

e-book

FIND YOUR WAY TO BALANCE

**SELF-CARE IN PREVENTING
BURNOUT**



Co-funded by
the European Union



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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION



The idea for this e-book arose in 2020, when we faced the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost everything in our school reality has changed. No meetings in the classroom, the need to "switch" to remote education and learn how to use specific tools that make it possible. In addition, there was combining home duties with work, remote learning for children and working with students at the same time, and in addition - for some time - the slogan "STAY AT HOME". And how not to go crazy? Of course, the pandemic was "just" an addition to the current problems that schools and teachers were struggling with. All this was a factor that had a very strong impact on teachers' mental health.

We decided to look at the topic from the perspective of teachers' work, and that is how the BALDIS project was created - Searching for professional solutions in the field of personal and professional life, including a report on the functioning of teachers during the pandemic, stories told by educators and specific tools that will be useful in preventing professional burnout.

In a partnership of six educational organizations - schools and business - we looked at how school educators dealt with this unusual situation and what impact the pandemic had on their personal and professional lives.

From this e-book you will NOT learn how to get over burnout - at this stage you need to consult a specialist, but you WILL LEARN:

- What is well-being and why is it worth working on your own well-being on an ongoing basis?
- When the "red light" lights up, i.e. the first symptoms of a violation of well-being
- Where you can find professional tools that will help you take care of your emotions and mental health before burnout occurs.
- What ways did teachers find to balance the balance during the COVID-19 pandemic?

This is a knowledge pill that you can take before delving into the issue of well-being.

WHAT IS WELL-BEING?



The first definition of "well-being" is the one formulated by WHO in 1948, i.e.:



"a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

Several dozen years had to pass before this concept was explored further.

Although Abraham Maslov used the term positive psychology already in the 1950s, the formal "birth" of this trend of psychology as a scientific discipline dates back to 1998. It focused on the study of positive aspects of human experience, such as happiness, mental resilience and developing individual strengths. Its goal, apart from getting to know a person, is also to influence the development of his potential and increase his perceived well-being.

Positive psychology actually addressed the issue of well-being and significantly developed research on it as an important element of human life and health.

The concept of well-being has a long history and evolving context in the social sciences, psychology, economics, philosophy, and other fields. The history of this term includes various stages and changes in the approach to what it means to be "well" or "happy".

Many researchers have attempted to define it, but it should be emphasized that this concept is multidimensional - it depends on the perspective and context.

In our study, we adopt the context of positive psychology, according to which well-being is a concept encompassing subjective feelings of happiness, life satisfaction, involvement in activities and a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

This definition focuses on the positive aspects of the human experience.

Stable well-being requires a balance between resources (mental, social, physical) and challenges (mental, social, physical).

When this balance is lacking, our well-being is compromised.



WHY IS WELL-BEING IMPORTANT?



BURNOUT?



A teacher's sense of well-being at work plays a key role in preventing burnout, which is a state of chronic work-related stress manifesting itself in a feeling of withdrawal, cynicism, and mental and emotional fatigue.

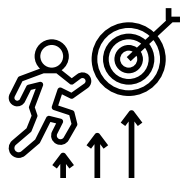
Improving well-being, in turn, is an investment in mental health, job satisfaction and the overall quality of professional life, which can reduce the risk of burnout.

If well-being is a state of general satisfaction, life satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment, covering the physical, mental and social aspects of an individual's life, it seems clear that for every person, including a teacher, taking care of their own well-being is crucial.

Why? Because the state of overall life satisfaction affects:



Resistance to stress



Motivation and commitment



Job satisfaction



A sense of purpose



Work and
personal life
balance



Relations



Professional
development



Mental well-
being

Maintaining balance and satisfaction in the above areas on an ongoing basis will bring us closer to achieving overall well-being and will bring benefits in our private and professional lives. Of course, the "well-being" we strive for is not a one-time state - it is a process related to working on ourselves, which requires our constant commitment.

Achieving well-being is a very individual and subjective matter. However, to look at yourself and assess whether you have already achieved it, you can use certain reference points.

satisfaction

You feel satisfaction from what you do, you see the meaning of your work and the importance of your role at school, and you derive joy from your professional achievements

time and you

You can manage time effectively, you try to maintain a balance between school duties and your personal life, which translates into your well-being.

emotions

You are familiar with positive emotions, you can feel joy and enthusiasm, you are satisfied with your actions both at work and in your personal life.

balance

You maintain mental balance even in the face of challenges, you are able to manage stress and respond to emerging difficulties.

relations

Your relationships with other teachers and students are healthy, based on trust and mutual respect, and you feel supported by your surroundings.

development

You develop, strive to achieve your private and professional goals, and acquire new skills.

motivation

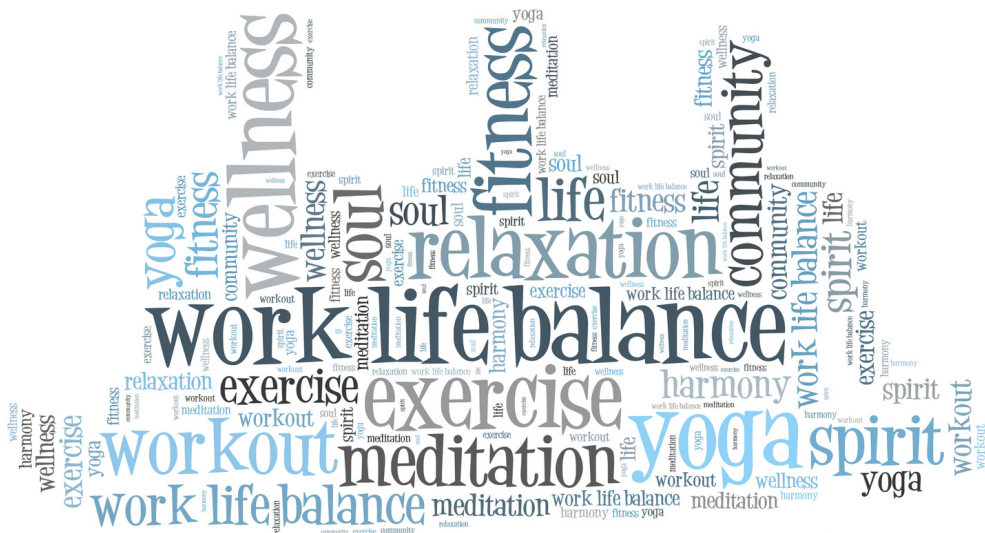
You are internally motivated to take on challenges and engage with passion in the tasks entrusted to you.

acceptance

You accept yourself as you are; it's about both your strengths and the areas you would like to improve - it builds self-esteem.

The final assessment of well-being depends on your personal feeling, life satisfaction and fulfillment in various areas. If you feel overall contentment and balance in your life, these may be signs that you have achieved well-being.

However, it is worth remembering that well-being is a process, not a permanent state, and may develop with time and experience.



“RED LIGHT”



When it comes to burnout symptoms, science defines a very specific set of behaviors and emotions.

Burnout is more than just a stressful day in the classroom. It can manifest itself in many ways, both in your personal life and at work.

Some of the key signs to look out for include:



LOSS OF PASSION OR MOTIVATION TO BE A TEACHER

Productivity problems (lack of productivity associated with feelings of apathy, lack of self-esteem, low self-confidence, feelings of hopelessness)

EMOTIONAL WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ENVIRONMENT

Separating yourself from co-workers, students, friends and family. Teachers experiencing burnout may refrain from participating in social or family gatherings (Schneider-Levi et al., 2020).



They may also avoid collaborating or sharing with other teachers. With withdrawal comes depersonalization, cynicism, a sense of alienation or a negative attitude towards the environment.



SYMPTOMS IN THE EMOTIONAL SPHERE

Burnout may be confused with depression because we notice similar emotional reactions in both cases. We may include flatness or lack of emotions, easy emotional dysregulation (irritability, anger, sadness), difficulty in performing regular or basic tasks (e.g. preparing a lesson plan).

Loss of interest, hopelessness, anxiety, irritability, and other symptoms of poor mental health may also occur (Capone, Joshanloo, & Park, 2019; Madigan & Kim, 2021). When teachers experience burnout, they may feel as if they are in survival mode every day or react with a short temper.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS



Physical symptoms may include rapid heartbeat, inability to catch your breath, and frequent headaches or stomach aches. It is worth paying attention to these indicators because the stress associated with burnout in adulthood may be a factor causing diseases (Kivimäki & Steptoe, 2018).

Additionally, teachers experiencing burnout may feel exhausted even after hours of sleep because they do so much during the day. They may also have trouble sleeping, as burnout can manifest as sleep disturbances (Saleh & Shapiro, 2008).

Research conducted on 7,000 teachers in Poland at the beginning of 2023, regarding the well-being of educational staff, confirmed the occurrence of professional burnout among teachers.

It was intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Symptoms of physical exhaustion, according to the above. research concerns as many as 67% of teachers stated, and 57% feel mental exhaustion - loss of motivation, difficulties in finding energy to work. 52% experience direct work-related stress. These data draw attention to the fact that this topic is important and needs to be addressed.

Nevertheless, the reality is not unequivocally bad. The above research also showed the areas that give them the greatest satisfaction, emotions and feelings related to being a teacher were indicated.

Unlike other professions, it turned out that teachers have a high sense of meaning in what they do, which translates into very high commitment and it is difficult to set boundaries. They are also characterized by a sense of agency, expressed in building influence on students. Moreover, it turned out that they had a great sense of belonging to a community of teachers, sharing common challenges, problems and topics that were a source of positive energy and a chance for well-being.

The message of the above-mentioned report is also that we should take care of the positive aspects of teachers' work and at the same time eliminate those that burden us. It is known that it is impossible to eliminate all stressful factors, but it is important to notice them, stop and take care to manage this difficult situation and avoid burnout.

Source: Plizga M., How teachers feel in their work. Report. Librus, March 2023. [The survey was conducted on 7,106 respondents]

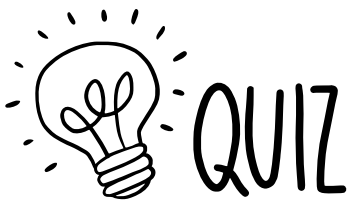
HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THIS IS IT?

Teaching is about giving students opportunities, ideas, knowledge and guidance. But this cannot be done effectively if our own "batteries" are running low.

Take care of your needs to balance your life for optimal health and regularly check in with your mental well-being. It's the best way to beat burnout - or avoid it altogether!

If the previously described symptoms are severe, repetitive and block your actions, it is worth visiting a specialist - a psychologist, psychiatrist, or therapist - to obtain professional support.

However, burnout doesn't happen overnight. This is a state that is led to - sometimes long-term - by the process of violating our well-being. By being aware of when the first symptoms of psychophysical imbalance appear, you can react earlier and prevent your body from "saying enough!" and stopped functioning properly.



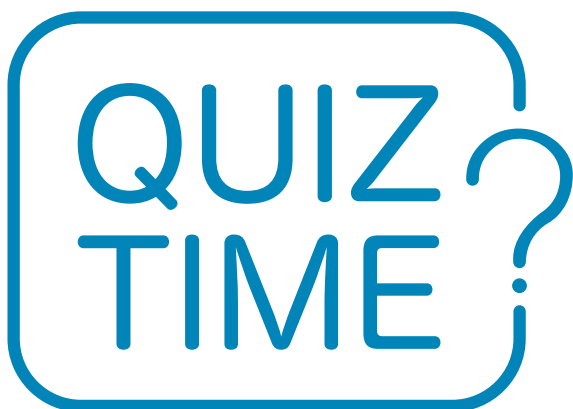
In our project, we developed a short quiz consisting of 10 questions. This test will stimulate you to think about your well-being.

The questionnaire was created on the basis of available research and reports on burnout. Although it is not a standardized test, it allows us to look at selected areas of a teacher's functioning and - in the form of a game - considers our emotions and behavior related to work, and suggests simple solutions.

This quiz allows you to build self-knowledge about what my work-life balance is when I feel it is OK. It allows you to learn about areas that are important for work-life balance.

Let's treat this self-test as a form of fun, stimulating thinking and drawing attention to important aspects of our lives.

Completing the questionnaire will only take a few minutes. Answer honestly and choose the option that best reflects your situation. At the end, you'll receive an assessment of your work-life balance and helpful suggestions for improving it. It is worth remembering that the feeling of well-being is something that is changeable and depending on the moment of the day we can do it differently. Therefore, in a situation where uncomfortable emotions or states are permanent, it is worth seeking advice from a specialist and treating our test only as a guide. Try it!



THE ROLE OF "I" IN CARE OF WELL-BEING



Each of us plays many roles in life - professional, private and social. The teacher also performs many of them. In addition to taking on the role of an educator, we can also be a mother or father, a partner, a friend...

Work-life balance is about harmonizing the roles that life puts us in.

If we talk about well-being, we are actually talking about the most important role, which we can call SELF. And taking care of yourself is the most important issue in taking care of your well-being.

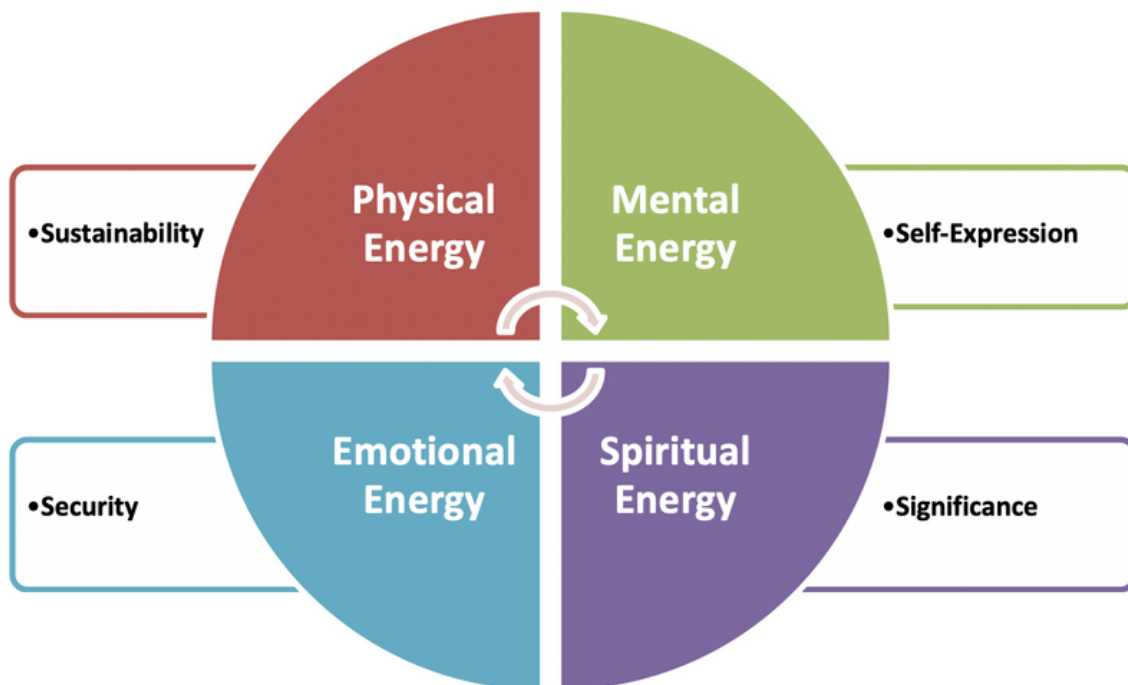
Excessive attention to any of the above roles is not appropriate and will disturb our balance, which in turn will affect our family, children at school, our friends.

We can perfectly illustrate this situation by comparing it to one of the safety rules on board an airplane - you put the oxygen mask on yourself first, and only then help others. Yes! take care of yourself first so that you can take care of other roles in your life.

When we talk about work-life balance and well-being, the phrase "holistic approach to taking care of one's well-being" often appears. Intuitively we know - yes, we need to take care of the whole thing - but in practice, questions often arise: how to do it? how to take care of everything? what exactly should you take care of?

This area of well-being can be divided into 4 main energies that are worth paying attention to even on a daily basis. We need them to ensure our well-being, but also - like energy - they run out, they need recharging, they need attention. All these energies are important and we should take care of the balance between them.

Just like on the phone, we receive a notification from the device that we are low on energy, our body also sends such notifications. If we miss the moment when we lack this energy in one area or another, burnout occurs. That's why it's worth observing.



HOW TO TAKE CARE OF "I"?



On the BALDIS project website you will find an extensive guide entitled: "The way to balance." You will find practical tips that you can use to take care of your well-being on a daily basis. The material is mainly dedicated to school principals to support teachers, but each of us, regardless of our profession, can find something for ourselves there.



The guide is based on an analysis of the best methods and tools for solving problems related to work-life balance and mental health, in particular burnout.

Among the 24 proposed solutions, we find those that support our main 4 energies.





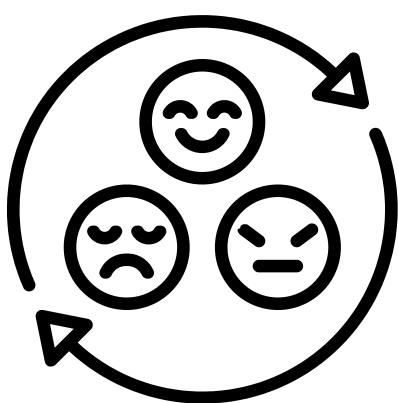
PHYSICAL ENERGY

WHO recommendations on taking care of physical energy say that to maintain good physical health, you should perform at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week.

That's a lot, but it's not just about time at the gym or fitness club. It's also a quick walk or a bike ride, which we can use to commute to work by car. It is worth finding the best way to take care of your physical well-being.

The guide itself contains many exercises supporting physical activity and movement, but it is also worth paying attention to SELF-MASSAGE, which relieves physical tension and does not require large financial outlays or a lot of time, and can be performed in the so-called "meantime".

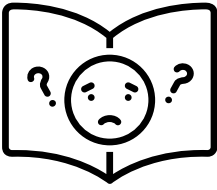
Self-massage is a great tool for anyone who has little free time, is looking for a cheap alternative to massage treatments or prefers not to be touched by others. Through gentle movements and soft manipulation of the skin, muscles and tissues, massage is believed to reduce pain by increasing blood flow to the area and gently exercising the muscles.



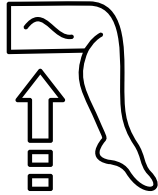
EMOTIONAL ENERGY

Naming our difficult emotions is the first step to dealing with them. Leaving the level of feeling to the level of the head, analyzing these situations, is a good way to deal with this emotion.

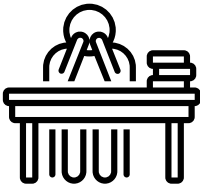
How do we know when our emotional battery is dead?



Difficulty accepting your own emotions



Tensions in the body, e.g. in the cervical section, muscle spasms



Starting the day without enthusiasm, with a low mood



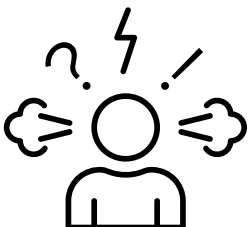
Very strong emotions, inappropriate to the situation



Lack of ability to reflect on difficult situations



Difficulty feeling higher emotions such as compassion and gratitude



Persistent feelings of stress and fear

Naming our difficult emotions is the first step to dealing with them. Leaving the level of feeling to the level of the head, analyzing these situations, is a good way to deal with this emotion.

The EMOTION WHEEL, another technique developed in our textbook, will help you with this. It makes it easier to name our emotional states, teaches how to manage emotions, and allows you to understand and empathize with the emotions of others. They can also be used when working with students.



Source: <https://positivepsychology.com/emotion-wheel/>

The Emotion Wheel also shows us how our emotions develop - how they go from mild to intense. This knowledge also helps you manage your emotional state.

It is worth working with students using this tool, working with young people on the ability to understand their own emotions, discover what they feel, and recognize what others feel.

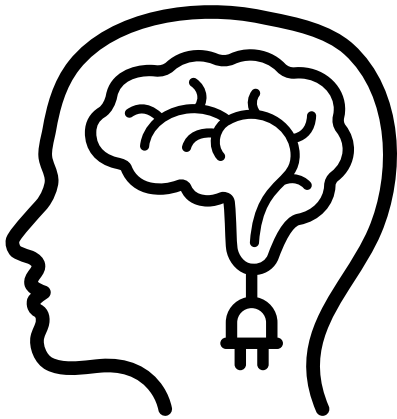
Working on emotions requires practice, so if we are not able to introduce changes immediately, it is also important to be able to name them, and this is where the EMOTION WHEEL helps, but also other tools presented in the guide, for example the WRITE IT DOWN exercise! It allows you to reflect and "get" these difficult emotions out of your head.



Emotional intelligence is one of the competencies of the future that can be used in the work environment in every industry. In times when information is available at our fingertips, skills that help us function in society are increasingly important. The ones that distinguish us from machines.

Emotional awareness gives us the advantage that by being able to read emotional signals, we can use them in the process of assessing and making decisions. This also means that we are able to understand what our students need and thus create ideal conditions for their development.

This means that not only you, as a teacher, will benefit from working on emotional intelligence, but together with the youth you can support their emotional development.



MENTAL ENERGY

When our mental energy drops, we find it difficult to concentrate and we have problems with creativity. In the case of teachers, there is a reluctance to create new lessons, ideas for exercises, and making classes more attractive. We lack motivation for mental work. It may also be the result of mental "cloud" or, on the contrary, a multitude of thoughts and a problem with organizing thinking.

What can influence the "charging" of mental batteries is CONTACT WITH NATURE. There are scientific studies confirming that even 10 minutes of exposure to greenery and the natural environment has a positive effect on improving mood, sharpening senses and even physical condition.

One of the techniques supporting real contact with nature is FOREST BATHING. That is, "immersion" in nature with your whole being. This seemingly obvious practice has its own rules. Not every trip to the forest will be forest bathing. It's a mindful walk through the forest, feeling it with every sense - we see all the colors, touch the textures, feel the smells, listen to the sounds. We are alone with nature. No distractions. We experience the forest with our whole being.



SPIRITUAL ENERGY

Spiritual energy is another element that influences our well-being. It is worth noting that this term is not unambiguous and may have different meanings for different people and cultures. There is no single common definition of this concept. This is a more symbolic and subtle approach to understanding the forces that influence our spiritual and emotional lives.

It may be expressed, among others, by: In:

- **awareness of our own values - what is important to us, why we do what we do and what guides us in life;**

- **contact with my own intuition - I know what is good for me, I follow my inner voice, harmony with myself;**
- **awareness of the influence of higher forces - they do not have to be related to religion, to God, it can be something we believe in, higher consciousness. This element does not have to be present in everyone's life.**

Various practices presented in the guide will also help us regain contact with ourselves, including: mindfulness, practicing acceptance, being "here and now", for some people prayer or meditation, or cultivating high feelings, will be important. When we approach ourselves, our emotions and feelings with mindfulness, we build an inner life, the "battery" of our spiritual energy is charged.



We would especially like to recommend a very simple method that does not require any expenditure and, if used regularly, brings positive results. It's PRACTICING GRATITUDE.

Research shows that people who practice gratitude have lower cortisol levels, which means they are less stressed. Scientists from the University of California analyzed available scientific works showing the relationship between personal predispositions to feel gratitude and mental well-being. Studies involving a total of over 100,000 volunteers showed clear correlations.

The personal tendency to experience feelings of gratitude was moderately or strongly associated with various parameters of well-being, such as life satisfaction, sense of happiness, and an appropriately low level of stress.

How to practice gratitude? Start a gratitude journal and spend a few minutes every day thinking about what you are grateful for today. It can be small things: delicious morning coffee, friendship, good sleep. Look at the list and read it aloud, starting with:



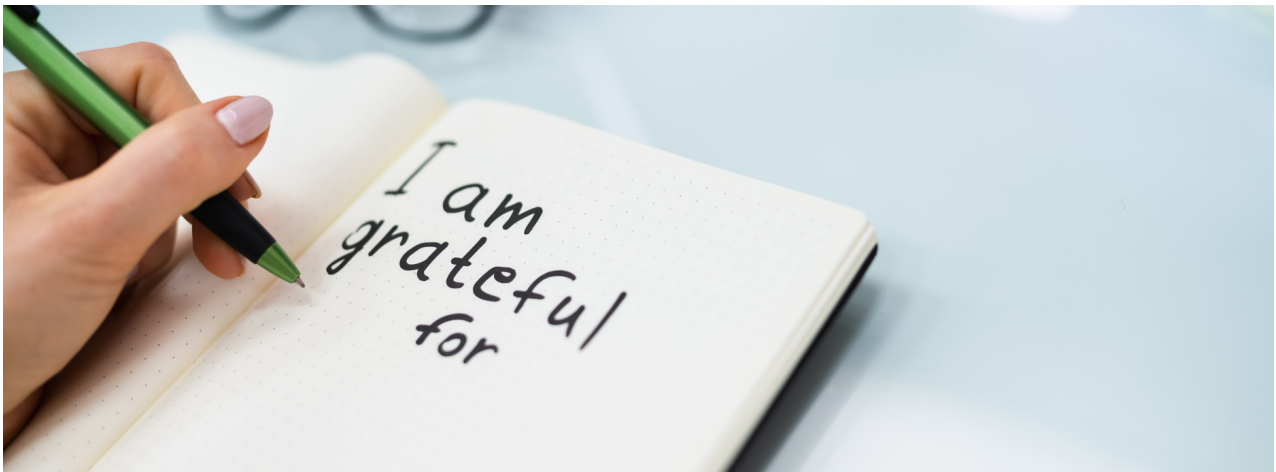
thank you for...

Do the exercise consciously, thinking about how you feel when you express gratitude.

We can also transfer the practice of gratitude to the classroom, to work with students. Let's teach our students to notice the little things for which we can be grateful.

Becoming aware of the above-mentioned areas that make up our "SELF" will allow us to perceive ourselves more consciously. React to losses in individual energy spheres. Let's choose those classes and exercises that resonate with us, that are good for us and practice regularly.

It is worth introducing "battery charging" techniques as habits, taking care of appropriate resources on an ongoing basis and preventing emotional, mental, physical and spiritual exhaustion and, consequently, avoiding professional burnout.



INTUITION AND CARE FOR WELL-BEING

Intuition from Latin is a premonition. We call it all feelings, opinions, knowledge and judgments that appear spontaneously, without any reasoning or inference. And yet, it discovers an important role in our lives. We are often guided by it in our actions.

The teachers' experiences collected as part of the BALDIS project show how important a role it played in dealing with difficult situations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic was a surprise to everyone. Schools had to switch to remote work mode, quickly learning solutions supporting this form of education. Nobody was prepared for this. In conversations with teachers, we rarely heard about comprehensive and systemic support. On the one hand, principals had to fulfill their functions and, on the other hand, they tried to support teachers.



Time for yourself

Tags: 🇧🇪

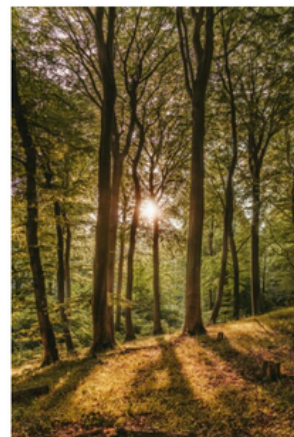
Introduction A school-based special educator who has been working in this position for 5 years. Prior to that she worked in a leisure organisation (free time organisation). [...]



Emotional intelligence

Tags: 🇪🇸

Introduction María José Sánchez has 4 years of experience as a teacher in different schools where she has worked as an interim teacher and as a substitute [...]



Forest my neighbour

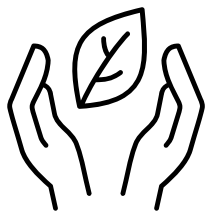
Tags: 🇩🇪

Introduction Teacher of geography, civic knowledge, technology, and nature. 16 years of experience in the profession. Works in a small rural school (100 pupils). Story [...]

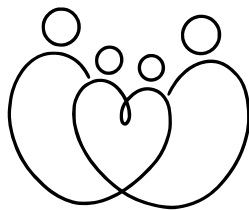
We analyzed a total of 28 cases of teachers from different backgrounds, different ages, and with different professional experience. We asked them about how they coped with the pandemic and how they now cope with emotionally difficult situations, what they do, and what their "safety valves" are.

The information we collected in interviews shows that teachers participating in the project acted intuitively during the pandemic, and at the same time, their ways of relieving the stress associated with remote teaching are highly consistent with practices whose effectiveness has been scientifically confirmed.

The practices indicated by teachers include:



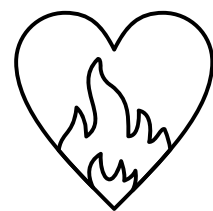
contact with nature



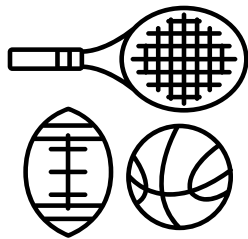
contact with loved ones



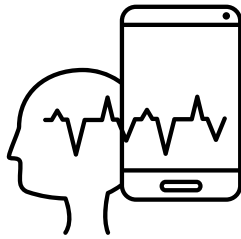
prayer



pursuing passion



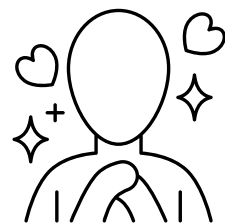
practicing sports



intellectual development



emotional development



practicing gratitude

Our body and mind speak to us in challenging situations. It gives off warning signals. If we are able to notice them, "repair programs" are automatically "implemented". We encourage you to read the stories of teachers from Poland, Spain and the Czech Republic, which may inspire you and allow you to see your own reflection in the experiences of others.



SUMMARY



All materials developed as part of the BALANCE THE DISTANCE project are intended to support the teachers' community in building their own well-being. Well-being that will allow you to avoid burnout or respond appropriately to its emerging signals.

- **A COMPARATIVE REPORT** on the pandemic situation and response showed that no matter what country we live in, we are human. We're similar. Our emotions, feelings and psychophysical condition are subject to similar influences and we reacted and react to challenges in a similar way.
- **BEST PRACTICES** are the experiences of teachers' colleagues gathered in stories. Stories that have great power - they allow you to convey emotions, allow you to find yourself in the experiences of others, learn and act. Storytelling is an age-old method of communication that conveys a specific value. It's worth using.
- **THE SCHOOL'S GUIDE ON HOW TO FIND BALANCE** is a resource developed on the basis of research carried out by project partners to identify the best methods and tools to address work-life balance and mental health issues, in particular burnout. The guide contains tips for primary school teachers in difficult situations who may need emergency psychological help. It can also be used by school managers (e.g. principals) to advise teachers in emotional difficulties.

Visit us!



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Content and editing: Joanna Zwolińska, LIFE-PROJECT

Graphic design: Joanna Zwolińska, LIFE-PROJECT

Polańczyk, 2023

LIFE PROJECT
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**Funded by
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Free publication



PROJECT NO: 2021-1-CZ01-KA220-SCH-000035830