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# MINDSHIFT: NAVIGATING STRESS FOR CLEAR DECISIONS

## Mental Health

Co-funded by the European Union

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## MINDSHIFT: NAVIGATING STRESS FOR CLEAR DECISIONS IS A 90-MINUTE INTERACTIVE SESSION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15–25.

The session supports mental health awareness by helping participants distinguish between everyday stress and serious overload. Through grounding, body awareness, group discussion and career-related scenarios, participants explore how stress affects concentration, critical thinking and decision-making. The session provides practical tools that can be used by teachers, youth workers and counsellors in schools, youth centres and non-formal education settings.

# CONTENTS


1. Session overview 5
2. Learning objectives 6
3. Key messages for participants 7
4. Materials and tools 8
5. Safety note for facilitators 9
90-minute flow 10

## Detailed session plan

Intro and safe space 11
Energizer and teaser: 5-4-3-2-1 grounding 13
Content input: stress or something more? 16
Experiential learning: Body Map 21
Application: career decision scenario 24
Reflection: My Grounding Reset Plan 27
Closing: one sentence checkout 29

## Worksheets

Worksheet 1: Stress vs. Overload 30
Worksheet 2: Body Map 32
Worksheet 3: Career Decision Scenario 34
Critical thinking checklist 35
Worksheet 4: My Grounding Reset Plan 36

## For the facilitator

Suggested homework 38
20 slides / worksheets structure 39
Possible variations 43
Facilitator notes 45
Simple evaluation questions 46

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# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

TARGET GROUP
Young people aged 15-25

GROUP SIZE
16-30 participants

DURATION
90 minutes

LEVEL youth worker, teacher, school counsellor, trainer

USER OF THE SESSION PLAN
Youth worker · Teacher · School counsellor · Trainer

FORMAT · INTERACTIVE SESSION
with grounding, short input, group work, reflection and personal action plan

# 1.SESSION OVERVIEW

## Goal

The session helps young people understand the difference between everyday stress and serious overload. Participants learn to recognise body and mind signals, use a simple grounding technique, and reflect on how stress affects their thinking, choices and future decisions.

## Why this session matters?

Young people often make important decisions while being tired, anxious, overwhelmed or under pressure. These decisions can be about school, relationships, work, study choices, volunteering, career paths or future plans. This session shows that stress is not only "in the head". It also appears in the body, in sleep, concentration, energy, mood and behaviour. When young people notice these signs earlier, they can respond more safely and ask for support before things become too heavy.

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# 2.LEARNING OBJECTIVES

## By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Explain the difference between normal everyday stress and longer-term overload.
2. Name at least 5 physical or mental signs of overload.
3. Practise the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique.
4. Describe how stress can influence critical thinking and decision-making.
5. Reflect on how stress may affect career or study choices.
6. Create a simple personal grounding and support plan.

# 3.KEY MESSAGES FOR PARTICIPANTS

## These are the main ideas that should stay with young people after the session:

- Stress is normal.

  Struggling alone is not necessary.
- The body often notices overload before the mind understands it.
- One stressful day is normal. A few stressful weeks are a signal to seek support.
- When we are overloaded, our thinking can become narrower, faster, more negative or more fearful.
- Grounding does not solve every problem, but it helps the nervous system calm down enough to think more clearly.
- Asking for help is not weakness. It is a smart response to pressure.

# 4. MATERIALS AND TOOLS

## For the facilitator

- projector or screen
- laptop
- speakers, if using video or podcast excerpt
- flipchart or whiteboard
- markers
- sticky notes
- timer
- printed worksheets
- printed scenario cards
- optional: calming background music for individual work

## For participants

- pen
- worksheet: Stress vs. Overload
- worksheet: Body Map
- worksheet: Career Decision Scenario
- worksheet: My Grounding Reset Plan
- sticky notes

## 5. SAFETY NOTE FOR TEACHERS AND YOUTH WORKERS

This session is educational, not therapeutic. Participants should not be asked to share personal traumatic experiences or private mental health struggles.

### The facilitator should say clearly:

*"You only share what feels okay to share. You can always pass. This session is about learning tools, not about exposing personal stories."*

If a young person shares something serious, such as self-harm, abuse, panic, long-term depression or feeling unsafe, the facilitator should follow the school or organisation's safeguarding procedure and connect them with appropriate support.

# 90-minute flow

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0–10 min | Intro / safe space | Welcome and group agreement | Create trust and clarify boundaries |
| 10–20 min | Energizer / teaser | 5-4-3-2-1 grounding | Bring attention to the present moment |
| 20–40 min | Content input | Stress vs. overload | Understand signs and time factor |
| 40–65 min | Experiential learning | Body Map + discussion | Notice how overload appears in the body |
| 65–80 min | Application | Career decision scenario | Connect stress with thinking and choices |
| 80–88 min | Reflection / transfer | My Grounding Reset Plan | Create personal action plan |
| 88–90 min | Closing | One sentence checkout | End with clarity and calm |

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# THANK YOU FOR USING THE MINDSHIFT LESSON PLAN WITH YOUR GROUP!

We would also really appreciate your feedback as the facilitator. Your experience helps us understand what worked well, what could be improved, and how useful the lesson plan was in practice.

**Facilitator / teacher feedback form**

We would also be very grateful if you could share the short participant feedback form with the young people who attended the workshop.

Their feedback helps us understand how the activities worked from their point of view, what they enjoyed, what they found useful, and what we could improve in the future.

**Participant (young person) feedback form**

Both forms are short and take only a few minutes to complete.

**Thank you again for using MindShift and for helping us improve the materials based on real experience from practice.**

# DETAILED SESSION PLAN 0-10 min

## Intro and safe space

Goal: To create a calm, respectful atmosphere and explain the purpose of the session.

## Facilitator says

*"Today we will talk about stress, overload and decision-making. Not because stress is bad, but because it gives us information. We will look at how stress appears in the body, how it affects our thinking, and what we can do when things feel too much."*

*"You do not have to share anything personal. You can always say 'pass'. We are not here to diagnose anyone. We are here to learn how to notice signals and take care of ourselves earlier."*

## Group agreement

Ask participants to suggest 3-4 simple agreements. Write them on flipchart.

Examples:

- We listen without judging.
- We do not force anyone to share.
- We speak from our own experience.
- What is personal stays in the room, unless someone is unsafe.
- We can take a break if needed.

## Materials

Flipchart, markers

## Possible variation

For younger groups, prepare the agreements in advance and ask participants to vote with thumbs up if they agree.

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# ENERGIZER AND TEASER:
# 5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING

**10-20 min**

## Goal

To help participants arrive in the room, calm the nervous system and experience a simple grounding tool.

## Why this activity works

When people are stressed or overloaded, it is often difficult to "just think clearly". Grounding starts with the body and senses. It brings attention back to the present moment.

## Instructions

Ask participants to stand or sit comfortably. Tell them that they do not need to close their eyes.

"We will try a short grounding exercise. It is useful when your mind is busy, when you feel tense, or when everything feels too much.

You do not need to do it perfectly. Just notice what is around you."

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## Guide them slowly:

1. Look around and notice 5 things you can see. Example: a chair, a window, someone's shoes, a pen, a colour.
2. Notice 4 things you can feel. Example: your feet on the floor, clothes on your skin, the chair under you, your hands touching each other.
3. Notice 3 things you can hear. Example: voices, traffic, breathing, sounds in the room.
4. Notice 2 things you can smell. Example: the room, your clothes, coffee, fresh air.If they cannot smell anything, they can simply notice that.
5. Notice 1 thing you can taste. Example: toothpaste, water, gum, or just the inside of the mouth.

Then ask them to take one slow breath in and out.

## Short reflection

Ask:

- What did you notice?
- Was it easy or difficult?
- Did anything change in your body?
- When could this be useful in real life?

## Key message

"When the mind is overloaded, we often need to start with the nervous system, not with the problem itself."

## Possible variation

Participants can do the exercise silently and then write one word about how they feel after it.

# CONTENT INPUT: IS IT JUST STRESS OR SOMETHING MORE?

**20-40 min**

## Goal

To help participants understand the difference between everyday stress and serious overload

## Facilitator explains

Stress is a normal reaction to pressure. It can happen before an exam, a performance, a difficult conversation, a deadline or a big decision. Stress can even be useful in small amounts. It can give us energy and focus. But stress becomes a problem when it is too intense, lasts too long, or starts affecting daily life.

# Simple distinction

## Everyday stress

- Comes and goes
- Connected to a clear situation
- You can recover after rest
- You can still function
- You can talk about it

## Serious overload

- Stays for days or weeks
- Feels constant or hard to explain
- Rest does not really help
- School, work, sleep or relationships are affected
- You feel stuck, alone or unable to cope

## Key concept: time matters

## Facilitator says:

"A stressful day can happen to anyone. A stressful few weeks are different. If stress stays for a long time, affects sleep, body, mood or concentration, it is a sign that support may be needed."

### Physical and mental signs of overload

Show the signs on a slide or infographic.

Body signs:

- tight chest
- headaches
- stomach pain
- tense shoulders or jaw
- fast heartbeat
- tiredness
- bad sleep
- low energy

Emotional signs:

- irritation
- sadness
- fear
- numbness
- feeling overwhelmed
- crying more easily
- feeling tense all the time

Mind signs:

- lack of focus
- overthinking
- negative thoughts
- feeling confused
- difficulty deciding
- feeling like everything is suddenly harder

Behaviour signs:

- avoiding people
- scrolling for hours
- procrastinating
- skipping school or tasks
- eating much more or much less
- reacting strongly to small things
- not doing things that usually help

## CRITICAL THINKING LINK

### Facilitator says:

"When we are overloaded, our brain often tries to protect us. It may choose the fastest answer, the safest answer, or the most familiar answer. But that does not always mean it is the best answer."

## Ask participants:

- Have you ever made a decision just because you were tired?
- What happens to your thinking when you are irritated?
- Is it easier or harder to listen to other opinions when you are stressed?
- Do you check facts carefully when you are overwhelmed, or do you react quickly?

## Key message

"A tense mind often has less space for careful thinking."

## Materials

Slides or infographic, projector.

## Possible variation

Use a short video, max. 3-5 minutes, about stress and the body. After the video, ask participants to write down one thing they recognised.

# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: BODY MAP

## Goal

To help participants recognise where stress and overload show up in the body.

## Activity part A: group body map

Divide participants into groups of 4-5. Give each group a large paper with a simple human outline. Ask them: "Where can stress or overload live in the body?" They can draw, write words, use symbols or arrows.

Examples:

- head: headaches, overthinking, pressure
- eyes: tiredness, crying, screen fatigue
- jaw: clenching, tension
- chest: tightness, fast heartbeat
- stomach: pain, nausea, butterflies
- shoulders: tension
- hands: shaking, sweating
- legs: restlessness
- whole body: exhaustion, heaviness, low energy

## Activity part B: add thoughts and behaviour

After 8-10 minutes, ask groups to add two more layers:

1. What thoughts can appear when someone is overloaded? Examples: “I can’t do this”, “Everything is too much”, “I will fail”, “Nobody understands”.
2. What behaviours can appear? Examples: avoiding, shouting, withdrawing, scrolling, sleeping too much, not sleeping, giving up quickly.

## Group sharing

Each group presents 2-3 things from their map.

## Debrief questions

- Which body signals are easiest to notice?
- Which signals do young people often ignore?
- What signs are visible to others?
- What signs are hidden?
- What can happen if we ignore these signals for too long?
- What is one early warning sign you want to notice sooner?

## Facilitator adds

"The body is not being dramatic. It is giving information. The earlier we notice the signals, the more choices we have."

## Materials

Body Map worksheet or flipchart paper, markers.

## Possible variation

If the group is shy, use pre-made cards with signs of overload and ask them to place the cards on the body outline.

# APPLICATION:
# CAREER DECISION SCENARIO

## Goal

To connect mental well-being with decision-making.

## Scenario

Give participants this scenario:

*"You are choosing between two job offers, study programmes or volunteering opportunities. One option is exciting but challenging. The other feels safe and easier. For the past three weeks, you have had bad sleep, low energy, headaches and difficulty focusing. You feel like everything is suddenly harder."*

## Small group task

In the same groups, participants discuss:

1. How might overload influence this decision?
2. What could the person think or feel?
3. What decision might they make too quickly?
4. What information should they check before deciding?
5. What should they do before making the final choice?

## Possible answers

Participants may notice that the person could:

- choose the easiest option just to escape pressure
- avoid making any decision
- underestimate themselves
- overestimate risks
- ignore important information
- say yes too quickly
- say no because they feel exhausted
- ask everyone else what to do instead of listening to themselves
- focus only on short-term relief

## Critical thinking questions

Give them these questions as a worksheet:

1. Am I deciding from calm or from panic?
2. What facts do I have?
3. What assumptions am I making?
4. What would I think if I had slept well?
5. What advice would I give a friend in the same situation?
6. Do I need more time, more information or more support?
7. Is this decision urgent, or do I only feel pressured?

## Facilitator explains

"Stress can make our world smaller. We may see only danger, failure or pressure. Clear decisions usually need space: enough sleep, enough information, and sometimes another person who helps us think."

## Group sharing

Ask each group to share one risk and one helpful step.

Example:

- Risk: "They choose the easy option because they are exhausted."
- Helpful step: "They sleep, talk to someone, write down facts, and decide later.

## Materials

Career scenario worksheet, pens.

## Possible variation

Use 3 different scenarios:

1. Choosing a university or study programme
2. Choosing between job offers
3. Deciding whether to leave a project, team or volunteering activity

# REFLECTION AND TRANSFER: MY GROUNDING RESET PLAN

## Goal

To help participants create a personal plan they can use when they notice stress or overload.

## Individual worksheet

Give each participant the worksheet My Grounding Reset Plan.

They complete these sentences:

1. My early warning signs are: Example: bad sleep, tension, irritation, no focus, low energy.
2. When I notice these signs, I can first: Example: breathe, drink water, go outside, do 5-4-3-2-1.
3. One thing that usually calms my body is: Example: walking, music, shower, sport, drawing, silence.
4. One person I can talk to is: Example: friend, parent, teacher, youth worker, counsellor.
5. Before making an important decision, I will ask myself: Example: “Am I calm enough to decide now?”
6. If this lasts more than a few weeks, I can: Example: ask for help, talk to a trusted adult, contact a counsellor or doctor.

## Pair sharing

Invite participants to share only one safe part of their plan with a partner.

Make it clear:

“You choose what you want to share. You can also keep it private.”

## Materials

My Grounding Reset Plan worksheet, pens.

## Possible variation

Participants can create the plan as a phone note instead of a worksheet.

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# CLOSING: ONE SENTENCE CHECKOUT

**88-90 min**

## Goal

To close the session calmly and help participants name one takeaway.

Ask participants to complete one sentence:

- Today I realised...
- One sign I want to notice earlier is...
- One thing I can try when I feel overloaded is...
- Before making a big decision, I want to remember...

They can say it aloud, write it on a sticky note, or keep it private.

## Closing sentence from facilitator

*"Stress is normal. Struggling alone is not something you have to do. Your body gives you information, and you can learn to listen earlier."*

# WORKSHEET 1:
# STRESS VS. OVERLOAD

## Everyday stress

### Stress can be normal when:

- it is connected to a clear situation
- it comes and goes
- you can rest and recover
- you can still do everyday things
- you can talk about it

### Examples:

- stress before an exam
- nervousness before a presentation
- pressure before a deadline
- conflict with a friend
- busy week

## Serious overload

### It may be overload when:

- it lasts for many days or weeks
- sleep, focus or energy are affected
- the body feels tense or painful
- everything feels harder than usual
- you feel alone, stuck or unable to cope
- rest does not really help

### Examples:

- bad sleep for several weeks
- constant tension
- avoiding everything
- feeling exhausted all the time
- not being able to focus
- feeling overwhelmed by small tasks

## Reflection

What signs of stress do young people often ignore? What signs should be taken seriously? When is it important to ask for help?

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# WORKSHEET 2: BODY MAP

Draw or mark where stress can appear in the body.

## Body signs

Where can these signs appear?

- tight chest
- headache
- stomach pain
- tiredness
- tense shoulders
- fast heartbeat
- shaking
- low energy
- bad sleep
- jaw tension

## Thoughts

What thoughts can appear when someone is overloaded?

Examples:

- “I can’t do this.”
- “Everything is too much.”
- “I will fail.”
- “I have no choice.”
- “I just want to disappear from everything.”

## Behaviour

What can people do when they are overloaded?

Examples:

- avoid people
- procrastinate
- scroll for hours
- stop replying
- get angry quickly
- sleep badly
- give up quickly

## Reflection

What is one early warning sign you want to notice sooner?

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# WORKSHEET 3: CAREER DECISION SCENARIO

## Scenario

You are choosing between two job offers, study programmes or volunteering opportunities.

One option is exciting but challenging.

The other option feels safe and easier.

For the past three weeks, you have had bad sleep, low energy, headaches and difficulty focusing. You feel like everything is suddenly harder.

## Questions

1. How might stress affect this decision?
2. What could this person be afraid of?
3. What option might feel attractive only because they are exhausted?
4. What facts should they check before deciding?
5. Who could they talk to?
6. What should they do before making the final choice?

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# CRITICAL THINKING CHECKLIST

Before a big decision, ask yourself:

1. Am I deciding from calm or from panic?

2. What facts do I have?

3. What assumptions am I making?

4. What would I think if I had slept well?

5. What advice would I give a friend in the same situation?

6. Do I need more time, more information or more support?

7. Is this decision urgent, or do I only feel pressured?

# WORKSHEET 4:
# MY GROUNDING RESET PLAN

## My early warning signs

I know I may be overloaded when I notice:

1.
2.
3.

## My first small reset

When I notice these signs, I can first:

1.
2.
3.

## My body-calming tools

Things that help my body calm down:

-
-
-

## People I can talk to

People or places where I can ask for support:

- 
- 
- 

## Before a big decision

Before I make an important decision, I want to ask myself:

“Am I calm enough to decide now?”

Another question I want to remember:

- 

## If it lasts longer

If I feel overloaded for more than a few weeks, I can:

- talk to
- contact
- ask for help from

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# SUGGESTED HOMEWORK

## Option 1: podcast reflection

Listen to a short podcast episode about stress, the nervous system or mental health.

After listening, answer:

1. What is one thing you learned?
2. What is one thing you recognised from your own life?
3. What is one tool you could try?

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## 20 SLIDES / WORKSHEETS STRUCTURE

### Slides 1–5: intro and theory

Slide 1: title

MindShift: Navigating stress for clear decisions

Slide 2: session goals

Today we will learn how to notice stress, understand overload, practise grounding and connect mental well-being with decisions.

Slide 3: group agreement

Respect, voluntary sharing, no judging, confidentiality, ask for help if needed.

Slide 4: stress is normal

Stress is a natural reaction to pressure. It can help us prepare, focus and respond.

Slide 5: when stress becomes overload

Stress becomes overload when it lasts too long, feels too intense or affects daily life.

## Slides 6–10: signs of overload

Slide 6: time matters

One stressful day is normal. A few stressful weeks are a signal.

Slide 7: body signs

Tight chest, headaches, stomach pain, tiredness, bad sleep, low energy.

Slide 8: mind signs

Lack of focus, overthinking, confusion, negative thoughts, difficulty deciding.

Slide 9: emotional signs

Irritation, sadness, fear, numbness, feeling tense, feeling overwhelmed.

Slide 10: behaviour signs

Avoiding people, procrastinating, scrolling, withdrawing, reacting strongly.

## Slides 11–15: grounding and body awareness

Slide 11: why grounding helps

When the mind is overloaded, we start with the body.

Slide 12: 5-4-3-2-1 grounding

5 see, 4 feel, 3 hear, 2 smell, 1 taste.

Slide 13: body map instructions

Where does stress show up in the body?

Slide 14: body map worksheet

Human outline with space for body signs, thoughts and behaviours.

Slide 15: key message

Your body is not being dramatic. It is giving you information.

## Slides 16–20: application and transfer

Slide 16: stress and critical thinking

Overload can make thinking faster, narrower and more negative.

Slide 17: career decision scenario

Choosing between two options while tired, tense and unfocused.

Slide 18: decision checklist

Facts, assumptions, pressure, timing, support, body state.

Slide 19: my grounding reset plan

Early signs, calming tools, support people, next steps.

Slide 20: closing reflection

One sign I will notice earlier. One tool I will try.

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# POSSIBLE VARIATIONS

## For groups of 30+

Use smaller groups of 5-6 and reduce full-group sharing. Ask each group to share only one insight. You can also use a "gallery walk": groups put their Body Maps on the wall, and participants walk around silently to read them.

## For a quieter group

Use more writing and less speaking. Participants can answer on sticky notes instead of sharing aloud.

## For younger participants, ages 15–17

Use simpler language and more examples from school life:

- exams
- friendships
- family pressure
- social media
- choosing school subjects
- fear of disappointing others

## For older participants, ages 20–25

Use examples connected to:

- job interviews
- university pressure
- financial stress
- moving away from home
- career uncertainty
- burnout

## For a 45-minute version

Use only:

1. 5-4-3-2-1 grounding
2. short input on stress vs. overload
3. Body Map
4. one personal action step

Skip the career scenario or give it as homework.

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# FACILITATOR NOTES

## What to avoid

Avoid saying:

- “Just relax.”
- “Other people have it worse.”
- “You are overthinking.”
- “You should be stronger.”
- “Everyone is stressed, deal with it.”

## What to say instead

Use:

- “That sounds heavy.”
- “You do not have to handle it alone.”
- “What support would feel safe?”
- “What is one small step now?”
- “Your body may be telling you that something needs attention.”
- “Let’s slow down before deciding.”

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# SIMPLE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

At the end, participants can answer anonymously:

1. I understand the difference between stress and overload.

1 2 3 4 5

2. I can name signs of overload in the body.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I know at least one grounding technique.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I understand how stress can affect decisions.

1 2 3 4 5

5. One thing I take from this session is:

.....

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# THANK YOU FOR USING THE MINDSHIFT LESSON PLAN WITH YOUR GROUP!

We would also really appreciate your feedback as the facilitator. Your experience helps us understand what worked well, what could be improved, and how useful the lesson plan was in practice.

**Facilitator / teacher feedback form**

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**Thank you again for using MindShift and for helping us improve the materials based on real experience from practice.**