RAY

Resilience and Adaptability in Youth

Youth Worker's Toolkit

cyprus
youth clubs
organization

COMUNE DI
CiniselloBalsamo

Funded by
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Title: Resilience and Adaptability in Youth: Raising awareness and developing skills amidst the Covid-19 crisis Toolkit.

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1. Consortium

Cyprus Youth Clubs Organization (KOKEN) – Cyprus

KOKEN, Leading Partner, is a non-profit, nonpartisan, non-governmental organization (NGO) which forms the central coordinating body of 70 Youth Clubs in urban and rural areas of Cyprus. The organization successfully coordinates, supports, and provides expert guidance to volunteer groups who actively participate in youth clubs. Additionally, the organization develops and delivers inclusive activities, educational seminars, awareness campaigns, whilst aiming at enhancing the well-being of young individuals.

Comune Di Cinisello Balsamo – Italy

The Youth Policy and Social Innovation Department of Cinisello Balsamo Municipality organizes and manages actions with/for young people. The activities aim to develop the soft skills, referring to key competences for lifelong learning as well as the growth of the active citizenship and youth participation. As a Public Body, it works for a shared youth policy strategy for a sustainable local development.

SDPL: Helsingin ja Uudenmaan piirijärjestö ry/Helsinki pioneers - Finland

Helsinki Pioneers is a children and youth organization based in Helsinki, Finland. Established in the early 50's, it has valuable experience in organizing various activities in order to empower youth, promote self-expression, enhance diversity and inclusion of all children, youth and adults irrespective of cultural backgrounds and limited opportunities.

Each year, it organizes around 20 summer and winter camps for children and young individuals making it one of the biggest youth organizations in Helsinki.

RAY - Resilience and Adaptability in Youth

Raising awareness and developing skills amidst the Covid-19 crisis project focuses on the mental health enhancement of youth, in an effort to equip young individuals with the mental strength to overcome everyday challenges and to bolster the mental health of youth impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. More specifically the objectives of the project include:

- Raising awareness of the impact of Covid-19 crisis on mental health in various contexts (e.g. workplace, education)
- Helping youth workers and the youth identify and recognize mental health issues.
- Improving adaptability and resilience skills of youth workers and youth
- Enhancing the use of non-formal methods to cope with potential mental health issues associated with Covid-19 crisis.

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2.   Youth Worker's Toolkit

This toolkit's aim is to enhance the youth workers' role in promoting mental health in the youth.

The content of the Toolkit was derived mainly from the needs assessment, which resulted mainly from the contributions of the participants of the Focus Groups that took place in Cyprus, Italy, and Finland respectively. The opinions and suggestions of the participants were taken in advisement when formulating the content, in order to develop a toolkit that meets the needs of individuals working with young people. As it was mentioned during the focus groups discussions, youth workers have a general idea on issues related to mental health but need further information, in order to enhance the quality of their work, while becoming more equipped with knowledge on forming and using effective coping strategies in helping young people deal with their problems.

According to WHO[1], mental health conditions account for a considerable proportion of the global disease burden during adolescence and are the leading cause of disability in young people. Adding to that, suicide is the fourth leading cause of death for ages 15 to 29[2].

Despite these high prevalence rates and the negative impacts of poor mental health on education, health, and employment outcomes, youth mental health seems to be neglected in the global public health space and development investments[3].

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the well-being of young people and has put them at an increased risk for mental health problems. Young people themselves report that their greatest concern is the toll that the pandemic is taking on their mental health[4].

2.1.   Node reward payment Mental health prevention interventions in youth

Mental health prevention interventions refer to programs designed to help avert or minimize mental health problems. Such programs are especially important for the mental and psychological well-being in youth, since, as mentioned before, according to the World Health Organization, half of all mental health conditions start by the age of 14 years of age. Furthermore, such conditions very often go unnoticed until much later, when negative, destructive behaviors start to emerge. Thus, utilizing mental health interventions early enough, before mental health problems develop can be a valuable tool for parents,

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[1] WHO, Guidelines on mental health promotive and preventative interventions for adolescents: helping adolescents thrive: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/336864/9789240011854-eng.pdf
[2] WHO, Suicide worldwide in 2019: global health estimates, Geneva: WHO, 2021
[3] "MHPSS Worldwide: facts and figures,"
https://www.government.nl/topics/mhpss/funding-and-support-for-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-in-crisis-situations/mhpss-worldwide-facts-and-figures
[4] Mastrotheodoros S. (2021), The effects of COVID-19 on young people's mental health and psychological well-being. Available at:
https://pjpeu.coe.int/documents/42128013/72351197/Effects-COVID-Youth-Mental-Health-Psychological-Well-Being.pdf/b2bc0c32-9fd5-0816-bce5-da9289cfca8c

educators, youth workers and other community stakeholders with an interest in the promotion of mental health in youth.

There are 3 levels of prevention interventions: the primary, the secondary and the tertiary. In youth, the primary interventions, also known as universal interventions, are programs designed for all young people, that is, the general population. Their content and activities have a universal focus and aim to reach all youth, providing access to tools that are likely to help and enable children, adolescent and young adults cope with and manage effectively the mental and emotional everyday challenges, which could potentially make them vulnerable to psychological distress and risky behaviors (e.g. substance abuse). Secondary, or selective, interventions, on the other hand do not focus on the entire population of youth, but are programs designed for and target individuals who are already at high risk of developing mental health problems and adopting unhealthy, self-destructive behaviors. Lastly, tertiary prevention interventions refer to programs that target individuals who are already experiencing mental health problems and engaging in harmful behaviors, aiming for support, recovery and prevention of recurrence.

Primary prevention, as it seems, is a valuable approach to the promotion of general mental health, because it helps stop mental health problems before they even arise. Universal mental health prevention interventions can take place in schools or other community settings. Due to its nature, it is also associated with youth work. Basically, primary prevention interventions are programs that aim to enhance the participants' life skills and thus increase the protective factors against mental health problems and risky and harmful behaviors. Gaining knowledge and awareness raising on mental health issues are also important aspects of primary prevention interventions. Participants of such interventions get to learn about various youth-relevant mental health topics, but most importantly they learn to understand and recognize warning signs of psychological distress. Knowing how to identify these early signs is vital for the healthy and effective management of the mental health issues in a young person's life. In addition, the development of healthy coping skills, within a prevention program, will further enable the young individual to adequately handle any psychological difficulties and other mental health challenges.

3.   COVID19 and Mental Health in Youth

A study in Southern Italy found large negative effects on young people's mental health during the first month of lockdown, as indicated by increases in depression, anxiety, somatic complaints, and aggressive behavior, and decrease in psychological strengths[5]

Other studies, examining evidence on the impacts of the pandemic on child and youth mental health suggest that there could be long-term impacts on youth mental health, especially in more vulnerable youth[6]. Furthermore, empirical evidence on the effects from past disasters on youth psychological well-being corroborate with the idea that disasters are risk factors for youth mental health[7]. Similar results came from a study in Germany that showed decreased autonomy and psychological well-being, and increased anxiety and depression[8]. Another study in Norway found small but significant increases in clinical levels of psychiatric problems in adolescents during the lockdown[9].

It has been suggested that COVID-19 disrupted several protective factors for youth mental health, such as supportive social interactions with family members, relatives, friends, or other community members. Therefore, the need for engaging them in programs designed to serve a soothing and stabilizing function, became even more imperative. Preventative or interventional programs, "in person" or "online/ digital," may be of help. In fact, there is much scientific support on the efficacy of numerous prevention programs in building resiliency in youth. Youth workers can greatly contribute to the promotion of mental and emotional wellbeing of youth, either by recommending and encouraging the participation of youth in evidence-based prevention programs in their respective geographical area or by implementing prevention interventions themselves. In any case, the positive impact of mental health prevention on the community and the society in general can be enhanced by the supporting role of the youth worker.

[5]https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.567484
[6]https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35089589
[7]https://bit.ly/3Mk00d0
[8]https://doi:10.3390/ijerph17239083
[9]https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000707

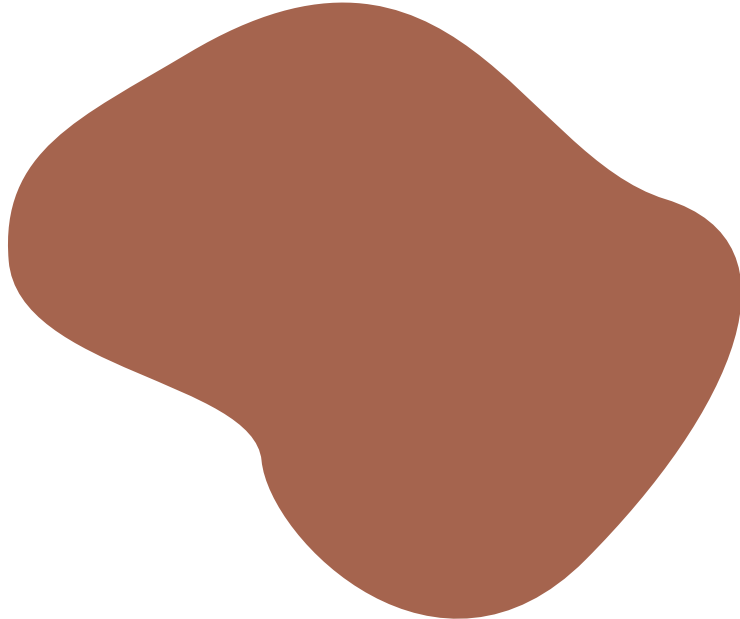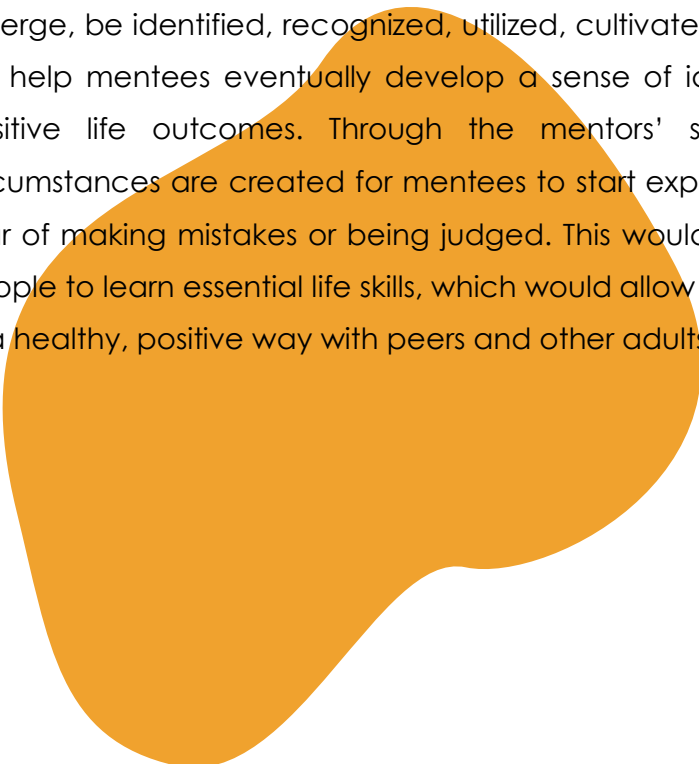### 3.1. Youth Workers and Mentoring Programs - How to create a safe environment when working with youth

For a mentoring program to be effective and have a positive impact on the youth participants / mentees, it is essential that a safe environment is established and maintained throughout its duration. A safe environment is created, reinforced and sustained through the quality of the relationship between the mentor and the young mentee. This relationship is developed and fostered by the mentor's approach, skills, and overall stance, when interacting with the youth. It aims to foster trust, acceptance, and ultimately enable youth to become confident, develop a positive sense of identity and achieve positive outcomes in important areas of their lives.

A critical element for the development of a safe environment is to create a sense of trust. The mentor needs to ensure that mentees feel welcomed, valued and respected. For this to happen, the mentor must be able to convey a sense of warmth, caring, and honesty, in a natural and genuine way. Many times, children and youth are able to spot behaviors that are seemingly friendly, yet not quite authentic. Such behaviors or approaches are not only unhelpful but also counterproductive in initiating and building a trusting relationship between youth and their mentors. Genuineness and authenticity are essential qualities that should characterize youth mentors. This does not mean mentors should not set limits or boundaries in their interactions with the youth. In fact, setting explicit boundaries might even help built a secure environment. But genuine and authentic mentors convey the feeling that their interest, care, and respect about their mentees are real, and this is being reflected in their overall interaction with the latter.

Along with trust comes acceptance, as a vital part of a successful mentoring relationship. An emotionally safe environment is created when participants feel accepted for who they are, despite their differences, weaknesses, or flaws. Especially when working with youth, creating an environment of acceptance is what will set the base for a sustainable, positive mentoring outcome. To achieve this, mentors must be able to allow mentees to freely express thoughts, feelings and concerns, without judging. Adopting such a non-judgmental stance is what will enable the young mentees to express themselves freely or learn how to do so. Therefore, mentors must listen more than talk, and listen actively. And although mentors should facilitate mentees to talk, they should refrain from pushing them to talk. Accepting, respecting and validating the expressed thoughts and emotions of mentees is crucial in developing a broader sense of acceptance that will in turn reinforce a safer, inclusive mentoring environment.

The further development of a safe environment in mentoring is achieved when mentors, in their effort to guide and help young individuals, adopt a youth-focused, supporting stance. That is, the mentors' role is not to tell the mentees what to do. Neither is to correct or "fix" things. Rather, the mentors' task is to allow and encourage the mentees strengths to emerge, be identified, recognized, utilized, cultivated and reinforced. In this way, mentors will help mentees eventually develop a sense of identity, grow and ultimately achieve positive life outcomes. Through the mentors' skills and overall stance, the right circumstances are created for mentees to start experimenting and exploring, without the fear of making mistakes or being judged. This would be the ideal environment for young people to learn essential life skills, which would allow them to grow and be able to interact in a healthy, positive way with peers and other adults.

What is Mental Health?

Mental health refers to the emotional and psychological well-being. Having good mental health helps one lead a relatively happy and healthy life, demonstrate resilience, and have the ability to cope in the face of life's adversities. Mental health can be influenced by a variety of factors, including:

- genetics
- environment
- daily habits
- biology

The Biopsychosocial (BPS) Model

The Biopsychosocial (BPS) Model emphasizes the interconnection between biological, psychological and socio-environmental factors. The BPS model was first suggested by Engel[1] in an effort to approach the issue of health and wellness in a more holistic way and point the importance of all of three aspects in leading a healthy life.

The COVID-19 outburst has caused additional everyday stress globally and medical experts point out that since early 2020 individual mental health has led to escalating symptoms and diagnoses of depression and anxiety[1]. Those mental health consequences, as they suggest, are not limited to the emotions or energy level of a patient; they extend to their physical and social health, as well. Taking into consideration the aftermath of the pandemic, doctors recognized a relationship between these aspects of our lives – the bodily, the mental, and the social. When one or more of the trio is disturbed, it can have direct and often negative impacts on the others.

3.2. Biological Factors

According to the BPS model, biological factors have an important influence in our mental health. Therefore, in order to take care holistically our body, we need to know about the biological factors that affect our wellbeing. Hormones that have positive affect are dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, and oxytocin[10].

One can give these feel-good hormones a natural boost with some simple activities.

- **Dopamine**, the "Feel Good" neurotransmitter that drives your brain's reward system. To stimulate it one could:
    - Listen to upbeat music
    - Eat a sweet treat
    - Get a good night sleep
    - Complete a small task
- **Serotonin**, a mood stabilizer that improves sleep, reduces anxiety and increase happiness. To stimulate it one could:
    - Get some sunshine
    - Go for a walk
    - Practice Meditation
    - Do some cardio
- **Endorphins**, the brain's natural painkiller. It reduces stress and increases pleasure. To stimulate it one could:
    - Do some exercise
    - Burn essential oils
    - Watch some comedy
- **Oxytocin**, the "Bonding Hormone". To stimulate it one could:
    - Pet a dog/cat
    - Give someone a hug
    - Hold hands
    - Cook for a loved one

3.3. Psychological Factors

According to Aaron Beck, the "father" of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, every event in our life contains three elements: cognition, emotion and behavior. When all these three elements are consistent, people experience inner balance but if they are not, the balance

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[10] https://atlasbiomed.com/blog/serotonin-and-other-happy-molecules-made-by-gut-bacteria

is lost and then the intrapersonal conflict begins. An interpersonal conflict arises from one's own thoughts, emotions, ideas, values and predispositions. For example, it can occur in situations when you are struggling between what you "want to do" and what you "should do. That kind of processes works against people's well-being and could have negative influence on mental health.

3.4.   Social Factors

The social factors mentioned in the BPS model include factors such as social interactions, community activities, socio-economical, socio-environmental, cultural factors, work issues, and family circumstances. The restrictions in socialization that came with COVID-19 impacted people's need to socialize or maintain healthy relationships with those outside of their home, disturbing the trio of BPS model, thus leaving negative impacts on the other two aspects. Therefore, feelings of isolation and imbalance arose especially among people who lack the necessary coping skills to deal with difficult experiences and circumstances.

3.5.   Resilience and Adaptability

Resilience, a component of mental wellbeing, is the "capacity to remain flexible in our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors when faced by life disruption, or extended periods of pressure, so that we emerge from difficulty stronger, wiser, and more able"[11]. Resilient people are able to cope with and "bounce back" from adverse situations by positively adapting to them. Being resilient does not mean that people don't experience stress, emotional turbulence and suffering. Contrary, resilient individuals work hard through emotional pain and do not always recover effortlessly. They often find a new path in life, a new or reversed self-image, they enrich, clarify, and prioritize relationships; and generally, may alter all together their priorities[12].

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), adaptability is the capacity to make appropriate responses to changed or changing situations. Meaning that one is able to modify or adjust behavior in meeting different circumstances or different people. Resilience and adaptability are of vital importance especially in extreme situations, such the pandemic era of Covid-19.

Resilience is mainly made up of five pillars: Self Awareness, Mindfulness, Self-Care, Positive Relationships and Purpose. Therefore, in order to strengthen resilience it is important to:

1.   Know your strengths and keeping them in mind

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[11] Pemberton, C. (2015). Resilience: A practical guide for coaches. Open University Press.
[12] Neenan, M. (2018). Developing resilience: A cognitive-behavioural approach. Routledge.

2. Build your self-esteem — have confidence in your abilities and the positive things in life
3. Build healthy relationships
4. Know when to ask for help
5. Manage stress and anxiety levels
6. Working on problem solving skills and coping strategies
7. Develop meaning and purpose in life
8. Set well-defined and achievable goals

4.   Mental Health Disorders

Mental disorders involve significant disturbances in thinking, emotional regulation, and/or behavior. According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 8 people in the world live with a mental disorder and even though effective prevention and treatment options exist, most people do not have access to effective care. A better understanding of the major mental health issues, and of the help available, is needed in order to support and enable young people to access professional help when necessary.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Ed. (DSM-5) helps mental health professionals to diagnose mental illnesses. There are many types of mental health disorders. In fact, almost 300 different conditions are listed in DSM-5.

> # More common mental health disorder and their symptoms

4.1.   Anxiety disorders

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear that could be mild or severe.

Experiencing occasional anxiety is a normal part of life and everyone may have feelings of anxiety at some point in their life. For example, one may feel worried and anxious about sitting an exam, or having a medical test, or a job interview. During times like these, feeling anxious can be perfectly normal[13].

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[13] https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/generalised-anxiety-disorder/overview/
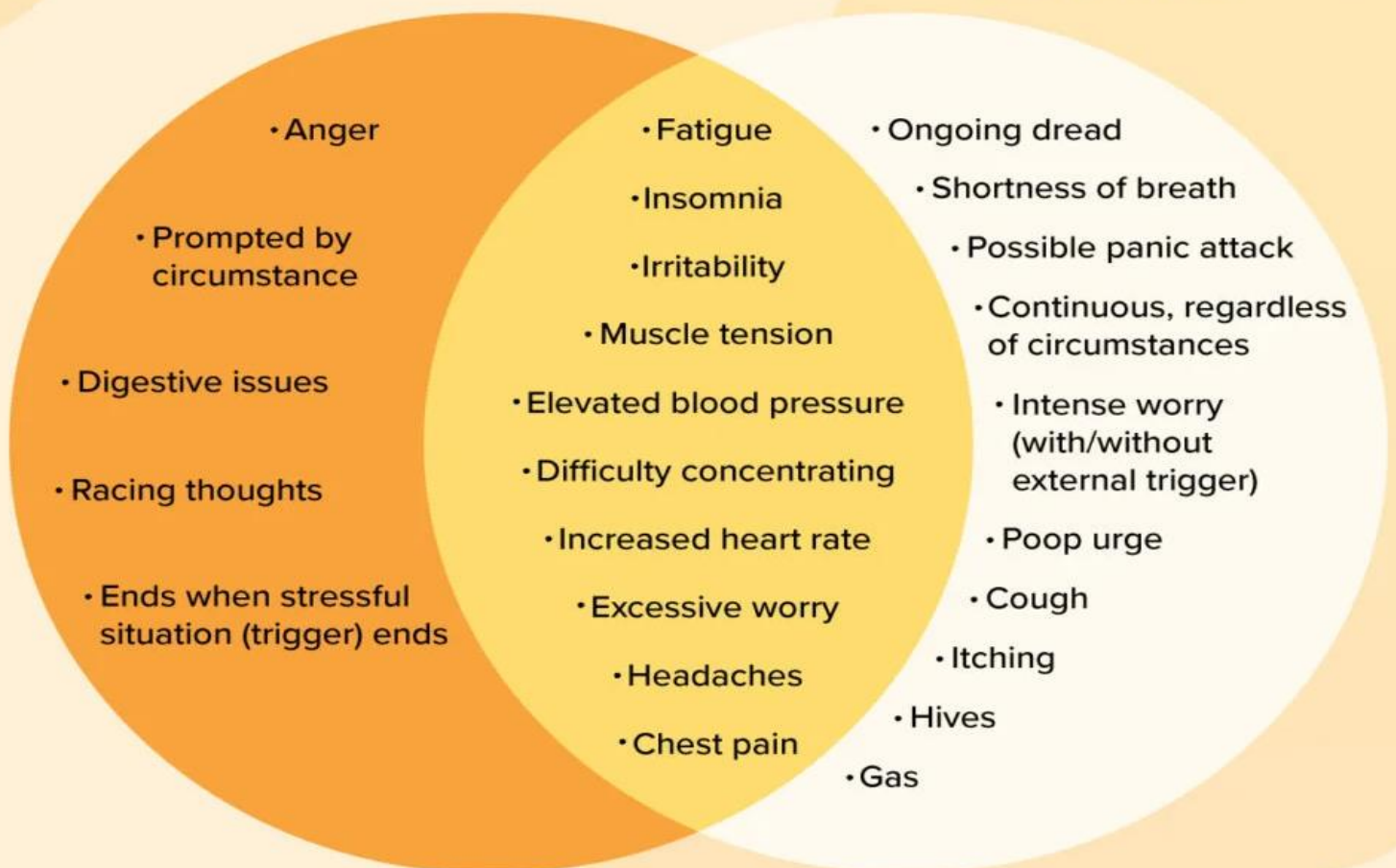
However, people with anxiety disorders have intense and excessive emotions of worry and fear. Because these feelings of anxiety and fear are so out of proportion to the actual danger, they tend to interfere and create dysfunction with daily activities.

Common anxiety signs and symptoms include:

- Feeling nervous, restless or tense
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic or doom
- Having an increased heart rate
- Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation)
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Feeling weak or tired
- Trouble concentrating or thinking about anything other than the present worry
- Having trouble sleeping
- Experiencing gastrointestinal (GI) problems
- Having difficulty controlling worry
- Having the urge to avoid things that trigger anxiety

STRESS

- Anger
- Prompted by circumstance
- Digestive issues
- Racing thoughts
- Ends when stressful situation (trigger) ends

- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Elevated blood pressure
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased heart rate
- Excessive worry
- Headaches
- Chest pain

ANXIETY DISORDER

- Ongoing dread
- Shortness of breath
- Possible panic attack
- Continuous, regardless of circumstances
- Intense worry (with/without external trigger)
- Poop urge
- Cough
- Itching
- Hives
- Gas

4.2. Bipolar affective disorder

Bipolar disorder (formerly called manic-depressive illness or manic depression) is a mental illness that causes unusual shifts in mood, energy, activity levels, concentration, and the ability to carry out day-to-day tasks[14]. Bipolar means sharing two poles (high and low) and Affective Disorder means a disorder having to do with mood. In most cases, the high pole is experienced as mania and the low pole experienced as depression. According to the American Psychological Association[15], these shifts can be so devastating that individuals may consider suicide.

The first symptoms typically appear in the late teens or early adult years, though some people may develop the disorder in childhood or later in life. Experts believe there are a number of factors that work together to make a person more likely to develop it. These are thought to be a complex mix of physical, environmental and social factors. A stressful circumstance or situation can trigger the symptoms of bipolar disorder. Some of the triggers include: the breakdown of a relationship; physical, sexual or emotional abuse; the death of a close family member or loved one. There is some evidence (according to NHS' online publications) that bipolar disorder may also be associated with chemical imbalances in the brain[16].

Symptoms

Common signs of a manic state:

- Feeling extremely happy.
- Talking faster than is normal.
- Feeling agitated.
- Overconfidence.
- Decreased sleep.
- Irritability.
- Racing thoughts.
- Behaving impulsively.
- Engaging in high-risk behaviors, such as reckless driving, gambling or excessive spending.

Common signs of a depressive state:

- Feeling sad or hopeless.
- Irritability.
- Low self-esteem.
- Abandoning favorite activities.
- Having difficulty concentrating or remembering.
- Experiencing unusual sleep habits such as sleeping too much or too little.
- Thinking about death or suicide.

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[14] https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/bipolar-disorder
[15] American Psychological Association https://www.apa.org
[16] National Health Service (NHS) https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions

4.3. Depression

Depression is the most common mental disorder and it is estimated that globally 5% of adults suffer from it[17]. Although sadness is an emotion that everyone could experience at times, depression is something way more than that. Depression is extreme sadness or despair that lasts more than a few days. It interferes with the activities of daily life and can cause symptoms such as:

- Pain
- Weight loss or gain
- Sleeping pattern disruptions
- Inability to concentrate
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt

- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.
- Negative thoughts about oneself and the world are also important in producing and maintaining depressive symptoms[18].

Thoughts

Negative, gloomy, self-critical

I've messed up again

There is no point

No-one likes me

Feelings

Depressed

Tired

Not motivated

Not interested

Slowed down

Behaviours

Withdraw & Isolation

Stay home

Cut off from others

Not go out

Not do much

Depression differs from simple grief or mourning, which are appropriate emotional responses to the loss of loved persons or objects. Where there are clear grounds for a

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[17] https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression
[18] Beck, A.T. (1967). Depression: Clinical, experimental, and theoretical aspects. New York: Hoeber. Republished as Depression: Causes and treatment. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

person's unhappiness, depression is considered to be present if the depressed mood is disproportionately long or severe vis-à-vis the precipitating event[19].

Mental health professionals can diagnose depression and offer treatment since depression could be treatable with the assistance of a professional.

4.4. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental illness that's triggered after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Experiences that can cause PTSD can range from extreme events, like war and national disasters, to verbal or physical abuse[20].

Symptoms include:

- Vivid flashbacks (feeling like the trauma is happening right now)
- Intrusive thoughts or images
- Nightmares, trouble sleeping
- Intense distress at real or symbolic reminders of the trauma
- Physical sensations such as pain, sweating, nausea or trembling
- Being easily startled or frightened
- Always being on guard for danger
- Self-destructive behavior, such as drinking too much or driving too fast
- Trouble concentrating
- Irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behavior
- Overwhelming guilt or shame.

4.5. Eating disorders

Eating disorders affect up to 5% of the population, most often develop in adolescence

A person with bulimia has repeated episodes of binge eating followed by compulsive behaviors such as vomiting or the use of laxatives to rid the body of food, whilst a person suffering from anorexia nervosa refuses to consume appropriate portions of food in fear of gaining weight. The common core belief of people suffering from eating disorders is the belief that the main gauge of self-worth is their body image.

Symptoms of eating disorders may include the following:

- A distorted body image
- Skipping most meals
- Unusual eating habits (such as eating thousands of calories at one meal or skipping meals)
- Frequent weighing
- Extreme weight change
- Insomnia

- Constipation
- Skin rash or dry skin
- Dental cavities
- Erosion of tooth enamel
- Loss of hair or nail quality
- Hyperactivity and high interest in exercise

4.6.   Obsessive compulsive disorder

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is relatively common disorder which affects more than 2% of the general U.S. population, with the average age of onset to be 19 years old and approximately 50% of people with OCD begin to have symptoms in childhood and adolescence[22]. Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) causes constant and repetitive thoughts, or obsessions. These thoughts happen with unnecessary and unreasonable desires to carry out certain behaviors, or compulsions. Many people

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[22] https://tdy.lol/JxKpg

with OCD realize that their thoughts and actions are unreasonable, yet they cannot stop them. The repetitive behaviors can significantly interfere with social interactions and performing daily tasks. OCD is usually a life-long (chronic) condition, but symptoms can come and go over time. The most common treatment for alleviating the symptoms of OCD is psychotherapy and medication.

5.   Coping with mental stressors

Being a teenager or a young adult can be even more stressful nowadays, as the pressure to cope and succeed in every area of life is growing. The focus group discussions suggested that during and after the pandemic of COVID-19 all the pre-existing stressors were magnified, with possible effect on all areas of their life, such as home, school, friendships and relationships. With the stigma surrounding mental health still present, many young people are reluctant to reveal their struggles, even to their peers. Therefore, it is very important for young people to know where to go for support or to have a person in their social environment, which they can trust and ask for help. The role of Youth Workers is vital since they interact with young people every day and could recognize the signs suggesting a young person is in need for help.

Young (as well as older) people without strong coping strategies react to mentally challenging situations by exhibiting signs such as:

- Feeling anxious or nervous
- Frequently feeling tired
- Stomachaches and chest pain
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- Moodiness
- Having negative thoughts

- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Problems remembering, focusing, and concentrating

5.1.   Unhealthy Coping Strategies

When a situation feels painful or overwhelming, young people and adolescences may default to unhealthy and sometimes harmful coping mechanisms. Subsequently, they may make risky or self-destructive choices, in order to distract themselves from their distress or to ease the intensity of their emotions. The most common unhealthy coping skills for young people include[23]:

- Avoidance - attempting to avoid a stressful situation
- Misdirected anger - using rage or aggression to mask sadness or release other difficult emotions

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[23] https://www.newportacademy.com/resources/empowering-teens/coping-skills-teens

- Social media overuse - to distract from painful feelings

- Substance abuse - as self-medication for anxiety, trauma, or depression

- Self-harm - as a way to release feelings of pain, tension, and anxiety

- Disordered eating - as a form of self-control when they feel out of control

Anger

a misunderstood emotion

Anger sometimes seems like the only coping skill young people and adolescences have. It would be beneficial for Youth Workers to have more information on anger and be able to understand what lies beneath the particular reaction. That knowledge will help them to have a more productive interaction with young people in their everyday encounters. Anger is a normal, healthy emotion, which we all feel sometimes. One could feel angry, for example, as a result of being treated badly or unfairly. Sometimes one can feel angry without even being able to determine the why. Anger is a very acceptable emotion, as long as people find a safe way to express it. According to Goleman[1], *"emotions are, in essence, impulses to act, the instant plans for handling life that evolution has instilled in us."*

In his book "Emotional Intelligence," Goleman writes that anger causes blood to flow to our hands, making it easier for us to strike an enemy or hold a weapon. Our heart rate speeds up, and a rush of hormones-including adrenaline-creates a surge of energy strong enough to take vigorous action.

Misdirected anger could lead to very unfortunate consequences, especially if one expresses anger through aggression and violence. The above could lead to serious problems, even troubles with the police.

It is very important for Youth Yorkers to be able to identify young people who do not have the competencies/skills to deal with anger in a healthy way, so they could direct the latter (the young people), and even educate them, to healthier coping mechanisms.

To better understand what hides underneath anger, psychologists Julie Gottman and John Gottman of "The Gottman Institute"[24], introduced the popular concept of the Anger Iceberg. Their theory assumes that anger is an emotion found at the tip of the iceberg. Underneath the iceberg lie a range of emotions.

The following chart will help you better visualize this.

24 https://www.gottman.com

This means that when you're angry, you're experiencing several other emotions such as shame, guilt, embarrassment, pain, exhaustion, anxiety, fear, loneliness, and grief.

Since these emotions are "hidden" or buried under the surface of the water, you're unaware of their existence, so all you're conscious of is anger.

Understanding what triggers anger and what may lay beneath it could help people to manage it.

Some of the physical and emotional changes that may occur when felling angry, include:

- Clenching your fists or teeth
- Your heart beating faster
- Your muscles tensing up
- A churning feeling in your stomach

- Shaking
- Sweating
- Feeling dizzy or sick
- Feeling irritated
- Feeling embarrassed or upset.

Over time, people can learn how to recognize the signs, and slow down or even stop this process. This can give them time to think about how they want to react to the situation. By identifying the automatic thought that triggers the feeling one can challenge the initial thought and even question its validity.

5.2. Healthy Coping Skills and Strategies

When young people are using these unhealthy coping skills, youth workers that are familiar with the subject of mental health could direct them towards exploring more healthy approaches in dealing with mental health stressor such as:

- Self-help strategies
- Support from people who are understanding, such as a friend or a family member
- Exploring counselling, therapy, or self-help groups
- Exploring alternative therapies

and always depending on the needs of each person since the is no one-size-fits-all problem-solving solution.

There is a variety of suggested models of coping strategies, but in the literature[25][26][27] one can see that generally those approaches fall into one the following categories:

- Problem-focused
- Emotion-focused
- Meaning making
- Social support
- Spiritual

5.3. Problem Focused

Taking direct action to solve a problem is often the fastest way to reduce stress. That works best when you are dealing with a specific and solvable problem or situation, rather than unfocused anxiety and stress. Problem-focused coping strategies include:

- Finding out as much information as possible about the situation, including the people who can help you in finding a solution
- Dismantling the problem into manageable pieces and addressing them one step at a time.

5.4. Emotion Focused

Emotional and psychological difficulties are not just the results of what's happening to us or around us. It is also the outcome of the perception we have pertaining the event and the thoughts that is triggering. That is why the way with which young people react to their thoughts and feelings plays a major role on how they experience a situation, as well as in what magnitude they experience it. Emotion-focused coping skills for young people help them manage their emotional response. For example:

- Breathing and relaxation practices, which automatically regulate the nervous system, create a sense of calm.
- Creative expression, such as art, music, or dance, helps people process emotions in positive and productive ways.

5.5. Meaning Making

[25] Lazarus R. S., Folkman S. (1984). Stress, Appraisal, and Coping. New York, NY: Springer.
[26] Carver C. S., Scheier M. F., Weintraub J. K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: a theoretically based approach. J. Pers. Soc. Psychol. 56, 267–283.
[27] Stanisławski, K. (2019). The coping circumplex model: An integrative model of the structure of coping with stress. Front Psychol, 10: 694.

Meaning making refers to how a person interprets, understands, and makes sense of life events[28], which can be crucial in negative circumstances. Meaning-making strategies can help change one's negative perspective and assist to see the positive or meaningful aspect.

Reframing helps shift one's mindset and point of view, allowing them to see a situation, person, or relationship from a healthier point of view.

Journaling can also help put one's feelings in perspective and make sense of what they're going through as part of their larger story.

5.6. Social Support

Turning to others who can help solve a problem is one of the most helpful coping skills for young people. It's a boost for the emotions and can also help alleviate a specific stressor. Social support strategies include:

- Connecting with a close friend, who makes you feel loved for who you really are
- Reaching out to a trusted friend, family member, or any other trusted individual for support and guidance

5.7. Spiritual

For many people, faith traditions can support healthy coping by providing social and emotional support and a sense of meaning. This form of coping does not have to involve an organized religion.

Spending time in nature inspires a sense of awe and gratitude, and reminds young people that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Volunteering connects adolescences and young people to their larger community. It's also showed to lower stress and promote overall health and well-being.

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[28] Park, C. L., & Folkman, S. (1997). Meaning in the context of stress and coping. *Review of General Psychology, 1*(2), 115-144. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.1.2.115

6.   Mindfulness

Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, through a gentle, nurturing lens.

Mindfulness also involves acceptance, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them. That is, accepting that there is no "right" or "wrong" way to think or feel in a given moment. When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune into what we're sensing in the present moment, rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future. Many studies have been conducted were they have shown that practicing mindfulness, even for just a few weeks, can bring a variety of physical, psychological, and social benefits .

7.   Mental Health Exercices

Mental or thought exercises focus on alternate ways to think about a given circumstance or experience that can help you get out of a stuck or unhelpful way of thinking. While some thought exercises have been studied extensively by psychological researchers (mainly CBT focused[29]), others are offered by psychologists and clinical mental health counselors (e.g. mindfulness exercises) because they've been helpful anecdotally for some types of patients.

It's important to keep in mind that there isn't a one-size-fits-all thought exercise. You can try one of them for a few weeks and see if you like the way they impact your mental health and feelings of well-being. If not, you can try a different one. Thought exercises are meant to be a method of seeing the world differently, and do not replace mental health professionals.

7.1.   The self-observation exercise[30]

This mindfulness approach is a practice of observing our inner compounds and experimenting with them. It's an exercise of self-discovery and self-observation, which are both elements for self-healing and sustainable living. When you begin to experience the symptoms you associate with anxiety, you can use this exercise to get curious and learn more about what you're going through.

When you have the opportunity take a couple minutes to yourself, away from other people so won't be interrupted. Start noting the way that every element of your body feels, like for example your shoulders, neck, stomach or head, Are you experiencing other symptoms, like fatigue or a headache? Don't judge the feelings, just observe them, like you were observing a scientific experiment and needed to catch everything. Then turn your self-observation to your thoughts. What are the specific stressors cycling through your mind? Try to catalog them, rather than letting them overwhelm you. When you've noticed one, let it go, recognizing that you've "heard" it. If you can get to a place of fully focusing on bodily and mental sensations, you may find yourself able to

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[29] https://positivepsychology.com/cbt-cognitive-behavioral-therapy-techniques-worksheets
[30] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mindful-recovery/202109/5-mindful-steps-self-observation

calm down, doing things like releasing the muscles you've discovered are tense or letting thoughts go instead of holding onto them intensely. This may take a few tries.

The act of self-observation can be a way to take your mind off the anxiety and come back to your body. When we're in fight-or-flight mode, the anxiety gets us to safety, but if we are physically safe, this can be a way to evaluate our body and find our baseline again.

7.2. The Worry Tree

The worry tree[31] is a clinically recognized Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) technique, that takes you through a series of decision steps once you've noticed that you're worrying about something. It is an exercise which can help make a conscious decision between worrying or doing something else. It is a graphic flowchart which is customizable to the person, but essentially starts by questioning, "what exactly am I worried about?" then "Can I do something about it?" and "Can I do something about it right now?" The tree guides you to let worries go when nothing can be done, to make a clear plan if nothing can be done right now, and to go do something if there is something useful to be done about the worry right now. It can
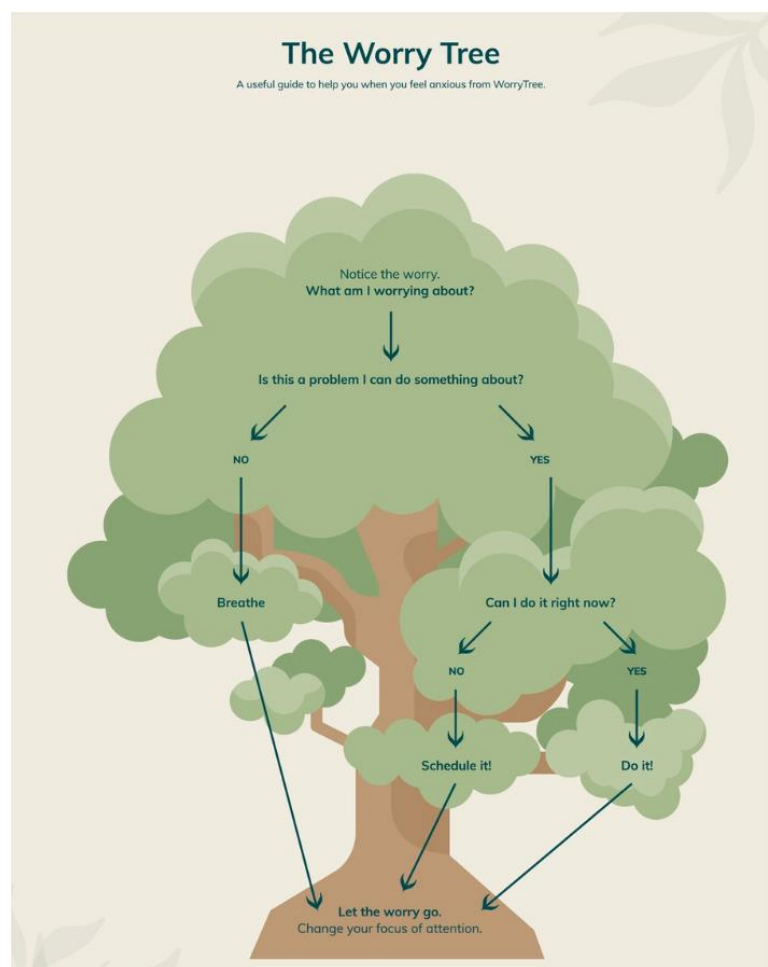
help avoid rumination, where we think the same anxiety-inducing thoughts over and over without relief. For more examples of thought exercises follow the link: https://cnet.co/3mLzzTf

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[31] https://www.worry-tree.com

7.3. Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises are a great way to center yourself and focus on the present moment. When you're feeling anxious about an upcoming event, take a few minutes to do some deep breathing exercises and see how much better you feel.

While there are several techniques you can try[32], one of the simplest is diaphragmatic breathing. This type of breathing engages your diaphragm, a muscle located at the base of your lungs.

1. Sit up straight or lie down on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the ground pushing air out of your lungs.
2. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach, just below your belly button.
3. Breathe in through your nose, letting your stomach expand, as you fill your lungs with air. You should feel your stomach rising as you inhale.
4. Exhale slowly through your mouth, letting your stomach fall back down as the air leaves your lungs.
5. Repeat the process several times, until you feel calmer.

7.4. Mindful Walking

Mindful walking is a great way to get some exercise and focus on the present moment. All you need is a place to walk and comfortable shoes. You can try walking a nature trail[33], a walk by the beach or river, or simply at a place where you feel at ease and peaceful. It is best to find a place where you won't be interrupted and to pick a route that you're familiar with, so you can focus on your surroundings and not on where you're going.

While walking, pay attention to your body. Notice how your feet feel as they hit the ground, how your legs are moving, and the sensation of your breath moving in and out of your lungs. As you walk, pay attention to your surroundings. Notice the sights, sounds, and smells around you. If your mind starts to wander, gently bring it back to the present moment.
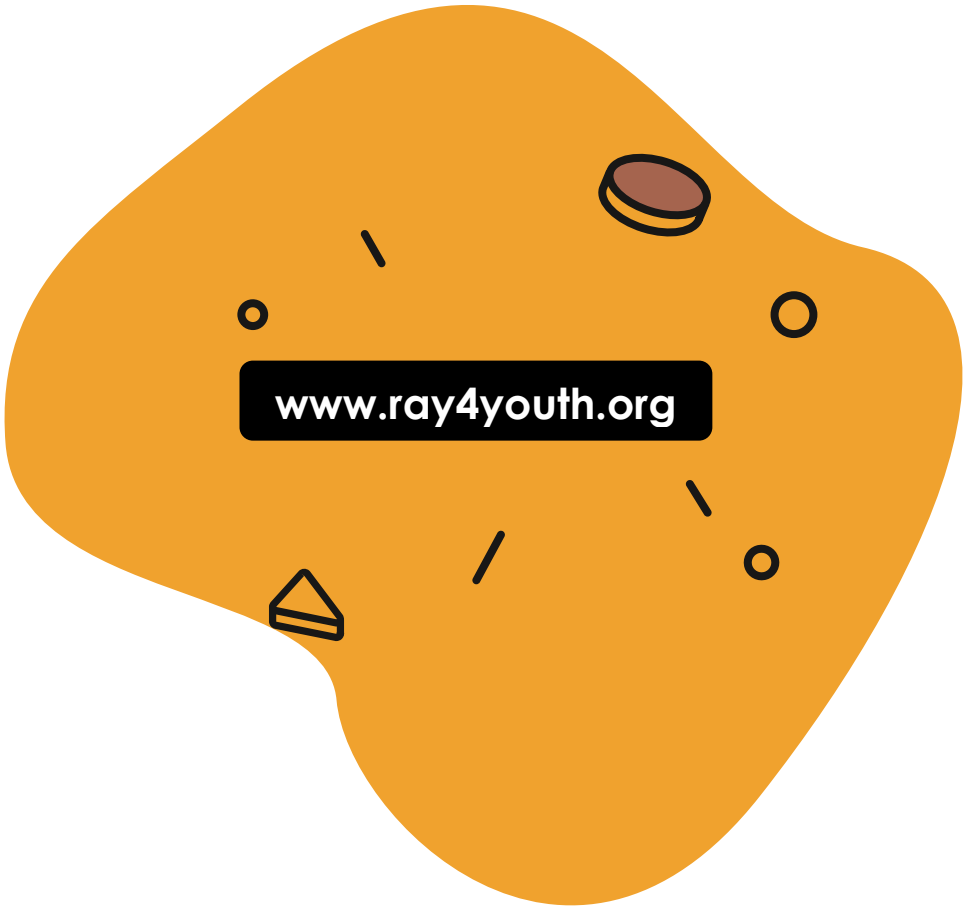
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[32] https://www.healthline.com/health/breathing-exercises-for-anxiety
[33] https://www.visitcyprus.com/index.php/en/discovercyprus/rural/rural-nature-trails

When you're finished walking, take a few minutes to reflect on your experience. How did it feel to be so present? What did you notice that you wouldn't have if you hadn't been paying attention?

Other mindful related activities for teens and young people can be found in the following link: https://bit.ly/41uQrwM

www.ray4youth.org

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