Online well-being measurement tool



ConnecTEEN project

Let's talk about life Foundation, Poland

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Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

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Online well-being measurement tool

PURPOSE OF THE TOOL

To assess the mental, emotional, social, and physical well-being of adolescents, considering mainly the subjective perceptions of young people

Context and Approach

The questions included in this tool were selected on the basis of holistic and multidimensional models of children's and adolescents' well-being developed within psychology, public health, education, and developmental sciences. Contemporary approaches to well-being emphasize that young people's quality of life cannot be adequately understood through a single indicator, such as academic achievement or mental health status alone. Instead, well-being is viewed as a complex construct encompassing emotional, psychological, social, and physical dimensions that interact with one another in everyday life.

Well-being includes factors such as self-esteem, autonomy, sense of purpose, overall life quality of relationships with peers, family members, teachers, and the broader community, as well as feelings of belonging, inclusion, and social support, aspects related to health behaviours, sleep, physical activity, safety, and general physical health, all of which are strongly associated with developmental outcomes and mental functioning.

Holistic frameworks further recognize that children and adolescents develop within interconnected social and environmental systems, including families, schools, peer groups, and local communities. Consequently, the selected survey questions were intended not only to assess individual characteristics, but also to capture contextual and relational factors influencing young people's everyday experiences. This approach enables a broader and more nuanced understanding of their needs, resources, and challenges.

Effectiveness of the Tool

The tool was piloted and evaluated across four countries: Spain, Lithuania, Czech Republic and Poland, with the participation of more than 900 VET students. This large-scale international testing phase made it possible to assess the clarity, relevance, and usability of the survey questions in diverse educational and cultural contexts. Feedback collected from participants and educators during the evaluation process provided valuable insights into students' experiences, comprehension of the questions, and the overall functionality of the tool. The results of this evaluation were systematically analysed and subsequently used to refine and improve the instrument, ensuring greater reliability, accessibility, and relevance for future implementation among young people in vocational education and training settings.

Meassurement areas

I. Emotional well-being: mood, stress, anxiety, depression
II. Social well-being: peer and family relationships
III. Physical well-being: physical activity, sleep, health
IV. School well-being: satisfaction with school, relationships with teachers
V. Self-esteem: sense of self-worth

Methodology: Cantril ladder

The tool uses the Cantril Ladder methodology to assess subjective well-being and overall life satisfaction among students. Developed by sociologist Hadley Cantril in 1965, the Cantril Ladder is an internationally recognized and widely used instrument for measuring how people evaluate the quality of their lives. It has been applied in major international studies and reports, including those conducted by World Health Organization and the UN's *World Happiness Report*. The method is valued for its simplicity, accessibility, and ability to provide a quick overview of an individual's perceived well-being. Within the tool, respondents are asked to scale from 0 to 10, where a score of 0 represents the "worst possible rating", while a score of 10 represents the "best possible rating." Students select by a slider a place on the scale that best reflects how they currently perceive their lives. Some questions additionally refer to a shorter timeframe, such as the past week, in order to capture more immediate experiences.

Assessment

The tool interprets the anonymous responses both at the individual level and at the group or class level. After responses are submitted, the system automatically calculates an average score for the group and individuals based on the Cantril Ladder ratings. This overall score serves as an indicator of general well-being and is linked to a set of recommendations for further action or follow-up:

- Scores between **0 and 4** (for the group or at least 2 individuals) are interpreted as indicating a potential risk situation and suggest an immediate need for educational intervention using the ConnecTEEN Intervention Programme.
- Scores between **5 and 7** indicate a moderate level of well-being and trigger a recommendation for closer monitoring. In such cases, the tool recommends conducting a follow-up assessment within 7–14 days.
  If the repeated result remains the same or decreases, this may indicate the need for immediate educational intervention using the ConnecTEEN Intervention Programme.
- Scores between **8 and 10** are interpreted as reflecting positive well-being and no immediate concerns; in these cases, the next assessment is recommended after approximately 4–8 months as part of regular monitoring.

By combining a simple self-assessment scale with automated interpretation and recommendations, the IT tool supports VET facilities in identifying classes that may require additional attention or support while also enabling ongoing monitoring of overall well-being trends within groups of young people.

GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS

The facilitatoir inform the classes about:

- **The purpose of the survey** (to assess well-being in the group and adjust educational activities accordingly)
- **The anonymity of the survey**

The facilitator emphasizes that if the survey causes any unpleasant emotions, or if someone feels afterward that they would like to talk about their difficulties or concerns about a classmate, they can reach out to specific individuals (such as the school psychologist, counselor, or a helpline).

How to conduct the survey

ConnecTEEN is a digital school well-being tool designed to allow teachers and counselors to anonymously measure their students' well-being in five key areas. Students complete a short questionnaire without needing to create an account, and the results are presented in automated charts that quickly identify areas that need attention.

The 5 areas of well-being**:**

Area	Description
Emotional	How the student feels emotionally on a daily basis
Social	Their relationships with peers and the social environment
Physical	Their physical well-being, sleep habits, and physical activity
School	Their experience and perception of the academic environment
Self-esteem	How he/she perceives himself/his/her self-confidence

How it works – general flow

- The teacher creates a session and obtains a unique code (e.g., AB12CD34).
- Share the code with the students (whiteboard, class chat, projector...).
- Students can access without an account or registration, only with the code.
- They answer the questionnaire completely anonymously using sliders.
- Upon closing the session, the system generates an automatic report with graphs and risk alerts.
- The teacher receives the report by email and can view it, download it as a PDF, or export it to Excel at any time.

For more information, please consult the **"Complete User's Guide" found in the annex.**

Setting and equipment

During the conduct of the study, appropriate conditions must be ensured to guarantee participant anonymity and confidentiality. Students may complete the study using school infrastructure, such as computers provided on-site, or alternatively using their own mobile phones, depending on what is most convenient and accessible for them.

Time

The study is expected to take approximately 20–25 minutes to complete; however, some students—particularly those with language barriers or special educational needs—may require additional time, up to 45 minutes, to complete all tasks comfortably and without pressure.

INFORMATION TO BE SHARED WITH PARTICIPANTS: QUESTIONNAIRE

Initial Message

Introduction:

This questionnaire is about your **well-being**, that means how you feel mentally, emotionally, socially, and physically. There are no right or wrong answers. We just want to know your honest thoughts and feelings.

Some questions are about how you usually feel, and some ask about the past week. Each question will clearly show what it refers to.

Your answers will help us better understand how students in your class are doing. Based on the results, your class may be offered activities to improve well-being, reduce stress, and strengthen relationships.

Some questions may feel personal or uncomfortable. That's okay. If you ever need support, you can talk to a school counsellor, psychologist, teacher, trusted adult, or contact an anonymous helpline.

The questionnaire may be repeated later (for example in a few weeks or months) to see if anything has changed. Your teacher will let you know if that happens. The questionnaire is anonymous, so nobody will know which answers are yours.

Thank you for taking part and answering honestly ♡

Emotional well-being

Emotional well-being refers to how people experience, understand, and manage their emotions in everyday life. It includes a wide range of emotional experiences, such as feelings of joy, gratitude, hope, love, and satisfaction, which can contribute to a sense of balance and overall well-being.

The following questions ask about your emotional experiences during the past week. Your responses will be analyzed collectively to better understand the overall emotional well-being within your class/group. The results may help identify strengths, areas that support well-being, and opportunities to promote positive emotional experiences, balance, and healthy ways of coping with everyday challenges.

1. 1/38. Thinking about past week, how often have you felt joy?
   (scale 0-10, 0: never, 10: always)
2. 2/38. Thinking about past week, how often have you felt gratitude?
   (scale 0-10, 0: never, 10: always)
3. 3/38. Thinking about past week, how often have you felt hope?
   (scale 0-10, 0: never, 10: always)
4. 4/38. Thinking about past week, how often have you felt loved?
   (scale 0-10, 0: never, 10: always)
5. 5/38. Thinking about past week, how often have you felt satisfaction?
   (scale 0-10, 0: never, 10: always)

Social well-being

Social well-being is the ability to build positive relationships, feel connected to others, and feel supported, respected, and included in social environments/groups such as family, friendships, school, work, and the community. It also includes feeling comfortable expressing themselves, maintaining healthy communication, and having a sense of belonging.
The following questions ask about social well-being, including perceived social support, relationship quality, and sense of belonging within family and peer groups.

1. 6/38. How much have you been able to rely on your family in difficult moments during the past week?
   (0: not at all, 10: fully)
2. 7/38. How much have you been able to rely on your classmates in difficult moments during the past week?
   (0: not at all, 10: fully)
3. 8/38. How much can you rely on your peers outside the class in difficult moments in everyday life?
   (0: not at all, 10: fully)
4. 9/38. To what extent do you feel important to the people in your family?
   (0: not at all, 10: fully)
5. 10/38. To what extent do you feel important to your classmates?
   (0: never, 10: always)
6. 11/38. To what extent do you feel important to your peers outside the classroom?
   (0: not at all, 10: fully)
7. 12/38. How would you rate your relationships with your family members over the past week on a scale of 0 to 10?
   (0: lowest rating, 10: highest rating).
8. 13/38. How much can you rely on your peers outside the class in difficult moments in everyday life?
   (0: lowest rating, 10: highest rating).
9. 14/38. To what extent have you felt important to the people in your family over the past week?
   (0: lowest rating, 10: highest rating).

Physical well-being

Physical well-being refers to the state of maintaining good physical health through regular physical activity, healthy habits, proper nutrition, sufficient rest, and the ability to perform daily activities with energy and without excessive fatigue.
The following questions ask about physical well-being, including sleep quality, physical activity, nutrition, energy levels, personal hygiene, and overall physical health and daily functioning.

1. 15/38. How often in the past week did you wake up feeling well-rested?
   (0: never, 10: always)
2. 16/38. How often in the past week did you fall asleep easily and sleep through the night without waking up (or only waking up briefly for example to use the toilet and then easily falling asleep again)?
   (0: never, 10: always)

3. 17/38. How many times in the past week did you engage in physical activity?
   (0: never, 10: always)
4. 18/38. How would you rate the quality of your diet/eating habit in the past week?
   (0: not fitted to my needs, poor, not satisfying, 10: totally fitted to my needs, satisfying and nutritious)
5. 19/38. How would you rate on a scale from 0 to 10 the time you had in the past week to take care of your personal hygiene?
   (0: lowest scoring, 10: highest scoring).
6. 20/38. How would you rate on a scale from 0 to 10 the energy you had in the past week to take care of your personal hygiene?
   (0: lowest scoring, 10: highest scoring).
7. 21/38. How would you rate your overall physical well-being in the past week?
   (0: lowest scoring, 10: highest scoring).
8. 22/38. How well were you able to balance screen time with other activities over the last week?
   (0: poorly balanced, 10: perfectly balanced)

School well-being

School well-being refers to a positive experience in the school environment, including feeling safe, supported, respected, engaged in learning, and connected to teachers, peers, and the school community.
The following questions ask about school well-being, including feelings of safety, support from teachers, sense of belonging, satisfaction with school experience, satisfaction with school and school marks, and relationships within the school environment.

1. 23/38. To what extent have you felt safe at school during the past week?
   (0: not at all 10: totally)
2. 24/38. To what extent have you felt you could count on the support of teachers regarding academic problems over the past week?
   (0: not at all 10: totally)
3. 25/38. To what extent have you felt you could count on the support of teachers regarding personal problems over the past week?
   (0: not at all 10: totally)
4. 26/38. To what extent have you felt like a part of your school community during the past week?
   (0: not at all 10: totally)
5. 27/38. On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied have you been with the school you attended over the past week?
   (0: not satisfied at all, 10: totally satisfied)
6. 28/38. On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied have you been with your school marks over the past week?
   (0: not satisfied at all, 10: totally satisfied)
7. 29/38. Rate your level of satisfaction with your interactions with teachers over the past week.
   (0: not satisfied at all, 10: totally satisfied)
8. 30/38. Rate your level of satisfaction with your interactions with your class mates over the past week.
   (0: not satisfied at all, 10: totally satisfied)

Self-esteem well-being

Self-esteem well-being refers to having a positive perception of oneself, including self-confidence, self-respect, a sense of personal value, and belief in one's abilities and strengths.

The following questions ask about self-esteem well-being, including self-confidence, self-image, self-acceptance, social comparison, and concerns about how one is perceived by others.

1. 31/38. Over the past week, how much have you liked your appearance?
   (0: not at all 10: totally)
2. 32/38. How often in the last week have you felt confident in your own abilities and progress?
   (0: never, 10: always)
3. 33/38. How often in the last week have you felt that your life has meaning and purpose?
   (0: never, 10: always)
4. 34/38. Over the past week, to what extent have you been satisfied with who you are?
   (0: not satisfied at all, 10: totally satisfied)
5. 35/38. Over the past week, to what extent have you liked how you look in photos?
   (0: not at all 10: totally)
6. 36/38. Over the past week, how comfortable and secure have you felt about being yourself around others?
   (0: not secure at all, 10: completely secure)
7. 37/38. During the past week, how often were you able to appreciate your own qualities without comparing yourself to your peers?
   (0: never, 10: always)
8. 38/38. During the past week, how often have you felt content with your own life without comparing it to people online or influencers?
   (0: never, 10: always)

Ending Message

After completing the survey, a message will appear with a thank-you note, information that the results will be presented soon by the class teacher or school counsellor (facilitator), and that educational activities in the class will be planned based on these results.

Additionally, a message will be displayed stating that if anyone felt uncomfortable while filling out the survey, became aware of certain issues, or was reminded of problems they are facing, they can seek support by talking to the school counselor or psychologist or by calling a helpline.

EMOTIONAL FIRST AID

The survey may be associated with the emergence of concerning or atypical behaviours in some students, such as withdrawal, increased irritability, difficulties with concentration, or unusual emotional reactions.

If such signs are observed, it is recommended to promptly consult the *Emotional First Aid Guide* (found in the Annex) developed within the framework of the ConecTEEN project, which provides practical guidance on recognising and appropriately responding to emotional difficulties in adolescents.

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ANNEX

PRESENTATION AND COMPLETE USER GUIDE

Presentation and Complete User Guide

Everything you need to know to understand and use the application, from beginning to end.

Version 1.0 · 2026

1. User Roles

ConnecTEEN has four user types with different access and permissions:

Role	Name	Access (URL)	What can you do?
Without account	Student	student.php	Answer questionnaires using a session code
Role 2	Teacher/Counselor	teacher.php	Create sessions, view results, close sessions
Role 1	Center Admin	admin.php	Manage classrooms, teachers, and sessions at your center
Role 0	Superadmin	admin.php	Global management: adds centers, countries, languages, questions...

2. Home page

URL: index.php — the main entry point of the application.
https://onlinetool.connecteenproject.com/index.php

- ConnectTEEN log in the top navigation bar.
- Language selector in the upper right corner (the interface is multilingual: Spanish, English, Czech, Lithuanian and Polish).
- Two large cards: "I am a student" and "I am a teacher/advisor."
- Lock icon in the top bar → access to the administration panel.

3. Student Guide

The student doesn't need an account or registration. The entire process takes place on the same screen, guided step by step, and always in the language the teacher chose when creating the session.

Step 1 — Enter the code

From student.php, the student writes the 8-character code given to him by his teacher and presses "Continue".

Step 2 — Before you begin
An explanatory screen appears: what the quiz is, that it's anonymous, and a text with additional information. The student clicks "Start quiz".

Step 3 — Answer the questionnaire
Each question is answered by moving a slider between two emoticons (😢 to 😊). The indicator's color changes depending on its position, and a progress bar at the top shows how many questions are left.
Restriction: If the student attempts to submit without having answered all the questions, a warning appears asking for confirmation before continuing, to avoid incomplete submissions by mistake.

Step 4 — Thank you for participating
Upon submitting the answers, a thank you screen appears with (if configured) help resources for the relevant country. The student can then close the page; no further action is required.

Privacy: Responses are completely anonymous: no data is saved that identifies which specific student submitted each response, only a sequential number (Student 1, 2, 3...). It is also not possible to respond twice from the same device to the same session.

4. Teacher's Guide

4.1 Access URL: teacher.php https://onlinetool.connecteenproject.com/teacher.php

4.2 Create your account

- Click "Don't have an account? Register" or contact to your Administrator of the Center who will add your details.
- Fill in your name, your educational center, your email and a password (minimum 8 characters, with one uppercase letter and one number).
- Check your email and click the confirmation link you will receive.
- You can now log in.

4.3 Log in

- Enter your email and password.
- You will receive a 6-digit code by email (two-step verification) — enter it and press "Verify".

Two-factor authentication: The code expires after 10 minutes. If you don't receive it, use "Resend code" on the same screen.

4.4 Create a quiz session

Field	What is	Mandatory?
Classroom	The class for which this session is.	Yes
Country	Determine context texts and help resources.	No
Language	The language in which all students in this session will see the questionnaire.	No

Professor's email	Where will the report be sent when it is closed?	Yes
Expected students	If that goal is reached, the session will close automatically.	No
Deadline	The session closes automatically at this point.	Yes
Description	Free note to identify the session.	No

When you create it, a **unique code** is generated that you share with your students.

4.5 Check results

The report (results.php) shows: general summary, bar chart by area, detail by area (with status ✓ Good / ⚠ Risk), distribution of students by score, and detail question by question and student by student.

- "Download PDF" — full PDF report, with header, footer and page numbering, ready to print or archive.
- "Export to Excel" — downloads an .xlsx file with 4 sheets (Summary, Detail by area, Distribution, Detail by student).

How to teach it: The report is also automatically sent by email when the session is closed, whether manually or automatically.

5. Center Administrator's Guide

Access URL: admin.php (the application detects your role and takes you to your dashboard). Manage a single center: its classrooms, sessions, and teachers. Everything you see is automatically limited to your own center.
https://onlinetool.connecteenproject.com/admin.php

5.1 Access

Email + password, anti-robot verification (image with text), and then a 6-digit verification code by email (same as the teacher).

5.2 Classrooms Tab

Add, edit, and delete classrooms in your center. You cannot delete a classroom that already has associated sessions, to avoid losing data already collected.

5.3 Sessions Tab

View all sessions created by teachers at your school (code, classroom, language, deadline, status, responses). You can manually close a session before its deadline if needed.

5.4 Teachers Tab

Addition, editing and deletion of your center's accounts (both teachers and other administrators of that same center).

6. When to Contact the Super Administrator

The Super Administrator is responsible for the overall management and system-wide configuration of the application. Please contact the Super Administrator directly if you require any of the following actions:

- Entity & Access Management:
  - Adding new Centres.
  - Adding new Countries and Languages to the platform.
  - Creating and assigning new Centre Administrators.
- Content & Global System Adjustments:
  - Modifying texts or questions.
  - Requesting any global administrative updates or high-level configuration support.

Contact: For any of these requests, please email connecteen@connecteenproject.com.

7. Security and privacy

ConnecTEEN has been designed with the understanding that it will be handling sensitive information about the well-being of minors. Some of the built-in protection measures include:

- Real anonymity: it is never recorded which specific student gave each answer.
- Passwords are always encrypted, never stored in plain text.
- Two-step verification via email for all admin accounts.
- Temporary account lock after several failed login attempts.
- Anti-robot verification (CAPTCHA) in the administration access.
- Automatic session closure due to inactivity.
- Audit record of all administrative actions (who, what, and when).
- Self-registration of accounts with administrative permissions is disabled: they are only created from within the panel itself by another administrator.

8. Use cases

Case 1 — October tutoring in 3rd ESO A

13. The teacher creates a session: classroom "3rd ESO A", Spanish language, deadline Friday.
14. Project the code onto the digital whiteboard.
15. The 28 students respond from their mobile phones in 5 minutes.
1. On Friday, the session closes automatically and the report arrives in the teacher's email.
16. The teacher sees that "Self-esteem" is at risk and decides to dedicate the next tutorial to that area.

Case 2 — A new center joins the platform

17. The Superadmin registers the center (name, country, city) from their panel.
18. Register the first Center Admin of that school.
1. The Center Admin enters, creates the classrooms, and registers the teachers.
19. Teachers can now start creating sessions with their classes.

Case 3 — Translate the questionnaire into a new language

20. The Superadmin adds the new language to the "Languages" tab.
21. Prepare an Excel file with the translation of the 38 questions and import it from the "Translations" tab (bulk upload).
22. From that moment on, any teacher can choose that language when creating a session.

9. Frequently Asked Questions

Do the students need to install anything?
No. It works from any browser, on mobile, tablet or computer, without installing anything.

Is it possible to know which specific student answered what?
No, by design. The system identifies students only by an anonymous sequential number (Student 1, 2, 3...), never by their name or any personal data.

What happens if a teacher forgets their password?
There is no "recover password" form for security reasons; you must contact your center administrator or the Superadmin to reset it.

Can I use the app in multiple languages at the same time?
Yes. Each quiz session is created in a specific language, but different sessions (even from the same center) can be in different languages depending on the needs of each teacher.

What does the risk threshold mean?
This is the average score (0–10) below which an area is marked as ⚠ Risk in the reports. It is set by the Superadmin and can be different for each of the 5 areas.

Can a report be printed or archived?
Yes, with the "Download PDF" button on the results report, which generates a complete PDF ready to print or save.

EMOTIONAL FIRST AID (EFA) IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Emotional First Aid (EFA) refers to a set of supportive interventions that adults can undertake in response to noticeable behavioural changes in children or adolescents—changes that may signal emotional or mental health difficulties. EFA is the psychological equivalent of physical first aid and should be applied in situations of emotional injury or crisis.
Importantly, emotional support can be provided by any adult—for example, a parent, legal guardian, teacher, educator, counsellor, or coach—that is, any person who first observes worrisome behaviours in a child or young person.

Just like medical first aid, the key goals of Emotional First Aid are to:

1. **Recognise** the needs of the young person, understand the difficulties they are experiencing, and assess the seriousness of the situation.
2. **Alleviate** distressing emotional states and provide a sense of safety and containment.
3. **Support** the identification of personal resources and sources of help, and guide the individual toward appropriate forms of assistance—including, when necessary, engaging other people or professional services *(Łuba, 2022)*.

The 4A Principle: Acknowledge, Ask, Accept, Act
At times, we may find ourselves facing the challenge of supporting a young person experiencing an emotional crisis. Although diagnosing mental health problems is not the teacher's role, nothing prevents us from offering Emotional First Aid (EFA). Promoting and practicing this approach is particularly important, as many adults feel incompetent or unprepared to help children and adolescents cope with emotional distress.

1. Acknowledge

- **Spot the signs:** Pay attention to any noticeable changes in the functioning of a child or adolescent and treat them as important signals that something significant—and possibly difficult—may be happening in their life *(Łuba, 2022)*.
- **Recognise symptoms:** Watch for difficulties with concentration and memory, irritability, tearfulness, hostility toward others, sudden emotional outbursts at school, anger in response to poor grades, or avoidance of conversation with parents *(Kicińska & Palma, 2023)*.
- **Initiate gentle observations:** You might say, for example:
    - *"I've noticed that you've been looking sad lately."*
    - *"You don't seem to spend time with your friends anymore."*
    - *"It seems you rarely leave your room unless you have to."*

Remember: Noticing a change in a young person's behaviour does not mean diagnosing a mental disorder. Diagnosis should always be left to qualified mental health professionals *(Kicińska & Palma, 2023)*.

A student has the right not to talk to you
A student has the right to refuse a conversation. This may occur because they are not yet ready to trust you, may not believe in your good intentions, or perhaps you have never had a personal exchange before. Sometimes, the student's suffering is so intense that it hinders communication with others. In other cases, they may simply be a reserved individual who prefers to keep personal matters to themselves.
If, during contact, you observe brief or evasive answers, attempts to reject your help, or even signs of irritation or verbal attacks, **do your best not to take it personally**. Instead of disappointment,

resentment, or frustration, try to cultivate within yourself genuine curiosity, patience, kindness, and care.
You may say, for example:

- *"I know we haven't had a conversation like this before."*
- *"You may not feel ready to talk right now."*
- *"If you prefer, we can talk when you're in a better mood."*
- *"Maybe you'd rather talk to someone else."*
- *"I'm worried about you and I want to help."*
- *"I'd really like you to start feeling better soon."*

2. Ask: Deepening understanding through active listening
Ask additional, open-ended questions to better understand the student's difficulties. Encourage them to give examples or specific details.

Examples of supportive prompts include:

- *"Could you tell me more about that?"*
- *"What exactly do you mean?"*
- *"When did these difficulties begin?"*
- *"Please help me understand better what's happening."*

Active listening guidelines: Listen carefully and attentively. Take seriously whatever the student chooses to share with you. Avoid interrupting or minimising their experience.

3. Accept: Instead of comforting or advising – accept and validate emotions
Resist the urge to immediately comfort, explain, or offer advice. These actions may unintentionally dismiss or devalue the student's emotions. Focus instead on acceptance and validation of what they are feeling. Express empathy and recognition, and encourage continued openness. Avoid attempts to "fix" the emotion or force positivity.

Reflecting and validating emotions
Reflect, validate, and normalise emotions by using phrases such as:

- *"It seems you're..."*
- *"I can see (or hear) that you feel..."*
- *"It sounds like you might be..."*
- *"I imagine you might feel..."*
- *"It looks like you're..."*
- *"You may be feeling..." (followed by a specific emotion or emotional state, e.g., sad, anxious, frustrated, lonely)*

Normalising emotional experiences
Normalising emotional experiences helps students recognise that their reactions are understandable and valid. For example:

- *"It's natural to feel this way when you're trying so hard to get better and don't see results yet."*
- *"I appreciate that you told me this."*
- *"Thank you for opening up — I realise this took a lot of effort."*
- *"Please do the same whenever you start feeling worse or more tense."*
- *"I'm here for you and I want to help you feel better."*

4. Act: Respond appropriately to the student's needs
Begin by exploring what the student already knows or has tried regarding their situation. Ask for consent before offering suggestions.

Exploring options:
- *"What have you already tried?"*
- *"How do others usually cope in similar situations?"*
- *"Would you like to hear about other possible options?"*

Offering suggestions:
- *"There are several possible approaches. Here are a few..."*
- *"Some people find that this method helps them, while others prefer..."*

Gathering feedback:
- *"What do you think about these ideas?"*
- *"Which option seems best to you?"*

Responding in collaboration with others
Inform the student of any actions you intend to take on their behalf, ensuring they retain a sense of participation and co-decision.
- *"It's very important that you talk as soon as possible with our school counsellor (name)."*
- *"This is a person who helps students with various difficulties, including the kind you're facing."*
- *"During the meeting, the counsellor will likely ask about your wellbeing, challenges, and problems. It would be helpful if you shared with them what you've just told me — that honesty will allow them to understand and help you better."*
- *"Please try to meet with them today — perhaps after classes? I'll let them know in advance so they can make time for you."*
- *"Let's go together right now if you'd like."*

Involving parents or guardians
It is crucial that parents are informed about what their child is going through and how it affects their feelings and behaviour. Their awareness allows them to better understand the situation and provide appropriate support.
- *"Sometimes it can feel worrying to think about your parents learning about your difficulties. How do you feel about that?"*
- *"Who should I talk to first — your mother or your father?"*
- *"Which of your parents do you get along with better, and who do you think will respond most supportively?"*
- *"Let's think together about what exactly we should tell them."*
- *"Would you like to be present during this conversation?"*
- *"Would you prefer to explain your situation yourself, or would you like me to do it for you?"*

Conclusion
Emotional first aid, like physical first aid, is not intended to provide full diagnosis or therapy, especially when the problems are complex or long-term. Its aim is to reduce feelings of isolation, helplessness, and hopelessness that accompany crisis situations. Continue communication, help the student find realistic short-term solutions, and monitor the implementation of agreed coping strategies.

HOW TO UNDERSTAND AN EMOTIONAL CRISIS

The impact of crisis and stress on functioning

A person in crisis experiences severe stress that directly affects brain functioning. Prolonged stress impairs rational thinking and emotional regulation; as the brain's structures responsible for processing and coping begin to operate differently, an individual's ability to manage problems effectively is reduced.
These biological changes narrow perception and limit the range of possible reactions. Consequently, an individual may develop depression, anxiety disorders, or experience a suicidal crisis. Furthermore, chronic, intense stress negatively impacts physical health, contributing to conditions such as stomach and intestinal ulcers, digestive and respiratory disorders, alopecia areata, depression, and neuroses.

How a Person Functions in Crisis

1. Emotional Domain
The emotional life of a person in crisis is dominated by intense feelings such as anger, sadness, fear, anxiety, despair, hopelessness, helplessness, loneliness, guilt, shame, or a sense of threat and isolation. These emotions are often overwhelming, leaving little room for balance or calm. Positive emotions may appear only fleetingly, often mixed with longing or apathy.

2. Cognitive Domain
Thoughts may reflect confusion, disorientation, and an inability to form clear judgments or rationally control the situation. Common thought patterns include:

- *"This is the end" / "There's no hope" / "It's unfair"*
- *"I can't take this anymore" / "I'm losing my mind"*
- *"I'm worthless" / "It's my fault" / "There's no escape"*

A crisis can distort the ability to evaluate reality realistically, leading to wishful or catastrophic thinking, resignation, or suicidal ideation. Concentration, memory, and attention span are also frequently impaired.

3. Behavioral Domain
Behaviour may become disorganised, impulsive, self-destructive, or inconsistent with expressed emotions. Individuals in crisis might act aggressively, misuse alcohol or medication, withdraw from social contact, neglect daily tasks, or abandon previously enjoyable activities. They may also exhibit risky behaviours or attempt suicide.

4. Physical Domain
The body directly reflects emotional strain. Common somatic symptoms include:

- Sleep disturbances (insomnia or hypersomnia)
- Changes in appetite (loss or increase)
- Fatigue and lack of energy
- Headaches, abdominal pain, back pain, and muscle tension
- Excessive sweating and increased susceptibility to infections

Understanding the Nature of Crisis

A crisis disrupts emotional balance and coping mechanisms. It is a natural human response to an overwhelming situation, presenting both a threat and an opportunity for growth. While a crisis exposes limitations and vulnerabilities, it simultaneously creates space for personal development and change. It can stimulate new perspectives, the search for alternative solutions, and the development of previously unused coping skills *(Kicińska, Palma, Witkowska, 2022)*.

Children and Adolescents in Crisis

When children or adolescents experience a crisis, they often lack the tools to overcome their difficulties independently. They may feel helpless, lonely, and lost, frequently believing that they are the problem or that no one cares about them. Some experience emotional numbness and become fixated on their distress, convinced that their situation will never improve.
However, most young people retain a fundamental hope for help and support. In these critical moments, it is vital that a caring adult creates a safe environment for the young person to release emotional tension. This provides essential space for reflection and opens up the possibility of shifting their way of thinking and coping. The subsequent step is to build resilience and adaptive coping skills through the ongoing support of trusted adults and peers.

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.