



# CROSSROADS GAP-YEAR MENTAL HEALTH HANDBOOK



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



# EMERGENCY RESOURCES

Service	Phone Number	Description
Police	100	Call in the event of danger or threat to safety.
Magen David Adom	101	For medical emergencies needing immediate attention.
United Hatzalah	1221	Medical emergency services, free of charge
Rape Crisis Hotline	1202- women 1203- men	24 hour sexual assault hotline
Terem Medical Center- Jerusalem	1-599-520-520	Urgent Care Clinic



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# INTRODUCTION TO YOUR GAP YEAR EXPERIENCE

A gap year can be an amazing, personal journey! This time is all about discovering who you are - developing yourself and your values, building independence, resilience, and refining your confidence. It's a wonderful opportunity to think about what matters to you, set exciting goals, and get ready for the next chapter in your life. With a clearer sense of purpose, you'll be all set to tackle whatever comes your way!

The year in Israel offers endless opportunities. Whether you're focusing on your personal goals, deepening your Jewish and religious identity, or simply exploring the beautiful land, it's important to be mindful of potential challenges along the way. To support your mental health and overall well-being during your gap-year, we've put together a helpful guide to navigate your time here in Israel.







# **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

**WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO GET OUT OF YOUR GAP  
YEAR?**

**WHAT ARE YOU MOST EXCITED ABOUT,  
AND WHAT ARE YOU MOST NERVOUS  
ABOUT?**

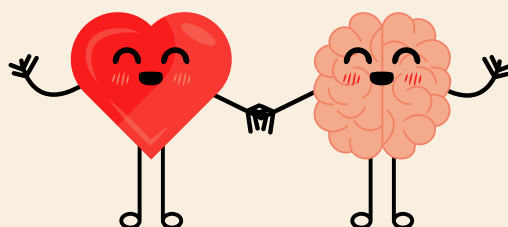
# MENTAL HEALTH IN A NUTSHELL



Mental health is about our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects the way we think, feel, and behave in everyday life, as well as how we cope with stress, connect with others, and make decisions.

**Good mental health doesn't mean never experiencing difficulties.** It means having the tools and resilience to handle life's challenges, recover from setbacks, and continue growing. Just like physical health, mental health exists on a spectrum and can change over time depending on circumstances, stressors, and support systems.

Taking care of our mental health involves many factors - balancing rest, nutrition, movement, emotional health, relationships, and self-care. It also means knowing when to reach out for help, whether from friends, family, or professionals. Prioritizing mental health is not just about avoiding illness; it's about building a life of meaning, connection, and well-being.





## PREPARING FOR TRANSITION

Starting your gap year means stepping into a new environment, routines, and relationships—all of which take time to adjust to. **Preparing ahead can make the shift smoother.** Think about what has helped you through past changes, and bring along a few familiar comforts from home. Keep an open mind, stay flexible when things don't go as planned, and give yourself grace as you settle in. Transition is a process, and each small step forward helps you feel more at home in your new surroundings.





# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

**WHAT HAS HELPED YOU  
THROUGH CHANGES AND  
TRANSITIONS IN THE  
PAST?**



Crossroads Gap Year Therapy Clinic : 02 624 6265  
Crossroads Gap Year Crisis Hotline: 050 468 5463



# HERE ARE A FEW THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

## Adjustment

It's normal to feel out of place—routine and connection will develop. The discomfort you may experience is a natural response to a significant life change that you need time to process. Be patient with yourself as you establish new routines and relationships.

## Staying Motivated

This year will push you to grow—challenging you to stretch your limits, try new things, and build independence. It's normal to feel tired, stuck, or unmotivated at times, but that doesn't mean you're failing—it means you're human. Motivation comes and goes; what matters is knowing how to keep going and when to pause, reset, and start again. Taking care of your energy through habits like sleep, healthy eating, and exercise can make a big difference.



### Navigating Transition

Being in a new place with new people can be tough. Think about what's helped you through past transitions, and try doing one small, meaningful activity each day to build your emotional reserves. Everyone adjusts at their own pace, so don't compare yourself to others.

### Cultural Adjustment

Staying curious and open-minded allows you to better understand local customs, values, and rhythms of daily life, helping you adjust more smoothly and feel more at home in your new surroundings. Entering a new environment can feel overwhelming or even isolating at first, but with time, what once felt unfamiliar often becomes second nature.



### Building Independence

Being on your own can be a great opportunity to develop practical life skills, make decisions on your own, and gain deeper self-awareness as you navigate this stage of life. Even small acts—like managing your schedule, budgeting, or asking for help when needed—can significantly boost your confidence and emotional resilience, laying the foundation for long-term independence and emotional well-being.

### Moving Beyond Comfort Zones

Living in Israel is an exciting adventure filled with new sights, sounds, and experiences, but it can also bring moments of confusion, culture shock, or emotional discomfort, and all of that is completely normal. These moments of challenge are often signs of personal growth, as they push you beyond your comfort zone and help you adapt, learn, and build resilience in unfamiliar settings.



# NEW SOCIAL CIRCLES

One of the most exciting parts of your year abroad is meeting new people. You'll have the chance to build friendships, learn from others, and develop the lifelong skill of connecting across different backgrounds and perspectives. These relationships can be fun, meaningful, and even life-changing. Many gap year participants find themselves in completely different social environments than before, which in many ways can feel like a brand new start.

But let's be real-stepping into a whole new social scene isn't always easy. You'll likely meet people who come from different backgrounds, think differently from you, or communicate in unfamiliar ways. That can feel awkward or uncomfortable at first, and that's okay. Navigating new group dynamics takes patience, openness, and time. Don't feel pressure to "click" with everyone right away. Be yourself, stay curious, and allow friendships to grow naturally.





# **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

**THINK ABOUT A TIME YOU BUILT A STRONG  
FRIENDSHIP. WHAT MADE IT WORK, AND HOW CAN  
YOU BRING THOSE SAME QUALITIES INTO NEW  
RELATIONSHIPS THIS YEAR?**

**WHAT'S ONE WAY YOU'D LIKE TO STEP OUTSIDE  
YOUR COMFORT ZONE SOCIALLY THIS YEAR?**

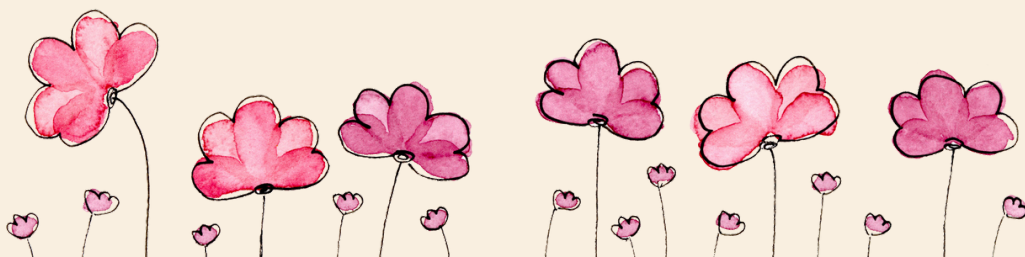


# DAILY LIVING AND WELLNESS

Your daily habits have a big impact on how you feel during your gap year. Simple routines—like getting enough sleep, eating balanced meals, staying active, and keeping your space organized—can help you feel more grounded and energized.

Make time for activities you enjoy, whether that's a walk, journaling, or connecting with friends. Building in moments to rest and recharge is just as important as staying busy. Pay attention to your body's signals—if you're feeling run down, take it as a cue to slow down. Practice healthy boundaries with your time and commitments so you don't burn out.

**Remember that wellness is a balance between taking care of your physical health, maintaining your emotional well-being, and nurturing your social connections.** Small, consistent steps in these areas can help you handle challenges more easily, stay resilient, and make the most of your experience.



# SLEEP

Getting enough rest is essential for managing your emotions and physical/mental wellbeing. Stick to a regular sleep schedule to sustain energy and mood, enhance your focus, and to avoid fatigue and burnout. This means getting adequate sleep, which is generally 7-8 hours a night. While getting enough sleep may sound easier said than done, there are a variety of tools you can use to upkeep this important ideal. Make a boundary or cutoff time for using your phone at night to avoid both the stimulus and potential to lose track of time.

In a social environment such as a gap year program, **“fear of missing out” can sometimes get in the way of taking these important steps** to prioritize your sleep routine. An invaluable resource to combat this challenge is to have an accountability buddy; someone you can make a pact with to encourage each other to stick to a healthy schedule.



# HYGIENE

Maintaining good hygiene, including keeping your belongings clean, promotes health and fosters positive social interactions, especially when living in a dorm. It also boosts self-esteem and helps you feel more in control. If you will be sharing bathrooms, showers, and laundry facilities, It may also help to plan ahead schedule wise so that all the resources are available to you when you need them.



# NUTRITION

Eating balanced meals helps support both your body and mind. Aim to include plenty of fruits, vegetables, and greens along with protein-rich foods in your diet. Keep in mind, your program might have limited food options at times, so you may need to consider supplementing to meet your nutritional needs. **The food you eat significantly impacts your energy levels, happiness, and brain function.**

Healthy eating, as well as eating habits is vital. When a person finds themselves engaging in unhealthy eating habits, it can negatively affect their wellbeing, or be a sign of another greater problem. **Skipping meals, suddenly avoiding certain foods, being preoccupied with restrictive eating, or relying on certain behaviors to curb appetite can also be concerning signs.** If you or someone you know is experiencing these behaviors, reach out to a mentor or professional for guidance.



# TIME MANAGEMENT

The use of planners and digital apps for task prioritization can help you organize your day while maintaining a healthy balance between studying, taking breaks, and unwinding.

Additionally, this approach can **reduce stress and prevent feelings of being overwhelmed**, while giving yourself command on how you spend your time.

Research has shown that being able to envision how your future self will feel about a choice can help you use your time more effectively. For example, when planning your daily schedule consider the potential impact and outcomes of two different choices down the line.





# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Make time in your routine for exercise, whether it's walking, running, or a sport. The key is to make it a daily part of your routine. All movement helps! **Regular physical movement has been shown to improve mental health and reduce stress.**

Think about going for a walk with a friend during lunch, walking instead of bussing when you have the option, or even just exploring your neighborhood. Whatever form it may be, make sure to get some exercise!





# **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

**WHAT'S ONE SMALL HABIT I COULD START (OR  
STOP) THAT WOULD MAKE ME FEEL STRONGER,  
CALMER, OR MORE ENERGIZED?**

# BUILDING YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

## Mentors & Teachers

Trusted adults can help balance your emotional, spiritual, and academic needs. They are there to listen, guide, and provide clarity when you feel confused or stuck, helping you make informed decisions. Taking charge of your self growth means finding your go-to advisors, role models, and helpers that everyone needs when they are working on their personal development



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## Friends & Peers

Open communication with supportive peers eases stress and builds connection. Having just one good friend can brighten your day and make you feel understood and grounded! Building genuine friendships doesn't happen overnight—stay open, patient, and authentic as you get to know others. Starting with simple conversations or shared experiences can lead to deeper bonds over time, which are vital for emotional support, reducing feelings of isolation, and fostering a sense of belonging.



## Family Connections

Staying in touch with loved ones provides stability and encouragement from home.

Regular calls, video chats, and messages with family and friends can ease feelings of homesickness and provide a sense of comfort and familiarity. These consistent connections serve as emotional anchors, reminding you that you're supported and not alone, even when far from home.

## Being Part of a Community

When on a gap year program, there are many opportunities to join programs, events, or volunteer opportunities to build meaningful friendships, and feel part of a community. Being actively involved in a community not only helps combat loneliness but also adds structure, motivation, and a sense of purpose to your daily life.





## **Mental Health Professionals**

Access to counselors or therapists is often available, either within your program or externally, such as through the Crossroads gap year therapy clinic. Reach out when needed. Taking a proactive approach and seeking assistance will allow you to build resilience and promote your overall well-being. This is one of the best times to work on emotional growth as there is limited academic pressure this year-use the extra headspace to build skills now.

## **You Are Not Alone**

Many students go through similar challenges when adjusting to a new environment—you're not alone in how you feel. Opening up about your experiences and emotions can foster understanding, reduce isolation, and lead to deeper, more authentic connections with others who are navigating the same journey.

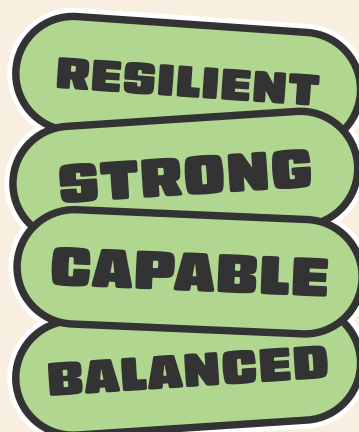


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# RESILIENCE

Resilience is your ability to adapt and bounce back when things get tough. Building it starts with self-awareness—knowing your triggers, emotions, and coping patterns. Practice healthy strategies like deep breathing, journaling, mindfulness, and reframing negative thoughts. **Break challenges into manageable steps**, focus on what you can control, and give yourself permission to rest and recharge.

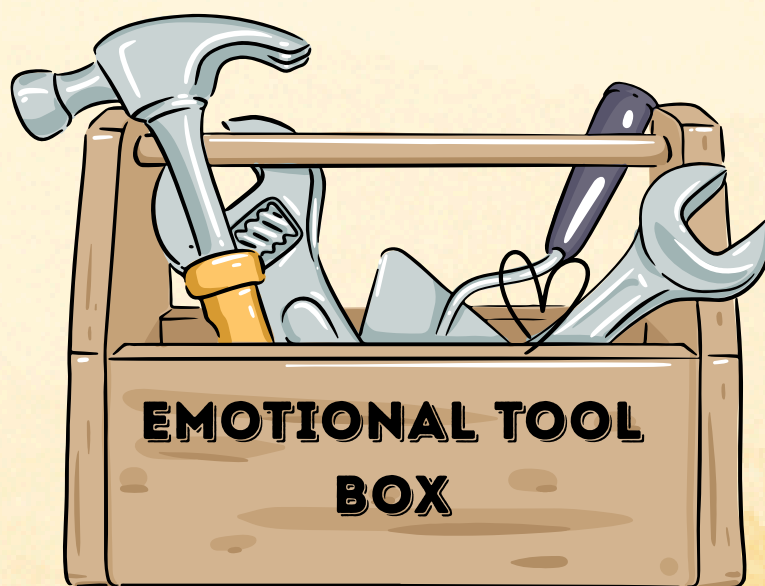
Over time, these tools help you handle setbacks with more confidence, stay grounded under pressure, and keep moving forward even when the road feels bumpy.



# BUILDING YOUR EMOTIONAL TOOLBOX

Just like you need the right tools to fix something, you also need tools to handle life's ups and downs. An emotional toolbox is a set of strategies that help you manage stress, regulate your feelings, and stay grounded when challenges come up.

Having your own emotional toolbox gives you confidence and resilience, knowing you're prepared to handle whatever comes your way.



# EXAMPLES OF HELPFUL TOOLS FOR YOUR EMOTIONAL TOOLBOX

## **TOOL #1**

### **Self-Check-Ins**

Regularly reflect on your emotional state to stay aware and grounded. Knowing how you're feeling helps you make healthier decisions and seek help if needed, preventing small issues from becoming bigger problems.

## **TOOL #2**

### **Strength Awareness**

Remind yourself to focus on what you are good at. Recognizing what you do well helps combat self-doubt and builds confidence, reinforcing a positive self-image during times of change or uncertainty.

## **TOOL #3**

### **Mindfulness Practices**

Practices like deep breathing, meditation, prayer, and grounding exercises can ease anxiety and sharpen present-moment awareness. They help quiet racing thoughts, create calm, and improve clarity, and many apps or videos online can guide you through them.

## **TOOL #4**

### **Coping Skills**

Strategies like journaling, exercise, or breathing help manage stress. Practicing these tools regularly builds emotional strength before a crisis hits, making it easier to stay grounded and respond calmly when challenges arise.

## **TOOL #5**

### **Healthy Routines**

Maintaining consistent sleep, balanced nutrition, and regular hydration supports mental and emotional stability. Consistent routines, which include healthy social outlets are some of the basics that form the foundation of resilience when life gets hectic.

## **TOOL #6**

### **Be Kind to Yourself (Self-Compassion)**

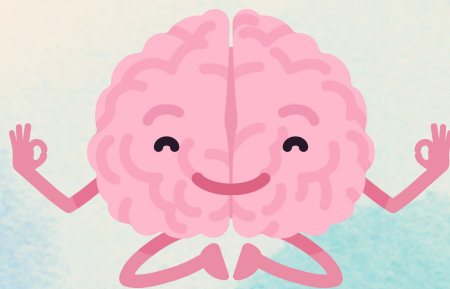
Treat yourself with the same kindness you'd show a friend. Mistakes and tough days are part of being human—respond with patience, not criticism. Self-compassion eases negative self-talk and helps you bounce back with confidence.





# MENTAL HEALTH VS PHYSICAL HEALTH

Your emotional well-being is just as important as your physical health- both affect your energy, relationships, and ability to handle everyday life. The same way that making doctors appointments when needed are necessary for your well being, so is reaching out to a mental health professional when you need to be seen. Checking in with yourself and asking for help when things feel off isn't weak- it's smart and strong. Everyone has stuff they deal with, even if they don't show it, and talking about it helps take the pressure off and reminds you you're not alone.



# WHEN TO SEEK HELP

**Warning signs of anxiety** may include constant worry, restlessness, difficulty sleeping, racing thoughts, physical tension, or feeling overwhelmed by everyday situations.

If you notice these signs in yourself, the first step is to pause, acknowledge what you're experiencing, and try grounding techniques like slow breathing or taking a short walk.

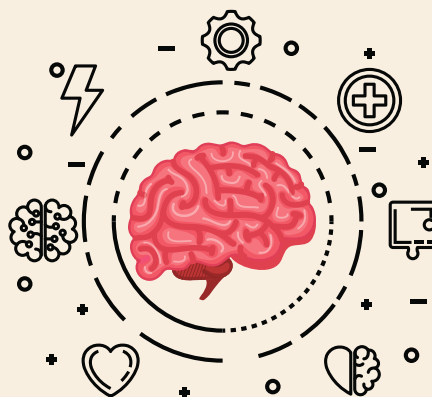
If anxiety persists or interferes with daily life, reach out to a trusted friend, program staff, or a mental health professional for support.

**Warning signs of depression** can include persistent sadness, social disengagement, low energy, or losing interest in activities you typically enjoy are all warning signs of depression. Reaching out for support becomes more crucial the longer these emotions persist, even though they can be overwhelming and make it tempting to isolate.

One of the most important first steps to feeling better and not dealing with it alone is to talk to someone you can trust, whether that someone be a friend, mentor, or mental health professional.

# NORMAL REACTIONS VS. WHEN TO GET HELP

Being sad and nervous can both be important healthy expressions of what you are feeling at a particular time. They can be normal reactions to experiences in everyday life and should be embraced when experienced in moderation. If stress, anxiety, or sadness begins to disrupt your daily life, it may be time to seek professional support. You don't have to wait for a crisis—even feeling "off" is a valid reason to reach out. It's a strong and healthy step toward feeling better. Support is available, and reaching out early can make a big difference.





# CONSIDER GETTING HELP IF YOU NOTICE:

- Persistent sadness, hopelessness, or emptiness
- Withdrawing from friends, activities, or your community
- Significant changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Losing interest in activities you typically enjoy

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## What to do if You or Someone You Know is in Crisis

If you or someone you know is experiencing mental distress, engaging in at-risk behavior, engaging in unsafe addictive behavior, has thoughts of self harm, or suicidal thoughts, seek immediate help. Don't wait! Help is available - reaching out can save lives! Most programs have trained staff and connections to local mental health professionals who are ready to support you. Acting swiftly can save lives and is the initial step toward safety, stability, and the journey of healing and recovery. You're not alone, and real help is out there.





# **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

**THINK ABOUT A RECENT CHALLENGE YOU FACED.  
HOW DID YOU RESPOND IN THE MOMENT? WHAT  
HELPED YOU GET THROUGH IT, AND WHAT MIGHT  
YOU TRY DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME?**



# BREAKING THE STIGMA AROUND MENTAL HEALTH

In some communities, talking about mental health can feel uncomfortable or even taboo, but it shouldn't be. Taking care of your emotional well-being is a key part of staying healthy overall.

**Struggling doesn't mean you're weak or doing something wrong- it means you're human.** Everyone has hard days, and reaching out for support is actually a sign of strength and self-awareness. Let's shift the conversation. Instead of seeing mental health as something to hide, think of it as part of your personal growth and self-care.

You deserve to feel supported, not judged!



**Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.** Whether you're feeling overwhelmed, lonely, or facing a crisis, reaching out can make all the difference. Talking to a friend, mentor, or professional can ease the weight you're carrying and remind you that you're not alone. Consider using the resources in this book and don't hesitate to reach out to the Crossroads Gap Year Therapy Clinic or Crisis Hotline if needed.

# MANAGING STRESS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

## **Seek Out Support and Stay Connected**

Remember during this time that you are not alone! Stay connected to people around you. If you're feeling overwhelmed speak with a friend, parent, supervisor, coworker, or reach out to a mental health professional. Social support can provide us with strength and hope and help us build resilience.



## **Self Care**

During times of crisis it is easy to forget about self care, but by taking adequate care of yourself, you can keep yourself safe. Participate in activities you enjoy, like music or art. Take time to pamper yourself. Take a break. Move your body. Drink a comforting warm drink. Give to yourself.



## **Limit Exposure to Media**

While it might be tempting to constantly refresh the news, overconsumption of news has a negative effect on our wellbeing. It will often make us feel more overwhelmed and exhausted. Additionally, social media has been flooded with graphic videos and images that are detrimental and harmful.



## **Maintaining Routine**

Maintaining routine in times of crisis and uncertainty allows us to retain a sense of control and normalcy during our everyday life. While our day to day will probably look different, we can look for small ways to maintain routine, such as continuing our usual morning or night routines, scheduling self care, and maintaining usual activities as much as possible.



## **Stay Grounded**

In times like this it is easy to become overwhelmed and distressed. Grounding exercises can help us manage acute stress and reduce anxiety. A simple grounding exercise is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique. It involves identifying 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. By doing so you shift your focus from anxiety-provoking thoughts to the present moment.



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**Crossroads** provides  
essential mental health  
support to English speaking  
gap-year participants,  
students, young adults, and  
teens.

To contact Crossroads regarding  
our gap-year therapy services  
call 02-624-6265 or reach out  
on WhatsApp at 050-868-9208.

**If in crisis, call our 24/7  
hotline: 050-468-5463**

**CROSSROADS**