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# PILOTING

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## Research report

Testing of educational materials by parents as part of  
an Erasmus plus project:

### **"Mental resilience for parents"**

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# Introduction

## Brief description of the project

The survey was conducted to gather the opinions of parents participating in the testing of **the Erasmus plus-funded project 'Parents' Mental Resilience'**. Participation in the project consisted of using the platform prepared educational materials, on psychological resilience and methods to support parental wellbeing. The materials included suggestions for different streams and techniques for supporting wellbeing on the principle that each participant would choose the content that best suited them. The learning platform included: a guide, exercises and videos from the webinars in the following areas:

- **Introduction** - i.e. where parental burnout comes from, and a brief description of all methodologies;
- **Neuroscience** - or what a parent can learn about the nervous system and how it affects the quality of parenting;
- **Self-regulation** - i.e. how to spot stressors and what strategy to choose to deal with them better;
- **Positive psychology** - or how to notice and build up your resources so that you can cope better with everyday stress;
- **Bond Theory and Intimacy Parenting** - or how to nurture relationships with each other and with their children to find more understanding and gentleness in everyday life;
- **Yoga** - which is an ancient concept and exercise that helps you regain a sense of calm and get to know yourself better;
- **Meditation** - which is an ancient and modern approach to gaining greater insight into oneself and finding a sense of peace;
- **A cognitive-behavioural approach** - i.e. how to notice and work on beliefs that can add to stress;
- **Mindfulness/Mindfulness** - i.e. exercises and practices to help you accept your thoughts, feelings, reality, etc., leading to changes in how you approach them;
- **Qigong** - which is an ancient exercise that releases tension, boosts energy and improves concentration.



## Method research

The survey included people who used the materials available on the platform between January and April 2023. Two methods were used to solicit opinions: a moderated group discussion and an online survey that participants evaluated the individual materials. Four participants, a facilitator and a note-taker took part in the focus interview, while questionnaires were completed by 10 people (10 participants, 36 completions on 10 issues). A total of 11 female participants took part in the entire survey, as some completed the questionnaire while also participating in the discussion.

The group discussion was characterised by a looser and more open form of expression and asked, for example, about the level of satisfaction with the materials, the extent to which the proposed techniques were implemented, suggestions for change. In the questionnaire, participants rated on a scale (from 1-5) the usefulness of the materials and how encouraging the materials were to practice and to what extent they would recommend them to a friend or acquaintance. In addition, the participants evaluated the individual modules in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, which they were asked about in the form of an open question.

When analysing data collected in this way, one must be cautious in drawing conclusions, not only because of the small numbers involved, but also because, as a rule, people who are on average positively engaged in participating in an interview or in completing a questionnaire attitudes towards the project, as they are more motivated to work with its developers. In addition, the small number of respondents does not allow strong conclusions to be drawn, but rather provides some hints on how to further develop the evaluated by programme participants.

## Main findings:

- the majority of participants declared themselves satisfied with the materials and stressed the need to create and promote similar programmes to support parental well-being
- in selecting the most useful materials (techniques), participants were characterised by a wide variety, which reflects well the assumptions and specificity of the programme, including a wide range of methods for self-selection
- emphasised the value of film footage as the best form of communication or as a good complement to the
- recommendations that were made often concerned the shortening of material that was too long and too voluminous

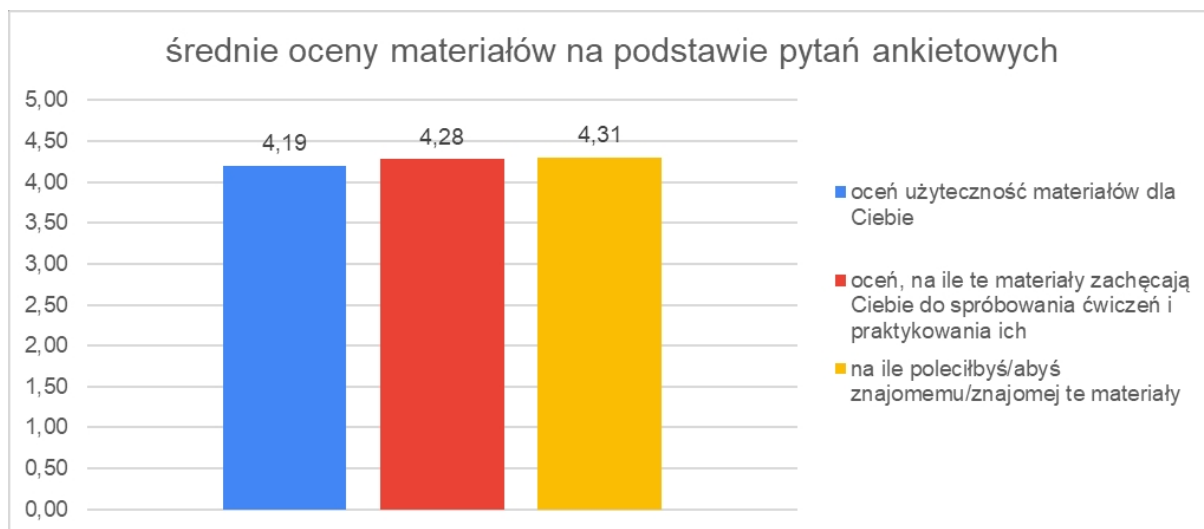
## Strengths of educational materials

The group discussion and the survey results showed that the participants were overwhelmingly satisfied with the materials provided on the platform. Regardless of the evaluation of the individual thematic content, they emphasised the importance and value of the 'Mental Resilience for Parents' project, stating, for example, that while most of the materials directed at parents contain methods, advice and exercises **to support children, the materials discussed here are about supporting the parents themselves, which is, in their opinion, very valuable**. Two people were unable to identify weaknesses in the materials. They also called for their dissemination. Many people emphasised the advantages of the video exercises included in the materials.

Sample statements by female participants:

*"(...) most of the exercises are child-centred and this was parent-centred. I believe this is helpful."*<sup>1</sup>

*"I didn't find flaws, it was a wide range of materials, there were a lot of techniques, there's no compulsion that we have to choose all of them, so it's hard to judge if there's something wrong."*



The chart above shows the average ratings given by participants in response to questions about: the usefulness of the materials, how motivating they were for practice and how much they would recommend them to a friend or acquaintance. The values are very close to each other and adequately reflect the distribution of answers, among which the predominant ones were: 4 (rather yes) and 5 (definitely yes). Given that the number of respondents was small and the answers are not independent of each other (several answers may come from one person), such an estimate is not reliable and should be approached with caution.

<sup>1</sup> Spelling of all quotations original.



## Evaluation of individual content

In a group discussion, the participants were able to express themselves freely which content they liked best and what they got out of it. In the survey, on the other hand, they were able to evaluate and comment more precisely on the topic of each module included in the materials. In the following, the opinions on each module resulting from the questionnaires and the group discussion will be collected and summarised.

### "Mental resilience for parents" - introduction

When evaluating the introduction to the materials, participants cited two issues as strengths: **real life stories and diversity and comprehensiveness**. There was appreciation in the feedback for the thorough preparation of the concept fan. At the same time, there were suggestions that the introduction should be shortened, as it can be intimidating in its volume. Other suggestions included noting that visuals that simplify the subject matter and bring all the content together in a condensed and accessible form would be helpful.

Examples of participants' statements: (answer to the question "What did you like about the module?")

*"Stories from other parents because they are reassuring and build a space where I would feel understood."*

*"Comprehensive approach, multiple concepts and openness to diversity - respecting that everyone is different and focusing on a sound presentation of methods in an accessible and quite condensed way without lobbying for one option."*

### Meditation

The content on meditation, was evaluated differently by the participants. While one of them praised meditation as a method she herself has been using for a long time, another said that this technique was definitely not for her and that the materials were difficult to digest by being too long in written form. The diversity of evaluations in terms of individual techniques is a somewhat desirable phenomenon when the subject of the study is a programme deliberately containing numerous concepts and techniques from which the user can choose those most suitable for him or her. At the same time, an easily digestible form of the materials is the target state regardless of the thematic content of the modules.

Example statements:

*"I have been practising meditation for a long time. It is wonderful and calming." "The meditation method itself does not convince me at all and frustrates me."*



## Mindfulness

The mindfulness and mindfulness materials were evaluated positively. One participant was already well acquainted with and practised the techniques presented. There was also a request to elaborate on the possibility of practising mindfulness in movement, which may reflect the need to look for techniques tailored to different conditions.

Example statement:

*"I practise mindfulness practically every day. Even several times a day. Breathing is essential, especially during difficult times. When I come home tired and see a 'tornado' that has passed through the room then a few breaths in and my perception changes."*

## Neuroscience - in search of a lost sense of security

The chapters on neuroscience were judged to be fairly prepared, up-to-date and accompanied by appropriate illustrations. One participant drew attention to the title. In her view, it unnecessarily suggests a lost sense of security in those reading the materials, and who will only, at a later stage, have the reason for this choice of words explained to them. Another person suggested adding the work of Dr Arielle Schwartz on PTSD.

Example statement:

*"Knowledge presented in a structured way, with case studies and suggested exercises."*

## Cognitive behavioural approach

The materials presenting the cognitive-behavioural approach did not receive much feedback, so it is difficult to draw conclusions from them. One person assessed the materials on this topic as very valuable, but at the same time difficult due to the awareness of numerous limitations and errors. There was also an opinion suggesting too much text in relation to the practical material.

Example statements:

*"The hardest content for me to absorb, revealing the causes of experienced 'limitations' and their impact on children. A bitter pill to swallow, may it have a healing effect, I will certainly return to these materials more than once."*





*"Too much text. For a guide for parents (who often have little free time), I would have preferred the form of short videos with an exercise booklet and an exercise plan for each day/week."*

*"Inspiring content, exercises".*

## Positive psychology

The materials on positive psychology were rated highly, especially because of the exercise suggestions contained in them. Especially the practice of gratitude was what the participants found highly valuable in their situation and declared to implement this in their daily life. At the same time, there were again calls for the written materials to be too long. At the same time, there were voices calling for the materials to be extended and as widely disseminated as possible. This kind of contradiction shows that, depending on attitudes and available time, different people have different needs for the volume of materials, regardless of whether they judge the content generally positive or not.

Example statements:

*"I've started a gratitude journal, I try to write down every day 3 good things that have happened."*

*"Even in conversation I try to talk more often about what I am grateful for. There has been a shift in my thinking."*

## Qigong

In both the group discussion and the online surveys, Qigong was evaluated very positively, above all as an interesting and at the same time simple method, relatively new to most of the participants. At the same time, the materials themselves were considered worthy of shortening.

Example statements:

*"I liked all of them, they were very interesting, but the most interesting was the qigong." "I started using the qigong energising exercises and I feel better after them than after coffee :)" "There are long materials, I don't have time to go into it that much."*



## Self-regulation

As part of the evaluation of self-regulatory material, there were also voices proposing a reduction of the text. At the same time, as part of the group discussion, subjects self-regulation was highly appreciated, especially because of the message teaching to direct oneself and one's emotions. Two people spontaneously identified this very topic as the most useful for them.

Example statements:

*"What I liked most about it was with self-regulation, because it's a approach, and that focus on yourself... I found it difficult at the beginning, I equated stress, for example, with anger. That the tension in me is stress and it comes out as anger. Whereas I started to separate stress from anger, I disenchanted those emotions."*

*"Reduce the wall of text, a lot of people don't digest Shanker's book for this very reason :) add drawings."*

## Theory ties

The materials on the topic of bond theory were assessed as valuable and useful. There was a request to include more practical exercises within them. The topics were described as very valuable, revealing and very helpful.

Example statements:

*"A sensational resource, clearly discussing bond formation and different attachment styles, and specific tips on how to build a secure bond with yourself, despite childhood deficits. An absolute revelation for me: a secure bond with myself and the realisation that it is impossible to love a child with unconditional love if one has not felt/received unconditional love..."*

*"For me, bond theory is more in the category of having knowledge, awareness, rather than developing specific skills, but I am aware of how all those described in the materials are intertwined and complementary."*

## Yoga

In the case of the yoga materials, female respondents expressed themselves very positively. They found the materials clear and very accessible. They appreciated the simple language and the ease of doing the suggested exercises. Among the comments and suggestions, the request for more videos, visuals and more interactivity of the module was repeated.



Example statements:

*"Clear instructions, ease of doing the item, you can spend only a few minutes". "Add an interactive part e.g. video, pictures."*

## Practice - what was most encouraging about it?

Both in the questionnaires and in the group discussion, participants were asked whether they practise the exercises suggested in the materials, what module motivated them to do so, what hinders and what supports their practice. The most common methods practised by the participants were:

- **practising gratitude** - in the form of an established gratitude diary and paying more attention to the good events in life. The practising participants said that the exercise helped them a lot, and they also emphasised that by implementing gratitude practices, a beneficial process of transformation had taken place in them

Example statement:

*"I started a gratitude diary and stopped complaining. Even in conversation I try to talk more often about what I am grateful for. I've had a mindset shift, I write down 3 things every day, sometimes coffee, sunshine and catching the bus and sometimes super big things. It's nice to have it on paper and not just in my head. It's great when you write it down and come back to it and it's with the person."*

- Self-regulation - practitioners pointed out that they had implemented self-regulation as a certain way of thinking and not necessarily specific exercises. At the same time, it happened that the findings from the materials were used in activities with children at school.

Example statement::

*"I will try to be even quicker to spot the signals of upset so that I don't get carried away with my emotions. Just to stop and look at them with detachment."*

- **Qigong** - often cited as something that has been tried, implemented or at least enriched existing practices.

Example statement:

*"I was interested in everything. I'm definitely going to try it!"*

- **yoga and mindfulness** - many of those declaring practice let it be known that these were methods they were familiar with and had already used before reading the materials.



Example statement::

*"Yoga and mindfulness is my everyday life".*

In the context of implementing the proposed techniques, the topic of how this practice does not always work out also came up. Participants mentioned that sometimes **they lacked motivation or better organisation, and sometimes it was simply due to a flurry of responsibilities.**

There was also resistance to implementation due to the negative associations with the Qigong stream. During the discussion, it was also stated that although meditation is not what the participant practices (it is not a method for her), her daughter really liked it. **Such examples show that, depending on the person, different techniques will be helpful, and that participants' familiarity with them can help to reach more people, such as their families.**

## Proposals for change

During the group discussion, numerous ideas emerged on how the programme could be improved. These can be grouped into two categories: what to improve in the current design of the programme and how to promote the programme.

### 1. **What to improve about the current programme design?**

The most common suggestion made in the context of the material learnt was to truncate it so as to reduce the effort needed to read it. Advice such as 'reduce the wall of text' or 'I'd prefer a quick one, just the introduction, so that I know if I'm even interested in it or not.' emerged. And so it was these pdfs of 30 pages each, it was a lot of material, and it was tiring, it took up a lot of time. It would have been better in the form of short videos'. The suggestion to add shorter, more pictorial forms was often made and quicker to read, especially attractive visuals, videos or summaries/notes to help decide from the outset whether to delve deeper into a particular topic. There was also a suggestion to add training courses. During the discussion on this topic, the participants mostly agreed that when preparing similar trainings, it is very important to have them (at least every now and then) offline and not overly long (about 45 minutes). When discussing live training, several participants pointed out that it is rare to have trainings that allow participation with children or the possibility to put them for the duration of the training, and they would work best with childcare provided in a separate room.

### 2. **How to promote the programme?**

Suggestions from participants on how to promote the programme varied. Almost all participants pointed out that encouraging participation in such programmes is not easy and many people will be uninterested from the outset. At the same time, they pointed out that "of mouth", i.e. recommendation from a friend, is important for promotion. They also made suggestions for promotion in schools, in parenting classes and on Instagram, suggesting that short videos on the Foundation's Instagram could be encouraging to a large audience.



## Summary and conclusions

The survey showed that the educational material from the **Erasmus plus-funded** project **'Mental Resilience for Parents'** was assessed overwhelmingly positively. An important observation from both the survey data and from the group discussion is that the participants' preferences for the proposed strands vary considerably.

This only confirms the concept of the 'Mental Resilience for Parents' project:

Depending on the person, situational circumstances, preferences, and problems experienced etc., different methods of support may be helpful. What is the greatest positive discovery for some, others may consider a waste of time.

The most common weakness of the programme was:

- too much text to read,
- no or too few , simplified forms of content delivery, such notes, visuals or videos.

In turn, the biggest advantage, highlighted by the test participants, was:

- targeting the project directly at parents,
- a large number of methods, their choice and adaptability.
- examples and inspirational stories included in the materials,
- practical exercises.