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The Joyful Trainer's Guide



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The Joyful Trainer's Guide

2024

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About the project:



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Joyful: Journey of Optimising Well-being through Fun and Unique Learning

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Project reference: 2023-2-DE02-KA210-ADU-000178079

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Information about the project and game

Now more than ever, focusing on **mental health and well-being** is essential as the world continues to feel the lasting effects of the recent pandemic.

The Joyful Project is **a small-scale Erasmus+ partnership** aimed at supporting adults, particularly NGO workers. It was created to provide a psycho-educational tool to promote well-being in the nonprofit sector. Over a year-long collaboration between organizations in **Germany, Romania, and Greece**, we developed Joyful - a unique board game that incorporates card game elements.

Our goal is simple: **to encourage players to reflect** on the key aspects of a balanced life and take proactive steps toward their well-being.

This guide is **designed for facilitators**, providing clear instructions on how to lead the game and support participants as they navigate its rules.

Our mission is to raise awareness about well-being and equip people with the knowledge and tools to take better care of themselves.

Working in the nonprofit sector can be both rewarding and demanding - we advocate, we support, we address critical social issues, and we give our all. But in the process, we often experience exhaustion, frustration, and even burnout. Many times we reach our limits and feel alone.

That's why it's crucial to pause, reflect, and support one another. So let's come together, let's take a breath, let's appreciate our work, let's be a support to ourselves and others and play Joyful!

Do you want to learn how to take care of your mental health and how to set boundaries?

Do you want to learn how to strengthen your ability to recognise and respond to the signs of emotional fatigue and burnout and how to take care of your work life balance?

If so, play Joyful!



We wish you to have fun and joyful learning!

Introduction to the Guide

This document is addressed to the employees and volunteers of NGOs, who will be using this game as a tool to enhance the understanding of the need for mental health within the institutions, and improve their well-being.

It aims to explain the concepts behind the game's rules, and provide insight and practical advice on its uses within this framework.

With this guide we would like to explain what is important during playing and what the trainer should take into account by preparing the game, playing, and reflecting.

Getting Ready

Before playing for the first time, a small amount of preparation is necessary, so that the trainer can be accustomed to the game's components and concepts.

01 Firstly, **download and print the game's token and card files**, in single-page printing, and supply yourself with a simple pen and paper for scoring.

02 **Print the game board using the A4 cut-outs**, and join them using tape, clippers or other items. Files for professional printing are also available.

***Note:** we recommend printing the cards in good print quality; we also advise you to check your printer's ink levels to ensure the best visibility of all elements and increase your enjoyment of our game.*

03 Then, cut the components carefully using their outline, or the cut guide symbols.).

- For sturdier card set-up, we recommend that **board game sleeves and cards are used**; any game store selling market-popular card games will be able to accommodate the needs in sleeves, and often they can supply cards they do not need that can be used as supporting structure, otherwise any playing card would do (the cards have been designed for **card/sleeve size: 63,5*88mm**).

- Should a better print/cut quality be needed, many medium and large printing companies offer to print and machine-cut the A4-paper cards at reasonable prices.
- If you prefer, you can **print the cards in sticker paper and use waste material such as cereal boxes** as a base to stick the cards on.
- As a last resort, we recommend **printing the cards on thicker paper**, although simple A4 would do.

04 Finally, **cut the tokens carefully**; we recommend that they are either printed in hard-paper, or sticker paper and subsequently stuck on a sturdier material (we recommend using material that would be trashed, such as cereal boxes, cartons etc).

After doing the preparatory steps, **the trainer will proceed to read the game's rules**, and **watch the short how-to-play video**. We recommend that the rulebook is read first, followed by the video which will clarify the way of play via example.

Educational Aspect & Trainer's Role

The game steers away from the majority of simple games created in educational context; it promotes **critical thinking and rationalization**, providing prompts to the user, instead of long texts that more often than not cause loss of interest in the topic.

It promotes collaboration, as a crucial part of mental well-being, embedded within the game's rules.

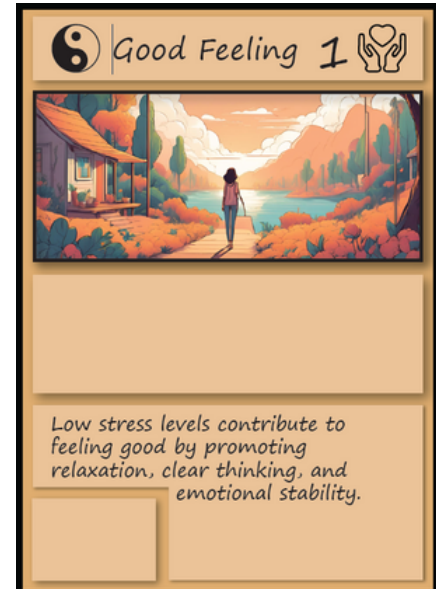
While the game has a number of different decks, they are all played as one; they are all considered the same and have the same card back. However, they are split into specific decks for game-mechanics purposes. In addition, the game concerns **5 different domains of well-being**, sets of neutral cards (to ensure the players can progress regardless of the random card order), and a set of "threat" cards in the form of Stressful situations.

Each **Basic, Spark, Personal Growth and Stress card** has a "flavor" text which provides a prompt on the card's topic, alongside the card's game-relevant mechanics. These flavor texts have been embedded into the game's workings to ensure players will read and use them during the course of the game.

Basic Cards

These cards are necessary to **allow the player to start at the game**. They provide you with the basic game's currency:

- **Positive Thinking**, to help combat Stress cards by provide you with one positive thinking symbol (3)
- **Good Feeling**, to acquire more well-being Personal Growth cards, two without a well-being symbol and 5 with one of the symbols each, providing the player with one good feeling symbol (7)



Each player starts with the same set of cards.

Sparks

These two decks of 10 cards each (one deck containing cards that provide the player with a good feeling symbol, and the other with a positive attitude symbol) exist to help the players with some easy solutions for their first turns; they can acquire a cheap card that will help them progress in future turns. They contain:

- 5 cards with one well-being symbol each
- 5 cards without a well-being symbol, but with the keyword "Empathy" allowing them to collaborate and help other players.

Growth Cards

There are 60 Growth cards, 12 from each well-being category. They are more powerful than the basic cards, and they contain mechanisms that allow the players to progress to the game, as well as utilize the educational concept as they are forms of combating stress and caring for a person's mental well-being.



Stress Cards

In order for the game to present a challenge to the players, 15 Stress cards have been included; they represent some Stressful situations or threats to a person's mental well-being.

The players will utilize their cards with the Positive Attitude symbol to combat them. They slow down the players' progress.



Trainer's Role

The trainer is a crucial part of the educational process of this game-tool; as it is meant to be used in the context of education, a versed trainer is at the heart of the game, instigating discussions and managing its flow.

The trainer will dictate the pace (faster or slower), will ask further questions on the played cards if needed, will help the players with prompts in order to aid them in processing the cards' information and help them tie-in the necessary prompt, linking it to well-being.

The trainer will also be able to modify the base game rules to better accommodate their needs, simplifying or enhancing the rule-set, or creating new cards to be used in the game's confines.

The game is designed to offer a fun and engaging time for the participants, allowing them to experience an actual game while at the same time learning. However, while its mechanics allow for a trainer-free gaming experience, the trainer is the key to promote the educational aspect and elevate the game to its true potential as a tool.

Behind the Scenes

This section provides additional information for the trainer, referring to the creation method followed, a short introduction to well-being and the Domains chosen by the team as well as the card general concept within each domain. It also portrays a pathway to ease your group into learning the full game rules, which will gradually integrate all aspects of the game until it is complete.

The Backstory of the Game Creation



In order to decide on the game type and style, the team went through a process that allowed them to firstly understand the general concepts of what a game mechanic is, then to review the category and mechanic examples, and finally discuss their preferred mechanics that they would like to see in the game.

The consortium noted a number of mechanics and then thinned them down to those they deemed more appropriate for the topic, based on the importance they allocated. Thus, it was decided that the game (among others) would:

- utilize cards, as the cards allow the group to promote texts (hand management)
- be cooperative, as collaboration within an organization is crucial and can help as a major bonding & coping mechanism (co-op)
- track the players' progress (point tracking)

- symbolize a person's advancement as they strengthen their character and obtain more practices (deck-building)
- would promote the ideas of well-being

All those aspects and more are represented within the chosen mechanics of the game.

During the course of the design, the team collaborated and split the work leading based on their knowledge & experience sector, aiding in each other's parts; this meant that the card interaction and game-relevant technicalities were driven by Dracon, while the Domains, card names, flavor texts were driven by ShareEdu and CRN. The process involved playing the game, testing the conditions and changing any aspects or attributes the team considered necessary.

Game adaptations

Joyful is a game for teams working in NGO. Ideally, 4 to 5 people, who are working together and getting to know each other, should take part in the game.

The players should be accompanied by a trainer, who will help them to understand the rules of the game and guide the team by explaining the rules (especially the first time), as well as help them keep the focus on the educational part and instigate discussions on well-being based on the cards played.

An important aspect to be provided for players is a quiet atmosphere and a separate room where there are no other activities, people or noises.

A basic game to learn the rules

The first session of the game should be held so that participants learn the rules of the game (see Rule Book). The educational aspect of the game is to learn about the areas of well being and the different components (cards) and threatening situations (stress cards) - this is psycho-education.

The basic module is to understand what elements of our life could be improved and what is important for each player individually.

The length of the game in its basic form is about 1,5 hours.

The game coach should pay attention to the atmosphere during the game so that the players support each other and win the game as a team, using the empathy cards as often as possible.

In-depth game

The extended version of the game involves adding your own experiences to the basic version and sharing them with other players.

When you buy a domain component card (5 colours), you get an extra point for telling your story (your own experience) with tips on how to take care of the category.

For example, if you buy the Optimal Sleep card, you can tell other players, what it means (that it is e.g. 6 to 8 hours long, in a quiet environment - comfortable bed, happy, well ventilated room etc.) and how we can take care of it (e.g. going to bed regularly, not using the smartphone before sleep etc.).

For each such told story we add one extra point in the domain from which the card is. This is too decided by the trainer. With stress cards, at the moment of overcoming, we get an extra point for sharing the story of how we overcame the difficulty from this card.

Core learning principles

The game is built on the following key learning principles:

Active participation – Players are not passive recipients of information but actively engage with the game’s content by making choices, reflecting on their experiences, and discussing outcomes with their peers.

Collaborative learning – As the game is designed for NGO workers and team-based environments, cooperation is essential. Players work together to achieve collective well-being, reinforcing the idea that mental health and work-life balance are shared responsibilities.

Scenario-based decision making – The game presents real-life inspired situations that require players to make thoughtful decisions. These scenarios encourage critical thinking and help develop problem-solving skills that can be applied beyond the game.

Reflection and discussion – After each round or game session, players are encouraged to reflect on their decisions and discuss their insights. This debriefing process enhances learning retention and helps players translate game experiences into real-world applications.

Game mechanics supporting learning

The design of Joyful incorporates mechanics that naturally support the learning process:

Card-based knowledge transfer – Each card presents key information related to well-being, challenges, and solutions, enabling a structured yet flexible approach to learning.

Progressive complexity – As the game unfolds, players encounter increasingly complex situations, allowing them to build on previous knowledge and skills.

Interpersonal engagement – The game encourages open discussions and mutual support, reinforcing positive social interactions and emotional intelligence.

Gamification of well-being – By transforming well-being education into an engaging game format, Joyful makes learning enjoyable and memorable.

Applying the Learning Beyond the Game The ultimate goal of Joyful is to inspire players to incorporate the lessons learned into their daily lives.

By understanding the key domains of well-being and recognizing early signs of emotional fatigue or burnout, players can develop healthier habits and support their teams more effectively. Coaches and facilitators are encouraged to guide discussions, ensuring that players connect their game experiences with real-world applications.

Through Joyful, players not only learn about well-being but also experience the importance of collaboration, empathy, and self-care. The game serves as a reminder that well-being is a continuous journey—one that requires awareness, action, and collective support.

Further Steps

The next part offers modifications or advice for the trainer, so that they can unlock the game-tool's full potential and modify it according to their educational needs, and the needs of their group.

We recommend that the next part is read after the first test-playthrough.

Advanced Trainer's Guide

The next part of this document contains **two parts**:

- simple practical advice for the trainer,
- alternate game modes and rules modifications.

Practical Advice

This part of the Guide is common advice given to all games created by the participation of Dracon RDS, as they reflect general topics that must be mentioned.

During the course of the game, it is easy for the players to lose themselves in the moment as they enjoy their participation. The trainer should be present to monitor the group's progress, and keep them on track of the educational aspect of the game.

Clean components and venue Know the rules

This may seem obvious, but the game components should be kept in a neat and tidy way, to be inviting to the players and offer them a good participating experience. The venue should also have good acoustics and ample light, and the space should allow "round" sitting allocation with a playing surface in the middle.

Prior to initiating the game with the learners, the trainer should ensure they know the rules themselves and are acquainted with the game's components. In the opposite case, loss of interest will be incurred to the participants.

Keep the group on track

Provide prompts, nod or quick-comment frequently to help the group stay on track. For example, quick questions like “how does this card help your personal growth and could lead to the card you selected to add to your deck”, remind the players to promote the well-being topics and understand the connections between the different practices they could employ.

Feel your group’s “vibe”

Not all people enjoy the same kind of games. Some would prefer more discussion, others more strategy, others more fun. Always know your group, and modify the game to their needs; examples of alternate modes can be found later on in this document.

Keep the group motivated

Remind the players of their need to pay attention to the active players and check their turn; the game aims to promote collaboration, so the trainer should verbally invite the players to help out and/or ask for help during the course of the game.

Don’t be afraid of change

The game is a tool more than a game. Do not be afraid to break its rules, to better serve your purposes. If a rule does not suit you, or hinders your progress, change it!

Alpha

Cooperative games often have the side-effect that a vivid persona is more represented and assumes a leadership role. It would be best to avoid such practices by reminding the players that they should make a basic effort to talk about their cards, accepting all attempts at a convincing connection between the Growth cards.

Get personal

The game is all about personal mental well-being. Try to make the players feel comfortable to open-up; allow them space without judgement where they can connect personal experiences to the cards played, if any. The experience of one person can be a lesson for another.

Alternate game modes

The game can be altered in many ways regarding its gameplay, so that it can serve the trainer's and the group's needs. Herein are some examples of alternate game modes, which can be used as they are presented, or serve as sparks to the trainer's creativity.

Custom difficulty

The trainer may decide to alter aspects of the game, to make it more difficult or easy, depending on their group. The game has been set into what the project team considers a fair difficulty, and the rules are built around that. These are ways that the trainer can modify the challenge:

- **Reduce difficulty:**

- Provide the players with additional starting cards (Sparks, Growth Cards), either randomly or by design
- Remove some of the Stress cards
- Separate more Growth cards during setup
- Keep a lower target for all domains
- Allow players to draw more cards during their turn

- **Increase difficulty:**

- Add more copies of Stress cards
- Separate less Growth cards during setup
- Keep a higher target for all domains

Fixed Cards

The trainer may decide they want one, any or all decks of cards to be set in a specific way. There are two ways this could be implemented; "Pre-Setting" and "Controlled".

Pre-setting

The trainer will set the decks of cards before the game in the order they wish and instruct the players to not shuffle them.

Controlled

The trainer keeps all decks of cards by them, and will allocate the cards they wish to the players, choosing instead of drawing from the top.

Mot(ivat)ion

Some groups prefer more energetic games, where they would be able to also expend physical energy. Including rules such as "while expressing your opinion, you must walk around the group, and you must finish and sit at the same time" or giving extra points for speakers who utilize hand motions, or give extra points for passionate standing role-playing for their societal force, are examples of energetic changes that could be applied.

Babel

In modern multicultural environments, it is easy for people to feel uncomfortable when being unable to speak comfortably in a foreign language. Allow them the window to express themselves in a language they are comfortable with and the help of their friends in translation; this will be especially helpful when the players wish to talk about a personal experience connected to their cards.

To gamify this experience, ask the players not speaking this language (before the translation) to guess what has been said by the tone, cards and gestures, moving the trackers extra slots on the appropriate domain if they are even remotely close.

Doomsday clock

At the end of each player's turn, reveal the top card of the growth deck and discard from the Potential all cards matching the revealed card's domain. Refill the Potential afterwards. This increases the difficulty as the cards will be over sooner.

Stress galore

Instead of shuffling the Stress cards into the deck, mark the first starting player. Once every player has had 2 turns, reveal a random stress card directly to the Stress Area. Each turn thereafter, reveal another Stress card. This increases difficulty; changing the frequency of Stress card appearance would mitigate.

Information on Well-Being

General Information

Wellbeing is a state in which an individual perceives themselves at a satisfactory level of mental, physical and emotional health. It is a holistic approach that encompasses not only the absence of illness, but also overall life satisfaction and a positive attitude. The definition of wellbeing includes aspects such as job satisfaction, work-life balance and the opportunity for personal development. A key element of well-being is a sense of fulfilment and meaning in daily tasks and relationships with others.

With the increasing pace of life and dynamic changes in the working environment, wellbeing is becoming not just a luxury, but a necessity. Today's challenges, such as remote working, changing work norms and increasing demands, can affect our wellbeing in a variety of ways.

Issues of wellbeing, happiness and quality of life are the focus of a fairly young field of psychology pioneered by Martin Seligman, namely positive psychology. A key tenet of this strand is the enhancement of an individual's strengths in order to experience well-being, rather than simply treating illnesses and compensating for deficiencies.

Seligman's conception of man depicts him as an individual who loses his sense of meaning and does not experience well-being due to the relentless pursuit of success, lack of time, excess responsibilities or scarcity of material goods. One could say that positive psychology and its practices are a kind of prevention and complement to the activities of clinical psychology, whose primary activity is the treatment of mental illness and disorders.

In the context of well-being and health psychology, it seems most relevant to deal constructively with stress, which is a frequent companion in our private and professional lives.

Can stress be avoided? Unfortunately not, but it can certainly be managed skilfully so that it does not cause us harm.

The psychological aspects of work also include a number of negative aspects, among which are all sorts of threats to well-being and thus to mental and physical health. Among the most popular are, of course, stress, especially long-term stress, which is the first step to all sorts of significant mental health abnormalities.

The Five Domains

During this project, our team members chose to categorize the concept of wellbeing into five Domains; this was both due to relevance as well as for game mechanic purposes. Each of these domains represent a different aspect of mental well-being approaches that could benefit the person; some contain activities that are also in common with other domains.

The term 'wellbeing' refers to a person's overall state of wellbeing, encompassing physical, mental and emotional health, as well as life satisfaction and an overall sense of happiness.

In today's challenging world, our health and wellbeing is crucial to the success of any NGO or company. Wellbeing in the workplace translates into satisfaction, productivity and overall organisational performance.

Each domain consists of different categories and cards. Aspects presented into one domain could very well apply into the other domains of wellbeing.

Therefore, our categorization is not rigid and should be regarded as a simple tool for optimal gameplay, enhanced with its educational aspect. By getting a card from one of five domains players learn about some aspect of wellbeing, as each card has a short description of the given aspect.

Physical Well-being Domain

It involves focusing on habits that promote physical health, like sleep, exercise, nutrition, sexual health, and making safe decisions about substance use. It's knowing how to navigate healthcare and understanding what your body needs, not only when you are sick, but also to prevent illness and injury.

Moving your body, scheduling your annual check up, eating nutritious meals or sleeping eight hours a night are some of many ways you can boost your physical wellness each day.

In the Joyful game we have cards important for physical well-being: optimal sleep, movement, sport, healthy food, moderation (in alcohol consumption), regular exercise, vegetables in our diet, qualitative rest.

Taking care of those aspects is important for feeling good.

Harmony Domain

Second domain is Harmony, which means reduction of stress in our life. For well-being, it is important to take care of the optimal sleep, movement, time management, and rest. Thus we have identified and prepared 3 types of rest: emotional, creative and mental.

Positive Attitude Domain

The development of a positive view and mindset is a crucial component of well-being. A positive outlook can be good for both your mental health and your overall health. Positive thinking has been linked to less stress, better problem-solving skills, and a better sense of well-being all around.

What is important for this domain? We have cards about calm sleep, learning new skills, feeling of purpose and happiness, positive energy to take actions, practising gratitude, problem-solving capacity and listening to music.

Job Satisfaction Domain

Satisfaction at work, being the fourth domain, is extremely important for the well-being of adults. For this domain we have 9 cards with following topics: work-life balance, calm sleep, time management, being assertive, good supervisor, recognition, job security and acceptance.

Social Well-being Domain

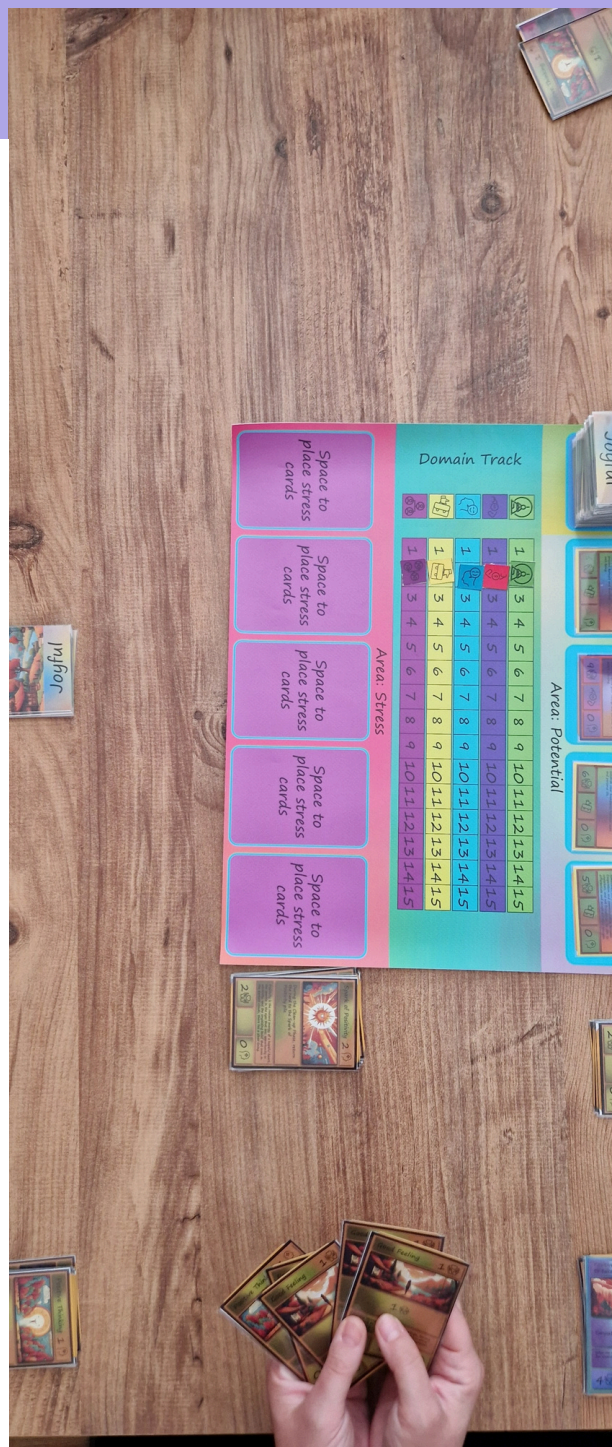
Social wellness refers to the relationships we have and how we interact with others. Our relationships can offer support during difficult times. Social wellness also includes balancing the unique needs of romantic relationships with other parts of your life. In the Joyful game we concentrate on the following aspects: good family relations, meaningful connections, friends, own boundaries in relations and acceptance.



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