

TOGETHER ROMANIA ASSOCIATION



HEALTHY MINDS

quick guide



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We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the participants, facilitators, and team leaders who contributed their time, energy, and expertise to the creation of this guide. Thank you for making this journey so meaningful and impactful!

Editor and Designer: Alexandru Iorga

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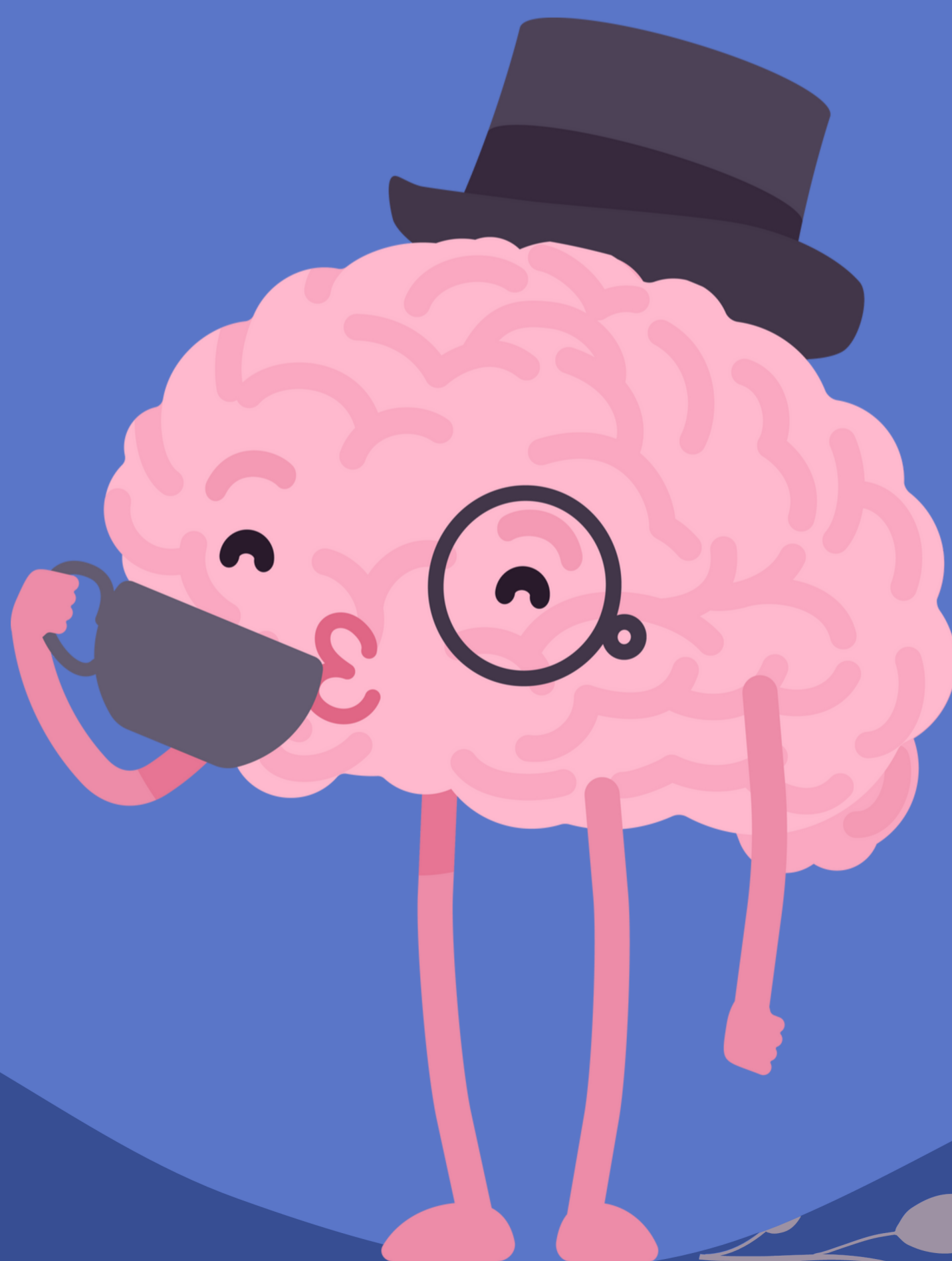


INTRODUCTION

This quick guide is the result of the **Erasmus+ youth exchange Healthy Minds**, project number **2024-1-R001-KA151-YOU-000205995**, coordinated by Together Romania Association. Participants from Turkey, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria came together to explore the importance of mental health and to develop tools and strategies for fostering well-being. With their collective efforts, this guide serves as a resource for anyone passionate about nurturing a healthy mind and promoting mental resilience.

The guide is structured to provide a well-rounded understanding of mental health, integrating both general knowledge and few practical tools. This provides context for the content and demonstrates the value of international cooperation in addressing shared challenges.

By weaving together knowledge, and practical tools, this guide aims to inspire and empower its readers. It reflects the spirit of the Healthy Minds project and the collective commitment of young people to building a healthier, more mindful world.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

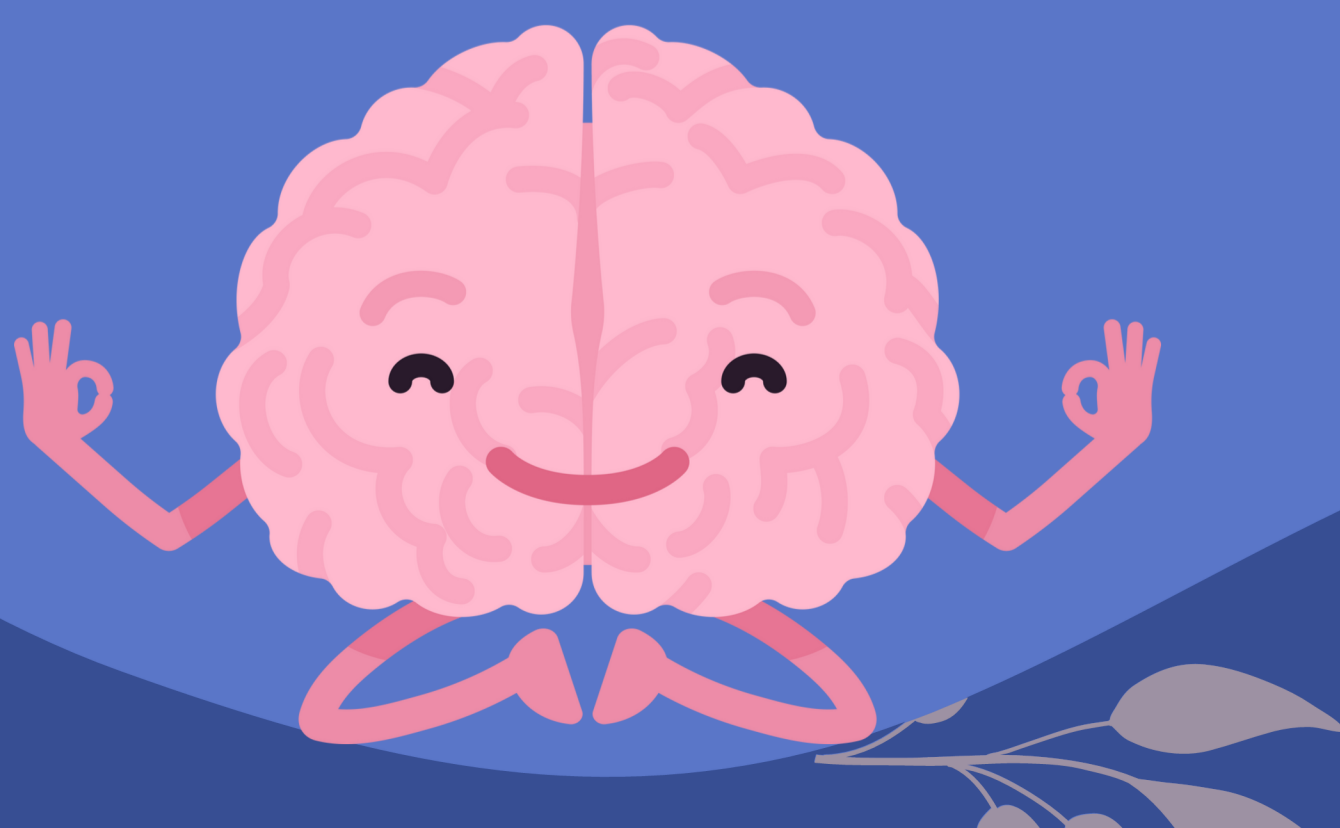
The **Healthy Minds youth exchange**, held from **October 4th to 13th, 2024**, took place in the scenic village of **Trăisteni, Romania**. The project brought together young participants from **Bulgaria, Poland, Slovakia, Türkiye, and Romania**, creating a dynamic and diverse group united in their goal to explore mental health and well-being.

The exchange aimed to raise awareness about mental health, combat stigma, and encourage open conversations on the subject. Through interactive workshops, mindfulness practices, physical activities, and creative expression sessions, participants gained practical tools for managing stress and anxiety. The program's key objectives included enhancing participants' understanding of mental health, fostering intercultural exchange, and promoting youth participation. By engaging participants in planning and leading activities, the initiative also helped develop self-confidence, organizational skills, and leadership abilities.

The exchange served as a vibrant platform for intercultural dialogue, allowing participants to share cultural perspectives on mental health and learn from one another's experiences. This approach fostered a sense of community, inclusivity, and respect for diversity, aligning with the **Erasmus+ Youth Goals** of advancing social inclusion and equity.

Peer-to-peer learning was a cornerstone of the project, empowering participants to mentor each other, exchange personal insights, and collaborate on impactful projects. This experiential learning format not only created a supportive network of young mental health advocates but also contributed to their personal and professional growth.

By prioritizing a supportive and inclusive environment, Healthy Minds empowered participants to take active roles in their mental health journeys and to inspire positive change within their communities. This transformative experience highlighted the power of youth exchange programs to create lasting impacts, not only in individual lives but also across broader social contexts.



ERASMUS+ FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Erasmus+ is a European Union program that aims to support education, training, youth, and sport across Europe. It plays a significant role in promoting lifelong learning, enhancing skills, and fostering international cooperation. The program not only focuses on academic exchanges but also emphasizes the development of personal and professional competencies.

Key Objectives of Erasmus+

1. **Education and Training:** Erasmus+ offers opportunities for students, teachers, trainees, and professionals to study, teach, or train abroad. This can enhance their skills, improve their employability, and help them become more culturally aware and adaptable.
2. **Youth:** Through Erasmus+ projects, young people can engage in youth exchanges, volunteering, and other non-formal learning opportunities. These experiences are designed to build skills such as leadership, communication, and team cooperation.
3. **Sport:** Erasmus+ also supports sports-related activities, particularly those aimed at promoting grassroots sports and physical well-being. It seeks to foster inclusion, reduce violence in sports, and promote healthy lifestyles.
4. **Lifelong Learning:** The program encourages people of all ages to continue learning throughout their lives, helping them adapt to changes in the job market or personal interests.

While **Erasmus+ supports both formal and non-formal education**, it is particularly renowned for its emphasis on non-formal learning, which refers to learning that takes place outside traditional classrooms and educational institutions. This type of learning is flexible, learner-centered, and experiential, offering young people the chance to acquire knowledge and skills in dynamic, real-world settings.



Non-formal education under Erasmus+ allows youth to engage in activities such as youth exchanges, training courses, volunteering projects, and long-term mobility programs. These initiatives provide young people with practical experiences that help build their confidence, improve communication skills, and increase their cultural awareness. Through these opportunities, youth learn to navigate challenges, collaborate in diverse teams, and develop leadership qualities—skills that are essential for personal development and future career success.

Here are some **official links** where you can find more information about Erasmus+:

Erasmus+ Official Website (EU Commission)

<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/>

This is the official Erasmus+ website by the European Commission, providing detailed information on all aspects of the program, including eligibility, application processes, and funding opportunities.

National Agencies (for Erasmus+ in your country)

<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/national-agencies>

This page links to the National Agencies responsible for managing Erasmus+ in each participating country. You can find country-specific information, guidelines, and local contact points.

European Youth Portal

https://youth.europa.eu/_en

This section of the European Youth Portal focuses on the opportunities offers to young people, including youth exchanges, volunteering, and non-formal education.

Erasmus+ Programme Guide

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/programme-guide_en

This is the official Erasmus+ Programme Guide, which provides comprehensive details about the program's rules, eligibility, and funding details.

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health is an integral part of who we are, shaping the way we think, feel, and interact with the world. It includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being, influencing every aspect of our lives, from how we handle challenges to how we form relationships. Mental health plays a significant role in determining the quality of life, and for young people aged 17-25, this stage of life often brings unique pressures and opportunities that can impact mental well-being.

Unlike physical health, which is often visible and easier to measure, mental health is more nuanced and can be harder to identify or understand. It isn't just about the absence of mental illness; it is about having a sense of purpose, feeling emotionally balanced, and being able to manage stress effectively. When mental health is thriving, individuals feel equipped to face the ups and downs of life with resilience and confidence.

Mental health is influenced by a complex interplay of factors:

- **Biological factors:** These include genetics, brain chemistry, and overall physical health, all of which can affect how the brain processes emotions and stress.
- **Life experiences:** Early childhood relationships, traumatic events, or major life transitions can leave a lasting imprint on mental health.
- **Social and cultural context:** Family support, friendships, social expectations, and cultural norms all shape how individuals perceive and experience mental health.
- **Environmental factors:** External influences such as academic pressures, financial concerns, workplace demands, or exposure to social media can significantly affect mental health, especially for young people navigating the transition to adulthood.



For youth aged 17-25, the challenges of this period are numerous. The transition from adolescence to adulthood often includes finishing school, entering the workforce, pursuing higher education, or forming long-term relationships. These milestones, while exciting, can also create feelings of uncertainty, pressure, or stress. The increasing role of social media in daily life adds another layer of complexity, often contributing to comparisons, unrealistic expectations, and a sense of isolation despite constant connectivity.

Understanding mental health means recognizing its dynamic nature—it is not static but instead changes over time. Mental health can be affected by specific events, ongoing circumstances, or even seasonal changes. What's important to remember is that everyone experiences fluctuations in their mental well-being, and this is a natural part of life.

This perspective highlights the importance of acknowledging mental health as a universal experience that affects all individuals, regardless of background or situation. By exploring mental health and its many influences, we can better understand how it shapes our lives and the lives of those around us.

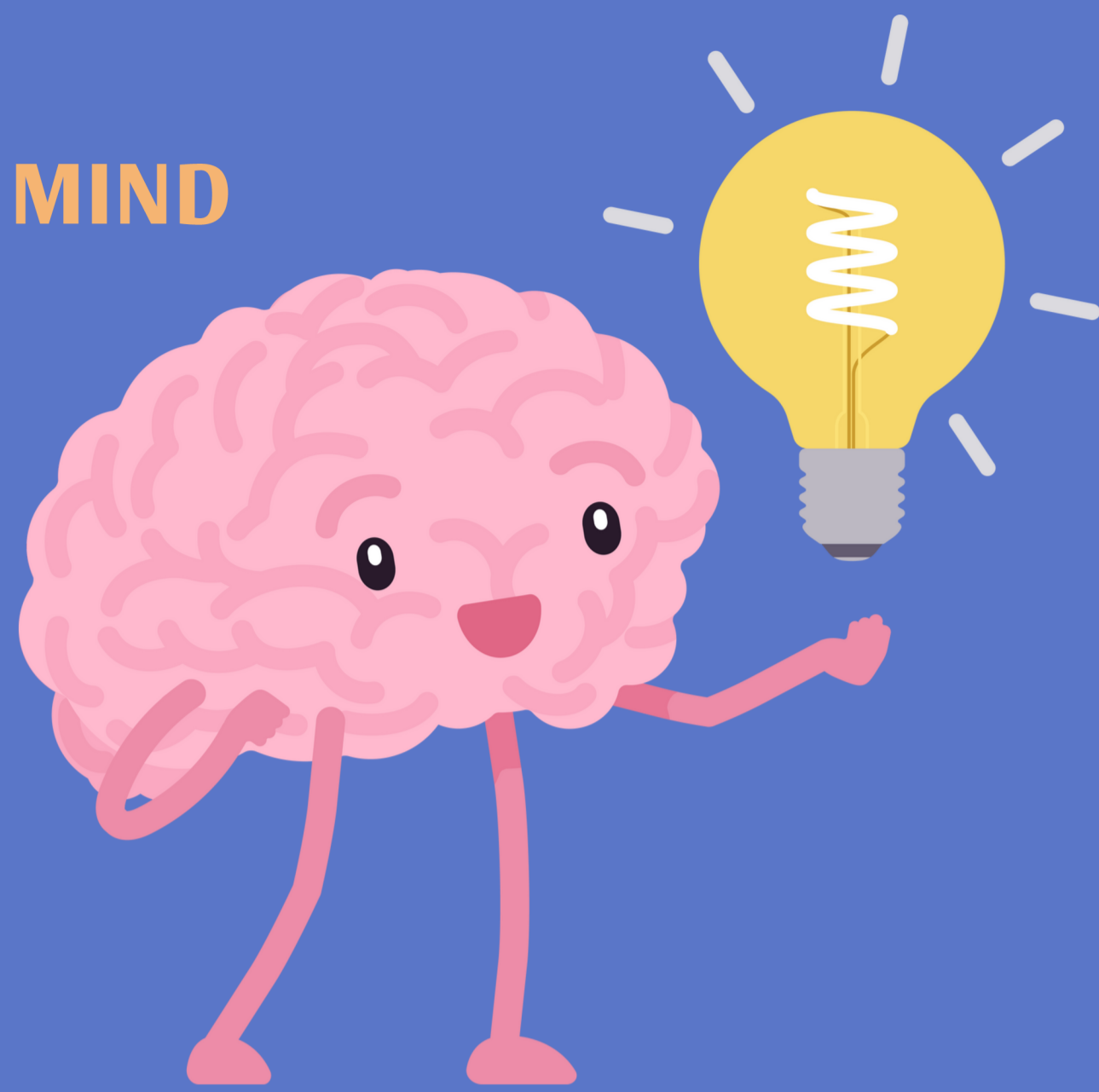
Understanding mental health is crucial for young people navigating the complexities of growing up. The transition to adulthood brings both challenges and opportunities, and mental health is the foundation that allows individuals to adapt, grow, and thrive during this period. By recognizing the importance of mental health, we can better equip ourselves to handle the ups and downs of life with resilience and self-awareness.

For youth, mental health is not just a personal concern but a shared responsibility among families, communities, and society. Creating a culture that values mental well-being, encourages open conversations, and provides accessible support can make a profound difference. By fostering environments where mental health is prioritized, young people can feel empowered to build fulfilling lives and contribute positively to their communities.



TIPS AND TRICKS FOR A HEALTHY MIND

Taking care of your mental health is just as important as looking after your physical health. Here are some practical strategies and exercises that you can incorporate into your daily life to maintain and improve your mental well-being:



1. Establish a Healthy Daily Routine

A consistent routine can provide structure and stability, reducing feelings of chaos or stress.

- **Sleep:** Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Stick to a regular sleep schedule, even on weekends. Create a calming bedtime routine, such as reading or listening to relaxing music, to signal your body it's time to rest.
- **Meals:** Eat balanced meals with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Avoid skipping meals, as this can lead to energy dips and irritability.
- **Exercise:** Engage in physical activity for at least 30 minutes most days. Activities like walking, cycling, dancing, or yoga are great ways to boost mood and reduce stress.

2. Practice Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques

Mindfulness helps you stay present and reduces feelings of anxiety or overwhelm.

- **Deep Breathing:** Practice deep, slow breaths for 5 minutes. Inhale for a count of four, hold for four, and exhale for four. This can calm your nervous system and reduce stress.
- **Meditation:** Set aside 5-10 minutes a day to sit quietly, focus on your breath, or use a guided meditation app. Meditation helps improve focus and emotional resilience.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Starting from your feet, tense and then relax each muscle group in your body. This can release physical tension caused by stress.

3. Stay Connected with Others

Strong social connections are vital for mental health.

- **Spend Time with Loved Ones:** Schedule regular meet-ups, calls, or video chats with friends and family. Feeling connected can reduce loneliness and provide emotional support.
- **Join Groups or Clubs:** Find people who share your interests, whether it's sports, art, or volunteering. Being part of a community can provide a sense of belonging.
- **Open Up:** Don't hesitate to share your thoughts and feelings with trusted individuals. Talking about what's on your mind can lighten the emotional load.

4. Limit Screen Time and Social Media Use

Excessive screen time, especially on social media, can contribute to stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

- **Set Boundaries:** Use apps to track and limit your screen time. Allocate specific times for social media and stick to them.
- **Unfollow Negativity:** Curate your social media feeds to follow accounts that inspire and uplift you. Avoid comparing yourself to others online.
- **Digital Detox:** Take regular breaks from screens, especially before bed. Use this time for offline activities like reading, journaling, or hobbies.

5. Cultivate Positivity and Gratitude

Focusing on the good in your life can help shift your mindset and improve overall happiness.

- **Gratitude Journal:** Write down three things you're grateful for each day. This practice can help you focus on positive aspects of life.
- **Affirmations:** Use positive affirmations like "I am capable" or "I am enough" to build self-confidence and resilience.
- **Celebrate Small Wins:** Acknowledge and reward yourself for achievements, no matter how small they may seem.



6. Develop Coping Strategies for Stress

Learning how to manage stress effectively is essential for maintaining mental health.

- **Take Breaks:** If you're feeling overwhelmed, step away for a moment to recharge. Even a 5-minute break can help.
- **Time Management:** Break tasks into smaller steps and prioritize them. Use tools like planners or apps to stay organized.
- **Engage in Creative Activities:** Activities like painting, playing music, or writing can be therapeutic and a great outlet for emotions.

7. Spend Time in Nature

Connecting with nature can have a calming and rejuvenating effect on your mental health.

- **Go for Walks:** A simple walk in a park, forest, or along a beach can reduce stress and improve mood.
- **Gardening:** If possible, grow plants or flowers. Watching something thrive can be satisfying and calming.
- **Outdoor Activities:** Try hiking, cycling, or simply sitting outdoors to soak up sunlight and fresh air.

8. Learn to Say No

Overcommitting can lead to stress and burnout.

- **Set Boundaries:** Understand your limits and communicate them clearly. It's okay to say no to requests that feel overwhelming.
- **Prioritize Yourself:** Make decisions that align with your goals and well-being, not just others' expectations.

9. Seek Help When Needed

It's essential to recognize when you need support.

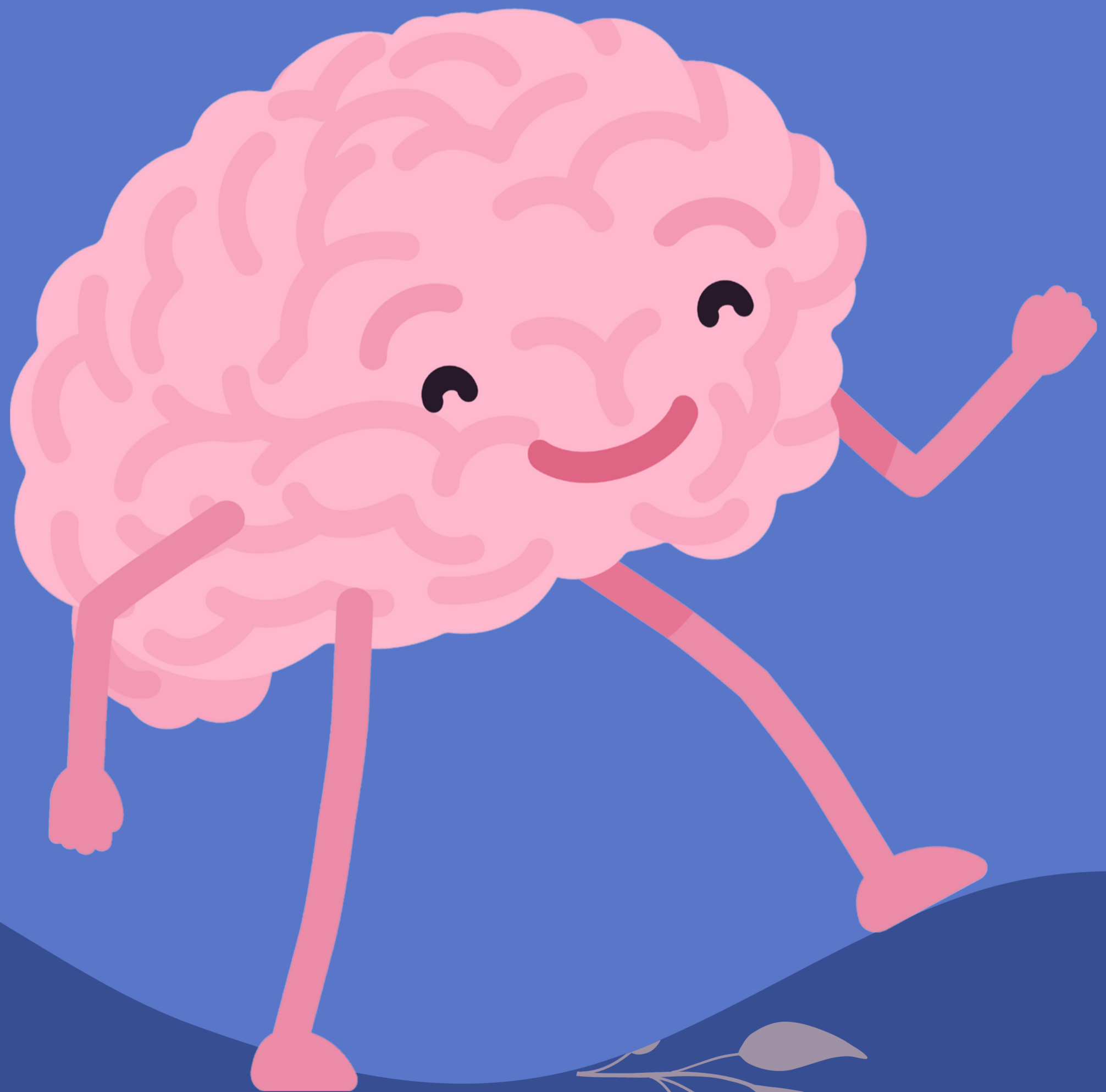
- **Talk to Someone You Trust:** Whether it's a friend, family member, teacher, or mentor, sharing your concerns can help.
- **Professional Help:** If you feel persistently anxious, sad, or overwhelmed, consider reaching out to a counselor or therapist. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

10. Engage in Activities That Bring Joy

Hobbies and enjoyable activities can act as stress relievers and mood boosters.

- Rediscover Old Hobbies: Whether it's drawing, playing a sport, or reading, revisit things you used to enjoy.
- Try Something New: Challenge yourself to learn a new skill or take up a new hobby.
- Laugh: Watch a comedy, spend time with funny friends, or read something lighthearted. Laughter is a natural stress reliever.

By adopting these strategies and exercises, you can build habits that support long-term mental well-being. Remember, mental health is a journey, and taking small, consistent steps can make a big difference.



PARTNERS

The success of this project would not have been possible without the collaboration and dedication of our **international partners**. Each organization brought unique perspectives, expertise, and energy, contributing significantly to the development and implementation of the activities. This chapter highlights the partner organizations involved, celebrating their role in fostering a meaningful and impactful youth exchange. Additionally, we provide contact information for those interested in connecting with these organizations or pursuing similar initiatives. Together, we continue to build a strong network committed to empowering young people and promoting mental health.



Name: Mladejki centar za razvitie- Vzaimopomosht
Place: Kazanlak, Bulgaria
E-mail: ydcma2004@gmail.com



Name: Stowarzyszenie AKTYWNI KREATYWNI
Place: Gołuchów, Poland
E-mail: aktywnikreatywni@interia.eu



Name: STEP - Spoločenstvo pre oblastný rozvoj
Place: Zemplínske Hámre, Slovakia
E-mail: info@societystep.eu



Name: ESENLER GENCLIK VE SPOR KULUBU DERNEGI
Place: Canakkale, Türkiye
E-mail: esenlergsk17@gmail.com



ABOUT US

Together Romania Association is a non-governmental and non-profit organization having the legal statute of an association with activities for youth in art, education, culture, environment, sport and social field. Some young and passionate people, experienced in national and international youth programs, founded it in September 2005, aiming to offer a proper way for Romanian youth personality development. The main goal is to integrate the youth in a diluted value society and to offer the opportunity of evolving socially, culturally, civic and intellectually, to promote tolerance, communication and cooperation between different cultures and generations.

Since 2005, our association supports young people at the local, regional and international level, using non-formal education methods. In principle, we design, plan and offer educational programs for different groups of young people (students, vulnerable groups, unemployed, students, unemployed) from the local community and adjacent villages. Our work is mostly addressed to young people between the ages of 13-35.

Since 2022, our association has been accredited under Erasmus+ in the field of Youth.

If your organization is interested in learning more about the Healthy Minds project or would like to work together on similar initiatives, please feel free to get in touch with us. Below are the contact details for the **Together Romania Association**.

Name: Together Romania

Place: Campina, Romania

E-mail: together_romania@yahoo.com

SM: @together_romania

Website: asociatiatogether.wordpress.com



HOW IS YOUR MIND SET TODAY?

