



CHILL PILL



PRACTITIONER HANDBOOK

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PRACTITIONER HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION

In the current European context, young people are navigating an increasingly complex social and digital world. The rise of social media, economic uncertainty, and the lingering effects of global health crises have contributed to a significant increase in stress, anxiety, and social isolation among youth. Traditionally, substance use prevention has relied on “top-down” educational models that focus on the dangers of drugs. However, research and field experience within the Chill Pill project suggest that a more effective approach is to focus on protective factors: resilience, emotional intelligence, and peer support.



The *Chill Pill: Drug Awareness & Alternative Pathways* project was designed to address these challenges by equipping youth workers and young people with a Well-being Coaching methodology. This handbook is the culmination of 24 months of development, testing, and feedback across seven partner countries. It serves as a bridge between the resources developed within the project and your daily practice.

The project ran from 2025 to early 2027 and brought together a consortium of seven partner organisations: AKLUB Centrum vzdělávání a poradenství (Czech Republic), Future in Perspective Limited [FIPL] (Ireland), Asociacion Regional Para la Inclusión Social [ARPIS] (Spain), Youth Against Drugs [YAD] (Finland), Skills Elevation FHB (Germany), KMOP Education and Innovation Hub (Greece), and Acumen Training (Poland).

This document is intended for external stakeholders who were not formally involved in the project's lifecycle. Whether you are a school principal, a VET tutor, a manager of a sports club, or a youth worker in a community centre, this guide explains how to adapt the Chill Pill resources to your unique context. Our goal is to ensure that the project's results, specifically the Peer Coaching Programme and the Digital Content Creation Toolkit, are sustainable. This handbook provides the "pedagogical glue" that holds these resources together, offering a roadmap for implementation that avoids common pitfalls and maximises impact.

If you are a youth practitioner, teacher, a youth worker, a VET tutor, or a student union representative, this handbook is for you. It is designed to help you take the Chill Pill resources and adapt them to your specific environment, without having to "reinvent the wheel." This is not a theoretical manual. Every recommendation inside was tested and validated by youth workers and young people across seven countries (Finland, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Germany, Spain, and the Czech Republic).

To access all of our resources, visit the project website: <https://chillpillproject.eu/>

HANDBOOK DEVELOPMENT

This Chill Pill Practitioner Handbook is informed by the practical experiences, reflections, and feedback gathered during the implementation of the Chill Pill project across all partner countries. Its content draws directly from national piloting activities, focus groups with youth workers, and structured reflection processes carried out during the project lifecycle. Youth workers, educators, and trainers who delivered the Chill Pill approach in diverse settings contributed insights on what worked well, what required adaptation, and what challenges emerged in real-life delivery. These perspectives shaped the recommendations presented throughout this handbook. Rather than offering a theoretical model, this handbook captures lessons learned from practice. Its purpose is to support external practitioners to adapt and implement the Chill Pill methodology safely, inclusively, and sustainably, while avoiding common pitfalls identified during piloting.



OUR METHODOLOGY

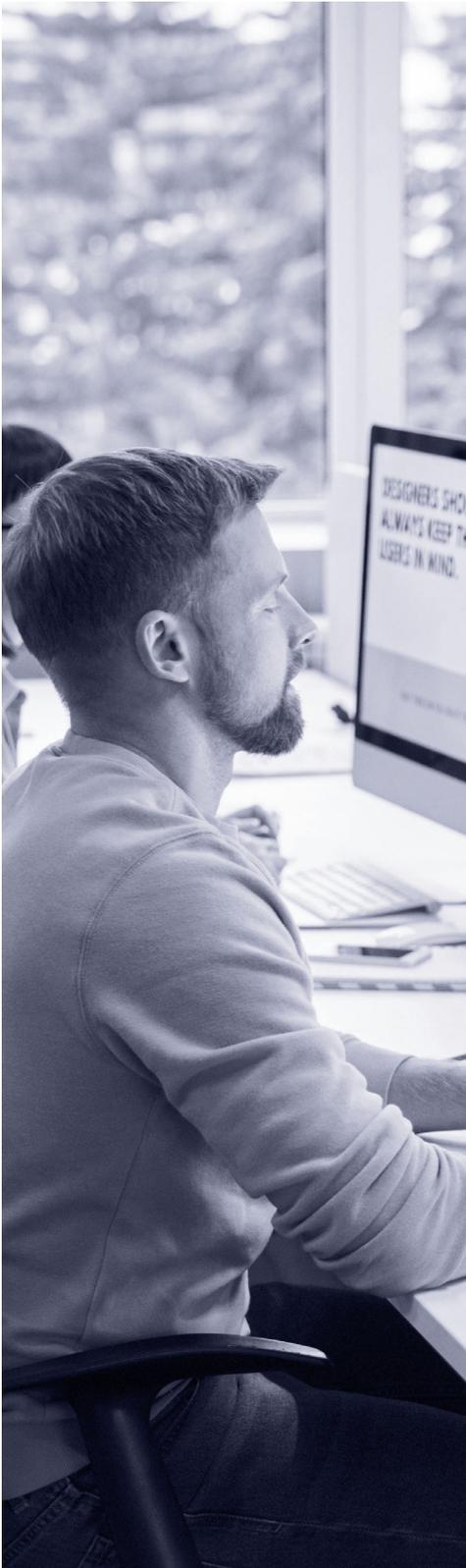
At the heart of Chill Pill is a shift in the traditional power dynamic of youth work. Coaching is distinct from teaching or counselling. While a teacher provides information and a counsellor provides advice, a coach provides empowerment. The Chill Pill methodology is based on the belief that young people possess the internal resources to navigate their challenges; they simply need the structured support to unlock them. The coaching mindset involves:

- **Neutrality:** The coach does not judge or direct.
- **Curiosity:** Using open-ended questions to encourage self-reflection.
- **Action-orientation:** Moving from “What is wrong?” to “What is the first step toward feeling better?”

CORE PRINCIPLES FOR PRACTITIONERS

The Chill Pill approach is guided by a set of core principles that underpin all activities, tools, and recommendations presented in this handbook. These principles should inform decision-making at every stage of implementation and can be adapted to suit different organisational and cultural contexts.

- **Youth-centred Practice**
Young people are active participants rather than passive recipients. Their experiences, perspectives, and boundaries must shape how activities are delivered.
- **Non-directive Support**
Practitioners facilitate reflection and empowerment rather than providing solutions. The focus is on listening, asking open questions, and supporting agency.
- **Safeguarding and Ethical Responsibility**
Well-being coaching has clear limits. Practitioners remain responsible for recognising risk, protecting young people, and activating safeguarding procedures when necessary.
- **Inclusion and Accessibility**
Activities must be adaptable to different learning needs, communication styles, and cultural backgrounds to ensure meaningful participation for all young people.
- **Sustainability through Integration**
The Chill Pill approach is most effective when embedded into existing structures and routines rather than delivered as a stand-alone intervention.



IMPLEMENTATION

To successfully scale the Chill Pill approach, three pillars must be integrated into your organisational culture:

- **Pillar 1: The Internalised Mindset**
Before youth can support youth, the professionals must be upskilled. This pillar focuses on training youth workers in active listening, empathy, and resilience. German youth workers noted that the practitioner must “stop fixing and start listening.”
- **Pillar 2: Peer-led Intervention**
The project’s core innovation is training young people to be Well-being Peer Coaches. This recognises that young people are more likely to share their struggles with a friend than an adult. By providing them with a structured framework, we turn natural peer influence into a professionalised support system.
- **Pillar 3: Creative Digital Expression**
Digital media is the native language of today’s youth. By integrating the Digital Content Creation Toolkit, we allow young people to “externalise” their emotions. Making a film about stress is, in itself, a therapeutic act that builds critical thinking and self-awareness.



LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

This section draws on intensive research conducted with over 40 youth work professionals across Europe. Insights emerged consistently through national focus groups and piloting activities in all partner countries and form the foundation of the recommendations presented in this handbook. The recommendations below are informed by lessons learned during the piloting and testing of the Chill Pill approach. They highlight common challenges, effective adaptations, and key ethical considerations identified by youth workers and educators delivering the programme in real-world settings. These recommendations are intended to support practitioners in adapting and applying the Chill Pill methodology within their own contexts, while maintaining safety, inclusivity, and meaningful impact.

Each subsection below presents a key finding from project implementation, followed by practical recommendations and considerations to support safe and effective adaptation in different contexts.

PREPARING PRACTITIONERS BEFORE DELIVERY

Across all partner countries, practitioners highlighted that the effectiveness of the Chill Pill approach depended heavily on their own readiness and mindset.

- **Finding:** Practitioners found that prior experience affected their integration strategy. Where tools were introduced without prior reflection on coaching principles, sessions were more likely to revert to directive or instructional styles.
- **Recommendation:** Practitioners should engage with the well-being coaching mindset before delivering Chill Pill activities. This includes developing skills in active listening, emotional awareness, and reflective facilitation.
- **Practice Consideration:** Introducing tools without this preparation risks reinforcing traditional power dynamics and reducing the effectiveness of peer-led approaches.

OVERCOMING THE “TEXT-HEAVY” BARRIER

A universal finding from our focus groups in Finland, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Ireland was that traditional, text-dense educational materials fail in a youth work setting.

- **Finding:** Practitioners reported that long theoretical modules are intimidating for youth, especially those with shorter attention spans or lower literacy levels. The “text-heavy” barrier is not just about reading level; it is about the power dynamic of the session. Dense text creates a hierarchy where the facilitator is the “expert”, and the youth is the “learner.”
- **Recommendation:** Move toward a visual-first delivery. Use the provided PowerPoints as skeletons and fill the sessions with role-play and discussion.
- **Practice Consideration:** Practitioners should internalise key messages in advance and deliver them through conversation and interaction rather than reading directly from materials.

THE NEED FOR NEURO-INCLUSIVE DESIGN

The Finnish, Spanish and Irish partners highlighted a critical gap: educational materials are often designed for “neurotypical” learners.

- **Finding:** Youth with ADHD, autism, or learning disabilities may find the structured coaching dialogues difficult to follow.
- **Recommendation:** Adapt the pacing. Instead of a 60-minute session, use “Micro-Activities” of 15 minutes. Provide visual “Check-in Cards” to help youth identify emotions without needing to find the words immediately.
- **Practice Consideration:** Flexibility should be treated as standard practice rather than an adaptation, allowing young people to participate through movement, visual expression, or creative media where appropriate.

THE “RED LINE” AND SAFEGUARDING

In Germany and Poland, participants expressed concern about the limits of peer support.

- **Finding:** There is a specific risk of “compassion fatigue” or “secondary trauma” for the peer coach if they feel responsible for a crisis beyond their control. Without a “red line,” the coach’s own well-being, the very thing the project seeks to protect, is at risk.
- **Recommendation:** The Handbook must include a clear “Escalation Protocol.” Coaching is for well-being; clinical intervention is for crisis.
- **Practice Consideration:** Practitioners should communicate the purpose and limits of peer support clearly from the outset and ensure that escalation pathways are understood by all participants.

Together, these findings and recommendations informed the design and refinement of the training packages and resources described in the following sections.

UPSKILLING TRAINING PACKAGE FOR YOUTH-WORKERS

THE SCENARIOS TOOLKIT FOR YOUTH WORKERS ”

This is a hands-on resource designed to support experiential learning through role-plays, simulations, and guided activities. It helps youth workers practise and model peer-led well-being coaching in a safe and structured environment before applying it with young people.

The [toolkit](#) includes eight realistic scenarios and activity outlines, each focusing on a key theme relevant to young people’s everyday experiences:

1. Exploring values
2. Goal setting
3. Active listening
4. Coping with stress
5. Mindfulness meditation
6. Dealing with negative self-talk
7. Exploring emotions
8. Building self-esteem

Each scenario is designed to spark reflection, encourage discussion, and strengthen facilitation skills. The activities help youth workers understand group dynamics, practise supportive communication, and guide young people without judgement or advice-giving. The toolkit can be used in training sessions, team meetings, or professional development workshops, and can be adapted to different levels of experience.



UPSKILLING PROGRAMME FOR YOUTH WORKERS

This Programme is a structured training pathway that equips professionals with the knowledge, mindset, and practical skills needed to support peer-led well-being coaching initiatives. The programme focuses not only on techniques, but also on personal development, self-awareness, and resilience in youth work practice.

The programme is organised into three modules, each divided into two units. Every unit is delivered as a 4-hour face-to-face workshop, allowing time for theory, reflection, and practical exercises.



Module 1: Introduction to Well-being Coaching for Youth Workers

This module introduces the foundations of well-being coaching and its relevance in youth work.

- Unit 1: Understanding the Principles of Well-being Coaching explores key concepts of well-being, coaching, and the role of the youth worker as a facilitator rather than an expert.
- Unit 2: Developing a Coaching Mindset among Young People focuses on helping youth workers foster a growth-oriented mindset, using core coaching skills such as asking powerful questions and providing constructive feedback.

Module 2: Communication and Empathy Skills

This module strengthens interpersonal skills essential for supportive youth work.

- Unit 1: Active Listening and Effective Communication focuses on improving listening skills and clear, respectful communication.
- Unit 2: Empathy and Building Rapport supports youth workers in developing trust-based relationships and responding sensitively to young people's needs and experiences.

Module 3: Developing Personal Resilience

This module addresses the well-being of youth workers themselves, recognising resilience as a key professional competency.

- Unit 1: Understanding Resilience and its Importance introduces resilience and its role in both personal well-being and sustainable youth work practice.
- Unit 2: Building Resilience through Mindfulness and Positive Psychology explores mindfulness and positive psychology techniques and how they can be integrated into daily routines and professional practice.

Together, the Scenarios Toolkit and the Upskilling Programme provide youth workers with practical tools, structured learning, and reflective space to confidently support young people in peer-led well-being coaching, contributing to healthier, more resilient communities and effective drug prevention efforts.

PEER-LED WELL-BEING COACHING PROGRAMME

The [Peer-led Well-being Coaching Programme](#) is a core educational resource of the CHILL PILL project, designed to empower young people to support one another in maintaining mental well-being and reducing the risk of drug use. Rather than focusing on fear-based prevention or clinical approaches, the programme promotes well-being as a protective factor and positions young people as active agents of change within their peer groups and communities.

This resource is intended for peer educators, youth workers, and young people who want to develop practical skills in emotional awareness, communication, and supportive peer interaction. It can be used in structured workshop settings, youth centres, schools, or informal learning environments, and is flexible enough to be adapted to different group sizes, cultural contexts, and experience levels.

The programme is organised into four thematic modules, each addressing a key area of peer-led well-being coaching:

- Module 1: Empowering Young People: Introduction to Well-being Coaching
- Module 2: Communication and Active Listening Skills
- Module 3: Understanding the concept of well-being and its importance in preventing substance use
- Module 4: Coping Strategies

Together, the modules present eight interactive workshop lesson plans, with each module containing two 3-hour sessions designed for practical, participatory learning. In addition, every module includes:

- A short introductory video to present the topic in an accessible and engaging way,
- Self-directed learning resources that allow participants to deepen reflection and continue learning independently.

The Peer-led Well-being Coaching Programme emphasises experiential learning through discussions, role-plays, group activities, and reflection. It encourages young people to listen without judgement, support rather than “fix,” and recognise the limits of their role as peer coaches. By strengthening self-awareness, empathy, and coping skills, the programme helps young people build healthier responses to stress and create supportive peer environments that contribute to long-term well-being and drug prevention.



TRAINING THE PEER COACHES

When implementing this with young people, the focus is on relatability. Use the “Ava’s Story” scenario, a realistic depiction of a young person struggling with social pressure and substance use, to spark discussion.

- **Peer recruitment:** Look for “natural influencers”; those youth who already have the trust of their peers.
- **Role-play is mandatory:** Our focus groups confirmed that youth only “learn” coaching by doing it. Sessions should be 20% theory and 80% practice.

HOW TO MAKE MOVIES WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Our [Digital Content Creation Toolkit](#) is a practical, youth-centred resource designed to support young people in exploring well-being, mental health, and drug prevention through creative video-making. It combines emotional reflection with accessible digital skills, guiding participants step by step from idea development to filming and basic editing. The toolkit prioritises self-expression, autonomy, and learning through doing, rather than technical perfection. By using storytelling, visual language, and creative experimentation, it provides young people with a safe and engaging way to reflect on their experiences, values, and coping strategies, while developing media literacy and confidence in sharing meaningful messages.

This toolkit consists of 12 topics designed to help youth create short-form video content:

1. Writing and developing a compelling script
2. Basic camera techniques and composition
3. Lighting and sound design for film
4. Creating a storyboard and shot list
5. Acting and directing techniques for film
6. Editing techniques and software basics
7. Colour grading and post-production effects
8. Developing a film marketing plan and social media strategy
9. Guidelines for safe social media sharing
10. How to deal with negative feedback and online criticism
11. Promoting mental health and well-being in film
12. Exploring the benefits of peer-to-peer support and coaching

WHY FILMING?

Filming is a powerful educational and well-being tool because it allows young people to express complex emotions, experiences, and ideas in a way that feels safer and more indirect than traditional verbal sharing. The camera can act as a “protective mask”: it creates distance between the young person and the topic, making it easier to explore sensitive issues such as stress, mental health, peer pressure, or drug use without feeling exposed or judged.

For many young people, especially those who struggle to articulate feelings verbally, visual storytelling offers an alternative language. Talking about a character, a scene, or a fictional situation often feels less threatening than talking directly about oneself, while still enabling deep reflection and emotional processing. Filming also supports autonomy and agency; young people decide what to show, how to show it, and how much of themselves they want to reveal. In the context of drug prevention and well-being, filmmaking shifts the focus away from moralising or fear-based messages and towards self-reflection, creativity, and empowerment. It allows young people to explore their realities, coping strategies, and values in a way that feels relevant and authentic to their lived experience.

THE PROCESS

The Digital Content Creation Toolkit guides young people through a structured yet flexible creative process, covering 12 topics that range from writing and technical skills to marketing. The aim is not to produce a polished or professional film, but to support a meaningful learning journey.

The process typically includes:

1. Idea development and reflection – identifying a topic, message, or feeling to explore
2. Planning and scripting – deciding how the story will be told (through images, voice, text, or sound)
3. Filming – experimenting with locations, camera angles, light, and movement
4. Editing and post-production – shaping the final message through cuts, subtitles, sound, or music

Throughout the process, young people are encouraged to reflect on their choices and the emotions behind them. Youth workers act as facilitators rather than directors, offering guidance, technical support, and a safe framework while leaving creative control in the hands of participants.

This approach values process over product. Learning happens not only through the final video, but through planning, collaboration, problem-solving, and self-reflection along the way.



SUGGESTED TOPICS

During the Chill Pill project implementation, young people from all partner countries made short movies on these topics:

- Sharing personal stories of how well-being coaching has helped individuals to avoid drug use and maintain their well-being.
- Demonstrating different types of well-being coaching strategies, such as mindfulness exercises, physical activity, or journaling.
- Highlighting the benefits of engaging in peer support activities for maintaining well-being and preventing drug use.
- Discussing the negative effects of drug use on mental, physical, and emotional well-being.
- Sharing tips and strategies for resisting peer pressure to engage in drug use and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
- Encouraging young people to reflect on their personal values and goals related to their well-being and drug use prevention.
- Sharing information about local resources and support services for young people struggling with drug use or related issues.

PRINCIPLES TO FOLLOW

When working with the video topics listed above, it is important to create a safe, flexible, and youth-led environment. The following principles can help ensure a positive and empowering experience:

- Choice and comfort come first: Allow young people to choose a topic they feel comfortable with. Participation should never involve pressure to disclose personal experiences.
- No obligation to appear on camera: Young people do not need to act in their own videos. They may choose to film from a point-of-view perspective, use voice-over narration, text, or subtitles instead.
- Encourage creative freedom: Participants can use animation, drawings, symbols, objects, music, or abstract visuals to express their ideas. Creativity can often communicate emotions more effectively than direct explanation.
- Respect personal boundaries: Make it clear that sharing personal stories is optional. Fictional characters, metaphors, or imagined scenarios are equally valid approaches.
- Focus on authenticity, not perfection: The goal is not technical excellence, but honest reflection and learning. Simple tools and basic editing are more than sufficient.
- Support, don't control: Youth workers should guide the process, not dictate content. Asking open questions and encouraging reflection is more valuable than giving instructions.
- Create space for reflection: After the videos are completed, offer opportunities to reflect individually or in groups on what was learned, how the process felt, and what surprised participants.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION: ORGANISATIONAL READINESS AND SAFE SPACES

The successful implementation of the Chill Pill programme begins long before the first session with young people. It requires a fundamental shift in the organisational environment. Practitioners must first conduct an internal audit of their “Safe Space” capabilities. A safe space in well-being coaching is not merely a physical location, although having a quiet, comfortable room with non-traditional seating (such as beanbags or floor cushions) is highly beneficial. More importantly, a safe space is a psychological contract. It is an environment where the power dynamics between adult and youth are flattened, and where confidentiality is the cornerstone of every interaction.

Before launching, organisations must ensure that all staff members, not just those directly involved in the coaching, understand the project’s ethos. This prevents a “culture clash” where a young person feels empowered in a coaching session but then faces a rigid, disciplinary atmosphere in the hallway. Preparation also involves mapping out local referral pathways. As identified by our Czech, German and Polish partners, a practitioner cannot feel confident unless they know exactly who to call if a situation escalates. This foundation-building phase should take at least two to three weeks of internal discussion, training via the peer-led modules, and environmental setup.

THE FIVE-WEEK IMPLEMENTATION CYCLE

Once the organisational foundation is laid, the implementation follows a structured but flexible five-week cycle.

1. Week One is dedicated to “Trust and Transparency.” During this week, youth workers should engage in group-building activities that have nothing to do with coaching or drugs. The goal is to establish rapport and explain the “Peer Coaching” concept without using overly academic language.

2. Week Two introduces the “Coaching Mindset” using the WP2 workshop materials. This is where practitioners use role-play scenarios to spark debates about empathy and resilience. It is crucial here to allow the young people to lead the conversation; the practitioner acts only as a “guardrail” to keep the discussion safe.
3. Week Three shifts the focus to active skill-building. Peer coaches begin practicing micro-coaching sessions with one another under the supervision of the youth worker.
4. Week Four is the “Creative Pivot,” where the Digital Content Creation Toolkit is introduced. Young people start brainstorming how to turn their well-being reflections into short-form videos.
5. Finally, Week Five serves as the “Reflection and Celebration” phase. Whether through a “Film Premiere” of their digital content or a formal graduation circle, this week is about validating the journey the young people have taken. This structured cycle ensures that the program feels like a progressive journey rather than a series of disconnected workshops.



ADAPTING CHILL PILL RESOURCES FOR DIVERSE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

FORMAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL CONTEXTS

In schools and VET (Vocational Education and Training) centres, the primary challenge is the “Curriculum Constraint.” Teachers often feel they do not have the luxury of time to run full coaching cycles. To adapt Chill Pill here, the programme must be “modularised.” Instead of a standalone programme, “Emotional Check-in Circles” can be integrated into the first ten minutes of a homeroom or advisory period. This routine creates a “mental transition” from the stresses of home or the playground into the learning environment.

Furthermore, the Digital Content Creation Toolkit can be embedded into Art, Media, or ICT curricula. By doing this, well-being isn’t seen as an “extra” task, but as the subject matter for their academic work. In Ireland, focus groups noted that for younger students (ages 8–11), the language must be stripped of its technicality. Schools should focus on “The Well-being Jar” or “Creative Aids,” using visual journaling rather than text-heavy reflection. The key for formal education is to make Chill Pill “invisible” but omnipresent, a set of tools that are used during breaks, in the gym, or within the digital arts lab.

INFORMAL YOUTH WORK SETTINGS OR SPORTS CLUBS

In sports clubs or extracurricular organisations, the language of “coaching” is already familiar, but it is usually associated with physical performance. The practitioner’s task here is to bridge the gap between “Physical Coaching” and “Well-being Coaching.” We recommend using the concept of the “Performance Mindset.” Just as an athlete trains their muscles to handle the stress of a match, they must train their mind to handle the stress of social pressure and personal challenges.

In these informal settings, the “Market of Values” (a best practice from Finland) is particularly effective because it is active and tactile. It allows youth workers to engage young people who might otherwise find “sitting and talking” to be boring or intimidating. For vocational centres, the focus should shift toward “Workplace Resilience.” Coaching scenarios can be adapted to reflect the stresses of an internship or a first job, making the well-being tools feel like professional assets. By framing Chill Pill as “Mental Fitness,” practitioners can overcome the stigma that often surrounds mental health in competitive or traditionally “tough” environments.

INCLUSIVITY, NEURODIVERSITY AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

PEDAGOGICAL ADAPTATIONS FOR NEURODIVERGENT LEARNERS

A critical takeaway from our Finnish and Irish partners was that the “standard” coaching model often presumes a neurotypical learner who can sit still, maintain eye contact, and process complex verbal instructions. To make the Chill Pill handbook truly sustainable, it must include an “Inclusivity Framework.” For youth with ADHD or Autism, text-heavy slides and long, silent reflection periods can be anxiety-inducing rather than helpful.

Practitioners are encouraged to use “Tactile Facilitation.” This means providing “fidget tools,” allowing for “movement breaks” during coaching dialogues, and utilising visual “Emotion Cards” that allow a young person to point to a feeling rather than having to name it out loud. Furthermore, the Digital Toolkit is a powerful tool for neurodivergent youth, as it allows them to communicate through images, lighting, and sound, often a much more comfortable medium for those who struggle with traditional social communication. The goal is to ensure that the “Chill Pill” approach isn’t a rigid box that youth must fit into, but a flexible resource that expands to meet their sensory and cognitive needs.

SUPPORTING MIGRANT YOUTH AND BREAKING CULTURAL STIGMA

In countries such as Germany and Poland, youth workers are frequently supporting newcomers and migrant populations who may come from cultures where mental health is a taboo subject. In these cases, a direct coaching approach can be met with resistance or silence. Practitioners should instead use “Metaphorical Coaching.” Instead of asking a young person to “disclose their trauma,” use the Digital Toolkit to explore themes of “Home,” “Journey,” or “Strength.”

Using the “Weather Report” method (asking a youth if their mind feels like a “storm” or “clear skies”) provides a safe, low-stakes way to check in without the pressure of a clinical interview. Language barriers can also be mitigated through the “Peer-to-Peer” model; if a young person can coach a peer in their native language using the Chill Pill framework, the impact is far greater than an adult-led session through a translator. Inclusivity means recognising that well-being looks different in every culture, and the practitioner’s role is to act as a “cultural bridge,” ensuring the tools are adapted to the specific lived realities of the youth they serve.

COMMON MISTAKES AND CRISIS INTERVENTION

RECOGNISING AND AVOIDING COMMON PITFALLS

During the piloting phase of the Chill Pill project, several recurring challenges emerged across different countries and settings. These challenges were not linked to a lack of commitment or competence, but rather to ingrained habits, structural constraints, and misunderstandings of the coaching approach. Recognising these pitfalls early allows practitioners to adjust their practice and protect both young people and peer coaches from unintended harm.

Through our pilot phases, several common mistakes were identified that can undermine the effectiveness of the Chill Pill approach. One major error is “The Fixer Trap.” Many youth workers enter the profession because they want to help, but in coaching, “helping” can accidentally become “telling.” When a practitioner provides the solution for the young person, they rob that youth of the opportunity to build their own resilience. Another common mistake is “Over-Professionalisation.” If the sessions feel too much like school or a doctor’s appointment, young people will disengage. The environment must remain informal and youth-led.

Additionally, practitioners often struggle with “Text Dependency,” as highlighted in multiple focus groups. This involves reading long scenarios from a manual, which can effectively kill the energy of the group. The handbook’s content should be internalised by the practitioner and then delivered through conversation, storytelling, and digital creation. Avoiding these pitfalls requires constant self-reflection and a willingness to let the young people “fail” safely as they learn to coach one another.

THE “RED LINE”: WHEN TO TRANSITION TO CRISIS INTERVENTION

The most significant responsibility of a Chill Pill practitioner is knowing when the “Well-being Coaching” ends and “Crisis Intervention” begins. Coaching is designed for the “Green Zone”, handling daily stressors, building confidence, and exploring healthy life choices. However, practitioners must be trained to recognise the “Red Flags” that indicate a young person has moved into a crisis state. These include:

- Explicit mentions of self-harm or suicidal ideation.
- Disclosures of ongoing physical or sexual abuse.
- Signs of severe, acute substance withdrawal or overdose.
- A sudden, total withdrawal from social interaction or a complete neglect of personal hygiene.

THE TRANSITION PROTOCOL

When a “Red Flag” is identified, the non-directive, coaching approach must immediately stop. The practitioner moves from a “Facilitator” role to a “Director” role. At this point, you are no longer asking “What do you think you should do?”; you are stating, “I am concerned for your safety, and we are going to get you professional help now.” This transition requires a “Warm Handover”, staying with the young person, explaining exactly who you are calling, and ensuring they feel supported but safe. The Handbook serves to remind all external stakeholders that while we empower youth to support one another, we never ask them to carry the weight of a clinical crisis.

EMBEDDING CHILL PILL FOR LONG-TERM USE

The Chill Pill approach is most sustainable when it becomes part of everyday practice rather than a one-off programme. Organisations are encouraged to integrate its principles into existing youth work, education, and well-being structures. This may include incorporating short reflective check-ins into regular sessions, embedding coaching principles into staff training and induction, or using creative activities as part of broader well-being or inclusion strategies. When embedded in this way, Chill Pill supports long-term cultural change rather than short-term intervention.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARISING THE JOURNEY: FROM PILOT TO PRACTICE

The creation of this Practitioner Handbook marks the transition of the Chill Pill project from a collaborative European experiment into a living, breathing methodology for youth work. Over the past two years, seven partner organisations across Finland, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Germany, Spain, and the Czech Republic have worked to bridge the gap between mental health theory and the raw, everyday reality of youth workers on the front lines. What we have discovered is that the challenges facing young people today (substance use, social anxiety, and digital isolation) cannot be solved by old-fashioned didactic methods. Instead, the solution lies in the “Chill Pill” philosophy - a commitment to empathy, a shift toward non-directive coaching, and a belief in the power of creative digital expression.

As we conclude this guide, it is important to remember that the pages you have read are not meant to be a rigid set of instructions, but rather a flexible framework. The “Chill Pill” approach is at its most effective when it is adapted, localised, and infused with the unique energy of the community in which it is being delivered. Whether you are implementing this in a high-tech media lab in Berlin, a community sports club in rural Ireland, or a migrant support centre in Poland, the core objective remains the same: to provide young people with the internal resilience they need to navigate a complex world with confidence and health.

THE ROLE OF THE PRACTITIONER AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

By adopting the Chill Pill methodology, you are stepping into a role that is much larger than that of a traditional youth worker or educator. You are becoming a “Change Agent” in the field of youth mental health. Throughout this handbook, we have emphasised that the most powerful tool you possess is not the Digital Toolkit or the role-play scenarios, but your own ability to model the well-being coaching mindset. Every time you choose to listen instead of “fix,” every time you create a safe space for a young person to explore their values, and every time you empower a youth to coach their peer, you are creating a ripple effect.

This ripple effect extends far beyond the duration of a single coaching session. When a young person gains the skills to regulate their emotions and support their friends, they carry those skills into their families, their future workplaces, and their broader communities. The sustainability of this project does not lie in the physical documents we have produced, but in the shifts in perspective that occur within your organisation. We encourage you to be patient with the process. Real growth, especially when dealing with sensitive topics like drug prevention and mental resilience, is often slow and incremental. However, the feedback from our focus groups has shown that the impact, once achieved, is profound and long-lasting.

THE SUSTAINABLE ECOSYSTEM: BEYOND THE HANDBOOK

While this handbook serves as your primary reference guide, it is part of a much larger digital ecosystem designed to support your work. The Chill Pill website, the multilingual eLearning platform, and the Digital Content Creation Toolkit are all resources that will remain available to ensure the project's legacy continues. We view this as a "living sustainability." As the youth sector evolves and new challenges emerge, the Chill Pill methodology is designed to evolve with it. We encourage you to remain connected to the project's online portals, where you can find updated materials, translated resources, and a community of practice that spans the continent.

Sustainability also means internalising these practices within your own institutional policy. We recommend that the leaders of schools, VET centres, and youth organisations use this handbook to advocate for well-being to be placed at the centre of their organisational mission. Mental health is no longer an "optional extra" in youth work; it is the prerequisite for all other forms of learning and development. By embedding the "Chill Pill" approach into your annual training schedules and daily routines, you are making a long-term investment in the human capital of your community.

FINAL REFLECTION: THE HUMAN IMPACT

At the end of every coaching session, every film created, and every workshop delivered, there is a young person who feels a little more seen, a little more heard, and a little more capable. That is the true goal of Chill Pill. Our focus groups across Europe have repeatedly reminded us that young people are not looking for adults to solve their problems; they are looking for adults who believe they are capable of solving their own.

As you move forward with the implementation of these tools, remember the words of the German youth worker who noted that this approach “reminded me why supportive communication really matters.” We hope this handbook serves as a constant reminder of that same truth. We invite you to be bold in your adaptation, inclusive in your facilitation, and unwavering in your support of youth well-being. The journey of a thousand peer-coaching sessions begins with a single conversation. We are honoured that you have chosen the Chill Pill methodology to guide those conversations toward a healthier, more resilient future for all young people. The true sustainability of the Chill Pill project lies not in the materials produced, but in the everyday choices practitioners make to listen, adapt, and create safe spaces where young people can support one another.



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