connected).

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3.**Pattern Recognition (End of Week):** At the end of the week, guide participants to review their journal entries. Encourage them to look for patterns: What are their most common triggers? Which apps do they use most frequently? Are there specific times of day when they are more likely to engage? Do certain digital activities consistently lead to negative feelings? What are the perceived rewards they seek from digital engagement?

4. **Discussion:** Facilitate a group discussion (if applicable) or individual reflection on their findings. Emphasize that awareness is the first step towards mindful change.

Reflection / Follow-up:

- What surprised you most about your digital habits?
- How did your feelings before and after digital engagement differ?
- What patterns did you observe regarding triggers and rewards?
- Based on your observations, what is one small change you could make to your digital habits this week?
- How can this awareness help you move towards more mindful technology use?

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2. Mindful Technology Use and Digital Well-being

Theoretical Concept

This subtopic introduces the foundational principles of mindful technology use, contrasting it with passive or unconscious digital engagement. It emphasizes the importance of intentionality, self-awareness, and conscious choice in interacting with digital devices and platforms. The goal is to cultivate a healthier relationship with technology that supports overall well-being rather than detracting from it.

Key Theoretical Input:

Mindful technology use is rooted in the broader concept of mindfulness, which involves paying attention to the present moment without judgment [3]. When applied to technology, it means engaging with digital tools with awareness and intention, rather than on autopilot. This contrasts sharply with habitual or reactive technology use, where individuals may find themselves endlessly scrolling or checking notifications without a clear purpose or even conscious thought [4]. The theoretical underpinnings of mindful technology use draw from various psychological frameworks, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), which emphasize the role of conscious awareness and value-driven behavior. Digital well-being, in this context, refers to the state of being healthy, happy, and prosperous in one's digital life.

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Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Mindful Check-in Challenge

Goals: To practice intentional engagement with digital devices; To develop awareness of the purpose behind digital interactions; To reduce automatic and unconscious technology use.

Materials Needed: Personal digital devices (smartphone, computer); A timer or alarm; A small notepad or digital note-taking app.

Duration: 1-2 minutes percheck-in, (ideally: multiple times a day, for one week).

Step-by-step Instructions:

Introduction: Explain the concept of a Mindful Check-in. Emphasize that before opening any app or engaging in any digital activity, participants will pause and ask themselves a series of questions.

2. **The Pause (Throughout the Day):** Before unlocking their phone, opening a social media app, or clicking on a link, participants should pause for a few seconds.

3. **Ask and Answer:** During this pause, they should mentally (or quickly jot down) answer the following questions:

Why am I picking up this device/opening this app right now? (e.g., to check a specific message, out of boredom, to escape a feeling, for information, to connect with someone). * What is my intention for this interaction? (e.g., to reply to a friend, to find a specific piece of information, to relax for 5 minutes).

4. **Conscious Engagement:** Based on their answers, they can then proceed with their intended action.

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Reflection / Follow-up:

- How did pausing before engaging with your device change your experience?
- What insights did you gain about your automatic digital habits?
- How can this practice help you feel more in control of your technology use?
- What specific intentions will you set for your digital interactions moving forward?

3. The Impact of Digital Overload on Mental Health

Theoretical Concept

This subtopic examines the detrimental effects of excessive and unmanaged digital engagement on mental health. It focuses on key phenomena such as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), attention fragmentation, and the exacerbation of anxiety, depression, and social comparison, providing a comprehensive overview of how digital overload can negatively impact psychological well-being.

Key Theoretical Input:

Digital overload, characterized by an overwhelming influx of information and constant digital demands, has significant implications for mental health. One prominent consequence is Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), an apprehension that one might miss rewarding experiences that others are having, especially when fueled by social media [5]. FOMO is often associated with increased anxiety, lower mood, and a compulsive need to stay connected, leading to a vicious cycle of checking and comparison [6]. The constant exposure to curated, often idealized, versions of others' lives on social media can intensify feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with one's own life, contributing to social comparison theory [7].

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Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Digital Detox Hour

Goals: To experience a period of intentional disconnection from digital devices. To observe the immediate effects of digital absence on mood and attention. To identify
alternative activities for leisure and relaxation.

Materials Needed: A timer. A designated tech-free space.

Duration: 60 minutes

Step-by-step Instructions:

Preparation: Choose a specific 60-minute period during the day when you can commit to being completely offline. Inform family members or housemates of your intention to avoid interruptions. Place all digital devices (phone, tablet, laptop, smart TV) in a designated out-of-reach area or turn them off. Set a timer for 60 minutes.

2. **Engage in Non-Digital Activities**: During this hour, engage in activities that do not involve screens. Examples include: Reading a physical book or magazine. Going for a
walk outdoors. Engaging in a hobby (e.g., drawing, knitting, playing a musical instrument). Spending time in nature. Practicing mindfulness or meditation.

3. **Observe and Reflect (During the Hour):** Pay attention to any urges to check your
phone or go online. Notice any feelings of discomfort, boredom, or restlessness. Also, observe any feelings of calm, focus, or presence that emerge.

4. **Post-Detox Reflection**: Once the 60 minutes are up, take a few moments to reflect on your experience.

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Reflection / Follow-up:

- What was your initial reaction to disconnecting? Did you feel anxious, relieved, or something else?
- What urges did you notice during the digital detox hour? How did you manage them?
- What non-digital activities did you engage in? How did they make you feel?
- Did you experience any changes in your mood, focus, or sense of presence
- during or after the detox? How might incorporating regular digital detox periods benefit your mental well-being? What challenges did you face, and how can you overcome them in future detox sessions?

4.Establishing Healthy Digital Boundaries and Routines

Theoretical Concept

This subtopic focuses on the practical implementation of strategies to create and maintain healthy digital boundaries and routines. It explores various techniques for managing screen time, designating tech-free zones, and integrating mindful digital habits into daily life to promote overall well-being and reduce the negative impacts of digital overload.

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Key Theoretical Input:

Establishing healthy digital boundaries and routines is a proactive approach to managing one's relationship with technology, moving beyond mere awareness to active behavioral change. In the context of digital use, self-regulation involves consciously setting limits and creating structures that support mindful engagement rather than impulsive or habitual consumption. One key aspect of healthy digital boundaries is screen time management. This involves not only reducing the total amount of time spent on devices but also being intentional about how that time is spent. Strategies can include setting specific time limits for certain applications, utilizing app blockers, or scheduling designated periods for focused work or leisure without digital interruptions [8]. The goal is to shift from a reactive to a proactive relationship with technology, where the individual, not the device, dictates the terms of engagement.

Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Design Your Digital Sanctuary

Goals: To identify areas in daily life where digital boundaries are needed. To create a personalized plan for establishing tech-free zones and times. To develop a sustainable routine for mindful technology use.

Materials Needed: A worksheet or notebook. Pen or pencil.

Duration: 30-45 minutes

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Step-by-step Instructions

Brainstorming (10 minutes): Ask participants to brainstorm a list of situations, times of day, or physical spaces where they feel their digital devices are most distracting.

2. **Worksheet Completion (15 minutes):**

•Tech-Free Zones: Identify at least two physical spaces where they will commit to not using digital devices (e.g., the bedroom, the dining table).

•Tech-Free Times: Identify at least two periods of the day when they will commit to being screen-free (e.g., the first 30 minutes after waking up, the hour before bed).

•Notification Settings: List 3-5 apps for which they will turn off non-essential notifications.

•Mindful Routine: Describe one new mindful digital routine they will implement

3.**Action Plan (10 minutes)**: For each of the boundaries and routines they have identified, ask participants to write down one concrete action they will take to implement it. For example, if they have designated the bedroom as a tech-free zone, their action might be to buy an alarm clock and charge their phone in another room.

Reflection / Follow-up:

- What was the most challenging part of designing your digital sanctuary?
- Which of the boundaries you've set do you anticipate being the most difficult to maintain? Why?
- How do you think these new boundaries and routines will impact your daily life and well-being?
- What support systems can you put in place to help you stick to your plan?
- How will you track your progress and adjust your plan as needed?

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5. Cultivating Supportive Digital Environments

Theoretical Concept

This subtopic explores how individuals and communities can actively foster positive and supportive online interactions. It delves into the concepts of digital empathy, responsible online communication, and leveraging technology to build genuine connections rather than contributing to isolation or negativity. The focus is on transforming digital spaces into environments that enhance well-being and transforming digital spaces into environments promote constructive engagement.

Key Theoretical Input:

Cultivating supportive digital environments is crucial for mitigating the negative impacts of social media and harnessing its potential for positive social connection. This concept is built upon the understanding that while digital platforms can be sources of distress, they also offer unparalleled opportunities for community building, information sharing, and fostering empathy [9]. The key lies in intentional design and conscious engagement. Digital empathy is a cornerstone of supportive online environments. It refers to the ability to understand and share the feelings of others in digital contexts, even in the absence of non-verbal cues [10].

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Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Digital Kindness Challenge **Goals:** To actively practice digital empathy and positive online interactions. To recognize the impact of one's online behaviour on others. To contribute to a more supportive and constructive digital environment.

Materials Needed: Personal digital devices with internet access. A journal or
note-taking app.

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Step-by-step Instructions

Introduction: Explain the concept of the Digital Kindness Challenge: for one week, participants will intentionally engage in acts of kindness and positive interaction online.

2. **Daily Kindness Acts (Days 1-7):** Each day, participants should aim to perform at
least three specific acts of digital kindness. Examples include:

- Leaving a thoughtful and encouraging comment on someone's post.
- Sharing positive and uplifting content.
- Sending a private message of support to a friend or family member.
- Correcting misinformation respectfully and constructively.
- Engaging in a meaningful and empathetic conversation in an online group.
- Expressing gratitude or appreciation to someone online. Offering help or advice in a supportive manner.

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3. **Daily Reflection:** At the end of each day, participants should briefly reflect in their journal on the acts of kindness they performed.

They should note:

What act of kindness did I perform? How did it feel to perform this act? What was the perceived reaction of the recipient (if any)? How did this act contribute to a more positive online environment?

Reflection / Follow-up:

- What was the most impactful act of digital kindness you performed?
- How did practicing digital kindness affect your own mood and well- being?
- Did you notice any changes in the online environment around you as a result of your actions?
- What challenges did you face in consistently practicing digital kindness?
- How can you integrate these practices into your regular online behavior to cultivate a more supportive digital environment long- term ?

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KEY LEARNINGS

The module on "Mindful Use of Social Media and Digital Detox" emphasizes that while digital technologies offer numerous benefits, their pervasive and often addictive design can negatively impact mental health. The key takeaway is the importance of intentionality and self-awareness in digital engagement.

What should youth or youth workers take away from this?

Youth and youth workers should understand the psychological mechanisms behind digital dependency, recognize the signs of digital overload (like FOMO and attention fragmentation), and actively implement strategies for healthy digital boundaries and routines. Ultimately, the module encourages a shift from passive consumption to active, mindful interaction with technology, fostering digital well-being and supportive online environments.

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PROMOTING SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Partner Organisation Name	CET Platform Lietuva
Country	Lithuania

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MODULE DESCRIPTION & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Promoting Self-Acceptance and Self-Esteem

This module helps young people understand self-acceptance and self- esteem, and how these shape mental wellbeing. It explores the impact of self-talk, identity, body image, and social pressures, while offering tools to replace harmful patterns with healthier, more compassionate practices. Building self-esteem matters because how youth see and value themselves strongly affects resilience, confidence, and emotional health.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, learners will:

- Understand what self-acceptance and self-esteem mean and why they are important.
- Recognize factors that influence self-worth, such as culture, exposure to social media, and early experiences.
- Identify the impact of negative self-talk on mental health.
- Learn practical strategies to build self-esteem, compassion and foster a healthier self-image.

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MODULE TOPICS & STRUCTURE

1. **UnderstandingSelf-Acceptance and Self-Esteem**
   a. Theory: Definitions, differences, and role in mental health.
   b. Practice: Reflection exercise: “How do I define myself?”
2. **The Inner Critic and Self-Compassion**
   a. Theory: How thoughts shape emotions and self-worth.
   b. Practice: Reframing negative self-talk.
3. **Identity, Body Image, and Social Comparison**
   a. Theory: Influence of culture, peers, and social media on self-image.
   b. Practice: Group discussion/ journaling: “When do I compare myself and how does it affect me?”
4. **Tools to Build Self-Esteem**
   a. Theory: Principles of self-compassion and gratitude.
   b. Practice: Guided self-compassion or mindfulness exercise.
5. **Integrating Self-Acceptance into Daily Life**
   a. Theory: The importance of routines, boundaries, and supportive environments.
   b. Practice: Create a personal “self-esteem action plan” with small, achievable goals.

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge & Understanding

Learners will be able to:

- Define self-acceptance and self-esteem.
- Explain their significance for mental health.
- Identify factors that shape self-worth, including self-talk, identity, body image, and social comparison.
- Describe the impact of negative self-beliefs on emotional wellbeing.
- Recognize practical approaches for strengthening self-esteem and self-acceptance.

Skills

Learners will be able to:

- Identify self-critical thoughts and reframe them using positive self-talk.
- Apply mindfulness and self-compassion techniques to daily situations.
- Practice strategies that reduce negative social comparison.
- Create a personal action plan for building self-esteem and resilience.
- Set achievable, meaningful goals to support ongoing self-acceptance.

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SECTION 1: Understanding Self-Acceptance and Self-Esteem

1. Theoretical Concept

Short Description: Explorewhat self-acceptance and self-esteem mean, how they differ, and their role in mental health. **Key Theoretical Input:** Self-acceptance is unconditional love for oneself, while self-esteem is the value of oneself based on perceived worth. Both are essential for resilience and well-being.

Multimedia Links:

VIDEOS: The Journey to Self-Love: Which Stage Are You At? | What Self-Esteem Is | On Disliking One self

Books: ***Kristen Neff - Self compassion: the proven power of being kind to yourself***

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Defining Myself

Goals: Increase self-awareness of personal definitions of worth

Materials Needed: Paper, pens/journals.

Duration: 10-15 minutes.

Step-by-step Instructions:

- *Ask learners to write " Who am I?" at the top of a page.*
- *For 5 minutes, list as many self-definitions as possible (e.g., roles, qualities, values).*
- *Highlight which items are external (e.g., achievements) vs. internal (e.g., kindness, perseverance).*

Reflection / Follow-up:

Discuss how shifting focus from external to internal qualities can support healthier self-worth.

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SECTION 2: The Inner Critic and Self-Compassion

1. Theoretical Concept

Short Description: Exploretherole of inner dialogue and how self-talk shapes emotions.

Key Theoretical Input: Negative self-talk fuels shame and low self-esteem; self-compassion helps counter the inner critic.

Multimedia Links:

VIDEOS: What to do if your inner voice is cruel Ethan Kross |How to challenge your negative self-talk Josh Green |

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name ofActivity: ReframingMy InnerVoice

Goals: Build awareness of inner critic and practice turning self-criticism into supportive self-talk.

Materials Needed: Paper, pens/journals.

Duration: 15–20 minutes.

Step-by-step Instructions:

- *Write down three recent self-critical thoughts.*
- *For each, rewrite it as if speaking kindly to a close friend.*
- *Share (voluntarily) examples with the group.*
- *Alternatively - the self-critical thoughts can be preselected by participants and shared anonymously, so each of them gets the set of thoughts that are random.*

Reflection / Follow-up: ...

Ask: How does the supportive version feel different? What might change if you practiced this daily?

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SECTION3:Identity,BodyImage,and Social Comparison

1. Theoretical Concept

Short Description: Explorehow culture, peers, and social media shape self-image and comparisons. **Key Theoretical Input:** Social comparison can motivate or harm; media often reinforces unrealistic ideals that lower self-esteem. **Multimedia Links:**

VIDEOS: Social Media And Self-Image | **Does social media negatively impact teen mental health?** |

Articles: The impacts of social media on youth self-image By Molly Smith |***Focus on Self-Presentation on Social Media across Sociodemographic Variables, Lifestyles, and Personalities: A Cross-Sectional Study***

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name ofActivity: The ComparisonLens

Goals: Build awareness of comparison patterns and their emotional impact.

Materials Needed: Paper, pens/journals.

Duration: 15–20 minutes.

Step-by-step Instructions:

- *Ask learners to reflect on a time they compared themselves to others.*
- *Write down: What triggered it? How did it make me feel? Was it helpful or harmful?*
- *Share insights in pairs or small groups.*

Reflection / Follow-up:

Encourage reframing comparisons by focussing on your own growth rather than external evaluation.

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SECTION 4: Tools to Build Self-Esteem

1. Theoretical Concept

ShortDescription: Introduce practical strategies that nurture self-worth.
Key Theoretical Input: Self-compassion, gratitude, and strength-based reflection improve resilience and confidence.
Multimedia Links: ***VIDEOS: Guided Meditation: The RAIN of Self Compassion with Tara Brach*** | ***5 Exercises To Strengthen Your Self-Confidence***
Materials:Self-Esteem Worksheets |

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Strengths &Gratitude Practice
Goals: Strengthen positive self-focus and appreciation.
Materials Needed: Paper, pens/journals.
Duration: 15–20 minutes.
Step-by-step Instructions:

- *List three personal strengths or achievements (big or small).*
- *List three things you are grateful for today.*
- *Share one item in pairs or group (optional).*

Reflection / Follow-up: ...

Discuss how gratitude and focusing on strengths shift self-perception over time.

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SECTION4:IntegratingSelf-Acceptance into Daily Life

1. Theoretical Concept

ShortDescription: Show how routines, boundaries, and supportive environments help sustain self-acceptance.
Key Theoretical Input: Small daily practices build long-term resilience and healthier relationship with oneself.
Multimedia Links: ***VIDEOS: 5 self-care micro habits to become unrecognizable*** |
Articles:7DailyRitualstoImproveYour Self-Esteem |

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: My Self-Esteem Action Plan
Goals: Transition learning into achievable steps for everyday life.
Materials Needed: Templates or blank paper, pens.
Duration: 30 minutes.
Step-by-step Instructions:

- *Identify one habit to reduce (e.g., negative self-talk, harmful comparison).*
- *Identify one supportive habit to add (e.g., journaling, mindful check-in).*
- *Write down 2–3 small, realistic goals for the next month.*
- *Set a specific time to do the new activity - ex. do a mindful check-in before bed, meditate in the afternoon and etc.*
- *Reflect on how the new activity ads up to your life - keep a tab on how it improves your day, why you need it?*

Reflection / Follow-up:

Share one goal with a peer for accountability; revisit progress in future sessions.

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KEY LEARNINGS

Key Insights from the Module

- Self-acceptance and self-esteem are foundations of mental wellbeing, helping young people build self confidence. The inner
- critic and negative self-talk often harm self-worth, but reframing thoughts with self-compassion creates healthier self- perception. Identity, body image, and social comparison strongly influence how
- youth see themselves, especially under cultural and social media pressure to be or act a certain way. Practical tools like gratitude, mindfulness, and strengths-based reflection support the growth of
- self-esteem. Daily habits and small actions, for example, setting boundaries, journaling, or creating personal goals—help integrate
- self- acceptance into daily life.

Key Takeaways

Youth and youth workers should recognize that self-acceptance and self-esteem are essential for mental health and resilience. By understanding the impact of self-talk, social comparison, and body image, they can identify harmful patterns and replace them with supportive practices. Using practical tools like mindfulness, gratitude, and personal action plans helps build confidence, emotional wellbeing, and healthier relationships with themselves and others.

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GLOSSARY

Self-Acceptance

Definition: Self-acceptance is the recognition and affirmation of one's own worth and value, acknowledging and embracing all aspects of oneself, including strengths, weaknesses, and imperfections. Source: Rose, S. (2021). What is self-acceptance? Retrieved from https://steverosephd.com/what-is-self-acceptance/

Self-Esteem

Definition:Self-esteem refers to the overall sense of personal worth or value, influenced by how individuals perceive themselves and their achievements. Source: American Psychological Association. (2021). Self-esteem. In APA Dictionary of Psychology. Retrieved from https://dictionary.apa.org/self- esteem

Self-Talk

Definition: Self-talk is the internal dialogue individuals have with themselves, which can be positive (supportive) or negative (critical), and significantly influences emotions, behavior, and mental health. Source: Brinthaupt, T. M., & Dove, L. M. (2016). Making sense of self-talk. Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice, 3(2), 213–227. https://doi.org/10.1037/cns0000079

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YOGA AND MEDITATION

Partner Organisation Name	Association WalkTogether
Country	Bulgaria

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MODULE DESCRIPTION & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

TOPIC DESCRIPTION This topic aims to explore and understand the mental health benefits of yoga and meditation for young people, and to help them develop the ability to apply these practices effectively. Yoga gives young people tools to calm the body and build resilience, while meditation trains the mind to stay centered and reduce harmful thought patterns. Together, they strengthen emotional regulation, self-esteem, and stress management—foundations of mental well-being in youth.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Learners will gain an understanding of how yoga and meditation affect the mind and body, explore different styles and their benefits, and review scientific evidence for their mental health impact. They will also practice basic techniques, apply mindfulness and breathing for stress management, and create a personalized yoga and meditation plan to support their own well-being.

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Module Topics & Structure

1. **Introduction to Yoga and Meditation**
2. **Yoga and Mental Health**
3. **Meditation and Mental Health**
4. **Scientific Research and Case Studies**
5. **Integrating Yoga and Meditation into Daily Life**

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge & Understanding

- Explain thephysiological and psychological effects of yoga and meditation.
- Identify various styles of yoga and types of meditation and their specific benefits.
- Discuss scientific evidence supporting the mental health benefits of yoga and meditation.

Skills

- Demonstrate basic yoga and meditation techniques aimed at improving mental well-being.
- Apply mindfulness and breathing techniques to manage stress and emotional states.
- Develop a simple, personalized yoga or meditation plan to support mental health.

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INTRODUCTION TO YOGA AND MEDITATION

1. Theoretical Concept

The origins of yoga trace back 4,000–5,000years. It wasn't until the second century B.C. that the sage Patanjali compiled the first written teachings of yoga in the Yoga Sutras. In this foundational text, he described what we now call the Eight Limbs of Yoga—practices which are said to purify both body and mind. To "live yoga" means weaving its principles into our daily lives and carrying the lessons learned into every aspect of our worldly experiences. Meditation is a practice that centers on calming and focusing the mind through various mental and physical techniques. Different forms of meditation can be used for different purposes—whether to relax, ease anxiety and stress, or support overall well-being.

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Yoga and Meditation for Beginners
Goals: Getting familiar with yoga and meditation
Materials Needed: Video Easy Yoga For Beginners; 5 Min Meditation Anyone Can Do Anywhere
Duration: 25 minutes
Step-by-step Instructions:

- *Open the links above and first do the beginners yoga class*
- *Then the easy 5-minute long meditation*

Reflection / Follow-up:

Compare your mental state before and after the two practices

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YOGA AND MENTAL HEALTH

1. Theoretical Concept

A study called "Exploring how different types of yoga change psychological resources and emotional well-being across a single session" by Park et al. focused on how a single session of yoga—incorporating meditation, active and restorative postures, and breathwork—affects psychological resources like mindfulness, body awareness, self-transcendence, spiritual peace, and social connectedness, as well as emotional well-being. Results showed that participants experienced increased positive emotions— specifically revitalization and tranquility.

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Yoga for Better Mental Health
Goals: Feel the psycho-emotionals benefits of yoga
Materials Needed: Video ***A Feel Good Yoga Flow To Rejuvenate Your Day; Feel Good Yoga For Total Mind & Body Re-Alignment***
Duration: 45 minutes
Step-by-step Instructions:

- *Open the links above and do the yoga classes (one of them or both)*

Reflection / Follow-up:

Compare your psycho-emotional state before and after the practices

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MEDITATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

1. Theoretical Concept

Meditation, one ofthe Eight Limbs of Yoga, is a practice offocusing the mind on a single point of attention—whether the breath, a mantra, calming music, or a visual image. By quieting distractions, meditation nurtures a state of clarity and calm that directly supports mental and emotional well-being. Research has shown that regular meditation can significantly reduce stress and anxiety, improve mood, enhance emotional resilience, and promote better sleep. It also strengthens focus and concentration, making it a valuable tool for maintaining mental balance in daily life.

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Meditate for Stress and Anxiety Relief
Goals: Experience the guided meditations to learn how to better cope with stress and anxiety
Materials Needed: **Video 15 Min Guided Meditation For Stress & Anxiety; Master Your Mind To Eliminate Stress, Fear, & Anxiety**
Duration: 25 minutes
Step-by-step Instructions:

- *Find a quiet spot and listen (preferably on headphones) to the two guided meditations*

Reflection / Follow-up:

Compare your mental state before and after the two meditations

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1. Theoretical Concept

According to aBBCarticle regular yoga practiceis linked to greater grey matter density in the brain, key to memory, emotional regulation, and self-awareness. This supports recovery from neurological conditions, and reduces symptoms of stress, anxiety, and PTSD. Researchers suggest that the mindfulness aspects of yoga fosters emotional resilience and improved mental regulation. The article "Meditation and Its Mental and Physical Health Benefits in 2023" suggests that meditation enhances affective regulation and promotes sustained positive emotional states, with clinical studies reporting significant reductions in anxiety disorders, major depressive disorder, and stress-related conditions. Evidence also indicates its therapeutic potential for PTSD.

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: How Yoga And Meditation Changed My Life
Goals: Learning about the yoga and meditation journeys of people
Materials Needed: Video YOGA BENEFITS AND MY YOGA JOURNEY; Meditating Every Day for 3 Years Changed My Life
Duration: 20 minutes
Step-by-step Instructions:

- *Watch the videos with testimonials of people about their yoga and meditation journeys*

Reflection / Follow-up:

Reflect on the possibility to have your own life-changing yoga and meditation journey

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Integrating Yoga and Meditation into Daily Life

1. Theoretical Concept

Different yoga styles have a differentmental health effect. Gentle forms like Hatha and Yin calm anxiety, stress, and burnout. More dynamic forms like Vinyasa, Ashtanga and Power Yoga support focus, resilience, and mood elevation. Breathing practices (pranayama in yoga) are often paired with meditation to regulate the nervous system and deepen awareness. Meditation calms the mind, while breathing techniques regulate the nervous system. Together, they create a powerful synergy for stress reduction, emotional healing, and improved focus.

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Small Steps Lead to Big Journeys

Goals: To implement into daily life a simple yoga, pranayama and meditation routine that is suitable for complete beginners

Materials Needed: ***Video What Are Sun Salutations & Why Do We Practice Them?***

Duration: 30 minutes

Step-by-step Instructions:

- *15 min Sun Salutations → 5 min Pranayama (deep breathing) → 10 min Mindfulness Meditation*

Reflection / Follow-up:

Journal about the changes in your mental health

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KEY LEARNINGS

- **Summarise the key ideas or insights from your module.**

Yoga and meditation complement each other: yoga calms the body and builds resilience, while meditation trains the mind to stay centered and reduce negative thought patterns. Mental health benefits include stronger emotional regulation, stress management, and improved self-esteem —essential foundations for youth well-being. Learners explore different styles and techniques, understanding how each benefits mental and emotional health. The module emphasizes the scientific evidence supporting these practices, connecting them to real mental health outcomes. Practical application is central: learners practice basic yoga, mindfulness, and breathing techniques and develop a personalized self-care plan.

- **What should youth or youth workers take away from this?**

Young people will have tools to manage stress, anxiety, and negative thinking. They will develop confidence in applying simple yoga and meditation practices daily.
Youth workers will have a clear understanding of the mental health benefits of yoga and meditation for young people. They will have resources for integrating yoga and meditation into youth programs as accessible, effective mental health tools.

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GLOSSARY

Yoga – A holistic practice fromancient India that integrates physical postures (asanas), breathing techniques (pranayama), relaxation, and meditation to promote balance of body, mind, and spirit.

Meditation – A mental practice of focused awareness and mindfulness, often involving observing the breath, thoughts, or sensations, to cultivate clarity, calmness, and inner peace.

Pranayama – A branch of yoga focused on regulating the breath through specific techniques of inhalation, exhalation, and breath retention, aimed at improving energy flow, concentration, and overall well-being.

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- Boho Beautiful Yoga
- The mind-altering power of yoga could improve your mental health
- Meditation and Its Mental and Physical Health Benefits in 2023
- Exploring How Different Types of Yoga Change Psychological Resources and Emotional Well-Being across a Single Session

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CREATIVITY & UPCYCLING - Using Green Methods to Support Mental Health

Partner Organisation Name	ARCHE
Country	Poland

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MODULE DESCRIPTION & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

CREATIVITY & UPCYCLING - Thismodule encourages young people to explore how creativity and upcycling can enhance mental wellbeing. Upcycling - transforming waste materials into valuable products - supports self-expression, problem-solving, and sustainable habits. Participants will discover how imaginative reuse fosters resilience, reduces stress, and increases self-awareness.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES - By the end of the module, learners will:

- Understand the role of creativity and upcycling in supporting mental health.
- Explore self-expression through transforming materials and objects.
- Gain confidence in using upcycling as a tool for stress relief, mindfulness, and personal growth.
- Strengthen resourcefulness, imagination, and problem- solving as protective factors for wellbeing.
- Develop personal strategies to integrate creativity and upcycling into daily life.

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Module Topics & Structure

Creativity & Upcycling – Using Green Methods to Support Mental Health

1. Introduction to Upcycling and Creativity
2. Materials as Mediums for Emotional Expression
3. Hands-On Upcycling Techniques
4. Collaborative and Community Upcycling Projects
5. Integrating Upcycling Practices into Daily Life

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge & Understanding

Learners willbe ableto:

- Define upcycling and explain its psychological, social, and environmental benefits.
- Describe how creative transformation of objects influences emotions, stress, and self-perception.
- Recognize the value of experimentation, trial-and-error, and improvisation.
- Identify social and community benefits of collaborative upcycling projects.

Skills

Learners will be able to:

- Transform everyday objects into functional or artistic creations.
- Apply reflective and problem-solving techniques during creative projects.
- Plan and execute small upcycling projects individually or in groups.
- Design a personal action plan to integrate creative upcycling into daily routines.

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SECTION 1: Introduction to Upcycling and Creativity

1. Theoretical Concept

Description: Engaging in upcycling enhances mental wellbeing by fostering creativity, problem-solving, and pride in making something useful from waste.

Key Theoretical Input: Hands-on creative activities stimulate reward pathways in the brain, induce flow states, and reduce cortisol levels.

Multimedia Links:

- **Video: How does creativity benefit mental health and wellbeing? (YouTube)**
- **Article: Linking Creativity to Psychological Well-being: Integrative Review of the Literature**

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Inspiration Walk

Focus: Observe surroundings for potential creative opportunities.

Materials Needed: Notebook, pen, camera/phone (optional)

Duration: 20 minutes

Instructions:

1. **Walk around the area and note objects or materials that could be repurposed.**
2. **Take photos or sketches.**
3. **Share ideas with a partner and discuss potential transformations.**

Reflection: How does noticing everyday objects differently change perception and imagination?

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SECTION 2: Materials as Mediums for Emotional Expression

1. Theoretical Concept

Description: Handling and transforming materials allows learners to express emotions and explore personal meaning.

Key Theoretical Input: Tactile engagement with materials reduces stress, promotes mindfulness, and enhances emotional regulation.

Multimedia Links:

- TED Talk: Tyler Kellogg: Something From Nothing
- Article: Creative expression and mental health

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Emotional Object

Focus: Express emotions through the transformation of a chosen material.

Materials Needed: Bottles, cardboard, old clothes, paint, scissors, glue.

Duration: 30 minutes

Instructions:

1. Choose a material or object.
2. Transform it into an item that represents a personal emotion or story.
3. Pair up and explain the choices made.

Reflection: Discuss how creating tangible representations of feelings impacts emotional awareness.

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SSECTION 3: Hands-On Upcycling Techniques

1. Theoretical Concept

Description: Learning upcycling techniques enhances problem-solving skills, creativity, and resilience.

Key Theoretical Input: Using practical skills such as cutting, assembling, and painting engages both cognitive and motor systems, fostering confidence and adaptability.

Multimedia Links:

- **Video: 10 FREE & EASY DIY UPCYCLING PROJECTS USING HOUSEHOLD ITEMS**
- **Article: Creating arts and crafting positively predicts subjective wellbeing and reduced loneliness**

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: DIY Upcycle Challenge

Focus: Build practical skills and confidence through hands-on creation.

Materials Needed: Recyclable items (bottles, boxes, fabric), basic craft tools, paints, markers.

Duration: 40 minutes

Instructions:

1. Select one or more items to upcycle.
2. Brainstorm ways to transform them into functional or decorative objects.
3. Create the item individually or in small groups.

Reflection: How did problem-solving and creativity contribute to feelings of achievement?

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SECTION 4: Collaborative and Community Upcycling Projects

1. Theoretical Concept

Description: Working together on upcycling projects strengthens social connections and promotes empathy.

Key Theoretical Input: Collaborative creativity releases oxytocin and enhances group cohesion, supporting emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

Multimedia Links:

- Video: Community Upcycling Project Video - Mrs. Klamm - North Valley Academy
- Creative Community Inspirations: Imaginative Upcycling Ideas

2. Practical Activity Structure

Name of Activity: Group Upcycling Project

Focus: Foster collaboration, creativity, and social engagement.

Materials Needed: Various recyclable materials, craft tools, shared workspace.

Duration: 60 minutes

Instructions:

1. Form small groups and choose a theme for a shared upcycling project.
2. Plan and execute the creation together.
3. Present the final products to the group.

Reflection: Discuss challenges and successes in collaborating creatively and how it affects mood and relationships.

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SECTION 5: Integrating Upcycling Practices into Daily Life

1. Theoretical Concept

Description: Regular creative and sustainable practices improve long-term mental wellbeing and environmental awareness.

Key Theoretical Input: Small daily habits, like repurposing waste materials, encourage mindfulness, responsibility, and satisfaction from creation.

Multimedia Links:

- Video: Upcycling Tutorial: 5 Easy Ways to Transform Your Clothes
- Article: Mindfulness and Creativity: Implications for Thinking and Practice

2. Practical Activity Structure Name of Activity: My Upcycling Action Plan

Focus: Apply creativity and resourcefulness to daily life.

Materials Needed: Paper, pens, small recyclable items.

Duration: 30 minutes

Instructions:

1. Identify 1–2 daily or weekly upcycling habits (e.g., turning old jars into plant pots).
2. Write 2–3 small goals to implement these habits over the next month.
3. Share plans with a partner for accountability.

Reflection: How can integrating small creative acts improve both personal wellbeing and environmental impact?

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KEY LEARNINGS

- Creativity and upcycling enhance emotional regulation, stress reduction, and self-esteem.
- Hands-on, practical projects foster problem-solving skills, confidence, and mindfulness.
- Collaboration in upcycling builds social connection, empathy, and community engagement.
- Small daily actions integrating upcycling strengthen long-term wellbeing and environmental awareness.

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GLOSSARY

- **Creativity:** The ability to generate original ideas, expressions, or solutions.
- **Upcycling:** Transforming waste or discarded materials into new, valuable items.
- **Flow:** A mental state of full engagement and enjoyment in a task.
- **Mindfulness:** Awareness of the present moment, often cultivated through focused attention.
- **Problem-Solving:** The process of identifying challenges and generating effective solutions.

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Emotional Life Skills for Taking Care and Maintaining our Mental Health

Partner Organisation Name	CONNECTING DOTS
Country	CYPRUS

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MODULE DESCRIPTION & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This MODULE explores the essential emotional life skills that support overall mental well-being. It emphasizes the importance of understanding and managing emotions, building resilience, and maintaining healthy relationships as key components of mental health. Learners will gain practical tools to recognize and regulate their emotions, cope with stress, communicate effectively, and create personal self-care routines. By developing these skills, individuals can strengthen their ability to handle life's challenges, reduce the risk of mental health struggles, and nurture a balanced, positive mindset. The topic also highlights the connection between lifestyle choices, emotional regulation, and long-term psychological well-being.

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Module Topics & Structure

1. Understanding Mental Health and Emotions
2. Self-Awareness & Self-Regulation
3. Building Resilience
4. Healthy Relationships & Communication
5. Stress and Anxiety Management
6. Lifestyle Practices for Mental Well-Being

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

Learners will be able to:

- Define mental health and explain the role of emotions in overall well-being.
- Identify and label emotions with greater accuracy and self-awareness.
- Apply strategies for managing and regulating emotions in daily life.
- Demonstrate skills in active listening, empathy, and assertive communication.
- Develop healthy coping mechanisms for stress, anxiety, and setbacks.
- Design a personal self-care plan to support ongoing mental health.
- Evaluate situations where professional or peer support may be necessary.
- Commit to sustainable practices that build resilience and emotional balance.

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1. Understanding Mental Health and Emotions

This topic introduces learners to the foundations of mental health and the role emotions play in daily life. It emphasizes that mental health is not just the absence of illness but a state of well-being where individuals can manage stress, work productively, build relationships, and contribute to their communities. Learners will also explore how emotions influence thoughts, behaviors, and decision-making.

What is Mental Health?

- WHO definition: a state of well-being in which a person realizes their potential, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively, and contribute to the community.

Why Mental Health Matters:

- Mental health is just as important as physical health. It influences how we think, feel, and behave every day. Good mental health helps us cope with stress, build strong relationships, make good decisions, and achieve our goals

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1. Understanding Mental Health and Emotions

What Are Emotions? Emotions are natural responses to our experiences, thoughts, and surroundings. They act like signals that tell us how we feel about a situation and guide our decisions and behaviors. Everyone experiences emotions — they are neither "good" nor "bad," but they can be comfortable (joy, love, excitement) or uncomfortable (anger, sadness, fear).

Why Emotions Matter

- Guide Decisions: Emotions help us decide what feels safe, important, or meaningful.
- Connect Us to Others: They allow us to empathize, build relationships, and communicate without words.
- Motivate Action: For example, fear can protect us from danger, and joy can motivate us to repeat positive experiences.
- Signal Needs: Sadness may signal the need for comfort; anger may signal that a boundary was crossed.

Types of Emotions

- Primary Emotions: Basic and universal feelings such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, and disgust.
- Secondary/Complex Emotions: Mixed emotions shaped by experiences and culture, such as guilt, pride, jealousy, or shame.

Emotions are closely linked to how we think and act:

- Thoughts: "I failed my test."
- Emotion: Sadness or frustration.
- Behavior: Avoiding studying, or trying harder next time.

Healthy Expression of Emotions

- Naming emotions instead of suppressing them ("I feel nervous" vs. "I'm fine").
- Sharing feelings with trusted people.
- Using coping strategies like journaling, art, exercise, or mindfulness.

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Activities

Discussion Starter:

- "What does mental health mean to you?" (Group brainstorm).

Activity: Emotion Wheel Exploration

- Learners use an Emotion Wheel to identify and label emotions they felt in the past week.
- Reflection: How did these emotions affect their actions and decisions?

Case Study Reflection:

- Present a short scenario (e.g., a student overwhelmed with exams).
- Learners identify the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors involved.

Reflection Questions

- When was the last time you felt strong emotions (positive or negative)?
- How did those emotions influence your choices or actions?
- Why do you think people sometimes hide their emotions or avoid talking about mental health?

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2. Self-Awareness & Self-Regulation

This unit helps learners develop the ability to recognize their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (self-awareness) and to manage them in healthy and constructive ways (self-regulation). These two skills are the foundation of emotional intelligence and play a vital role in maintaining mental health, improving relationships, and achieving personal goals.

1. Self-Awareness

- Definition: The ability to notice and understand your emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Importance: Helps in making
- conscious choices rather than acting on impulse. Tools for developing self-awareness: Journaling, Reflection questions,
- Mind-body check-in (noticing physical signs of stress or calm), Seeking feedback from trusted peers or mentors.

2. Self-Regulation

- Definition: The ability to manage emotions, behaviors, and impulses in healthy ways. Importance: Builds resilience, reduces
- stress, and strengthens relationships. Techniques for self-regulation - Mindfulness & Breathing: Staying present and calm.
- Grounding Techniques: Using the five senses to reduce overwhelming feelings. Positive Self-Talk: Replacing negative thoughts with constructive ones. Delay– Pause–Respond: Taking a moment before reacting.

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Activities

Reflection Exercise: Emotional Triggers

- Learners list situations that make them feel stressed, angry, or anxious.
- Discuss how recognizing triggers can prevent emotional outbursts.

Mindfulness Practice: 3-Minute Breathing Space

- Guide learners through slow breathing to notice thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations.

Role-Play: React vs. Respond

- Learners act out scenarios (e.g., receiving criticism from a teacher or friend).
- Practice an impulsive reaction vs. a thoughtful, regulated response.

Positive Self-Talk Exercise

- Provide examples of negative thoughts ("I can't do this") and reframe into positive alternatives ("This is hard, but I can try my best").

Reflection Questions:

- What are my top three emotional triggers?
- How do I usually react when I feel strong emotions?
- What self-regulation strategy works best for me?
- How would my relationships improve if I practiced more self-awareness and self-regulation?

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3. Building Resilience

Resilience is the ability to adapt, recover, and grow stronger in the face of challenges, setbacks, or stress. This unit helps learners understand what resilience is, why it is essential for mental health, and how to develop it through practical strategies, positive mindset, and supportive habits.

1. What is Resilience?

- The capacity to bounce back from difficulties. Resilient people don't avoid challenges; they face them with adaptability and a growth mindset.

2. Why Resilience Matters

- Helps manage stress and reduces the impact of setbacks.
- Improves problem-solving and decision-making.
- Supports long-term mental well-being and healthy relationships.

3. Components of Resilience

- Emotional Awareness, Belief in your ability to handle situations, Optimism, Support Systems, Adaptability.

4. Strategies to Build Resilience

- Growth Mindset, Goal Setting, Positive Thinking & Gratitude, Healthy Coping Skills, Social Support.

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Activities

1.Resilience Reflection Exercise

- Learners write about a time they faced a challenge and how they overcame it.
- Discuss lessons learned and personal strengths discovered.

2.Gratitude Journal

- List three things each day that went well or made them feel supported.

3.Growth Mindset Scenario

- Present a scenario (e.g., failing a test or losing a game).
- Learners brainstorm positive responses and actions to learn from the situation.

4.Support Network Mapping

- Learners create a visual map of people they can rely on during challenging times.

Reflection Questions

- What is one challenge I recently faced, and how did I handle it?
- Which personal strengths helped me recover or cope?
- How can I apply resilience strategies in my daily life?
- Who can I turn to for support when I feel overwhelmed?

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4. Healthy Relationships & Communication

Healthy relationships and effective communication are essential for emotional well-being and mental health. This topic helps learners understand how to build and maintain positive relationships, practice empathy, listen actively, communicate assertively, and set healthy boundaries. Strong interpersonal skills reduce conflicts, improve social support, and enhance resilience.

1. Healthy Relationships

- Characteristics of healthy relationships: trust, respect, support, honesty, and equality. The role of social support in mental health. Differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships.

2. Effective Communication

- Active Listening, Empathy, Assertiveness, Non-Verbal Communication.

3. Conflict Resolution

- Recognizing common sources of conflict. Steps for constructive conflict resolution: Stay calm and breathe, Listen to the other person, Express your own feelings clearly, Find common ground and compromise. Avoiding harmful responses.

4. Setting Healthy Boundaries

- Types of boundaries: physical, emotional, digital, and social.
- Communicating boundaries clearly and respectfully.

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Activities

Role-Play: Active Listening

Pair learners to practice listening fully, summarizing what the other said, and responding empathetically.

Assertiveness Practice

Learners practice saying “no” or expressing a need politely but firmly in different scenarios.

Conflict Resolution Exercise

Present a common conflict scenario (e.g., disagreement with a friend). Learners work in groups to find a solution using the steps above.

Reflection Questions

- What makes a relationship healthy or unhealthy?
- How do I currently communicate with friends or family, and how can I improve?
- When have I struggled to set boundaries, and what would I do differently now?
- How can empathy and active listening change the way I connect with others?

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5. Stress and Anxiety Management

Stress and anxiety are natural responses to life's challenges, but when unmanaged, they can negatively affect mental health, relationships, and daily functioning. This unit equips learners with knowledge and practical strategies to identify, manage, and reduce stress and anxiety, fostering emotional balance and resilience.

1. Understanding Stress and Anxiety

- Stress: A physical or emotional reaction to challenging situations. Anxiety: Persistent worry or fear that may be disproportionate to the situation. Signs and Symptoms: Physical, Emotional, Behavioral.

2. Common Stressors for Young People

- Academic pressure, exams, and deadlines. Peer pressure and social challenges. Family conflicts or expectations. Uncertainty about the future.

3. Stress and Anxiety Management Strategies

A. Immediate Coping Techniques: Deep breathing exercises. Grounding techniques. Short mindfulness or meditation breaks.

B. Long-Term Habits: Regular physical activity. Balanced nutrition and adequate sleep. Time management and prioritization skills. Journaling or creative expression.

C. Social and Emotional Support: Talking with trusted friends, family, or mentors. Joining support groups or clubs.

D. Professional Help: When stress or anxiety becomes persistent or overwhelming, seek counselors, psychologists, or helplines.

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Activities

1. **Stress Mapping**
   - Learners list their main stressors and rank them by intensity.
   - Identify patterns and discuss possible coping strategies.
2. **Breathing and Grounding Practice**
   - Guide learners through a 5-minute deep breathing or 5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercise.
3. **Time Management Exercise**
   - Learners create a simple weekly schedule to balance study, rest, and recreation.
4. **Reflection Journal**
   - Record daily stressors, emotional reactions, and coping strategies used.

Reflection Questions

- What situations usually trigger my stress or anxiety?
- Which coping strategies help me feel calmer and more focused?
- How can I plan my day to reduce unnecessary stress?
- Who can I turn to for support when feeling overwhelmed?

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6. Lifestyle Practices for Mental Well-being

Mental health is closely connected to lifestyle habits. This unit guides learners on how daily routines, nutrition, physical activity, sleep, and digital habits influence emotional well-being. By adopting healthy lifestyle practices, young people can strengthen resilience, reduce stress, and maintain overall mental health.

1. Sleep and Rest

- Importance of 7–9 hours of sleep for mood, focus, and stress management. Effects of sleep deprivation: irritability, poor concentration, weakened immunity. Tips for healthy sleep: regular schedule, limiting screen time before bed, relaxing bedtime routines.

2. Nutrition

- Foods that boost energy and mental clarity. Limiting processed foods, sugary drinks, and excessive caffeine.

3. Physical Activity

- Exercise as a natural stress reliever and mood booster. Activities: walking, dancing, sports, yoga, or any enjoyable movement. Benefits for both physical and mental health.

4. Digital Balance

- Strategies: digital detox, setting limits, mindful social media use, prioritizing face-to-face interactions.

5. Personal Self-Care Practices

- Regular relaxation activities. Emotional check-ins. Planning balanced routines that include work, rest, and play.

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Activities

1. **Self-Care Planning Workshop**
   - Learners create a weekly plan including sleep, meals, exercise, study, relaxation, and social time.
2. **Mindful Technology Use Exercise**
   - Track screen time for a day and identify patterns of overuse.
   - Plan strategies to reduce unnecessary digital stress.
3. **Physical Activity Challenge**
   - Encourage learners to engage in at least 20–30 minutes of enjoyable movement daily for a week.
4. **Nutrition Reflection**
   - Keep a food and mood diary to see how eating habits affect emotions and energy levels.

Reflection Questions

- Which daily habits currently help or harm my mental well-being?
- How can I adjust my routines to include more self-care?
- What activities make me feel relaxed, happy, or energized?
- How can I use technology in a way that supports rather than harms my mental health?

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KEY LEARNINGS

1**. Understanding MentalHealth and Emotions:** Mental health is a vital part of overall well-being, and emotions are natural signals that guide our decisions and relationships. By learning to understand and label emotions, we take the first step in building emotional life skills that strengthen mental health.

2. **Self-Awareness & Self-Regulation:** Self-awareness is the first step to understanding ourselves, while self-regulation is the next step that allows us to manage our emotions and actions wisely. Together, they help us stay calm, make better choices, and maintain stronger mental health.

3**. Building Resilience:** Resilience is not about avoiding difficulties but learning how to navigate them with strength, flexibility, and optimism. By developing resilience, young people can face life's challenges with confidence, maintain mental health, and grow stronger through adversity.

4**. Healthy Relationships & Communication:** Healthy relationships and communication skills are critical for mental health. By listening actively, practicing empathy, expressing yourself assertively, and setting boundaries, young people can build stronger, more supportive, and balanced connections.

5. Stress and Anxiety Management: Stress and anxiety are natural, but they do not have to control our lives. By understanding triggers, practicing coping strategies, maintaining healthy habits, and seeking support when needed, young people can manage stress effectively and maintain emotional balance.

6. Lifestyle Practices for Mental Well-being: Small lifestyle changes can have a big impact on mental health. By prioritizing sleep, nutrition, exercise, and mindful routines, young people can enhance emotional well-being, build resilience, and maintain balance in their daily lives.

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4. Building Healthy Relationships and Communicating Effectively

5. Achieving Physical and Mental Well-Being

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MENTAL HEALTH LEXICON

Anxiety

- A common mental health condition, characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure. *See the APA's definition of Anxiety dictionary.apa.org*

Autism

- A mental disorder which can affect speech ability, emotional intelligence, or abstract thinking. Symptoms in adults may include difficulty making conversation, social anxiety, and very limited interest in only a few activities. *Learn more from Autism Speaks (or similar autism resources)*

Bipolar Disorder

- A mental health condition characterized by extreme mood swings: emotional highs (mania or hypomania) and lows (depression). *World Health Organization offers an overview on bipolar disorder*

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

- A mental health condition marked by instability in mood, self-image, behavior, and relationships. *See the Mayo Clinic's page on borderline personality disorder Mayo Clinic*
- *Also, the NIH's BPD topic page is useful nimh.nih.gov*

Depressive Disorder (Depression)

- A common mental health condition, characterized by a low mood or loss of pleasure or interest in activities for extended periods, disturbed sleep and appetite, feelings of low self-worth, thoughts about dying and hopelessness, tiredness, and poor concentration. *More at the WHO fact sheet on depression World Health Organization*
- *And also the Mayoclinic symptoms & causes page Mayo Clinic*

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MENTAL HEALTH LEXICON

Eating Disorders

- Serious illnesses marked by severe disturbances in eating behaviors. People may become fixated or obsessed with weight loss, body shape, or controlling their food intake. *See resources from the National Institute of Mental Health*

Functional Amnesia

- The loss of memory for events one has personally experienced, occurring without identifiable neurological pathology. It is thought to emerge as a defense against anxiety or as a way of escaping specific distressing situations. *Information from APA or psychological trauma literature*

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

- A chronic disorder where a person has uncontrollable, recurring thoughts (obsessions) and behaviors (compulsions) that they feel compelled to repeat. *The NIMH covers OCD in detail*

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- A psychiatric disorder that can follow exposure to a traumatic event (natural disaster, serious accident, violence). *See the NIMH page on PTSD nimh.nih.gov*

Schizophrenia

- A chronic and severe mental disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels, and acts. People with schizophrenia may lose touch with reality (hallucinations, delusions). *See the Mayo Clinic on schizophrenia.*

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