Funded by
the European Union

POLICY BRIEF

Bringing Youth Mental Wellbeing Practices into Schools

Low-cost and safe recommendations for implementing mindfulness, stress-regulation and body-based practices in educational settings

About this brief

- Produced as a dissemination and sustainability output of an Erasmus+ Wellbeing4Youth Youth Exchange (2025-3-PL01-KA152-YOU-000375027).
- Written for school leaders, teachers, pedagogues and youth workers with no prior training in psychosocial practices.
- Focuses on what schools can realistically adopt with existing staff, existing spaces, and little or no budget.
- Grounded in a trauma-aware approach: it complements, and never replaces, professional mental-health support.

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Funded by
the European Union

1. Executive Summary

Young people's mental wellbeing has become one of the most pressing challenges facing schools today. Rising levels of stress, anxiety and disconnection are increasingly visible in classrooms, yet most schools lack the time, budget or specialist staff to respond systematically. This brief distils the practices, tools and safeguards developed and tested during an international youth mobility project into a short, actionable guide that any school can start using within a single term.

The recommendations below are organised around three simple ideas. First, small and frequent practices — a two-minute breathing check-in, a regulation pause between lessons — are more sustainable than occasional large events, and they cost nothing beyond a few minutes of classroom time. Second, safety and consent must be built into every activity from the start: no physical contact without agreement, a standing "right to pause", and language that never asks students to re-enact difficult personal experiences. Third, ownership should sit with the school itself — a designated staff member, a simple written micro-policy, and a light monitoring routine — so that the practices continue long after any external project or trainer has left.

Who this brief is for

- Head teachers and school management deciding whether to adopt wellbeing routines school-wide.
- Teachers, pedagogues and school counsellors who will run the practices day to day.
- Local authorities and youth-work organisations supporting schools to implement it.

Sections 2–4 explain the rationale and the core practices; Section 5 sets out the safety framework; Sections 6–8 give a practical, low-cost implementation pathway with a sample school micro-policy; Sections 9–10 cover monitoring and where to find the full set of free resources referenced throughout.

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

2. Why Schools?

Schools reach nearly every young person, regardless of family income, and they do so repeatedly over many years — a reach that no single external programme can replicate. This makes them the most efficient and equitable setting in which to normalise conversations about mental health and to teach basic self-regulation skills before difficulties escalate into crisis.

2.1 The gap this brief addresses

Many schools want to act on student wellbeing but hesitate because they associate it with specialist therapy, expensive external providers, or complex curricula that compete with academic time. In practice, a meaningful first step requires none of these. Brief, well-designed routines — led by existing staff, requiring no equipment, and taking two to ten minutes — can measurably reduce classroom stress and give students a shared vocabulary for naming how they feel.

2.2 What schools should expect, and not expect

- A realistic expectation: calmer transitions between lessons, fewer low-level behavioural flare-ups, and students better able to name and manage everyday stress.
- Not a realistic expectation: these practices are prevention and skills-building, not treatment. Students showing signs of significant distress must still be referred to school counsellors or external mental-health services.
- A shared language: simple terms such as "check-in", "regulation pause" and "right to pause" give staff and students a common, non-clinical way to talk about wellbeing.

2.3 Evidence base behind the approach

The practices recommended here combine three well-established strands: mindfulness-based stress reduction adapted for classroom use, body-awareness and movement techniques drawn from movement-theatre pedagogy, and trauma-aware facilitation principles that prioritise consent and choice at every step. None of the individual techniques are new; what this brief offers is a tested, school-ready packaging of them, refined through direct piloting with youth workers and young people during the underlying mobility project.

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

3. Core Practices to Implement

The following four practice families form the core toolkit. Each can be introduced independently; schools new to this area should start with check-ins and regulation pauses before layering in the others.

3.1 Check-ins

A short, structured moment — usually at the start of a lesson, homeroom period, or club — where students briefly name how they feel (a word, a number 1–5, an emoji, or a coloured card). Check-ins take under two minutes, require no materials, and give staff an early, low-pressure signal when something is wrong.

3.2 Breathing and grounding micro-practices

Very short (60–90 second) exercises such as paced breathing, the "5-4-3-2-1" grounding technique, or a brief body scan. These are best used as a regulation pause between demanding activities, before a test, or after a conflict, rather than as a stand-alone lesson.

3.3 Body-based and movement techniques

Drawn from movement-theatre practice: simple stretching, posture resets, mirroring exercises in pairs, and grounding-through-movement sequences. These support students who find it easier to regulate through physical movement than through stillness or talk, and they double as a natural energiser between lessons.

3.4 Guided reflection and emotional vocabulary

Short group discussions or written prompts that help students name emotions, recognise personal strengths and obstacles (including practical barriers such as cost or fear of judgement), and identify one trusted adult or service they could turn to if needed.

Starter set (Week 1)

- Daily 90-second breathing check-in at the start of homeroom.
- One body-based regulation pause per day, placed after the most demanding lesson block.
- One 15-minute guided reflection session per week, ideally in a subject with existing space for discussion (e.g. tutor time, PSHE/civic education, or form period).

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

4. Safety and Ethical Framework

Every recommendation in this brief is conditional on the following safeguards. These are non-negotiable minimums, not aspirational extras, and should be agreed by school leadership before any practice is introduced to students.

4.1 Trauma-aware principles

- No activity ever asks students to re-enact or describe a traumatic personal experience. Reflection stays at the level of everyday stress and general strengths/obstacles, not disclosure of trauma.
- Facilitators are trained to recognise signs of distress and to pause an activity immediately if a student appears overwhelmed.
- Sessions never position themselves as a substitute for therapy; students showing ongoing distress are referred to the school counsellor or an external mental-health service.

4.2 Consent and the "right to pause"

- Zero physical contact without explicit, ongoing consent — including in movement and mirroring exercises.
- Every student has a standing right to opt out of any individual activity at any time, without needing to explain why and without penalty.
- Seated or non-contact variants are prepared in advance for every movement-based activity, so opting out never means simply sitting out with nothing to do.

4.3 Inclusion by design

- Plain-language instructions, pictograms and captions/subtitles for any audio or video material used.
- Explicit accommodation for students who are highly sensitive to touch, sound or crowding, migrant and newly arrived students, and students from rural or low-income backgrounds who may have less prior exposure to these practices.

4.4 Data and confidentiality

Check-in responses and reflection notes are treated as sensitive. They should never be used for grading, disciplinary decisions, or shared outside the immediate facilitating staff without a student's consent, except where a safeguarding duty to protect the student's wellbeing requires escalation under the school's existing child-protection policy.

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

5. A Low-Cost Implementation Model

The practices in Section 3 are deliberately designed to require nothing beyond what a school already has: a classroom, a clock, and a member of staff. The table below sets out what is genuinely needed versus what is optional.

Resource	Genuinely needed	Nice to have, not required
Space	Existing classroom, cleared floor space for movement	Dedicated quiet room
Staff	One staff member per class, briefed using this document and the free toolkit	External trainer or school counsellor co-facilitating
Materials	Printed exercise cards or the free PDF toolkit; no equipment	Posters, a printed guide for parents, QR-code table-top signage
Time	2–15 minutes per day within existing lesson/homeroom time	A dedicated weekly wellbeing period
Training	One staff briefing session (60–90 minutes) using this brief and the free e-guide	Full-day external training or a certified course

Where a small budget is available, the highest-value spend is printing the pocket-size exercise cards and the student e-brochure for distribution, and covering staff time for a single planning meeting — not equipment or venues.

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

6. Step-by-Step Implementation Guide

1. Secure a short mandate from school leadership: one paragraph confirming that check-ins and regulation pauses may be piloted in a defined group of classes for one term, and naming a staff lead.
2. Brief the piloting staff in a single 60–90 minute session covering: the four core practices (Section 3), the safety and consent rules (Section 4), and how to respond if a student becomes distressed.
3. Agree the starter set (see Section 3 box) and add it to the daily/weekly timetable for the pilot classes — do not attempt all four practice families at once.
4. Prepare non-contact and seated alternatives for every movement-based activity before the first session, not as an afterthought.
5. Introduce the practices to students with a short, honest explanation: what it is, why the school is doing it, and an explicit reminder of the right to pause and opt out.
6. Run the pilot for a full term, keeping a simple weekly log (see Section 9) rather than a heavy evaluation process.
7. Hold a short review meeting at the end of the term using the indicators in Section 9, decide whether to extend to more classes, and update the school's micro-policy (Section 7) accordingly.

Common pitfalls to avoid

- Starting with all four practice families at once — staff and students disengage faster than they adopt.
- Treating a single onboarding assembly as sufficient training — the 60–90 minute staff briefing in Step 2 is the minimum.
- Allowing movement or mirroring exercises to proceed without a prepared non-contact alternative visibly offered every time.

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

7. A Sample School Micro-Policy

A micro-policy is a short, one-page document — not a full safeguarding policy — that makes the ground rules for these practices explicit and visible to staff, students and parents. Schools are encouraged to adapt the wording below rather than adopt it verbatim.

Sample wording (adapt freely)

• This school uses brief daily wellbeing check-ins and regulation pauses as part of normal classroom routine.

• No student is ever touched without their clear, ongoing agreement.

• Every student may opt out of any individual activity at any time, without explanation and without consequence.

• These practices support everyday wellbeing; they are not therapy. Any member of staff or student with ongoing concerns should contact [named school counsellor / designated safeguarding lead].

• Session content and check-in responses are kept confidential within the facilitating staff team, except where the school's child-protection duties require escalation.

7.1 Roles and responsibilities

- School leadership: issues the mandate, allocates timetable slots, signs off the micro-policy.
- Designated staff lead: coordinates the pilot, keeps the weekly log, is the first point of contact for staff questions.
- Classroom/homeroom teachers: deliver the daily check-ins and regulation pauses, following the safety rules in Section 4.
- School counsellor or pedagogue: receives referrals when a student shows signs of ongoing distress; ideally co-delivers the initial staff briefing.
- Parents/guardians: informed in advance via a short letter or newsletter item; given the option to ask questions or raise concerns before the pilot starts.

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

8. Monitoring, Evaluation and Sustainability

Monitoring should be lightweight enough that it does not become a burden that causes staff to abandon the practices. A single shared spreadsheet, updated weekly by the designated staff lead, is sufficient for most schools.

8.1 Suggested indicators

- Number of sessions/check-ins actually delivered each week, against the plan.
- Approximate number of students reached, including whether students facing additional disadvantage (newly arrived, rural, highly sensitive) are participating.
- Staff-reported change in classroom transitions and low-level behavioural incidents (a simple 1–5 rating is enough).
- Number of student opt-outs and, where volunteered, the reasons — used to improve the activities, never to pressure participation.
- Number of referrals made to the school counsellor as a result of a check-in — a sign the early-warning function is working, not a failure metric.

8.2 Review cadence

- 3 months: quick staff check-in — is the starter set still running as planned?
- 6 months: full review against the indicators above; decide on scaling to more classes.
- 12 months: refresh the staff briefing, update the micro-policy if needed, and re-confirm leadership's mandate for the following school year.

8.3 Keeping it alive beyond the pilot

Sustainability depends less on funding than on ownership. Naming a permanent staff lead, folding the review dates into the school's existing calendar, and keeping the practices inside time the school already controls (homeroom, tutor time, PSHE) — rather than treating them as an add-on requiring a special slot — are what allow schools to continue after any external project support ends.

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

9. Free Resources and Where to Find Them

All materials referenced in this brief are released under a CC BY licence and may be copied, translated and adapted with attribution. They were developed collaboratively with young people and reviewed against trauma-aware standards; none of them replace professional therapeutic support.

9.1 Available materials

- Youth e-guide to mental wellbeing: peer-written, easy-to-read, covering wellbeing, healthy eating, stress, body awareness, strengths/obstacles and where to find support.
- Student e-brochure: a condensed, printable set of quick stress-reduction tips and a wellbeing checklist (sleep, movement, nutrition).
- Digital toolkit and exercise-card deck: ready-to-use session plans with QR codes linking to short instructional videos.
- Project website: a central hub hosting all of the above, plus recorded webinars and a map of local support services, actively maintained for at least 24 months after project completion.

9.2 Getting help beyond this brief

Schools introducing these practices for the first time are encouraged to contact local youth-work organisations or the project's partner network for an initial briefing session, and to establish a direct referral link with local mental-health support services before the pilot begins, so that staff know exactly where to direct a student who needs more than a classroom-based response.

In short

- Start small: check-ins and regulation pauses only, for one term, in a few classes.
- Make consent and the right to pause visible and real, every session.
- Give one member of staff clear ownership, and review at 3, 6 and 12 months.
- Treat this as prevention, not treatment — always keep a clear referral path to professional support.

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.