

Early Warning System (EWS) Students Guide



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Introduction – Why did we create this tool?

Do you know that feeling when everything at school seems heavier? After the pandemic, many VET students are experiencing more anxiety, stress, and low motivation; teachers are also struggling, and you can feel it in class. In this context comes **F3 – Fitter Minds, Fitter VET, Fitter Jobs**, a European project aiming to make learning more inclusive and accessible for everyone—especially for those going through difficult periods in terms of mental well-being. We work to strengthen school and teacher policies and practices so that every student can take part and feel better at school. The project is carried out together with partners from different countries: **Magyar Digitális Oktatásért Egyesület** (Budapest, digital teaching innovation), **Šolski center Nova Gorica** (Slovenia, technical-vocational training), **Scuola Centrale Formazione – SCF** (Italy, national VET network), **BBS Syke – Europaschule** (Germany, a vocational school with a European dimension), and **Colegio de Enseñanza y Readaptación SL** (Barcelona, educational and reintegration pathways).

Within F3 we created a short, repeatable self-assessment designed to help you understand how you're doing and to give you practical feedback you can use right away. It's not a medical test and does not make diagnoses: it's for prevention, to build awareness, and to suggest simple strategies for managing difficult emotions and thoughts.

The underlying framework is **ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy)**, a cognitive-behavioral approach that helps you accept difficult emotions, step back from unhelpful thoughts, stay in the present, clarify your values, and take concrete action steps—or make a gesture aligned with what truly matters to you. The goal is to help you feel better at school and in everyday life by training self-awareness, emotion regulation, resilience, trust, responsibility, perseverance, and creativity—and at the same time to help the school promote a safer, more inclusive climate by reducing stigma and barriers that often remain invisible.

By using it, many students find they understand better how they're doing, have practical ideas for handling stressful moments, and feel more autonomous in everyday choices. They learn to sharpen their motivation (what matters and why you study), reduce blocking thoughts, and monitor progress over time so they can tell when things are improving or when it's time to ask for extra support. The questionnaire also makes it easier to talk about it with a tutor or teacher if you wish, and contributes to a safer, more inclusive class climate because it lowers shame and stigma. In short: more awareness, concrete tools, less stress, and more energy to learn—for you and for the whole school community.

1.2 Structure and sections of the student questionnaire

The questionnaire is built as a two-stage pathway. It opens with **Part 1 – 1.1 “How are you feeling right now?”**, a short screening that captures how you’ve been over the past two weeks, touching on simple, concrete areas (energy, mood, emotion regulation, relationships, physical activity, and any substance use), with responses on a **0–4 Likert scale**.

Areas and sample items:

- € **Well-being and emotions:** “Most of the time I feel physically well”; “I feel calm and happy”; “I can manage my emotions.”
- € **School relationships:** “I get along with classmates”; “I feel comfortable with my teachers.”
- € **Recent stressful events:** “I have experienced very stressful events in the last two weeks.”
- € **Lifestyle/risk behaviors:** physical activity (last 7 days), alcohol, and non-prescribed drugs.

Your answers create a **well-being profile** (very low, low, medium, high) that indicates what to do next. With a medium/high profile, you move straight to **Part 2**; with a low/very low profile, a short **Part 1.2** opens to explore the more delicate areas.

This second part consists of short blocks of questions, each on a theme: mood, anxiety, sleep, appetite/energy, body image, social media use. The items pick up on common signals but use simple, school-friendly language.

For example, for mood: “In the past two weeks I have felt sad,” “Things I usually enjoy felt pleasurable,” “I felt guilty,” “I slept much more or much less than usual.” Answers always use the same 0–4 scale (from “never” to “often”), and where needed there is a “I don’t know / Prefer not to answer” option to avoid forcing responses. This keeps completion light while becoming more precise when signals that require attention emerge—consistent with the project’s preventive, non-clinical spirit.

Part 2 – “Do you know yourself?”

This is a questionnaire you can complete right after Parts 1.1 and 1.2 or at a dedicated moment. It helps you train a more flexible mind: staying present, managing emotions and thoughts better, remembering what matters to you, and taking small, useful steps every day.

1.3 Scoring interpretation & explanation of results

Part 1.1 quickly measures “how I’m doing” over the past two weeks. Based on your responses, the system assigns one of four labels: **very low, low, medium, high**.

- € If **medium/high** comes out, the pathway ends here (the student sees a simple message that essentially says “at the moment you’re doing quite well”).

- € If **low/very low** comes out, you need a more detailed map: **Part 1.2** opens to see where the difficulties cluster (mood, anxiety, sleep, energy/appetite, body image).

The system sums the values and translates them into a label. There is no “right or wrong”: it’s a snapshot of this period, not a judgment about the person nor a diagnosis.

1.4 Actions for developing social and emotional competencies and for your well-being

To truly help you, alongside the questions you’ll find small moves to try in everyday life. They help you manage emotions and thoughts when they get heavy and protect your focus and motivation. For example: start with **3 slow breaths** before studying to calm your body, and take a **micro-break with no notifications** mid-morning to recharge attention. Along the way, you’ll discover other simple strategies to choose from, so you can decide which work best and turn them into small habits.

3) If Part 1.2 flags areas as “within norms / monitor / priority”: what to do concretely

Here’s how the feedback works, simply put: at the end (or after 1.2) you can receive three types of feedback—**within norms**, **monitor**, **priority**—and each triggers different suggestions and actions.

- € **Within norms** means you’re on a good course: you receive continuity feedback with **1–2 habits to maintain** (e.g., regular sleep times, a micro-break during study).
- € **Monitor** means there’s some effort but it’s manageable: you receive a **7-day mini-plan** with two simple actions (one for daytime, one for evening) and, at the end of the week, you do a brief check on what helped and what to change.
- € **Priority** means you need closer support: you’re offered a **1:1 meeting** with a trusted adult to agree on **two concrete steps** and set a **short follow-up (10–14 days)**.

This scheme applies to all areas (energy/well-being, emotions/stress, relationships, digital media use, safety): same logic, different tips based on how you’re doing—without judgments.

4) Feeling well: skills you can train

Work on one competency at a time (1–2 weeks); choose micro-actions:

- € **Self-awareness.** Do a short daily check-in on your state (one word or a color) and note “one thing that helps me now.” This trains presence and self-as-context: you notice what you feel without judging yourself and become more able to choose what need.
- € **Emotion regulation.** When you feel an emotional wave, name the emotion and apply the **STOP** routine (Stop–Breathe–Observe–Proceed). It works because you welcome the emotion and don’t get hooked by difficult thoughts: they feel lighter and

you restart with useful actions.

- ✘ **Social skills & trust.** Once a week, do a micro-action of connection (ask for or offer help, thank someone, join a cooperative task). Acting like this puts relational values into practice and strengthens your sense of belonging.
- ✘ **Perseverance/agency.** Take a task and split it into **3 clear steps**; track progress day by day. This is committed action: **small steady steps** beat sporadic “spurts” and build self-efficacy.
- ✘ **Resilience/optimism.** When difficult thoughts arrive, reframe them with “I am having the thought that...” and recall a similar episode you already managed. Let thoughts flow by and pay attention to what you’re doing now: this helps you see the situation more clearly and makes the “stories in your head” weigh less.
- ✘ **Responsibility/creativity.** Each week propose a “**zero-cost idea**” to improve study or class climate and state your commitment. You connect values and action: short, coherent, doable initiatives that train creativity and a sense of responsibility.

5) “Did you know?” good practices for school

Along the pathway you’ll find guided steps already inside the questionnaire: they’ll show you small actions to manage stress, attention, and routines. Here are just a couple of examples—the others you’ll discover while completing it.

- ✘ **4-7-8 breathing:** useful in the evening, when you feel tension, or before a test. How to do it: inhale 4, hold 7, exhale 8 (3–4 times).
- ✘ **Study-life boundaries:** schedule a **non-negotiable micro-break** and a **no-notifications window** (e.g., the last 30 minutes before sleep).

The questionnaire will offer other simple good practices to try for a few days, so you can see which ones work best for you.

1.5 When should you seek professional help?

In VET schools, well-being and learning are often connected—but not always. Even when one of the two wobbles, the environment can make a difference: if it’s welcoming and notices signs of struggle early, it becomes easier to participate, regain motivation, and achieve results. That’s why the project focuses on **prevention**: growing awareness (for students, teachers, and leaders), training skills to feel well with yourself and others, and using simple, non-medical digital tools to catch difficulties early so you can act before problems become big.

Sometimes feeling well and learning don’t go hand in hand, and you may feel overwhelmed. Asking for help is not a failure: it’s a smart way to take care of yourself—just as you’d see a doctor for physical pain. If some signals persist or make your day harder, talking to a

professional can make a difference. Below you'll find when it's time to seek professional help.

All these guidelines are inside the **F3 questionnaire**: completing it is a simple first step to understand how you're doing, receive suggestions tailored to you, and—if needed—be directed to the right person.

1. **Whom to ask for help (and what to expect)**
You can reach out to: the designated teacher, a tutor, the school psychologist/counselor, a listening service, your family, or local services. What usually happens? A short conversation, a few practical strategies for the week, and—if needed—a referral to someone who can support you better. **Confidentiality and respect come first.**
2. **“Okay, where do I start?”**
Choose a trusted person and set aside a moment with them. You can say: “Lately I’ve been struggling with... I’d like to understand what I can do.” Agree on **two simple steps for 7–14 days** (for example: a sleep routine and one breathing pause per day) and set a review.
3. **Let’s normalize this—together**
Having difficult periods does not define who you are. You’re not “overreacting,” you’re not “burdening anyone”: you’re doing prevention. Asking for help is not a failure—it’s a life skill.

Final message: If signals persist, increase, or block your daily life—or if safety is involved—**ask for help today**. Doing it early makes everything easier.

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