



WHEN SCARS BECOME ART

**A Handbook on Wellbeing and Inclusion
for Youth Workers Supporting
Young Roma, Migrants and Refugees**



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When Scars (!) Become Art: A Handbook on Wellbeing and Inclusion for Youth Workers Supporting Young Roma, Migrants and Refugees

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Foreword

Working in the field of human rights and youth work, I often have the feeling that is best captured by the words *running to stand still*. Running to get funds, write applications, assess applications. Running to face spaces that we keep saying are shrinking, but it often feels like they already shrunk. Running to face the internal politics of organisations, of intergenerational dialogue and of institutional constraints. Running to listen to the struggles of young people, knowing that often you are running to stand still and not everything will be done to offer a solution, so you keep listening, you keep standing still. Nothing ever changes, and if it does, it always feels ridiculously small compared to the struggles.

And yet, there are moments when something genuinely sparks hope. When I had the absolute pleasure of being asked to read the handbook of the project When Scars (!) Become Art, and to offer my comments to some of the educational activities, I distinctly remember thinking that I had something new and desperately needed in my hands. This handbook was addressing topics that are often overlooked or labelled as too complex in the field of youth work, like identity development and mental health, especially in the context of minority communities. And in doing so, the activities in this handbook offer a way to explore these hard topics with care, attention to the individuality and freedom to express however one wants to.

This work is brave, because it is not aimed at standing still like too much of the daily business in the field. For once, it feels like we are not running to carry an important message as widely as possible. We have worlds within ourselves, and these worlds need care and understanding too if we want to achieve a better, more humane society. I wouldn't say there is only one way to get to this scenario, but if you are a youth worker, an educator, if you have the chance to work with minority communities, I would certainly start by reading this handbook.

Preface

What does it mean for a young person to feel they have a place in this world?

Young people who grow up facing displacement, exclusion, discrimination, and uncertainty often carry invisible stories beneath the surface of everyday life. For many young Roma, migrants, and refugees, experiences of systemic exclusion, forced movement, prejudice, poverty, trauma, and social invisibility shape not only their opportunities but also their sense of identity, belonging, and wellbeing. These are not personal failings or individual misfortunes. They are the consequences of structures, policies, and social norms that consistently deny certain young people the right to belong. At the same time, there is also resilience, creativity, courage, and an extraordinary capacity for healing and transformation.

When Scars (!) Become Art, both the project and this handbook, was created from the belief that youth work can become a powerful space of expression, inclusion, and empowerment. We dedicate this to all youth workers who stand alongside young people in their journeys: listening, supporting, facilitating, advocating, and creating environments where every young person can feel seen, heard, respected, and valued.

This publication was developed within an international collaboration among partner organisations from six countries, committed to inclusion, wellbeing, mental health awareness, and human rights in youth work. It is grounded in research, practical experience, and the voices of mental health professionals, youth workers, and young people themselves.

Inside, you will find both theoretical background and practical activities. The handbook explores topics such as ethical youth work, professional boundaries, self-care, non-formal education, trauma-informed approaches, cultural sensitivity, emotional expression, resilience, wellbeing, identity, and many more. The activities are designed to be flexible, participatory, and adaptable, while encouraging creativity, dialogue, inclusion, and emotional awareness.

At the same time, this handbook recognises that youth workers themselves need support, reflection, and self-care. Working alongside young people navigating trauma, exclusion, and discrimination requires emotional awareness, ethical responsibility, and sustainable professional practice. The wellbeing of those who provide support is inseparable from the quality of the support itself.

We hope this resource inspires youth workers, educators, facilitators, community leaders, and organisations to keep building inclusive spaces where diversity is celebrated and where every young person has the opportunity not only to cope, but to grow, participate, create, and belong. And we hope it is also an invitation: to listen more deeply, to act more courageously, and to recognise that even the deepest scars can become part of a meaningful work of art.

The editors

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction



1.1 Project Information

When Scars (!) Become Art is a 30-month Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership in Youth project (December 2023 - May 2026) implemented by six partner organisations from Germany, Türkiye, Romania, Greece, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The project focuses on strengthening youth work practices that support young Roma, refugees, and migrants, with particular attention to mental well-being, social inclusion, and culturally sensitive approaches. Through research, cooperation, and innovative educational tools, the project aims to support youth workers and organisations in responding more effectively to the realities faced by young people navigating systemic exclusion.

The project aims to increase the capacity of civil society organisations and institutions by improving their methods, tools, and frameworks for working with young Roma, refugees, and migrants. By promoting a deeper understanding of inclusion and mental wellbeing interventions, the project seeks to support young people in building resilience, agency, and meaningful social participation, including in contexts of systemic exclusion.

1.2 Research Basis and Rationale

This handbook was developed in response to the findings of the *When Scars (!) Become Art* research, which explored the relationship between social inclusion, discrimination, and wellbeing among young Roma, migrants, and refugees across six European countries. The research showed that discrimination and social exclusion are common experiences for many young people and that these experiences negatively affect their wellbeing, increasing risks such as anxiety, stress, trauma symptoms, and reduced life satisfaction. At the same time, the study highlighted that wellbeing is strongly influenced by factors such as social connectedness, sense of agency, and positive identity, which can act as protective resources when properly supported.

A key finding was that youth workers often face complex situations related to emotional wellbeing, inclusion, and identity but lack practical, accessible tools to respond confidently and safely. The research emphasized the need for culturally sensitive, trauma-informed, and participatory approaches that strengthen resilience, agency, and belonging rather than focusing only on problems or risks. This handbook was therefore created as a practical resource to support youth workers in creating safer spaces, facilitating meaningful non-formal learning activities, and promoting mental wellbeing, inclusion, and participation among Roma, migrant, and refugee youth.¹

A note on scope: this handbook is a practical resource for non-formal education, not a clinical intervention programme. It does not aim to measure clinical mental health outcomes, trauma symptom reduction, or long-term behavioural change. Meaningful change in wellbeing is complex and influenced by many factors beyond the scope of any single resource. The purpose of the activities and approaches

¹ Baci, E.L., Okros, N.I. (2025). Social inclusion and mental health. Research report on the effects of discrimination on the wellbeing of marginalized young people in Germany, Greece, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Turkey. Research report, 27 Dec 2025.

in this handbook is to support learning, reflection, belonging, and responsible practice - not to replace professional mental health support.

1.3 Handbook Aim, Objectives and Target Groups

The aim of this handbook is to equip youth workers with practical, culturally sensitive, and trauma-informed tools that support the inclusion, participation, and mental well-being of young Roma, refugees, and migrants. The handbook strengthens youth workers' competences in facilitating safer and inclusive non-formal learning environments while also promoting professional self-care and sustainable youth work practice.

In the context of this handbook, **Roma** refers to diverse Roma communities across Europe, recognising that experiences, cultural practices, and social realities vary significantly between countries and groups. **Migrants** are understood as young people who have moved across national borders for different reasons, including work, education, family reunification, or other social and economic circumstances. **Refugees and asylum seekers** refer to young people who have fled their countries due to conflict, persecution, or serious threats, including those with granted protection status and those currently undergoing asylum procedures. The handbook acknowledges the diversity within and between these groups and avoids treating them as homogeneous categories.

Objectives:

1. To strengthen youth workers' competences in facilitating trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and inclusive non-formal learning environments for young Roma, refugees, and migrants.
2. To support youth workers in understanding the relationship between discrimination, social exclusion, and wellbeing, and in responding to that relationship practically and ethically in their work.
3. To provide a diverse range of adaptable activities and session outlines focused on wellbeing, inclusion, resilience, agency, and emotional awareness.
4. To promote youth worker self-care, professional boundaries, and sustainable practice, recognising that the wellbeing of the facilitator is inseparable from the quality of the work.

1.4 How To Use This Handbook

This handbook is designed as a flexible, modular resource for youth workers supporting the wellbeing, inclusion, and participation of young Roma, refugees, and migrants through non-formal education. It can be used as a complete programme guide or as a source of individual activities. There is no single correct way to use it. What matters most is that you know your group, trust your judgment, and adapt accordingly.

Getting Started

Before facilitating any activity, take time to read through the introductory sections of the handbook. Section 1 gives you the project background and rationale. Section 2 covers ethical guidelines, professional boundaries, and self-care. Section 3 provides the methodological framework that grounds everything that follows.

We particularly recommend reading Section 3.1 (Understanding Discrimination and Its Impact), Section 3.4 (Cultural Sensitivity), and Section 3.5 (Trauma-Informed Practice) before running any session. These sections explain the why behind the how. Without them, activities may be delivered competently but without the depth of understanding that makes them genuinely useful.

Understanding the Activity Structure

Every activity in this handbook follows the same structure:

- **Introduction:** what the activity is and why it works
- **Emotional Intensity:** the activity's emotional demand, rated on a five-point scale
- **Objectives:** what the facilitator intends to create or achieve through the activity
- **Learning Outcomes:** what participants may experience, develop, or take away
- **Duration and Group Size:** realistic timing and group guidance
- **Materials and Preparation:** everything needed before the session
- **Step-by-step Instructions:** phased facilitation guidance
- **Discussion and Debriefing:** a bank of reflection questions
- **Tips and Considerations:** practical facilitation guidance specific to this group
- **Variations:** adaptations for different contexts, group sizes, or intensity levels
- **Resources:** sources and theoretical grounding

These elements are guidance, not prescription. Adapt freely. Every group is different, and your knowledge of your specific group is always more valuable than any written instruction.

The Emotional Intensity Rating

Every activity carries an emotional intensity rating. This is one of the most important navigation tools in the handbook and should always be checked before selecting an activity.

- **Low:** accessible and light, suitable for new groups or early sessions
- **Low to Medium:** a gentle entry into personal or emotional territory
- **Medium:** requires some established trust and may surface stronger emotions
- **Medium to High:** significant emotional depth, suitable for groups with an established foundation
- **High:** the most personally and emotionally demanding activities in the handbook

Activities rated High carry a specific warning box at the start of their Tips section. Read it carefully before proceeding. High intensity activities require solid group trust, facilitator psychological literacy, and ideally a co-facilitator present.

One important distinction: the emotional intensity rating describes the typical demand of the activity itself, not the emotional climate of any particular group on any particular day. A Low-rated activity with a group that is collectively carrying grief, conflict, or current crisis may surface more than a High-rated activity with a settled, well-established group. The rating is a property of the activity in the abstract, your reading of your specific group in the room is always the more important guide. When in doubt, trust what you observe over what the rating predicts.

That said, no rating system can fully predict what will happen in a room. Even a Low intensity activity can surface unexpected emotions in a particular group on a particular day. The emotional intensity rating is a guide, not a guarantee. Ultimately, how you read and respond to your group in the moment is what matters most. This is why facilitator readiness is so important, and why we have included a Facilitator Readiness Tool in the Appendices.

General Recommendations

- Create a safer, respectful, and inclusive environment where participants feel free to engage at their own level.
- Respect cultural differences and avoid assumptions about participants' experiences.
- Practice the '**Right to Pass**': Ensure participants know they have the right to opt out of any activity or question without explanation. Respecting silence is as important as facilitating speech.
- Ensure accessibility for participants with different physical, cognitive, or language needs.
- Encourage feedback and adapt sessions accordingly.

Working with the Debriefing Questions

The debriefing questions in each activity follow a structured reflection sequence inspired by Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Gibbs' Reflective Cycle. The sequence moves through four stages:

- **Experience** (Description; what did participants observe and experience?)
- **Reflection including feelings** (Feelings; what emotions or reactions came up?)
- **Analysis** (Meaning-making; what does this reveal about the theme, the group, or the world?)
- **Application/Action** (Transfer; how does this connect to real life, and what might participants do differently?)

This sequence is intentional and important. Without it, activities risk staying at the surface, engaging in the moment but not genuinely transformative. The analysis and transfer stages are where real learning happens, where individual experience connects to broader social realities, and where participants leave with something they can actually use.

Follow the sequence but not the clock. All four stages should be visited, but the time spent in each depends entirely on where the group is. Some groups will move quickly through description and feelings and want to go deep on analysis. Others will need much longer in the feeling stage before they can think analytically. Read the room. A debrief that skips stages produces shallow learning. A debrief that gets stuck in one stage and never moves forward leaves participants without the meaning-making and transfer they need. The sequence is your guide. The group's energy is your compass.

The questions provided in each activity are a bank to choose from, not a checklist to complete. Select some that feel most relevant for your group at that moment. If you adapt or replace questions, try to maintain the sequence. And never skip the debrief entirely. It is not an optional add-on. It is where the activity becomes learning.

Sequencing Activities

The activities in this handbook are designed primarily as standalone sessions. Each one has its own objectives, its own arc, and its own value independent of what comes before or after it. A youth worker running a single session with a group they see regularly does not need to follow any particular sequence. Pick what fits your group, your context, and your objective for that session.

That said, activities within each section follow a deliberate internal progression, from lighter and more accessible to deeper and more personally demanding. If you are combining several activities, whether across a few sessions or a longer programme, this progression is worth following. The section introductions explain it explicitly.

For facilitators running a more structured multi-session programme, the following broad arc is suggested:

Beginning: Connection and Trust: Always start with Section 5.1 (Safer Spaces and Icebreakers), regardless of which themes you plan to address. Build connection and trust before introducing personal or emotional content.

Building: Awareness and Expression: Once trust is established, move into emotional awareness and expression (Sections 5.2 and 5.3), mindfulness (Section 5.4), and identity work (Section 5.5). These sections build the inner vocabulary and self-awareness that deeper work requires.

Deepening: Resilience and Wellbeing: Sections 5.6 and 5.7 explore personal history, self-worth, and mental health. They contain the highest concentration of Medium to High and High intensity activities. Ensure adequate trust and time before entering this territory.

Action: Agency and Advocacy: Section 5.8 brings everything together into voice, choice, and collective action. It works best when participants have already done some identity, resilience, and wellbeing work.

Closing: Integration and Sustain: Every session and every programme should close with intention. Section 5.9 (Closing Rituals) provides a range of closing options.

This arc is a suggestion, not a requirement. Use it if it fits. Adapt it if it doesn't. Trust your knowledge of your group.

Choosing the Right Activity: A Quick Decision Guide

Not sure which activity to choose? Work through these questions:

- **Is this the first or second session with this group?** If **yes**, stay within Section 5.1 and Low intensity activities only. Do not introduce personal or emotional content until connection has been established.
- **How much trust has been established in the group?** Little or some trust: Low to Medium intensity is appropriate. Sections 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 are good starting points. Moderate trust: Medium intensity is accessible. Sections 5.4 and 5.5 can be introduced with care. Strong, established trust: Medium to High and High intensity activities are appropriate with proper preparation.
- **What does the group need right now?** Energy and connection: Name and Gesture Circle, Human Bingo, Feel the Beat, Freeze Frames. Emotional awareness: Emotions Circle, Feelings Collage, Emotion Stars, Your Inner Weather. Identity and self-worth: Identity Maps, The Masks We Wear, Enough, The Mirror and The Map. Resilience and future orientation: The Hero's Journey, Timeline of Resilience, Letter to My Future Self. Collective action: Build It Together, Change Starts Here. Grounding and closing: Any activity from Section 5.9.
- **Have you used a similar activity recently with this group?** Check the thematic tags on each activity to avoid repeating the same objectives and methods. Each section introduction explains how activities differ from each other within the same theme.
- **Is the activity rated High intensity?** If yes, read the warning box in the Tips section before proceeding. Ensure trust is solid, grounding techniques are ready, and your referral pathway is known. Consider whether a co-facilitator should be present.

Remember: even after working through this guide, the final decision always rests with you. You know your group. Trust that knowledge.

Facilitator Readiness

Some activities touch on sensitive topics including identity, discrimination, trauma, self-worth, and personal dreams. Before facilitating any session, take a moment to honestly assess your own readiness. Ask yourself:

- Am I comfortable holding space for strong emotions or difficult conversations?
- Do I feel prepared to manage group dynamics if sensitive topics arise?
- Do I know when and how to refer participants to professional support?
- Have I read the Tips section of this activity carefully, including any High intensity warnings?
- Do I have a grounding exercise ready if needed? (See Section 4.6.6 (p. 41))
- Do I know my referral pathway? (See Section 4.4.7 (p. 43-44) and the Referral and Support Contacts section. (7))

If you feel you cannot safely facilitate a particular activity, adapt it, seek support from a colleague, or choose a different exercise. Facilitators are not therapists. Knowing your limits is not a weakness. It is responsible and ethical youth work.

We want to be honest about something here. No handbook, no checklist, and no rating system can fully prevent something difficult from happening in a room. We have done our best to signal risks, offer alternatives, and provide grounding tools. But ultimately, what happens in a session depends on the facilitator's presence, judgment, and humanity. The Facilitator Readiness Tool in the Appendices is there to support honest self-reflection before a session. Use it. And be honest with yourself when you do.

A note on informed consent and programme orientation

Voluntary participation begins before the first session. Where possible, young people should be given a brief, honest orientation to the nature of the programme before they commit to participating, not a detailed outline of every activity, but enough information to make a genuine choice. This might include: the general themes that will be explored (identity, emotions, belonging, personal history); the fact that some activities may touch on difficult or personal experiences; the reminder that participation is always voluntary and that opting out of any activity at any time is not only allowed but respected.

For young people who have experienced trauma, coercion, or situations where they were not given choices about their own participation in processes, this advance orientation is not a formality. It is the first concrete demonstration that this space will be different. It communicates: *you get to decide whether this is for you*. That message, delivered clearly before the first session begins, can meaningfully shape whether a young person walks in with openness or guardedness.

This does not require formal paperwork or lengthy explanations. A brief, honest conversation is enough. What matters is that it happens.

A Note on Language and Adaptation

Activities in this handbook can be facilitated in any language. Participants should always be encouraged to contribute in their first language where possible. Multilingualism is an asset, not a barrier. All written materials including worksheets, cards, and templates can be translated or adapted for local contexts.

The handbook was developed across six European countries and reflects diverse realities. Facilitators are encouraged to adapt examples, scenarios, and references to their specific national and community context. What works in one setting may need adjustment in another. Creativity in how you organise and present activities is not only permitted, it is encouraged.

CHAPTER 2

Youth Work and Ethical Guidelines for Youth Workers



2.1 Youth Work

Youth work takes many forms. Across Europe and beyond, it operates within different legal frameworks, funding structures, professional standards, and cultural traditions. In some countries it is a regulated profession with academic pathways and state recognition. In others it is driven primarily by civil society, volunteers, and non-governmental organisations. In many places it exists somewhere in between, evolving and contested.

What remains consistent across these differences is the core orientation: youth work meets young people where they are, values their lived experience as legitimate knowledge, and creates conditions for their development, participation, and agency. Whether state-funded or volunteer-driven, formally recognised or informally practiced, the youth worker creates conditions for development, participation, and agency, working within and sometimes against the systems that shape young people's lives.

This handbook was developed through a partnership of six organisations from Germany, Türkiye, Romania, Greece, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Each context shaped the research, the activities, and the perspectives reflected in this handbook. A summary of youth work frameworks and practices in each of these six countries is available in the Appendices (see Appendix 8) for readers who want that contextual background.

The handbook itself is designed to be used beyond these six countries. Its methodology, activities, and principles are transferable across national contexts. What matters is not where you are working but who you are working with, and how.

2.2 Ethical guideline for youth workers

Youth work is underpinned by a strong ethical framework that ensures the protection, empowerment, and inclusion of young people. At its core, this means treating young people with respect and dignity, recognising them as the primary people whose interests must always come first. It means supporting voluntary participation, promoting equality, diversity, and human rights, and encouraging personal, social, and political development through non-formal and informal learning.

Professional integrity requires maintaining clear boundaries, practising confidentiality, and avoiding relationships or actions that could exploit or harm young people. It also means committing to continuous professional development through training, mentoring, supervision, and reflection, ensuring that your practice remains competent, honest, and self-aware.

One principle deserves particular emphasis: practise a style of dialogue that values the young person's lived experience as equal to your own knowledge. This creates a co-learning space where you do not simply give answers but work together with young people to explore and understand their reality. Young people are not the recipients of your expertise. They are the experts on their own lives.

Ethical practice also means working in partnership, with communities, families, and professionals from other sectors, to secure the best possible outcomes for young people. These ethical principles are not static rules. They are living commitments that require ongoing reflection, dialogue, and

accountability. By embedding these values and principles into everyday practice, youth workers contribute to the development of inclusive, participatory, and supportive communities that empower young people in their transition to adulthood (Petkovic & Bárta, 2019).¹

Ethical Principles and Values

- Treat young people with respect, dignity, and without discrimination.
- Recognize young people as the *primary people this work is for*, ensuring their best interests always come first.
- Support equality, diversity, inclusion, and human rights.
- Promote voluntary participation and empower young people to make decisions.
- Encourage personal, social, and political development through non-formal learning.
- Maintain professional integrity, boundaries, and confidentiality.
- Practice a style of dialogue that values the young person's lived experience as equal to the worker's knowledge. This creates a "co-learning" space where the youth worker doesn't just give answers, but works together with the young person to explore and understand their reality.

Professional Responsibilities

- Promote the welfare and safety of young people while allowing them to learn through challenging experiences (*duty of care*).
- Avoid conflicts of interest, personal gain, or inappropriate relationships with young people.
- Maintain competence through continuous training, reflection, supervision, and professional development.
- Work in cooperation and collaboration with other professionals and agencies to achieve the best outcomes for young people.
- Practise with integrity, compassion, courage, and self-awareness, ensuring both self-care and professional care.

Rules, Policies, and Procedures

- Use clear organisational rules to translate ethical principles into practice (e.g., safeguarding policies, anti-discrimination rules, confidentiality policies).
- Follow guidelines on behaviour inside and outside work, ensuring that personal conduct does not undermine trust in youth work.
- Ensure transparency in governance and operation, and prevent corruption or misuse of power.

Competences and Development

- Build competences in moral reasoning, critical reflection, and ethical decision-making.
- Engage in mentoring, supervision, and fieldwork experience to strengthen practice.
- Develop knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes through formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

¹ Petkovic, S., & Bárta, O. (2020). *Ethical standards in youth work and how they support education and career pathways of youth workers* [Working paper]. Youth Partnership.

Implementation and Support

- Raise awareness of the code of ethics among youth workers, organisations, and communities.
- Integrate ethical standards into recruitment, job descriptions, training, and supervision.
- Provide continuous organisational support, supervision, and resources to sustain ethical practice.

2.3 Professional Boundaries in Youth Work

Building trust and connection is essential in youth work. So is maintaining professional boundaries. Boundaries are not walls. They are respectful guidelines that protect both young people and youth workers, ensuring that relationships remain ethical and focused on the young person's growth.

Clear boundaries matter especially when working with sensitive topics related to wellbeing, identity, or trauma. Without them, the most well-intentioned youth worker can cause harm, burn out, or lose sight of their role.

Professional boundaries define what is appropriate in a youth worker and young person relationship, where your role ends and when referral to other professionals is needed, and how to protect your own wellbeing and avoid burnout.

Examples of Healthy Boundaries

Area	Healthy Practice	Boundary Concerns
Communication	Scheduled and transparent contact (e.g. during working hours)	Private late-night messaging or sharing personal phone number
Emotional Involvement	Showing empathy and care without over-identifying	Becoming overly invested in a young person's life, feeling personally responsible for their outcomes
Physical Space	Respecting personal space, asking for consent (e.g. for hugs)	Uninvited touch, being alone in closed spaces
Social Media	Professional accounts, clear digital boundaries	Adding youth to personal accounts or private DMs
Time Management	Ending sessions on time, honoring breaks	Giving unlimited time or cancelling personal time to help
Power Dynamics	Involving youth in planning and admitting when you don't have all the answers.	Feeling that you must "fix" the young person or making decisions for them without their input.

Red Flags - When Boundaries Slip

- You think about a specific young person constantly outside of work.
- You are sharing too much of your own personal life.
- You avoid asking for help from colleagues out of fear of seeming unprofessional.
- You are saying "yes" to everything, even when it is overwhelming.

Tools to Strengthen Boundaries

- **Reflective practice:** Regularly journal or debrief with a colleague or supervisor.
- **Clear agreements:** Set expectations early on - about time, confidentiality and communication.
- **Supervision and intervision²:** Use professional support to reflect on complex relationships.
- **Self-awareness:** Check in with your own emotions and energy levels - over-identification is often a sign your own boundaries need attention.

Boundaries are not about being distant. They are about creating a safer and empowering environment. Clear boundaries help young people:

- Know what to expect
- Learn how to model respectful relationships
- Feel secure enough to open up without fear of judgment or confusion

Reflection Questions for Youth Workers

- When do I feel most at risk of overstepping my role?
- How do I know when I need support or supervision?
- What boundary has been hard for me to maintain and why?
- What message do my boundaries send to the young people I work with?

2.4 Self-Care for Youth Workers

Youth work is emotionally rewarding. It is also emotionally demanding, in ways that are specific and often underestimated. Working closely with young people who may have experienced discrimination, displacement, or trauma, and trauma carries real risks: emotional exhaustion, secondary traumatic stress, and the gradual erosion of the capacity to be present that makes this work possible in the first place.

Self-care is not a luxury. It is an ethical responsibility. A youth worker who is depleted, dysregulated, or carrying unprocessed emotional weight cannot create the conditions that young people need. Taking care of yourself is not separate from taking care of them. It is part of the same commitment.

For deeper guidance on self-regulation, professional limits, and referral, see Section 4.4.7

2.4.1 Coping Strategies

Self-care starts with awareness. These tools help you check in with yourself, process emotions and stay in balance.

² Supervision is structured, formal process where a professional (supervisor) with more experience, supports, guides and monitors the work of other professional (supervisee).

Intervision is a peer-to-peer process where colleagues of similar professional level reflect together on their work experiences, challenges and solutions.

Self-reflection prompts

Use in a journal, walk-and-think time or during team check-ins.

- What energises me in my work right now?
- What drains me?
- What emotion am I carrying from today's session?
- What boundary did I hold or struggle to maintain?
- What would I tell a colleague in my shoes?

Quick Tools for Emotional Regulation

Tool	How to use it	When to use
3-Minute Body Scan	Tune in to breath, tension, posture	After intense session
Name It to Tame It	Say the emotion out loud or write it down	When overwhelmed
"What's in my control?" Map	Draw two circles: inside = controllable, outside = not	When feeling stuck
Shift + Reframe	Turn self-criticism into reflection: "What did I learn?"	After mistakes or hard days
Voo Sound	Take a deep breath and release a slow, sustained "voooo" sound from the belly. Repeat 3 to 5 times. The vibration activates the body's calming response	When carrying tension or emotional heaviness after a session

Open questions for peer reflection, useful in intervision or supervision debriefs:

- What moment stayed with you from this week?
- Where did you feel emotionally hooked?
- What are you learning about your limits?
- What support would help you right now?

2.4.2 Burnout Prevention

Burnout often comes slowly and silently. Preventing it means noticing early signs, building habits and taking restorative action.

Early signs to watch for:

- Constant fatigue
- Irritability or detachment
- Emotional numbness
- Avoiding youth or sessions
- Feeling like nothing you do is enough

Burnout Prevention Strategies

Strategy	Examples
Boundaries	Stick to working hours, say “no” when needed.
Balance	Alternate intense work with creative/restorative tasks.
Body Care	Sleep, hydration, movement, non-negotiable basics
Joy Check	Keep a list of what makes you smile - use it.
Mini-Rituals	Morning grounding, post-session decompression, gratitude pause.

Remember: Prevention is much easier and more effective than recovery.

2.4.3 Support Through Team Culture

Youth work can feel isolating and it does not have to be. Teams that share, reflect and support one another are stronger and more resilient.

What is Supervision and Intervision?

- **Supervision:** Reflective support with a trained supervisor (internal or external), focusing on professional boundaries, emotional impact and ethics.
- **Intervision:** Peer-led reflection sessions with colleagues, focused on learning, sharing dilemmas and emotional support.

How to Build a Supportive Team Culture

- Start regular check-ins and debriefs after sessions.
- Normalize talking about emotions, not just logistics.
- Schedule monthly intervention sessions with or without guided themes.
- Use rotating facilitation so everyone leads and learns.

Intervision Prompt Box

Pick one card or question at each meeting (use in teams):

- What story from this month shaped you?
- What is one thing you did well - and did not recognize at the time?
- Where did you doubt yourself?
- What is a recent challenge you are still carrying?

CHAPTER 3

Theoretical Framework



This section establishes the analytical and theoretical foundation of this handbook. It begins with an in-depth examination of discrimination and its impact on the wellbeing, identity, and belonging of young Roma, refugees, and migrants, grounded in the project's own research findings across six European countries. It then maps the theoretical traditions that shaped the handbook's approach, methods, and activities. Reading this section before facilitating any activity is strongly recommended. It explains not just what the handbook does, but why.

3.1 Understanding Discrimination and its Impact

3.1.1 What Is Discrimination and What Forms Does It Take?

Discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably, excluded, or harmed because of who they are, their ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, skin colour, migration status, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other aspects of their identity. For many of the young people in our research, discrimination was not an occasional encounter but a pervasive, everyday reality, so frequent and normalised that many young people described it simply as part of life, something they have always known and learned to expect.

As one youth worker put it: *"For many, discrimination is simply an everyday experience that they have always had, a kind of normality."*

Discrimination takes many forms and operates at different levels of visibility and severity. It often starts long before an act occurs, in biases, stereotypes, and prejudices that shape how people perceive and relate to others. When these attitudes go unchallenged, they gradually translate into preferential or unequal treatment: who gets the job, who is welcomed in a space, who is believed, who is given a chance. At its most visible, discrimination manifests as verbal abuse, threats, physical aggression, or explicit exclusion. But it is frequently less dramatic than this, a look on public transport, a job offer withdrawn when a surname is recognised as 'foreigner', a young person consistently overlooked in a classroom.

The project's research confirmed that racial and ethnic discrimination was the most commonly and frequently experienced form across all groups. Roma youth and refugees and asylum seekers reported particularly high rates, for many, discrimination was not an occasional encounter but a near-constant reality. Immigrants reported lower but still significant levels. Across all countries, discrimination emerges not as an exception but as a persistent, structural feature of the social environments many of these young people navigate.

What discrimination may look like in youth settings

- Social exclusion within peer groups along ethnic or cultural lines
- Lower expectations from adults and educators based on a young person's background
- Being treated differently by institutions or services because of ethnicity or legal status
- Asking a young person to speak for or represent their entire culture or community
- Jokes about accents, names, or origins that go unchallenged
- Denial of access to opportunities, spaces, or activities based on identity

Even small incidents matter. Unchallenged attitudes at the everyday level create the conditions for more serious harm.

A note on antigypsyism

Roma youth face a specific and historically rooted form of racism that deserves to be named explicitly: Antigypsyism. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance - ECRI defines it as a specific form of racism based on ideas of racial superiority and dehumanisation, shaped by centuries of exclusion and persecution, and expressed through violence, hate speech, stigmatisation, exploitation, and other manifestations of discrimination and marginalisation.

What makes antigypsyism distinct is its historical and structural depth. It is not only about isolated prejudiced acts between individuals, but about deeply rooted systems, narratives, and practices that have shaped institutions, policies, and social attitudes across Europe for generations. Discrimination is therefore not separate from antigypsyism, but one of the ways in which it becomes visible and experienced in everyday life.

This matters for youth workers because these realities shape the experiences many Roma young people bring into youth spaces. Distrust toward institutions, including schools, public services, and youth organisations, is often connected to personal, family, and community experiences of racism and exclusion. For some Roma youth, being cautious, hesitant, or selective about when and how they identify themselves can therefore be a form of self-protection shaped by lived experience.

Antigypsyism is not only a historical issue or background context. It can also appear in youth spaces themselves, sometimes openly, and sometimes through stereotypes, assumptions, implicit bias, lowered expectations, or everyday interactions that remain unnoticed or unchallenged.

3.1.2 How Discrimination Affects Wellbeing

The project's research confirmed clearly that discrimination has measurable negative effects on wellbeing. Young people who experienced more discrimination reported lower life satisfaction and higher levels of anxiety, depression, and trauma symptoms.

But the research revealed something more precise and more useful than a simple cause-and-effect relationship: **discrimination does not directly cause poor mental health. Instead, it works through a pathway.**

It harms their 'Place in the World', what the researchers call, their sense of belonging, identity, and feeling that they matter. When these are weakened, their wellbeing also decreases. **This is an important finding for youth workers, because it tells you not just what is happening to young people, but where you can make a difference.**

Place in the World is made up of three interconnected dimensions:

1. **Social connectedness:** This is about feeling connected to others. Discrimination makes young people feel alone, like they do not belong, like they cannot trust others. When this feeling of connection is lost, wellbeing drops.
2. **Self controllability:** This is about feeling in control in their own life. When discrimination happens again and again, young people start to feel that nothing they do matters. Their ethnicity, their legal status, how they look.. these feel like walls they cannot get past. This feeling of powerlessness is harmful in itself.
3. **Internalised discrimination:** This is about how the young people see themselves. When negative messages about who you are come from many places over a long time, you can start to believe them. A young person may begin to feel they are worth less, that they do not belong, that something is wrong with them. This is not their fault. It is what happens when people are treated badly for a long time.

The research showed that when these three things are strong, young people cope much better, even when discrimination does not stop. This is an important finding for youth workers: **you may not be able to stop the discrimination a young person faces outside your space. But strengthening their sense of belonging, agency, and self-worth is not just supportive work, it is the intervention.**

3.1.3 Internalised Discrimination and Identity

Of the three dimensions of Place in the World, internalised discrimination deserves particular attention in youth work, because it is the one most directly shaped by the relationships and spaces young people encounter every day, including yours.

Internalised discrimination happens gradually. A young person hears enough times that Roma people are unreliable, that refugees are a burden, that migrants don't really belong, and begins, quietly, to wonder if it might be true. They may start to feel ashamed of their language, their family, or their background. They may work exhaustingly hard to hide who they are. They may hold back in group settings, not because they have nothing to say, but because they have learned that what they say will be judged differently.

This process is sometimes called **internalised stigma**, and the research confirms it as one of the key mechanisms through which discrimination translates into anxiety, depression, and trauma symptoms.

Youth workers cannot undo the discrimination a young person has experienced. But you can be one of the relationships and spaces where a different message is consistently given, where a young person's background is treated as a source of knowledge rather than a source of shame, where their language is celebrated rather than tolerated, and where the narrative about who they are and what they are capable of is genuinely different from the one they have heard elsewhere.

Gently challenging limiting narratives, the stories young people tell about themselves that reflect what others have told them rather than who they actually are, is one of the most important things a youth worker can do. This does not mean dismissing the reality of discrimination or offering false reassurance. It means holding space for a fuller, more accurate story.

3.1.4 Intersectionality

Not all young people who are Roma, refugees, or migrants experience discrimination in the same way, or to the same degree. Some navigate multiple, overlapping forms of exclusion and discrimination that compound the impact. An intersectional approach means asking not only "what has this young person experienced?" but "which aspects of their identity may place them at additional risk, and how does that shape what they need?"

Pay particular attention to:

- **Girls and young women** who may face gender-based discrimination both within their communities and from wider society, and who may have significantly less autonomy and freedom of movement
- **LGBTQ+ youth** who may face rejection from both mainstream society and from within their own communities, and who may have no safe space in which to be fully themselves
- **Young people with disabilities** who face additional access barriers and whose needs are frequently overlooked in services and activities designed for the majority
- **Unaccompanied minors** who carry adult burdens without adult support, often navigating legal systems and survival entirely alone

The project's qualitative findings highlighted that intersecting forms of discrimination, for example, being a Roma woman, or a refugee with a disability, can intensify the psychological impact signifi-

cantly. When designing activities and spaces, consider who may be navigating more than one of these intersecting forms of discrimination at once

3.1.5 Belonging, Inclusion and Mental Wellbeing

Belonging is more than participation. A young person can be physically present in a group and still feel profoundly unseen. True belonging occurs when a person feels recognised, valued, and accepted, not in spite of who they are, but because of it. And its absence, the chronic feeling of being on the outside, carries a real cost: to confidence, to mental health, to a young person's sense of their own right to take up space.

For many Roma youth, the question of belonging is inseparable from a long history of exclusion within societies where they have lived for centuries. Belonging has often been conditional, withheld, or granted only at the cost of assimilation. For young migrants and refugees, belonging may involve the complex process of building connection in a new place while maintaining ties to where they come from, a process that takes time, trust, and genuine welcome. These are different experiences that deserve different sensitivity. What they share is this: the experience of feeling genuinely connected to others and to a group is one of the most powerful protective factors for wellbeing.

In youth work, belonging cannot be declared. It must be built, slowly and consistently, through small everyday acts: being addressed respectfully, having one's name pronounced correctly, being invited to contribute, being listened to without judgment.

Inclusion in youth work goes beyond ensuring access or participation. It means creating spaces where young people feel recognised, respected, and able to belong. Inclusion is not something youth workers deliver to young people. It is something co-created through relationships, language, and shared experience. An inclusive approach recognises that exclusion is often systemic rather than individual, that trust must be earned over time, that participation is voluntary and develops gradually, and that equity does not mean treating everyone the same but offering genuinely responsive support.

The connection between inclusion and mental wellbeing is direct and significant. Young people who feel excluded or invisible may experience increased anxiety, loneliness, and reduced self-worth. Even small experiences of belonging and recognition can strengthen resilience and confidence. Inclusive youth work supports mental wellbeing by reducing isolation, strengthening identity and self-acceptance, creating conditions where emotions can be expressed without fear, and offering alternative narratives to shame and stigma.

Inclusion should never be conditional upon behaviour, performance, or emotional readiness. Every young person deserves to be included as they are.

3.1.6 Language, Power and Representation

Language shapes how inclusion is experienced. The words used in a youth work space send a constant signal about whose experience is valued, whose identity is respected, and who gets to define themselves. Youth workers should be mindful of how labels, humour, or casual assumptions can unintentionally reinforce the very exclusion the work is trying to address.

This means actively rejecting labels often imposed by external systems, such as "illegal," "marginalised," or "at-risk," and creating conditions where young people can define who they are on their own terms. A young person is not a category. They are a person whose identity is complex, layered, and not reducible to their legal status, their country of origin, or their circumstances.

Power dynamics are always present in youth work. Facilitators often control time, space, and decision-making, and inclusion requires consciously sharing that power: inviting young people into deci-

sion-making processes, valuing lived experience as a form of expertise, allowing youth to lead or co-facilitate activities, and acknowledging mistakes openly and learning from feedback.

Representation also matters. Inclusion is not only about who participates but whose knowledge and experiences are valued. Whose stories are on the walls? Whose languages are welcomed? Whose cultural references appear in the materials? These are not decorative questions. They shape whether young people feel they belong or are merely tolerated.

True inclusion happens when the youth worker moves away from delivering solutions and instead works alongside young people to explore the reality of their lives. In this horizontal relationship, the youth worker is a co-learner, remaining open to being changed by the insights and experiences of the young people they work with. This is not a technique. It is a disposition.

3.1.7 What this means for the youth workers

Understanding discrimination is not only about background knowledge. It has direct and specific implications for how you work.

- **Address discrimination when you see it:** Discriminatory comments, jokes, or exclusionary behaviour in your group should be addressed clearly and calmly, not ignored, not minimised, and not handled in a way that shames the person who said it while ignoring its impact on others. Silence in the face of discrimination communicates that it is acceptable. Your response, even a brief and quiet one, communicates that this space operates by different rules.
- **Set clear group agreements from the start:** Co-create agreements with your group about how people will treat one another. When young people have a role in setting the rules, they are more likely to uphold them. Include explicit commitments around language, respect, and the right to one's own identity and background.
- **Strengthen social connectedness:** Because social connectedness is one of the key mediators between discrimination and wellbeing, activities and spaces that build genuine belonging, trust, and peer connection are not just nice to have, they are protective. Check-ins, collaborative activities, shared rituals, and opportunities for young people to know and be known by each other all contribute to this.
- **Restore agency through choice:** Offering choices, even small ones about how to participate, where to sit, how to respond communicates that a young person has control in this space. For young people whose sense of self-controllability has been eroded by repeated experiences of powerlessness, this matters more than it might appear.
- **Use inclusive language and celebrate multilingualism:** The language used in your space sends a constant signal about whose experience is valued. Instead of "Where are you really from?", try "Would you like to share anything about your background?" Instead of treating multilingualism as a barrier, treat it as an asset. Simple rituals like greeting each other in different languages, learning one new word per session, using multilingual icebreakers send a clear message: all languages are valued here.
- **Invite, never pressure:** Invite young people to share aspects of their culture, background, or experience voluntarily. Never put a young person in the position of representing their entire community, or ask them to share personal history they have not chosen to offer. The right to privacy about one's own story is especially important for young people who have already had that privacy violated in various ways.
- **Model the narrative you want young people to hold about themselves:** Notice and name strengths out loud. For example, young refugees navigating multiple legal systems, languages, and cultural contexts simultaneously is exercising extraordinary competence. A Roma young person acting as a translator or advocate for their family may already be demonstrating leadership. These things are worth naming, not in a patronising way, but as accurate observations about what you actually see.

The research is clear: when young people feel they belong, believe they can influence their lives, and see themselves as worthy and capable, they are significantly more resilient in the face of discrimination. Creating the conditions for that is within the reach of every youth worker, in every session.

3.2 Theoretical Grounding

Before naming the theoretical traditions this handbook draws on, we want to be honest about what you will find here, and what you will not.

This handbook draws primarily on published academic literature from European and North American traditions. This is not because we believe these traditions represent the fullness of human knowledge about healing, community, resilience, identity, or how people learn and grow. They do not. It is because Western academic institutions have historically controlled what gets published, peer-reviewed, and recognised as legitimate knowledge. The absence of Roma oral traditions, Middle Eastern therapeutic practices, African community healing approaches, Islamic psychology, and indigenous wisdom systems from the citations in this handbook reflects a structural gap in academic publishing, not a gap in the knowledge itself.

We name this at the outset because the handbook's own values demand it. A handbook that asks facilitators to notice whose voices are absent in a room must also ask whose voices are absent in its own references. The answer is: many.

Facilitators are therefore strongly encouraged to bring the knowledge, traditions, healing practices, storytelling forms, collective rituals, and wisdom of their specific communities into every activity. The handbook provides a structure. The knowledge belongs to the communities using it.

We owe this honesty to the very communities this handbook is written for. Their knowledge, practices, and ways of making meaning deserve to be named as sources, not only as subjects. Future iterations of this handbook should actively seek to incorporate non-Western knowledge traditions, not as additions or appendices, but as foundations.

With that honesty stated, below are the theoretical traditions this handbook draws on, and how each one shaped what you will find inside.

One important note before beginning: theories are tools, not truths. They help us ask better questions and notice things we might otherwise miss. They do not tell us who any individual young person is, what they have experienced, or what they need. The young people who encounter this handbook are not illustrations of theories. They are people, diverse, complex, and irreducible to any framework, however well-intentioned.

This handbook sits at the intersection of three broad intellectual traditions: critical and political pedagogy, relational and developmental theory, and psychological and somatic approaches to wellbeing. These traditions do not always agree with each other. Where they are in tension, we have tried to hold that tension honestly rather than resolve it artificially.

Critical and Political Traditions

The deepest influence on this handbook is the critical tradition in education and social theory. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*¹ established that education is never neutral. It either reproduces existing power relations or creates the conditions for transformation. This handbook is built on the liberatory side of that argument. Activities do not deliver knowledge to young people about their situation. They

¹ Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder and Herder.

create conditions in which young people can name their own experience, question the narratives imposed on them, and develop the agency to act.

Critical Race Theory² adds the structural dimension: racism and discrimination are not primarily matters of individual prejudice but features of institutions, policies, and social norms that shape who gets access to opportunity, safety, and recognition. The concept of intersectionality³ deepens this further, showing that people experience oppression not through a single identity but through the simultaneous interaction of multiple identities, ethnicity, gender, legal status, disability, sexuality, in ways that cannot be understood by looking at any one dimension alone.

Feminist pedagogy⁴ brings the embodied and relational dimension of critical education: personal experience is legitimate knowledge, emotions are sources of insight rather than obstacles to learning, and the personal is always political. Social Identity Theory⁵ explains how group membership shapes self-perception, and how the devaluation of a group by dominant culture can become a source of psychological harm for its members.

Together these traditions explain why this handbook takes discrimination seriously not as a backdrop but as a central subject, and why agency, voice, and the reclaiming of narrative are not supplementary themes but core ones.

Relational and Developmental Traditions

The second tradition this handbook draws on is concerned with how people learn and grow in relationships. Social constructivism⁶ established that knowledge is built together, not discovered in isolation. People learn most effectively when supported by others who offer just enough scaffolding to help them reach what they cannot yet reach alone. This shapes the facilitator's role throughout the handbook: not an expert delivering content but a guide creating conditions for co-discovery.

Attachment Theory⁷ adds a foundational layer: human beings are wired for connection, and our early experiences of being cared for or neglected shape how we relate to others, regulate our emotions, and experience safety in the world. For facilitators, this means that the quality of the relational environment, its consistency, warmth, and predictability, is not incidental to the work. It is the work.

Dewey and Kolb's experiential learning tradition⁸ establishes that genuine learning requires active engagement followed by structured reflection, which is why every activity in this handbook includes a debrief built on an experiential learning cycle. The CASEL framework for Social-Emotional Learning⁹ names what many of the emotional and wellbeing activities are building toward: not just engagement in the moment but lasting competencies in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Positive Youth Development¹⁰ and the Strengths-Based approach¹¹ both insist that young people are not problems to be fixed but people with existing capacities that deserve to be identified, named, and built upon. This shapes the handbook's refusal of deficit-based framing throughout.

2 Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2023). *Critical race theory* (4th ed.). New York University Press.

3 Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139-167.

4 hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge.

5 Tajfel, H., & Turner, J.C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W.G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.

6 Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

7 Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. Basic Books.

8 Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.

9 CASEL. (2020). *CASEL's SEL framework: What are the core competence areas and where are they promoted?* Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

10 Lerner, R. M. (2005). *Promoting Positive Youth Development: Theoretical and Empirical Bases*. National Academies Press.

11 Saleebey, D. (2012). *The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice*. Pearson.

Psychological and Somatic Traditions

The third tradition concerns what happens inside a person, in their body, their nervous system, their inner narrative, and their capacity for wellbeing. Studies on trauma¹² demonstrated that traumatic experience lives in the body, not only in memory or cognition, and that healing requires approaches that work with the nervous system as well as the mind. Polyvagal Theory¹³ explains why co-regulation, the presence of a calm and regulated adult, is one of the most powerful tools available in trauma-informed work, and why physical safety, predictability, and choice are not optional features of good facilitation but essential conditions for participation.

Narrative Therapy¹⁴ holds that people make sense of their lives through stories, and that the dominant stories told about communities facing systemic exclusion are frequently written by others. The facilitator's role is not to fix the person but to hold space for a different, more accurate story to emerge. Positive Psychology¹⁵ contributes the focus on what allows people to flourish, positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, though this handbook uses it critically, recognising that wellbeing cannot be reduced to individual practice alone when structural conditions are unjust. Finally, Resilience Theory¹⁶ establishes that resilience is not a fixed personality trait but a dynamic process found in the interaction between a person and their environment, which is why this handbook consistently asks not “why isn't this young person more resilient?” but “what conditions are we creating, and what is the system failing to provide?”

Some trauma-informed approaches, including Polyvagal Theory, offer useful frameworks for understanding how safety, stress, and co-regulation may influence participation, emotional regulation, and learning. These approaches have strongly influenced trauma-informed educational and wellbeing practices, particularly through their emphasis on predictability, relational safety, and nervous system awareness. At the same time, aspects of these theories continue to be discussed and debated within scientific and clinical fields. In this handbook, they are used as practical and reflective frameworks rather than as fixed or universally accepted scientific explanations.

The Place in the World Research Model

This handbook is also grounded in original research conducted as part of the When Scars (!) Become Art project across six European countries. The research confirmed that discrimination does not directly cause poor mental health. It works through a mediating construct called Place in the World, made up of three interconnected dimensions: social connectedness, self-controllability, and internalised discrimination. The research found that when these three dimensions are damaged, wellbeing tends to deteriorate. When they are strong, young people show greater resilience even in the face of ongoing discrimination. This finding is not background context. It is the structural logic of this handbook. The activities are designed to strengthen precisely these three dimensions: building belonging, restoring agency through choice, and challenging internalised narratives. Section 1.2 explains the research findings in full.

Final word on theoretical framework

These theoretical traditions do not always fully align with one another. Some focus primarily on structural power and social transformation, while others focus on emotional regulation, relationships, or individual wellbeing. At times, these perspectives may sit in productive tension. Rather than attempting to resolve these differences into a single unified model, this handbook approaches them as complementary lenses that help facilitators understand the complexity of young people's experiences

12 van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.

13 Porges, S.W. (2011). *The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation*. W.W. Norton.

14 White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. W.W. Norton.

15 Seligman, M.E.P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Free Press.

16 Masten, A.S. (2014). *Ordinary magic: Resilience in development*. Guilford Press.

from multiple perspectives at once. The aim is not theoretical purity, but reflective and responsible practice that remains attentive to both personal wellbeing and structural realities.

CHAPTER 4

Methodological Framework



If the theoretical framework explains why this work matters, the methodological framework explains how it is done. This section translates the theoretical foundations of Section 3 into practical approaches that guide every facilitation choice in this handbook. It covers how young people learn and grow through non-formal education, how capacity is built in both youth workers and young people, how cultural sensitivity shapes everyday practice, and how trauma-informed principles are integrated into everything from room setup to debriefing questions.

These are not separate topics. They are four dimensions of the same approach, and they inform each other continuously. A facilitator who understands the pedagogical approach but not the trauma-informed principles will miss something essential. A facilitator who applies cultural sensitivity but not the strengths-based capacity building approach will fall short. Read this section as a whole before moving into the activities. It is the foundation on which everything else is built.

4.1 Pedagogical Approach

This handbook is grounded in non-formal education and experiential learning.¹ Learning is understood as an active, participatory process in which young people build knowledge, skills, and awareness through experience, reflection, and dialogue. Activities are designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing youth workers to respond to the specific needs, backgrounds, and dynamics of each group rather than following fixed teaching methods.

The activities in this handbook follow a simple but intentional learning cycle. Participants first engage in a shared experience through an activity or exercise. This is followed by reflection, where participants explore what happened and what stood out for them. Through guided discussion, participants then connect the experience to broader themes such as inclusion, wellbeing, resilience, or identity, before considering how insights can be used to navigate challenges or create positive change in their own lives and communities.

Within this approach, the role of the youth worker is to facilitate rather than instruct. Youth workers create safer and inclusive spaces, guide reflection, and support participation without pushing young people to share beyond their comfort level. The focus is not on providing therapy or expert solutions, but on enabling young people to explore experiences, build confidence, and learn together.

Participation as a Process

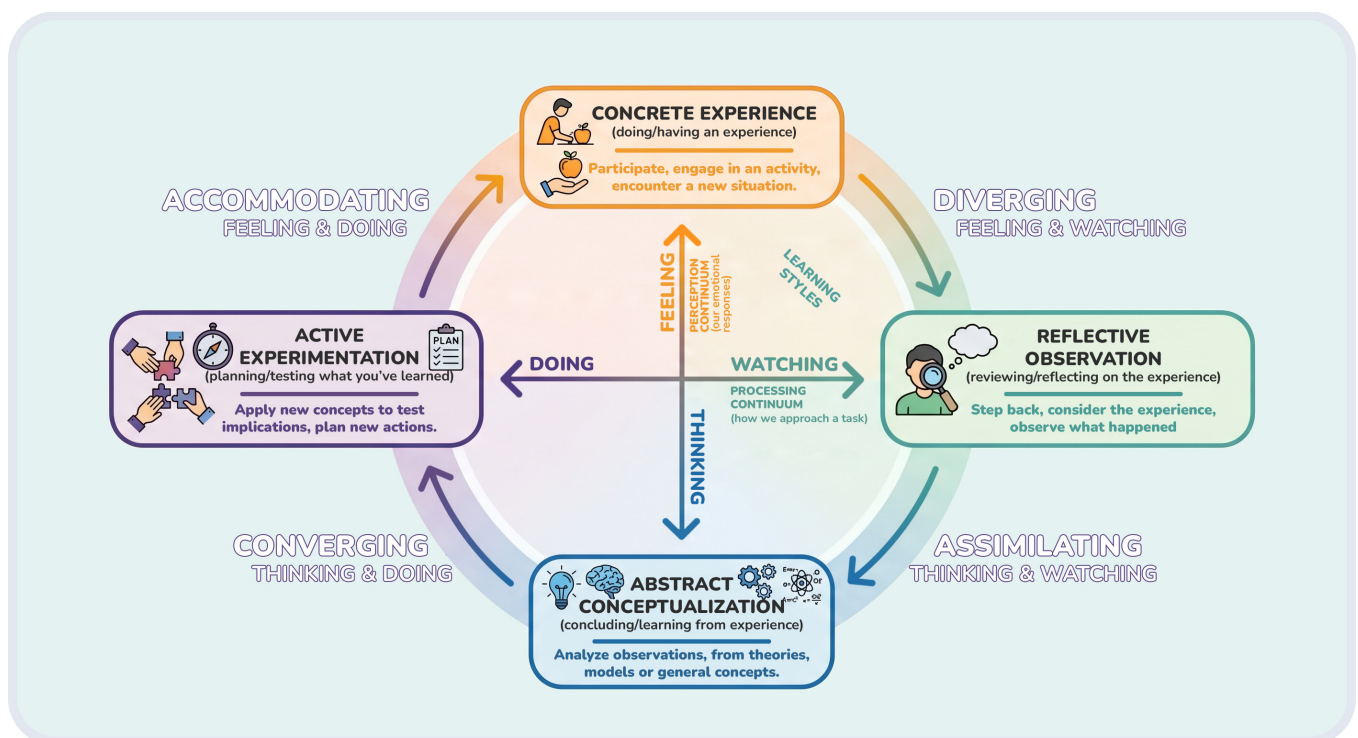
Meaningful participation does not happen automatically. It develops gradually, and young people may need time to build confidence before taking visible roles in a group, especially if previous experiences taught them that their voices were ignored, judged, or unwelcome. Youth workers can support participation by offering different levels of involvement, encouraging small leadership opportunities, sharing decision-making in activities and group processes, and validating contributions even when they are small or tentative.

¹ Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic.

Participation should remain voluntary and flexible throughout. Listening, observing, and supporting peers are equally valid forms of participation. A young person who sits quietly but attentively is participating. A young person who declines to share but stays present is participating. The goal is not visible engagement at all costs but genuine presence on the young person's own terms.

This pedagogical approach is closely connected to the trauma-informed and culturally sensitive principles presented in the following sections, ensuring that participation remains supported, respectful, and empowering for all participants.

KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE



4.2 Capacity Building

4.2.1 What Is Capacity Building?

Capacity building means more than simply providing training or information. It is a holistic, long-term process designed to support an individual, group, or organisation to grow their knowledge, skills, confidence, and internal resources so they can operate more effectively, sustainably, and independently. It is fundamentally about strengthening people's ability to take ownership of their challenges and successes. Capacity building shifts the focus from fixing immediate problems to building lasting ability, ensuring that the impact of any intervention remains long after the programme or support ends.

In the context of youth work, this approach is vital. It supports both young people and the professionals who guide them to develop the necessary tools, understand complex social and emotional topics, and take active, informed roles in their communities or organisations.

4.2.2 Capacity Building in the Context of This Handbook

This handbook is dedicated to advancing the inclusion and mental wellbeing of Roma, refugee, and migrant youth. Capacity building here is explicitly directed toward two essential and interconnected pillars.

1. Building the Capacity of Youth Workers

This handbook serves as a core resource to equip youth workers with the specialised knowledge and confidence needed to work effectively with young people from communities facing systemic exclusion. Capacity building for youth workers focuses on transformation in three key areas:

- **Professional Competence:** Moving beyond general youth work skills to understanding the specific mental health challenges that connect with experiences of social exclusion, discrimination, and trauma. This includes learning practical methods for responding to distress and effective referral.
- **Creating Safer and Inclusive Spaces:** Developing cultural sensitivity and the ability to work without prejudice, proactively examining one's own assumptions and biases. This capacity involves creating environments of psychological safety where all young people feel seen, respected, and heard, regardless of their background or legal status.
- **Sustaining Professional Resilience:** Building tools for effective self-care, avoiding burnout, and managing the emotional demands of supporting young people through difficult and sensitive topics. By strengthening their own resilience, youth workers ensure their impact remains positive and sustained.

2. Building the Capacity of Young People

The activities and approaches in this handbook are designed to empower young people themselves, focusing not only on skill development but on their wellbeing, confidence, and fundamental sense of belonging. Capacity building encompasses:

- **Emotional and Social Resilience:** Developing inner resources to cope with adversity, express emotions, manage stress, and build constructive relationships, even in the face of ongoing exclusion or prejudice. This includes the six elements that research and practice consistently show to support resilience: stable and trustworthy relationships, affirmation of identity and cultural heritage, genuine opportunities for participation and voice, supported emotional expression, collective solidarity and community connection, and a sense of hope and future orientation.

- **Inclusion and Voice:** Strengthening self-worth and a sense of acceptance within the group and in society. This includes learning how to speak up, advocate for one's needs, and take initiative, moving from passive participation toward active contribution and decision-making.
- **Personal Agency:** Building the trust and self-understanding necessary to make informed decisions about one's own life and future. The goal is to strengthen inner and outer resources so young people can continue growing and thriving long after any specific activity, workshop, or programme ends.

4.2.3 Core Principles of Capacity Building

The application of capacity building within this handbook is grounded in three core principles:

- **Strength-Based and Asset-Focused:** This handbook rejects a deficit-based model that focuses only on needs or problems. Instead, the approach is fundamentally strength-based, recognising the existing skills, cultural knowledge, resilience, and community bonds that young people already possess. A young person navigating multiple legal systems, languages, and cultural contexts simultaneously is not someone who lacks skills. They are already practising high-level problem-solving, mediation, and advocacy. Capacity building provides a stage for those skills to be recognised and built upon.
- **Holistic and Trauma-Informed:** Capacity building for young people who have experienced social exclusion, discrimination, or trauma cannot be limited to superficial skill-building. The approaches within this handbook are trauma-informed, prioritising emotional safety, trustworthiness, choice, and collaboration in every interaction. Mental wellbeing is not treated as a separate topic but is integrated into every element of inclusion and skill development. These principles complement the trauma-informed and cultural sensitivity approaches described in Sections 4.3 and 4.4.
- **Co-Creation and Peer Learning:** True capacity is not delivered to people. It is built with them. This handbook promotes a model of co-creation where young people are actively involved in adapting activities, providing feedback, and eventually taking on leadership roles. Peer-to-peer learning is valued as a primary method, recognising that the most powerful insights often come from shared lived experience. This principle also requires youth workers to adopt a learner's mindset, continually learning from and valuing the experiences the young people themselves bring.

4.2.4 The Capacity Building Cycle

This handbook is designed to be used as part of a continuous cycle, ensuring that growth is iterative and reflective:

- **Reflect and Assess:** The process begins with structured opportunities for honest self-reflection, for both youth workers and young people, on current skills, needs, assumptions, and goals. This ensures activities are tailored and relevant.
- **Apply and Practice:** Knowledge gained through the handbook is immediately moved into practical application through role-playing, simulations, peer projects, and supported community action.
- **Support and Mentor:** Capacity building requires consistent follow-through. The cycle includes a dedicated emphasis on mentoring, supervision, and follow-up support from the youth worker to reinforce learning and help young people navigate real-world barriers.
- **Evaluate and Adapt:** The final stage involves assessing what worked and what needs adjustment. This continuous feedback loop ensures that the capacity building effort remains responsive to the unique and evolving needs of the communities it serves.

This cycle operates at programme level and complements the experiential learning cycle used within individual activities.

4.2.5 Measuring Capacity Growth

For capacity building to be effective, its success must be measured against meaningful outcomes, not just simple outputs. It is not enough to state “we ran five workshops.” Success must be defined by observable, lasting change. Success must be defined by observable, lasting change.

Target Group	Shift from Output (Activity)	Shift to Outcome (Impact)
Youth Workers	Attended three sessions on mental health awareness.	Demonstrated a measurable increase in confidence handling sensitive disclosures and reported a lower incidence of professional burnout over six months.
Young People	Participated in a leadership workshop.	Showed increased agency (taking initiative in their community) and greater social capital (a stronger, reliable network of support and belonging).

Key indicators of success include the sustained adoption of inclusive practices by youth workers, increased self-efficacy among young people, and a strengthening of their connection to supportive networks and communities.

4.2.6 From Personal Growth to Systemic Change

The ultimate objective of capacity building extends beyond making individuals stronger. It is about creating a more inclusive ecosystem. Individual capacity growth should lead to systemic improvements within youth organisations and the communities they serve.

When youth workers are better prepared and more resilient, it can lead to a strengthened and more inclusive organisational culture. Capacity building helps organisations translate good intentions into robust policies and practices that ensure inclusion and mental wellbeing are priorities for all young people, not just those participating in specific projects. This includes reviewing recruitment practices, adapting communications, and establishing clear protocols for addressing discrimination.

Capacity building is not a one-time project. It is an ongoing investment. This handbook is designed to be a living resource, revisited, debated, and adapted as the social, political, and economic contexts of the communities it serves continue to evolve.

4.3 Cultural Sensitivity

Working with young Roma, refugees, and migrants requires awareness that experiences, identities, and cultural backgrounds are diverse and complex. Cultural sensitivity in youth work means approaching young people with respect, openness, and curiosity, while recognising that there is no single normal way of communicating, learning, or expressing emotions. It is not about mastering knowledge about every culture, but about creating space for different perspectives and adapting facilitation practices so that all participants feel supported, respected, and included.

Cultural sensitivity is both a value and a practical approach. It supports ethical youth work by promoting equality, dignity, and participation, while helping youth workers respond to differences in communication styles, expectations, and experiences. A culturally sensitive approach recognises that identities are shaped by many factors, including migration, discrimination, language, community, gender, religion, and personal history, and that diversity exists within every group.

4.3.1 Key Principles for Culturally Sensitive Practice

- Prioritise trust and emotional safety
- Avoid assumptions and stereotypes about participants or communities
- Recognise diversity within groups. No community is homogeneous
- Use inclusive and respectful language
- Be aware of power dynamics between facilitators and participants
- Offer different ways of participation: discussion, creative work, reflection, movement, silence
- Adapt activities, examples, and communication to the local context and the needs of the group
- Accept participants not as beneficiaries or recipients of support, but as active agents with knowledge and experience, and base the process on their contributions
- Respect participants' choice regarding personal sharing and disclosure
- Respect local experiences and community knowledge
- Value silence and active listening as high-level forms of participation, rather than only prioritising verbal or extroverted engagement
- Recognise that people's experiences are shaped by multiple aspects of identity such as gender, ethnicity, legal status, or age. Avoid reducing participants to a single identity or assuming shared experiences within one group

4.3.2 Cultural Sensitivity in Practice

Cultural sensitivity is reflected in everyday facilitation choices. This includes allowing participants to engage at their own pace, respecting silence as a valid form of participation, and avoiding pressure to share personal experiences. Youth workers should remain attentive to how group dynamics, language barriers, or social differences influence participation and belonging. When misunderstandings arise, curiosity and dialogue are more helpful than assumptions or quick judgments.

Young people are the primary experts of their own cultural realities. The youth worker's role is not to judge or explain participants' cultures, but to create conditions where those realities can be expressed openly and respectfully.

Working across cultures also means recognising one's own perspective. Youth workers do not need to have the same background as participants, but they should be willing to listen, reflect, and learn from young people themselves. Cultural sensitivity is an ongoing process rather than a fixed competence. Cultural humility, the willingness to remain a learner, is more important than cultural expertise.

4.3.3 Power, Responsibility and Ethical Facilitation

Cultural sensitivity is inseparable from an awareness of power. In youth work, facilitators often control time, space, resources, and decision-making. This power is not inherently problematic, but it requires conscious and ongoing attention.

Supporting genuine participation means actively sharing power with young people. This can take many forms: inviting young people into decisions about how activities are run, co-creating group agreements, allowing youth to lead or co-facilitate sessions, acknowledging mistakes openly, and remaining genuinely open to feedback and adaptation. Lived experience is a form of expertise. When a young person challenges a facilitation choice or names something that is not working, that is valuable information, not resistance.

Ethical facilitation also means knowing the limits of your role. Youth workers are not therapists, advocates, or social workers, though their work may touch on all of these domains. Being clear about what

you can and cannot offer, and knowing when and how to refer to other professionals, is not a limitation. It is responsible practice.

Finally, facilitating agency is not about giving power to young people. Power is not the facilitator's to give. It is about removing the barriers that prevent young people's existing power from being expressed. That distinction matters. It shifts the facilitator's role from provider to enabler, and it places young people where they belong: at the centre of their own story.

4.3.4 Reflection Questions for Youth Workers

- What assumptions might I bring into this group or activity?
- Whose voices are easily heard, and whose might be missing?
- Am I adapting activities to participants' realities, or expecting participants to adapt to mine?
- How do I respond when cultural differences or tensions emerge in the group?
- Instead of asking "Why is this young person acting this way?" try asking: "What in my own cultural lens makes this behaviour feel unfamiliar or different?"
- Where in this session am I holding power that could be shared?
- What would it mean to genuinely learn from the young people in this room today?

4.4 Trauma - Informed Practice

4.4.1 What is trauma and how it can manifest in youth settings

Trauma is the psychological impact of events that overwhelm a person's coping capacity and create intense feelings of fear, helplessness, or threat. It is not just about the event itself, but how the individual experiences it. Trauma can come from a single overwhelming event or from repeated difficult experiences over time, and it leaves traces not only in memory but in the body and nervous system.

Many young refugees, migrants, and Roma youth may have experienced:

- War or armed conflict
- Forced displacement and dangerous journeys
- Family separation or loss
- Detention or exploitation
- Discrimination and violence
- Ongoing uncertainty about asylum or legal status

It is important to remember that trauma looks different for every person. Two people can go through the same event and be affected in very different ways. For many young people in this group, it may not be one moment that caused harm, but a long accumulation of painful experiences. Thus, ongoing discrimination can also act as a source of trauma.

Discrimination as a source of trauma

Trauma does not only come from single dramatic events. Research shows that discrimination itself, particularly when it is repeated and cumulative, can produce trauma symptoms. Both everyday subtle discrimination and major discriminatory experiences over a lifetime have been found to be significant predictors of trauma. For young refugees and asylum seekers, post-migration discrimination can also trigger and re-activate traumas they already carry from before their arrival. The project's research

confirmed this association across all six countries: discrimination was linked to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and trauma symptoms. This is why the two cannot be understood separately, and why trauma-informed practice is inseparable from an awareness of discrimination.

Members of communities facing stigma and systemic exclusion may also experience guilt, shame, and intense anxiety as a result of the prejudices directed at their group. This pattern, referred to in research as minority stress, makes individuals more vulnerable to stress responses and leaves lasting effects on both physical and mental health. Understanding this helps youth workers recognise that what a young person carries may not be the result of a single traumatic event but the accumulated weight of belonging to a group that is consistently devalued by the surrounding society.¹

How trauma affects the body and the mind

When a person experiences something threatening, the nervous system activates a survival response. There are four recognised responses: fight (aggression or attempts to control the situation), flight (escape or avoidance), freeze (immobilisation or numbness), and fawn (appeasing or people-pleasing in order to avoid conflict or danger). These are involuntary, instinctual responses, not character traits or choices.

But when trauma is severe or repeated, the nervous system can get stuck in this state of alert, or may remain in a state of heightened arousal. A young person may remain in a constant state of threat response even when they are physically safe. Their body and mind are still trying to protect them, even when there is nothing to protect them from right now.

This is where the concept of the **Window of Tolerance** is helpful.

Understanding the Window of Tolerance²

The concept of the “window of tolerance” is commonly used in trauma-informed and educational practice as a simple way of understanding how stress and emotional activation can affect participation, learning, and communication. In this handbook, it is used as a practical facilitation tool rather than a clinical or diagnostic framework. The aim is not to interpret or label participants’ behaviour, but to help youth workers notice when someone may need more space, grounding, flexibility, or support in order to participate comfortably.

People participate and learn best when they feel emotionally regulated, when they are calm enough to think, reflect, and engage. This state is sometimes described as being within a “window of tolerance.” When someone moves outside this window, they may experience emotional overload or shut-down. Youth workers do not need to diagnose this, but it can help to recognise common signs. These signs may appear during a session and can indicate that a young person may need more support, grounding, flexibility, or space in order to participate comfortably.

Signs someone may be overwhelmed (hyper-arousal):

- Agitation or restlessness
- Speaking very fast or loudly
- Anger or panic reactions
- Difficulty focusing
- Strong emotional outbursts

1 Kite, M. E., Whitley, B. E., Jr., & Wagner, L. S. (2022). *Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination* (4th ed.). Routledge.

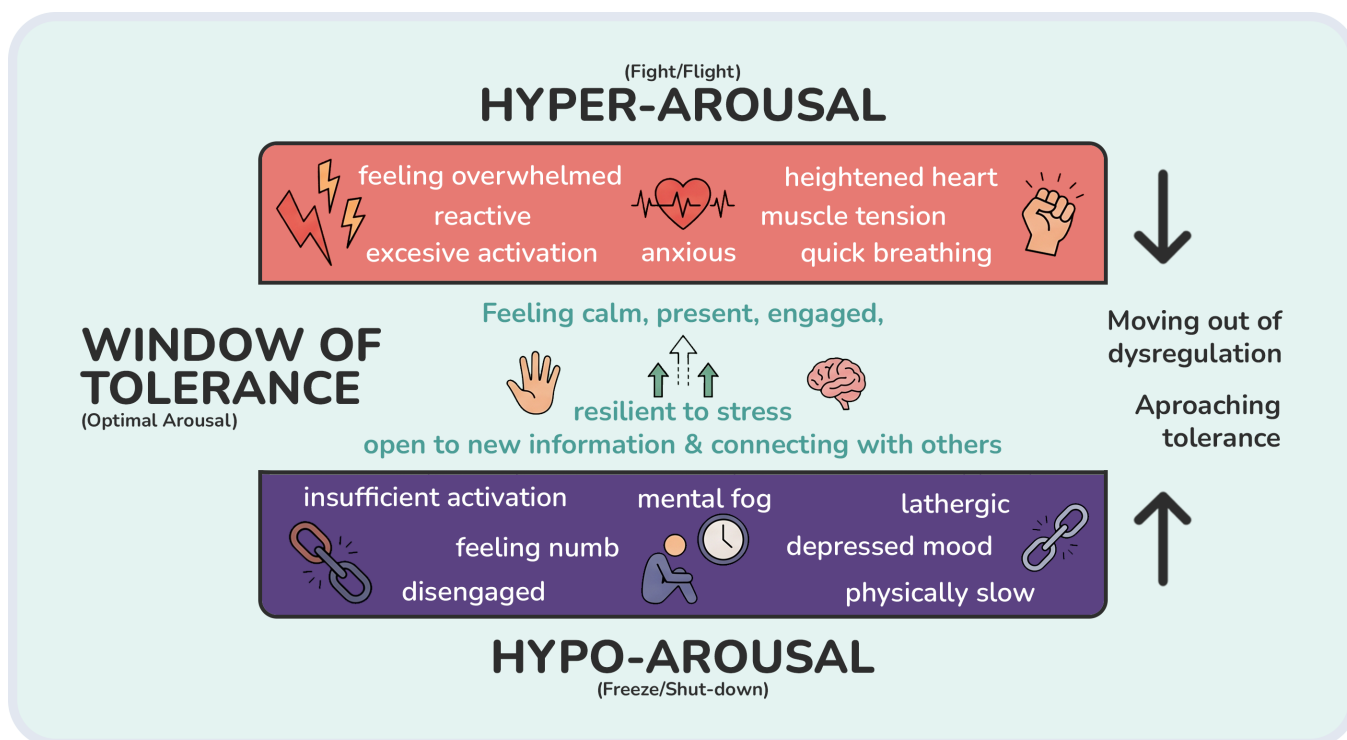
2 Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*. Guilford Press.

Signs someone may be shutting down (hypo-arousal):

- Freezing
- Staring at a single point
- Becoming very quiet or withdrawn
- Avoiding eye contact
- Appearing disconnected or numb
- Low energy or difficulty responding
- Sudden silence after emotional topics

These signs are only general indicators and should not be used to diagnose or label participants.

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE DIAGRAM



Possible stress and survival responses in group settings

Trauma is not always visible. As a youth worker, you may notice behaviours that are confusing or difficult to manage. Beyond in-the-moment reactions, it can also show up as patterns you notice over time. Understanding what lies behind these behaviours changes how you respond:

What you see	What may be behind it
Anger or aggression	Fear, lack of safety (Fight response)
Withdrawal or silence	Distrust, emotional overwhelm (Freeze response)
Difficulty concentrating	Stress response
Constant alertness	Hypervigilance from past danger
Over-responsibility for siblings	Parentification (taking the role that is not theirs)

These are survival strategies, not bad behaviour. They developed for a reason. Recognising that behaviours may sometimes reflect stress, overwhelm, adaptation, or past experiences, rather than simply ‘bad behaviour’ or personal flaws, is a core principle of trauma-informed youth work.

4.4.2 What is trauma-informed practice?

Trauma-informed practice is an approach that recognises that some young people may have experienced stressful, harmful, or traumatic events that can influence how they participate, communicate, trust others, or regulate emotions. In youth work, being trauma-informed does not mean providing therapy or asking young people to share personal experiences. Instead, it means creating conditions that reduce the risk of re-traumatisation and support participation in a way that feels supported, respectful, and empowering.

A trauma-informed approach focuses on how activities are facilitated rather than on identifying or labelling individual experiences. It encourages youth workers to pay attention to emotional safety, personal boundaries, and participant choice, while understanding that strong emotional reactions may sometimes emerge during group work. By integrating trauma-informed awareness into everyday practice, youth workers can create environments where young people feel more secure, in control, and able to participate at their own pace.

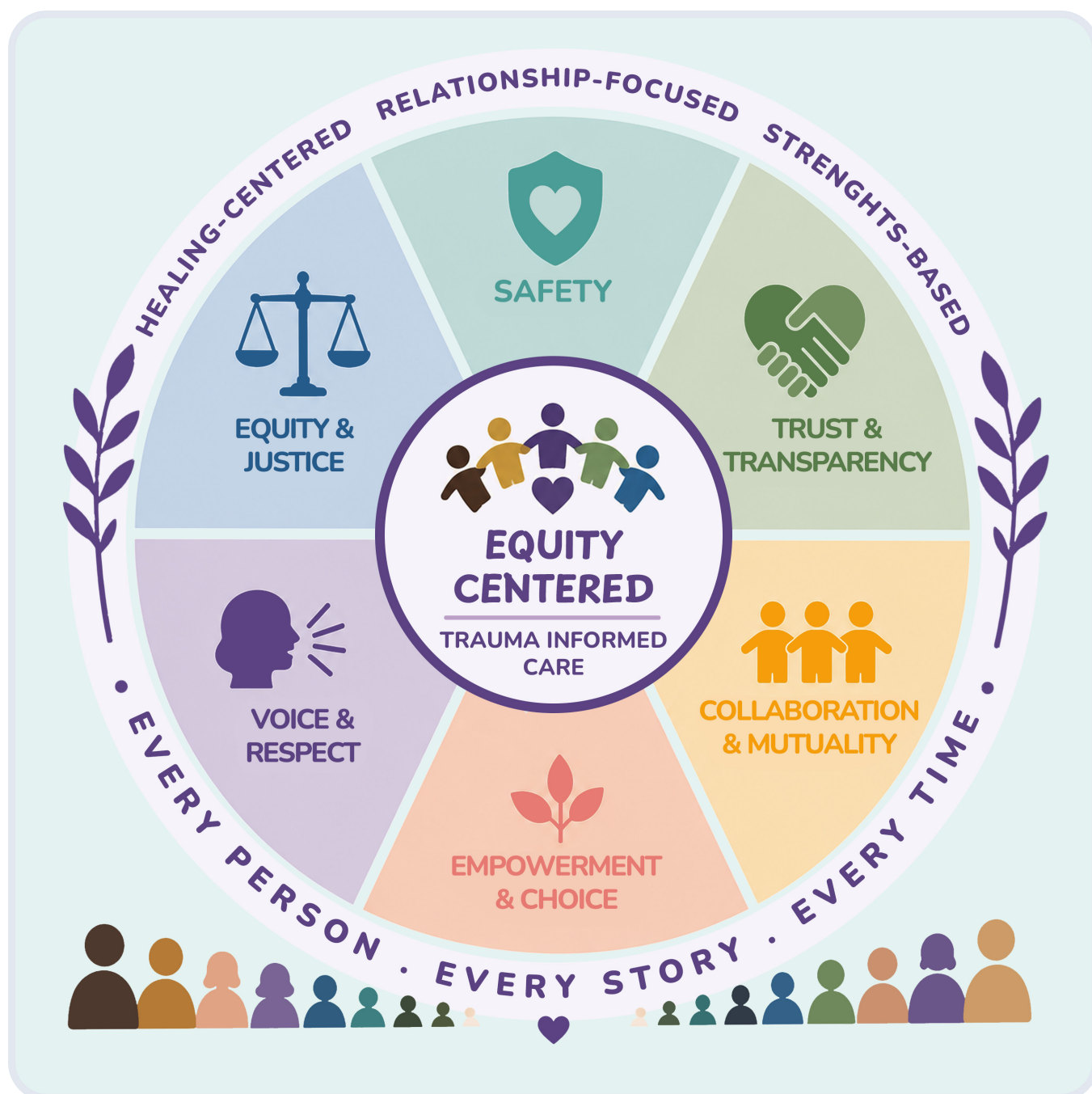
4.4.3 Core principles of trauma-informed practice

Trauma-informed practice in youth work is guided by a set of core principles that help create safe, respectful, and empowering learning environments. These principles support both young people and facilitators in navigating emotional experiences responsibly.

- **Safety:** Young people need to feel physically and emotionally safe in order to participate fully. Safety is created through clear boundaries, predictable structures, respectful communication, and the possibility to opt out or take breaks when needed.
- **Trust and Transparency:** Being clear about expectations, activities, and boundaries helps build trust. Youth workers should communicate openly about what an activity involves, what participation looks like, and how confidentiality is handled.
- **Choice and Autonomy:** Participation should always be voluntary. Young people should have choices about how they engage, how much they share, and whether they wish to step back from certain discussions or activities. Keep in mind the “Empowerment through ‘No’, ensuring participants know that saying ‘no’ is not just allowed, but is a valid exercise of their autonomy.”

- **Collaboration and Shared Power:** Trauma-informed practice values partnership rather than authority. Youth workers facilitate processes together with participants, encouraging shared decision-making and mutual respect.
- **Strength-Based Approach:** Instead of focusing on problems or deficits, trauma-informed youth work recognises young people's existing strengths, resilience, and resources. Activities aim to build confidence and agency rather than reinforce feelings of vulnerability.
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion:** Experiences of trauma and wellbeing are shaped by cultural, social, and personal contexts. Trauma-informed practice therefore goes hand in hand with cultural sensitivity, respecting different ways of expressing emotions, coping, and participating.

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE DIAGRAM



4.4.4 Creating safer and supportive spaces

Throughout this handbook, we use the term “safer space” rather than “safe space.” This distinction is intentional. No space can be completely safe for everyone all the time. Safety is relative, it is shaped by each person’s history, identity, and the experiences they carry into the room. What feels safe for one person may feel threatening for another. Calling a space “safe” makes a promise that no one can fully keep. “Safer” is more honest. It acknowledges that we are working to create conditions that reduce harm, build trust, and support participation, while recognising that this is an ongoing effort, not a guaranteed outcome. The goal is not to eliminate all discomfort. Meaningful learning often involves discomfort. But that discomfort should serve growth rather than cause harm. A safer space is one where young people feel supported enough to take risks, share selectively, and engage at their own pace.

What makes a safer space?

To truly support mental health, every activity must take place in a space that is:

- **Emotionally safer** youth feel heard, not judged
- **Physically safer** space is welcoming, clean and accessible
- **Psychologically safer** youth can express vulnerability without fear
- **Culturally safer** identities and experiences are respected

Core safer space principles

Safer spaces are created by agreeing together on clear ways of working from the beginning, both in individual and group settings. The most important rules are:

- **Confidentiality:** Everything shared within the group stays within the group. This is not just a rule, it is the foundation of trust that makes genuine sharing possible. Young people need to know that what they say will not be repeated outside the room, judged, or used against them. **However, confidentiality has one clear and non-negotiable limit: if a youth worker has reason to believe that a young person is at risk of harming themselves or others, that information cannot remain confidential.** Communicate this limit clearly and honestly at the very beginning of any group work, not as a threat but as an act of care. Never over-promise confidentiality. If you are unsure about your organisation’s specific safeguarding protocols, clarify them before the session begins.
- **Voluntary participation:** Youth can pass or step back.
- **Non-judgment:** Respecting diverse views and experiences.
- **Shared ownership:** Co-create agreements and rituals.
- **Consistency and predictability:** Same time, tone, structure.

Supportive Practices

Examples of practices that help create safer spaces include:

- Check-ins and check-outs
- Group agreements
- Emotional vocabulary tools (e.g. emotion wheels)
- Creative reflection activities
- Grounding or closing rituals

These practices can be integrated into sessions to support emotional safety and group trust. (See Activities section for full examples.)

Trauma-Sensitive Facilitation Tips

- Avoid putting youth “on the spot”
- Provide choices in how they participate
- Be mindful of non-verbal cues, like withdrawal or agitation
- Always debrief and check-in after emotion activities
- **Know your role: you are not a therapist, but you can be a trusted adult.**

Facilitator Self-Check

Some activities in this handbook may touch on themes that resonate with your own personal history or experiences. Before facilitating activities on identity, discrimination, trauma, or loss, it is worth asking yourself: “Is there anything in this activity that might personally affect me? Do I have the emotional capacity to hold this space today?” This is not a sign of weakness. It is self-awareness. If you notice you are personally activated during a session, slow down, ground yourself, and seek support from a colleague or supervisor afterwards.

Before the activity, ask yourself;

- What is the purpose of this?
- Is this inclusive and adaptable?
- What support might a young person need during or after?
- How will I debrief or close the session?
- Am I leading this activity ‘for’ the youth, or ‘with’ them?

Safer and Braver Spaces

While this handbook emphasizes the creation of safer spaces, it is also important to recognise that meaningful learning sometimes involves discussing difficult topics. In this sense, facilitation may occasionally invite “brave moments”, where participants are encouraged to express different perspectives or reflect on challenging issues. Discomfort and challenge are not automatically signs that a space is unsafe; meaningful learning and dialogue sometimes involve tension, disagreement, and emotional complexity. These moments should always happen within a foundation of psychological safety, respect, and choice. Participants should never be pushed beyond their emotional limits or required to disclose personal experiences.

4.4.5 Responding to Emotional Distress

Avoiding Re-Traumatisation as Prevention

Youth settings can unintentionally re-trigger trauma when:

- Young people are forced or pressured to tell their story
- They are asked to represent their entire culture or community
- Emotional outbursts are publicly confronted
- Discipline styles resemble past experiences of authority violence
- Sudden changes happen without preparation

Always prepare young people for transitions and changes in advance.

During activities related to identity, wellbeing, inclusion, or personal experiences, strong emotions may sometimes arise. Participants may become quiet, tearful, agitated, angry, withdrawn, or overwhelmed. These reactions are not necessarily a problem, emotions are a natural part of learning and reflection. The role of the youth worker is not to analyse or “fix” these emotions, but to support the person calmly in the ways they need while maintaining the wellbeing for everyone involved.

When this happens, a young person may have moved outside their Window of Tolerance (See Section 4.4, page 44).

Handling Moments of Emotional Distress

If a participant shows signs of emotional distress, youth workers can:

- Stay Calm and Present
 - Take a deep breath and keep a calm tone.
 - Show that you are there for the young person and not judging them.
- Listen Actively
 - Give full attention (eye contact, nodding).
 - Avoid interrupting; let them share their feelings at their own pace.
- Acknowledge Emotions
 - Use simple phrases: *“I can see this is difficult for you”* or *“It’s okay to feel sad/angry”*.
 - Naming emotions helps participants feel understood.
- Create a Quieter/Calmer Space
 - If possible, move to a quieter area.
 - Assure confidentiality (unless there is a safety risk).
- Encourage Expression
 - Suggest safe ways to release emotions: drawing, writing, breathing, talking.
 - Remind them all feelings are valid, but not all actions are safe.
- Set Boundaries
 - Be clear: support the young person without becoming a therapist.
 - If emotions are too strong or harmful, stop the activity gently and guide them to professional help if needed.
- Use Grounding Techniques
 - Simple exercises like “5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you hear...” help bring participants back to the present moment.
- Offer Choices
 - Let the participant decide: *“Do you want to take a short break, draw your feelings, or talk with me?”*. This gives back a sense of control.
- Seek Support
 - If the situation is too heavy, involve another facilitator or professional.
 - Always respect your own limits as a facilitator.
- Reflect Afterwards
 - After the session, check in with the participant.
 - As a facilitator, reflect with your team: *“What went well? What can we do better next time?”*.

What Youth Workers Should Avoid

When responding to a participant in distress, it is equally important to maintain boundaries. Please keep the following in mind:

- **Do not** ask for detailed personal disclosures.
- **Do not** interpret or analyse the participant's experience.
- **Do not** promise confidentiality if someone's safety is at risk.
- **Do not** try to solve complex emotional or psychological situations alone.
- **Avoid** turning the situation into a group discussion unless the participant clearly wants this.
- **Avoid** 'fixing' the person's reality: If a refugee youth is angry about a legal injustice, don't try to "calm them down" by telling them it will be okay. Validate the *feeling* even if you cannot change the *fact*.

After the Moment

Once the situation has stabilised:

- Gently close or ground the activity for the whole group.
- Offer a brief check-in or calming exercise.
- Reflect privately on what happened and seek supervision or support if needed.
- Consider whether follow-up or referral may be appropriate.
- Acknowledge your own feelings. Supporting someone in distress is emotionally taxing. Talk to a colleague or supervisor, don't carry the weight of the young person's experience home with you.

Strong emotions do not mean the activity failed, they often indicate that meaningful themes were touched. What matters is how the situation is held and supported.

4.4.6. Quick Grounding Techniques for Everyday Practice

When a young person experiences anxiety, emotional overload, or distress, simple grounding techniques can help them reconnect to the present moment and regain a sense of calm and groundedness. These techniques are supportive tools, not therapy, and should always be offered as choices, never imposed. Use one or two techniques only, avoid overwhelming the young person with multiple options at once.

1. Slow Breathing

Invite the young person to slow their breathing:

- Inhale gently through the nose
- Exhale slowly through the mouth
- Repeat a few times together if they agree

Speak calmly; don't force rhythm. Encourage slow, comfortable breathing, gently allowing the exhale to be slightly longer than the inhale. Longer exhales can help the body settle and signal safety to the nervous system. (Some people find it helpful to place one hand on the belly or chest to notice their breathing, but this should always be optional and only suggested if the person feels comfortable.)

2. 5-4-3-2-1 Sensory Grounding

Help them reconnect with the environment:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste or notice in your body

This helps reduce anxiety and reconnect the person to the present moment.

Note: *If they can't smell or taste anything, they can simply name their favourite smell or taste; it works just as well.*

3. Physical Grounding

Encourage simple body awareness:

- Place both feet on the floor
- Notice the support of the chair, encouraging them to feel the weight of their body being held by the chair. This reminds the nervous system that they don't have to 'hold themselves up' alone at this moment
- Hold an object (water bottle, pen, fabric)
- Gently stretch or move shoulders

Movement can reduce overwhelm quickly.

4. Orientation to the Present Moment

When someone feels anxious or overwhelmed, gently encouraging them to reconnect with their surroundings can help the nervous system settle. Invite the young person to slowly look around and notice where they are right now.

You might guide them to:

- Look around the room and notice shapes, colours, or objects
- Listen to sounds nearby or in the distance
- Feel their feet on the floor or the chair supporting them
- Notice any smells in the environment
- Pay attention to any taste in their mouth or take a sip of water

The aim is not to analyse or describe perfectly, but simply to reconnect with the present moment and the sense of being safer here and now.

5. Choice and Control

Always offer options:

- Take a short walk
- Step outside
- Drink water
- Sit quietly

Choice restores agency, which is key in trauma-informed practice.

Example: *If a participant approaches you during a break and says they feel very anxious, move to a quieter space if possible, speak calmly, and offer simple grounding options such as slow breathing, noticing surroundings, or sitting together quietly. Avoid asking for detailed explanations unless the young person chooses to share.*

If distress does not reduce, or if the young person expresses risk of harm to themselves or others, follow referral procedures and seek professional support.

When Someone Seems Withdrawn or Shut Down

Sometimes distress does not appear as strong emotion but as silence, low energy, or disconnection. In these moments, the goal is gentle re-engagement rather than deep discussion. You can sit nearby without pressure. Offer a drink of water or a simple choice. You don't need to fill the silence, sometimes just being a calm, present adult is enough. If the young person does not re-engage, that is okay. Let them know you are there if they need you.

4.4.7 Facilitator Self-Regulation, Limits and Referral

Youth Worker / Facilitator Self-Regulation

Supporting young people in discussions related to wellbeing, identity, or difficult experiences can sometimes be emotionally demanding. Trauma-informed practice therefore includes not only awareness of participants' needs, but also awareness of the youth worker's own emotional state. Facilitators should regularly check in with themselves, notice signs of stress or overwhelm, and recognise when they need to slow down, pause an activity, or seek support. Taking care of one's own regulation is part of creating a safer and stable environment for others.

Regular exposure to trauma stories can lead to emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and secondary traumatic stress, a gradual emotional cost of supporting others through difficult experiences. Protect yourself by maintaining regular supervision and intervision, keeping clear working hours, and building personal self-care routines.

(See Section 2.4 for a full guide on self-care and burnout prevention.)

Limits and Referral

Youth workers are not expected to have all the answers or to manage every situation alone. Knowing professional limits is essential for ethical and sustainable practice. Youth workers are facilitators and supportive adults, not therapists or mental health professionals. It is acceptable to adapt, pause, or stop an activity if emotions become too intense, and to consult colleagues, supervisors, or partners when unsure how to proceed.

Referral to professional support should be considered when a young person continues to experience significant distress, expresses risk of harm to themselves or others, or requires support beyond the role of youth work. Recognising when additional help is needed is a strength, not a failure. The responsibility of the youth worker is to provide security, support, and appropriate signposting rather than clinical intervention.

When to Refer

Refer to specialised services when you observe:

- Persistent nightmares or flashbacks
- Self-harm behaviour
- Severe or prolonged withdrawal
- Panic attacks that significantly impair functioning
- Suicidal thoughts or expressions of wanting to die
- If they say “I hate myself!” - ask about suicidal thoughts

Important note on suicidal thoughts: Do not promise confidentiality. Inform your safeguarding lead immediately. Contact emergency services if the risk is imminent. Your primary responsibility at this moment is the young person’s safety.

Build partnerships in advance with local mental health services, school counsellors, social workers, and refugee and community support organisations. Knowing who to contact before you need them makes referral faster and less stressful for everyone.

A regulated adult helps regulate young people.

(See Section 7: Referral & Support Contacts for country-specific services.)

4.5 Reflection and Evaluation

This handbook is designed as a flexible resource for non-formal education rather than a structured clinical or therapeutic intervention programme. Activities may be used individually, adapted into workshops, or integrated into longer-term youth work processes depending on the needs, context, and readiness of each group.

For this reason, evaluation within this handbook does not aim to measure clinical mental health outcomes or establish direct causal links between activities and long-term behavioural change. Instead, reflection and evaluation are used to support learning, ethical practice, emotional safety, and continuous adaptation.

In non-formal education, evaluation is not a control mechanism but a learning process. It helps youth workers and participants reflect on what felt meaningful, what supported participation and inclusion, and what may need to be adapted in future sessions.

Evaluation should remain participatory, proportionate, and ethically handled. Young people should never feel tested, judged, analysed, or pressured to disclose personal experiences or emotions.

Principles for Ethical and Participatory Evaluation

When reflecting on or evaluating activities from this handbook, youth workers are encouraged to follow these principles:

- Participation in feedback should always remain voluntary.
- Reflection tools should prioritise emotional safety and avoid requiring personal disclosure.
- Written or anonymous feedback should be handled confidentially where appropriate.
- Evaluation should remain proportionate to the context and avoid collecting unnecessary information.
- Feedback should be used constructively to support learning, adaptation, and reflection rather than blame or performance measurement.

Session-Level Reflection

Session-level reflection focuses on participants' immediate experience of the activity and the overall emotional and relational climate of the group. Reflection may take verbal, visual, creative, or written forms depending on the age, context, and preferences of participants.

Possible closing prompts include:

- One thing I learned today...
- One thing that stayed with me...
- One word that describes how I feel now...
- One thing that felt meaningful or important...
- One thing I would change next time...

Participation remains voluntary. Silence, observation, or uncertainty are also valid forms of participation and feedback.

Facilitators may also use simple reflective check-ins such as:

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much):

- I felt safe during this session.
- I felt respected and heard.
- I was able to participate in a way that felt comfortable for me.
- The activity felt meaningful or useful for me.

These types of questions can help youth workers reflect on the emotional climate and accessibility of a session without requiring participants to disclose sensitive information.

Youth Worker Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is a central part of ethical and trauma-informed youth work. After facilitating a session, youth workers are encouraged to reflect individually, with colleagues, or through supervision/intervision processes.

Possible reflection questions include:

- Did participants appear emotionally safe and included?
- Were different forms of participation respected?
- Did I adapt the activity appropriately to the group's needs?
- Did I maintain appropriate professional boundaries?
- How did I feel during and after the session?
- What would I adjust or approach differently next time?

Because many activities in this handbook engage with identity, discrimination, wellbeing, and belonging, youth workers should also remain attentive to their own emotional state and capacity.

Questions for facilitator self-check:

- Am I carrying emotional weight from this session?
- Do I need to debrief with a colleague or supervisor?
- Did anything in this session trigger strong personal reactions?
- Do I need additional support, rest, or reflection before facilitating again?

Supporting others responsibly requires ongoing self-awareness, reflection, and care.

Tracking Learning and Professional Growth Over Time

For youth workers who use this handbook regularly, a light reflective tracking approach may be useful. Rather than focusing on formal measurement, the purpose is to support ongoing professional learning, confidence, and self-awareness over time.

Every few months, youth workers may reflect on questions such as:

- Has my confidence in facilitating sensitive topics increased?
- Am I more comfortable responding to emotional distress or difficult group dynamics?
- Do I feel clearer about when and how to refer participants to professional support?
- Has my understanding of inclusion, participation, or cultural sensitivity evolved?
- Have I become more aware of my own boundaries, assumptions, or facilitation habits?

These reflections are not intended as formal assessment tools, but as opportunities for ongoing professional development, ethical reflection, and learning.

Learning, Adaptation, and Limits

Meaningful change in wellbeing, participation, belonging, or resilience is complex and shaped by many factors beyond the scope of a single activity or handbook. Not all meaningful outcomes are immediately visible or easily measurable, and learning processes are rarely linear.

This handbook does not aim to measure:

- clinical mental health outcomes,
- trauma symptom reduction,
- long-term behavioural change,
- or broad systemic changes beyond the immediate learning environment.

The purpose of reflection and evaluation within this handbook is therefore not to prove transformation, but to support responsible facilitation, reflective learning, emotional safety, and continuous adaptation in youth work practice.

Facilitator tip: *A participant's decision to remain silent, say "I don't know," or engage minimally should not automatically be interpreted as resistance or disengagement. It may reflect reflection, uncertainty, emotional processing, cultural communication differences, or a need for greater trust and safety. Silence should be treated with the same respect as verbal participation.*

CHAPTER 5

Activities



This directory provides a quick reference guide to all the activities in this handbook. Use the columns below to filter by time, group size, and emotional intensity to find the perfect fit for your session.

Nr.	Title	 Time	 Group	 Level	 Intensity	 Themes	Introduction	Page
5.1 Safer Space and Icebreakers								66
1	Safer Space Creation	30-40	Any	Foundation	Low	- trust - group agreements - inclusion	Participants co-create the group's shared agreements and ways of working together, laying the foundation for everything that follows.	68
2	Emotions Circle Check-in	10-15	Any	Foundation	Low to Medium	- emotional awareness - check-in - vocabulary	Participants use emotion cards to show how they are feeling right now, opening the session with honest and gentle self-awareness.	71
3	Name & Gesture Circle	15-20	Any	Foundation	Low	- connection - playfulness - first introductions	A simple circle activity where participants introduce themselves through a name and a personal gesture, building first connections in a new group.	74
4	Human Bingo	15-20	10-30	Foundation	Low	- connection - diversity - shared experience	Participants move around the room finding people who match descriptions on their bingo card, discovering what they share and what makes them unique.	76
5	Speed Dating	40-45	10-35	Foundation	Low	- connection sharing, - curiosity	Participants rotate through short paired conversations using prompt cards, getting to know many people in a short time.	78
6	Story Chain	25-35	5-20	Foundation	Low	- listening - creativity - collective storytelling	Participants build a story together one sentence at a time, practising active listening and spontaneous contribution in a playful group format.	81
7	Musical Dating	40-45	10-35	Foundation	Low to Medium	- connection - movement - energy	A movement-based variation of Speed Dating where music signals rotation, combining physical energy with deeper personal sharing.	83
8	Object Story	30-40	8-35	Foundation	Low to Medium	- story - personal sharing - identity - connection	Participants bring or choose an object that means something to them and share the story behind it, opening a gentle window into personal experience.	86
5.2 Emotional Expression								89
9	Feelings Collage	40-50	5-30	Foundation	Low to Medium	- emotional expression - creativity - self-awareness	Participants create a personal collage using images, colours, and words that represent their current emotional landscape, without needing to explain or name what they feel.	90

Nr.	Title						Introduction	Page
		Time	Group	Level	Intensity	Themes		
10	The Emotion Stars	35-45	5-30	Intermediate	Medium	- emotional vocabulary - self-awareness - reflection	Participants map a range of emotions onto stars, exploring the nuances between feelings and expanding their emotional vocabulary in a visual and accessible way.	93
11	I Feel Statements	45-60	6-20	Intermediate	Low to Medium	- emotional literacy - communication - boundaries	Participants practise expressing their feelings using structured first-person statements, building the language skills needed for honest and respectful communication.	96
12	My Emotion Space	45-60	5-25	Foundation to Medium	Low to Medium	- self-awareness - emotional mapping - regulation	Participants create a personal map of the activities, people, and places that energise, drain, process, and ground them, building self-knowledge and self-care awareness.	100
13	Emotions Mask	50-70	5-30	Intermediate	Medium to High	- identity - emotional expression - inner and outer self	Participants create a mask that shows what they present to the world on the outside and what they carry on the inside, exploring the gap between public and private emotional experience.	103
14	Letters to Mariam	50-80	12-30	Intermediate	Medium to High	- emotional expression - empathy - emotional awareness - discrimination - self-awareness	Using a fictional story, participants write letters to a character experiencing discrimination, exploring difficult emotions and building empathy in a safely distanced way.	106
5.3 Art and Creative Expression								110
15	Joyful Moments Discovery	30-45	5-30	Foundation	Low	- wellbeing - positive emotion - gratitude	Participants explore and share the small everyday moments that bring them genuine joy, building awareness of personal sources of wellbeing and positive emotion.	112
16	Animal Guides	40-60	5-30	Foundation	Low to Medium	- Identity - strengths - self-awareness	Participants choose an animal that represents a quality they recognise in themselves, using metaphor and creative imagination to explore identity and inner resources.	115
17	Let Your Fingers Talk	40-60	10-20	Intermediate	Low to Medium	- emotional expression - creativity - body awareness	Participants use finger painting to express emotions and inner states without words, releasing tension and exploring feelings through colour, texture, and touch.	118
18	Image Reflection	40-50	5-20	Foundation to Intermediate	Medium	- reflection - meaning-making - emotional awareness	Participants select images that resonate with their current experience and use them as a starting point for personal reflection and group sharing.	121
19	Clay and Emotions	50-70	8-20	Intermediate	Medium to High	- emotional expression - embodiment - creativity	Participants use clay to give physical form to an emotion or inner experience, exploring feelings through their hands and the act of creation.	124
20	Feel the Beat	60-80	10-27	Foundation	Low to Medium	- energy - body awareness - emotional release	Participants use music and movement to express emotions physically, releasing energy and connecting with their bodies through rhythm and collective movement.	127

								
Nr.	Title	Time	Group	Level	Intensity	Themes	Introduction	Page
5.4 Meditation and Mindfulness								131
21	Mindful Breathing and Movement	20-35	Any	Beginner	Low	- grounding - body awareness - regulation	Participants combine gentle movement with conscious breathing to reconnect with their bodies and the present moment, building a simple and accessible mindfulness foundation.	133
22	Body Scan Meditation	25-35	Any	Foundation to Intermediate	Low to Medium	- body awareness - grounding - self-regulation	Participants are guided through a slow, attentive scan of the body from head to toe, building awareness of physical sensations and releasing held tension.	136
23	Blow It Away	30-40	10-40	Foundation	Low to Medium	- stress release - emotional regulation - visualisation	Participants visualise a worry, fear, or tension and release it through a conscious breathing exercise, using imagination and breath together as tools for emotional regulation.	139
24	Loving-Kindness Meditation	25-30		Intermediate	Medium	- compassion - self-worth - connection	Participants are guided through a meditation practice of directing warmth and care toward themselves and others, building self-compassion and a sense of connection.	143
5.5 Identity, Belonging and Inclusion								147
25	Identity Maps	40-55	Any	Intermediate	Low to Medium	- identity - self awareness - diversity	Participants create a visual map of the different aspects of their identity, exploring what makes them who they are and how different parts of themselves connect and interact.	150
26	Voices of Identity	60-80	5-30	Advanced	High	- identity - internalised narratives - discrimination	Participants explore the different voices and messages they have received about who they are, examining which come from within and which have been imposed from outside.	153
27	The Masks We Wear	50-70	5-20	Advanced	High	- Identity - emotional expression - authenticity	Participants create a mask showing what they present to the world on the outside and what they carry on the inside, exploring the gap between public and private self.	157
28	Parts of Me	60-70	8-25	Intermediate	Medium to High	- identity - belonging - self-awareness	Participants respond to identity-related prompts through movement in space, exploring different aspects of self and how they relate to belonging and exclusion across two reflective rounds using the same set of stimuli.	161
29	The Living Tree	45-60	10-30	Foundation	Low to Medium	- strengths - resilience - roots and belonging	Participants map their personal roots, strengths, and hopes onto a tree, connecting their identity to their history, community, and future aspirations.	165
30	Breaking the Myth Game	45-60	10-30	Intermediate	Low to Medium	- discrimination - stereotypes - critical thinking	Participants challenge common myths and stereotypes about Roma, refugee, and migrant communities using evidence and personal experience, building critical awareness and solidarity.	169

Nr.	Title						Introduction	Page
		Time	Group	Level	Intensity	Themes		
31	The Light Within You	50-70	10-25	Intermediate	Medium	- self-worth - affirmation - dignity	Participants reflect on and name the qualities, strengths, and light they carry within themselves, closing the section with a powerful act of self-affirmation and mutual recognition.	173

5.6 Resilience

177

32	Strength Circles	30-45	5-20	Foundation	Medium	- strengths - affirmation - collective support	Participants identify and share their personal strengths with the group, receiving affirmation from peers and building a collective picture of the resources present in the room.	179
33	The Hero's Journey	60-80	5-20	Intermediate	Low to Medium	- resilience - narrative - personal history	Participants map their own life journey onto the hero's journey framework, exploring challenges they have faced and the strengths that helped them through.	182
34	The Resilience Box	45-60	Any	Intermediate	Low to Medium	- resilience - identity - personal resources	Participants create or curate a personal box of objects, symbols, and words that represent their sources of strength and resilience, building a tangible reminder of what they carry.	185
35	Timeline of Resilience	70-90	5-30	Advanced	High	- personal history - resilience - meaning-making	Participants create a visual timeline of significant moments in their lives, exploring how challenges have shaped them and identifying the resources and relationships that helped them survive and grow.	188
36	Letter to My Future Self	30-50	Any	Intermediate	Medium	- hope - agency - future orientation	Participants write a letter to their future self, capturing what they have learned, what they want to remember, and what they hope for themselves going forward.	191

5.7 Wellbeing and Mental Health Awareness

194

37	Conversations We Don't Usually Have	60-90	10-30	Foundation	Low	- wellbeing - awareness - group exploration	Participants explore the six dimensions of wellbeing through a World Café format, mapping what supports and challenges their wellbeing across different areas of life.	196
38	Your Inner Weather	40-60	8-25	Beginner	Low	- emotional awareness - self-reflection - check-in	Participants use weather metaphors to describe their current emotional and mental state, building self-awareness and emotional vocabulary in an accessible and creative way.	200
39	Meeting Your Inner Critic	60-70	8-25	Advanced	High	- self-worth - inner dialogue - self-compassion	Participants explore the critical inner voice that judges and limits them, learning to recognise it, understand where it comes from, and respond to it with greater self-compassion.	205
40	Whose Voice is This?	75-90	8-25	Advanced	High	- internalised narratives - identity - discrimination	Participants examine the origins of the critical or limiting messages they carry, tracing which voices belong to them and which have been absorbed from outside through discrimination and stigma.	210

Nr.	Title						Introduction	Page
		Time	Group	Level	Intensity	Themes		
41	Enough	70-80	8-25	Advanced	High	- self-worth - internalised discrimination - affirmation	Participants confront the belief that they are not enough and explore where that belief comes from, building towards a personal declaration of their own worth and dignity.	215
42	The Mirror and The Map	50-70	10-25	Advanced	High	- self-awareness - strengths - future orientation	Participants reflect on how they see themselves now and how they want to see themselves in the future, mapping the distance between present reality and personal aspiration.	220
43	My Power Shield	50-60	Any	Intermediate	Low to Medium	- strengths - identity - resilience	Participants create a personal shield representing their strengths, values, support systems, and challenges overcome, building a tangible symbol of their own power and resilience.	225
44	Weeds and Seeds	45-60	8-25	Intermediate	Low to Medium	- reflection - letting go - growth	Participants identify what they want to release from their lives and what they want to nurture and grow, using the metaphor of a garden to reflect on personal change and intention.	229
45	Peer Support Circles	60-70	10-25	Advanced	High	- connection - mutual support - active listening	Participants practise supporting each other through structured listening circles, building the skills and confidence needed to show up for peers in difficulty.	234
46	Self-Care Exploration	60-90	Any	Foundation	Low	- self-care - sustainability - personal commitment	Participants explore what genuinely restores and supports them, creating a personal self-care plan they can carry into their everyday lives.	239
5.8 Agency and Advocacy								244
47	Beyond the Label	80-90	8-25	Advanced	High	- identity - discrimination - agency	Participants examine the labels imposed on them by systems, media, and society, reclaiming the right to define themselves on their own terms.	246
48	My Personal Manifesto	75-90	8-30	Intermediate	Medium	- agency - values - self-expression	Participants write a personal manifesto declaring who they are, what they stand for, and what they claim for themselves, transforming self-awareness into a public act of voice.	251
49	Freeze Frames	70-90	10-30	Intermediate	Medium	- advocacy - collective voice - embodiment	Participants use frozen physical tableaux to represent social situations involving discrimination or injustice, exploring power dynamics and collective responses through the body.	255
50	What Would You Do Scenarios	40-55	Any	Intermediate	Medium	- decision-making - ethics - advocacy	Participants work through realistic scenarios involving discrimination, exclusion, or injustice, practising how to respond with courage, clarity, and care.	259
51	My Brave Step	50-75	8-25	Intermediate	Medium	- agency - commitment - action	Participants identify one concrete step they are willing to take in their own life or community, transforming reflection and intention into a personal commitment to act.	262

Nr.	Title						Introduction	Page
		Time	Group	Level	Intensity	Themes		
52	Feathers of Courage	70-90	10-30	Advanced	High	- courage - affirmation - collective witnessing	Participants name an act of courage they have taken or want to take and receive collective acknowledgement from the group, building confidence and mutual solidarity.	267
53	Build It Together	45-60	9-25	Intermediate	Medium to High	- collaboration - collective agency - community	Participants work together to design a solution to a shared challenge, practising collective decision-making, negotiation, and the experience of building something together.	272
54	Change Starts Here	90-120	10-30	Intermediate	High	- advocacy - systemic thinking - collective action	Participants identify a change they want to see in their community or society and take the first concrete steps toward making it happen, connecting personal agency to collective action.	276

5.9 Activity Closing Rituals

282



5.1 Safer Spaces and Icebreakers

Safer spaces and icebreakers play an essential role at the beginning of group work. Icebreakers help participants connect, reduce initial tension, and create a welcoming atmosphere where people feel comfortable participating without pressure. In youth work, their purpose is not only to energise the group but also to gradually build trust, inclusion, and psychological safety.

When planning activities, facilitators should think in terms of progressive group-building. Early activities should focus on light connection, names, movement, playful interaction, or low-risk sharing. As trust grows, facilitators may introduce deeper activities such as group agreements, emotional check-ins, or personal sharing that strengthen group cohesion.

While this handbook emphasises the importance of safer spaces, meaningful learning sometimes involves moments of openness and courage. These “brave moments” should always emerge from a foundation of safety and choice, participants should never be pressured to share personal experiences, and facilitators should gradually increase the depth of activities according to the group’s readiness.

A note on language: *throughout this handbook we use the term safer space rather than safe space. This is intentional; it acknowledges that no space can be completely safe for everyone at all times, but that we can and should actively work to make spaces as safe as possible. The effort matters, even when the ideal is not fully reachable.*

What You Will Find In This Section

This section contains eight activities that follow a clear progression, from establishing the group’s shared agreements and emotional awareness, through broad connection and playful interaction, to gradually deeper one-to-one exchanges and personal expression.

Safer Space Creation (Nr.1) is recommended as the first activity for any new group or programme day; it establishes the group agreements that everything else builds on. **Emotions Circle Check-in** (Nr.2) introduces emotional awareness as a regular group ritual. **Name & Gesture Circle** (Nr.3) helps participants learn each other’s names through movement. From there, **Human Bingo** (Nr.4) and **Speed Dating** (Nr.5) build a broad connection across the whole group; surface level but warm. **Story Chain** (Nr.6) introduces creative collective expression through a fictional frame, lowering the threshold for personal sharing. **Musical Dating** (Nr.7) combines movement with deeper one-to-one questions. Finally, **Object Story** (Nr.8), the most intimate activity in the section, invites personal expression through symbolism and requires the trust that the preceding activities have built.

Activities can be selected individually based on the group’s needs, or sequenced progressively across a session or programme opening.

Facilitator Tips

- **Before selecting an icebreaker or safer space activity:** take a moment to observe the group's energy. This helps you align the activity with the participants' current emotional state:
- **If the energy is low or “shut down” (Hypo-arousal):** Participants may be quiet, avoiding eye contact, or showing low engagement. Choose an icebreaker that involves gentle movement or rhythmic coordination to help “wake up” the nervous system and build connection.
- **If the energy is high or “agitated” (Hyper-arousal):** Participants may be restless, loud, or distracted. Choose a safer space activity that focuses on grounding, breath, or focused attention to help the group settle into the window of tolerance.



Theme

- Trust
- Group agreements
- Inclusion



Duration

30-40



Group Size

Any

Note: for very large groups (20+) consider collecting initial inputs in small groups before bringing agreements to the full group.



Emotional Intensity

Low



Materials

- Large flipchart paper / visible wall space
- Markers
- Sticky notes and pens (one set per participant)

Optional: decorative materials to make the agreement sheet visually appealing

ACTIVITY 1

Safer Space Creation

Safer Space Creation is a structured facilitated activity that invites participants to collectively define what they need to feel safe, respected, and open in the group. Rather than having rules imposed from the outside, participants co-create their own group agreements, making them more meaningful, more owned, and more likely to be honored throughout the program.

Objectives

- To co-create a shared set of group agreements that reflect everyone's needs.
- To establish a culture of respect, confidentiality, and non-judgement from the very first session.
- To introduce the concept of brave space alongside safer space.
- To give participants a sense of ownership and agency over their shared learning environment.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify and articulate what they personally need to feel safer and respected in a group.
- recognize that safety means different things to different people and that this diversity is valid.
- commit to a shared set of agreements that support the whole group's wellbeing.
- approach the program with greater openness and willingness to engage.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5 min): Welcome participants and introduce the purpose of the activity. Explain that before anything else, the group will take time to create a shared space together, not by following a pre-made list of rules, but by naming what each person genuinely needs to feel comfortable, respected, and able to participate. Frame this as an act of collective care: "These are not rules imposed on you, they are commitments we make to each other."



Preparation

1. Set up the flipchart or wall space before participants arrive.
2. Write the title “Our Group Agreements” or “Our Safer Space” at the top of the flipchart in advance.
3. Prepare a few seed concepts to offer if the group is very quiet or stuck, not as a pre-made list but as gentle prompts: **confidentiality, right to pass, respect, non-judgment, open-mindedness.**

Introduce the concept of brave space alongside safer space: a safer space is one where people feel protected and respected, but a brave space acknowledges that real learning sometimes involves moments of discomfort, openness, and courage. Both are needed, safety is the foundation, bravery is what becomes possible because of it.

2 Individual Reflection (10 min): Give each participant 2-3 sticky notes and a pen. Ask them to write one agreement per sticky note, something they personally need from the group to feel safe, respected, and open. This can be anything: a value, a behavior, a boundary. Encourage honesty and specificity over generic statements. Model one yourself: “For me, I need to know that what I share here stays here.”

Allow quiet thinking time, do not rush this phase.

3 Sharing and Building (15 min): Invite participants one by one to place their sticky notes on the flipchart and briefly explain what they wrote. As agreements are shared, look for natural clusters, confidentiality, respect, non-judgment, right to pass, open-mindedness, and group them together on the flipchart. Acknowledge each contribution genuinely.

After everyone has shared, read the full list back to the group. Ask: “Is there anything missing? Is there anything anyone would like to adjust?” This moment of collective review is important, it transforms individual wishes into shared commitments.

Facilitator’s role: *You are not curating or filtering, every contribution is valid. If something is unclear, ask gently: “Can you say a little more about what that means for you?” Never dismiss or minimize any agreement, even if it seems obvious.*

4 Collective Commitment (5 min): Once the group is satisfied with the agreements, invite everyone to add their name or a symbol, a small but meaningful gesture of collective commitment. Post the agreement somewhere visible in the room where it will remain throughout the program.

5 Discussion and Debriefing (5min): See below

Close by acknowledging what just happened: this group just built something together. Everything that follows will happen within this shared space they created.



Discussion & Debriefing

This activity does not require a full structured debrief. A brief closing reflection is enough:

1. What agreements did the group come up with? Were there any that surprised you?
2. How did it feel to create these agreements together rather than having them given to you?
3. Is there one agreement on this list that feels especially important to you personally?
4. How will you hold yourself and each other to these agreements throughout our time together?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Ownership Is Everything:** The power of this activity comes entirely from the fact that participants create the agreements themselves. Resist the temptation to add your own agreements to the list unprompted, or to steer the group toward specific words. If something important is missing, like confidentiality, you can offer it as a gentle question: “Is there anything about what we share here and how it stays within the group that anyone wants to name?”
- **Returning to the Agreements:** Post the flipchart visibly and refer back to it throughout the program, not as a disciplinary tool but as a living reminder of what the group built together. At the start of each new day or session, a brief glance at the agreements helps re-establish the shared space. If something difficult happens in the group, returning to the agreements is a constructive and non-punitive way to re-center.
- **Right to Pass:** Always include the right to pass as a non-negotiable element, if the group does not name it themselves, offer it explicitly. For participants who may have experienced coercion or pressure to perform or disclose, knowing they can pass at any moment is foundational to genuine safety.
- **Brave Space:** The brave space concept may be new to some participants. Frame it gently, it is not about pushing people beyond their comfort zone, it is about creating enough safety that people feel they can take small steps of openness when they are ready.

Variations

- **Visual version:** Instead of a flipchart list, participants draw or illustrate their agreements; the result is a collective artwork that is more visually engaging and culturally accessible.
- **Larger groups:** In larger groups, the activity may require more time.

Resources

Rooted in social movement traditions of collective agreement-making and community safety. The brave space concept draws on critical pedagogy and dialogue education.

See: Arao & Clemens (2013) - *From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces*.



Theme

- Safer Space
- Emotional Awareness
- Group Cohesion



Duration

10-15



Group Size

Any



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- 5-6 large emotion face cards placed on the floor (drawn, printed, or illustrated), suggested emotions: happy, sad, worried, calm, excited, tired
- Optional:** additional blank cards and markers so participants can add an emotion that is not represented

ACTIVITY 2

Emotions Circle Check-in

Emotions Circle is a simple, visual activity that invites participants to identify and name how they are feeling at the start or end of a session. By placing emotion faces on the floor and asking participants to stand by the one that matches their current state, it normalises emotional awareness in a gentle, accessible, and non-verbal way.



Objectives

- To normalize talking about emotions at the start and end of sessions.
- To help participants identify and name their current emotional state.
- To give facilitators real-time information about the group's emotional climate.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- practice identifying and naming their emotions in a safer and supported context.
- experience being seen and acknowledged in their current emotional state.
- develop greater emotional self-awareness over the course of a program.
- recognize that all emotions are valid and welcome in the group space.



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 Introduction (2 min):** Point to the emotion faces on the floor and invite participants to look at all of them. Explain that they are going to stand by the face that best matches how they feel right now, not how they think they should feel, but how they actually feel in this moment. Remind them that all emotions are welcome here and there are no right or wrong answers.
- 2 Positioning (3-4 min):** Participants move to stand by their chosen emotion. If more than one feels right, they can stand between two. If none of the faces captures their feeling, they can name it themselves. Allow a moment of quiet once everyone has chosen, let participants look around and notice where others are standing.



Preparation

1. Prepare and print or draw the emotion face cards in advance. Make them large enough to be clearly visible from across the room, A3 size or larger works well.
2. Place them on the floor spread out enough that participants can stand by their chosen emotion without crowding.
3. Think about where you will place this activity in the session; it works best as the very first thing and the very last thing, bookending the session with emotional awareness.

3 Sharing (5-8 min): Invite participants to share why they chose their emotion: “would anyone like to say something about how they are feeling today?” Keep sharing voluntarily and unhurried. A simple nod or acknowledgment from the facilitator after each share is enough, this is not a problem-solving moment, it is a moment of witnessing.

Facilitator’s role: *Read the room carefully. Notice where the majority of participants are clustered. If many are standing by “sad,” “worried,” or “tired,” acknowledge it openly and warmly before moving on: “I can see many of us are carrying something today, thank you for naming that. Let’s keep that in mind as we go through the session.” Use this information to adjust your session plan if needed, a heavy emotional climate calls for a gentler opening activity.*



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice during the activity?
2. How did it feel to name your emotion, even just by standing by a face?
3. What does it mean for a group when everyone’s emotions are acknowledged and visible - what becomes possible?
4. Where else in your life could this kind of emotional awareness be useful?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **When the Room Is Heavy:** If the majority of participants cluster around difficult emotions, sad, worried, tired, do not panic and do not try to fix it. Name it warmly: “I can see many of us are carrying something heavy today, thank you for being honest about that.” Then use this information to adjust your session. This is not a problem, it is the check-in doing exactly what it is meant to do. A group that tells you they are sad is a group that trusts you enough to be honest.
- **If Someone Becomes Emotional:** Occasionally a participant may become tearful or visibly distressed when standing by their chosen emotion; sometimes simply being asked “how are you feeling?” is enough to release something that has been held tightly. For guidance on how to respond to strong emotional reactions in the group, refer to *Section 3.5.5. Responding to Emotional Distress.* - of this handbook.
- **The Blank Card:** It is good to have a blank card and marker available. The emotion faces provided may not capture every feeling, particularly across diverse cultural contexts where emotional vocabulary differs. Inviting participants to name and draw their own emotion if needed signals that their inner experience matters even when it doesn’t fit a category.



Variations

- **Expanded emotion range:** For more experienced groups or later in a program, add more nuanced emotions; proud, confused, grateful, overwhelmed, hopeful. This builds emotional vocabulary gradually.
- **Drawing version:** Instead of standing by a face, participants draw their own emotion face on a sticky note and place it on a collective emotion map on the wall. Over a multi-day program this becomes a visual record of the group’s emotional journey.



Resources

Grounded in social-emotional learning (SEL) approaches and emotion regulation theory. Naming emotions as a regulation tool draws on affect labelling research.

See: CASEL (casel.org), *Lieberman et al. (2007)*, *Gross (1998)*.



Theme

- Safer Space
- Icebreaker
- Group Cohesion



Duration

10-15



Group Size

Any



Emotional Intensity

Low



Materials

None required.



Preparation

1. Arrange the space so participants can stand comfortably in a circle where everyone can see and hear each other.
2. Prepare your own name and gesture in advance, make it genuine and slightly playful to set the tone.
3. Think about how you will handle participants with physical limitations before the session starts, have an alternative ready (see Variations).

ACTIVITY 3

Name & Gesture Circle

Name & Gesture Circle is a simple, playful activity that helps participants learn each other's names through movement and creative expression. It is an ideal opener for any group session, energizing, inclusive, and accessible to everyone regardless of language level or background.

Objectives

- To help participants learn each other's names in an engaging and memorable way.
- To build initial group connection and cohesion.
- To create a relaxed and inclusive atmosphere for what follows.
- To encourage creative self-expression from the very first moment.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- remember the names of other group members more easily through movement association.
- experience a first moment of being seen and acknowledged by the group.
- begin to feel at ease in the group space through shared laughter and play.
- approach self-expression with openness and lightness.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (2 min): Invite participants to stand in a circle. Explain that each person will say their name and accompany it with a simple, unique gesture or movement, anything that feels right to them. The group will then repeat both the name and the gesture together. As the activity progresses, each new person adds their name and gesture, and the group repeats all previous ones in sequence.

2 Facilitator Models (1-2 min): Begin yourself, say your name clearly and perform your gesture with enthusiasm. Model the energy you want the group to bring: playful, relaxed, and uncritical. The tone you set here determines the tone of the whole round.

3 The Circle (8-10 min): Go around the circle one by one. After each person shares, the whole group repeats their name and gesture. As the sequence grows, encourage the group to support each other, if someone forgets, others can help with a smile rather than pressure.

4 Debriefing (3 min): A light reflection, this does not need to be a full debrief. A few questions are enough.

5 Closing: Thank the group and acknowledge what just happened, everyone in this circle now knows each other's names. That is not a small thing.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice about others' gestures or energy?
2. How did it feel to express yourself through movement?
3. Why do you think pairing a name with a gesture makes it easier to remember?
4. How did this activity help you feel part of the group?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Energy and Modeling:** Your gesture sets the tone entirely. If you play it guarantee and do something minimal, the group will too. If you commit fully, even something slightly silly, it gives everyone permission to do the same.
- **Physical Limitations:** Be mindful of participants who may have physical limitations. Offer alternatives naturally and without drawing attention, a facial expression, a hand movement, or even a sound works just as well as a full body gesture.
- **Group Size:** For larger groups the memory sequence can become very long. With more than 15-20 participants consider doing the sequence in two smaller circles, or dropping the cumulative memory element and simply having each person share their name and gesture once with the group repeating after each individual.

Variations

- **Extended version:** At the end of the full sequence, go back around and see how many gestures the group can remember without prompting, turning it into a fun collective memory challenge.
- **Later in the program:** Revisit this activity at the end of a training or exchange, participants choose a new gesture that represents something they learned or felt. A simple and meaningful closing ritual.

Resources

This activity is rooted in traditional non-formal education practice.



Theme

- Safer Space
- Icebreaker
- Group Cohesion



Duration

15-20



Group Size

10-30



Emotional Intensity

Low



Materials

- Printed Bingo cards (see Appendix 9)
- Pens or pencils

ACTIVITY 4

Human Bingo

Human Bingo is an energetic, movement-based icebreaker that gets participants talking to as many people as possible in a short time. By searching for people who match descriptions on their bingo card, participants discover unexpected similarities and differences in a fun, low-pressure way.



Objectives

- To encourage participants to mingle and interact with as many people as possible.
- To discover common interests and experiences within the group.
- To create an open, friendly, and energetic atmosphere.
- To break initial social barriers and promote inclusion through playful interaction.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- discover unexpected similarities and connections with other group members.
- practice initiating conversation in a structured and low-pressure context.
- approach new people with curiosity and openness.



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 Introduction (3-5 min):** Distribute Bingo cards and pens. Explain the rules: participants move around the room and find one person who matches each description on their card. When they find a match, they write that person's name in the box. The first person to complete a full line, horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, calls "Bingo!" Emphasize that the goal is to talk to as many different people as possible, each box should have a different name.
- 2 Mingling (10-12 min):** Participants move freely around the room, asking questions and filling in their cards. Keep the energy light and encouraging. Play upbeat background music if the atmosphere feels stiff.
- 3 Sharing (2-3 min):** Once someone calls "Bingo!" invite them to share one or two interesting things they discovered. Then open briefly to the whole group, did anyone find a surprising connection? Keep this light and celebratory.



Preparation

1. Design the Bingo card in advance with statements appropriate for this group. This is the most important preparation step, see Tips for guidance on how to design statements safely and thoughtfully.
2. Print one card per participant before the session.
3. Clear enough space for participants to move around freely.
4. Think in advance about participants who may have language barriers, consider whether bilingual cards or visual symbols would help.

4 Debriefing: See below.

5 Closing: Acknowledge the energy in the room and what just happened, in the space of 10 minutes, everyone spoke to people they had never met before. That is the beginning of a group.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you discover about others during the activity?
2. How did it feel to approach someone you didn't know and start a conversation?
3. What does it tell us about this group that we found so many unexpected connections?
4. How can finding common ground help us work and learn together?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Designing the Bingo Card:** The entire activity depends on the quality of the bingo card statements. For this target group, statements must be carefully chosen to celebrate diversity and find genuine common ground without inadvertently highlighting painful experiences. Good statements focus on everyday life, preferences, and light personal facts:
 - “Loves to cook” / “Can whistle” / “Has a younger sibling” / “Speaks more than one language” / “Loves dancing” / “Has seen the sea” / “Knows a joke in another language” / “Has a favorite childhood food”

Avoid statements that assume stable living conditions, celebrate travel in a way that highlights displacement, or touch on family situations that may be painful. “Has lived in more than one country” sounds fun but can carry real weight for displaced participants, reframe as “knows something interesting about two different places.”

- **The Competitive Element:** The Bingo format is inherently competitive but the competition should feel light and incidental. Remind participants that the real goal is connection, not winning. If some participants, particularly those with language barriers, are clearly struggling to complete their card as quickly as others, acknowledge this warmly and extend the time slightly.



Variations

Quieter groups: Remove the competitive Bingo element entirely, participants simply mingle and find as many matches as possible within the time, then share discoveries in a circle.



Resources

Council of Europe (1995/2004). *All Different All Equal* - Education Pack. Council of Europe Publishing. Available at: www.coe.int



WHEN SCARS
BECOME ART



Theme

- Safer Space
- Icebreaker
- Group Cohesion



Duration

40-45



Group Size

10-30

Note: works best with larger groups where the clock appointment system creates genuinely random pairings.



Emotional Intensity

Low



Materials

- Paper and pens for every participant (for drawing the clock)
- List of topics for facilitators (See Appendix 10)

ACTIVITY 5

Speed Dating

Speed Dating is a dynamic, structured get-to-know-you activity that uses the metaphor of a clock to create intentional one-to-one or small group conversations across the whole group. By revealing one topic per round, it builds gradually from light and playful to slightly more personal, creating genuine connection in a short time without ever feeling forced or invasive.



Objectives

- To help participants get to know each other beyond first impressions.
- To create intentional connections across the whole group rather than only with familiar people.
- To build a warm, curious, and playful group atmosphere.
- To gradually deepen connection through progressively more personal topics.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- discover unexpected things about people they had not previously spoken to.
- practice initiating and sustaining one-to-one conversation in a structured and supportive context.
- experience a growing sense of familiarity and belonging within the group.
- approach others with greater curiosity and openness.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Drawing the Clock (5-7 min): Give each participant a piece of paper and a pen. Ask them to draw a simple clock face with 12 hours marked. Explain that they are going to fill their clock with appointments; they need to find a different person for each hour and write each other's names in the corresponding slot. For larger groups, two or three people can share one appointment slot.

Invite participants to move around the room and make their appointments; this phase is already a first moment of mingling and connection. Encourage them to fill as many slots as possible with people they don't know well.



Preparation

1. Prepare your 12 topics in advance and decide the order; start with the lightest and most playful, build gradually toward slightly more personal. The sequence matters.
2. Clear enough space for participants to move around freely and find their appointment partners.
3. Think about how you will reveal topics, calling them out clearly, writing on a flipchart, or showing on a card. Make sure everyone can hear or see each new topic.
4. For groups with language barriers, consider having topics written on cards that you hold up simultaneously as you announce them.

2 Speed Dating Rounds (30-35 min): Once clocks are filled, call the first hour: “Find your 1 o’clock appointment!” Give participants a moment to locate their partner, then announce the first topic. Participants have 2-3 minutes to discuss the topic together. When time is up, call the next hour and reveal the next topic.

Reveal topics in this order:

1. Favourite song or music you love right now
2. A hobby or something you love doing in your free time
3. A dream travel destination or country you’d love to visit
4. A favourite film or series
5. A favourite food or dessert
6. A memory that puts a smile on your face
7. Your dream job - real or imaginary
8. How do you relax or recharge?
9. One thing you hope to get from our time together
10. A talent or something you are good at
11. If you won the lottery tomorrow - what would you do?
12. How do you usually spend your weekends?

Facilitator’s role: *Keep the energy moving, announce each new hour and topic clearly and with enthusiasm. Watch the room and give a 30-second warning before each transition. If some pairs are still deep in conversation when time is called, acknowledge it warmly: “Looks like some of you need more time, you can continue later!” Keep the atmosphere light and celebratory throughout.*

3 Brief Sharing (3-5 min): After all rounds are complete, bring the group back together. Invite a few volunteers to share one surprising or memorable thing they discovered about someone. Keep this light; two or three contributions is enough.

4 Debriefing (5 min): See below.

5 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. Which conversation or topic stood out to you the most, and why?
2. How did it feel to talk to so many different people in a short time? Was anything surprising or unexpectedly comfortable?
3. What does this experience tell us about connection and what we have in common across differences?
4. How might you carry this kind of curiosity toward others into the rest of our time together?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Topic Order Matters:** The sequence moves deliberately from light and external (music, hobbies, travel) through personal preferences (food, memory, dream job) to slightly more reflective (relaxation, expectations, talent, lottery, weekends). By the time participants reach the deeper topics, they have already had several warm exchanges and trust has naturally built. Never reveal all topics in advance - the element of surprise keeps energy high and prevents participants from preparing answers rather than having genuine conversations.
- **Language Barriers:** Simple, universal topics like food, music, and weekends are highly accessible across language barriers. For participants with limited shared language, these conversations can happen with gestures, phone photos, humming a song, or drawing; encouraging creative communication rather than defaulting only to words.



Variations

- **Shorter version:** Use 6-8 topics instead of 12. Works well for groups of under 15 or sessions with limited time.
- **Progressive sequence:** Use Speed Dating as the second get-to-know-you activity after a lighter icebreaker; participants already have a little warmth and the clock conversations go deeper more quickly.
- **Return activity:** Use a second round of Speed Dating mid-program or at the end with deeper questions: participants are surprised by how much more easily the conversations flow compared to the first time.



Resources

Rooted in structured dialogue and get-to-know-you methodologies in non-formal education.



Theme

- Safer Space
- Icebreaker
- Creative Expression
- Group Cohesion



Duration

30



Group Size

6-25



Emotional Intensity

Low



Materials

None required

Optional: paper and pen to record the story as it develops.

ACTIVITY 6

Story Chain

Story Chain is a creative, collaborative icebreaker where participants build a shared story together, one sentence at a time. It is highly useful for warming up a group's imagination and communication while naturally including everyone regardless of language level or background. The fictional frame makes it accessible and low-pressure, there is nothing personal to reveal, just a story to build together.



Objectives

- To stimulate creativity, imagination, and collaborative storytelling.
- To strengthen attentive listening and focus within the group.
- To encourage cooperation and inclusion through shared narrative building.
- To foster a relaxed and joyful atmosphere that enhances group cohesion.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- experience the pleasure of creating something together as a group.
- practice attentive listening and building on others' ideas.
- feel included and valued through equal contribution to a shared creation.
- approach creative expression with playfulness and openness.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (3 min): Invite participants to sit in a circle where everyone can see and hear each other. Explain the activity: together the group will build one story, one sentence at a time. Each person adds a single sentence that continues from where the previous person left off. There are no wrong contributions, every sentence moves the story forward. Encourage humor, creativity, and surprises.

1 Story Building (12-15 min): Begin with your prepared opening sentence. Then go around the circle, with each participant adding one sentence. Keep the energy light and encouraging, celebrate unexpected twists and creative contributions. If someone freezes, offer a gentle prompt: "What do you think happens next?" or "Who might appear at this moment in the story?" If the story starts moving toward very dark or distressing territory, gently redirect: "And just then, something surprising arrived..."



Preparation

1. Prepare 2-3 opening sentences in advance so you can start the story confidently and set a tone that is warm, imaginative, and inclusive. Examples: "Once upon a time, in a city where it rained colored confetti, there lived a very curious cat..." or "In a small village at the edge of a giant forest, something unusual happened one morning..."
2. Prepare 2-3 theme cards as optional prompts in case the group gets stuck, friendship, adventure, a mysterious discovery, an unexpected journey.
3. Consider whether you want to write the story down as it develops, this can become a lovely group keepsake.

1 Ending (2 min): When everyone has contributed at least once, invite the group to create an ending together. This can be done by the last person in the circle or collectively, "how should our story end?" Allow a moment of applause or appreciation for what the group created together.

1 Debriefing (10 min): See below.

1 Closing: If you wrote the story down, read it back to the group. This moment, hearing the full story they created together, is often surprisingly moving and funny. It makes the collective creation tangible.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What moments in the story stood out to you?
2. How did it feel to build something together one sentence at a time?
3. What does this experience tell us about what becomes possible when we truly listen and build on each other's ideas?
4. Where else - in your life, your community, your work - does this kind of collaborative building matter?



Resources

Grounded in narrative pedagogy and social constructivist learning traditions.

See: Bruner (1991), Vygotsky (1978).



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Emotional Safety:** With groups that may have experienced trauma, stories can occasionally drift toward heavy or distressing themes, violence, loss, danger with no resolution. If this happens, gently steer the narrative back toward possibility: "And just then, an unexpected helper arrived..." Keep this natural and light, avoid drawing attention to the redirect.
- **Language Barriers:** One sentence at a time is manageable for participants with limited shared language, keep sentences short and simple yourself to model accessibility. Never skip someone because of language difficulty, a single word or a gesture that the facilitator weaves into the story is a valid contribution. "Maria added a dragon" is a complete sentence.



Variations

- **Themed version:** Give the group a theme connected to the session; resilience, belonging, finding your way, and let the story explore it metaphorically.
- **Cross-section connection:** This activity pairs beautifully with The Hero's Journey in the Resilience section, Story Chain can serve as a lighter, earlier introduction to collaborative storytelling before the more structured Hero's Journey framework is introduced.



Theme

- Safer Space
- Icebreaker
- Group Cohesion



Duration

40-45



Group Size

8-30



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- A device and speaker for playing music
- A playlist of upbeat, culturally diverse, and inclusive music prepared in advance
- Open space for participants to move freely
- List of topics for facilitators (See Appendix 11)

ACTIVITY 7

Musical Dating

Musical Dating is a dynamic, movement-based activity that combines the energy of music and dance with meaningful one-to-one conversation. When the music stops, participants connect with whoever is nearest and explore a deeper question together. The playfulness of the movement lowers defenses, making the deeper questions land more naturally and comfortably than they would in a seated discussion.

Objectives

- To deepen connection and mutual understanding within the group beyond surface-level sharing.
- To create genuine one-to-one moments of reflection and exchange in a playful format.
- To build a sense of warmth, and belonging through shared movement and conversation.
- To support participants in reflecting on their values, joys, and inner life in a low-pressure way.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- share something personally meaningful in a safer and spontaneous context.
- discover unexpected depth and commonality with people they had not previously spoken to.
- experience a sense of genuine connection and belonging within the group.
- approach their own inner life, values, joys, memories, with greater openness and curiosity.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (3-5 min): Explain the activity: music will play and participants move freely around the room; walking, dancing, or simply moving however feels comfortable. When the music stops, they find the nearest person and pair up. The facilitator then reveals one question for the pair to discuss. When the music starts again, they separate and move around the room until the next stop.

Emphasize that there is no right or wrong way to move; this is not a performance. The movement is simply a way to mix the group and bring energy before each conversation.



Preparation

1. Prepare your playlist in advance; choose music that is energizing, culturally diverse, and unlikely to carry painful associations. Avoid music with strong political or religious connotations. A mix of instrumental, world music, and well-known upbeat songs works well.
2. Select 5-6 questions from the list that feel right for this particular group; you do not need to use all 8. Choose based on the group's level of trust, cultural mix, and where they are in the program. Have them written on cards or a note so you can reveal them smoothly without pausing to remember.

2 Musical Rounds (30-35 min): Start the music. Let it play for 45-60 seconds, long enough for participants to move away from their previous partner and mix genuinely. Stop the music and invite participants to pair up with whoever is nearest. For groups with odd numbers, one trio is fine.

Reveal the first question clearly and give pairs 3-4 minutes to discuss. Then start the music again and repeat.

Suggested questions; select 5-6 based on the group:

1. If you could have dinner with anyone in the world, who would it be and why?
2. What is something you are proud of that others might not know about?
3. If you could learn any skill instantly, what would it be?
4. What is one small thing that brings you joy?
5. What is something you wish more people understood?
6. If you were to leave one thing behind for the next generation, what would it be?
7. What is one thing that often makes you feel better on a difficult day?
8. What is one thing you enjoyed doing as a child that you stopped doing?

Facilitator's role: Move around the room yourself during the music; your movement gives permission to everyone else. Between questions, read the room: if pairs are still deep in conversation when time is up, give an extra minute. If a question lands particularly well, you might invite one or two pairs to share briefly with the whole group before moving on. Never rush a moment that is clearly meaningful.

3 Brief Sharing (3-5 min): After the final round, bring the group back together. Invite a few volunteers to share one thing that stayed with them; something they heard, something that surprised them, or something that resonated. Keep this light and voluntary.

4 Debriefing (5-10 min): See below.

5 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. Which question or conversation stood out to you most?
2. How did the movement between conversations affect how you felt going into each new exchange?
3. Did any question surprise you with what it brought up for you personally?
4. What does this tell us about what happens when we create space to really listen to each other?
5. What would you like to carry from this into the rest of our time together - and into how you connect with people outside this room?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **The Music:** Music choice matters more than it might seem. It sets the physical and emotional tone of the movement phases. Culturally diverse music signals inclusion and curiosity; it tells participants that their cultural background is welcome in the room. Avoid music that might be strongly associated with a particular political context or that carries religious significance that not everyone shares.
- **Movement and Body Awareness:** Some participants may feel uncomfortable dancing or moving freely, particularly in groups where body expression is culturally unfamiliar or where trauma has affected participants' relationship with their bodies. Frame movement as completely optional and personal: "move however feels comfortable for you, walking is completely fine."
- **Progressive Sequencing:** This activity works beautifully as part of a progressive get-to-know-you sequence. Use a lighter icebreaker first, then Speed Dating for structured one-to-one connection, and Musical Dating as the deepest layer. By the time participants reach Musical Dating, trust has already been building, making the deeper questions land much more naturally and honestly.



Variations

- **Without music:** If music is not possible or appropriate, participants simply mill around the room and stop when the facilitator calls "pair up." The conversation questions remain the same, the movement still mixes the group effectively.
- **Deeper version:** For groups with strong established trust, add one or two more vulnerable questions; "what is something you are still learning about yourself?" or "what is one thing you would tell your younger self?" These work best in the final rounds when warmth is highest.



Resources

Inspired by structured dialogue and somatic awareness approaches.



Theme

- Safer Space
- Icebreaker
- Emotional Expression
- Group Cohesion



Duration

30-35



Group Size

5-12

Note: for larger groups split into smaller circles of 6-8



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- A collection of neutral, interesting objects for participants to choose from, stones, buttons, leaves, fabric scraps, small toys, shells, pieces of rope, keys (see Tips for guidance on object selection)

Optional: calm background music during the choosing phase

ACTIVITY 8

Object Story

Object Story is a quiet, intimate icebreaker that invites participants to share a short personal story through the symbolism of an object. By connecting meaning to something tangible, it creates space for personal expression and genuine connection in a gentle, low-pressure way. It works best when a group has already had some initial contact, making it ideal as a second or third session activity rather than a first-day opener.



Objectives

- To encourage self-expression and personal storytelling through symbolism.
- To promote empathy, curiosity, and mutual understanding among participants.
- To build trust and deepen group connections in a safer and creative environment.
- To invite curiosity about different experiences, meanings, and perspectives.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- practice sharing something personally meaningful in a safer and supported context.
- develop empathy and curiosity toward others' experiences and backgrounds.
- experience genuine connection through the sharing of personal stories.
- approach listening with greater attentiveness and respect.



Preparation

1. Prepare a collection of neutral objects in advance, aim for at least 1.5 times the number of participants so everyone has genuine choice. See Tips for guidance on which objects to include and which to avoid.
2. Arrange objects on a central table or cloth before participants arrive, laid out openly so they are easy to browse and choose from.
3. Think carefully about the framing, this activity must never ask participants to bring objects from home. See Tips for why this matters for this target group.
4. Set up a calm, comfortable seating arrangement in a circle where everyone can see each other.
5. Emotionally prepare yourself: objects can carry unexpected weight. A stone might represent a homeland, a piece of fabric might represent a person who is gone. Be ready to hold that gently.



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 **Introduction and Choosing (5 min):** Invite participants to approach the collection of objects and choose one that speaks to them in some way, it might remind them of something, represent a value, or simply feel right without knowing why. There is no wrong choice. Give participants a minute or two to browse and choose quietly. Calm background music can help settle the atmosphere during this phase.
- 2 **Sharing (12-15 min):** Invite participants one by one to show their object to the group and share what it represents, a memory, an experience, a value, or simply why they chose it. Keep sharing voluntarily and unhurried. After each person shares, invite the group to ask one short, respectful question if they wish, not to probe, but to show genuine curiosity.
- 3 **Collective Acknowledgment (3-5 min):** After everyone has shared, take a moment to acknowledge the variety of stories and connections that emerged. You might note a theme or a surprising connection between objects without singling individuals out. Thank the group for the trust they brought to the circle.
- 4 **Debriefing (10 min):** See below.
- 5 **Closing:** Close by inviting participants to place their chosen object back on the cloth in the center, creating a small collective arrangement. This simple gesture makes the group's shared stories visible as a whole.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice while choosing your object and listening to others share?
2. How did it feel to share something personal through an object rather than through direct words?
3. Did anything surprise you, about your own choice or someone else's?
4. How might this kind of attentive, curious listening change how you approach other people's stories - here and beyond this room?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Emotional Intensity:** This activity sits at Low to Medium intensity, objects can carry unexpected emotional weight. A participant may choose a stone because it reminds them of a place they can no longer return to, or a piece of fabric because it reminds them of someone they have lost. This is not a problem to prevent, it is a sign that the activity is working. Hold these moments with care and without rushing.
- **Never Ask Participants to Bring Objects From Home:** This is the most important consideration for this target group. Asking participants to bring a meaningful personal object assumes they have such objects available, but for refugees and recently displaced young people, personal belongings may have been lost, left behind, or never existed in the first place. Being asked to bring “something meaningful” when you have nothing left from your previous life can be quietly devastating. Always provide a collection of objects for participants to choose from, and frame this as the norm, not a fallback.
- **Choosing Objects Carefully:** Select objects that are neutral, tactile, and open to multiple interpretations. Good choices: stones, buttons, leaves, fabric scraps, small toys, shells, pieces of rope, wooden pieces, dried flowers. Avoid: photographs (too personal and potentially painful), mirrors (can feel confronting), anything with specific cultural or religious associations that may not be shared across the group.

Variations

Imaginary object version: Remove the physical objects entirely and ask participants “If you could choose any object in the world to represent something about yourself right now, what would it be and why?” This works beautifully for groups where providing physical objects is not possible, and removes any material inequality entirely.

Resources

Grounded in object-based learning and narrative therapy approaches.
See: Winnicott (1971), White & Epston (1990).



5.2 Emotional Expression

Emotional expression refers to the ability to recognise, communicate, and express feelings in constructive and healthy ways. For young people, learning to express emotions can reduce tension, improve communication, and strengthen relationships with others. In youth work, emotional expression activities help participants develop emotional vocabulary, increase self-awareness, and normalise the experience of different feelings.

Facilitators should remember that people express emotions differently; some prefer speaking, others may feel more comfortable using drawing, movement, or creative expression. Participation should always remain voluntary, and activities should offer multiple ways for participants to engage without pressure to share personal experiences.

What You Will Find In This Section

This section contains six activities that support participants in recognising, naming, and expressing their emotions through a range of creative and accessible methods. Activities move across different expressive modes, visual art, personal mapping, structured communication, and written expression, ensuring that participants with different communication styles, language abilities, and comfort levels can all find a meaningful entry point.

The section follows a gradual progression. It opens with **Feelings Collage** (Nr.9), a purely visual, non-verbal activity that requires no words and no prior emotional vocabulary. **Emotion Stars** (Nr.10) then expands participants' emotional spectrum by naming and working with a wide range of feelings. **I Feel Statements** (Nr.11) gives participants a clear structure to practice using that vocabulary in communication. **My Emotion Space** (Nr.12) invites them to map how they currently respond to strong emotions, drawing on the vocabulary and awareness built in the preceding activities.

Emotions Mask (Nr.13) deepens the exploration through creative embodiment and requires the trust that the earlier activities have built. The section closes with **Letters to Mariam** (Nr.14), a collaborative writing activity that uses a fictional frame to explore the purpose and protective function of emotions, offering depth without requiring personal disclosure.

Activities can also be used as standalone sessions; the progression is a suggestion, not a requirement.

Most activities sit at **Low** to **Medium** emotional intensity, with the exception of Emotions Mask and Letters to Mariam which sit at **Medium** to **High**. They are designed to open emotional awareness gently rather than to process deep or traumatic material. If strong emotions emerge, the Facilitator Tip below and the grounding guidance in Section 3.5.6 offer practical support.

Facilitator Tip

Emotional expression activities can sometimes bring unexpected reactions. Focus on normalising emotions rather than analysing them. Participants do not need to explain or justify their feelings, observing, drawing, or listening are also valid forms of participation.

If the group becomes emotionally intense, slow down, simplify the activity, or return to grounding practices before continuing.



Theme

- Emotional Expression
- Self-awareness
- Wellbeing



Duration

40-50



Group Size

5-20



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Old magazines, newspapers, printed images - enough variety for everyone to find something that resonates
- Large paper or cardboard (A3 or larger), one per participant
- Scissors and glue sticks

ACTIVITY 9

Feelings Collage

Feelings Collage is a creative activity where participants use images and colors to show how they feel. It makes emotional expression easier, especially for those who find it hard to use words. It is a gentle and low-pressure way to explore emotions.



Objectives

- To provide a creative outlet for expressing current emotions without words.
- To build emotional awareness and vocabulary through visual exploration.
- To create space for diverse emotional experiences to be acknowledged and respected.
- To foster group connection through shared creative expression.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- express their current emotional state through visual and creative means.
- begin to name and recognize emotions they find difficult to articulate verbally.
- experience being seen and acknowledged through their creative work.
- approach emotional expression with greater openness and confidence.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5 min): Welcome participants and introduce the activity. Explain that they are going to create a collage that represents how they are feeling right now, not how they think they should feel, but how they actually feel. There are no right or wrong choices. They can use any images, colors, patterns, or words that speak to them, cutting, tearing, layering, and arranging however feels right.

2 Creation (25-30 min): Invite participants to browse through the materials and begin selecting. Allow the process to be quiet and individual, this is not a collaborative activity. Soft music helps create a calm, focused atmosphere.

3 Sharing and Transition (10 min): Invite volunteers to share something about their collage; what they chose, why a particular image or

Optional:

- markers, colored pencils, or paint for adding drawn elements
- calm background music during the creation phase



Preparation

1. Collect a wide variety of magazines and printed materials in advance, the more diverse the better. Include images of nature, people, textures, patterns, colors, and abstract visuals. Avoid materials with graphic violence, highly sexualized content, or strong political imagery.
2. Set up tables with materials accessible before participants arrive, having everything laid out creates an immediate creative atmosphere.
3. Consider playing soft background music during the creation phase to help participants settle into the work.
4. Emotionally prepare yourself: some participants may express heavy or painful emotions through their collage. Your role is to hold space for that without interpreting or commenting on their work.
5. Think in advance about how you will handle sharing; emphasize clearly from the start that sharing is optional.

color felt right, what their collage says about how they are feeling. Keep sharing genuinely optional and unhurried. Guide the focus toward meaning rather than artistic quality; “what does this image mean to you?” rather than “that’s beautiful.”

If the group is hesitant to share verbally, a silent Gallery Walk works well here, collages are placed around the room and participants walk quietly to view each other’s work.

4 Debriefing (10 min): See below

5 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice while searching for images; was there anything that drew you in unexpectedly?
2. Were there any images or colors you were drawn to but hesitated to include? What stopped you?
3. How did it feel to express your emotions through images rather than words?
4. Did anything about your collage surprise you? Did it reveal something you hadn’t fully named before?
5. What did it feel like to see the different emotions represented across the group?
6. Looking at the range of emotions across the group - what does it tell us that we all arrived here today carrying such different emotional states? What does that mean for how we are together in this space?
7. How might you use creative expression like this as a tool for emotional awareness in your own life?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

Emotional Safety: Some participants may find that images surface emotions they were not expecting, grief, longing, joy, anger. This is not a problem, it is the activity working as intended. Hold space for whatever emerges without rushing to fix or resolve it. If a participant becomes distressed, refer to the guidance in the handbook's section on responding to emotional distress. (3.5.5)

Variations

- **Emotions Drawing:** If magazines and printed materials are not available, participants draw their emotional state using colors, shapes, and symbols instead. The process and purpose are identical, this is a simpler version requiring only paper and coloring materials.
- **Themed Collage:** For groups further into a program, give a specific theme, "what does belonging feel like?" or "what does resilience look like?", to connect the creative expression to the session's learning.
- **Gallery Walk:** Place completed collages around the room and invite silent viewing before the verbal sharing phase. Reduces pressure and creates a collective moment of appreciation.

Resources

Grounded in expressive arts therapy approaches.
See: Rogers N. (1993).



Theme

- Emotional Expression
- Self-awareness
- Wellbeing



Duration

60-70



Group Size

5-25

Note: *individual work within a group setting*



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Large paper (A3 or larger), one sheet per participant
- Coloring materials - colored pencils, crayons, watercolor paint, brushes, markers
- Flipchart and markers for the opening plenary

Optional:

- Printed emotion word pairs list as support
- Calm background music during the creation phase

ACTIVITY 10

The Emotion Stars

Emotion Stars invites participants to think about different emotions and connect them to their own experiences. It gives a simple structure that makes sharing easier and less overwhelming. The activity supports self-reflection and group understanding.

Objectives

- To help participants explore and differentiate their full emotional spectrum rather than single isolated feelings.
- To build emotional vocabulary by naming and working with a wide range of emotions including opposites.
- To promote self-awareness through mindful creative expression.
- To open reflection on how opposite emotions can coexist within the same person at the same time.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- recognize and name a wider range of emotions beyond the most common or accessible ones.
- reflect on the complexity and richness of their emotional spectrum.
- express emotions through color and creative means in a personal and meaningful way.
- develop greater emotional self-awareness through the process of mindful creation.
- begin to recognize that opposite emotions can coexist - and that this is a normal part of human experience.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Opening Plenary (10 min): Welcome participants and begin with a brief group activity before any individual work.

Ask participants to briefly share their present mood in one word - a simple opening that connects everyone to their current emotional state.

Then introduce the concept of opposite emotions. Ask the group: "Can anyone give me an emotion?" Write it on the flipchart. Then ask: "What would be the opposite of that feeling?" Write the pair. Do this for 5-6 pairs, building the list together as a group.

Once the list is on the flipchart, pause and ask: "Do you think it is possible to feel both sides of any of these pairs at the same time?"



Preparation

1. Create your own completed Emotion Star in advance to use as an example. Make it genuine rather than perfect - and include at least one opposite pair where both sides are colored with similar intensity, to naturally model the coexistence idea without explaining it explicitly.
2. Prepare a list of emotion word pairs to offer as support - examples:
 - happy/sad
 - calm/anxious
 - proud/ashamed
 - loved/lonely
 - hopeful/hopeless
 - excited/bored
 - grateful/resentful
 - confident/insecure

Write these on the flipchart or print as a handout.
3. Set up tables with materials accessible before participants arrive.
4. Consider playing soft background music during the creation phase - this activity has a meditative quality and music supports that.

Allow a brief open discussion for 2-3 minutes. Do not resolve it or give the “correct” answer. Simply hold the question open: **“Keep that in mind while you create your star today.”**

2 Building the Star (5 min): Distribute large paper and coloring materials. Show your own completed Emotion Star as an example.

Ask participants to draw a large circle on their paper and divide it into 8, 10, or 12 equal sections. On the outer edge of each section they write the name of a feeling - arranging opposite pairs directly across from each other in the circle. They can use the flipchart pairs, add their own, or do a mix of both.

Remind participants that they choose which emotions belong on their personal star - there are no right or wrong choices.

3 Coloring (25-30 min): Invite participants to find and apply colors that represent their personal and momentary experience of each feeling. This is not about choosing the “correct” color for an emotion - it is about what each feeling looks like to them, right now, today.

Add one instruction: “Color more intensely or deeply if the feeling is strong for you today, and more lightly or softly if it is faint or distant.” This makes the intensity of each feeling visible in the star - and allows the coexistence of opposite feelings to show naturally if it is true for that person today.

Emphasize the importance of taking time with this phase. Encourage a mood of calm and mindfulness - this is not a task to complete quickly but a process to inhabit.

4 Sharing and Transition (5 min): Invite participants to look at their completed star for a moment before sharing. A Gallery Walk works beautifully here - stars placed around the room, participants walking silently to view each other’s work. This creates a collective moment of appreciation without requiring verbal sharing.

Alternatively invite volunteers to share one thing about their star - a color choice, a surprising emotion that appeared, or something they noticed.

5 Debriefing (15 min): See below

6 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. Which emotions did you choose to include — and were there any that surprised you?
2. Which emotions were easiest to color and which were most difficult?
3. How did it feel to work slowly and mindfully with your emotional spectrum?
4. Was there any opposite pair where both feelings felt equally present and strong for you today?
5. Did anything about your star reveal something you hadn't fully named before?
6. What does it tell us that opposite emotions can sometimes feel equally alive at the same time?
7. How might understanding that others also carry complex, sometimes contradictory emotions change how you relate to the people around you?
8. How might having a clearer picture of your emotional spectrum help you in your daily life?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **The Opening Question:** “Do you think it is possible to feel both sides of any of these pairs at the same time?” is not a rhetorical question — it is a genuine invitation to think. Do not rush to answer it yourself. Let participants sit with it and carry it into the creative phase. The star itself will answer it more powerfully than any explanation.
- **The Meditative Quality:** Protect the calm of the coloring phase. Keep the room quiet, play soft music, and resist the urge to fill silences with instructions or commentary. Calmness is part of the learning.
- **Color Freedom:** Emphasize clearly that there are no correct colors for any emotion. One person's sadness might be blue, another's might be grey or even red. This is deeply personal — and that diversity is itself a learning point about emotional experience.
- **Emotional Surprises:** Participants sometimes find that an emotion they didn't expect appears strongly during the coloring phase. These moments of surprise are among the most valuable in the activity. Acknowledge them gently in the debrief without singling individuals out.



Variations

- **Simplified version:** For younger participants or groups with lower emotional vocabulary, provide a pre-written list of emotions and ask participants to choose 6–8 rather than generating their own.
- **Paired sharing:** Instead of a Gallery Walk, participants share their star with one other person in depth — explaining their color choices and what they noticed.



Resources

Grounded in emotional literacy and creative arts approaches to self-awareness.



Theme

- Emotional Expression
- Communication Skills
- Self-awareness



Duration

70–80



Group Size

6–20

Note: works in pairs or trios



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Flipchart and marker to write the formula visibly
- Optional:
- Printed prompt cards with the formula and starter feelings
- Emotion word list for participants who need support finding feeling words

ACTIVITY 11

I Feel Statement

I Feel Statements is an activity that teaches participants how to express emotions using a simple structure: “I feel... when... because...”. It helps them communicate feelings clearly without blaming others. The focus is on self-awareness and respectful communication.



Objectives

- To teach participants a clear and respectful formula for expressing emotions with ownership and without blame.
- To practice moving from surface emotional reactions toward deeper self-awareness of personal impact.
- To build emotional vocabulary and confidence in naming and communicating feelings.
- To practice empathetic listening and validation as equally important communication skills.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- use the “I feel / when / because [impact on me]” formula to express emotions clearly and without blame.
- distinguish between blaming an external cause and naming the personal impact of a situation.
- develop greater confidence and vocabulary in naming their emotional experiences.
- practice active listening and reflecting back what they hear from others.
- recognize this formula as a transferable tool for communication in everyday life.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Phase 1: Introduction (5 mins): Introduce the formula and write it visibly: “**I feel [Emotion] when [Event] because [Impact on Me].**” Show only the first two parts of the formula: ‘I feel [Emotion] when [Event].’ The third part remains covered; participants will discover it later.”

Explain the purpose: this structure helps us express what we feel in a way that is honest, clear, and owned by us. It separates the feeling from the situation and from blame.



Preparation

1. Write the formula clearly on the flipchart before the session: “**I feel [Emotion] when [Event] because [Impact on Me].**” part with a piece of paper before participants arrive. Only reveal it when moving into Phase 3.
2. Prepare your own examples to model both levels; keep them genuine and varied:

Level 1: “I feel proud when my students learn something new.”

Level 2: “I feel sad when a friend cancels our plans because it makes me feel like I don’t matter.”
3. Prepare the two sets of starter feelings:

Round 1: happy, sad, angry

Round 2: proud, worried, frustrated
4. Think in advance about participants who may carry very heavy personal situations, displacement, loss, family separation. The formula can hold all of these and that is a strength. Be ready to hold space if something significant surfaces.

Show the difference between blame and impact on the flipchart:



I feel angry when my friend doesn’t listen because he is disrespectful.



I feel angry when my friend doesn’t listen because it makes me feel invisible.

Model two or three examples yourself, make them genuine and slightly personal to show that this is a real and useful tool, not just a classroom exercise.

- 2 Level 1 Practice (10 mins):** Ask participants to find a partner they will keep for the whole activity. Give everyone the first set of starter feelings: **happy, sad, angry.**

Ask each person to think of a real or imagined situation for each feeling and practice the first two parts of the formula only:

“I feel [Emotion] when [Event].”

Partners listen attentively and reflect back what they heard simply and without judgment: “So you feel happy when...” Both partners take turns for all three emotions before moving on.

Facilitator’s role: Circulate between pairs. If participants add a “because” spontaneously, great, let them. If they default to blame language, gently redirect: “Try starting with the feeling and the situation first.”

Before introducing Level 2, make a moment of the reveal; remove the paper covering the third part of the formula. This signals that the group is ready to go deeper

- 3 Level 2 Practice (15 mins):** Bring the group’s attention back. Introduce the second level, the “because [Impact on Me]” part. Remind participants that the “because” is not about the other person or external cause. It is about what the situation does to them personally.

Show the difference again on the flipchart if needed. Invite participants to return to their pairs and practice the full formula with the same three emotions, happy, sad, angry, this time adding the “because” layer.

Encourage them to go slowly with the “because” part; it is worth taking time to find the real impact rather than the first thing that comes to mind. Partners continue to listen and reflect back the full statement.

- 4 Full Formula Practice with New Emotions (20 mins):** Bring the group back together briefly. Introduce the second set of feelings: **proud, worried, frustrated.** Explain that these emotions are slightly more nuanced and may require more reflection to find the right “because”, and that is the point.

Invite participants to return to their pairs and practice the complete formula with all three new emotions:

Example to model if needed:

“I feel proud when I finish something difficult because it reminds me that I am capable.”

Partners continue listening and reflecting back. Encourage deeper, more specific “because” in this round, participants have now practiced enough to go further.

5 Group Sharing (10 mins): Bring the group back together. Invite volunteers to share one statement from any round, real or imagined, any emotion. Keep sharing completely voluntarily. Acknowledge each contribution warmly without commenting on the content.

6 Debriefing (15 mins): See *below*

7 Closing: See *Section 5.9 Closing Rituals*.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What happened during the rounds, what did you notice?
2. What was it like to use this formula? Did it feel natural or strange at first?
3. What was the difference between Level 1 and Level 2? What changed when you added the “because”?
4. Was it easy or difficult to find the right feeling word? What helped?
5. What was the hardest part, naming the feeling, describing the situation, or finding the impact?
6. Did the second set of emotions, proud, worried, frustrated, feel different to work with than the first set?
7. What is the difference between “I feel angry because he is disrespectful” and “I feel angry because it makes me feel invisible?”
8. What did it feel like to be on the listening side, to reflect back what you heard?
9. What did you learn about listening from being on the receiving side?
10. Why do you think expressing feelings without blame is harder than it sounds? What does that tell us about how emotions are usually communicated in the world around us?
11. Where in your daily life could this formula be useful, with whom, in what situations?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **The “Because” Trap:** The most common mistake is locating the “because” in the other person’s behavior or character rather than in the personal impact. Watch for this and redirect gently, not as a correction but as an invitation to go deeper: “That makes sense, and what does that do to you personally?”
- **Heavy Situations:** The formula can hold very heavy emotional content ; participants may use it to express grief, displacement, loss, or discrimination. “I feel sad when I see my hometown on the news because I have nowhere to go anymore” is a completely valid and powerful I Feel Statement. Do not shy away from these moments, hold them with care and without rushing forward. If a participant becomes distressed, refer to the guidance in the handbook’s section on responding to emotional distress.
- **Cultural Considerations:** In some cultural contexts, direct verbal expression of personal feelings, particularly difficult ones, may feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Acknowledge this openly: the formula is a tool, not a requirement. Participants decide when and with whom it feels right to use it outside this room.
- **Validation Is a Skill:** The listening and reflecting-back role is not passive. Emphasize to participants that being heard and validated is as important as being able to express. A partner who listens carefully and reflects back accurately is offering something genuinely valuable.
- **Keeping the Same Partner:** Participants keep the same partner throughout all three rounds, this is intentional. By Phase 4 a real sense of trust and familiarity has developed between pairs, which makes the deeper emotions more comfortable to practice with. Unless the participants specifically ask for it, keeping the same partner is valuable.

Variations

- **Written version:** Participants write their statements rather than saying them aloud; works well for quieter groups or participants with language barriers.
- **Emotion word cards:** Provide a set of emotion word cards to support participants who struggle to find feeling words. This builds vocabulary alongside formula practice.
- **Shorter version:** If time is limited, run only Phases 1–3 with the first set of emotions. This gives participants the core skill in approximately 35–40 minutes.
- **Extended formula:** For groups with strong emotional vocabulary and established trust, add a fourth element, “and what I need is ____”, turning the formula into a full communication statement: “I feel [Emotion] when [Event] because [Impact on Me] and what I need is [Need].”
- **One-to-one adaptation:** This activity works very well in individual sessions; the facilitator models the formula and the young person practices with real situations from their own life at their own pace.

Resources

Grounded in Nonviolent Communication (NVC) principles.
See: *Rosenberg (2003)*.



Theme

- Emotional Expression
- Self-awareness
- Wellbeing



Duration

60



Group Size

5–30

Note: individual work within a group setting



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Large paper (A3 or larger), at least two sheets per participant in case they want a fresh sheet for Round 2
- Markers, colored pencils, pens
- Layout for facilitators (See Appendix 12)

Optional:

- Stickers, sticky notes, decorative materials
- Calm background music during the creation phases
- Optional: Facilitator's own completed Emotion Space as a model (prepared in advance, see Preparation)

ACTIVITY 12

My Emotion Space

My Emotion Space encourages participants to reflect on their emotions and express them freely. It creates a supported and personal space where they can explore feelings at their own pace. The focus is on comfort, honesty, and self-awareness.

Objectives

- To help participants reflect on how they currently respond to strong emotions, without judgment.
- To explore a diverse range of healthy ways to express and process emotions.
- To empower participants to actively design their own personal emotional handbook.
- To honor the diversity of healthy emotional expression across cultures and personal circumstances.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify their current emotional responses, both helpful and unhelpful, with greater self-awareness.
- discover a wider range of healthy strategies for expressing and processing strong emotions.
- create a personalized emotional handbook that reflects their own needs, culture, and circumstances.
- recognize that healthy emotional expression looks different for different people, and that this diversity is valid.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5–7 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the activity. Explain that each person is going to create a visual map of their personal “Emotion Space”, how they currently respond when strong emotions arrive, what they do with those feelings, what helps and what doesn’t.

Show your own completed Emotion Space and walk through it briefly; name a few things you included and why. Keep your sharing genuine and appropriately personal. Explicitly include something from the “draining” area; this models honesty and removes any pressure to present only positive responses.



Preparation

1. Create your own Emotion Space in advance. Design it genuinely, include:
 - Some obvious healthy strategies (talking to a friend, listening to music, going for a walk)
 - Some less obvious ones participants might not think of (crying as a healthy release, cooking a familiar dish, being in nature, silence, cultural or spiritual practices, dancing alone)
 - Something in the “crowded or draining” area; an unhelpful pattern you recognize in yourself (scrolling endlessly, isolating, ruminating), this normalizes the fact that we all have responses that don’t serve us
2. Your model does significant work here; it plants seeds without prescribing and shows participants the full range of what their space can hold.
3. Prepare the room with materials accessible before participants arrive.
4. Think about the gallery walk; ensure there is enough wall or floor space for participants to display their spaces.

Remind participants: there are no right or wrong answers. The only question is what is honest for them.

2 Round 1 - Mapping the Current Space (15–20 mins): Distribute large paper and materials. Ask participants to draw or design their current Emotion Space; a visual representation of what they do when they feel a strong emotion. They might include:

- Things that help them feel better (strategies, people, places, activities)
- Things they do that don’t really help but they do anyway
- Things that feel crowded, heavy, or draining

Encourage the use of colors, symbols, drawings, and words in any language. This is personal and private, they decide what goes in.

3 Gallery Walk (8–10 mins): Invite participants to place their Emotion Space on the wall or floor. Ask everyone to walk around silently and look at each other’s spaces, noticing similarities, differences, and things they hadn’t thought of. No discussion yet, just observation.

Facilitator’s role: Walk around yourself. Pay attention to what appears across multiple spaces, these themes will be valuable in the debrief.

4 Round 2 Redesigning (optional) (15 mins): After the gallery walk, invite participants to return to their own space. They can:

- Add new strategies they noticed in others’ spaces or thought of during the walk
- Remove or cross out things that don’t serve them
- Redesign on a fresh sheet if they prefer a new start
- Leave their space as it is if it already feels right

This round is genuinely optional, participants who feel their space is complete don’t need to change anything. The choice itself is part of the activity.

5 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

6 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you put in your Emotion Space? Was there anything that surprised you about what you included?
2. What did you notice while walking around and looking at others’ spaces?
3. How did it feel to map out how you currently respond to strong emotions, including the things that don’t always help?
4. Did you discover any strategies in someone else’s space that you hadn’t thought of? What was it like to see that?
5. What does it tell us that healthy emotional expression looks so different from person to person?

6. Why do you think some ways of processing emotions, like talking to a therapist, are treated as more valid than others, like prayer, music, or community gathering?
7. How do you know if something helps you process an emotion or only distracts you from it?
8. Is there one thing you want to bring into your Emotion Space that wasn't there before?
9. How might you use your Emotion Space outside of this session, as a reminder, a reference, a tool?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Your Model Is Everything:** The example you bring does more work than any instruction you give. Make it genuine, make it diverse, and make sure it includes something imperfect, a strategy that doesn't always help. This gives participants permission to be honest rather than presenting an idealized version of their emotional life.
- **No Prescribed List:** Never hand out a list of "healthy coping strategies" before or during the activity. The point is for participants to discover and share their own, the collective gallery walk does this organically and much more powerfully than any facilitator-provided list. You can add to the conversation in the debrief if important strategies haven't emerged, but always after participants have shared first.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** What counts as healthy emotional expression is deeply culturally shaped. Prayer, cooking a familiar dish, community gathering, music, silence; these are all valid and should be welcomed without hierarchy. Avoid framing Western psychological strategies as more legitimate than cultural or spiritual ones.
- **If Something Concerning Appears:** If a participant's space includes responses that suggest self-harm or harmful coping, approach them quietly and privately after the session. Refer to the guidance in the handbook's section on responding to emotional distress. Do not address it publicly or in the debrief.
- **The Optional Redesign:** Some participants will want to redesign completely, others will add a few things, others will leave their space untouched. All three responses are valid. Never suggest that not redesigning means someone hasn't engaged, sometimes the most powerful realization is "my space is already working for me."

Variations

- **Paired version:** After the gallery walk, participants share their space with one person they trust, explaining two or three things they included and why. More intimate than whole-group sharing.
- **Extended version:** Participants take their Emotion Space home and add to it over the following week, bringing it back to the next session to share what they discovered. Turns it into a living document rather than a one-session activity.
- **Follow-up:** This activity pairs naturally with I Feel Statements; participants who have mapped their emotional handbook can then practice expressing the emotions that most often visit their space using the I Feel formula.

Resources

Grounded in strengths-based youth work approaches.
See: Saleebey (2006).



Theme

- Emotional Expression
- Self-awareness
- Group Cohesion



Duration

35–45



Group Size

5–30



Emotional Intensity

Medium to high

Note: This activity touches emotionally sensitive territory. We advise completing the Facilitator Readiness Check (Appendix X) before use.



Materials

- Paper plates, one per participant
- Markers, colored pencils, paint
- Elastic bands or string to attach the mask

Optional:

- Decorative materials; stickers, fabric scraps, feathers, glitter
- Calm background music during the creation phase

ACTIVITY 13

Emotions Mask

Emotions Mask is a creative activity where participants make a mask to represent a specific emotion. By showing the emotion through a physical object, it becomes easier to talk about it. This helps participants feel more comfortable sharing and connecting with others.



Objectives

- To provide a creative and accessible entry point for expressing and discussing emotions.
- To help participants externalize a feeling through a physical, tangible object.
- To build emotional vocabulary and normalize talking about feelings in a group setting.
- To strengthen group connection through shared creative expression.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- express a chosen emotion through creative visual means.
- practice naming and describing an emotional experience in a supported context.
- develop greater comfort talking about feelings within the group.
- experience connection and recognition through hearing others describe similar emotional experiences.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the activity. Explain that each person is going to create a mask representing one emotion, an emotion they know well, feel often, or are curious about. The mask can look however they want; colors, symbols, expressions, patterns. There is no right or wrong way to make it.

Show your own mask as an example and share briefly when you feel that emotion and what it is like. Keep your example genuine but light: this sets the tone for what participants are invited to share.

2 Creation (15–20 mins): Invite participants to choose their emotion and begin creating their mask. Allow the process to be quiet and individual. Soft background music helps create a calm, focused atmosphere.



Preparation

1. Prepare materials and set them out accessibly before participants arrive.
2. Make your own mask in advance, choose a genuine emotion and be ready to share it as a model. Keep your example warm and accessible rather than heavy.
3. Think about which emotions participants might choose; some may gravitate toward socially acceptable emotions like happiness. This is completely fine. Never push participants toward more difficult emotions.
4. Be attentive throughout to signs of emotional overwhelm and feel confident using grounding techniques if needed (3.5.5)

3 Sharing (10–12 mins): Invite participants one by one to put on / hold up their mask or place in front of them and share:

- What emotion does your mask represent?
- When do you feel this emotion?
- What does it feel like when it is present?

Keep sharing genuinely voluntarily; participants can show their mask without speaking if they prefer or not explain. Acknowledge each contribution warmly without interpreting or commenting on content.

4 Debriefing (10 mins): See *below*

5 Closing: See *Section 5.9 Closing Rituals*.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What emotion did you choose to represent, and what made you choose that one?
2. Was it easy or difficult to represent your emotion visually? What choices did you make?
3. How did it feel to share your emotion with the group. or to listen to others share theirs?
4. Did anything surprise you, about your own mask or someone else's?
5. Did seeing the emotion outside yourself in a mask change how you thought about it?
6. What does it tell us that so many different emotions are present in this room right now?
7. What does it feel like to have an emotion seen and acknowledged by others?
8. How might giving an emotion a visual form, a color, a shape, a face, help you understand or relate to it differently?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** This activity works best with groups that have some existing trust and familiarity. Facilitators should feel comfortable holding space for strong emotions and have at least one grounding technique ready. A co-facilitator is advisable if available. If the group is new or trust has not yet been established, consider using a lighter activity first or running this later in the program.
- **Emotion Choice:** Some participants will choose happy or excited, socially acceptable emotions. This is completely valid and should never be questioned or redirected. The activity works at whatever emotional depth participants choose. Deeper emotions will emerge naturally as trust grows, this activity is not the place to push for them.
- **The Mask as Distance:** The physical mask creates a useful layer of distance, participants are talking about the mask's emotion rather than directly about themselves. This is protective and intentional. Never remove that distance by asking participants to connect the mask to specific personal situations unless they do so themselves.
- **Cross-reference:** This activity connects naturally to *The Masks We Wear* in Section 4.4, which explores the deeper concept of what we show versus what we hide. Emotions Mask is a lighter, more accessible entry point. Facilitators running multi-day programs might use Emotions Mask early and *The Masks We Wear* later as a deeper exploration of the same metaphor.
- **Risk of Emotional Flooding:** When participants engage with an emotion through a physical object they have created, they can sometimes become more deeply immersed in that feeling than expected, particularly if the emotion chosen is grief, shame, fear, or anger. Watch carefully during the sharing phase for signs that a participant is becoming overwhelmed rather than simply expressing. If you notice this; tears that escalate, visible distress, difficulty speaking, or shutdown, gently interrupt the sharing, invite the participant to set the mask face down, and offer a grounding exercise before continuing. The mask can be set aside; the person is always more important than the activity. Refer to Section 3.5.5 for guidance on responding to emotional distress.



Variations

- **Two-sided mask:** Participants create a mask with two sides; one emotion they show publicly and one they keep private. This bridges naturally toward *The Masks We Wear* in Section 4.4 and increases emotional depth slightly.
- **Group emotion mask:** Instead of individual masks, each small group creates one large collective mask representing how the group is feeling today. Works well as a session opener or closing ritual.



Resources

Grounded in drama therapy and expressive arts approaches.
See: Landy, R.J. (1994)



Theme

- Emotional Expression
- Emotional Literacy
- Empathy



Duration

60–70



Group Size

12–30

Note: works in groups of 4–5



Emotional Intensity

Medium to high

Note: This activity touches emotionally sensitive territory. We advise completing the Facilitator Readiness Check (Appendix X) before use.

ACTIVITY 14

Letters to Mariam

Letters to Mariam is a creative, collaborative activity that uses a fictional character and letter-writing to explore the purpose and protective function of emotions. Participants read Mariam's story, identify her emotions, and write letters, first from Mariam to her emotion, then from the emotion back to Mariam. The fictional frame keeps the activity accessible while the debrief gently connects the learning to participants' own lives.

Objectives

- To invite participants to explore the possible purpose and function of different emotions through creative and collaborative writing.
- To develop empathy and perspective-taking through creative collaborative writing.
- To build emotional vocabulary and literacy through engagement with a fictional character's emotional world.
- To create a safe distance for exploring difficult emotions without requiring personal disclosure.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- begin to explore the possible functions and purposes of different emotions, including difficult ones.
- practice perspective-taking by inhabiting both a character's experience and an emotion's point of view.
- develop greater empathy toward their own and others' emotional responses.
- begin to relate the learning about Mariam's emotions to their own emotional experiences.
- experience collaborative meaning-making through creative group writing.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Reading Mariam's Story (5–7 mins): Distribute the printed story and give participants time to read it individually and quietly. Allow silence, let the story land before any discussion begins.



Materials

- Printed copies of Mariam's story (See Appendix 13)
- Large paper and markers for each group
- Guiding questions for each group, printed or written on cards (see Preparation)
- Flipchart and markers for the opening plenary

Optional: decorative paper or cards for writing the letters



Preparation

1. Print one copy of Mariam's Story per participant in advance.
2. Prepare guiding question cards for each group, one set per emotion. See Step-by-step Instructions for the questions.
3. Prepare your flipchart with space to write emotions as the group names them in the opening plenary.
4. Divide participants into 6 groups in advance if possible;
 - Team Anger
 - Team Sadness
 - Team Fear
 - Team Happiness
 - Team Pride
 - Team Hope

For smaller groups, combine Hope and Pride into one team or drop one emotion.

2 Opening Plenary (8–10 mins): Bring the group together and ask: “What emotions do you think Mariam is feeling in this story?”

Write whatever the group offers on the flipchart. Welcome all contributions without judgment. You can use gentle prompts for emotions that don't come up easily. Build the list collaboratively. Once the group has named most of the emotions, introduce the six you will be working with: anger, sadness, fear, happiness, pride, and hope.

3 Letter Writing — Round 1 (15 mins): Assign each group their emotion. Give each group their guiding questions card.

Round 1: Each group writes a letter FROM Mariam TO their assigned emotion.

Guiding questions for Round 1:

- What might this emotion be trying to do for Mariam?
- If this emotion could speak, what would it want Mariam to understand about why it is there?
- Does this emotion have a reason for being present in her life right now?
- How does this emotion affect her, does it help her, complicate things for her, or both?

Example opening: *“Dear Anger, I feel you most when I think about the official who barely looked at me. You rise up in my chest and make it hard to breathe...”*

4 Letter Writing — Round 2 (15 mins):

Round 2: The same group now writes the REPLY; a letter FROM the emotion BACK TO Mariam.

Guiding questions for Round 2:

- What is the job of this emotion? What is it trying to do for Mariam?
- If this emotion could speak, what would it want Mariam to understand about why it is there?
- Does this emotion have a reason for being present in her life right now?

Example opening: *“Dear Mariam, I know I make things difficult sometimes. But I am here because I am trying to protect you. When you feel me rise up, it means something important is happening that deserves your attention...”*

5 Group Sharing (10 mins): Invite each group to read both their letters aloud to the whole group; first Mariam's letter, then the emotion's reply. Allow a brief moment of appreciation after each pair of letters before moving to the next group.

6 Debriefing (15-20mins): See below.

7 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What happened in the letters? Which emotion surprised you most when you wrote or heard its reply to Mariam?
2. Which group do you think had the hardest job finding the protective logic of their emotion, and why?
3. How did you feel during the activity?
4. How did it feel to write from the emotion's perspective; to defend and explain it rather than push it away?
5. Was there a moment while writing where something clicked or surprised you?
6. What was it like to write these letters together as a group? How did you build them collectively?
7. Do you think emotions like anger or fear are "bad" emotions, or are they just doing a job?
8. What would happen to Mariam if she had none of these emotions, if she felt nothing at all?
9. Is there an emotion in your own life that you have been pushing away that might actually be trying to tell you something? *(optional)*
10. Do you think you could use this exercise with your own emotions, writing a letter to a feeling you carry?

Variations

- **Adapted character:** The name Mariam and her story can be adapted to better fit the specific cultural context of the group, the facilitator may adjust details while keeping the emotional arc intact.
- **Extended version:** After the sharing phase, invite groups to swap their letters with another group and write a response, Team Anger reads Team Sadness's letters and writes a short note between the two emotions. This deepens the understanding of how emotions relate to each other.

Resources

Grounded in narrative therapy and functional theories of emotion.
See: White & Epston (1990), Barrett (2017).



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** This activity works best with groups that have some existing trust and familiarity. Facilitators should feel comfortable holding space for strong emotions and have at least one grounding technique ready. A co-facilitator is advisable if available. If the group is new or trust has not yet been established, consider using a lighter activity first or running this later in the program.
- **Scenario Adaptation:** Adapt the scenario if needed to fit your group's context. The emotional dynamic matters more than the specific setting.
- **A note on the name and character of Mariam:** The fictional scenario uses a character named Mariam, a name with strong associations with specific cultural and religious communities. Facilitators should be aware that for some participants, this name may feel like a deliberate representation of their own community, which can be affirming for some and feel presumptuous or reductive for others. Before facilitating this activity, consider the composition of your group. If the name Mariam carries specific resonance for particular participants, acknowledge this openly: *"I want to note that Mariam is a fictional character, she's meant to be someone any of us could imagine and relate to, not a representative of any particular community."* You are also free to change the name to one that fits your group's context more naturally, or to invite participants to rename the character themselves, which can itself become a small but meaningful act of ownership.
- **The Fictional Frame Is the Protection:** Never break the fictional frame during the activity itself, always refer to Mariam, never to participants' personal lives. The personal layer belongs in the debrief and only in Layer 3, which is completely optional. The safety of the activity depends on this boundary being held consistently.
- **The Emotion's Protective Logic:** Some groups will find it easy to write the emotion's reply, hope and happiness almost write themselves. Others will struggle, particularly Team Fear and Team Anger. The guiding questions are essential for these groups. If a group is really stuck on finding the protective logic, ask them: *"What would happen to Mariam if she never felt this emotion at all? What would she lose?"*
- **Holding the Framework Lightly:** This activity is built on the idea that emotions serve a purpose, that fear signals danger, anger responds to injustice, sadness signals the need for support. This is grounded in evolutionary psychology and functional theories of emotion and is a useful therapeutic lens. However, facilitators should hold it lightly rather than as an absolute truth. Trauma can produce emotional patterns that were once adaptive but have become painful or limiting over time. Some groups may write more ambivalent or complex replies, an emotion that says *"I'm not sure I always help you"* is just as honest and valid as one that confidently declares its protective purpose. Both deserve space. The activity is an invitation to look at emotions with curiosity, not a lesson with a correct answer.
- **Institutional Discrimination:** Mariam's story includes a moment of institutional discrimination, the official who barely looked at her. This moment will likely generate strong responses, particularly from participants who may have experienced similar treatment. Hold space for that without rushing past it.
- **Group Dynamics:** Each group becomes an advocate for their assigned emotion; this creates energy and investment. Watch for groups that dismiss or mock their emotion (*"we got fear, that's the worst one"*) and redirect gently: *"Your job is to find out why Fear is actually Mariam's ally, that's the challenge."*



5.3 Art and Creative Expression

Art offers young people a way to explore emotions and identity without relying on words, which is particularly vital for Roma, refugee, and migrant youth, for whom verbal expression in a group setting may feel difficult, insufficient, or unavailable. For many, creative practice also offers a way to navigate complex feelings and the experience of invisibility, helping participants reclaim voice and authorship over their own story.

Within this handbook, art is understood as a process rather than a product. The value of the creative process lies not in the quality of what is produced but in what happens inside the person while they are producing it — the noticing, the choosing, the making, and the meaning. The role of the youth worker is not to interpret or analyse participants' creations, meaning belongs to the creator. Facilitators hold the process, respect each individual's choice to remain silent or keep their work private, and offer open questions rather than explanations.

While Section 5.2 focuses on developing emotional vocabulary and direct expression, this section uses creative process as an alternative language for when words fall short.

What You Will Find In This Section

This section contains six activities that use creative expression as a language for exploring emotions, identity, and inner experience. Each activity works through a different creative mode, joyful memory, animal symbolism, sensory painting, evocative imagery, clay sculpting, and rhythm, offering participants multiple entry points regardless of artistic skill, language ability, or comfort with verbal expression.

The section follows a gradual progression from lighter and more individual activities toward more embodied and collective ones. **Joyful Moments Discovery** (Nr.14) opens the section with a deliberately light and positive invitation, noticing and celebrating small everyday moments of joy. **Animal Guides** (Nr.15) moves into gentle symbolic self-reflection through the metaphor of animals. **Let Your Fingers Talk** (Nr.16) introduces a sensory, somatic element, painting with eyes closed to bypass the inner critic. **Image Reflection** (Nr.17) deepens the exploration through contemplative pair work using evocative image cards. **Clay and Emotions** (Nr.18) combines collective body sculpture with individual clay work, requiring the trust that the earlier activities have built. The section closes with **Feel the Beat** (Nr.19), a rhythm-based collective activity that brings the group together through shared sound and movement.

Activities range from **Low** to **Low** to **Medium** emotional intensity. Three activities, Image Reflection, Clay and Emotions, and Feel the Beat, run approximately 90 minutes; shorter versions are available in the Variations section of each activity. If strong emotions emerge during any creative activity, slow down, offer grounding, and refer to Section 3.5.5 and 3.5.6.

Facilitator Tip

Focus on the process, not the outcome. Participants do not need artistic skills or prior experience, there is no right way to create. Offer choices in how participants engage, and avoid interpreting or analysing their artwork or emotional responses.

If strong emotions emerge during creative work, slow down the pace, simplify the activity, or offer a grounding exercise before continuing. Your role is to hold a calm, respectful space where expression is possible, not to guide participants toward a specific result.



Theme

- Art and Creativity
- Wellbeing
- Self-awareness



Duration

60–70



Group Size

5–30

Note: individual drawing within a group setting.



Emotional Intensity

Low



Materials

- Drawing paper (A4 or A3), one sheet per participant
- Colored pencils, markers, crayons, or any available coloring materials

ACTIVITY 15

Joyful Moments Discovery

Joyful Moments Discovery is a creative drawing activity that invites participants to slow down, notice, and celebrate the small moments of joy and beauty in their everyday lives. By illustrating personal moments of happiness, gratitude, and simple pleasure, participants practice present-moment awareness and build a visual record of what nourishes them. In a handbook that often works with difficulty and challenge, this activity offers something equally important, a deliberate turn toward lightness, appreciation, and joy.

Objectives

- To invite participants to recognize and celebrate small, everyday moments of joy in their lives.
- To practice present-moment awareness through creative visual expression.
- To cultivate appreciation for simple pleasures as a foundation for wellbeing.
- To create a personal visual record of what brings joy and nourishment.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify and name small everyday moments that bring them joy or comfort.
- practice mindful attention to positive experiences through the creative process.
- develop a greater appreciation for simple pleasures as a resource for wellbeing.
- experience a sense of lightness and positive emotion through creative expression.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5–7 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the activity with warmth. Explain that today is about noticing and celebrating joy, not big, dramatic happiness, but the small quiet moments that nourish us. The kind of joy that is easy to miss when life is busy or difficult.

Optional:

- Printed prompt list (see *Preparation*)
- Calm, uplifting background music during the drawing phase
- Smartphones for participants who prefer to take or find photos instead of drawing



Preparation

1. Prepare a list of joyful moment prompts in advance, these are gentle invitations, not requirements. Examples:
 - Something that made you smile recently, however small
 - A food or drink that brings you comfort
 - A place where you feel at ease
 - Something in nature that you find beautiful
 - A person whose presence makes you feel good
 - A sound, smell, or texture you love
 - Something you are quietly proud of
 - A simple pleasure you enjoy regularly
2. Keep prompts accessible and universal, avoid prompts that assume stable living conditions or access to specific experiences. “A place you love to travel” is not appropriate for this group, “a place where you feel at ease” is.
3. Create your own Joyful Moments drawing in advance to show as an example.

Share your own example briefly, show your drawing and name one or two of your joyful moments. Keep your sharing genuine and light.

Offer the prompt list as a gentle starting point, participants can use the prompts, ignore them entirely, or invent their own. The only invitation is: draw something that brings you joy.

Add an important note for this target group: joy does not have to be recent or easy to access. It can be a memory, a hope, something imagined, or something very small. “The smell of coffee in the morning” is as valid as anything else.

2 Drawing (35–40 mins): Invite participants to begin. They can draw one moment in detail or several smaller moments across the page. Encourage color, decoration, and personal style, this is a celebration, not an assignment.

For participants who prefer not to draw, offer alternatives:

- Write words or phrases describing their joyful moments
- Find images on their phone that represent moments of joy
- Cut images from magazines if available

3 Gallery Walk and Sharing (10 mins): Invite participants to place their drawings around the room and walk silently to view each other’s work. This collective moment of seeing what brings joy to the people around you is itself a form of connection and celebration.

After the gallery walk, invite volunteers to share one moment from their drawing, what it is and why it brings them joy. Keep sharing light and genuinely optional.

4 Debriefing (10 mins): See *below*.

5 Closing: See *Section 5.9 Closing Rituals*.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you choose to draw and was it easy or difficult to identify your joyful moments?
2. What did you notice while drawing? Did anything surprise you about what came up?
3. How did it feel to spend time deliberately focusing on joy?
4. Were there common themes across the group’s drawings? What does that tell us?
5. What does it mean to notice and celebrate small moments of joy, especially during difficult times?
6. Do you think choosing to notice joy — especially during difficult times — can be an act of resistance or self-determination? Why or why not?
7. How might regularly noticing joyful moments support your wellbeing?
8. Is there one small joyful moment you could intentionally create or notice this week?

4. Set up a warm, welcoming space with materials accessible before participants arrive. This activity benefits from a slightly brighter, more celebratory atmosphere than other art activities, if possible, let in natural light or add a small visual detail that signals warmth.

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Joy Is Not Always Accessible:** For participants carrying grief, displacement, or ongoing hardship, being asked to focus on joy can feel alienating or even painful. Frame the invitation carefully, joy can be a memory, a hope, something imagined, or something very small. A single moment of warmth counts. Never push participants toward positivity if they are genuinely struggling, allow them to draw something quiet or neutral and meet them where they are.
- **Cultural Considerations:** What brings joy is deeply culturally shaped. Foods, sounds, places, relationships, spiritual practices, all of these vary enormously across the group. Celebrate this diversity explicitly during the gallery walk and debrief. Avoid framing any form of joy as more valid or sophisticated than another.

Variations

- **Photography version:** Instead of drawing, participants use their smartphones to take or find photos representing their joyful moments. Works particularly well with tech-comfortable groups and produces a beautiful collective digital gallery.
- **Gratitude Map:** Instead of illustrating moments, participants create a visual map of everything they are grateful for; people, places, objects, experiences. Slightly more reflective than the drawing version.
- **Collective Joy Wall:** Each participant contributes one image or drawing to a shared wall display. The collective result becomes a visual celebration of the group's diverse sources of joy — can remain displayed throughout a multi-day program.

Resources

Grounded in positive psychology and present-moment awareness approaches.

See: *Seligman (2002)*, *Seligman (2011)*.



Theme

- Art and Creativity
- Self-awareness
- Identity



Duration

55–65



Group Size

5–30

Note: individual drawing within a group setting



Emotional Intensity

Low



Materials

- Drawing paper (A4 or A3), one sheet per participant
- Pencils, black pens, colored pencils, markers, or any available drawing materials

Optional:

- Paints and brushes for participants who prefer a more expressive medium
- Calm background music during the drawing phase

ACTIVITY 16

Animal Guides

Animal Guides is a creative drawing activity that invites participants to explore their own characteristics and inner resources through the symbolism of animals. By choosing three animals to represent their physical, emotional, and cognitive aspects, participants engage in a gentle and imaginative form of self-reflection. The animal metaphor creates a natural protective distance; participants talk about the animal's qualities rather than directly about themselves, making the activity accessible for diverse groups.



Objectives

- To invite participants to explore their own characteristics and inner resources through creative symbolism.
- To build self-awareness through the process of imaginative drawing and reflection.
- To strengthen a sense of personal identity and inner strength using a strengths-based approach.
- To create a calm, focused space for individual creative expression.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify and represent personal qualities through animal symbolism across physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions.
- reflect on their own strengths and characteristics through a creative and non-threatening lens.
- develop greater self-awareness through the process of drawing and sharing.
- approach self-reflection with curiosity and openness rather than judgment.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5–7 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the activity. Explain that each person is going to choose three animals; one that represents something about how they move or exist physically in the world, one that represents something about how they feel and connect emotionally, and one that represents something about how they think or approach challenges.

Show your own example and share briefly why you chose each animal. Keep your sharing genuine and slightly personal, this models the depth



Preparation

1. Set up tables with drawing materials accessible before participants arrive.
2. Prepare your own Animal Guides drawing in advance; choose three animals that genuinely feel like you and be ready to share it as a model. Your example sets the tone and shows participants what depth of reflection is possible.
3. Think in advance about how to explain the three categories simply and accessible:
 - physical (how your body moves through the world).
 - emotional (how you feel and connect).
 - cognitive (how you think and solve problems).
4. Consider whether you want participants to draw their animals in separate sections of the paper or as a single composition with environments, both work, choose what feels right for the group.

of reflection participants are invited to bring without pushing for personal disclosure.

Remind participants clearly: *there are no right or wrong animals, no artistic skill required, and sharing is always optional.*

2 Choosing Animals (5 mins): Give participants a few quiet minutes to think about their three animals before drawing. Encourage them to trust their instincts, the first animal that comes to mind for each category is often the most honest choice.

If participants seem stuck, offer gentle prompts:

- Is there an animal you have felt drawn to or identified with?
- Is there an animal whose way of moving through the world reminds you of yourself?
- Is there an animal known for a quality you recognize in how you think or feel?

3 Drawing (25–30 mins): Invite participants to draw each of their three animals. Encourage them to add the environment in which each animal lives, this often reveals additional meaning about how participants see themselves in context.

Remind participants throughout that artistic quality is completely irrelevant; a simple outline, a symbol, or even just the animal's name written and decorated is equally valid.

4 Sharing and Transition (10 mins): Invite volunteers to share their three animals and explain the symbolism behind their choices, why that animal for that dimension, and what quality it represents. Keep sharing genuinely optional. A Gallery Walk also works well here, drawings placed around the room, participants walking silently to view each other's work.

5 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

6 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. Which animal came most easily and which took the longest to choose?
2. Was there anything surprising about the animals you ended up choosing?
3. How did it feel to represent yourself through animals rather than words?
4. How did it feel to explore yourself through this creative and indirect lens, different from being asked directly about yourself?
5. What do the strengths of your chosen animals tell you about your own inner resources?
6. Looking at everyone's animals, what does the variety tell us about the different kinds of strength present in this group?
7. Is there a quality from someone else's animal that you would like to develop in yourself?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **The Protective Distance:** The animal metaphor naturally creates distance between the participant and direct self-disclosure. This is one of the activity's greatest strengths, never remove that distance by pushing participants to connect their animals explicitly to personal situations or experiences unless they choose to do so themselves.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Animal symbolism varies significantly across cultures, a snake may represent wisdom in one cultural context and danger in another. Never assume what an animal means to a participant and always invite them to explain their own interpretation. Validate whatever meaning a participant assigns to their chosen animal.
- **The Environment:** Encouraging participants to draw the animal's environment often unlocks additional reflection, someone who draws their emotional animal in a vast open landscape is communicating something different from someone who draws it sheltering under a rock. Notice these details yourself but never point them out to participants.



Variations

- **Written version:** For participants who are uncomfortable drawing, they write the animal's name and list three qualities that animal has which resonate with them. The reflection is identical.
- **Collage version:** Participants find images of their animals in magazines and create a collage instead of drawing. Works well for groups with lower confidence in drawing.
- **Deeper version:** For more experienced groups, add a fourth question: *"Is there an animal that represents a quality you are still developing or wish you had?"* This adds an aspirational dimension to self-reflection.



Resources

Grounded in art therapy approaches to self-exploration and strengths-based identity work.

See: Guzman, L. (2020)



Theme

- Art and Creativity
- Emotional Expression
- Self-awareness



Duration

55–60



Group Size

5–20

Note: individual work within a group setting



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- A3 paper, one sheet per participant (taped to the table to prevent sliding)
- Finger paints in a range of colors, at least 6–8 colors per participant
- Aprons or old shirts to protect clothing
- Wet wipes or access to a sink for cleaning hands

ACTIVITY 17

Let Your Fingers Talk

Let Your Fingers Talk is a sensory, expressive art activity that invites participants to paint with their fingers while their eyes are closed. By removing sight from the creative process, participants bypass the inner critic and allow emotions and bodily sensations to guide their expression directly. The result is often surprising, and the surprise itself is part of the learning. This activity requires a degree of trust and physical comfort, and works best with groups that have already established some safety and connection.

Objectives

- To provide a sensory, non-verbal outlet for emotional expression through touch and color.
- To help participants access emotions and bodily responses that are difficult to express verbally.
- To encourage present-moment awareness through tactile creative engagement.
- To build self-awareness by reflecting on what emerged through the creative process.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- express emotions and inner states through color and touch without relying on words or visual control.
- experience greater present-moment awareness through sensory engagement.
- reflect on the connection between physical sensation, color choice, and emotional state.
- approach creative expression with greater spontaneity and openness.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5–7 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the activity. Explain that today they are going to paint with their fingers, and with their eyes closed or gaze down, however they feel comfortable. The goal is not to create a beautiful picture but to let their fingers respond to how they feel, choosing colors and making marks without seeing what they are doing.

Optional:

- Eye masks or blindfolds; see *Tips for important guidance on use*
- Calm background music during the painting phase



Preparation

1. Set up individual workstations before participants arrive, tape A3 paper to each table surface, arrange finger paint colors accessibly, and place wet wipes nearby.
2. Prepare 4–5 gentle prompts in advance; these are offered one at a time during the painting phase. See Step-by-step Instructions for examples. Keep prompts open and non-threatening, avoid questions about difficult experiences or challenges.
3. Prepare your own example painting to show participants, make it genuine and slightly messy to signal that perfection is irrelevant.
4. Think carefully about the eye-closing element, for some participants, closing eyes in a group setting may feel uncomfortable. Plan how you will frame this as optional from the start.
5. Lay out aprons and ensure the space can handle some paint mess, this is a tactile, sensory activity and the physical freedom is part of what makes it work.

Show your own example painting and explain briefly, not what it means, but how it felt to make it. Keep your sharing focused on the process rather than the product.

Address the eye-closing element directly: *“I’ll invite you to close your eyes during the painting, but this is always your choice. If closing your eyes feels uncomfortable, you can simply look down or keep your eyes open. There is no pressure.”*

Aprons on, hands ready.

2 Settling and First Touch (5 mins): Before introducing any prompts, invite participants to simply touch the paints with their fingertips, feel the texture, notice the temperature, explore the colors without any intention yet. This settling phase allows participants to become comfortable with the sensory experience before any emotional prompts are introduced.

3 Guided Painting (25–30 mins): Invite participants to close their eyes (or look softly downward) and begin painting. Read prompts slowly and gently, one at a time, with 3–4 minutes between each:

- Choose a color that represents how you are feeling right now and let your fingers move however they want.
- Choose a color that represents something that brings you comfort or calm.
- Choose a color that represents something you are looking forward to.
- Choose a color that represents your energy today.
- Choose a color that feels like you — right now, in this moment.

The participants can open their eyes while choosing a color or arrange the colors in a specific way beforehand. Keep prompts gentle, present-focused, and forward-looking. Avoid prompts about difficult experiences, challenges, or painful emotions, the sensory and eyes-closed format already creates enough depth without adding heavy content.

4 Opening and Reflection (5 mins): When the final prompt is complete, invite participants to take a slow breath and open their eyes.

Allow a full minute of silence for participants to look at what their fingers created. This moment of revelation, seeing for the first time what emerged, is often one of the most powerful in the activity. Do not rush it.

Invite participants to place their painting somewhere visible and step back to look at it from a slight distance.

5 Sharing and Transition (5 mins): Invite volunteers to share one observation about their painting, not what it means, but what they notice about it. Encourage observation rather than interpretation: *“What colors did you use most?”* / *“What do you notice about the marks?”* Keep sharing light and optional.

6 Debriefing (10 mins): See below.

7 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. Which color did you reach for most, and what did you notice about the marks you made?"
2. What surprised you when you opened your eyes and saw your painting?
3. What did it feel like to paint without seeing what you were making?
4. What did you notice about the connection between how you felt and the colors or marks you made?
5. What does this activity tell you about emotions that are difficult to express in words?
6. How might engaging with color and touch be useful as a tool for emotional awareness in your own life?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Eye Closing Is Optional:** Never require participants to close their eyes or wear a blindfold. For participants who may have experienced surveillance, detention, confinement, or trauma, closing eyes in a group setting can feel activating or uncomfortable. Frame it as an invitation from the very start and offer alternatives naturally, looking softly downward or focusing on the hands rather than the paper works equally well.
If a participant becomes distressed during the painting phase, invite them to stop, offer a grounding breath, and refer to *Section 3.5.5*.
- **The Prompts Are the Heart of the Activity:** The prompts guide the emotional depth of the painting phase. Keep them gentle, present-focused, and forward-looking. The original version of this activity used heavier prompts about difficult experiences, this version deliberately moves away from that. The sensory format already creates depth without adding heavy emotional content.



Variations

- **With music:** Play different pieces of music for each prompt instead of asking color questions, participants choose colors and movements in response to what they hear. More abstract and less directive.
- **Brushes version:** For participants uncomfortable with finger painting, offer brushes. The eyes-closed element remains the same.
- **Collective painting:** One large sheet of paper is shared by the whole group, everyone paints simultaneously with eyes closed. The collective result becomes a group artwork. Requires more space and trust but creates a powerful shared experience.



Resources

Grounded in somatic awareness and expressive arts therapy approaches.
See: Rogers, N. (1993) and Levine, P. A. (1997)



Theme

- Art
- Self-awareness
- Emotional Expression



Duration

90



Group Size

10–20



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- A set of evocative image cards: POY cards, Dixit cards, or any similar deck designed for reflective work
- Accessible alternative: a collection of printed photographs or postcards (nature, people, abstract, textures), magazine images cut out and laminated, or any diverse set of evocative visuals prepared in advance

ACTIVITY 18

Image Reflection

Image Reflection is a calm, contemplative activity that uses evocative image cards as visual prompts to explore personal needs, emotions, and inner dialogue. By intuitively selecting images and connecting them to three simple questions; what does my body need, what do my emotions need, what does my mind need, participants deepen self-awareness and practice empathetic listening in a gentle, inclusive space. No words are required to begin, the images do the first work.

Objectives

- To create a calm, supportive space where participants can reconnect with themselves through visual reflection.
- To encourage self-expression and storytelling through images and guided questions.
- To foster empathetic listening and connection among participants.
- To support awareness of what the body, emotions, and mind currently need.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- use visual metaphors to explore their current emotional and mental states.
- increase awareness of what their body, emotions, and mind need in the present moment.
- practice active, non-judgmental listening in pairs.
- reflect on personal insights through image-based storytelling.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Arrival and Grounding (10 mins): Welcome participants and briefly introduce the activity. Explain that today they will use images rather than words as a starting point for reflection; there are no right or wrong choices and no artistic skill is required.

Invite participants to sit comfortably, close their eyes if they wish, and take a few slow breaths. Guide them briefly toward the present moment: *“Notice how your body feels right now. Notice what’s on your mind. Just observe, without needing to change anything.”*

After 2–3 minutes, distribute the reflection handout and give participants a moment to read the three questions silently.

- Printed reflection handout with three questions (one per participant)
- Flipchart with the three questions written visibly

Optional: calm background music



Preparation

1. Prepare or source your image card set in advance. If using printed photographs or postcards, aim for at least 3 times the number of participants so everyone has genuine choice.
2. Print one reflection handout per participant.
3. Write the three questions on the flipchart before participants arrive: “What does my body need now? / What do my emotions need now? / What does my mind need now?”
4. Set up the room in a calm, comfortable way, chairs in a circle or spread out with enough personal space for individual reflection.
5. Place image cards face down in the center of the room before participants arrive.
6. Emotionally prepare yourself: some participants may connect deeply with an image in an unexpected way. Your role is to hold space without interpreting or commenting on their choices.

2 Image Selection (20 mins): Invite participants to approach the face-down cards and select one image intuitively for each question, without overthinking. They place each chosen image next to its corresponding question on their handout.

If a participant wants to swap a card, they may do so once per question. Encourage them to trust their first instinct rather than searching for the “perfect” image.

3 Pair Sharing and Silent Integration (25–30 mins): Invite participants to find a partner and share their three images and the stories behind them. Each person takes an uninterrupted turn, the listener’s role is to listen attentively without commenting, advising, or interpreting.

After both partners have shared, the facilitator invites each pair to draw one random reflection card from a prepared set. Examples of reflection questions: “*What connects all your images?*” / “*What surprised you in this process?*” / “*What do all three images have in common?*”

Partners take 5–7 minutes of silent integration, sitting quietly with what they experienced before moving into the group debrief.

4 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

5 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What was it like to choose images intuitively, without thinking too much?
2. What did you notice during the pair sharing?
3. How did it feel to express yourself through images rather than words?
4. How did it feel to be listened to without interruption or response?
5. What was it like to listen without responding or advising?
6. Did anything surprise you about your choices or what emerged?
7. What did this activity reveal about what you currently need?
8. Do you think our societies and institutions — schools, workplaces, systems — make it easy or difficult for people to meet these three needs? What gets in the way?
9. What is one small thing you could do this week to meet one of the needs your images revealed?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Emotional Safety:** Some participants may connect with an image in a deeply personal or unexpected way. Hold space for this without probing or interpreting. If a participant becomes visibly distressed, slow the pace, offer a grounding breath, and check in privately after the activity.
- **Image Card Alternatives:** If professional card decks are unavailable, a well-prepared set of printed photographs works equally well. The quality of the images matters; choose diverse, evocative visuals that include nature, people, textures, abstract patterns, and everyday objects. Avoid images with strong political content, graphic violence, or culturally specific religious symbols.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Image interpretation is culturally shaped, what feels calming or meaningful to one participant may feel uncomfortable to another. Never suggest what an image “means” and always validate whatever connection a participant makes.



Variations

- **Shorter version:** Use only one question (“What do I need right now?”) and one image. Works well as a session opener or check-in — 20–25 minutes total.
- **Individual version:** Skip the pair sharing and move directly from image selection to a brief whole-group sharing round. Works better for groups with lower trust. Sharing is always voluntary.



Resources

This activity is adapted from the Points of You “*Punctum*” methodology. For further information: www.points-of-you.com



Theme

- Art and Creativity
- Emotional Expression
- Self-awareness



Duration

90–100



Group Size

8–20



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Salt dough (See Preparation for the recipe), or polymer clay, enough for one substantial piece per participant
- Sculpting tools if available, otherwise fingers work perfectly
- A flat surface or board for each participant to work on
- Aprons or old shirts to protect clothing
- Wet wipes or access to a sink
- Small pieces of paper with emotion words written on them, one per participant for Phase 1

ACTIVITY 19

Clay and Emotions

Clay and Emotions is a two-part creative activity that moves from collective embodied expression to individual sculpting. In the first part, participants use their bodies to create living sculptures of emotions, becoming the emotion physically and collectively. In the second part, they translate that same emotional experience into clay, creating a personal sculpture they can hold in their hands. The progression from body to clay mirrors the journey from feeling to form — making the invisible visible and tangible.

Objectives

- To help participants explore and experience a range of emotions through embodied and creative expression.
- To explore the relationship between individuals and their emotions through sculpting and movement.
- To build emotional awareness by giving feelings a physical, tangible form.
- To foster collective connection through shared creative and embodied experience.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- recognize and embody a range of emotions through movement and group sculpture.
- express a personally significant emotion through the creative process of clay sculpting.
- reflect on their relationship with a chosen emotion and how they experience it in their body and daily life.
- approach emotions with greater curiosity and acceptance rather than avoidance or judgment.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Body Sculpture Warm-up (20–25 mins): Invite participants to stand in the open space. Explain that in this first phase they are going to use their bodies, not words or art, to express emotions. They will become living sculptures.

Begin with a simple warm-up: ask participants to walk around the space and when you call an emotion, they freeze and shape their body into that emotion. Start with accessible emotions, happy, tired, surprised,

Optional:

- Calm background music during the sculpting phase
- Printed salt dough recipe card (one per participant)



Preparation

1. Prepare salt dough in advance if using, the recipe is simple:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup salt
- 1 cup water

It needs to be made before the session. Alternatively source polymer clay.

2. Write emotion words on small pieces of paper for Phase 1; include a range:

- joy
- fear
- pride
- sadness
- anger
- surprise
- longing
- hope
- frustration
- calm.

Fold them so participants draw one randomly.

3. Set up sculpting workstations before participants arrive, one flat surface per participant with clay, tools if available, and wet wipes nearby.
4. Clear enough space in the room for the body sculpture phase, participants need room to move and form group sculptures.
5. Prepare your own clay sculpture example to show participants, make it genuine and imperfect.

before moving into more complex ones. Do this for 5–6 emotions, 30–60 seconds each.

Then move into group sculptures: ask participants to form a collective sculpture together representing one emotion, everyone contributes their body to the composition. Call 3–4 emotions for group sculptures, giving participants 1–2 minutes each to find their position and hold it.

2 Transition to Clay (5 mins): Bring the group together briefly. Invite each participant to draw one folded emotion paper, this is the emotion they will sculpt in Phase 3. Give them a moment to sit with their chosen emotion before moving to their workstation.

3 Clay Sculpting (35–40 mins): Invite participants to sit at their workstation and begin sculpting their emotion. The sculpture can be abstract or representational, there is no correct form. Encourage them to let their hands respond to how the emotion feels rather than thinking about what it should look like.

Play soft background music during this phase, the shift from the active body sculpture phase to the quiet individual sculpting phase benefits from a calm, meditative atmosphere.

4 Sharing and Transition (5–7 mins): Invite participants to place their sculptures in the center of the space, creating a collective display of emotions. Allow a moment of quiet appreciation before any sharing begins.

Invite volunteers to share: which emotion they sculpted, why they chose that form, and how they typically experience this emotion in their life. Keep sharing genuinely optional.

5 Debriefing (15 mins): See below

6 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice during the body sculpture phase? Which emotion was most interesting to embody?
2. What happened when you began working with the clay? What did you notice in your hands and in your body?
3. How did it feel to give your emotion a physical shape?
4. Was there anything surprising about the form your sculpture took?
5. What does your sculpture tell you about your relationship with this emotion?
6. What does it mean to give an emotion a form you can hold in your hands? What changes when emotions become tangible?
7. How might working with your hands and body help you process emotions in everyday life?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **The Two Registers:** This activity moves through two very different emotional registers, the active, playful energy of body sculpture and the quiet, inward focus of clay work. Both are valuable and they complement each other. Protect the transition between them, the brief moment in *Phase 2* where participants draw their emotion and sit with it is the bridge between the two phases. Don't rush it.
- **Body Sculpture Safety:** The body sculpture phase is playful but keeps it grounded, no physical contact between participants unless the group is very established and comfortable with each other. Sculptures are individual body positions or group arrangements, not physical interaction.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Some cultural contexts may have associations with specific emotions or with the act of giving emotions physical form. Be sensitive to this and never interpret or comment on a participant's sculpture without invitation.

Variations

- **Clay only version:** If space or group dynamics make the body sculpture phase difficult, skip *Phase 1* and begin directly with clay sculpting. The activity is slightly less rich but still effective.
- **Body sculpture only:** Run only *Phase 1* as a shorter standalone warm-up or energizer, 20–25 minutes. Works well as an introduction to embodied expression before other activities.
- **Abstract sculpting:** For groups uncomfortable with representing a specific emotion, invite participants to sculpt "how I feel right now" without naming the emotion first. More open and less directive.

Resources

Grounded in expressive arts therapy approaches.
See: *Guzman, L. (2020)*



Theme

- Art and Meditation
- Emotional Expression
- Wellbeing
- Group Cohesion



Duration

90



Group Size

10–27

Note: works best with one full set of Boomwhackers (8–12 tones); larger groups can share instruments or use body percussion



Emotional Intensity

Medium

ACTIVITY 20

Feel the Beat

Feel the Beat is a rhythm-based expressive activity that uses sound, movement, and collective music-making to support emotional expression, stress regulation, and group connection. By creating rhythms individually and then building toward a shared collective pulse, participants experience something that is difficult to manufacture through words alone, the felt sense of being in sync with others. The activity requires no musical skill or experience and works equally well with professional rhythm instruments or everyday objects. It is particularly accessible for groups with diverse language backgrounds, as rhythm speaks without words.

Objectives

- To support non-verbal expression of emotions through rhythm, sound, and movement.
- To enable physical release of tension and support grounding through repetitive rhythm.
- To strengthen group cohesion, empathy, and mutual listening through collective music-making.
- To increase awareness of emotional states and personal regulation strategies.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- express current emotional states non-verbally through rhythm and sound.
- experience the felt sense of group synchronization and collective belonging.
- develop greater awareness of how rhythm and sound affect their emotional state.
- gain a simple, accessible tool for emotional regulation they can use independently.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Wake the Rhythm (10 mins): Begin with a light physical warm-up, gentle stretching, shaking arms and legs, rolling shoulders. Keep this brief and playful.

Introduce the rhythm echo game: the facilitator claps or taps a short rhythm and the group repeats it back exactly. Start simple, two or three



Materials

- Preferred: A full set of Boomwhackers (8–12 tones), one per participant where possible
- Accessible alternatives (all work equally well):
- Body percussion; clapping, chest patting, stomping, snapping
- Plastic cups or bottles of different sizes filled with rice, sand, or stones (wrap in colored tape to maintain visual distinction)
- Household objects; plastic buckets, wooden spoons, pots
- Natural elements (outdoor settings) — sticks or stones of different sizes
- PVC pipes cut to various lengths
- Chairs or floor mats arranged in a circle

Optional: laptop, projector, and screen for the Play-Along variation (see Variations)

beats, and gradually increase complexity. This is not about difficulty but about activating attention, body awareness, and group focus.

If the group seems tense or shy, begin with 2–3 slow deep breaths together before the echo game. A brief grounding moment before rhythm work settles the nervous system and creates a calmer entry.

Introduce the instruments; Boomwhackers, body percussion, or alternative tools. Allow participants to explore their instrument freely for 2–3 minutes before any structured activity begins. This unstructured exploration reduces self-consciousness and builds comfort.

2 Emotional Sound Mapping (20 mins): Invite participants to choose an instrument, or if using Boomwhackers, a color that feels like their current emotional state. If more than one person wants the same color, that is fine, let it happen naturally.

Offer reflective prompts slowly and gently:

- “If your feeling today had a sound, how would it sound?”
- “Is your rhythm fast or slow? Loud or soft? Steady or irregular?”
- “Let your instrument say something your words haven’t said yet.”

Give participants 3–4 minutes to create a short individual rhythm, their emotional sound for today. Then invite pairs to share their rhythms with each other, playing for rather than explaining to. After pairs share, invite a few volunteers to play their rhythm for the whole group. No interpretation or analysis, just listening and acknowledgment.

Brief check-in: “How did it feel to express something without words?”

3 Group Pulse, From Chaos to Harmony (20 mins): The facilitator begins a steady, simple base rhythm, a 4/4 pulse, slow and grounding. Invite participants to join one by one, adding their own rhythmic layer on top of the base. There is no instruction about what to play, each person adds whatever feels natural.

As more layers join, the sound builds from individual voices into a collective pulse. Allow the chaos to exist, the moment when it begins to synchronize naturally is often surprising and powerful.

Once the group has found a shared pulse, introduce gentle variations:

- Play louder together, then softer
- Speed up slightly, then return to the base tempo
- One person plays a solo while others hold the pulse underneath
- Complete silence for three beats, then resume together

Facilitator’s role: Hold the base rhythm steadily. If energy becomes very high or chaotic, slowly reduce your own rhythm to a quiet heartbeat pulse, participants will naturally follow back to calm. This is the grounding technique for this activity.



Preparation

1. Set up the space in a circle before participants arrive — enough room for gentle movement.
2. If using Boomwhackers, arrange them visibly so participants can choose their instrument intuitively at the start.
3. If using alternative instruments, prepare them in advance, fill bottles, cut pipes, gather objects. Assign different colors or markings so instruments are visually distinct.
4. practice the rhythm echo game and the Group Pulse phase yourself before the session, knowing the flow from the inside makes your facilitation significantly more natural.
5. Think about your grounding plan: if energy becomes very high during the Group Pulse phase, have a simple heartbeat pulse ready to bring the group back to calm.
6. No background music during Phases 1–3, participants need to focus entirely on their own bodies and the group's internal rhythm.
7. See example video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cG0jprCQ6Ak>

- 4 **Creative Sound Pieces (20 mins):** Divide participants into small groups of 3–5. Each group creates a short sound piece, 30–60 seconds, representing an emotion or theme of their choice. Examples: joy, anger, hope, waiting, release, connection.

Groups have 10 minutes to create and practice. Then each group performs their piece for the others. After each performance, the group appreciates without evaluating, a simple collective sound response (a soft shared hum, a gentle tap) works better than applause, which can feel like performance pressure.

Facilitator's role: *Circulate quietly during creation. If a group is stuck, offer a gentle prompt: "What does hope sound like? Is it fast or slow? Does it build or stay steady?" Do not suggest specific rhythms, the discovery is the learning.*

- 5 **Reflection and Return (5–7 mins):** Invite the group to sit in a circle. Close with a collective breathing rhythm, the facilitator sets a slow pulse and participants breathe in sync with it. Three to four slow breaths together.

Then invite each participant to share one word describing how they feel now, and one word describing how they felt at the beginning. No elaboration needed. The contrast itself is informative.

- 6 **Debriefing (15 mins):** See below.

- 7 **Closing:** See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you choose as your instrument or sound, and what drew you to it?
2. What happened in the group during the From Chaos to Harmony phase, what did you notice?
3. How do you feel now compared to when we started?
4. What did you notice about yourself during the activity, in your body, your energy, your emotions?
5. What does it tell us that a group of people with different backgrounds and experiences can find a shared rhythm together?
6. How can rhythm or sound help regulate emotions in daily life?
7. Is there a simple rhythm or sound practice you could use when you need to ground yourself or release tension?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **No Wrong Sounds:** This is the most important principle of the activity. Emphasize it genuinely and repeatedly, every sound is part of the collective experience, there is no wrong note, no wrong rhythm, no wrong choice. For young people who may have experienced significant judgment or evaluation, this freedom can feel unfamiliar and then deeply liberating.
- **Grounding High Energy:** Rhythm work can release significant energy — laughter, movement, strong emotion. This is healthy and part of the process. However if the group becomes overwhelmed or the energy feels high, return slowly to a quiet heartbeat pulse; tap it gently and steadily until the group follows. This is the most effective grounding technique available in this activity.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Rhythm and music carry deep cultural significance across all human communities. Welcome the different rhythmic traditions participants bring, someone who knows a rhythm from their own cultural background can introduce it as their contribution to the Group Pulse phase. This transforms cultural difference from a barrier into a resource.

Variations

- **Play-Along video version:** Using a laptop and projector, the group plays along with Boomwhacker Play-Along videos, participants strike their instrument when their color appears on screen. This reinforces collective focus and is particularly effective for participants with language barriers as the instructions are entirely visual. Search “*Boomwhacker Play-Along*” on YouTube for freely available videos.
- **Body percussion only:** Run the entire activity using only clapping, stomping, chest patting, and snapping. No instruments needed. Equally effective and creates a more intimate, embodied experience.
- **Outdoor version:** Use natural materials, sticks, stones, surfaces, for rhythm work outdoors. The natural environment adds a grounding quality to the experience.
- **Shorter version:** Run only Phases 1–3 as a 30–40 minute energizer or session opener. Works well to transition between heavier activities or to re-energize a group after a long reflective session.

Resources

Grounded in music therapy and rhythm-based regulation approaches.

See: Thaut, M. H. & Hoemberg, V. (2014)



5.4 Meditation and Mindfulness

Meditation and mindfulness offer young people practical tools for grounding, self-awareness, and emotional regulation; the ability to pause, notice what is happening inside, and find a moment of stillness even in the middle of difficulty. For young people navigating significant stress and uncertainty, these practices offer practical tools for self-regulation that require no equipment, no special setting, and no prior experience.

Within this handbook, meditation is approached as a grounding and awareness practice, not as a spiritual or religious exercise. The goal is not calmness at all costs but awareness, self-regulation, and self-compassion. Participants are supported in noticing their breath, their body, and their present moment experience, without judgment, without pressure, and without the requirement to achieve any particular state.

Facilitators should be aware, however, that these practices do not have the same effect on everyone. For some participants, particularly those with trauma histories, introspective practices can lead to increased arousal rather than regulation. Directing attention inward to the body or breath can sometimes activate rather than calm the nervous system. This is not a failure of the practice or the participant. It is a predictable response that requires careful facilitation. For this reason, all activities in this section offer eyes-open alternatives, movement-based variations, and the freedom to observe rather than participate. Facilitator psychological literacy is essential, without the ability to recognise signs of distress and respond appropriately, difficulties can arise. Facilitators who are unfamiliar with trauma responses are strongly encouraged to review *Section 3.5* before facilitating any activity in this section.

Facilitators do not need to be experienced meditators to guide these activities. What matters more than expertise is presence, the willingness to slow down, hold silence, and model the qualities of attention and self-compassion that the activities invite.

What You Will Find In This Section

This section contains four short, accessible mindfulness and meditation practices that follow a clear progression, from the most active and externally grounded to the most inward and relational.

Mindful Breathing and Movement (Nr.21) opens the section with an active, energising practice that combines conscious breathing with gentle body movement, the most accessible entry point, requiring no prior experience and no stillness. **Body Scan Meditation** (Nr.22) moves from movement into stillness, guiding participants to direct gentle attention through the body and develop awareness of how stress and emotion live physically. **Blow It Away** (Nr.23) introduces the more abstract mindfulness skill of observing thoughts without attachment, made tangible through the playful metaphor of soap bubbles. The section closes with **Loving-Kindness Meditation** (Nr.24), the most emotionally demanding of the four, cultivating self-compassion and a felt sense of connection. This final activity works best with groups that have already established trust and have some prior mindfulness experience, either through the earlier activities in this section or elsewhere in the programme.

All four activities work as standalone sessions and can be used at any point in a programme; as an opening, a closing, or a grounding moment between more intensive activities. If facilitators want to use all four together, the sequence above is strongly recommended.

Facilitator Tip

Always offer alternatives to closed eyes, a soft downward gaze is equally valid and equally effective. Never require stillness if a participant is more comfortable with gentle movement. Remember that these practices do not work the same way for everyone, if a participant becomes more agitated or distressed during a meditation activity rather than calmer, this is a signal to slow down, offer grounding, and allow them to step back without drawing attention to them. For guidance on responding to strong emotional reactions, refer to *Sections 3.5.5 and 3.5.6*.



Theme

- Art and Meditation
- Wellbeing
- Self-awareness



Duration

20–25



Group Size

Any



Emotional Intensity

Low



Materials

- Open space for gentle movement, chairs can be moved aside if needed

Optional:

- Calm background music
- Printed take-home breathing guide

ACTIVITY 21

Mindful Breathing and Movement

Mindful Breathing and Movement is a short, accessible practice that combines conscious breathing with gentle body movement. Unlike the stillness of Body Scan Meditation, this practice is active and energizing, inviting participants to use breath and movement together as tools for grounding, regulation, and presence. It works equally well as a session opener, a transition between activities, or a standalone practice for managing stress and restoring focus.

Objectives

- To introduce participants to conscious breathing as a practical tool for emotional regulation and grounding.
- To combine breath awareness with gentle movement to support present-moment connection.
- To provide an accessible and energizing mindfulness practice suitable for any group.
- To offer a short, transferable tool participants can use independently in daily life.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- practice a simple breathing technique to reduce tension and restore calm.
- experience the connection between breath, body movement, and emotional state.
- develop greater awareness of how physical movement and breath affect their inner state.
- gain a short, practical tool they can use independently for grounding and self-regulation.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction and Arrival (3–5 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the practice. Explain that today they are going to use breath and gentle movement together, not as exercise, but as a way of arriving in the present moment and noticing how they feel.



Preparation

1. Clear enough space for participants to stand and move gently without touching each other.
2. Familiarize yourself with the breathing pattern and movement sequence before the session; you should be able to guide it naturally without notes.
3. Practice it yourself first; knowing how it feels in your own body makes your facilitation more authentic.
4. Think about participants with physical limitations; all movements in this practice can be done seated if needed. Have this adaptation ready from the start.
5. Decide whether you want to use background music, instrumental or nature sounds work well. Avoid music with lyrics during the breathing phases.

Invite participants to stand comfortably with feet hip-width apart, or to remain seated if they prefer. Emphasize that all movements are invitations; participants do what feels comfortable and skip anything that doesn't.

2 Conscious Breathing (5 mins): Begin with breath alone before adding movement. Guide participants through a simple breathing pattern:

1. *"Breathe in slowly through your nose for four counts; one, two, three, four. Hold gently for two counts. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for six counts; one, two, three, four, five, six."*
2. Repeat this 4–5 times, guiding the counts aloud. Encourage participants to notice how their body responds, the rise and fall of the chest, the sensation of air, any shift in how they feel.
3. After 4–5 rounds invite participants to return to their natural breathing rhythm and simply notice the difference.

3 Breath and Movement (10–12 mins): Now invite participants to combine breath with gentle movement. Guide each movement slowly and model it yourself throughout:

- **Shoulder rolls:** Slowly roll both shoulders back and down on the exhale. Three times.
- **Neck release:** On the inhale, sit or stand tall. On the exhale, gently drop the right ear toward the right shoulder. Hold for two breaths. Return to center on the inhale. Repeat on the left side.
- **Arm raise:** On a slow inhale, raise both arms gently out to the sides and up overhead. On the exhale, lower them slowly back down. Three times.
- **Grounding stance:** Plant feet firmly on the floor. On each exhale, imagine breathing down through your feet into the ground. Three slow breaths.
- **Gentle sway:** Allow the body to sway gently from side to side, like a tree in a light breeze. Let the breath guide the movement. 30 seconds.
- **Still arrival:** Stand or sit quietly. Take three final slow breaths. Notice how you feel now compared to when you started.

4 Return and Reflection (2–3 mins): Guide participants gently back to stillness. Allow a moment of quiet before speaking.

Ask simply: *"Take a moment to notice how you feel right now, in your body, in your breath, in your mind. Just notice."*

Allow 30 seconds of silence before moving into the debrief.

5 Debriefing (10 mins): See below.

6 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.

Discussion & Debriefing

4. Did you notice in your body during the breathing and movement, maybe a particular moment or movement where you felt a shift?
5. How do you feel now compared to when we started?
6. What did you notice about the connection between your breath and how you felt?
7. What does it tell us that something as simple and always available as our own breath can be a tool for regulation and calm?
8. When in your daily life might this kind of practice be useful, and what would make it realistic to use regularly?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Seated Adaptations:** All movements in this practice can be done seated, shoulder rolls, neck release, arm raises, grounding, and sway all work equally well in a chair. Offer this from the very start as an equally valid option, not as a modification for those who cannot stand.
- **Your Own Practice:** This activity requires you to model the movements throughout; you cannot guide it effectively from a distance. Move with participants, breathe with them, and let your own genuine engagement with the practice be visible. This gives permission and creates safety.
- **Breathing Pattern:** This is the most important element of the activity. The 4-2-6 pattern (in for 4, hold for 2, out for 6) activates the parasympathetic nervous system through the extended exhale, creating a genuine physiological shift toward calm. Understanding this helps facilitators explain the practice credibly and adapt it confidently. If participants find counting distracting, simplify to “*breathe in slowly, breathe out even more slowly*”.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Some participants may have associations with breathing practices from specific spiritual or cultural traditions. Frame this clearly as a practical, secular tool, not yoga, not meditation in a religious sense, just conscious breathing and gentle movement.

Variations

- **Breathing only:** Run only Phase 2 as a 5-minute standalone grounding tool. Works as a session opener, a transition, or a quick regulation tool at any point in a program.
- **Movement only:** Skip the breathing counting and simply guide participants through the gentle movement sequence with natural breath. More accessible for participants who find counting distracting.
- **Walking version:** Guide the practice as a slow mindful walk, participants walk at a reduced pace, coordinating breath with steps. Works well outdoors.

Resources

Grounded in evidence-based breathwork and somatic regulation approaches. The 4-2-6 breathing pattern draws on parasympathetic nervous system activation research.
See: Porges, S. W. (2011)



Theme

- Art and Meditation
- Wellbeing
- Self-awareness



Duration

30–35



Group Size

Any



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Body Scan Meditation text for the facilitators (See Appendix 14)
- Comfortable seating or mats for lying down, chairs work fine if mats are unavailable

Optional:

- Blankets or cushions for comfort
- Calm background music or nature sounds during the meditation

ACTIVITY 22

Body Scan Meditation

Body Scan Meditation is a guided mindfulness practice that invites participants to bring gentle, non-judgmental attention to different parts of their body, noticing sensations, tension, and ease without trying to change anything. By moving awareness slowly through the body, participants practice grounding in the present moment and develop a greater understanding of how stress and emotion live in the body. This is a structured and accessible introduction to mindfulness for participants with no prior experience.



Objectives

- To introduce participants to a simple, structured mindfulness practice accessible to everyone.
- To develop awareness of bodily sensations and their connection to emotional and stress states.
- To provide a practical grounding tool for managing stress and returning to the present moment.
- To create a calm, supportive space for rest and inward attention.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- practice a structured body awareness technique to reduce tension and promote calm.
- recognize the connection between physical sensations and emotional or stress states.
- experience grounding through breath and present-moment attention.
- gain a practical tool they can use independently for self-regulation.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction and Settling (5–7 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the activity gently. Explain that today they are going to try a body scan, a simple practice of bringing attention to different parts of the body, one at a time, just noticing what is there without trying to fix or change anything.



Preparation

1. Set up the space before participants arrive, arrange seating or mats so participants have enough personal space to feel comfortable. Dim the lights if possible.
2. Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the body scan script before the session; you should be able to guide it naturally without reading from notes. Your voice, pacing, and presence are the main facilitation tools.
3. Practice the body scan yourself before facilitating it with a group. Knowing what the experience feels like from the inside makes your facilitation significantly more authentic and attuned.
4. Have a grounding exercise ready in case someone becomes distressed, the 5-4-3-2-1 sensory grounding technique works well as a gentle return to the present.
5. Think carefully about the trauma-informed adaptations for this group, see *Tips before facilitating*.

Emphasize clearly:

- There is no right or wrong way to experience this
- Participants can keep their eyes open with a soft downward gaze if closing eyes feels uncomfortable
- They can sit, lie down, or find any position that feels comfortable
- They can stop or step back at any moment; participation is always voluntary

Invite participants to settle into their chosen position and take two or three slow natural breaths before beginning.

2 Guided Body Scan (15 mins): Guide participants through the body scan slowly and gently. Speak in a calm, unhurried voice with natural pauses between each area. You can use the Body Scan Meditation Handout.

3 Gentle Return (3–5 mins): After the final breath, allow complete silence for one full minute. Do not rush this transition.

Then guide participants gently back: *“Begin to notice the sounds around you. Feel the weight of your body in your chair or on the floor. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes.”*

Allow participants to stretch gently if they wish before moving into the debrief.

4 Debriefing (10 mins): See below.

5 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice while scanning your body, were there any areas that stood out or held more tension?
2. How did you feel during the practice, was it easy or difficult to stay present?
3. Was there anything surprising about what you noticed in your body?
4. What does your body awareness tell you about how you are carrying stress or emotion right now?
5. Do you think everyone has equal access to spaces, time, and tools for rest and self-regulation, or is this a privilege? What gets in the way?
6. How might a practice like this be useful in your daily life, when and where could you use it?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Trauma-Informed Body Scan:** Body scan meditation can be activating for participants with trauma histories, directing sustained attention to bodily sensations can trigger somatic trauma responses, particularly for people who may have experienced physical violence, detention, or displacement. If a participant becomes visibly distressed during the practice, gently say: *“You can open your eyes anytime and just breathe naturally, there is no pressure to continue.”* After the session, check in privately with anyone who seemed uncomfortable.

Note: If a participant becomes distressed, refer to Section 3.5.5.

- **Eyes Open Option:** Always offer this as a genuine, equal alternative, not as a backup for those who can't manage eyes closed. Some participants will find a soft downward gaze more grounding than closed eyes. Frame it from the start: *“Eyes closed or with a soft downward gaze, whichever feels right for you.”*
- **First Time Meditating:** For participants who have never tried meditation, normalize any experience, it is completely fine to feel restless, distracted, or nothing in particular. The practice is in noticing, not in achieving a specific state.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Meditation carries different associations across cultures, some participants may have spiritual or religious associations with contemplative practices. Frame this clearly as a secular, practical tool for stress awareness and grounding, not as a spiritual or religious practice.



Variations

- **Seated version:** For groups where lying down is not comfortable or appropriate, the entire practice works equally well sitting in a chair with feet flat on the floor.
- **Eyes-open grounding version:** For groups with higher trauma sensitivity, replace the eyes-closed body scan with an eyes-open grounding practice, participants keep eyes open and gently shift attention through the body while remaining visually connected to the room. Less inward but more accessible.



Resources

Grounded in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) approaches.
See: Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990)



Theme

- Meditation and Mindfulness
- Wellbeing
- Emotional Expression
- Self-awareness



Duration

60–70

Note: Shorter version available; see Variations.



Group Size

10–40



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Meditation Guidance for facilitators (See Appendix 15)
- Soap bubble containers, one per participant (the small, inexpensive children's play type)
- Comfortable seating, chairs, floor mats, or cushions arranged in a circle or spread out

ACTIVITY 23

Blow It Away

Blow It Away is a guided mindfulness meditation that uses the simple, playful act of blowing soap bubbles as a physical metaphor for releasing thoughts and emotions. By observing thoughts without holding onto them, imagining them as bubbles that form, float, and dissolve, participants practice one of the most fundamental mindfulness skills: the ability to notice what is passing through the mind without being swept away by it. The soap bubbles transform this practice from abstract to tangible, giving participants a concrete, sensory experience of impermanence and release. The activity is secular, accessible, and works across cultural and language backgrounds.



Objectives

- To introduce participants to the practice of observing thoughts and emotions without judgment or attachment.
- To support emotional release and stress regulation through guided breathing and symbolic action.
- To develop the capacity to create inner space, a pause between experience and reaction.
- To offer a simple, memorable mindfulness tool participants can use independently.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- practice observing thoughts and emotions as passing experiences rather than fixed realities.
- experience a sense of release and lightness through guided breathing and the bubble metaphor.
- develop greater awareness of the temporary nature of difficult thoughts and feelings.
- gain a simple, portable mindfulness practice they can use independently when feeling overwhelmed.

- Optional: LED candles (strongly preferred over real candles for safety in youth work settings)

Optional:

- Soft background lighting, dimmed if possible
- Notebooks or journals and pens for reflective writing after the meditation.



Preparation

1. Set up the space before participants arrive, comfortable seating, soft lighting, LED candles if using. The atmosphere you create before participants enter does significant work. A calm, thoughtful setup signals that something different is about to happen.
2. Source soap bubble containers in advance, one per participant. These are widely available and inexpensive. Have extras in case some don't work.
3. Assign an assistant if possible, their role is to quietly place one bubble container next to each participant during the meditation, without breaking the meditative state. Practice this placement beforehand so it can happen smoothly and silently. If no assistant is available, distribute bubble containers before the meditation begins rather than during it, explain their purpose briefly and ask participants to set them aside until invited to use them.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Setting the Space and Introduction (10 mins): Welcome participants warmly and invite them to find a comfortable position, sitting on a chair, cross-legged on the floor, or however their body feels most at ease. Feet flat on the floor or legs uncrossed works well for grounding.

Acknowledge the bubble containers if visible: *"You'll notice a small container of soap bubbles next to you, we'll use these later."* Emphasize that eyes can remain open with a soft downward gaze, and there is nothing to perform or get right.

Acknowledge that for some participants this may be their first time trying something like this: *"It is fine if your mind wanders or if you feel restless, that is completely normal. Just notice whatever happens without trying to change it."*

Emphasize clearly:

- Eyes can remain open with a soft downward gaze if closing feels uncomfortable
- Participation is always voluntary; stepping back at any point is fine
- There is nothing to perform or get right

2 Guided Meditation (25–30 mins): Guide participants through the following script slowly, with genuine pauses between sentences. Read at approximately half the speed that feels natural, mindfulness scripts need space.

3 The Bubble Release (10–12 mins): After a full minute of silence following the meditation, guide participants gently back: *"Begin to notice the sounds around you. Feel the weight of your body in your seat. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes."*

Allow participants to orient themselves quietly before speaking. Then invite them to pick up their bubble container.

Say simply: *"These bubbles are the physical continuation of the meditation. As you blow them, imagine that everything you placed in that inner bubble is being released, passing, fading, dissolving. Just like these bubbles, everything is temporary. Everything passes."*

Allow 3–4 minutes of free bubble-blowing, participants can stand, sit, move gently, blow alone or together. Play no music. Allow the sounds of the bubbles and the space itself to hold the moment.

Facilitator's role: *Observe without intervening. This moment often produces unexpected responses, laughter, tears, quiet wonder, or simply peaceful engagement. All of these are valid. If the group naturally falls into shared silence and bubble-blowing without any debrief, allow it. Some experiences do not need immediate words.*

4 Debriefing (10 mins): See below.

5 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.

4. Read through the meditation script several times before the session. It should feel natural and unhurried, not read mechanically. Your voice, pacing, and genuine calm are the primary facilitation tools.
5. Familiarize yourself with the 4-2-6 breathing pattern used in the script, in for 4, hold for 2, out for 6. Practice it yourself until it feels natural.
6. Prepare the space to be phone-free if possible, the contrast between screen time and this kind of stillness is part of the experience.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice during the meditation, in your body, your breath, your mind. Also about your inner experience?
2. What happened when you imagined your thoughts as bubbles, was it easy or difficult to let them float away?
3. Was there a moment during the meditation where your mind wandered or resisted, and what did you notice when that happened?
4. How did it feel to blow bubbles after the meditation, what came up?
5. What does it tell us that thoughts and feelings, even heavy ones, are temporary, like bubbles?
6. How might creating a moment of inner pause help you in daily life when things feel overwhelming?
7. Is there a simple version of this practice, even just three slow breaths, that you could use on your own?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **The Silent Bubble Moment:** The bubble-blowing phase after the meditation is the most distinctive and memorable part of this activity. Protect it. Do not rush into the debrief, allow the bubbles to do their work. If participants are clearly benefiting from simply being present with the bubbles, let them stay there. The debrief can wait or be shortened. As the original activity notes: if the group needs to stay in silence or simply play with the bubbles, let them. Observe their attitude, it is not always necessary to talk immediately. Some participants may share later, during a break, or privately.
- **Secular Framing:** This meditation is inspired by Buddhist observation techniques, specifically Vipassana and Yoga Nidra, but is presented here in a completely secular format. Do not reference the Buddhist origins unless participants ask. If they do, explain that the technique of observing thoughts without attachment is a universal human practice that appears in many traditions and also in contemporary mindfulness psychology.
- **First Time Meditating:** For participants who have never tried meditation, normalize any experience. Restlessness, wandering thoughts, and feeling nothing in particular are all completely normal. The practice is in noticing, not in achieving calm.
- **Trauma-Informed:** Always offer the eyes-open option as a genuine equal alternative. For participants who may have experienced trauma, closing eyes in a group setting can feel activating. A soft downward gaze is equally effective for this practice.

Variations

- **Shorter version:** Run only the breathing and body scan phases (approximately 10 minutes) followed immediately by bubble blowing. Works well as a session transition or closing ritual. 20–25 minutes total.
- **Outdoor version:** The bubble-blowing phase works beautifully outdoors, in a garden, courtyard, or park. The natural setting deepens the experience of impermanence as bubbles catch sunlight and wind.
- **Journaling version:** After the bubble phase, participants write or draw in a journal for 5–7 minutes before the group debrief. This creates a private processing space between meditation and verbal sharing.

Resources

Grounded in mindfulness-based observation techniques, drawing on secular adaptations of Vipassana traditions.
See: *Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990)*



Theme

- Art and Meditation
- Wellbeing
- Self-awareness
- Inclusion



Duration

25–30



Group Size

Any



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Loving-Kindness Meditation Guidance for facilitators (See Appendix 16)
- Comfortable seating, chairs or cushions on the floor

Optional: calm background music or soft nature sounds

ACTIVITY 24

Loving-Kindness Meditation

Loving-Kindness Meditation is a gentle guided practice that invites participants to direct warmth, care, and compassion, first toward themselves, then toward others, and finally toward the wider world. Rooted in an ancient contemplative tradition but offered here in a fully secular and accessible format, this practice cultivates self-compassion, empathy, and a felt sense of connection. For young people who may have experienced exclusion, discrimination, or self-criticism, the simple act of wishing oneself well can be quietly transformative.

Objectives

- To cultivate self-compassion and a kinder inner relationship with oneself.
- To strengthen empathy and a sense of connection toward others.
- To offer a simple, accessible practice for emotional regulation and wellbeing.
- To create a moment of collective warmth and shared humanity within the group.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- practice directing compassion and warmth toward themselves in a structured and supported way.
- experience a greater sense of connection to others through shared intention.
- develop greater self-compassion as a resource for navigating difficulty.
- gain a short, portable practice they can use independently for emotional support.



Preparation

1. Set up the space before participants arrive, comfortable seating with enough personal space for each person to feel at ease.
2. Familiarize yourself deeply with the practice before facilitating it. This is not a script to read but a living practice to guide, your own groundedness and warmth are the primary facilitation tools.
3. Practice the meditation yourself first. The phrases need to feel genuine coming from you; participants will feel if they are being read mechanically.
4. Prepare the four phrases you will use. The traditional phrases are:
 - “May I be well.”
 - “May I be safe.”
 - “May I be happy.”
 - “May I be at peace.”

But you can adapt them to feel natural and appropriate for your group. See Tips for guidance.
5. Think carefully about the self-compassion element, for some participants, wishing themselves well may feel strange, uncomfortable, or even painful. This deserves explicit acknowledgment in the introduction.
6. Have a gentle grounding exercise ready in case strong emotions emerge.



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 Introduction and Settling (5–7 mins):** Welcome participants and introduce the practice warmly. Explain that today they are going to try a practice of deliberately directing warmth and care, starting with themselves, then expanding outward to others.

Emphasize clearly:

- This is a secular practice; it has no religious requirements or associations
- Participants can keep their eyes open with a soft downward gaze if closing feels uncomfortable
- Any position is fine; sitting, lying down, feet on the floor
- Participation is always voluntary and they can stop or pause at any moment

Invite participants to settle, take two or three natural breaths, and allow the room to become quiet.

- 2 Self-Compassion - Directing Warmth Inward (7–8 mins):**

Before beginning, you can acknowledge simply: *“For some of us, wishing ourselves well might feel strange or difficult, that is completely normal. Just notice whatever comes up, without pressure to feel anything in particular.”*

Guide participants to place one hand gently on their heart if this feels comfortable. Explain that this simple gesture helps direct attention inward.

In a slow, warm voice, guide the first phrases. See the *Loving-Kindness Meditation Handout*.

- 3 Extending to Someone We Care About (5 mins):** *“Now bring to mind someone you care about; a friend, a family member, someone whose face makes you feel warm when you think of them. It doesn’t have to be someone you see often — just someone whose wellbeing matters to you.”*

- 4 Extending to the Group (3–4 mins):** *“Now bring awareness to the people in this room; everyone here, including yourself. We may come from different places and carry different stories, but at this moment we are here together.”*

- 5 Gentle Return (2–3 mins):** *“Take a slow, natural breath. Begin to notice the sounds around you, the weight of your body in your seat. When you are ready, gently open your eyes.”*

Allow complete silence for one full minute before speaking. Let the experience settle before moving into the debrief.

- 6 Debriefing (10 mins):** See below.

- 7 Closing:** See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice during the practice, in your body, your breath, your mind?
2. How did it feel to direct warmth toward yourself, was it easy, strange, or something else?
3. Was there a moment in the practice that felt particularly meaningful or surprising?
4. What was it like to extend warmth first toward someone you care about and then toward the group, and is this something you could imagine doing on your own?
5. What does it tell us that wishing ourselves well can feel more difficult than wishing others well?
6. How might regularly practicing self-compassion support your well-being in daily life? When?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Self-Compassion Can Be Hard:** For many participants, particularly those who have experienced significant hardship, discrimination, or internalized negative messages about their worth, wishing themselves well can feel deeply uncomfortable, strange, or even painful. Acknowledge this explicitly in the introduction and normalize it throughout. Never push participants toward a particular emotional experience. If tears emerge, hold them gently, they are often a sign that something important is being touched.
- **The Phrases:** The traditional phrases (*see the Handout*) are simple and effective, but adapt them if needed. “*May I be okay. May I feel safe. May I find moments of happiness. May I rest*” works just as well. What matters is that the phrases feel genuine and warm rather than formal or foreign. You can also invite participants to find their own phrase if the suggested ones don’t resonate.
- **Secular Framing:** Some participants may have associations between this kind of practice and specific spiritual or religious traditions. Frame it clearly as a secular, practical wellbeing tool, an intentional practice of directing warmth and care, nothing more. If a participant has their own spiritual practice that incorporates similar intentions, that is equally valid.
- **Eyes Open Option:** Always offer this as a genuine equal alternative. Some participants, particularly those with trauma histories, may find closing eyes in a group setting uncomfortable or activating. A soft downward gaze is equally effective for this practice.
- **Your Own Warmth:** The quality of your voice and your own genuine engagement with the practice are everything in this meditation. If you are going through the motions, participants will feel it. If you genuinely mean the phrases as you guide them, that warmth is transmitted. Practice beforehand until the phrases feel real to you.
- **Pairing the activity:** This activity works best with groups that have already established trust and have some prior experience with mindfulness practices, either through earlier activities in this section or through grounding practices elsewhere in the programme. It is not recommended as a first session activity.

Variations

- **Shorter version:** Guide only *Phase 2 (self-compassion)* and *Phase 4 (the group)*. 10–12 minutes. Works well as a session closer or a moment of collective care at the end of a difficult day.
- **Written version:** Instead of a guided meditation, participants write their own loving-kindness phrases to themselves on a card, personalizing the words that feel most meaningful. They keep the card as a take-home resource.
- **Extended version:** Add a fifth phase, extending warmth toward people the participant finds difficult or has conflict with. This is the traditional next step in loving-kindness practice but requires significant trust and emotional safety. Use only with established groups and always keep it optional.

Resources

This practice is inspired by the Metta meditation tradition, adapted here in a secular format for youth work.

See: Salzberg, S. (1995)



5.5 Identity, Belonging and Inclusion

Identity, belonging, and inclusion are not abstract concepts in youth work, for many Roma, refugee, and migrant youth, they are daily lived realities. **“Who am I? Where do I belong? Am I welcome here?”** These questions shape how young people participate, how much they trust, and how much of themselves they bring into a room.

Identity is not fixed or singular. It is shaped continuously through relationships, social environments, and the messages young people receive about who they are. When those messages are repeatedly negative, through discrimination, stereotyping, or exclusion, young people may begin to absorb them as internal truths. This is why identity work in youth settings matters: it creates space for young people to reflect on who they are beyond the categories assigned to them, and to understand their cultural knowledge and lived experience as sources of strength rather than markers of difference.

Belonging is more than participation. A young person can be physically present in a group and still feel profoundly unseen. True belonging occurs when a person feels recognised, valued, and accepted, not in spite of who they are, but because of it. In youth work, belonging cannot be declared, it must be built, slowly and consistently, through small everyday acts: being addressed respectfully, being invited to contribute, being listened to without judgment.

Inclusion goes beyond ensuring access. It means creating spaces where young people feel recognised, respected, and able to belong. Inclusion is not something youth workers deliver to young people, it is something co-created through relationships, language, and shared experience. It requires ongoing reflection, adaptability, and a willingness to share power with the young people in the room.

Creating Inclusive Spaces

An inclusive environment is defined not only by rules but by how young people experience the space. Safety and belonging are built gradually through consistency, respect, and participation.

Key dimensions of inclusive spaces include:

- **Emotional safety** – young people feel able to express themselves without fear of ridicule or punishment, including the freedom to remain silent.
- **Cultural safety** – identities and cultural backgrounds are respected as everyday realities, without tokenism or exoticisation.
- **Psychological safety** – participants feel that mistakes, uncertainty, or vulnerability will not be used against them.
- **Participatory safety** – young people have real opportunities to influence activities, agreements, and group processes.

Belonging grows when participants feel seen, valued, and welcomed consistently within the group.

Role of Youth Workers

Inclusive practice requires ongoing reflection rather than fixed expertise. Youth workers are encouraged to reflect on:

- their own assumptions and privileges
- reactions to difference or resistance
- communication styles and facilitation choices
- the limits of their role and responsibility

Cultural humility is more important than trying to become an expert in every culture. This means remaining open, curious, and willing to learn from young people themselves, because the young person's lived experience is a higher form of expertise in this space than the worker's academic or professional training. Inclusion is not about surface comfort, it is about ensuring that what happens in the room is genuinely relevant to young people's lives, experiences, and needs.

The activities that follow translate these principles into concrete methods, each designed with flexibility for different cultural contexts, trauma-informed awareness, respect for agency and choice, and a strengths-based perspective. Inclusion is not a destination but an ongoing process of negotiating space, care, trust, and participation together.

What You Will Find In This Section

This section contains seven activities that follow a deliberate arc across three interconnected dimensions, identity, belonging, and inclusion.

The section opens with three identity activities. **Identity Maps** (Nr.25) invites participants to visually map the different dimensions of who they are, a broad, gentle, and personal entry point.

Voices of Identity (Nr.26) deepens the exploration through values cards and scenario work, connecting personal identity to cultural experience and empathy. **The Masks We Wear** (Nr.27) is the most emotionally demanding of the identity activities, exploring the gap between what participants show the world and what they carry inside. It should only be used once a solid foundation of trust has been established.

Parts of Me (Nr.28) serves as the bridge between identity and belonging; a movement-based activity that connects how participants see themselves to how they have been received by the world around them. **The Living Tree** (Nr.29) builds collective belonging through shared creative expression, making visible the individual and collective resources that connect the group.

The section closes with two inclusion activities. **Breaking the Myth Game** (Nr.30) develops critical thinking skills by challenging stereotypes and rewriting harmful narratives about Roma, refugees, and migrants. **The Light Within You** (Nr.31) closes the entire section, and can close a whole programme, by affirming the universal human dignity every person carries, regardless of background, status, or experience.

Activities range from **Low** to **Medium** to **High** emotional intensity. Activities 26, 27, and 28 carry Medium to High or High intensity and should not be used as opening activities with a new group. The sequence above is strongly recommended if facilitators want to use several activities together.

Facilitator Tip

Identity, belonging, and inclusion activities can surface strong emotions, particularly for young people who have experienced discrimination, exclusion, or identity-based shame. Hold the space with particular care as activities move into higher intensity territory.

Never pressure participants to disclose specific personal experiences of discrimination or exclusion. The protective distance of metaphor, masks, trees, maps, is intentional and important. Respect it.

Be attentive to the difference between Roma identity and refugee and migrant identity in your group. Roma youth are European, they are not guests in their own continent. Refugee and migrant youth are navigating displacement and belonging in a new place. These are different experiences that deserve different sensitivity. Never conflate them.

If strong emotions emerge, slow down, return to grounding, and close gently. For guidance on responding to strong emotional reactions, refer to *Sections 3.5.5 and 3.5.6*.



Theme

- Identity
- Belonging
- Self-confidence



Duration

40 - 50



Group Size

Any

Note: Individual drawing within a group setting



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Large paper (e.g., A3 or flipchart paper).
- Colored markers, pens.

Optional: crayons or glitter for decoration.

ACTIVITY 25

Identity Maps

Identity Maps is a creative personal mapping activity that invites participants to explore who they are, not as something fixed, but as a layered, evolving landscape that includes where they come from, what they value, what they carry, and where they are going. By choosing a shape and filling it with different dimensions of their identity, participants practice personal storytelling and build self-awareness in a space that welcomes complexity, contradiction, and incompleteness. For groups where identity has been shaped or constrained by external forces, returning that definition to the participant is itself a meaningful act.



Objectives

- To invite young people to reflect on who they are, where they come from, and what makes them unique.
- To build self-awareness, confidence, and personal storytelling skills.
- To foster a sense of inclusion by acknowledging the diverse knowledge and experiences participants bring.
- To create space for multiple dimensions of identity to be expressed without judgment.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- visually articulate the various parts of their identity, including family, culture, values, and dreams.
- recognise and appreciate the diversity of identities within their peer group.
- approach their own and others' identities with greater curiosity and respect.
- practice respectful listening when engaging with peers' personal stories.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5-10 mins): Introduce the activity by framing identity not as one fixed thing but as a complex, layered map, something that includes where we come from, what we value, what we carry, and where we are going. Distribute large paper and art materials. Establish a non-judgmental space: remind participants there is no right or wrong way to do this, and no artistic skill is required.



Preparation

1. Clear the workspace to provide enough room for participants to draw comfortably.
2. Set out art supplies accessibly before participants arrive so the creative atmosphere is established from the moment they enter.
3. Think in advance about how to respond if a participant says *"I don't know what to put"* or freezes, have a gentle prompt ready such as *"What's one thing that feels important to you right now?"* or *"Is there a color that feels like you today?"*

2 Creation (20-25 mins): Ask participants to choose a shape (like a flower, tree, or river) to represent themselves and fill it with different parts of their identity (e.g., family, culture, strengths, struggles, values, dreams). Encourage them to use colors and symbols.

3 Sharing and Transition (10-15 mins): Invite volunteers to share selected parts of their maps; this can be in pairs, small groups, or with the whole group depending on the level of trust in the room. Emphasize clearly that sharing is optional and that passing is always welcome. Guide the focus toward the story and meaning behind the map, not the artistic quality. If the group is hesitant, a Gallery Walk works well here, maps are placed around the room and participants walk silently to view each other's work without speaking.

4 Debriefing (10 mins): See below

5 Closing the activity (5min): Close by inviting each participant to place one hand on their map and silently acknowledge one part of their identity they are glad they put down. A simple collective gesture or a brief shared moment of appreciation for what the group created together works well here.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What shape did you choose, and why?
2. What did you notice in yourself while listening to others share, was there anything that resonated, surprised, or stayed with you?
3. What part of your identity was the easiest to put on the map? Why?
4. What felt difficult or confusing while you were mapping your identity?
5. Did anything about your own identity surprise you while you were drawing it?
6. How does seeing the diversity of everyone's maps affect your sense of group?
7. How can knowing your values (or strengths) help you when facing a struggle?
8. In what ways can we better honor each other's identities outside of this room



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Emotional Safety:** Normalize complexity from the start, identity is not simple or perfect, and both strengths and struggles belong on the map. If a participant includes something heavy or painful, acknowledge it quietly without drawing group attention. Never interpret or comment on what someone has drawn.
- **Sharing:** Strictly enforce the rule that sharing is voluntary. If sharing happens in small groups, ensure those groups are composed of people who feel a degree of mutual trust.
- **Debriefing with younger participants:** Avoid questions that invite participants to comment on the content of others' maps. Always direct reflection inward: *"What did you notice in yourself?"* rather than *"What did you think about what others shared?"*.
- **Connect to Inclusion:** During the debrief, use the collected maps to visibly demonstrate the richness and diversity within the group, directly linking self-awareness to feeling included and accepted.
- **Cultural and Inclusive Considerations:** For many Roma participants, identity has often been defined or distorted by external systems, stereotypes, legal categories, societal labels. This activity returns that definition to the participant. Be mindful that for some, putting Roma identity on paper in a group setting may feel vulnerable. Never push for cultural disclosure. For refugee and migrant participants, identity may feel fragmented or in transition, validate that maps can include things from the past, the present, and the hoped-for future all at once.



Variations

- If the group appears tense or uncomfortable drawing "struggles," you can adjust the prompt to focus purely on "dreams, goals, and values" to keep the activity lighter and more forward-looking.
- If participants are hesitant to share out loud, you can conduct a "Gallery Walk" where maps are placed silently around the room and participants walk around to view them without speaking.
- **Low-literacy / language barriers:** Participants can use only colors, symbols, drawings, or words in any language, no writing required.



Resources

Grounded in narrative therapy and strengths-based approaches to identity exploration.

See: *White & Epston (1990), Saleebey (2006).*



Theme

- Identity
- Belonging
- Inclusion



Duration

60-80



Group Size

5-30



Emotional Intensity

High

Note: This is a psychologically demanding activity. It requires facilitator readiness assessment before use. See Appendix X and the note at the start of Tips & Considerations.

ACTIVITY 26

Voices of Identity

This reflective activity invites participants to explore identity, belonging, and cultural values through movement, dialogue, and scenario work. It creates space for personal expression while strengthening empathy and mutual understanding across differences. By moving from personal reflection to collective meaning-making, it builds a natural bridge between self-awareness and understanding others.

Objectives

- To create space for participants to explore their personal and cultural values.
- To strengthen empathy and mutual understanding across different backgrounds and experiences.
- To support the connection between identity, inclusion, and mental wellbeing.
- To build a sense of shared humanity while honoring individual and cultural differences.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- reflect on personal and cultural values that shape their identity.
- develop empathy toward experiences of migration, discrimination, and belonging.
- recognise connections between identity, inclusion, and mental wellbeing.
- approach differences with greater curiosity, respect, and openness.



Preparation

1. Prepare value cards in advance, cards with statements representing diverse beliefs and lived priorities. Examples:
 - Family is everything to me.
 - I wish people respected my culture more.
 - I don't feel safe being myself in public.
 - Mental health is not talked about in my community.
 - I feel strong when I share my story.
 - I carry my culture everywhere I go.
 - Sometimes I don't know where I belong.
 - My language is part of who I am.



Materials

- Value cards (prepared in advance; see *Preparation*)
- Scenario cards (prepared in advance; see *Preparation*)
- Flipchart and markers

Optional: quiet corner setup (a chair slightly away from the main space with a calming object or grounding card)

Aim for 20–25 cards covering a wide range of experiences. Print or write them clearly and place them around the room before participants arrive, spread them out so participants have to physically move between them.

2. Prepare scenario cards for Phase 3, one set of 4–5 cards per small group. Different groups can receive different scenarios to broaden the collective discussion. Examples are provided in the *Step-by-step Instructions*.
3. Set up a welcoming space. Consider a quiet corner, a chair slightly set apart with a simple grounding card or calming object, for any participant who needs a moment during the activity.
4. Emotionally prepare yourself before facilitating this activity, it touches identity, discrimination, cultural loss, and belonging, and some participants may respond strongly. Have a grounding exercise ready and know your own limits. A grounding moment at the close is not optional, do not end the session without one. Simple options include slow breathing, the butterfly hug technique, or 5-4-3-2-1 sensory grounding (see *Section 3.5.6*). Give participants time to return to the present moment before leaving the space.
5. Given the high emotional intensity, consider having a co-facilitator present if possible.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Check-in and Introduction (5 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the activity briefly, this is a space to explore values, identity, and what belonging means to each of us. Begin with a simple check-in: invite participants to share one word describing how they feel today, or respond to a gentle opening question such as “*What does belonging mean to you?*” Keep this light and voluntary, it is a warm-up, not a deep reflection.

2 Value Card Movement (30 mins): Explain that value cards are placed around the room and invite participants to walk around and stand next to a card they relate to. They can move between cards if more than one feels right.

Once participants have settled, invite sharing:

- Why did you choose this card?
- Is this something you talk about at home or with friends?
- How does it feel to live by this value in your community?

Transition to Phase 3: Before splitting into groups, take a moment to bridge the two phases explicitly. You might say something like: “*You’ve just spent time with your own values and what you carry. Now we are going to look at some situations that other young people face, and because you’ve just been reflecting on your own experience, you might find you can step into these stories with more understanding than you expected.*”

3 Scenario Work (30 mins): Split participants into small groups of 3–5. Give each group 4–5 scenario cards based on real-life challenges. Examples:

- A Roma teen hides their identity at school to avoid bullying
- A young refugee is struggling with homesickness and anxiety
- A migrant youth is pressured to give up their native language
- Someone feels proud of their culture but doesn't know how to share it

For each scenario, invite the group to discuss:

- How might this person feel emotionally?
- What strengths from their culture or community could help them?
- What kind of support might feel meaningful to this person?

4 Debriefing (20min): See below.

5 Closing the activity (5min): Close with a brief grounding moment. Invite each participant to share one word that stayed with them from today, something they heard, felt, or noticed.



Discussion & Debriefing

6. What did you notice while choosing or moving between the value cards?
7. What stood out to you in the scenario discussions?
8. What did the scenario work reveal about what it feels like to be in someone else's situation?
9. How did it feel to talk about identity and belonging today?
10. Was anything emotionally challenging or surprising?
11. What did this activity teach us about identity and inclusion?
12. How can cultural disconnection affect a person's sense of wellbeing?
13. What is one thing you could do to make someone feel more seen and valued?



Resources

This activity is adapted from the “Who Are I?” activity in the *Compass Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People*, 2012 edition, page 340.

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** It should only be facilitated with groups that have already established strong trust and have spent significant time together. A co-facilitator is strongly recommended. Facilitators should be familiar with trauma-informed practice and confident using grounding techniques before running this activity. Do not use it with a new group or as a standalone session without prior relationship-building. If you are unsure whether you, or your group, are ready, choose a lighter activity first.
- **Emotional Safety:** This activity touches identity, discrimination, cultural loss, and belonging, all of which can carry real emotional weight. Normalize this from the start: it is okay to feel moved, to take a break, or to step into the quiet corner. Remind participants throughout that sharing is always optional. If a participant becomes visibly distressed, acknowledge their feelings quietly and privately without drawing group attention.

During scenario work, watch carefully for participants who become quiet, withdraw, or show signs of distress, personal reactions to scenarios can be subtle and easy to miss in a group setting. If you notice this, check in privately during a break rather than drawing attention in the group.

- **Facilitator Lens:** Before facilitating this activity, ask yourself: am I prepared for the moment when a scenario stops being a scenario? For some participants, “a Roma teen who hides their identity at school” or “a young refugee struggling with homesickness” is not a fictional character to empathise with, it is their own experience, handed back to them in the third person. The scenario format offers protective distance, which is valuable. But it also means that strong reactions during *Phase 3* may not look like distress, they may look like unusual quietness, over-investment in the discussion, or sudden withdrawal. Watch for these carefully, and check in privately rather than publicly if you notice them.
- **Sensitive themes:** Some value cards and scenarios may resonate very directly with participants’ own lived experiences, particularly for Roma youth who may have experienced identity-based discrimination, or for refugees navigating cultural loss. Never push for personal disclosure and avoid drawing public connections between a participant and a scenario.

Never close this activity without a grounding moment. The emotional weight of the scenario work and value card phase requires a deliberate transition back to the present before participants leave the room.
- **Timing of the activity:** This activity should only be facilitated with groups that have already established a foundation of trust. It is not suitable as an opening activity with a new group. Consider using activities from *Sections 5.1* and *5.2* first to build connection and psychological safety before introducing this one.
- **Group dynamics:** In *Phase 2*, some participants may gravitate toward the same card, allow this, it can become a moment of unexpected connection. In *Phase 3*, monitor groups to ensure quieter participants are not steamrolled. If a group finishes their scenarios quickly, invite them to go deeper on one rather than rushing through all of them.

Variations

- **Lower intensity:** Remove value cards that touch on discrimination or mental health and focus on values around family, culture, dreams, and community. This creates a gentler entry point for groups with lower trust.
- **One-to-one adaptation:** Facilitator and participant explore the value cards together, followed by one scenario discussed as a conversation rather than a group task.



Theme

- Identity
- Belonging
- Emotional Expression
- Self-awareness



Duration

55–65



Group Size

5–200

Note: individual work within a group setting; also works as a one-to-one activity



Emotional Intensity

High

Note: This is a psychologically demanding activity. It requires facilitator readiness assessment before use. See Appendix X and the note at the start of Tips & Considerations.

ACTIVITY 27

The Masks We Wear

The Masks We Wear is a reflective creative activity that invites participants to explore the gap between what they show the world and what they carry inside. Using the metaphor of a mask, something every human wears in different contexts, participants create a personal visual representation of their outer and inner worlds. The activity opens space for reflection on authenticity, emotional safety, and the conditions under which we feel free to be ourselves. It works both as an individual reflection tool and as a powerful group experience when trust has been established.



Objectives

- To invite participants to explore the difference between how they present themselves to the world and what they experience internally.
- To support reflection on identity, authenticity, and emotional safety.
- To create space for participants to recognize when and where they feel safe to be themselves.
- To strengthen self-awareness and self-compassion through creative expression.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- reflect on the layers of their identity, what they show, what they protect, and what they carry privately.
- recognize the social and emotional reasons behind the masks people wear.
- develop greater self-compassion toward the parts of themselves they find difficult to show.
- begin to identify the conditions, people, places, moments, that make authenticity feel possible.



Preparation

1. The emotional intensity of this activity depends significantly on how it is facilitated and which variation is chosen. The full two-sided version sits at **High** intensity. The lighter variation, outside only, sits at **Medium**. Facilitators should select the version that matches their group's level of trust and readiness.
2. Prepare or print mask templates in advance, one per participant. A simple face outline is enough. If templates are not available, participants can draw their own outline.



Materials

- Paper mask templates, one per participant (a simple face outline printed on A4 paper works well)
- Alternatively: blank A4 or A3 paper where participants draw their own mask outline
- Colored pencils, markers, pens

Optional:

- Magazines, scissors, glue for a collage version
- Calm background music during the creation phase

3. Set up tables with materials accessible before participants arrive.
4. Think carefully about the sharing phase, this activity can surface significant personal material. Plan how you will hold space for that without pushing for disclosure. Sharing must be genuinely optional from the very start.
5. Emotionally prepare yourself: the inside of the mask may reveal things participants rarely name. Your calm, non-reactive presence is the most important thing you can offer.
6. Prepare a grounding exercise to use after the activity, this is not optional for this emotional intensity level. See [Section 5.9 Closing Rituals](#) and the grounding techniques in [Section 3.4.4](#).



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5–7 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the activity. Explain that we all wear masks, not just in theatre or at celebrations, but every day. We show different faces in different contexts: at school, at home, with strangers, with close friends. Some of what we show is genuine. Some are protective. Some are simply what feels comfortable to share in a given moment.

Explain the task: participants are going to create their own mask. The outside represents what others typically see, the roles they play, the expressions they show, the way they present themselves. The inside represents what they carry privately, the emotions, thoughts, fears, or parts of themselves that don't always get to come forward.

Remind participants clearly: *there is no right or wrong version of this mask. It belongs entirely to them. Sharing is always optional.*

2 Creation (20–25 mins): Invite participants to begin. They can use words, colors, symbols, drawings, or a combination, whatever feels most natural. Encourage them to work on both sides without rushing either one.

3 Reflection and Optional Sharing (10–15 mins): Invite participants to hold their mask and look at both sides quietly before any sharing begins. Allow a moment of silence.

Then invite reflection with these questions, offered gently, not as a checklist:

- What felt easy to put on the outside?
- What was harder to put on the inside, and why?
- When do you feel safe enough to let the inside show?

Sharing with the whole group is optional. You might instead invite participants to share with one trusted person, or simply keep their mask private.

4 Debriefing (10–15 mins): See below.

5 Closing: a grounding moment is essential after this activity. See [Section 5.9 Closing Rituals](#). Do not end without it.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice while creating your mask, what came easily and what took more time?
2. How did it feel to think about what goes on the outside versus the inside?
3. Was there anything that surprised you about what you put on either side?
4. Why do you think people wear masks, what do they protect us from?
5. What does it tell us about safety and trust when we feel able to show more of the inside?
6. What conditions, in a group, in a relationship, in a space, make it easier to be yourself?
7. What is one small thing that could make this group a place where more of the inside feels safe to show?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** It should only be facilitated with groups that have already established strong trust and have spent significant time together. A co-facilitator is strongly recommended. Facilitators should be familiar with trauma-informed practice and confident using grounding techniques before running this activity. Do not use it with a new group or as a standalone session without prior relationship-building. If you are unsure whether you, or your group, are ready, choose a lighter activity first.
- **Emotional Safety:** This is one of the higher-intensity activities in the handbook. Some participants may find that the inside of the mask surfaces emotions or self-perceptions they rarely name, grief, shame, longing, fear. Hold this with care and without rushing. Never ask participants to elaborate beyond what they have offered freely. If a participant becomes distressed, refer to the guidance in *Section 3.4.4*.
- **Group Readiness:** Do not use this activity with a group that has just met. It requires a foundation of trust and safety. At minimum, participants should have spent at least one or two sessions together before this activity is introduced.
- **Facilitator Lens:** Before facilitating this activity, ask yourself: do I understand the difference between the masks people choose and the masks people are forced to wear? The introduction frames mask-wearing as universal, which is true and valuable. But for some participants in this group, the mask is not a choice — it is a response to real threat. Hiding identity, language, or background to avoid discrimination or danger is not the same as presenting differently in different social contexts. If this distinction surfaces during reflection or sharing, do not smooth it over in the name of universality. A participant who names that their mask is not optional is telling you something important about their reality. Hold that honestly, without rushing toward the reassurance that one day they won't need it.
- **The Inside Stays Private:** Make it clear from the introduction that participants decide what happens to their mask. They can keep it face down, fold it, take it home, or share only selected parts. The inside of the mask is theirs — it should never be displayed, passed around, or read by others without explicit invitation.
- **Cross-reference:** This activity connects naturally to *Emotions Mask* in *Section 4.2*, which is a lighter, more accessible entry point using the same metaphor. Facilitators running multi-day programs might use *Emotions Mask* early and *The Masks We Wear* later when trust is more established.

Variations

- **Lighter version:** Ask participants to create only the outside of the mask, what they show the world. This removes the vulnerability of the inside while still generating meaningful reflection on identity and self-presentation.
- **Written version:** For participants who prefer words, they write a list for each side rather than creating a visual mask.
- **Extended version:** After the activity, participants write a short letter from their inside to their outside, or vice versa. Connects naturally to *Letters to Mariam* in Section 4.2.

Resources

Grounded in psychodrama and narrative therapy approaches to identity exploration.

See: Moreno (1953), White & Epston (1990).



Theme

- Identity
- Belonging
- Inclusion
- Self-awareness



Duration

60–70



Group Size

60–70



Emotional Intensity

Medium to High

Note: This activity touches emotionally sensitive territory. We advise completing the Facilitator Readiness Check (Appendix X) before use.

ACTIVITY 28

Parts of Me

Parts of Me is a movement-based reflective activity that invites participants to explore different dimensions of their identity and how those dimensions connect to their sense of belonging. By physically moving toward words placed around the room, participants engage with identity not as an abstract concept but as something felt and embodied. The activity moves in two rounds, the first exploring identity itself, the second connecting those same identity dimensions to experiences of belonging and exclusion. The same words stay on the walls throughout, allowing the second round to go deeper more naturally.



Objectives

- To invite participants to explore different dimensions of their identity in a supported, movement-based format.
- To support reflection on which parts of identity feel strong, vulnerable, or misunderstood.
- To connect identity to belonging, exploring how different parts of ourselves have been welcomed or excluded by the world around us.
- To build empathy and mutual understanding through shared reflection on identity and belonging.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify and reflect on multiple dimensions of their own identity with greater awareness and self-compassion.
- recognize that identity is complex, layered, and shaped by both inner experience and social context.
- begin to explore the connection between specific aspects of identity and experiences of belonging or exclusion.
- develop greater empathy toward others whose identity dimensions have shaped their experiences differently.



Preparation

1. Hang word cards around the room before participants arrive, spread them out enough that participants have to physically move between them and small clusters can form at each one without crowding.
2. Read through all questions in advance and decide which ones to use, you do not need to ask all of them. Choose the ones most relevant to your group.



Materials

1. 10–12 large word cards to hang around the room, one word per card, clearly written or printed:
 - Nationality
 - Language
 - Gender
 - Religion
 - Age
 - Ethnicity
 - Social class
 - Ability
 - Political opinion
 - Beliefs and values
 - Achievements
 - Career/future plans
2. Enough open space for participants to move freely between the word cards

Optional: blank cards and markers so participants can add identity dimensions not represented

3. Prepare the bridging statement between Round 1 and Round 2, this transition moment is important. See *Step-by-step Instructions*.
4. Think carefully about the emotional intensity of this activity. Some questions, particularly about what troubles participants most or what has made them feel they don't belong, can surface significant personal material. Have a grounding exercise ready and know your referral pathway.
5. This activity works best when the group already has some initial trust. It can follow an icebreaker or a lighter activity but should not be the very first thing a new group does together.



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 Introduction (5 mins):** Welcome participants and introduce the activity. Explain that the words around the room represent different dimensions of identity; different parts of who we are. There are no right or wrong answers. Participants move to whichever word responds to the question being asked, and if more than one feels right, they can stand between two words or choose the one that feels most true right now.

Emphasize that this is a personal and private reflection first, participants are not required to explain their choice unless they want to. Sharing is always optional.

- 2 Round 1 - Identity (25–30 mins):** Read tasks one at a time, slowly. After each question, give participants time to move and settle before inviting brief voluntary sharing. Not every task needs a sharing round, use your judgment based on the group's energy.

Tasks:

- Move to the part of your identity you feel strongest about — the part that gives you confidence or pride.
- Move to the part of your identity you feel least sure about — the part that feels fragile or uncertain.
- Move to the part of your identity you think others notice first about you.
- Move to the part of your identity that troubles you most.
- Move to the part of your identity that changes the most — the part that feels most in motion.
- Move to the part of your identity you think is most often misunderstood by others.

After the final question, invite participants to stand still for a moment and notice where they are, what that says about them right now.

Facilitator's role: Move around the room yourself between questions. Keep the energy calm and unhurried. If a question lands heavily on some participants, acknowledge it gently: "Some of these questions are harder than others — that's completely okay."

3 Transition (3–5 mins): Bring participants back to the center of the room briefly before Round 2. This transition moment is important; it signals that the activity is deepening.

Say something like: *“You’ve just spent time with different parts of your identity, who you are, what feels strong, what feels uncertain, what others see. Now I want to invite you to think about how these same parts of yourself have been received by the world around you. The same words are still on the walls. This time we’re going to think about belonging.”*

4 Round 2 — Belonging (15–20 mins):

Tasks:

- Move to the part of your identity that has most often made you feel like you don’t belong somewhere.
- Move to the part of your identity that has helped you find your people — the ones who really get you.
- Move to the part of your identity where you have felt the most pressure to hide or change in order to fit in.
- Move to the part that connects you to your community or roots.
- Move to the part of your identity that you have had to fight hardest to have accepted.

After the final question, allow a moment of quiet. Invite participants to look around the room and notice where others are standing, without comment.

5 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

6 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*. A grounding moment is important after this activity given the emotional depth of Round 2.

Discussion & Debriefing

6. What did you notice while moving between the words, was anything surprising about where you ended up?
7. Were there questions where it felt difficult to choose just one word, what made it hard?
8. How did it feel to move through the identity round, and then the belonging round? Did the experience shift between the two?
9. Was there a question that stayed with you, one that felt particularly close or tender?
10. What does it tell us that the same part of someone’s identity can be both a source of strength and a reason for exclusion?
11. What does it mean to have to fight for a part of yourself to be accepted, what does that cost?
12. What would it look like for a space to genuinely welcome all the words on these walls, all the dimensions of who people are?
13. Is there one part of your identity that you would like to bring more fully into this group, something you haven’t fully shown yet?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** This activity works best with groups that have some existing trust and familiarity. Facilitators should feel comfortable holding space for strong emotions and have at least one grounding technique ready. A co-facilitator is advisable if available. If the group is new or trust has not yet been established, consider using a lighter activity first or running this later in the program.
- **Emotional Safety:** Round 2 questions, particularly “*which part has made you feel you don’t belong,*” “*which part you felt pressure to hide,*” and “*which part you have had to fight hardest to have accepted*”, can surface real and painful experiences. Hold these moments carefully. Never push for elaboration and always validate whatever participants share or choose not to share. If a participant becomes visibly distressed, refer to *Section 3.4.4*.
- **The Transition Between Rounds:** The bridging moment between *Round 1* and *Round 2* is one of the most important facilitation moments in the activity. Take your time with it. Allow participants to settle before introducing the belonging frame. The shift from “who I am” to “how I have been received” is significant and deserves to be marked clearly.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Some identity dimensions may carry very different weight across cultural contexts, religion, gender, and social class may be more or less central depending on background. Never assume which words will land most heavily and always follow the group’s lead.



Variations

Pair reflection: After each round, participants briefly share their choices with one trusted partner before any whole-group sharing. Builds trust gradually and makes the whole-group debrief richer.



Resources

Adapted from “*Diritti LGBTQIA+, diritti umani. Guida per docenti*”
- Amnesty International, 2025



Theme

- Identity
- Belonging
- Resilience
- Wellbeing



Duration

75–90



Group Size

10–30

Note: works best with larger groups where the collective tree becomes genuinely rich



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium

ACTIVITY 29

The Living Tree

The Living Tree is a collective art and reflection activity that invites participants to identify their inner and outer resources and contribute them to a shared tree created together. The tree becomes a visible, living symbol of both individual resilience and collective belonging, making tangible something that often remains invisible: that even in difficult circumstances, people carry resources, and that together those resources are more than the sum of their parts. It works equally well as a belonging activity and a resilience activity.

Objectives

- To help participants identify and name their own inner and outer resources.
- To create a shared experience of collective belonging through collaborative art.
- To make visible the resources that connect participants to each other and to their communities.
- To strengthen a sense of collective resilience and mutual support within the group.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify and articulate their own inner and outer resources with greater awareness.
- recognize that resources, however different in form, are shared across the group.
- experience a sense of belonging through contributing to something collective.
- approach their own resilience and wellbeing from a strengths-based perspective.



Preparation

1. Prepare the large canvas or paper surface before participants arrive, lay it on a large table or on the floor with art supplies accessible around it.
2. Prepare your flipchart or slides with the inner and outer resource categories, you will use these during the plenary input phase. See the Inner and Outer Resources handout in the Resources section.



Materials

- One very large sheet of paper or canvas, large enough for the whole group to draw on simultaneously (flipchart sheets taped together work well)
- Markers, colored pencils, paints, and brushes
- Sticky notes in two colors, one color for inner resources, one for outer resources
- Pens for writing on sticky notes
- Inner and Outer Resources facilitator guidance (See Appendix 17)

Optional: prepared flipchart or slides with the inner/outer resource categories for the plenary input

3. Prepare sticky notes in two clearly distinct colors; designate one color for inner resources and one for outer resources before the session.
4. Think about how you will introduce the concepts in the plenary; keep it conversational and participatory rather than a lecture. Start with questions to the group before giving any input.
5. Emotionally prepare yourself: some participants may find it difficult to identify resources; particularly those experiencing acute hardship or loss. Have gentle prompts ready and be prepared to hold that with care.



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 Plenary Introduction (10–15 mins):** Begin with open questions to the group, do not give definitions yet:
 - What is a resource? What comes to mind when you hear that word?
 - Can you think of something you draw on when life gets difficult?
 - What is the difference between something inside you and something outside you that helps?

Let the group explore the concepts first through their own words. Then offer the facilitator input, present the inner and outer resource categories using the flipchart or handout. Keep this input brief and engaging, 5–7 minutes maximum. The goal is to give participants a framework, not a lecture.

- 2 Individual Reflection (10 mins):** Distribute sticky notes, two colors, one for inner resources and one for outer. Ask participants to take a few quiet minutes to think about their own resources and write them on the sticky notes; one resource per note. Encourage them to think broadly and personally. Remind them that resources do not have to be currently accessible, a memory, a tradition, a relationship that once existed all count.

If participants seem stuck, offer gentle prompts:

- Is there something small that reliably makes you feel better?
- Is there a person, place, or memory that gives you strength?
- Is there something inside you, a quality, a belief, a practice, that helps you get through difficult moments?

- 3 Collective Tree Drawing (40–45 mins):** Invite participants to gather around the large canvas. Explain that together they are going to draw one living tree, with deep roots and wide branches. The roots represent inner resources, what grounds us from within. The branches represent outer resources, what connects us to the world around us.

Invite participants to begin drawing, collaboratively, simultaneously, without assigned roles. Some will draw the trunk, some the roots, some the branches, some will add leaves, animals, sky, ground. There are no wrong contributions. Play soft background music.

4 Placing Resources on the Tree (5 mins): Once the tree is complete, or has reached a point where it feels alive, invite participants to place their sticky notes on the tree:

- Inner resources (one color) go on the roots
- Outer resources (the other color) go on the branches

As they place their notes, invite participants to briefly share what they wrote if they wish, but keep this light and optional. The visual result of all the sticky notes on the tree is itself a powerful moment.

5 Collective Appreciation (2-3 mins): Invite everyone to step back and look at the tree together. Allow a moment of silence to take it in.

You might say: *“Look at what we just made together. Every root and every branch on this tree belongs to someone in this room. None of us has all of these, but together we have all of them.”*

6 Debriefing (15 mins): See below

7 Closing: See *Section 5.9 Closing Rituals*. The tree itself can serve as a closing ritual, it can remain displayed throughout the day/program as a visible reminder of the group’s collective resources and belonging.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice while drawing the tree together, what happened in the group?
2. What did you notice when you looked at all the sticky notes on the tree?
3. How did it feel to contribute to something collective, to add your piece to a shared creation?
4. Were there any resources on the tree that surprised you, either your own or someone else’s?
5. What does it tell us that so many of our resources are shared that others draw on similar things?
6. What does the tree represent about this group, about what we carry individually and what we build together?
7. Is there a resource on the tree that you would like to develop or access more in your own life?
8. How might you use this tree, or this awareness of your resources, in a difficult moment this week?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **When Participants Struggle to Identify Resources:** For young people experiencing acute hardship, loss, or displacement, being asked to identify resources can feel alienating or even painful, as if they are being asked to be grateful for what they have when what they have feels insufficient. Hold this with care. Validate that resources look different for everyone, that a small resource is as real as a large one, and that a resource does not have to be currently accessible to be worth naming. A memory of belonging counts. A cultural practice carried from home counts. The fact that they are here, in this room, today counts.
- **The Drawing Phase:** The collective drawing phase can feel chaotic at first, that is part of it. Resist the urge to organize or direct. The organic, slightly messy quality of a collectively drawn tree is part of what makes it feel alive and genuinely shared. Trust the group.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Resources are culturally shaped, prayer, community rituals, specific foods, languages, and spiritual practices may all appear on the sticky notes. Welcome all of these explicitly and treat no resource as more valid or sophisticated than another.



Variations

- **Smaller groups:** Each participant draws their own smaller tree and then the trees are placed together to create a forest, a collective display of individual resources.
- **Resilience focus:** Emphasize the roots, inner resources, and use the activity as a resilience building exercise. Works well in Section 5.5 as an alternative or complementary activity.



Resources

Grounded in strengths-based and resilience approaches.
See: Grotberg (1995), Saleebey (2006).



Theme

- Inclusion
- Critical Thinking
- Anti-discrimination
- Intercultural Learning



Duration

60–75



Group Size

10–30



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium

ACTIVITY 30

Breaking The Myth Game

Breaking the Myth Game is a structured critical thinking activity that challenges participants to examine common myths and stereotypes about Roma, migrants, and refugees, and to actively rewrite them. By moving through a spectrum line, discussing statements in small groups, and collectively transforming myths into more accurate and inclusive narratives, participants develop the analytical skills and confidence to challenge discriminatory thinking in their own lives and communities.

Objectives

- To help participants distinguish between stereotypes, myths, and facts about Roma, migrants, and refugees.
- To develop critical thinking skills when encountering discriminatory narratives.
- To practice rewriting harmful myths into more accurate and humanizing statements.
- To build confidence in challenging discrimination constructively in everyday situations.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- distinguish between stereotypes, myths, and facts in real-world narratives.
- develop critical thinking skills when encountering discriminatory language or assumptions.
- recognize the emotional impact of stereotypes on the people they target.
- strengthen confidence in addressing discrimination respectfully and constructively.



Materials

- A long tape or rope on the floor marking a spectrum line from “Agree” to “Disagree”
- Printed statement cards, one set per small group for Phase 2 (different statements per group)
- Flipchart and markers for the collective rewriting phase

Optional:

- Printed statement cards for Phase 1 spectrum activity
- Printed Statement Design Guide, (see Appendix 18) for principles, example statements, and guidance on designing locally relevant statements



Preparation

1. Prepare two sets of statements in advance using locally relevant myths and facts about Roma, migrants, and refugees, one set for **Phase 1 (spectrum line)** and a different set for **Phase 2 (small group analysis)**. See the *Statement Design Guide* in the *Appendices* for principles, examples, and guidance on designing statements safely for this target group.
2. **Phase 1 statements (5–6)**: accessible, immediately recognizable, debatable enough to generate different positions across the group, safe enough to state aloud in a full group setting.
3. **Phase 2 statements (4–5 per group, different across groups)**: more nuanced and complex, varied so that each group brings different material to the plenary discussion.
4. Lay the tape spectrum line on the floor before participants arrive.
5. **Emotionally prepare yourself**: some statements may resonate personally with participants who have lived with these stereotypes. Be ready to hold that carefully.



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 **Spectrum Line (15 mins)**: Invite participants to stand at one end of the room. Explain the spectrum line, one end is “Agree,” the other is “Disagree,” and participants can position themselves anywhere along it. There are no right or wrong positions, the goal is honest reflection and discussion.

Read your Phase 1 statements one at a time. After each statement, participants move to their position on the line. Invite 2–3 volunteers to briefly explain their position. Keep this phase moving, the goal is to surface initial reactions, not to resolve every statement deeply.

- 2 **Small Group Analysis (20 mins)**: Divide participants into small groups of 3–4. Give each group a different set of 4–5 statements; these are different from the Phase 1 statements so participants encounter new material. Ask groups to discuss each statement and decide:

- Is this a myth or a fact, and why?
- What is the impact of this statement on the people it describes?
- Where does this myth come from, what does it reveal about the society that produced it?

Groups work simultaneously on different statements, this means the plenary will be richer as each group brings material the others haven’t discussed yet.

3 Collective Rewriting (15 mins): Bring the whole group together. Each group shares one myth from their set. Together as a whole group, rewrite the myth statement so that it:

- Reflects reality more accurately
- Humanizes rather than stereotypes
- Acknowledges systemic factors rather than individual characteristics

Write the rewrites on the flipchart. By the end of this phase the group has collectively produced a set of more accurate, humanizing counter-narratives, and crucially, has encountered a much wider range of myths than any one group could have discussed alone.

4 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

5 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. Which statement generated the strongest reaction, in yourself or in the group?
2. What did you notice about where people positioned themselves on the spectrum line?
3. How did it feel to hear some of these statements, even in a critical context?
4. What surprised you during the rewriting phase, was it easier or harder than expected?
5. Why do stereotypes and myths persist even when people know they are harmful?
6. What does the rewriting exercise tell us about the power of language in inclusion and exclusion?
7. What tools do you now have to challenge a myth or stereotype when you encounter it in real life?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Statement Design:** The entire activity depends on the quality and safety of the statements. Both Phase 1 and Phase 2 statements must be carefully designed, see the *Statement Design Guide* in the *Appendices* for detailed principles and examples.

Remember: Phase 1 statements are read aloud to the full group and need to be accessible and safe for that context. Phase 2 statements go to small groups for deeper analysis and can be more nuanced and complex.

- **Emotional Safety:** Some participants may find statements personally activating, particularly those who have heard these myths directed at them or their families. Watch for signs of distress and acknowledge reactions warmly. The activity is designed to challenge myths, not to make participants relive them. If a statement triggers strong emotion, slow down, acknowledge it, and adjust the pace. Refer to Section 3.4.4 if needed.
- **The Rewriting Phase:** This is the most empowering part of the activity. Participants are not just critiquing harmful narratives, they are actively creating better ones. This shift from passive analysis to active authorship is important. Celebrate the rewrites genuinely, they represent real collective work.

Variations

- **Shorter version:** Run only *Phase 1* with 5–6 carefully chosen statements and a brief debrief. 30–35 minutes. Works well as a session opener or standalone awareness-raising activity.
- **Extended rewriting:** After the group rewriting phase, each small group creates a short campaign message, a poster slogan, a social media post, or a short script, that challenges the myth publicly. Connects naturally to *Section 5.7 Agency, Participation and Advocacy*

Resources

Grounded in critical pedagogy and anti-discrimination education approaches.

See: Freire (1970)

The spectrum line methodology is adapted from “Where Do You Stand?” See: Council of Europe (2012). *Compass: A Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People*.



Theme

- Inclusion
- Identity
- Belonging
- Wellbeing



Duration

90



Group Size

10–25



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium

ACTIVITY 31

The Light Within You

The Light Within You is a symbolic, arts-based activity that invites participants to explore the universal human qualities they carry inside, dignity, compassion, strength, and worth, and to reflect on what covers or diminishes that inner light in contexts of exclusion and discrimination. Using the metaphor of a lamp whose light is gradually revealed as reflection deepens, participants create a personal symbolic object representing their inner light and share it in a collective closing ritual. The activity approaches inclusion from the inside out, beginning with the recognition that every person carries the same fundamental light, regardless of background, status, or experience.

Objectives

- To support participants in recognizing their own inner qualities, dignity, compassion, strength, and worth, as universal human qualities.
- To raise awareness of how discrimination and exclusion cover or diminish a person's sense of inner light.
- To strengthen self-confidence and a sense of shared humanity through creative expression.
- To create a collective experience of inclusion through a shared closing ritual.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- recognize and name inner qualities they carry, regardless of external circumstances or how others have defined them.
- reflect on the emotional impact of exclusion and discrimination on their sense of self-worth.
- experience a sense of shared humanity through the recognition that every person carries the same inner light.
- create a personal symbolic object that serves as a tangible reminder of their inner resources and worth.



Materials

- A symbolic lamp or light source; a candle, a lantern, or any light source that can be covered and uncovered
- Dark fabric or paper to cover the lamp
- Small sticky notes or paper strips and pens
- Paper cups, small jars, or paper lanterns, one per participant
- Markers, colored pencils, paint, stickers, decorative materials

Optional:

- LED tea lights, one per participant for the closing ritual
- Calm background music during the creative phase



Preparation

1. Set up the symbolic lamp in the center of the room before participants arrive, covered with dark fabric. This visual is the anchor of the whole activity and should be immediately visible when participants enter.
2. Prepare one paper cup, small jar, or paper lantern per participant along with decorative materials.
3. If using LED tea lights for the closing ritual, have one per participant ready to distribute in Phase 3.
4. Think carefully about the reflection phase, asking participants to name what covers their light can surface experiences of discrimination, shame, or loss. Frame this carefully and keep sharing voluntary throughout.
5. Emotionally prepare yourself: some participants may connect deeply with the metaphor in unexpected ways. Your calm, warm presence is the most important facilitation tool in this activity.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction and the Lamp Metaphor (15–20 mins):

Welcome participants and draw their attention to the covered lamp in the center of the room. Ask simply: *“What do you think is under this cover?”*

After a brief moment of responses, introduce the metaphor: *“Under this cover is a light. And I want to suggest that every person in this room carries something similar, an inner light. Not a metaphor for being special or perfect, but something more fundamental: the human qualities that are in all of us. Dignity. Compassion. The capacity to love and be loved. The desire to belong. These are not things some people have and others don’t. They are universal.”*

Then ask: *“If this light is in all of us, what covers it? What makes it harder to feel or show?”*

Invite responses from the group, write them on sticky notes and place them on the fabric covering the lamp. Responses might include: discrimination, shame, fear, loneliness, being told you don’t belong, having your identity denied, exhaustion, not feeling seen. Accept all responses without judgment.

As responses accumulate on the cloth, acknowledge them: *“These are real. These are things that cover the light, not just for some of us, but for all of us in different ways and at different times.”*

2 Individual Reflection (5–7 mins):

Invite participants to sit quietly for a moment and reflect privately:

- “What covers your light most often?”
- “What helps your light shine more brightly?”

This reflection is entirely private, no sharing required. Soft background music helps create a contemplative atmosphere.

3 Creating the Personal Lamp (35–40 mins): Distribute paper cups, jars, or paper lanterns and decorative materials. Invite participants to create their own personal lamp, decorating it with colors, symbols, words, or images that represent their inner light. What does their light look like? What colors does it carry? What symbols represent what is most alive in them?

Remind participants throughout: *the process matters more than the product. There is no correct way to make a lamp. Artistic skill is irrelevant.*

4 The Reveal and Collective Ritual (10 mins): When most participants have finished their lamps, invite everyone to gather in a circle with their creation.

Slowly and without words, remove the dark fabric from the central lamp, revealing the light underneath. Allow a moment of silence.

Then invite participants to place their own lamp next to the central light, or if using LED tea lights, to place one inside their creation and turn it on.

As the lamps are placed together, say simply: *“Every light here is different. Every lamp was made by a different person, carrying different experiences, coming from different places. And yet the light inside each one is the same.”*

Allow a moment of collective appreciation before moving into the debrief.

5 Debriefing (15–20 mins): See below.

6 Closing: The lamps themselves can serve as a closing ritual, participants take their lamp home as a reminder of their inner light and the community they built together.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice during the activity, while creating your lamp or watching the collective display come together?
2. What did you put on your lamp, and what made you choose those colors or symbols?
3. How did it feel when the central lamp was uncovered, what did that moment bring up for you?
4. What does it mean to you that every lamp is different but every light is the same?
5. What covers your light most often in everyday life, and what helps it shine?
6. What would it mean for a community, a school, or a youth group to genuinely protect everyone's light, to create conditions where no one's light gets covered?
7. Is there something from today, a symbol, a color, a moment, that you want to carry with you?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **The Central Lamp:** The lamp in the center of the room does significant work before the activity even begins. When participants arrive and see it covered, curiosity is already activated. Choose a lamp or light source that feels warm and meaningful, a candle, a lantern, a simple LED light. The moment of uncovering should feel unhurried and slightly ceremonial.
- **The Sticky Notes on the Cloth:** This is the most emotionally significant moment in Phase 1. As participants name what covers the light, discrimination, shame, fear, exclusion, and place those notes on the cloth, they are collectively naming the reality of exclusion without anyone having to share personal stories. The cloth becomes a shared document of what this group knows about what covers human dignity. Hold this moment with care.
- **The Collective Display:** The moment when all lamps are placed together is the emotional peak of the activity. Do not rush it. Allow silence. Let participants look at what the group created together before moving into the debrief.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Light as a metaphor for inner worth and dignity appears across cultures and spiritual traditions, from candles in religious practice to lanterns in celebration. This gives the metaphor broad resonance. However be sensitive to participants for whom light symbolism carries specific religious meaning, frame the metaphor clearly as symbolic and universal rather than linked to any specific tradition.

Variations

Full day version: The original conception of this activity unfolds over a full day (5–7 hours) with extended creative work, outdoor activities, and deeper immersion. For programs with sufficient time, this extended version allows for significantly richer creative expression and reflection. The 90-minute version preserves the core metaphor and ritual while condensing the creative phase.

Resources

Grounded in symbolic and arts-based approaches to human dignity and inclusion. Originally developed as a multi-day workshop by the project partners within the project. The 90-minute version was adapted for this handbook.



5.6 Resilience

Resilience, in its simplest terms, refers to the ability to recover and adapt in the face of adversity and challenge. Importantly, it is not a fixed trait, something people either have or lack. It is a dynamic, evolving process that can be nurtured and supported, especially when the right conditions and relationships are present.

In youth work with Roma, refugee, and migrant youth, resilience requires careful framing. It should never be understood as the ability to endure injustice, nor should it be romanticised as toughness or used, even unintentionally, to justify poor conditions or the absence of systemic change. The goal is not to create young people who can tolerate unlimited adversity, but to support them in maintaining their wellbeing while working alongside them toward change. For many young people, moving from “why is this happening to me?” to “this is happening because of an unjust system and I have the right to resist it”, represents a powerful form of resilience.

Resilience also matters for youth workers themselves. Working closely with young people from communities facing systemic exclusion is emotionally demanding, and the emotional labour involved is real and often invisible. Resilient youth workers are not those who push through everything without showing emotion, they are those who are self-aware, supported, and equipped to process what they carry.

This chapter is not a recipe, but a contribution. Resilience is a journey that continues across lifetimes and generations. In every activity, every conversation, and every act of trust, youth workers have the chance to plant the seeds of it.

See *Section 2.4* and *Section 3.5.7* for guidance on self-care and professional limits.

What You Will Find In This Section

This section contains five activities that approach resilience as a dynamic, strengths-based process, something that can be nurtured and supported rather than something young people either have or lack. The activities focus primarily on what participants already carry, their strengths, their resources, their stories of getting through, and their capacity to imagine a future worth moving toward. Where activities do invite looking back at difficult experiences, the focus remains firmly on capacity and strength rather than on hardship itself.

The section opens collectively with **Strength Circles** (Nr.32), building resilience as something found in the group as much as in the individual. **The Hero's Journey** (Nr.33) uses collaborative storytelling and a fictional frame to explore challenge, support, and growth without personal disclosure. The **Resilience Box** (Nr.34) shifts to individual work, creating a personal, practical collection of grounding resources to use beyond the session. The section reaches its most personally intense moment with **Timeline of Resilience** (Nr.35) which invites participants to map their own history of navigating difficulty and connect past strengths to future possibilities. It carries high emotional intensity and works best after trust has been established through earlier activities. **Letter to My Future Self** (Nr.36) closes the section with a hopeful, private, forward-facing activity, a bridge between past resilience and future possibility.

All five activities work as standalone sessions. If facilitators want to use several together, the sequence above is recommended, building from collective to personal and from lighter to deeper.

Facilitator Tip

Resilience activities should generally focus on strengths and resources rather than on pain or hardship. Encourage young people to recognise support systems, skills, and small successes. Resilience grows through connection and choice, not through pressure to be strong.

Try asking: “What is a skill you used this week to get through a difficult moment?” rather than “Tell us about a difficult moment you had.” This focuses on the agency, the skill, rather than the trauma.

Some activities in this section, particularly *Timeline of Resilience*, do invite participants to look back at difficult experiences. When facilitating these, keep the focus firmly on what participants did and what they drew on, not on the difficulty of what happened. The past is the context; their capacity is the content.

If strong emotions emerge, slow down, return to grounding, and refer to *Sections 3.5.5 and 3.5.6*.



Theme

- Resilience
- Inclusion



Duration

30-45



Group Size

5-20



Emotional Intensity

Medium



Materials

None

Optional: anonymous notes or post-its and pens for shy groups.

ACTIVITY 32

Strength Circles

Strength Circles is a circle-based activity that invites participants to acknowledge their own strengths and affirm the qualities they notice in others. Simple in format but significant in impact, it directly counters narratives of deficiency by making visible what young people already carry, and what their community sees in them.



Objectives

- To build self-confidence and self-awareness of personal strengths.
- To foster a sense of community and affirmation within the group.
- To practice positive self-talk by articulating one's own strengths.
- To develop the ability to notice and articulate positive qualities in others.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- recognize and articulate their own personal strengths.
- practice expressing specific, positive feedback to their peers.
- reflect on what it feels like to be seen and affirmed within a group
- approach self-acknowledgement with greater openness and confidence



Preparation

- Arrange chairs in a comfortable circle where everyone can see and hear each other.
- Prepare your own personal strength and affirmation example to model for the group, be specific and genuine, as this sets the tone.
- Think in advance about how you will respond if a participant says "I don't know" or freezes, have a gentle prompt ready (e.g., "*Is there something small you did recently that you felt good about?*").
- Consider the group's level of trust and familiarity. If this is an early session or a new group, emphasize the brave space framing more strongly and keep expectations low, one word is enough.
- Emotionally prepare yourself: receiving affirmations can be unexpectedly moving for some participants. Be ready to hold space for that without rushing forward.



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 Introduction (5 min):** Arrange participants in a circle and introduce the goal: practicing self-acknowledgment and community affirmation. Set ground rules, stressing that this is a “brave space” (not a perfect one), and encourage focused attention and active listening during others’ turns.
 - 2 Self-Reflection (5-10 min):** Each person takes a turn reflecting on one personal strength they are truly proud of (e.g., “I help my siblings”). Begin by modeling your own example. Ensure a steady, non-rushed pace, allow silence between turns.
 - 3 Affirming Others (10-15 min):** Move to the second round. Each person affirms someone else in the circle by naming a specific, positive quality they see in that person. Remind the group that receiving an affirmation is as important as giving one, a simple “thank you” is enough.
- Facilitator’s role:** *Stay present and attentive. If someone struggles, offer a gentle prompt rather than skipping them. Avoid commenting on or interpreting what participants share, your role is to hold the space, not evaluate.*
- 4 Debriefing (5-10 min):** Bring the sharing to a close and transition into the reflective discussion. For debriefing questions, see below.
 - 5 Closing the activity (5 min):** After the debriefing, close the activity with a brief grounding moment. You can close with a simple collective gesture, word, or a moment of shared silence, or sharing one strength discovered today. Thank the group for their courage and presence.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What happened during the activity?
2. What did you observe or notice while listening to everyone share in the circle today?
3. How did it feel to openly say your own strength out loud? Was it easy or difficult?
4. What was it like to receive a specific affirmation from someone else?
5. How did it feel to name a specific quality you noticed in someone else?
6. Why do you think it is often hard for us to talk about our own positive qualities?
7. What does this experience tell us about how we see ourselves versus how our community sees us?
8. What does recognizing our strengths tell us about our ability to handle challenges?
9. What is one thing you might do differently next time you (or a friend) are doubting yourselves?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Emotional safety:** Giving and receiving compliments can make some participants feel awkward or silent. Allow for that 10-second silence to let the awkwardness settle before prompting them again.
- **Tip on Phase 3:** Remind participants that affirmations should be based on qualities, behaviours, or attitudes they have observed, not appearance. If the group doesn't know each other well, model this explicitly: *"I notice you listen carefully when others speak"* rather than *"you have a nice smile."*
- **Group dynamics:** When participants are sharing how it felt to receive an affirmation (Reflection), they might immediately jump to why it's hard to accept compliments (Meaning). Take notes to track these insights, and gently guide them back to the feeling first before moving on to the analysis.
- **Cultural considerations:** In some cultural contexts, speaking publicly about one's own strengths may feel uncomfortable or boastful. Frame self-acknowledgement as an act of honesty rather than pride.



Variations

- For groups larger than 10-15 people, split participants into smaller circles of 5-6. This saves time and makes it easier for everyone to speak and stay focused.
- For shy groups, use anonymous notes or post-its. Participants can write their affirmations and drop them into a center bowl to be read aloud, removing the pressure of direct verbal delivery.
- If session time is limited, run a combined round where each participant shares one personal strength and immediately offers an affirmation to the person sitting on their right.



Resources

Grounded in strengths-based youth work approaches.
See: Saleebey (2006).



Theme

- Resilience
- Emotional Expression



Duration

40-50



Group Size

5-20



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

Hero's Journey Worksheet (See Appendix 20)

Optional:

- Large paper and markers for mapping the story, or simple materials for puppets/props.
- "The Hero's Journey Story Starter Worksheet" (for groups needing extra support).

ACTIVITY 33

Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey is a collaborative storytelling activity that uses the classic five-stage narrative structure to explore challenges, resilience, and the role of community support. By building a fictional story together, participants reflect on real experiences of difficulty and growth from a safe emotional distance, the story belongs to the hero, not to them, which makes it possible to go further than direct sharing might allow. The fictional frame is not an escape from reality but a way of approaching it more honestly.



Objectives

- To provide a safe emotional distance for exploring challenges.
- To strengthen creativity, imagination, and shared meaning-making.
- To help youth reflect on resilience and support systems.
- To build group cohesion through collaborative storytelling.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- recognize the importance of community and "helpers" in overcoming life's difficulties.
- practice creative expression, collaborative problem-solving, and active listening.
- reflect on personal qualities of resilience through the lens of a fictional character.
- approach their own challenges with greater openness to support and growth.



Preparation

1. Arrange seating so everyone can see and hear each other comfortably.
2. Familiarize yourself with the five phases of the hero's journey so you can guide the group naturally without reading from notes.
3. Print the worksheet if you anticipate the group may need extra structure or struggle with a blank start.
4. Prepare a gentle opening line to start the story (e.g., "Once there was a young person from a small town who one day had to leave everything familiar behind..."). Having this ready prevents an awkward silence at the start.
5. Think in advance about how to handle the story if it moves toward very dark or distressing territory - have a gentle redirect ready (see Tips).



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (10 min): Introduce the basic “hero’s journey” structure:

1. Faces a challenge or leaves home.
2. Meets helpers.
3. Faces difficulties.
4. Learns something.
5. Returns stronger.

Start the fictional story with an opening line (your own or the worksheet starter) and invite the group to take it from there.

To introduce the structure, you can use a concrete example; a traditional story relevant to your group or a globally known hero’s journey like Lord of the Rings works well.

2 Co-creation (20-25 min): As a group, participants co-create the story, with each person (or pair/small group) adding the next element. Encourage creativity in deciding the challenges and the supports the hero encounters. Move through the five phases, gently guiding the group to follow the structure so the story reaches a point of learning and growth rather than staying stuck on difficulty alone.

3 Transition to reflection (5 min): Once stories are complete, invite groups to share their hero’s journey with the whole room. They can choose their own format, telling the story, acting it out as a brief role play, or creating a visual map to walk the group through. Keep presentations short and celebratory.

4 Debriefing (10 min): See below.

5 Closing the activity (5min): Close by inviting each participant to share one word that describes the hero, or one quality from the story they would like to carry with them. End with a brief grounding moment or a simple collective gesture to close the session.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What happened in our story today?
2. Who or what supported the hero during the difficult times?
3. How did it feel to co-create this story together?
4. Was it easy or difficult to come up with the next part of the narrative on the spot?
5. What helped the hero successfully navigate their challenge?
6. How is the hero’s journey similar to real-life experiences of challenge and growth?
7. Who gets to be the hero in the stories our societies tell, and whose journeys of challenge and resilience go unrecognized?
8. What is one quality of the hero you would like to develop in yourself?
9. How can we act as “helpers” for others in our real-world journeys?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **A note on the Hero's Journey framework:** The hero's journey is a widely used narrative structure, but it carries assumptions worth naming. It tends to privilege a linear, triumph-oriented story arc, challenge met, obstacle overcome, growth achieved, which reflects particular cultural traditions and is not universally resonant. For young people whose experiences of adversity have not followed a linear path, who have not (yet) reached a point of resolution, or whose cultural traditions hold different relationships to storytelling, suffering, and time, this framework can feel like an ill-fitting frame rather than a liberating one.

Facilitate this activity with that awareness. Make it explicit to participants that the “hero's journey” is one possible way of telling a story about difficulty and growth, not the only one, and not necessarily theirs. Invite them to push back on the structure, to adapt it, to leave parts of it empty, or to find a different shape altogether for their own story. A young person who says “my story doesn't have a victory moment yet” is not failing the activity. They may be telling the most honest story in the room.

Pay particular attention to participants who may be in an active crisis, ongoing displacement, or unresolved legal situations. For them, a framework that asks “*what did you learn from your challenge?*” may land as minimising rather than affirming. Adjust your framing accordingly, or consider whether this is the right moment for this activity with this group.

- **Emotional Safety:** The fictional frame provides natural emotional distance, which is one of the strengths of this activity. Keep the focus on the story rather than on personal experiences, do not invite participants to connect the story to their own lives unless they choose to do so themselves. If the story becomes very dark or begins to reflect real trauma (e.g., themes of violence, deportation, loss), gently steer the narrative: “*And what unexpected help might arrive here?*” Avoid drawing attention to the shift, keep it natural and light.
- **Sensitive Themes:** The concept of “leaving home” can carry real weight for refugee and migrant participants. Frame it broadly from the start, “home” can be a feeling, a memory, or a person, not only a place. “Returning stronger” does not have to mean going back, it can mean arriving somewhere new with greater strength.
- **Group Dynamics:** Keep the pace relatively steady to maintain the energy and flow of collaborative storytelling. If one person is dominating the narrative, invite others with a simple: “*Who wants to add the next part?*” If the group is slow or hesitant, use the worksheet as a scaffold.
- **Adaptation Tips:** Strongly encourage creativity and imaginative solutions; remind the group that the story doesn't have to be realistic, which helps provide safe emotional distance.

Variations

- If the group is having trouble starting, experiencing “blank page syndrome,” or needs more structure, provide them with “**The Hero's Journey Story Starter Worksheet.**” This gives them a pre-written opening about a character facing a challenge and asks them specific prompt questions to finish the story, easing the pressure of building a narrative entirely from scratch.
- If you have more than 10-12 participants, break them into smaller groups of 4-5. Give each group 15 minutes to write out or draw their own Hero's Journey, and then have them present their stories to the larger room.

Resources

Grounded in narrative and archetypal storytelling traditions across cultures. See: *Campbell (1949)*.



Theme

- Resilience
- Well-being



Duration

45 - 60



Group Size

Any

Note: Individual creation within a group setting



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Small boxes (cardboard, shoe boxes, or simple paper to fold/draw one).
- Markers, colored pens, glue, scissors, and decorative items (stickers, fabric scraps).

Optional: Digital devices for participants who choose to create a digital box (playlist, photo folder).

ACTIVITY 34

The Resilience Box

The Resilience Box is a creative, practical activity that invites participants to build a personal collection of grounding resources, things that bring them strength, calm, and comfort. By making coping strategies tangible and visible, participants develop a tool they can return to in difficult moments long after the session ends.



Objectives

- To help participants identify and gather grounding resources and coping strategies.
- To provide a visual or physical reminder of safety and inner strength.
- To strengthen self-regulation, emotional awareness, and self-compassion.
- To foster a sense of shared support through the creation of a collective community box.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify specific sensory, intellectual, or relational tools that help them feel calm.
- create a tangible or digital resource for future emotional regulation.
- reflect on how shared resources and peer support contribute to personal resilience.
- approach their own emotional needs with greater self-awareness and self-compassion.



Preparation

- Source boxes in advance, cardboard boxes, shoe boxes, or simply paper that participants can fold and decorate work well. Have enough for one per participant.
- Gather all art supplies and physical boxes.
- Prepare a calm and supportive room environment conducive to creative, introspective work. Gentle background music can help settle the creative atmosphere.
- Think in advance about what to do if a participant struggles to identify any positive coping items, this is a real possibility with this target group. The community box phase is a useful fallback (see *Tips*).



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 Introduction (5 min):** Introduce the activity and define the Resilience Box as a mental or physical container for items that bring strength, calm, or safety. Provide each participant with a small box (or paper to draw one) and art supplies.
- 2 Creation (30-40 min):** Ask participants to imagine and “fill” their box with items. They can write, draw, or physically place symbols representing things like: a comforting song, a photo of someone they trust, a favorite scent, a quote of hope, or a meaningful object. Encourage participants to decorate their box, making it highly personalized.
- 3 Community Box & Transition (10-15 min):** Offer the option to create a collective **community resilience box** by inviting participants to share one non-personal item or idea that brings them calm. The facilitator gathers these contributions and briefly acknowledges the collective resource the group has built together. Then gently transition into the reflection discussion.
- 4 Debriefing (10 mins):** See *below*.
- 5 Closing the activity (5min):** Close by inviting participants to hold their box for a moment and think of one situation in the coming week where they might open it. A simple collective gesture or a short breathing exercise works well



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice while creating the box?
2. How did it feel to actively focus on things that bring you safety and calm?
3. What did you observe while everyone was building and decorating their boxes?
4. Was it easy or difficult to find these items for your box?
5. What items or ideas stood out to you when we made our collective “community resilience box”?
6. How might the items in your box help you when you face a difficult moment?
7. What does it mean to take care of your own emotional needs, what did this activity show you about that?
8. What does creating a collective “community resilience box” symbolize for the group?
9. When would be a good time or situation to use or open your box?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Emotional Safety:** Stress that the box is a highly personal tool; sharing the contents is completely optional. This strengthens the connection to self-trust.
- **Cultural & Inclusive Considerations:** Encourage participants to fill their box with a diverse mix of items: sensory (a scent), intellectual (a quote), and relational (a photo). This creates a comprehensive coping kit that respects different cultural ways of finding comfort. Avoid suggesting specific items as examples in a way that assumes shared cultural references.
- **Focus on Future Use:** Guide the final reflection toward the utility of the box: Where should they keep it? When should they use it? The goal is to make it a practical tool for emotional regulation outside of the session.



Variations

- If a participant struggles to find positive coping items due to acute distress, focus heavily on the **community box** aspect first. This allows them to borrow ideas and strength from the collective group until they feel ready to build their own. Alternatively, they can contribute to and draw from the collective resource without the pressure of building their own.
- Creating a physical box isn't mandatory. If participants feel more comfortable using technology, actively encourage the **digital box** medium, whether the workshop is in-person or online. Participants can create a dedicated Drive folder, a Pinterest board, or a photo album on their phone. They can fill it with a song they like, an image that brings them happiness, a meme that makes them laugh or a personal photo that means a lot to them.



Resources

Grounded in trauma-informed and strengths-based emotional regulation approaches.

See: Saleebey (2006), Levine (1997).



Theme

- Resilience
- Well-being



Duration

45-60



Group Size

5-30

Note: Individual work within a group setting.



Emotional Intensity

High

Note: This is a psychologically demanding activity. It requires facilitator readiness assessment before use. See Appendix X and the note at the start of Tips & Considerations.



Materials

- Large sheets of paper.
- Markers/coloured pens.

Optional: sticky notes.

ACTIVITY 35

Timeline of Resilience

Timeline of Resilience is a reflective drawing activity that invites participants to map their life journey, identifying past moments of challenge and the strengths they used to navigate them, then connecting those strengths to future goals and possibilities. By giving personal history a visual form, the activity supports a shift from hardship to capacity.

Objectives

- To reframe past struggles as sources of strength and resilience.
- To identify and map key life moments where resilience was demonstrated.
- To encourage personal growth and a forward-looking mindset by setting future goals and dreams.
- To support self-awareness and self-agency through guided reflection.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- reflect on their personal history through a strength-based lens.
- gain an understanding of the specific internal resources they used to overcome past challenges.
- begin to connect past strengths to future possibilities.
- approach their own story with greater self-compassion and agency.



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 Introduction (5 min):** Introduce the concept of the timeline and define resilience as the ability to navigate challenges, not avoid them. Provide participants with a large sheet of paper and drawing materials, and instruct them to draw a horizontal line with “Past” on the left and “Future” on the right. Inform participants that they decide how personal their timeline will be and it can include small everyday moments or larger life experiences.
- 2 Mapping the Past (15-20 min):** Ask participants to mark key life moments on the “Past” side where they overcame a difficulty or challenge (e.g., surviving a tough school year, caring for family, moving countries). Encourage them to reflect on the strengths they had to use during those moments by asking them to think about what helped them to get through those moments.



Preparation

1. Prepare a calm, quiet space for individual reflection. Gentle background music can be helpful.
2. Have at least one grounding exercise ready in case emotional support is needed (e.g., 5-4-3-2-1 sensory grounding).
3. Consider your own capacity. If possible, consider having a co-facilitator present given the high emotional intensity.

Facilitator's role: Circulate quietly and be available. If someone seems stuck, offer a gentle prompt: "Is there a small moment where you surprised yourself?"

- 3 **Mapping the Future (15-20 min):** Have participants shift focus to the "Future" side of the timeline. Prompt them to add strengths they want to develop, specific goals, or personal dreams. This connects past capacity to future potential.
- 4 **Transition to Reflection (5 min):** Bring the group back together. Give participants a moment to look at their full timeline before the discussion begins.
- 5 **Debriefing (10-15 min):** See below.
- 6 **Closing of the activity (5min):** Close with a brief grounding moment. You can close with a collective word, gesture, or a moment of shared silence. If the session has been emotionally intense, a simple breathing exercise is a good way to bring everyone back to the present before leaving.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did your timeline look like? What did you notice while creating it?
2. How did it feel to map out your challenges as a visual journey?
3. Was it difficult or empowering to look back at those moments, or both?
4. What was the most surprising moment of resilience you marked on your timeline?
5. What specific strength did you use most often in your past moments of challenge?
6. How does seeing your challenges mapped out as a journey change the way you feel about them?
7. What does this tell us about our ability to navigate the future?
8. Looking at the "Future" side, what is the first small step you can take toward one of your goals?
9. When you look at your past moments of challenge, who or what outside of yourself helped you through? What does that tell us about the role of community and support in resilience?
10. How can you use the strengths you identified today when you face a new obstacle?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** It should only be facilitated with groups that have already established strong trust and have spent significant time together. A co-facilitator is strongly recommended. Facilitators should be familiar with trauma-informed practice and confident using grounding techniques before running this activity. Do not use it with a new group or as a standalone session without prior relationship-building. If you are unsure whether you, or your group, are ready, choose a lighter activity first.
- **Emotional Safety & Sensitivity:** This activity can bring up difficult memories. Emphasize from the start that participants control how personal their timeline is, small everyday moments are just as valid as major life events. Facilitators should avoid encouraging participants to explain traumatic events in detail. If a participant becomes overwhelmed, stay calm and present, acknowledge their emotions without judgment, and use a simple grounding technique. Offer choices to restore a sense of control: *“Would you like to take a short break, draw abstractly, or step outside for a moment?”*
- **Facilitator Lens:** Before facilitating this activity, ask yourself: am I framing resilience as something this young person had inside them, or as something that emerged between them and their circumstances, their community, their relationships, and sometimes sheer luck? For many participants in this group, surviving displacement, discrimination, or family hardship was not primarily a matter of personal strength, it was also about who showed up, what resources existed, and what the system did or failed to do. Reflecting only individual capacity back to a young person can unintentionally place the weight of survival on their shoulders. The debriefing question about community and support is not a question by accident, but make sure you actually reach it.
- **Cultural considerations:** Be sensitive to cultural or personal differences in what constitutes a moment of resilience. Validate all experiences as genuine examples of strength. Participants may choose to focus on small everyday challenges rather than major life events.
- **Focus on Capacity:** Constantly reinforce that the goal is not to dwell on the difficulty of the past, but to recognize the capacity and strength that was demonstrated in overcoming it. You are a trusted adult facilitating reflection, not a therapist. If the situation is too heavy, seek support from another professional and respect your own limits.

Variations

- Participants who do not wish to write or draw can use abstract symbols, colors, or place sticky notes on their timeline line instead. If the environment becomes too intense, allow participants to move to a quieter area.
- If the group has a history of severe trauma, adjust the instructions so they **only** map the “Future” side of the timeline, focusing purely on goals and hopes. Alternatively, tell them they can map fictional characters’ journeys instead of their own to provide protective emotional distance.
- For youth with low literacy or language barriers, provide old magazines, scissors, and glue. They can create a collage of their timeline using images and colors instead of writing words.
- This activity works exceptionally well in a 1-on-1 setting. If a young person becomes overwhelmed or triggered in the group setting, a facilitator can pull them aside and do this activity individually, allowing for a highly personalized and safe pace.

Resources

Grounded in narrative therapy and strengths-based resilience approaches.

See: White & Epston (1990), Grotberg (1995).



Theme

- Resilience
- Emotional Expression



Duration

30-45



Group Size

Any

Note: Individual reflection within a group setting.



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Paper, pens, envelopes (one set per participant).

Optional: drawing materials (markers, colored pencils).

ACTIVITY 36

Letter to My Future Self

Letter to My Future Self is a private, structured reflective activity that invites participants to write directly to their future selves, offering encouragement, articulating hopes, and setting intentions across time. By making the future self a real and addressable presence, the activity builds hope, strengthens positive internal dialogue, and creates a tangible bridge between who participants are today and who they are becoming. The letter belongs entirely to the participant, it is never shared or read aloud, making this one of the most private and self-trusting activities in the handbook.

Objectives

- To build hope, vision, and motivation by fostering a connection with one's future self.
- To strengthen self-trust, emotional resilience, and positive internal dialogue in a private format.
- To encourage self-reflection and articulate personal goals and wishes for the future.
- To practice positive self-talk and provide self-encouragement across time.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- practice positive self-talk and self-compassion in a structured way.
- articulate clear personal goals and wishes for their future.
- recognise private reflection as a valid and accessible tool for emotional expression.
- approach their own future with greater hope and openness.



Preparation

- Prepare a quiet, comfortable space conducive to individual reflection. Gentle background music can help settle the atmosphere.
- Decide on the logistical plan for the letters in advance (participants may choose to keep the letter themselves or leave it with the facilitator to be returned at a later agreed date.)
- Prepare a few optional writing prompts in case participants feel stuck (e.g., “*What do you hope your life looks like?*”, “*What advice would you give yourself?*”, “*What are you proud of right now?*”).
- Emotionally prepare yourself: some participants may find imagining the future difficult or even distressing, particularly those facing displacement or uncertainty. Have a gentle alternative ready (see *Variations*).



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 Introduction (5 mins):** Provide paper, pens, and an envelope to each participant. Introduce the idea of writing to one’s future self (e.g., 6 months to 5 years from now). Explicitly emphasize that the letter is entirely private and will not be read by the facilitator or the group. Encourage participants to begin with something kind, a word of encouragement or gratitude to themselves before moving into goals or wishes.
- 2 Writing/Drawing (20-25 mins):** Ask participants to imagine their future self and write/draw a letter. Provide prompts: encouragement, goals, wishes, or advice (e.g., “*What do you hope your life looks like?*”, “*What advice do you want to give yourself?*”). Offer the option to draw instead of write for non-writers.
- 3 Sealing & Logistics (5 mins):** Invite participants to take a deep breath and imagine their future self opening the letter before sealing the envelope. Have participants seal their letters in the provided envelopes. Clearly explain the plan for the letters, either to be kept personally by the participant or to be collected, stored securely and returned on an agreed date.
- 4 Transition to Reflection (5min):** Bring the group’s focus back to the circle and remind participants that the debriefing focuses on the experience of doing the activity, not the contents of the letters.
- 5 Debriefing (10 min):** See below
- 6 Closing the activity (5min):** Close with a brief grounding moment. Invite participants to hold their sealed envelope for a moment and silently wish their future self well. A simple collective gesture, a shared word, or a short breathing exercise works



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What kind of themes or feelings came up for you while writing?
2. What happened when you tried to picture yourself in the future?
3. How did imagining your future self affect your feelings about today?
4. How did it feel to write kind and encouraging words to yourself, was that easy or difficult?
5. What was the hardest part of the activity? (Imagining the future? Giving yourself advice?)
6. What does this activity tell us about our ability to support ourselves through hard times?
7. Without sharing private details, what kind of message did you most want your future self to hear?
8. What is one commitment or promise you made to your future self that you can start acting on today?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Emotional Safety:** Respect the 10-second silence rule. Writing to oneself can be an emotional experience; give participants time to transition back to verbal group sharing.
- **Privacy Stress:** Stress that the letter is for the participant only and sharing the content is never required, thus strengthening self-trust in a private format. Focus on Encouragement, guide participants to start the letter with encouragement or gratitude before jumping into goals, fostering a positive tone from the beginning.
- **Logistics:** If you plan to collect and return the letters, ensure envelopes are clearly and privately labeled (e.g., name and return date) and have a highly reliable, secure system for storage to guarantee they are not lost.



Variations

- For much younger participants, provide a structured template with fill-in-the-blanks (e.g., “Dear me, I am currently really good at _____. In the future, I hope I learn how to _____.”).
- Imagining the future can be daunting or triggering for youth facing current displacement or severe insecurity. If you notice a participant struggling, offer a “shorter timeline” option - writing a letter to themselves for next week rather than next year.
- For low-literacy groups, provide colorful magazines, scissors, and glue so participants can make a **vision board envelope** or **collage** representing their future selves instead of writing words.
- An online version can be considered as an option. FutureMe (www.futureme.org) — a free tool for sending emails to your future self, useful for the online variation.



Resources

Grounded in positive psychology and hope theory approaches.
See: Seligman (2011), Snyder (2002).



5.7 Wellbeing and Mental Health Awareness

Wellbeing refers to the overall quality of a young person's life, feeling connected, valued, and able to cope with everyday challenges. It includes emotional, social, and physical dimensions, as well as the sense of belonging, confidence, and purpose that allows young people to grow and participate meaningfully in their communities.

Mental health awareness in youth work does not mean diagnosing or treating mental health conditions. It means helping young people recognise emotions, understand stress, develop coping strategies, and know when and how to seek support. Youth workers play an important role in creating environments where conversations about wellbeing are normalised and stigma is reduced. Seeking support is a sign of strength and self-awareness, not a failure.

Self-confidence is closely connected to wellbeing. When young people recognise their strengths, experience success, and feel valued by others, they are more likely to participate, take initiative, and recover from setbacks. Building confidence is an act of reclaiming agency, supporting young people to move from being passive recipients of care to being active subjects of their own lives.

This section is rooted in the research finding that underlies this entire handbook: **discrimination erodes wellbeing not only through external barriers but through what it puts inside, reduced self-worth, internalised stigma, anxiety, and the gradual erosion of a young person's sense of their place in the world.** The activities respond to this directly. They do not ask participants to analyse their problems, they build the inner resources that protect against the psychological harm of discrimination.

What You Will Find In This Section

This section contains ten activities that address wellbeing and mental health awareness through a carefully sequenced arc, moving from opening conversations and understanding the inner world, through challenging internalised messages, to building self-worth and confidence, and finally sustaining wellbeing through daily practice and peer connection.

The arc moves through four phases:

- 1. Understand** — **Conversations We Don't Usually Have** (Nr.37) and **Your Inner Weather** (Nr.38) open mental health as a topic of normal, curious conversation and give participants the emotional and neurological framework they need for everything that follows. These two activities can be used independently but work best as a pair, one opens the conversation, the other maps the inner landscape.
- 2. Challenge** — **Meeting Your Inner Critic** (Nr.39), **Whose Voice Is This?** (Nr.40), and **Enough** (Nr.41) examine the critical inner voices many participants carry, tracing them to their origins in discrimination, systemic exclusion, and external messages absorbed over time. Each activity builds directly on the previous one: Meeting Your Inner Critic examines the voice; Whose Voice Is This? traces it to its source; Enough asks the deepest question of all, where does your worth actually come from? These three activities carry Medium to High or High emotional intensity and should only be used with groups that have established solid trust. Enough in particular should be treated with care, facilitators should refer to the warning note at the start of its Tips section before running it.
- 3. Build** — **The Mirror and The Map** (Nr.42) and **My Power Shield** (Nr.43) come after the Challenge phase for a reason. Having examined and questioned internalised messages, participants are now ready to construct something solid, witnessed by peers and grounded in real evidence from their own lives. Do not rush the transition from Enough into The Mirror and The Map without adequate grounding and recovery time.
- 4. Sustain** — **Weeds and Seeds** (Nr.44), **Peer Support Circles** (Nr.45), and **Self-Care Exploration** (Nr.46) close the section with practical tools, collective support, and a restorative experience. Weeds and Seeds gives participants a personal wellbeing maintenance map. Peer Support Circles builds the social infrastructure for ongoing mutual support. Self-Care Exploration closes the whole section, and can close a whole programme, with something gentle, unstructured, and restorative.

All ten activities work as standalone sessions. If facilitators want to use several together, the sequence above is strongly recommended, it follows a deliberate pedagogical logic that builds from awareness to action. The Mirror and The Map requires genuine group familiarity and should not be used in early sessions. Self-Care Exploration works best as a closing activity for a programme day or programme.

Facilitator Tip

Wellbeing activities should focus on strengthening resources rather than analysing problems. If a conversation moves toward deep trauma or crisis, gently guide the group back to their current resources and grounding. Your goal is to stay within the Window of Tolerance, the zone where learning and connection happen (see Section 3.5.1).

Mental health awareness means opening conversation and reducing stigma, not providing therapy. Always keep participation voluntary and be prepared to refer participants to professional support when needed (see Section 3.5.7).

If strong emotions emerge, slow down, return to grounding, and refer to Sections 3.5.5 and 3.5.6.



Theme

- Wellbeing
- Mental Health Awareness
- Group Connection



Duration

90-100



Group Size

10-30



Emotional Intensity

Low

ACTIVITY 37

Conversations We Don't Usually Have

Conversations We Don't Usually Have is a two-part opening activity that creates the foundation for the entire Wellbeing section. It begins with a playful balloon warm-up that normalizes mental health talk and then moves into a structured World Café that maps six dimensions of wellbeing through collective discussion. Together these two parts give participants a shared language for wellbeing, give the facilitator a genuine picture of where the group needs most support.

Objectives

- To normalize mental health and wellbeing as topics of open, curious, everyday conversation.
- To reduce stigma around mental health by creating a playful, non-threatening entry point.
- To map the group's collective understanding and experience of the six dimensions of wellbeing.
- To give the facilitator a genuine picture of where the group needs most support



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- experience mental health as a normal, universal topic that can be discussed openly and even playfully.
- develop a shared vocabulary for wellbeing across its six dimensions.
- recognize that others share similar questions, experiences, and challenges around mental health.
- identify which dimensions of wellbeing feel strongest and which feel most challenging for them personally.



Preparation

- Prepare one uninflated balloon and one marker per participant.
- Set up 6 World Café tables before participants arrive, each with a large sheet of paper labeled with one dimension and markers.
- Read the Six Dimensions of Wellbeing facilitator handout before the session, familiarize yourself with how each dimension is framed in this handbook and think about which dimensions may be most relevant or sensitive for your specific group.



Materials

1. Six Dimensions of Wellbeing; Facilitator Handout (see Appendix 21)
2. Balloons (biodegradable if possible), one per participant
3. Markers, one per participant
4. 6 large sheets of paper or flipchart pages, one per World Café table, each labeled with one dimension:
 - Physical Wellbeing
 - Mental Wellbeing
 - Social Wellbeing
 - Environmental Wellbeing
 - Personal Wellbeing
5. Facilitator handout on the Six Dimensions of Wellbeing
6. Colored markers at each table

Optional:

- Printed guiding questions at each table (see Preparation)
- Upbeat background music during the balloon phase

- Prepare the guiding questions for each table, same questions at all six tables:
- What comes to mind when you hear this?
- How does this show up in your everyday life?
- What makes this harder?
- What helps you feel good in this area?
- What small action could make a difference right now?
- Designate one table host per table, this person stays across all rotations and briefly summarizes what previous groups discussed for incoming groups.
- Think about the useful dimension, photograph the table papers at the end. They reveal exactly where the group's wellbeing needs are concentrated.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Balloon Warm-up “Pop the Stigma” (20 mins):

Welcome participants and introduce the activity warmly. Explain that today is about conversations we don't usually have, about how we feel, what we need, and what wellbeing actually means in our lives.

Distribute balloons and markers. Ask each participant to inflate their balloon and write one wellbeing related question on it, something they are genuinely curious about, something they wonder, or something they think is worth talking about. Offer examples if participants seem stuck:

- What relaxes you when you feel stressed?
- What does stress feel like in your body?
- How do you know when you need support?
- What helps you feel better on a hard day?
- What does mental health mean to you?
- Is it easy or hard to talk about how you feel?

Play upbeat background music. Give participants 3-4 minutes to write their question.

Invite participants to toss their balloons into the air simultaneously. Everyone moves around the space, batting balloons to keep them in the air for 30-60 seconds.

On the facilitator's signal, everyone grabs one balloon — not their own. They find the person closest to them and discuss the question on the balloon they are holding. Give pairs 3-4 minutes for discussion.

Repeat 3-4 rounds, toss again, grab a new balloon, find a new partner, discuss the new question.

Brief whole group reflection:

- What was one question that generated an interesting conversation?
- Did anything surprise you?

Keep this very light. Transition directly into the World Café.

2 World Café of Wellbeing (55-65 mins): Transition from the balloon phase to a slightly more focused atmosphere. Explain the World Café format briefly — five to eight minutes at each table, one table host stays throughout, incoming groups build on what previous groups discussed.

The World Café is a structured discussion format where participants rotate between tables, each focused on a different topic. A table host stays at each table throughout all rotations and briefly summarises what previous groups discussed for each incoming group. This means every group builds on what came before rather than starting from scratch.

Introduce the six dimensions briefly, one sentence each. Refer to the facilitator handout for framing guidance:

- **Physical Wellbeing;** how we feel in our bodies
- **Mental Wellbeing;** our thoughts, emotions, and inner experience
- **Social Wellbeing;** our connections, relationships, and belonging
- **Environmental Wellbeing;** our surroundings, safety, and access to space and nature
- **Personal Wellbeing;** our sense of meaning, purpose, and identity
- **Spiritual Wellbeing;** connection to something larger than ourselves, whatever that means personally

Divide participants into six groups and assign starting tables. Begin rotations, 8-10 minutes per table.

Facilitator's role: *Move quietly between tables. Listen without intervening. Notice which dimensions generate the most energy, difficulty, or silence, this is valuable information. After all rotations, invite table hosts to briefly share the key themes that emerged at their table.*

Close the World Café by briefly listening from the table hosts.

3 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

4 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*, or transition directly into *Your Inner Weather* if running sessions back to back.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. Which table felt most familiar, and which felt most unfamiliar or surprising?
2. What was the most interesting or unexpected thing you heard at any table?
3. How did it feel to talk about these dimensions openly, easy, strange, revealing?
4. Were there dimensions where you noticed strong emotions coming up, either your own or in the group?
5. What does it tell us that some dimensions of wellbeing are talked about openly while others are rarely mentioned?

6. How are the dimensions connected, where did you notice one affecting another?
7. Which dimension do you most want to pay attention to in your own life right now, and what is one small thing you could do?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Reading the Room:** Photograph the table papers at the end of the World Café. They are a genuine needs assessment, the language participants use, the examples they give, the questions they ask reveal exactly where support is most needed. Use this to guide your facilitation choices for the rest of the section.
- **Spiritual Wellbeing:** Introduce this dimension with genuine openness, not assuming everyone has a religious practice, not privileging any specific tradition, and never suggesting spirituality is required for wellbeing. The invitation is: “*for those for whom this dimension is meaningful, what does it look like for you?*”. Some participants will bring faith and religious practice. Others will bring connection to nature, ancestors, cultural heritage, music, or moments of awe and wonder. All of these are valid expressions of spiritual wellbeing.
- **Environmental Wellbeing:** This dimension may surface very real and painful realities for this target group, many participants may not have safe homes, stable environments, or access to green space. Acknowledge these realities honestly without rushing to solutions or toxic positivity.

Variations

- **Shorter version:** Run only the balloon phase as a 20-minute standalone opener.
- **Extended dimensions:** Add *Financial Wellbeing* and/or *Vocational Wellbeing* as additional tables, see the facilitator handout for guidance on when these additions are appropriate.

Resources

The six dimensions of the wellbeing framework and guiding questions are adapted from *Annex 5 of the Mind Growth Odyssey handbook, an outcome of the Mind Growth Odyssey youth exchange*, published on the SALTO Youth Toolbox by Kateřina Kalábová (2026). Available at: salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox. See: Dodge et al. (2012).



Theme

- Wellbeing
- Mental Health
- Awareness
- Self-awareness
- Emotional Regulation



Duration

70-90



Group Size

8-25



Emotional Intensity

Medium to High

Note: This activity touches emotionally sensitive territory. We advise completing the Facilitator Readiness Check (Appendix X) before use.

ACTIVITY 38

Your Inner Weather

Your Inner Weather is a psychoeducation and self-awareness activity that helps participants understand what happens in their body and mind when they experience stress, anxiety, or emotional overwhelm. Through practical tools, mapping physical and emotional stress responses, creating a personal emotion thermometer, and practising grounding techniques — participants develop greater self-awareness and concrete strategies for navigating difficult moments. This activity does not treat or diagnose, it normalises, educates, and equips.



Objectives

- To help participants recognize and name their own physical and mental responses to stress and anxiety.
- To normalize the body-mind stress response as a universal human experience rather than a sign of weakness.
- To introduce the emotion thermometer as a personal self-awareness and regulation tool.
- To practice accessible grounding techniques for managing overwhelming emotions.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify and name their own physical and emotional responses to stress with greater awareness.
- recognize that stress and anxiety responses are normal, universal, and biological, not personal weakness.
- use a personal emotion thermometer to map their emotional intensity levels and identify regulation strategies.
- practice at least two grounding techniques they can use independently in daily life.



Preparation

- Prepare the flipchart with two columns: **In My Body** and **In My Mind**, ready for Phase 2.
- Prepare your own weather check-in example, something genuine and light to model the metaphor.
- Familiarize yourself with the three grounding techniques; 5-4-3-2-1, 4-2-6 breathing, and physical grounding. Practice them yourself so you can guide them naturally without reading from notes.



Materials

- Flipchart and markers
- A4 paper, one per participant for the personal thermometer
- Colored pencils or markers
- Pens

Optional: calm background music during the thermometer phase

- Some participants may have trauma histories that make body awareness exercises activating. Always offer the option to observe rather than participate, and never require eyes to be closed during any phase of this activity.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Weather Check-in (5 mins): Welcome participants and open with the weather metaphor:

“If your inner weather right now, how you’re feeling inside, were a weather forecast, what would it be?”

Invite a quick round, one word or phrase per person. Examples: “partly cloudy,” “sunny with a chance of rain,” “foggy,” “stormy but clearing up,” “calm and clear.” Keep this light and fast, it’s a warm-up, not a deep reflection. But notice what comes up, it tells you something about where the group is starting from.

2 Understanding the Storm; Body and Mind (20 mins): Begin not with a presentation but with questions. Let the group generate the knowledge first.

Round 1 — What is mental health? Ask: *“What comes to mind when you hear the words ‘mental health’?”* Let responses come freely. Write them on the flipchart without judgment. Then ask: *“Who in this room has mental health?”*

Everyone raises their hand. Acknowledge this explicitly: *“Mental health is not a condition some people have and others don’t. Everyone has mental health, just like everyone has physical health. Some days it’s good, some days it’s harder. That’s completely normal.”*

Before collecting responses in the 2 rounds below, acknowledge briefly: *“Some of what comes up here might feel familiar in a way that brings something up for you. That’s completely okay, just notice and stay with what feels comfortable.”*

Round 2 — What happens in the body? Ask: *“When you feel anxious, stressed, or overwhelmed, what happens in your BODY?”*

Collect responses on the flipchart under **In My Body:**

- Racing heart
- Tight chest
- Shallow breathing
- Stomach knot
- Tension in shoulders or jaw
- Sweating
- Frozen, can’t move
- Restless, can’t sit still
- Headache
- Exhaustion

Round 3 — What happens in the mind? Ask: “*And what happens in your MIND?*”

Collect responses under **In My Mind:**

- Racing thoughts
- Complete blank
- Catastrophizing, “everything will go wrong”
- Can’t concentrate
- Replaying the same thought
- Inner critic gets louder
- Feeling of dread
- Disconnection, “I’m not really here”

Look at the two columns together: “*This is your nervous system doing its job. These responses exist to protect you, they are not weakness, they are biology. The storm is real. And like all weather, it passes.*”

Round 4 — Thoughts Ask: “*What about thoughts, do you believe everything you think?*”

Pause and let this land. Then offer: “*Our minds produce thousands of thoughts every day. Some are helpful. Some are not. Some feel absolutely true, but aren’t. The mind is something we have, not something we are. We can observe our thoughts without automatically believing them.*”

Write on the flipchart: **I am not my thoughts.**

3 My Personal Emotion Thermometer (10 mins): Distribute A4 paper and colored pencils. Ask participants to draw a thermometer, from 0 at the bottom (completely calm) to 10 at the top (completely overwhelmed).

Invite participants to mark:

- Where they are right now
- Where they usually are on a normal day
- Where they go when something stressful happens
- Where they go when discrimination or exclusion happens
- Then ask them to note alongside the thermometer:
- What does my body feel at level 7-8?
- What does my mind do at level 7-8?
- What helps me come back down to 4-5?

This last question is the bridge to Phase 4 — grounding.

4 Grounding; Finding Shelter (15 mins): *“Now you know your thermometer. Grounding tools help bring you back down when the storm gets too intense. Let’s practice three of them together, not just hear about them, but actually do them.”*

Tool 1 — 5-4-3-2-1 Sensory Grounding: Guide participants through the technique together: *“Name 5 things you can see. 4 things you can feel. 3 things you can hear. 2 things you can smell. 1 thing you can taste or notice in your mouth.”*

After completing: *“Notice how you feel right now compared to 2 minutes ago. Even a small shift is the technique working.”*

Tool 2 — 4-2-6 Breathing: Guide participants through the breathing pattern together: *“Breathe in through your nose for 4 counts. Hold for 2. Breathe out through your mouth for 6. The longer exhale activates your body’s calming response.”*

Repeat 3-4 times together.

Tool 3 — Physical Grounding: *“Place both feet flat on the floor. Feel the weight of your body in your chair. Press your hands gently on your thighs. Notice the physical sensation of being held, by the chair, by the floor, by gravity. You don’t have to hold yourself up right now.”*

After all three: *“These tools don’t make the storm disappear. They help you find shelter until it passes. The more you practice them, the more natural they become.”*

Ask participants to note on their thermometer which tool they want to try first when they reach level 7-8.

5 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

6 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What came up during the body and mind mapping, was anything surprising or new about your own responses?
2. Where did you land on your thermometer, and what did you notice about your own trigger levels?
3. How did it feel to map your own physical and emotional responses to stress?
4. How did it feel to practice the grounding tools, did anything shift, even slightly?
5. What does it mean that the body and mind respond together to stress, that they are not separate?
6. What does it tell us that these responses are biological and universal, not signs of weakness or failure?
7. Why don’t we talk about this, and how could you change that in your daily life?
8. Which grounding tool do you want to try first?
9. Where in your daily life may this show up next?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** This activity works best with groups that have some existing trust and familiarity. Facilitators should feel comfortable holding space for strong emotions and have at least one grounding technique ready. A co-facilitator is advisable if available. If the group is new or trust has not yet been established, consider using a lighter activity first or running this later in the program.
- **Psychoeducation Without Lecturing:** The facilitated discovery approach in Phase 2 is essential. Participants generating the knowledge themselves is more powerful and more respectful than being told. Your role is to ask good questions, acknowledge responses genuinely, and add briefly where needed. If you find yourself talking for more than 2-3 minutes continuously, stop and ask a question.
- **The Grounding Tools Must Be Practiced:** Do not just explain the grounding techniques, do them together. Participants who have physically practiced a grounding technique are significantly more likely to use it independently than those who have only heard about it. The practice is the learning.
- **Trauma-Informed Body Work:** Some participants may find the body awareness phases activating, particularly those with trauma histories. Always offer the option to observe rather than participate. Never require participants to close their eyes during grounding phases. A soft downward gaze is always equally valid.
- **The Thermometer Is Personal:** Every participant's thermometer will look different. Never suggest what "should" be on anyone's thermometer. The tool only works when it's genuinely personal.



Variations

- **Shorter version:** Run only Phases 1-2, weather check-in and body/mind mapping, as a 25-30 minute psychoeducation activity. Works well as a session opener.
- **Thermometer only:** Run Phase 3 as a standalone 15-minute check-in tool at the start of any session, participants mark where they are on their thermometer and share one word about their current weather.
- **Youth worker focus:** Adapt examples to professional stress, burnout warning signs, and the specific physical and mental responses that emerge in demanding youth work practice.



Resources

Grounded in psychoeducation and nervous system regulation approaches. See: *Porges (2011), Siegel (2010)*.



Theme

- Wellbeing
- Mental Health Awareness
- Self-awareness
- Self-compassion



Duration

60–70



Group Size

8–25



Emotional Intensity

High

Note: This is a psychologically demanding activity. It requires facilitator readiness assessment before use. See Appendix X and the note at the start of Tips & Considerations.

ACTIVITY 39

Meeting Your Inner Critic

Meeting Your Inner Critic is a reflective and practical activity that invites participants to get acquainted with the critical inner voice that many of us carry, the voice that judges, doubts, and undermines. By naming the inner critic, examining whether its messages are actually true, and rewriting them with greater accuracy and kindness, participants develop a crucial skill: the ability to observe their thoughts rather than automatically believe them. This activity builds directly on the self-awareness developed in Your Inner Weather and prepares the ground for the deeper work of Whose Voice Is This?, where the origins of the inner critic in discrimination and internalized stigma are explored.



Objectives

- To help participants recognize and name the inner critic, the self-critical voice that many people carry.
- To practice examining inner critic messages rather than automatically believing them.
- To develop the capacity to respond to self-critical thoughts with greater accuracy and self-compassion.
- To begin exploring where inner critic messages come from, and whether they were chosen or inherited.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify and name a recurring inner critic message they carry.
- practice examining self-critical thoughts using three reflective questions.
- rewrite a self-critical message into a more accurate and compassionate version.
- approach their own inner voice with greater curiosity and less automatic belief.



Materials

- Small paper strips, one per participant for the inner critic message
- A4 paper, one per participant for the rewrite
- Pens
- Flipchart and markers

Optional: calm background music during the writing phase.



Preparation

- Prepare your own inner critic example to share, something genuine but not too heavy. Your willingness to model vulnerability sets the tone entirely for this activity.
- Prepare the three examination questions on the flipchart before participants arrive, ready to reveal at the right moment.
- Think carefully about the sharing phase; some participants may find naming self-critical thoughts activating. Frame it carefully and keep sharing genuinely voluntary throughout.
- This activity works best after Your Inner Weather, participants already have language for their inner experience and feel grounded enough to go deeper.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction — The Voice Inside (10 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the concept of the inner critic warmly and with humor where appropriate:

“Most of us have a voice inside that comments on what we do, how we look, and who we are. We carry many inner voices, some sound like a coach: helpful, encouraging, honest. But one voice in particular tends to judge, doubt, and undermine. It is repetitive, unkind, and convinced it knows the worst about us. Today we are going to meet that voice, and look at it a little more carefully.”

Invite brief responses: *“Does this sound familiar? What does your inner critic sound like?”* Keep this light, participants sharing one word or phrase is enough at this stage.

Share your own example genuinely: *“My inner critic often tells me [X]. It sounds very convincing. But today we’re going to look at it more carefully.”*

Introduce the core idea: *“The inner critic is not the truth. It is a voice, often very old, often inherited from somewhere or someone outside us. And like all voices, it can be examined, questioned, and responded to. We are not our thoughts. We have thoughts.”*

2 Name It (10 mins): Distribute paper strips. Ask participants to write one thing their inner critic tells them regularly, one sentence, as specific as possible.

Examples to offer if participants seem stuck:

- I am not smart enough
- I always mess things up
- Nobody really likes me
- I don’t deserve good things
- I have to work twice as hard just to be seen as equal
- I am too much / not enough

Soft background music during this phase. Give participants genuine quiet time, do not circulate or interrupt.

When most participants have written their message, invite them to look at what they wrote for a moment. *“This is the voice. Now let’s meet it properly.”*

3 Take a Closer Look (15 mins): Reveal the three examination questions on the flipchart one at a time, allowing participants to reflect on each before moving to the next:

1. *“Is this actually true, or does it just feel true?”* Give 2-3 minutes of quiet reflection. Then invite a brief voluntary sharing: *“What did you notice with this question?”*
2. *“What would I say to a close friend who told me this about themselves?”* Give 2-3 minutes of quiet reflection. Then invite brief voluntary sharing.
3. *“Where did this thought come from, did I choose it, or was it given to me?”* Give 2-3 minutes of quiet reflection. This question is intentionally open — the source could be a parent, a teacher, a past experience, a cultural message, or a broader social narrative. All answers are valid. Some participants may make connections to experiences of discrimination or exclusion. Others may trace the thought to a specific person or moment. Never guide participants toward a particular answer, let the question do its work.

After all three questions, acknowledge what just happened: *“You just did something most people never do, you questioned your inner critic rather than simply believing it. That is a significant act.”*

4 Rewrite It (15 mins): Distribute A4 paper. Invite participants to turn their paper strip face down and write a more accurate, kinder version of their inner critic message on the A4 paper.

Important framing: *“This is not about toxic positivity, not ‘I am amazing and perfect.’ It is about finding something truer and fairer. Something you might actually believe.”*

Examples of rewrites:

- I am not smart enough ➡ I am still learning and that is enough
- I always mess things up ➡ I make mistakes sometimes, that is human
- I don’t deserve good things ➡ I am worthy of care simply because I exist
- I have to work twice as hard to be seen as equal ➡ The standard is unfair, my worth is not defined by how hard I have to work

Give participants 8-10 minutes to write their rewrite, in any language, in any form. They can write one sentence or a whole paragraph. They can draw rather than write. The rewrite belongs entirely to them.

5 Optional Sharing (5 mins): Invite participants to share their rewrite, not the original inner critic message, if they choose. Keep this genuinely optional. A participant who chooses to share their rewrite is doing something significant, acknowledge it warmly and specifically.

6 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

7 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice when you wrote your inner critic message down, how did it feel to name it?
2. Which of the three examination questions landed most strongly for you, and what did you discover?
3. How did it feel to rewrite the message, was it easy, difficult, or something else?
4. Was there anything surprising about where your inner critic message came from?
5. When do you notice your inner critic most strongly in daily life?
6. What does responding to your inner critic with accuracy and kindness look like in practice?
7. What does it mean that we can observe our thoughts rather than automatically believe them?
8. What does it tell us that so many inner critic messages sound similar across different people and different backgrounds?
9. What is one inner critic message you could practice examining this week, and what would you say back to it?
10. In what situations could you use this?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** It should only be facilitated with groups that have already established strong trust and have spent significant time together. A co-facilitator is strongly recommended. Facilitators should be familiar with trauma-informed practice and confident using grounding techniques before running this activity. Do not use it with a new group or as a standalone session without prior relationship-building. If you are unsure whether you, or your group, are ready, choose a lighter activity first.
- **Your Own Example Is Everything:** This activity lives or dies on your willingness to model vulnerability. If you share a genuine, specific inner critic message, not a sanitized example, participants feel permission to do the same. Choose something real but manageable. Your example sets the emotional temperature of the whole activity.
- **The Paper Strip Stays Private:** Make it absolutely clear, multiple times, that the paper strip with the original inner critic message is private. Nobody will read it, ask about it, or reference it. Some participants may want to tear it up or fold it away at the end, encourage this if it feels meaningful. The private inner critic message and the public rewrite mirror the structure of Beyond the Label in the Agency section.
- **Facilitator Lens:** Before facilitating this activity, ask yourself: if a participant traces their inner critic directly to experiences of discrimination or racism, am I prepared to acknowledge that connection without redirecting them back to individual coping? The inner critic is often not a personal malfunction, for many young people in this group, it is the internalised voice of a system that has consistently told them they are less. Question 3 is where that realisation may surface. Your role is not to resolve it, but to hold it with honesty.
- **Question 3 — Where Did This Come From?:** This question is the most significant and the most open. Inner critic messages come from many places, family, relationships, cultural messages, past experiences, discrimination. Never guide participants toward a particular answer. Some will make connections to discrimination. Some will name a specific person. Some won't know, and that's fine. The value is in the asking, not the answering.
- **The Rewrite Is Not Denial:** Explicitly frame the rewrite as a search for accuracy and fairness, not positive thinking. For participants who have experienced real and ongoing discrimination, "I am worthy of care simply because I exist" may feel more true and more powerful than "everything is going to be great." The rewrite should feel believable, not aspirational.
- **Connection to Whose Voice Is This?:** This activity naturally opens the door to the deeper exploration of internalized discrimination in Whose Voice Is This?, where Question 3 is taken much further. If facilitators are running both activities, Meeting Your Inner Critic is the preparation. If running as standalone, it is complete in itself.



Variations

- **Letter version:** After the rewrite, participants write a short letter from their kinder inner voice to their inner critic, acknowledging it, thanking it for trying to protect them, and gently letting it know it's not needed right now.
- **Pairs version:** After the examination questions, participants share their inner critic message with one trusted partner who asks the three questions aloud. The experience of being examined by another person rather than alone deepens the reflection.



Resources

Grounded in cognitive behavioural therapy and attachment theory approaches.
See: Beck (1979), Bowlby (1988).



Theme

- Wellbeing
- Mental Health Awareness
- Anti-discrimination
- Self-worth



Duration

75-90



Group Size

8-25



Emotional Intensity

High

Note: This is a psychologically demanding activity. It requires facilitator readiness assessment before use. See Appendix X and the note at the start of Tips & Considerations.

ACTIVITY 40

Whose Voice Is This?

Whose Voice Is This? is a structured reflective activity that takes the inner critic work of Meeting Your Inner Critic one step further, asking not just “is this thought true?” but “whose voice is this really?” For Roma, refugee, and migrant youth who may have experienced discrimination, exclusion, and systemic marginalization, many self-critical thoughts are not randomly formed, they are the internalized voices of a world that has repeatedly sent the message “you are less than.” This activity makes that connection explicit, compassionate, and actionable through a three-column framework: The Internalized Thought, The Reality Check, and The New Narrative.

Objectives

- To help participants recognize internalized discrimination — the process by which external messages of exclusion become internal beliefs about oneself.
- To practice examining internalized thoughts using a simplified cognitive reframing framework.
- To distinguish between personal failing and systemic reality, moving from “what is wrong with me?” to “what is wrong with this system?”
- To support participants in developing a New Narrative, a more accurate, dignified, and self-authored statement about who they are.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- recognize and name at least one internalized thought that originated in discrimination or exclusion rather than personal reality.
- apply a three-column framework to examine and reframe internalized thoughts.
- distinguish between personal responsibility and systemic barriers in shaping self-perception.
- create a personal New Narrative statement that reflects their inherent dignity and worth.



Preparation

- Prepare the three-column worksheet in advance, one per participant. Three columns labeled:
 - The Internalized Thought
 - The Reality Check
 - The New Narrative



Materials

- The wheel of power <https://www.icvanetwork.org/topics/5532/news/10083475>
- Printed or drawn three-column worksheets, one per participant (see Preparation)
- Pens
- Flipchart and markers for the facilitator model

Optional: calm background music during the individual work phases

- Prepare a flipchart version of the three columns to model the process with your own example.
- Prepare 2-3 examples of internalized thoughts relevant to this target group; see Step-by-step Instructions. These are offered as starting points for participants who find it difficult to identify their own.
- Think carefully about the introduction, the concept of internalized discrimination needs to be introduced with genuine care. It is important that participants never feel blamed for having internalized messages, or that they are being told what to think about their own experience.
- This activity works best after Meeting Your Inner Critic, participants already have practice examining self-critical thoughts and are ready to go deeper into their origins.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction — What Is Internalized Discrimination? (10 mins):

1. Welcome participants and introduce the concept directly:

“Most of us carry thoughts about ourselves that feel absolutely true, ‘I am not smart enough,’ ‘I don’t really belong here,’ ‘People like me don’t deserve that.’ Today we are going to look at where some of those thoughts actually come from.”

2. Before introducing internalized discrimination, briefly introduce how power and structural inequality operate; because this is the missing piece that makes the rest of the activity make sense. Use the Wheel of Power and Privilege as a visual anchor:

“Different aspects of our identity, our ethnicity, language, legal status, gender, ability, place us in different relationships to institutional power. This is not about individual good or bad people. It is about how systems are structured. Some identities are consistently centred, protected, and valued by institutions. Others are consistently marginalised, overlooked, or penalised. This is structural, not personal.”

3. Walk through the wheel briefly, not exhaustively, just enough for participants to locate themselves and understand the concept. Then connect it directly to internalized discrimination:

“When we are repeatedly on the outside of that power, when systems, media, institutions, and social interactions consistently send the message ‘you are less than’, we can start to believe it. We absorb those messages as if they were our own thoughts. This is called internalized discrimination. It is not a weakness. It is a very human response to an unfair world. And it is not permanent.”

4. Acknowledge directly:

“This is not about blaming yourself for the thoughts you carry. You did not choose them. They were placed inside you by experiences that were not your fault. Today we are going to look at them carefully, and begin to give them back.”

2 Recognizing Internalized Thoughts (15 mins): Present examples of common internalized discrimination thoughts for this target group, on the flipchart or printed cards. Offer these as starting points, not as definitive lists:

- For many Roma youth:
 - I have to prove I'm not like the stereotype
 - People like me don't succeed in education
 - I should hide where I come from
 - I have to be twice as good to be seen as equal
- For many refugees and asylum seekers:
 - I don't really belong here
 - I should be grateful for whatever I get and not ask for more
 - My culture and language are disadvantages
 - I am a burden
- For migrants:
 - I have to assimilate completely to deserve acceptance
 - My accent makes me less credible
 - I should stay quiet and not cause trouble
- General:
 - People like me don't deserve that
 - I am too much / not enough
 - I should stay in my place

Invite participants to read through the examples privately and notice which ones resonate, if any. Then invite brief voluntary sharing: *"Does any of these feel familiar, or is there a different one you carry?"*

Keep this light and non-pressuring. Participants do not need to disclose, the recognition itself is valuable.

3 The Three Columns (25 mins): Distribute the three-column worksheets. Introduce the framework:

"We are going to work with three columns. The first is the internalized thought, something you carry about yourself that may have come from outside you. The second is the reality check, naming the systemic reality behind the thought, separating what is true about the world from what is true about you. The third is the new narrative, a more accurate, more dignified statement about who you are."

Model the full process on the flipchart with a genuine example:

- 1. The Internalized Thought:** I have to work twice as hard to be seen as equal.
- 2. The Reality Check:** Where did this come from? Is it me or something external? Do I want it to be like this?
- 3. The New Narrative:** The system is unfair and I am worthy of equal respect regardless of how hard I work.

Walk through each column explicitly:

- **The Internalized Thought;** be specific. Not “I feel bad about myself” but the actual thought.
- **The Reality Check;** this is not about excusing everything. It is about naming what is systemic rather than personal. “Society has unfair standards” is not denial, it is accuracy.
- **The New Narrative;** this is not toxic positivity. It is a statement grounded in inherent dignity. Not “everything will be fine” but “I am worthy simply because I exist.”

Give participants 15 minutes to work through their own three columns individually. Soft background music. Circulate quietly, be available without hovering. If a participant is stuck on the Reality Check, offer a gentle prompt: “*What would you say to a friend who believed this thought about themselves? What is actually true about the world that created this thought?*”

Note on the New Narrative: See *Tips and Considerations*.

4 Sharing the New Narrative (10 mins): Invite participants to share their New Narrative, not the internalized thought, not the reality check, just the New Narrative. One sentence, read aloud if they choose.

This is a moment of genuine collective witnessing, each New Narrative statement is a small act of reclaiming dignity. Acknowledge each one specifically and warmly.

If participants want to display their New Narrative, on the wall, on a shared piece of paper, encourage it. If they want to keep it private, equally valid.

5 Debriefing (15 mins): See *below*.

6 Closing: See *Section 5.9 Closing Rituals*.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice while working through the three columns, which was easiest and which was hardest?
2. What happened when you tried to write the Reality Check, was it easy or difficult to separate systemic reality from personal failing?
3. How did it feel to write your New Narrative, and to hear others' New Narratives?
4. Was there anything that surprised you about the thought you chose to work with?
5. What does it mean that many of the thoughts we carry about ourselves were placed there by systems and experiences outside our control?
6. What is the difference between accepting a difficult reality and internalizing it as a truth about your worth?
7. What would help you challenge this voice when it shows up again?
8. What would change, in how you feel, in how you act, if you genuinely believed your New Narrative?
9. In what situations could you use this?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** It should only be facilitated with groups that have already established strong trust and have spent significant time together. A co-facilitator is strongly recommended. Facilitators should be familiar with trauma-informed practice and confident using grounding techniques before running this activity. Do not use it with a new group or as a standalone session without prior relationship-building. If you are unsure whether you, or your group, are ready, choose a lighter activity first.
- **Facilitator Lens:** Before facilitating this activity, ask yourself: what is my own relationship to the internalized thoughts on this list? If you share identity with participants, some of these thoughts may be ones you carry yourself, and facilitating this activity while personally activated is one of the most common risks here. If you do not share identity with participants, be honest with yourself about whether your example feels genuine or borrowed. Participants will feel the difference. Your role in this activity is not to explain internalized discrimination to young people who have lived it, it is to create the conditions for them to examine it on their own terms.
- **The Reality Check Is Political:** The Reality Check column names systemic reality, unfair standards, structural inequality, discrimination. This is not neutral territory. As a facilitator you are not pretending to be objective about whether discrimination is real or whether systemic barriers exist. They do. The Reality Check is grounded in the research that underlies this entire handbook. Name this honestly if participants ask.
- **One important note on the New Narrative:** be careful not to inadvertently dismiss participants' real survival strategies. Some young people genuinely do need to work harder to access opportunities, this is a real systemic reality. The New Narrative is not about changing strategy. It is about changing the belief that drives it. The difference between "I work hard to prove I deserve dignity" and "I work hard because I want to achieve my goals" is the difference between existential effort and strategic effort. The first is exhausting and self-eroding. The second is empowering and self-directed.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Some internalized thoughts are deeply culturally embedded, connected to gender roles, community expectations, religious frameworks, or intergenerational patterns. Be sensitive to this complexity. The three-column framework works across cultural contexts but the specific thoughts and narratives will vary enormously. Never suggest what someone's New Narrative should say.
- **Connection to Beyond the Label:** This activity connects directly to Beyond the Label in the Agency section, both involve reclaiming narrative from external definition. If participants have already done Beyond the Label, this activity will feel like a natural deepening. Cross-reference explicitly if relevant.

Variations

- **Group version:** Instead of individual worksheets, small groups work through one shared internalized thought together, building a collective Reality Check and New Narrative. Works well for groups with lower individual confidence or higher collective trust.
- **Creative version:** Instead of writing, participants represent their New Narrative through drawing, symbol, or collage. Works well for groups with language barriers or lower literacy.

Resources

Grounded in internalized oppression theory and cognitive reframing approaches.

See: *Fanon (1952), Beck (1979).*

Wheel of Power and Privilege: icvanetwork.org



Theme

- Wellbeing
- Self-worth
- Mental Health AwarenessAnti-discrimination



Duration

70–80



Group Size

8–25



Emotional Intensity

High

Note: This is a psychologically demanding activity. It requires facilitator readiness assessment before use. See Appendix X and the note at the start of Tips & Considerations.

ACTIVITY 41

Enough

Enough is a deeply personal and quietly radical activity that invites participants to examine where their sense of worth currently comes from, and whether that source is actually solid. Through individual reflection, a self-directed path of questions, and a collective closing celebration of inherent worth, participants move from examination toward liberation. The activity holds both personal and systemic sources of worth with equal care, recognising that the question of “am I enough?” can be shaped by family, culture, relationships, achievement pressure, or discrimination. The title says everything: you were enough before anyone told you otherwise.

Objectives

- To help participants examine where their sense of worth currently comes from, and whether that source is stable or fragile.
- To support participants in exploring the possible origins of self-worth through a self-directed path of reflective questions.
- To challenge both personal and systemic sources of “not enough” with greater accuracy, compassion, and political awareness.
- To begin the shift from external validation to internal sovereignty, knowing you are worthy simply because you exist.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- examine where their sense of worth currently comes from with greater self-awareness and curiosity.
- identify whether their source of worth is stable or dependent on external conditions.
- distinguish between unstable external sources of worth and stable internal ones.
- develop a personal statement of inherent worth that feels genuinely believable rather than aspirational.



Materials

- Enough Path Cards
See Appendix 22 (5 cards, print multiple copies, laminate if possible)
- A4 paper — one per participant for individual reflection work
- Pens and colored pencils
- Optional:**
- Calm background music during the individual work phases
- Display space for closing statements



Preparation

- Prepare path cards in advance, print, cut, and if possible laminate for reuse. Place multiple copies of each card face up on the floor or a central table before participants arrive. See the Enough Path Cards in the Appendices for the full content of each card.
- Prepare your own reflection on where your worth is parked, something genuine to share briefly in Phase 1. Your modeling sets the tone.
- Think carefully about the closing phase, some participants may find declaring their worth publicly vulnerable. Plan how to hold this as a genuine invitation rather than a requirement.
- Have a grounding exercise ready, the depth of the path work means some participants may need support before the debrief.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Opening — Where Does Your Worth Come From? (10 mins)

Welcome participants and open with the destination first:

“Today we are going to do something simple but quite radical: look at where your sense of worth comes from, and ask whether that source is actually solid. Not to dwell in what went wrong, but to find something more stable. Something that belongs to you regardless of what anyone else thinks, says, or does.”

Then continue:

“Most of us, at some point in our lives, have heard a voice that said we weren’t enough. Not smart enough, not beautiful enough, not successful enough. Today we are going to look at where that voice comes from. Because where it comes from matters. And we are going to ask whether it is actually true.”

Share your own brief example genuinely, where your worth has been parked at a fragile external source. Keep it real and light.

2 Where Is My Worth Parked? (15 mins): Distribute A4 paper. Ask participants to reflect privately on the following questions, writing, drawing, or mapping their responses:

- What makes me feel worthy, what gives me a sense of being enough?
- What makes me feel unworthy, what triggers the feeling of not being enough?
- Is my sense of worth something I carry inside me, or does it depend on things outside me?

Give participants 8–10 minutes of quiet individual reflection. Soft background music helps.

Then invite brief voluntary sharing, 2–3 participants if they choose. Keep this light: *“Would anyone like to share one thing they noticed?”*

3 Choose Your Path (5 mins):

Explain:

"On the floor you will find five cards, each describing a different source of low self-worth. Walk around quietly, read each one, and take a photo of the card, or cards, that feel most relevant to you right now. You don't need to tell anyone which card you chose. This is entirely your own."

Allow participants to walk around and take photos in their own time. Play soft background music. Nobody announces their choice, the selection is completely private.

4 Work Through the Questions (20-30 mins): Participants return to their seats and work through the questions on their chosen card, independently, privately, using their phone photo as reference.

For the 5 path cards, see Appendices.

Facilitator's role: Circulate quietly and be available. Do not ask which path anyone chose. If someone seems stuck, approach gently: *"Is there a question on your card you want to think through together?"*

5 Bridge (2mins): Bring participants back together gently before the statement of worth phase:

"You have just done something significant, you looked carefully at where your sense of worth comes from. Now let's move toward something different. Toward something that is yours."

6 My Statement of Worth (10 mins): Bring participants back together. Invite each participant to write one personal statement of worth on a fresh piece of paper, something that feels genuinely believable, not aspirational. Not "I am amazing and perfect" but something truer:

- I am worthy of care simply because I exist
- My worth does not depend on how hard I work or what I produce
- I may choose to work hard to achieve my goals, but my worth does not depend on that effort
- I am enough as I am right now, not the version I am working toward

Give participants 5 minutes to write their statement. Invite voluntary sharing, participants who want to read their statement aloud do so. The group responds with a simple collective acknowledgment, a nod, a snap, a soft "yes."

7 Joy as Resistance (5 mins): Close with one final question, light, forward-facing, celebratory:

"What is one thing you love doing just because, not because it makes you look good, not because it impresses anyone, not because it fits any standard, just because it brings you alive?"

Quick round, one thing per person. No elaboration needed. This closing round shifts the energy from examination to celebration, a reminder that joy, pleasure, and delight are themselves acts of resistance against a world that tells you that you must earn the right to feel good.

- 8 Grounding (3mins):** Before moving into the debriefing, invite participants to take three slow breaths together and return to the present moment.
- 9 Debriefing (15 mins):** *See below.*
- 10 Closing:** *See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.*

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice when you reflected on where your worth is currently parked, was anything surprising?
2. Which path felt most familiar, and what did you discover while working through the questions?
3. How did it feel to write your personal statement of worth, was it easy or difficult to find something genuinely believable?
4. What is the difference between an unstable external source of worth and a stable internal one?
5. Was there a path question that was particularly difficult or uncomfortable to sit with?
6. What does it mean that the question of worth can come from so many different places, family, systems, culture, discrimination, and yet feel so personal?
7. What would change in your daily life if you genuinely believed your statement of worth?
8. What is one small thing you could do this week to protect and strengthen your sense of worth?

Resources

Grounded in self-determination theory and self-worth research.
See: *Rosenberg (1965), Deci & Ryan (1985).*

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** It should only be facilitated with groups that have already established strong trust and have spent significant time together. A co-facilitator is strongly recommended. Facilitators should be familiar with trauma-informed practice and confident using grounding techniques before running this activity. Do not use it with a new group or as a standalone session without prior relationship-building. If you are unsure whether you, or your group, are ready, choose a lighter activity first.
- **Facilitator Lens:** Before facilitating this activity, ask yourself: am I prepared to hold both dimensions of this work at the same time, the personal and the political? The path cards and the statement of worth operate at the individual level, but the reason so many young people in this group may carry a belief that they are not enough is not personal. It is structural. The debrief is where that connection must be made explicit, particularly the question about worth coming from discrimination and systemic sources. If the debrief stays only at the personal level, “how did it feel?”, the activity risks becoming a self-help exercise rather than what it actually is: a quiet act of resistance.
- **The Path Cards Are Private:** Never ask participants which path they chose, not during the activity, not in the debrief, not privately. The self-directed path selection is what makes this activity safe. Respecting that privacy is non-negotiable.
- **The Statement of Worth Must Feel Believable:** Explicitly frame the statement of worth as a search for accuracy rather than aspiration. For some participants “I am worthy simply because I exist” will feel true and powerful. For others it may feel too far from their current reality. If a participant struggles, offer: “*What is the smallest, most believable version of this you could write right now?*” Even “I am trying to believe I am enough” is a valid and honest statement.
- **Path B - A Special Note on Strategic Effort:** For participants who work hard as a survival strategy, to access scholarships, avoid discrimination, or navigate unfair systems, be careful not to inadvertently suggest they should stop working hard. The reframe is about the belief driving the effort, not the effort itself. The difference between “I work hard to feel like a person” and “I work hard to achieve my goals” is the difference between existential effort and strategic effort. The first is exhausting and self-eroding. The second is empowering and self-directed.
- **Path D - E and Systemic Sources:** For participants working through Path E, the questions may surface significant anger, grief, or recognition of real injustice. Hold this with care. Anger at discrimination is appropriate and healthy, do not rush to comfort or resolution. The statement of worth at the end is not a denial of the injustice but a refusal to let it define worth.
- **Joy as Resistance:** The closing round is intentionally light and celebratory. Protect this energy, do not let it become another reflection exercise. One thing, quickly, joyfully. The contrast between the depth of the path work and the lightness of the joy round is itself pedagogically meaningful.

Variations

- **Pairs version:** After working through path questions individually, participants share their reflections with one trusted partner, not the questions themselves but what they discovered. The partner listens without advising.
- **Extended version:** After writing their statement of worth, participants decorate it, turning it into a small piece of art they can keep and display. Connects naturally to the creative activities in Section 5.3.
- **Youth worker focus:** Adapt Path B specifically to youth work, “*I am worthy as a professional even when I can’t fix everything*” is a particularly relevant reframe for youth workers experiencing burnout or helplessness.



Theme

- Wellbeing
- Self-esteem
- Self-confidence
- Group Connection



Duration

60–70



Group Size

10–25

Note: participants work in rotating pairs



Emotional Intensity

High

Note: This is a psychologically demanding activity. It requires facilitator readiness assessment before use. See Appendix X and the note at the start of Tips & Considerations.

ACTIVITY 42

The Mirror and The Map

The Mirror and The Map is a two-part self-esteem building activity that moves from being witnessed to building evidence. In the first part, The Mirror, participants receive genuine observations about their character from peers, planting seeds of self-knowledge they didn't have to invent alone. In the second part, The Map, participants build an evidence file around those witnessed qualities, finding specific moments from their own lives that prove those qualities exist. The sequence is intentional: being seen by others first creates the foundation from which participants can see themselves more clearly. This activity works best when groups have spent meaningful time together, genuine witnessing requires genuine familiarity.

Objectives

- To create a structured experience of being genuinely seen and witnessed by peers, for character qualities rather than achievements or appearances.
- To help participants build a personal evidence file of who they are, grounded in specific, real moments from their own lives.
- To strengthen self-esteem through the combination of external witnessing and internal evidence-gathering.
- To develop greater self-confidence through the recognition that qualities participants already possess have real, demonstrable presence in their lives.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- receive and internalize at least two genuine character observations from peers.
- identify specific evidence from their own life that supports witnessed qualities.
- experience a stronger, more grounded sense of self-esteem, built on both external recognition and internal evidence.
- approach themselves with greater confidence and self-belief grounded in real experience rather than abstract affirmation.



Materials

- A4 or A3 paper, one per participant for The Map
- Pens and colored pencils

Optional:

- Printed quality inspiration card, one per participant or displayed on flipchart (see Preparation)
- Calm background music during The Map phase



Preparation

- Prepare a quality inspiration list, not a prescriptive menu but a gentle starting point for participants who struggle to find the right word.
Examples:
 - Courage / Resilience / Persistence
 - Empathy / Warmth / Care for others
 - Curiosity / Deep thinking / Creativity
 - Honesty / Integrity / Authenticity
 - Humor / Lightness / Joy
 - Quiet strength / Patience / Groundedness
 - Leadership / Initiative / Generosity
 - Listening / Presence / Attentiveness
 - Loyalty / Reliability / Trustworthiness
 - Kindness / Compassion / Gentleness
- Display this list on a flipchart or print as a small card, available as inspiration, never as instruction.
- Think carefully about group readiness, this activity requires genuine familiarity, AND a healthy group dynamic. Do not use if any of the following are present in the group: ongoing exclusion or cliquing, boundary violations between participants, harassment or mockery, however subtle, unresolved conflict or tension between specific participants, or any dynamic where some participants hold significantly more social power than others. In these conditions, witnessing can become a vehicle for harm rather than recognition. If you are unsure about your group's dynamics, err on the side of caution.
- Prepare your own example of a witnessed quality and three pieces of evidence, to model both phases genuinely.



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 Introduction (5 mins):** Welcome participants and introduce the activity warmly.

"Today we are going to do two things. First, we are going to witness each other. Not compliment each other's clothes or hair, not say nice things to be polite, but genuinely name something we have actually observed in each other's character since we have been together. Second, we are going to build a map of evidence. Taking what we are given by others and finding the proof of it in our own lives."

Introduce the witnessing protocol:

- **The speaker says:** "I witness [quality] in you."
- **The receiver says:** "I hear you", and writes the quality in the center of their paper.

Explain: *"I hear you' is enough. You don't have to say thank you, you don't have to agree, you don't have to express emotion. Just receive it. Write it down. It's yours now."*

Model briefly with your own example, show participants what genuine witnessing sounds like versus surface compliments.

2 The Mirror — Witnessing Rounds (20 mins): Invite participants to find a partner, ideally someone they have connected with during the program. If participants feel more comfortable sitting side by side rather than face to face, that is equally valid.

- **Round 1 (6-7 mins):** Partner A witnesses Partner B, one quality, genuinely observed. Partner B receives, says “I hear you,” writes the quality in the center of their paper. Then Partner B witnesses Partner A. Same process.
- **Round 2 (6-7 mins):** Find a new partner. Repeat. Each person now has two witnessed qualities on their paper.
- **Round 3 (6-7 mins):** (Optional) Find a third partner if time and energy allow. Three witnessed qualities creates a richer map.

Facilitator’s role: Circulate quietly. If someone is struggling to find a quality to witness, offer a gentle prompt: “What have you noticed about how this person shows up in the group? How do they listen? How do they respond when things are difficult? What do you see in them that they might not see in themselves?”

Refer participants to the quality inspiration list if needed, but encourage them to find their own word first.

3 Transition (2 mins): Invite participants to look at the qualities written in the center of their paper, 2 or 3 seeds planted by people who have genuinely observed them.

Say simply: “These are not compliments. These are observations. Now let’s find the evidence.”

4 The Map — Building the Evidence File (20 mins): Explain the task:

“For each quality you received, find three receipts. Specific moments from your own life where that quality showed up. Not general statements, specific moments. The more concrete the better.”

Model with your own example:

- **Quality witnessed:** resilience
- **Receipt 1:** That time I finished the project even when I was completely exhausted
- **Receipt 2:** The way I kept going after that difficult feedback
- **Receipt 3:** How I supported my friend through their crisis even when I was struggling myself

Participants work individually and privately, writing, drawing, or mapping their evidence in whatever format feels right. The paper is theirs, they can organize it however makes sense to them. Some will write lists. Some will draw. Some will create a visual map with the quality at the center and receipts branching outward.

Give participants 15 minutes of quiet individual work. Soft background music helps. Circulate quietly, be available without hovering. If someone is genuinely stuck on finding receipts, offer a gentle prompt: *“When did this quality show up even in a small way? It doesn’t have to be a dramatic moment, even something small counts as evidence.”*

5 Optional Sharing (5 mins): Invite participants to share one receipt, one specific moment of evidence, if they choose. Not the witnessed quality, not the whole map, just one receipt they feel good about.

Keep this genuinely optional and warm. A participant sharing one receipt is doing something significant, acknowledge it specifically.

6 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

7 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*. Participants keep their map, it is a personal document of who they are, witnessed and evidenced. Encourage them to add to it over time.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What was it like to witness someone else, to look for a genuine quality rather than a surface compliment?
2. What was it like to receive a witnessed quality, to hear someone name something they had genuinely observed in you?
3. How did it feel to find receipts, specific evidence of the quality in your own life?
4. Was there a receipt that surprised you, a moment you hadn’t thought of as evidence of strength before?
5. What is the difference between someone telling you that you are resilient and finding your own evidence of resilience?
6. What does it tell us that the qualities others witness in us are often ones we struggle to see in ourselves?
7. What is one quality on your map that you want to consciously develop or draw on more in the coming weeks?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** It should only be facilitated with groups that have already established strong trust and have spent significant time together. A co-facilitator is strongly recommended. Facilitators should be familiar with trauma-informed practice and confident using grounding techniques before running this activity. Do not use it with a new group or as a standalone session without prior relationship-building. If you are unsure whether you, or your group, are ready, choose a lighter activity first.
- **Genuine Witnessing vs Surface Compliments:** The most important facilitation moment in this activity is the introduction of the witnessing protocol. Spend real time on this; give examples of what genuine witnessing sounds like versus surface compliments:

Surface compliment: “You are so nice” Genuine witnessing: “I witnessed how you listened to someone today without trying to fix their problem, just being present with them”

Surface compliment: “You are really smart” Genuine witnessing: “I see the way you think carefully before you speak, you take ideas seriously”

The more specific the witness, the more powerful the seed.

- **Group Readiness:** Repeat this clearly in the introduction: *“I am going to ask you to witness something you have genuinely observed, not something you think they want to hear, not a polite compliment. This only works if it’s real. And it can only be real if we have actually spent time together.”* This frames the activity’s requirement for familiarity without making it feel like a test.
- A note on the witnessing protocol: This activity uses a structured form of peer witnessing, asking participants to name genuine character qualities they have observed in each other. This is not a clinical mirroring technique. It is a narrative therapy-informed practice of social recognition. However, the witnessing protocol only works when it is genuine, insincere or inaccurate witnessing is worse than no witnessing at all. Facilitators should monitor the quality of witnessing during the rounds and intervene gently if they notice surface compliments, awkward politeness, or, in a group with poor dynamics, witnessing that feels loaded or unkind. If you have any doubt about the group’s readiness or dynamics, use the Written Witnessing variation instead, which removes the face-to-face element and gives participants more control.

Variations

- **Written witnessing:** For groups where face-to-face witnessing feels too intense, participants write their witnessed quality on a small card and place it on the other person’s chair or paper, no eye contact required. Equally powerful and more accessible for some groups.
- **Facilitator witnessing:** For groups with very low trust or very early in a program, the facilitator witnesses each participant themselves, modeling the protocol and planting the first seed before peer witnessing begins.
- **Extended map:** After the session, participants continue building their map over several days, adding receipts as they notice qualities showing up in their daily life. Works beautifully in longer programs where the map can be shared at a final session.

Resources

Grounded in narrative therapy and self-esteem research approaches.
See: Harter (1999), White & Epston (1990).



Theme

- Wellbeing
- Self-confidence
- Resilience
- Capacity Building



Duration

50–60



Group Size

Any

Note: Individual drawing within a group setting



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium



Materials

- Paper with a large shield outline (divided into 4 parts) printed or drawn.
(See Appendix 23)
- Colored markers, pens.

Optional: materials for decoration (magazines, scissors, glue, stickers).

ACTIVITY 43

My Power Shield

My Power Shield is a creative activity that uses the visual metaphor of a shield to help participants identify and map their personal strengths, values, support systems, and past challenges. By giving these inner and outer resources a visual, tangible form, participants consolidate a positive self-concept and build a practical reminder of what they already carry. The shield becomes a personal artifact, something to return to when self-belief feels fragile.

Objectives

- To help participants visually map their personal strengths, values, support systems, and resilience.
- To strengthen self-belief by reflecting on past challenges that have been successfully navigated.
- To identify reliable sources of support, people, places, and practices, that increase emotional strength.
- To create a personal item participants can return to when they need a reminder of their own resources and strength.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- visually represent their unique internal and external resources with greater clarity and awareness.
- identify specific values and strengths they already possess.
- recognize their own capacity to navigate adversity through reflection on past challenges.
- approach their own worth and resilience with greater confidence and self-compassion.



Preparation

- Print or draw shield outlines in advance, one per participant. The shield should be large enough to write and draw comfortably in all four sections.
- Set up tables with art materials accessible before participants arrive.
- Think in advance about how to explain “value” simply, as a guiding principle (honesty, kindness, determination) rather than a material asset. Have a few examples ready.
- Think about how to hold the “challenge overcome” quadrant sensitively, for some participants naming a past challenge may surface difficult memories. Have the lighter variation ready (see *Variations*).
- Prepare your own shield example to show participants, make it genuine and personal. Your example sets the depth of reflection participants feel invited to bring.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5–7 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the concept of the Power Shield; a symbol of personal protection, strength, and identity. Explain that today participants will create their own shield by mapping four things they already carry:

1. **Something they are good at;** a skill, a talent, or a quality
2. **A value they live by;** a principle that guides how they treat others and themselves
3. **A person or place that gives them strength;** an outer resource they can turn to
4. **A challenge they have overcome;** proof of their resilience

Distribute shield outlines and materials. Remind participants: there is no right or wrong way to fill the shield. Words, drawings, symbols, colors; whatever feels most natural. Artistic skill is completely irrelevant.

2 Creation (20–25 mins): Invite participants to begin filling their shields. Encourage them to take their time with each quadrant, this is not a race. Play soft background music if it helps settle the atmosphere.

Facilitator’s role: Circulate quietly. Be available without hovering. If someone seems stuck, offer a gentle prompt:

1. For quadrant 1: “Is there something small you do well that you sometimes take for granted?”
2. For quadrant 2: “Is there a principle you always come back to, even when it’s hard?”
3. For quadrant 3: “Is there a person whose voice in your head makes you feel stronger?”
4. For quadrant 4: “Is there a moment you got through something you didn’t think you could?”

3 Sharing and Gallery Walk (10–15 mins): Invite participants to display their shields around the room, on walls, chairs, or tables. Invite a silent gallery walk, participants walk around and look at each other's shields without speaking.

After the gallery walk, invite brief voluntary sharing: participants can share one element from their shield if they choose. Keep sharing genuinely optional.

4 Debriefing (10 mins): See below.

5 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*. Participants keep their shield, it is a personal artifact. Encourage them to display it somewhere they will see it.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did it look like while everyone was creating their shields, what did you observe in the room?
2. What kinds of symbols, colors, or words did you notice on other shields during the gallery walk?
3. How did it feel to map out your own strengths, values, and support systems?
4. Which quadrant was most difficult to fill in, and why?
5. How does seeing your shield, and others' shields, affect your sense of your own strength?
6. Which part of your shield do you rely on the least but could use more?
7. What does it tell us that resilience is often talked about as something individual, when so many of the things on our shields are actually people, relationships, and communities?
8. How can the challenge you overcame help you navigate current or future difficulties?
9. How can the strengths on our shields be used to support each other in this group?
10. When you feel low or overwhelmed, how could you use your shield as a reminder of your value and resources?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Defining Value Simply:** Ensure participants understand “value” as a guiding principle, honesty, kindness, determination, fairness, rather than a material asset or achievement. Have a few examples ready. If participants are confused, ask: *“Is there something you believe in so strongly that you try to live by it even when it’s difficult?”*
- **The Challenge Quadrant:** For some participants, naming a past challenge may surface difficult memories. Never push for details, the challenge can be described as abstractly as the participant chooses. If the group seems tense around this quadrant, offer the lighter variation (see below).
- **Symbols Over Words:** Explicitly validate the use of symbols, colors, and drawings over written words. A single symbol can carry more meaning than a paragraph, and is more accessible for participants with lower literacy or language barriers.

Variations

- **Lighter version:** Replace “a challenge I have overcome” with “a goal I am working toward”, keeps the activity forward-looking and reduces vulnerability.
- **Collage version:** Participants use magazine images, colored paper, and words to create their shield. Works well for groups with lower confidence in drawing or lower literacy.
- **Group Shield:** After individual shields are complete, create a large collective shield on the wall. Each participant contributes one symbol from their personal shield. The group shield represents collective resilience, a powerful visual of shared strength.

Resources

Grounded in strengths-based and asset-mapping approaches.
See: Saleebey (1997), Kretzmann & McKnight (1993).



Theme

- Wellbeing
- Self-awareness
- Everyday Practice
- Sustain



Duration

50–60



Group Size

8–25

Note: Individual work within a group setting.



Emotional Intensity

Low to Medium

ACTIVITY 44

Weeds and Seeds

Weeds and Seeds is a practical, reflective activity that helps participants map their personal wellbeing landscape, identifying what nourishes and sustains them (seeds) and what drains and depletes them (weeds) across different areas of daily life. Using the garden as a metaphor, participants create a personal wellbeing maintenance map that is honest about both the challenges they face and the resources they already have. Unlike many wellbeing activities that focus only on the positive, Weeds and Seeds deliberately holds both, because genuine wellbeing practice requires knowing what to tend and what to pull out. The activity closes with one concrete action participants can take this week to strengthen their garden.

Objectives

- To help participants identify the specific people, practices, thoughts, and situations that nourish their wellbeing in daily life.
- To help participants recognize what drains, depletes, or undermines their wellbeing, honestly and without judgment.
- To develop awareness of early warning signs that wellbeing is suffering.
- To create a simple, personal wellbeing maintenance plan grounded in daily reality.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify specific seeds, sources of nourishment and restoration in their daily life.
- identify specific weeds, sources of depletion, stress, or undermining in their daily life.
- recognize personal early warning signs that their wellbeing is suffering.
- develop one concrete action they can take to tend their wellbeing garden this week.



Materials

- Large paper or A3, one per participant
- Colored markers, pens, pencils

Optional:

- Printed garden template with sections for seeds, weeds, soil, and weather (see Preparation)
- Calm background music during the individual work phase
- Sticky notes in two colors; one for seeds, one for weeds



Preparation

1. [text here]



Preparation

- Prepare a simple garden template if using, a large outline with sections for:
 - **Seeds;** what nourishes me
 - **Weeds;** what drains me
 - **Soil;** my foundations (values, routines, relationships that ground me)
 - **Weather;** external conditions I can't control but need to navigate
- Alternatively participants draw their own garden freehand, equally valid and often more personal.
- Prepare your own brief example of seeds and weeds from your own life, something genuine to share in the introduction. Your modeling normalizes honest self-reflection.
- Think carefully about the weeds, for some participants naming what drains them may surface significant difficulties. Keep the framing practical and forward-looking rather than analytical or therapeutic.



Step-by-Step Instructions

- 1 **Introduction (8–10 mins):** Welcome participants and introduce the garden metaphor:

“Wellbeing is not a destination, it is something we tend, like a garden. Gardens need attention. They need watering, sunlight, good soil. And they need weeding, because weeds grow back, and if we ignore them, they crowd out everything else.”

Introduce the four elements:

1. **Seeds;** the things that nourish you. Relationships, practices, places, activities, thoughts, routines that restore your energy, lift your mood, or make you feel like yourself.
2. **Weeds;** the things that drain you. Different behaviours of people, situations, habits, thought patterns, or circumstances that deplete your energy, undermine your confidence, or leave you feeling worse.
3. **Soil;** your foundations. The values, routines, and relationships that ground you, the stable base your garden grows from.
4. **Weather;** external conditions you can't control but need to navigate. Systemic barriers, discrimination, instability, uncertainty, things that affect your garden from the outside.

Share one or two brief genuine examples from your own garden. Keep this light and real.

2 Individual Garden Mapping (20–25 mins): Distribute paper and materials. Invite participants to create their own garden, using the template or drawing freehand.

Guide the mapping with gentle prompts, one at a time, with space between each:

Seeds:

- What are the things that reliably make you feel better, even a little?
- What activities, people, or moments restore your energy?
- What small daily things nourish you that you might take for granted?

Weeds:

- What are the things that consistently drain your energy or undermine your wellbeing?
- Are there thought patterns, habits, or situations that you keep coming back to that leave you feeling worse?
- Are there certain behaviours or dynamics in relationships or environments that deplete rather than restore you?

Soil:

- What are the foundations that keep you grounded, even on difficult days?
- What values or routines do you return to when things get hard?

Weather:

- What external conditions affect your wellbeing that you didn't choose and can't easily change?
- What does the weather in your life look like right now?

3 Early Warning Signs (5 mins): After the mapping, invite participants to add one more element to their garden, a weather vane or a small note:

“What are your early warning signs that your garden is struggling? What do you notice first, in your body, your mood, your behavior, when your wellbeing is suffering?”

Examples to offer:

- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Withdrawing from people
- Losing interest in things you usually enjoy
- Irritability or emotional numbness
- Physical tension or exhaustion
- The inner critic getting louder

These early warning signs are the garden's alarm system, noticing them early makes tending easier.

4 One Action (5 mins): Invite participants to look at their garden and identify one concrete action they can take this week, to plant a seed, pull a weed, or tend the soil:

“What is one small, realistic thing you could do this week to tend your wellbeing garden? Not a grand plan, just one thing.”

Participants write this action clearly on their paper, somewhere visible.

5 Brief Sharing (5 mins): Invite participants to share their one action with a partner or with the whole group, if they choose. Keep this light and forward-focused.

6 Debriefing (10 mins): See below.

7 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*. Participants keep their garden map, it is a personal wellbeing reference they can return to and update over time.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice while mapping your garden, was anything surprising about your seeds or weeds?
2. Which was easier to identify, the seeds or the weeds, and what does that tell you?
3. How did it feel to name both honestly, what nourishes you AND what drains you?
4. Which weed is hardest to remove and why?
5. What did you notice about your early warning signs, had you recognized them before?
6. What does it mean to tend your wellbeing actively rather than waiting until the garden is completely overgrown?
7. Were there any weeds that you can't pull out, external conditions you can't change? How do you navigate those?
8. What is one seed you will actively grow this week?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Weeds Are Not Always Removable:** Some weeds are structural, discrimination, poverty, housing insecurity, legal uncertainty. These cannot simply be pulled out through individual effort or positive thinking. Acknowledge this explicitly: *“Some weeds in your garden were planted by systems and circumstances outside your control. Naming them is not the same as being able to remove them immediately. But naming them honestly, rather than blaming yourself for their presence, is itself an important act.”*
- **Seeds Can Be Very Small:** Encourage participants to include small, everyday seeds, the smell of coffee, a particular song, a brief walk, a text from a friend. These small seeds are often the most reliable and accessible sources of daily restoration. Wellbeing is maintained through accumulation of small positive moments, not through occasional grand gestures.
- **The One Action:** The most important facilitation moment at the end of Phase 4. Help participants choose an action that is genuinely small and realistic, not aspirational. “I will exercise every day” is not a one-week action. “I will take a 10-minute walk on Tuesday” is. The smaller and more specific the action, the more likely it is to happen.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Seeds and weeds are deeply culturally shaped. Community practices, spiritual rituals, cultural celebrations, food, music, these are all genuine seeds that deserve naming and honoring. Never suggest that any source of nourishment is too small, too simple, or too culturally specific to count.

Variations

- **Collective garden:** After individual mapping, groups create one shared garden on a large sheet of paper, adding seeds and weeds that feel collective or shared. Powerful for groups who have worked together over time.
- **Ongoing garden:** Participants return to their garden map at the end of each session in a longer program, adding new seeds and weeds as the program progresses. The garden grows alongside the participants.

Resources

Grounded in strengths-based wellbeing and everyday practice approaches.

Adapted from “*The Garden of Wellbeing*” in the Youth Mental Health Portfolio, published on the SALTO Youth Toolbox by Nanna Ventzel (2025). Original authorship unknown.

Available at: salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox. The activity has been significantly developed and expanded for this handbook.



Theme

- Wellbeing
- Social Connection
- Peer Support
- Mental Health Awareness



Duration

60–70



Group Size

10–25

Note: works in small circles of 5–7



Emotional Intensity

High

Note: This is a psychologically demanding activity. It requires facilitator readiness assessment before use. See Appendix X and the note at the start of Tips & Considerations.

ACTIVITY 45

Peer Support Circles

Peer Support Circles is a structured small-group activity that creates a supported, intentional space for participants to share a current challenge and receive genuine support from their peers. Unlike informal venting or advice-giving, this activity uses a clear structure, defined roles, a listening protocol, and a positive closing round, to ensure that sharing feels comfortable, that listening is active and respectful, and that every participant leaves feeling heard and supported rather than exposed or overwhelmed. The activity begins with the Helping Hand reflection, which invites each participant to clarify their own capacity to support others before the circles begin.

Objectives

- To create a structured safer space for participants to share a current challenge and feel genuinely heard.
- To practice active non-judgmental listening as a form of peer support.
- To strengthen social connection and mutual support within the group.
- To build participants' confidence in both sharing vulnerability and holding space for others.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- practice sharing a personal challenge in a structured and boundaried format.
- develop active listening skills, attending fully without advising, fixing or judging.
- experience the power of feeling genuinely heard and supported by peers.
- approach both vulnerability and solidarity with greater confidence and self-awareness.



Materials

- Helping Hand template, one per participant (a simple hand outline printed on A4 paper; see Appendix 24)
- Pens
- Optional:**
- Talking object, a small stone, a pen, or any simple object that the sharer holds while speaking
- Timer for keeping sharing rounds equal



Preparation

1. [text here]



Preparation

- Print one Helping Hand template per participant in advance.
- Think carefully about group composition, mix participants who know each other well with those who don't. Avoid placing participants together who have existing conflict or tension.
- Prepare a clear explanation of the listening protocol; see Phase 2. Practice explaining it simply and directly.
- Think carefully about the boundaries of what is appropriate to share; see Tips. Have a gentle redirect ready if a participant begins to disclose something that requires professional support.
- Know your referral pathway before the session, refer to Section 3.4.4 and the Referral and Support Contacts section.
- Emotionally prepare yourself: peer support circles can surface significant material. Your role is to hold the container, not to intervene in every circle.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Helping Hand — Opener (10–12 mins): Before forming circles, invite participants to complete the Helping Hand individually. Distribute the printed hand outline and explain:

“Before we support others, it helps to know our own capacity right now. Each finger of this hand represents one way of supporting someone.”

Ask participants to write one response for each finger:

- **Thumb;** One thing I can notice (a sign that someone needs support)
- **Index finger;** One thing I can ask (a question that opens rather than closes)
- **Middle finger;** One way I can listen (how I show someone I am truly present)
- **Ring finger;** One way I can offer support (without fixing or advising)
- **Little finger;** One thing I can do for my own self-care (so I don't carry others' weight home)

Give participants 5–7 minutes to complete their Helping Hand in silence. Then invite brief voluntary sharing, 2–3 participants share one finger. Keep this light and affirming.

Say: *“You already know how to support someone. This hand is a reminder of that. Keep it with you during the circles.”*

2 The Listening Protocol (5 mins): Before forming circles, introduce the listening protocol clearly. This is the structure that makes peer support safe.

Explain: *"In our circles today we follow four rules:*

- 1. One voice at a time. The person holding the talking object speaks. Everyone else listens.*
- 2. Listen to understand, not to respond. Your job is not to fix, advise, or solve. Your job is to be fully present with what the person is sharing.*
- 3. No advice unless asked. After someone shares, the group does not offer solutions. The group offers presence, a nod, eye contact, a simple 'thank you for sharing.'*
- 4. Confidentiality. What is shared in the circle stays in the circle."*

Check for understanding before circles begin.

3 Forming Circles and Role Assignment (3–5 mins): Divide participants into small circles of 5–7. Within each circle assign three roles:

- **Sharer;** the person currently speaking (rotates)
- **Timekeeper;** ensures each person has equal time (2–3 minutes per share)
- **Circle Holder;** watches the group's emotional temperature and signals the facilitator quietly if support is needed

Explain that roles rotate, everyone will share, everyone will listen.

4 The Sharing Round (20–25 mins): Invite each circle to begin. The first sharer takes the talking object and shares one current challenge; something they are genuinely navigating right now. The challenge should be:

- Real and current, not hypothetical
- Personal but not requiring professional intervention
- Something the participant feels comfortable sharing in this group

The timekeeper ensures each person has 2–3 minutes. After each share the group responds with presence, not advice. A simple "thank you for sharing" is enough.

Facilitator's role: *Move quietly between circles. Observe without intervening unless a circle holder signals distress or a disclosure crosses into territory requiring professional support. If this happens, approach quietly and privately, do not interrupt the whole group.*

5 The Support Round (10 mins): After everyone has shared, invite one optional support round. Each listener can offer one of the following, nothing more:

- **A word of solidarity:** I hear you / That sounds hard / You are not alone
- **A question that opens:** What would feel most helpful right now? / What do you need?"
- **A shared experience:** I have felt something similar - without redirecting to their own story

Remind participants: the support round is not a solution session. It is a moment of collective acknowledgment.

6 Positive Closing Round (5 mins): Close each circle with a positive round. Each participant shares one of the following:

- One thing they are taking away from the circle
- One strength they noticed in someone else today
- One word that describes how they feel now compared to when they arrived

Keep this brief and warm, the closing round returns the energy to the positive before participants leave the circle.

7 Whole Group Debrief (15 mins): See below.

8 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What was it like to share a challenge in this structured format, how did it feel compared to sharing in everyday conversation?
2. What did you notice about yourself as a listener, was it easy or difficult to listen without advising?
3. How did it feel to be heard without someone trying to fix your situation?
4. What did the Helping Hand reveal about your own capacity to support others?
5. What is the difference between fixing someone's problem and genuinely supporting them, why does that distinction matter?
6. What does peer support make possible that professional support cannot, and vice versa?
7. How could you bring the listening protocol from today into your everyday relationships?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** It should only be facilitated with groups that have already established strong trust and have spent significant time together. A co-facilitator is strongly recommended. Facilitators should be familiar with trauma-informed practice and confident using grounding techniques before running this activity. Do not use it with a new group or as a standalone session without prior relationship-building. If you are unsure whether you, or your group, are ready, choose a lighter activity first.
- **This is not group therapy:** Peer Support Circles is a structured peer support activity, not a therapeutic intervention. The distinction matters. Peer support means being heard, feeling less alone, and experiencing solidarity. It does not mean processing trauma, receiving clinical guidance, or working through deep psychological material. If a sharing round begins to cross into territory that requires professional support, acute distress, crisis, disclosure of harm, follow your referral pathway immediately. The activity's value lies precisely in staying within its boundaries. A youth worker who holds those boundaries well creates something genuinely valuable. A youth worker who allows those boundaries to dissolve creates risk. When in doubt, err on the side of caution and refer.
- **Boundaries of Sharing:** The most important facilitation task before the circles begin is establishing what is appropriate to share. A current challenge might be: navigating a difficult relationship, feeling uncertain about the future, struggling with belonging, managing stress or anxiety, facing a difficult decision. It should not be: acute crisis, suicidal ideation, disclosure of abuse or violence, or anything requiring immediate professional intervention. If a participant begins to share something in this second category, approach quietly and privately, acknowledge their courage, pause the circle gently, and follow your referral pathway. Refer to *Section 3.4.4*.
- **The Listening Protocol Is the Safety:** The four rules are not bureaucratic, they are the container that makes genuine sharing possible. Enforce them warmly but firmly. If advice-giving begins, redirect gently: *"Let's stay with listening for now, what else does this person need us to hear?"*
- **Circle Holder Role:** The circle holder role is important, it gives participants an active responsibility for the group's emotional safety. Brief circle holders before the activity begins: *"Your job is to notice if someone seems overwhelmed and to signal me quietly, a hand raised or eye contact is enough."*
- **Cultural Considerations:** Peer support looks different across cultures, in some contexts sharing personal challenges with peers is natural and expected, in others it is unusual or uncomfortable. Never pressure participants to share more than they are comfortable with. The right to pass applies throughout.

Variations

- **Lighter version:** Replace "one current challenge" with "one thing that has been on my mind lately", a less vulnerable entry point that still opens genuine connection.
- **Themed circles:** Give each circle a specific theme, belonging, future plans, cultural identity, stress management. Reduces the open-ended vulnerability while still generating meaningful peer connection.

Resources

Grounded in peer support research and structured dialogue approaches.
See: *Mead & MacNeil (2006)*.



Theme

- Wellbeing
- Self-care
- Everyday Practice
- Sustain



Duration

60–90

Note: Flexible depending on group energy and available time.



Group Size

Any

Note: Individual exploration within a collective setting



Emotional Intensity

Low

ACTIVITY 46

Self-Care Exploration

Self-Care Exploration is a free, creative, and restorative activity that invites participants to explore different self-care practices through a series of stations, each offering a different way of resting, creating, moving, or reflecting. There are no instructions, no right way, and no product to produce. Participants move between stations at their own pace, guided only by curiosity and what their body and mind need at the moment. The activity closes with one simple question that transforms a beautiful creative experience into a genuine sustained practice: which station felt most like you? This is not an activity about expression, it is an activity about discovery. Participants leave knowing something new about what restores them.

Objectives

- To give participants a direct, experiential taste of different self-care practices in a supported and unstructured space.
- To support participants in discovering which forms of self-care feel most natural and restorative for them personally.
- To normalize self-care as a legitimate, accessible, and enjoyable daily practice.
- To close the Wellbeing section with a gentle, restorative, and celebratory experience.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- experience at least three different self-care practices through hands-on exploration.
- identify one or two specific self-care practices that feel genuinely restorative for them personally.
- recognize self-care as a diverse, personal, and accessible practice rather than a prescriptive set of rules.
- leave the session with at least one concrete self-care practice they want to continue independently.



Materials

- **Station 1** — Mandala Drawing/Coloring:
 - Printed mandala outlines in various complexity levels
 - Colored pencils, markers, fine-liners
- **Station 2** — Watercolor/Gouache Painting:
 - Watercolor or gouache paints
 - Brushes, water containers, paper
 - Optional: salt, cling film, or other texture tools
- **Station 3** — Scrapbooking:
 - Old magazines, newspapers, printed images
 - Scissors, glue sticks
 - Blank paper or card for background
- **Station 4** — Journaling:
 - Blank paper or small notebooks
 - Pens, colored pencils
 - Optional: printed gentle prompts face down, participants choose whether to use them or write freely
- **Station 5** — Playdough:
 - Salt dough or commercial playdough, enough for multiple participants
 - Simple sculpting tools if available, otherwise fingers work perfectly
- **Station 6** — Origami/Paper Folding:
 - Colored paper in various sizes
 - Simple printed origami instructions, 2-3 different designs at different difficulty levels
- **Station 7** — Movement/Gentle Stretching: (See Appendix 25)
 - Clear floor space
 - Printed guide with 6-8 simple stretches or gentle yoga poses, illustrated, no text required
 - Optional: yoga mat or blanket
- **Station 8** — Music Listening:
 - Laptop or phone
 - Headphones, ideally over-ear for full immersion
 - A pre-prepared calming playlist, ready to play before participants arrive
 - A comfortable chair or cushion
- **Station 9** — Gratitude Jar:
 - A glass jar or box in the center of the station
 - Small paper strips and pens
 - A simple prompt displayed: “Write one good thing, however small, and place it in the jar”



Preparation

- Set up all nine stations before participants arrive, each clearly arranged and visually inviting. The atmosphere participants walk into matters enormously. Dim lighting, soft music playing in the background, materials laid out beautifully, this signals from the moment they enter that something different is about to happen.
- Prepare/Find the calming playlist for Station 8 in advance, test the headphones and volume before the session. Suggested playlist length: at least 90 minutes of continuous calm music. Instrumental, ambient, or nature sounds work well.
- Prepare/Find the movement guide for Station 7, print simple illustrated stretches. No text required, just clear visual demonstrations of gentle movements.
- Prepare optional journaling prompts for Station 4, place them face down so participants can choose whether to use them or write freely. Examples:
 - What is one small thing that made today bearable or good?
 - What does my body need right now?
 - What am I grateful for that I don't usually notice?
 - What would I tell a younger version of myself today?
- Play soft background music throughout the session, not at Station 8 specifically but as a general ambient backdrop for the whole room.
- Think about the closing question in advance, this is the only facilitation moment in the activity and it carries the whole sustain dimension. See *Phase 3*.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5 mins): Welcome participants warmly and introduce the activity with genuine lightness:

"Today is yours. There are nine stations around the room, each one offering a different way of taking care of yourself. There are no instructions, no right way, and nothing to produce. You move between stations at your own pace, stay as long as you want, skip any station that doesn't call to you. The only invitation is to notice, what feels good? What restores you? What do you want to come back to?"

Briefly point out each station and what it offers, one sentence each. Then step back and let participants begin.

2 Free Exploration (50–75 mins): Participants move freely between stations. Music plays softly. The facilitator is present but invisible, circulating quietly, ensuring materials are replenished, making sure the atmosphere stays calm and unstructured.

If participants seem uncomfortable with the lack of structure, particularly those used to more directed activities, a gentle reassurance is enough: *"There's no right way. Just explore."*

3 The Closing Question (5–10 mins): When the exploration time is coming to an end, gently bring participants together, not abruptly but with a soft signal (lower the music, walk to the center of the room).

Ask one simple question:

“Which station felt most like you, something you could imagine coming back to when you need to restore yourself?”

Invite a brief round, one station per person, one sentence if they want to say more. Keep this light and celebratory. There are no wrong answers.

Then offer one closing thought:

“Self-care is not a luxury. It is not a reward for when everything else is done. It is maintenance, like charging your phone. You just spent time discovering what charges you. Take that with you.”

4 Closing: See *Section 5.9 Closing Rituals*. The gratitude jar, now full of small good things written by the group, can be displayed or participants can take their own slip home.

Discussion & Debriefing

This activity does not require a full debrief, the closing question in Phase 3 serves as the reflection. If facilitators want to extend the reflection slightly:

1. Which station surprised you, either by how much or how little you connected with it?
2. Was there a station you avoided, and do you know why?
3. What does it tell us that self-care looks so different for different people?
4. What is one self-care practice you want to try to build into your week, however small?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Protect the Freedom:** The biggest facilitation risk in this activity is over-structuring it. Resist every impulse to add prompts, timers, rotation instructions, or guided reflection during the exploration phase. Freedom IS the self-care. Structure is what participants experience everywhere else. This session is different precisely because it is unstructured.
- **The Atmosphere Matters:** Spend time setting up the space beautifully. Dim the lights if possible. Arrange materials invitingly. Play music from the moment participants arrive. The physical environment communicates safety, care, and permission to rest. If the room looks like a classroom, participants will behave like students. If it looks like a sanctuary, they will behave like people taking care of themselves.
- **Station 8 — Music Listening:** This station often becomes the most popular, particularly for participants who are exhausted or overwhelmed. A chair, headphones, and beautiful music is sometimes exactly what a person needs. Protect this station's simplicity, do not add prompts or instructions.
- **Station 7 — Movement:** Some participants may feel self-conscious about stretching or moving in front of others. If space allows, place this station slightly apart from the others, giving it a degree of privacy. The printed guide removes the need for verbal instruction and reduces self-consciousness.
- **The Gratitude Jar:** The gratitude jar at Station 9 accumulates something quietly beautiful over the course of the session, small good things written by everyone in the room. At the closing, acknowledge this: "That jar is full of good things noticed by the people in this room today." Then decide together what happens to it, displayed somewhere, kept by the facilitator, or slips taken home individually.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Self-care looks different across cultures. Some participants may gravitate toward practices connected to their cultural heritage, a specific kind of music, a specific kind of making. Honor whatever emerges. The stations are invitations, not prescriptions.

Variations

- **Outdoor version:** Replace some stations with outdoor equivalents, sketching nature, barefoot walking, sitting under a tree. Works beautifully in programs with outdoor access.
- **Expanded version:** Add additional stations based on group preferences identified earlier in the program, cooking/baking, sewing, singing, prayer or meditation corner. The more the stations reflect the group's actual interests, the more powerful the discovery.
- **Regular practice:** In longer programs, run a shorter version (30-40 minutes, 4-5 stations) at the end of each program day as a daily closing ritual. Participants gradually develop a clearer picture of their personal self-care preferences over time.

Resources

Grounded in positive psychology and self-determination theory approaches. See: *Seligman (2011), Deci & Ryan (1985).*



5.8 Agency and Advocacy

Agency refers to a young person's ability to make choices, influence decisions, and take meaningful action in their own life and community. In youth work, participation goes beyond simply attending activities, it means having real opportunities to contribute, express opinions, and shape processes. Every activity in this section asks young people to participate actively, to make choices, take steps, speak up, and act collectively.

For many Roma, refugee, and migrant youth, experiences of exclusion, discrimination, or limited access to decision-making spaces may reduce the feeling that their voice matters. Youth work can counteract this by creating environments where young people experience themselves as active contributors rather than passive recipients. Agency grows when young people feel respected and listened to, have opportunities to make choices, experience responsibility in supported ways, and see that their actions can create change.

Advocacy in this section is understood as both a personal and a collective practice. At the personal level it begins with voice, the ability to name one's own story, declare one's values, and refuse the narratives imposed by discrimination and exclusion. At the collective level it grows into action, identifying shared issues, analyzing power, building solidarity, and making specific demands to those with the power to change things.

This progression from personal voice to collective action mirrors what the research underlying this handbook consistently shows (see Section 3.1): that young people who maintain a positive and empowered sense of their role and potential within society are significantly better able to buffer the psychological harm caused by discrimination. Agency and advocacy are therefore not only political practices, they are wellbeing practices. When a young person moves from "why is this happening to me?" to "this is happening because of an unjust system and I have the right to resist it", that is both advocacy and healing.

Facilitating agency is not about giving power, power already exists within the young people. It is about removing the barriers that prevent that power from being expressed.

What You Will Find In This Section

This section contains eight activities that follow a deliberate arc from personal voice to collective action:

Voice → Choice → Action → Solidarity → Advocacy

It is the section where everything built across the handbook comes together: the safety established in *Section 5.1*, the emotional awareness developed in *Sections 5.2–5.4*, the identity work of *Section 5.5*, the resilience built in *Section 5.6*, and the self-worth reclaimed in *Section 5.7*, all of it converges here into agency and advocacy.

The section opens with two **Voice** activities. **Beyond the Label** (Nr.47) invites participants to reclaim their own narrative, naming what has been imposed and declaring their own truth.

My Personal Manifesto (Nr.48) moves from narrative to declaration, participants write and speak their values and beliefs in the first person.

Two **Choice** activities follow. **Freeze Frames** (Nr.49) uses drama to explore stressors and practice collective responses. **What Would You Do? Scenarios** (Nr.50) builds decision-making confidence through fictional situations involving discrimination and exclusion.

The **Action** phase bridges intention and real-world action. **My Brave Step** (Nr.51) supports participants in identifying and committing to one concrete step they have been hesitating to take.

Feathers of Courage (Nr.52) goes deeper, guiding participants through naming a postponed dream, reframing the fear holding them back, and taking one real step toward it within the session. It carries High emotional intensity and works best after My Brave Step has introduced the barrier reflection dimension.

Build It Together (Nr.53) closes the **Solidarity** phase by creating a direct experiential parallel between a team challenge and the structural inequality participants navigate in real life, making visible what collective response to unfairness looks and feels like.

The section culminates in **Change Starts Here** (Nr.54), a full community organizing cycle where participants map a real community issue, analyze power, design a collective response, and write a letter to someone with the power to change things. It is the most complex activity in the section and benefits from the full arc that precedes it.

All eight activities work as standalone sessions.

The Voice → Choice → Action → Solidarity → Advocacy sequence is strongly recommended if facilitators want to use several together. Beyond the Label and My Personal Manifesto work best after participants have done some identity work, Section 5.5 provides the ideal foundation. Change Starts Here benefits from the full arc, participants who have already found their voice, practiced choice, and taken action are ready to organize collectively.

Facilitator Tip

This section is rooted in a simple but radical understanding: discrimination erodes wellbeing by making young people feel that their voice doesn't matter and that the systems around them are fixed and unchangeable. Agency and advocacy are the direct response to that erosion. Every activity in this section is practice for the real thing.

Agency develops best when young people feel ownership over the process. Instead of asking "How can I involve them?" try asking "Where can I step back and create space?" Offer choices, invite ideas, and allow different forms of participation. Leadership does not always look loud or visible — quiet contribution and shared responsibility are equally valuable.

Be attentive to the distinction between personal agency, the capacity to act in one's own life, and collective advocacy, the capacity to act together toward systemic change. Both are present in the activities and both deserve to be named and celebrated.

All activities here require careful facilitation and genuine familiarity with the material. Facilitators should practice these activities before running them, maintain a high level of awareness throughout, and never underestimate the emotional and political weight of what participants may bring into the room.

If strong emotions emerge, slow down, return to grounding, and refer to Sections 3.5.5 and 3.5.6.



Theme

- Agency
- Identity
- Belonging
- Self-awareness



Duration

90–95



Group Size

8–25



Emotional Intensity

High

Note: This is a psychologically demanding activity. It requires facilitator readiness assessment before use. See Appendix X and the note at the start of Tips & Considerations.

ACTIVITY 47

Beyond the Label

Beyond the Label is a creative reflective activity that invites participants to explore the gap between how the world has defined them and how they define themselves. Working on a single large sheet of paper, one side private, one side public, participants first acknowledge the labels and narratives imposed on them from outside, then create their own visual representation of their truth, and finally declare how they want to be known on their own terms. The mini exhibition that closes the activity transforms individual acts of self-definition into a collective celebration of reclaimed narratives. This activity is about voice, not just finding it, but using it.



Objectives

- To create space for participants to acknowledge and name the external narratives and labels that have been imposed on them.
- To support participants in articulating their own truth, beyond stereotypes, systems, and others' assumptions.
- To invite participants to actively choose how they want to be known and how they define their own story.
- To create a collective moment of witnessing and celebrating self-defined narratives.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify and name external narratives or labels that have shaped how others perceive them.
- articulate their own truth and identity in a creative, self-chosen format.
- experience the shift from being defined by others to becoming the author of their own story.
- approach their own narrative with greater confidence, agency, and self-compassion.



Materials

- Large paper (A3 or larger), one sheet per participant
- Markers, colored pencils, pens
- Optional: magazines, scissors, glue for collage

Optional:

- Smartphones for photos
- Wall space, string, or clothespins for the mini exhibition
- Calm background music during the creation phases



Preparation

- Prepare one large sheet of paper per participant before the session.
- Set up wall space or a string line for the mini exhibition before participants arrive, this signals from the moment they enter that something worth displaying will be created today.
- Think carefully about the framing of Part 1, this is the most sensitive moment in the activity. The invitation to name imposed labels needs to be held carefully. Participants should never feel pressured to name specific traumatic experiences, labels can be general (“troublemaker,” “immigrant,” “someone who doesn’t belong”) rather than personal.
- Prepare a grounding exercise for after Part 1, moving from the private imposed narrative to the creative self-expression of Part 2 needs a gentle transition.
- Emotionally prepare yourself: some participants may find Part 1 activating, naming what has been imposed on them can surface anger, grief, or shame. Your calm, warm presence is the most important facilitation tool in this activity.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction and Framing (10 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the activity. Explain that today is about stories, specifically about who gets to tell them.

Say something like: *“Every one of us carries stories about who we are. Some of those stories we chose. Some were chosen for us, by systems, by stereotypes, by people who thought they knew us before they knew us. Today we are going to look at both kinds of stories. And then we are going to choose our own.”*

Distribute large sheets of paper. Ask participants to turn the paper landscape and draw a line down the middle, creating two sections on the front. The back of the paper will be used first and remains private.

2 Part 1 — The Imposed Story (10 mins, private): Ask participants to turn their paper over to the blank back. This side is entirely private, it will never be displayed and never needs to be shared.

Invite participants to write, draw, or mark: *“How has the world labeled you? What words, assumptions, or stories have been placed on you by others, by systems, by strangers, by society, that don’t feel true to who you are?”*

Give participants time to work in silence. Play soft background music. Do not circulate during this phase, give participants genuine privacy.

After the time is up, invite participants to take one slow breath, in through the nose, out through the mouth. Acknowledge quietly:

“Whatever is on that side of the paper, you named it. You don’t have to carry it unnamed anymore. Now we turn to the other side.”

3 Part 2 — My Own Truth (20 mins): Ask participants to turn the paper back to the front. The left side of their paper is for Part 2, how they see themselves, their own truth beyond the labels.

Invite participants to fill this section using whatever medium feels right, words, drawings, symbols, colors, collage, photos. They might represent:

- Something they are proud of
- A quality they know they have
- Something that matters deeply to them
- A part of their identity they want to claim

Remind participants: *“There is no right way to do this. Use whatever feels most like you.”*

4 Part 3 — My Chosen Narrative (15 mins): Now invite participants to fill the right side of the paper, how they want to be known, the narrative they choose for themselves going forward.

Offer a gentle prompt: *“If you could write the first line of your own story, the one you tell, in your own words, what would it say?”*

Participants can add to their visual, write a sentence, create a symbol, or simply write “I am...” and complete it in their own way.

5 Mini Exhibition (20 mins): Invite participants to display their completed paper, front side out, on the wall or string. The back (Part 1) remains hidden against the wall or folded inward. The public side shows only Parts 2 and 3, their own truth and chosen narrative.

Once all papers are displayed, invite participants to walk silently through the exhibition, looking at what the group created together. Give them 5–7 minutes for this silent gallery walk.

Then invite brief voluntary sharing, participants can stand next to their paper and share one thing: a word, a symbol, a sentence. Nothing more is required.

Facilitator’s role: *Hold this moment with genuine warmth. What is on those walls is not artwork, it is a collection of self-defined stories from people who have often had their stories told for them. Treat it accordingly.*

6 Debriefing (15mins): See below.

7 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*. Before participants leave, invite them to take their paper home, both sides. The imposed narrative and the chosen one, together.



Discussion & Debriefing

1. What was it like to work on the back of the paper, naming the imposed labels?
2. What did you notice when you turned the paper over and began working on your own truth?
3. How did it feel to see your story displayed, to see it take up space on the wall?
4. Was there anything that surprised you about what you put on the front of your paper?
5. What does it mean to have your story told by others, and what changes when you tell it yourself?
6. Looking at all the papers on the wall, what do you notice about the stories this group carries and the stories they choose?
7. What is one thing from today, a word, an image, a moment, that you want to carry forward as part of your own story?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** It should only be facilitated with groups that have already established strong trust and have spent significant time together. A co-facilitator is strongly recommended. Facilitators should be familiar with trauma-informed practice and confident using grounding techniques before running this activity. Do not use it with a new group or as a standalone session without prior relationship-building. If you are unsure whether you, or your group, are ready, choose a lighter activity first.
- **Part 1 — The Imposed Story:** This is the most sensitive moment in the activity. Some participants may find naming imposed labels activating, it can surface anger, grief, or shame that has been carried for a long time. Hold the silence during this phase genuinely, do not circulate, do not check in, do not interrupt. The privacy of this moment is what makes it possible. After Part 1, always offer a brief grounding breath before moving on.
- **The Back of the Paper:** Make it absolutely clear, multiple times, that the back of the paper is private and will never be displayed or shared. This is non-negotiable. If a participant accidentally displays their paper with the back visible, quietly and discreetly help them turn it around without drawing attention.
- **Part 1 for Participants with Significant Trauma:** For participants who have experienced severe discrimination or trauma, naming imposed labels may be more than they can hold safely in a group setting. Offer an alternative: they can leave the back blank, or simply write one word, or draw a symbol. The activity works even if Part 1 is minimal, the important thing is the turn toward Parts 2 and 3.

If a participant becomes distressed, refer to *Section 3.5.5*

- **Cultural Considerations:** For many Roma participants, imposed labels may include deeply painful historical and contemporary experiences of discrimination and stereotyping. For many refugee and migrant participants, labels may include legal categories, media representations, or assumptions about their reasons for migration. Never suggest specific labels, always let participants name their own experience.

Variations

- **Photo version:** Participants take three photos, one representing the imposed narrative, one representing their own truth, one representing their chosen story. Works well with tech-comfortable groups and produces a striking digital exhibition.
- **Collage version:** Participants use magazine images and words rather than drawing or writing. More accessible for participants who feel uncomfortable with self-expression through drawing.
- **Written version:** Participants write three short paragraphs, one for each part, rather than creating visual representations. Works well for groups with strong literacy and comfort with writing.
- **One-to-one adaptation:** Facilitator and young person work through the three parts together in a private session. The exhibition becomes a shared display of just two stories, equally powerful.

Resources

Grounded in narrative therapy and expressive arts approaches to identity reclamation.

Adapted from *Three Portraits of You* (Guzman, L. *Essential Art Therapy Exercises*. Rockridge Press) and *Me, Myself and We* (Council of Europe T-Kit 4: Intercultural Learning).



Theme

- Agency
- Identity
- Self-awareness
- Advocacy



Duration

90



Group Size

8–30



Emotional Intensity

Medium

ACTIVITY 48

My Personal Manifesto

My Personal Manifesto is a bold, creative activity that invites participants to identify their core values, choose the topics that matter most to them, and write a personal declaration, in their own words, in the first person, on their own terms. A manifesto is a strong personal statement about who you are, what you choose to stand for, what you believe, and what you decide matters. By learning to speak in the first person, “I believe,” “I stand for,” “I refuse,” “I deserve”, participants practice one of the most fundamental acts of agency: claiming their voice and using it with clarity and confidence. The activity closes with a collective declaration ritual, each participant stands and reads one line aloud, transforming individual voices into a shared moment of power.



Objectives

- To help participants identify and articulate their core values as the foundation of their personal agency.
- To introduce first-person assertive language as a practical tool for self-expression and advocacy.
- To support participants in creating a personal declaration of what they believe, stand for, and refuse to accept.
- To create a collective moment of shared voice and mutual empowerment through the declaration ritual.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify 3–5 core values that genuinely reflect what matters most to them.
- practice first-person assertive language as a tool for self-expression and advocacy.
- create a personal manifesto that articulates their beliefs, boundaries, and aspirations.
- experience the power of speaking their truth aloud in the presence of others.



Materials

- Topic list, printed or displayed on flipchart (see Preparation)
- A4 or A3 paper, one per participant for the manifesto
- Markers, colored pencils, pens, decorative materials

Optional:

- Magazines, scissors, glue for collage elements
- Starter phrases card, printed or displayed (see Phase 3)
- Calm background music during the writing and visual phases
- Display space for finished manifestos



Preparation

- Prepare the topic list on a flipchart or printed card, see *examples in Phase 2*. Aim for 15–20 topics covering both personal and social dimensions.
- Prepare the starter phrases on a flipchart or printed card ; see *Phase 3*.
- Set up display space if you want manifestos to be exhibited after the declaration, wall space, string, or a simple table display.
- Think about the declaration ritual in advance, how will you hold the space when participants stand and read? Practice your own opening line to model the ritual.
- **Emotionally prepare yourself:** for some participants, standing and declaring something publicly may feel vulnerable or unfamiliar. Have a gentle opt-out ready, participants can read sitting down or whisper their line if standing feels too exposed.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Core Values — Building the Pool (10 mins): Invite participants to take 2–3 minutes of quiet reflection to answer one question: *“What are the 3–5 things that matter most to you in life? They can be people, principles, beliefs, practices, relationships, or feelings, anything that genuinely guides how you live and what you care about. Write them down in any language, in any form.”*

Then invite participants to share their values one by one while the facilitator writes them on the flipchart, creating a collective values pool. No discussion yet, just a collection. Duplicates: if ten people value family, family appears once but the facilitator acknowledges it: *“family came up many times, it clearly matters to this group.”*

Once the pool is complete, invite participants to look at it as a whole, this is what this group values. Then ask them to choose 3–5 values from the pool that feel most true to them personally. They can choose values others suggested, the pool belongs to everyone.

2 Choosing Topics (10 mins): Explain that a manifesto is focused, it doesn’t try to say everything. Participants will choose 3 topics they want to address in their manifesto. Display or distribute the topic list:

1. Personal topics:
 - My identity and who I am
 - My culture and heritage
 - My dreams and future
 - My relationships and community
 - My body and health
 - My emotions and inner life
2. Social topics:
 - Discrimination and racism
 - Education and opportunity
 - Belonging and inclusion
 - Migration and displacement
 - Gender equality
 - Mental health and stigma
 - Youth voice and participation
 - Justice and human rights

Invite participants to choose 3 topics, the ones they feel most passionate about, most connected to, or most urgent about. These don't have to connect perfectly to their values, trust the instinct.

3 The Power of I (5 mins): Before participants begin writing, offer a brief but important introduction to first-person assertive language.

Say: *"A manifesto speaks in the first person. Not 'people deserve respect', but 'I deserve respect.' Not 'discrimination is wrong', but 'I refuse to accept discrimination.' The Power of I is not arrogance. It is clarity. It is taking ownership of what you believe and saying it directly, out loud, in your own name."*

Display or distribute the starter phrases:

- I believe...
- I stand for...
- I refuse...
- I deserve...
- I will...
- I am...
- I choose...
- I demand...
- I celebrate...
- I reject...
- I know...
- I trust...

Invite participants to read through the phrases and notice which ones feel most natural or most powerful to them.

4 Writing the Manifesto (25 mins): Invite participants to begin writing. Using their values as the foundation and their chosen topics as the focus, they write their manifesto, a series of first-person statements that declare what they believe, stand for, and refuse to accept.

Remind participants: *there is no correct format, no minimum or maximum number of statements, no right way to write a manifesto. Some may write 5 statements. Some may write 20. Some may write in their first language. All of this is valid.*

5 Making It Visual (15 mins): Invite participants to give their manifesto a visual identity, decorating, illustrating, choosing colors, adding symbols or images that feel like them. The manifesto should look like its author.

Remind participants: *artistic skill is irrelevant. What matters is that the manifesto feels genuinely theirs, in content, in form, in visual expression.*

6 The Declaration (10 mins): Invite participants to stand, or to remain seated if standing feels too exposed. Explain the ritual: one by one, each participant reads one line from their manifesto aloud to the group. Just one line, the one that feels most important, most true, most powerful.

After each participant reads their line, the group responds with a simple collective acknowledgment, a snap, a nod, a soft collective "yes." Not applause, something quieter and more intentional.

After everyone has spoken, allow a moment of silence. Then say simply: “That was your voice. It matters.”

7 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

8 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*. Invite participants to take their manifesto home, or display it if they choose. A manifesto is not a worksheet. It is a living document.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. Which values did you choose, and what drew you to them?
2. What was the experience of writing in the first person, “I believe,” “I refuse,” “I deserve”?
3. How did it feel to stand and read your line aloud, to hear your own voice say something you believe?
4. Was there a line you wrote that surprised you, something that came out stronger or more clearly than you expected?
5. What does it mean to speak in the first person, to say “I” rather than “people” or “someone”?
6. What did you notice about the collective moment when everyone read their line, what happened in the room?
7. Where in your daily life could you use the Power of I, a situation where speaking in the first person could make a difference?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **The Power of I Is Political:** For Roma, refugee, and migrant youth who have been systematically denied voice, in schools, in institutions, in public life, saying “I believe” and “I deserve” is not a small thing. Hold the declaration ritual with genuine respect. What happens in that circle is not a performance exercise. It is practice for the real world.
- **Language Barriers:** Participants can write their manifesto in any language, their first language, a second language, a mixture. A manifesto written in Romani, Arabic, Turkish, or Serbian is as valid as one written in English. If participants want to share a line in their own language, invite them to, and invite a brief translation if they wish, but never require it.
- **Your Own Manifesto:** Write your own manifesto before the session. Know your values, choose your topics, write your lines. Your willingness to participate genuinely, to stand and read your own line with the group, is one of the most powerful facilitation choices you can make in this activity.

Variations

Group Manifesto: After individual manifestos are complete, the group creates a collective manifesto, choosing the lines that resonate most widely and combining them into a shared declaration. Powerful closing activity for a multi-day program.

Resources

Grounded in agency and self-efficacy theory approaches.
See: *Bandura (1997)*.



Theme

- Agency
- Participation
- Emotional Expression
- Capacity Building



Duration

90–120



Group Size

10–30

Note: works in small groups of 4–6.



Emotional Intensity

Medium

ACTIVITY 49

Freeze Frames

Freeze Frames is a drama-based activity that uses the technique of still body sculptures, freeze frames, to explore stress, challenges, and the choices available in difficult moments. By first expressing a stressor non-verbally through their bodies, then bringing it to life through improvisation, and finally creating a freeze frame of a stress-relief response, participants move through the full arc of a difficult experience, from feeling stuck to imagining a way forward. The drama format provides natural protective distance, making it possible to explore real and significant challenges through a creative and collective lens.



Objectives

- To provide a supported, creative space for participants to express and explore stressors and challenges through non-verbal drama.
- To practice generating and embodying stress-relief responses and coping strategies.
- To develop confidence in using the body as a tool for communication and self-expression.
- To strengthen collective problem-solving and creative collaboration.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- express stressors and challenges non-verbally through body sculpture and improvisation.
- generate and practice stress-relief responses through creative drama.
- develop greater awareness of the choices available in difficult situations.
- approach challenges with greater creativity, confidence, and collective support.



Materials

- Open space for movement, chairs moved aside

Optional:

- Simple props, scarves, chairs, objects, for groups who want them
- Flipchart with stressor examples for groups who need inspiration



Preparation

1. Clear enough space for participants to move freely and form group sculptures without touching each other or the walls.
2. Prepare a brief warm-up sequence; see *Phase 1*.
3. Think carefully about stressor selection; see *Tips*.
4. Consider having a co-facilitator present given the medium emotional intensity and the active nature of the activity.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Warm-up — Wake the Body (10–15 mins): Begin with a brief physical warm-up to activate the body and reduce self-consciousness before the drama work begins.

Start with simple movements, shaking hands and arms, rolling shoulders, gentle stretching. Then introduce the freeze frame concept through a playful warm-up:

- Call out simple words and ask participants to freeze their body into that word immediately:
 - happy
 - tired
 - surprised
 - confused
 - strong
- Start accessible and slightly playful before moving into more complex emotions.
- After each freeze, invite participants to look around the room and notice the different bodies expressing the same word.
- Then move into pairs, one participant creates a freeze frame, the other guesses what emotion or situation is being expressed. Switch roles. This builds comfort with the technique before group work begins.

2 Stressor Freeze Frames (20–25 mins): Divide participants into small groups of 4–6. Explain that each group will create a freeze frame representing a stressor, a challenging situation that participants in this group might recognise from their own lives.

Offer a broad range of stressor examples on the flipchart if needed:

- Feeling invisible or ignored
- Being misunderstood because of language or culture
- Facing discrimination or unfair treatment
- Pressure to fit in or hide part of yourself
- Family expectations and responsibilities
- Uncertainty about the future
- Feeling like you don't belong
- Being treated as less than others
- Navigating two different cultural worlds
- Dealing with loneliness or isolation
- Facing barriers in education or employment

Groups choose their stressor, through discussion or by the facilitator assigning one, and create a still freeze frame representing it. Every group member must be part of the sculpture.

Give groups 5–7 minutes to create their freeze frame. Then each group presents their sculpture to the room, holding it still for 30 seconds while others observe.

Facilitator's role: After each presentation, invite brief observations from the audience, "what do you notice?", without interpretation or analysis. Keep it descriptive.

3 Bringing It to Life — Action Clip (15–20 mins): Introduce the Action Clip technique, bringing the freeze frame to life through improvisation. Groups animate their sculpture: participants move, speak, and interact as the characters in their scene, exploring how the stressor plays out in real time.

Give groups 5 minutes to develop their action clip, they don't need a script, just a direction. The facilitator can guide the improvisation by suggesting that participants focus on their reactions to the stressor: avoidance, confrontation, seeking help, feeling stuck.

Each group performs their action clip, 1–2 minutes maximum. After each performance, invite brief whole-group reflection: “*what did you see happening?*”

4 Stress-Relief Freeze Frame — Flashforward (20–25 mins): Now introduce the Flashforward technique. Ask groups to create a new freeze frame, this time showing a stress-relief response to their stressor. A moment where something shifts, where agency is exercised, where support is found or a different choice is made.

First, invite groups to generate their own stress-relief response: “*What could help in this situation? What does the person or people in your scene need? What could change?*” Give groups 3–4 minutes to discuss and decide.

Groups create their flashforward freeze frame and then bring it to life as a short action clip, showing the stress-relief response in action.

Each group presents their flashforward. After all presentations, gather the whole group for the debrief.

5 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

6 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*. A brief grounding moment is important after the physical and emotional engagement of this activity.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice while creating and watching the freeze frames, what stood out?
2. Which stressor felt most familiar or closest to something you have experienced?
3. How did it feel to express a difficult situation through your body rather than words?
4. What was it like to move from the stressor freeze frame to the stress-relief flashforward?
5. What does this activity show us about the choices available in difficult situations, even when they feel stuck?
6. Where did the stress-relief responses come from, what does it tell us that the group generated most of them itself?
7. What is one stress-relief response from today that you could realistically use in your own life?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Stressor Selection:** The stressor examples provided are broad and accessible, they allow participants to connect without requiring personal disclosure. Never ask participants to base their freeze frame on a specific personal experience. The fictional/collective framing is protective and important. If a group chooses a stressor that feels very close to a participant's current reality, monitor carefully and offer grounding if needed.
- **The Warm-up Is Essential:** Do not skip or shorten the warm-up phase. Drama work requires physical and psychological preparation, participants who feel self-conscious about using their bodies will not engage fully with the freeze frame phases. The warm-up normalizes physical expression and reduces inhibition before the deeper work begins.
- **Physical Safety:** Freeze frames involve bodies in space. Establish clear physical safety guidelines at the start, no physical contact between participants unless explicitly agreed, no unsafe positions, no props used in ways that could cause harm.
- **Emotional Intensity:** If a group's freeze frame or action clip becomes very emotionally intense, touching themes of violence, severe discrimination, or acute distress, acknowledge it gently and redirect: "*what unexpected support might arrive here?*" Keep the focus on the stress-relief flash-forward rather than dwelling in the stressor.
- **Generating Stress-Relief Responses:** The most powerful moment in the activity is when groups generate their own stress-relief responses. This is agency in action, participants discovering that they already know what helps. Celebrate this explicitly in the debrief. If a group genuinely gets stuck, offer gentle facilitator prompts rather than providing answers:
 - "What has helped you or someone you know in a similar situation?"
 - "What would a good friend do here?"
 - "What small thing could shift this moment?"
 - "Who could this person turn to?"
 - "What does this person need most right now?"

These keep the agency with the group rather than transferring it to the facilitator.

Variations

- **Shorter version:** Run only Phases 1 and 2, warm-up and stressor freeze frames, as a 30–40 minute standalone activity. Works well as an energizer or introduction to drama-based methods.
- **Flashback variation:** Instead of a flashforward, groups create a flashback, showing what led to the stressor. This adds depth and context but increases emotional intensity. Use only with established groups.
- **Individual freeze frames:** Instead of group sculptures, participants create individual freeze frames. Works better for smaller groups or one-to-one settings.

Resources

Adapted from Bell Shakespeare's Frozen Images methodology.
For further information: www.bellshakespeare.com.au
See: Boal, A. (1979)



Theme

- Agency
- Participation
- Inclusion
- Capacity Building



Duration

40 - 55



Group Size

Any

Note: Divided into small groups or pairs for discussion.



Emotional Intensity

Medium



Materials

- Printed scenario cards, one per group or pair
- Pens and paper for taking discussion notes

Optional: flipchart for synthesizing responses during the sharing phase.

ACTIVITY 50

"What Would You Do?" Scenarios

"What Would You Do?" Scenarios invites participants to practice problem-solving and decision-making when faced with discrimination, cultural misunderstanding, or challenging social situations. By discussing fictional situations, participants explore responses and build confidence, discovering that they already have the capacity to respond thoughtfully, and that practicing in a low-stakes environment makes real-world action more possible.

Objectives

- To improve decision-making skills, empathy, and readiness to respond to difficult real-world situations.
- To build confidence and problem-solving abilities when facing discrimination or cultural misunderstanding.
- To increase emotional awareness of how challenging situations affect individuals.
- To strengthen the capacity for active support and intervention.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify potential challenges and barriers in situations involving discrimination or exclusion.
- practice forming constructive responses and support strategies in difficult situations.
- gain confidence in their ability to intervene or seek help in real-life scenarios.
- approach challenging situations with greater empathy, agency, and readiness to act.



Preparation

- Create or select real-life scenarios relevant to discrimination, emotional stress, or cultural misunderstanding. Examples:
 - A Roma teen hides their identity at school to avoid bullying
 - A young refugee is struggling with homesickness and anxiety
 - A migrant youth is pressured to give up their native language
 - A participant is excluded from a group activity because of a language barrier
 - Someone witnesses a peer being mocked for their cultural background and doesn't know what to do
 - A young person is told they don't belong somewhere because of where they come from
- Print scenario cards in advance, one per group or pair.
- Prepare different scenarios for different groups so the sharing phase is richer.
- Think carefully about emotional intensity, scenarios should provide safe emotional distance while remaining realistic and recognizable.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5–10 mins): Introduce the activity emphasizing that the goal is to practice thoughtful responses, not to find a single correct answer. There are no perfect responses, only honest ones.

Establish ground rules for respectful, active listening. Divide participants into small groups or pairs.

2 Group Discussion (15–20 mins): Present one or two scenarios to each group. Groups discuss three core questions:

- What would you do?
- What challenges might you face in doing that?
- How could you support someone in that situation?

3 Sharing (10–15 mins): Gather the whole group and invite each small group to share their main ideas, proposed actions, and biggest challenges. Synthesize and validate diverse responses on the flipchart.

4 Debriefing (10 mins): See below.

5 Closing: See Section 4.9 *Closing Rituals*.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What scenarios did your group discuss, what was the situation?
2. What were the different responses your group came up with?
3. How did it feel to step into someone else's shoes for these scenarios?
4. Which scenario felt most difficult to resolve, and why?
5. What common challenges emerged across the different scenarios?
6. What new idea or response did you hear from another group that changed your perspective?
7. What makes it difficult to intervene when someone is being discriminated against?
8. What inner strength or resource would you need to take action in one of these situations?
9. How can practicing scenarios like this help you feel more prepared in real life?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Select Relevant Scenarios:** Choose scenarios that are specific and relevant to the experiences of the target groups, Roma, refugee, and migrant youth, but ensure they provide safe emotional distance through fictional framing. Never use scenarios that too closely mirror a specific participant's known personal situation.
- **Emotional Reactions:** Be prepared for participants to have strong emotional reactions to the scenarios. Validate their feelings but gently guide the conversation back to constructive problem-solving. Use grounding techniques if necessary, refer to *Section 3.4.4*.
- **Linking to Strengths:** In the debrief, explicitly link the solutions proposed by participants back to their existing strengths and resources, reinforcing their confidence and problem-solving capacity. The goal is not to teach participants what to do but to help them recognize what they already know.

Variations

- **Pairs version:** If scenarios feel too close to current traumatic events, allow participants to discuss in pairs rather than presenting to the larger group, reducing the pressure of open sharing.
- **Younger groups:** Simplify scenarios and focus heavily on "who could you ask for help?" rather than complex intervention strategies.
- **Role play extension:** After the discussion phase, groups act out their chosen response, bringing the scenario to life through brief improvisation. Connects naturally to Freeze Frames.
- **Another scenario based activity:** If participants have already completed *Voices of Identity* (Nr.26), choose different scenarios to avoid repetition.

Resources

Grounded in social learning theory approaches to agency building.
See: *Bandura, A. (1977)*



Theme

- Agency
- Participation
- Resilience
- Capacity Building



Duration

70–75



Group Size

8–25



Emotional Intensity

Medium

ACTIVITY 51

My Brave Step

My Brave Step is a reflective and action-oriented activity that supports participants in identifying and committing to one concrete small action they have been hesitating to take. By first exploring the barriers, internal and external, that hold people back from acting, participants discover that hesitation is universal and that their specific barriers are often shared. The activity closes with a commitment circle and a collective celebration of courage, not of success, but of the willingness to try. My Brave Step is rooted in the understanding that agency grows through practice: one small step, taken with intention, is the beginning of everything.



Objectives

- To help participants identify and name the internal and external barriers that prevent them from taking action.
- To support participants in identifying one specific, concrete, and personally meaningful brave step.
- To practice making a public commitment as a tool for strengthening follow-through and accountability.
- To build a culture of collective encouragement where effort is celebrated regardless of outcome.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify and articulate specific internal and external barriers to taking action in their own lives.
- define one concrete, achievable brave step they are ready to attempt.
- experience the power of making a public commitment within a supportive group.
- approach risk-taking and action with greater courage and self-compassion.



Materials

- Tape or rope for the spectrum line, one long line on the floor from Agree to Disagree
- Small cards or paper strips, one per participant for writing their brave step
- Pens
- Flipchart and markers for collecting barrier themes

Optional: a small box or envelope for participants to seal their brave step inside



Preparation

- Lay the spectrum line tape on the floor before participants arrive.
- Prepare 5–6 spectrum line statements in advance, see Phase 1 for examples. Choose statements that normalize hesitation and barriers without being too heavy or triggering.
- Prepare the flipchart with two headings: **Internal Barriers** and **External Barriers**, ready to collect themes during the whole group synthesis.
- Think carefully about the commitment circle, some participants may find making a public commitment vulnerable. Plan how to frame this as an invitation rather than a requirement.
- Prepare your own brave step to share, your genuine participation in the commitment circle is one of the most powerful facilitation choices in this activity.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 What Holds Me Back (20–25 mins):

Spectrum Line (8–10 mins): Invite participants to stand at one end of the room. Explain the spectrum line, one end is Agree, the other is Disagree, and participants can position themselves anywhere along it.

Read statements one at a time. After each statement participants move to their position. Invite 1–2 volunteers to briefly explain their position, keep this light and moving.

Statements:

- I often know what I want to do, but something stops me from doing it.
- I worry about what others will think if I try and fail.
- I find it easier to encourage others to take action than to take action myself.
- I have tried things before and been disappointed, and that makes me hesitate now.
- Sometimes I feel like my actions won't make a difference anyway.
- I am waiting until I feel completely ready before I take a step.

After the final statement, acknowledge what just happened: *“Look at where people are standing. Most of us hesitate. Most of us have barriers. That is not weakness, it is human.”*

Pair Discussion (7–8 mins): Invite participants to find a partner, ideally someone they don't know well. In pairs, discuss:

“What is your most common barrier, the voice or feeling that most often stops you from taking action?”

“Is this barrier more internal (fear, self-doubt, ‘I’m not ready’) or external (structural barriers, lack of support, circumstances beyond your control)?”

Emphasize that both kinds of barriers are real and valid. External barriers, discrimination, poverty, legal insecurity, lack of opportunity, are not personal failures. They are systemic realities. Naming them honestly is part of the work.

Whole Group Synthesis (5 mins): Bring the group back together. Invite pairs to share one barrier they discussed, the facilitator collects themes on the flipchart under Internal Barriers and External Barriers.

Look at the flipchart together: *“This is what holds this group back. Some of these are inside us. Some are in the world around us. Both are real. And both can be worked with.”*

2 My Brave Step (15 mins): Invite participants to sit quietly with their paper strip or card. Explain:

“A brave step is not a goal or a dream, it is one specific, small, concrete action you can take in the next week. Something that genuinely challenges you, not something easy, but something achievable. Something you have been putting off, avoiding, or telling yourself you’re not ready for yet.”

Offer gentle prompts to help participants identify their step:

- Is there something you keep meaning to do but haven’t started?
- Is there a conversation you have been avoiding?
- Is there something small you could try that connects to a bigger dream?
- What would you do if you knew you couldn’t fail?

Give participants 5–7 minutes of quiet reflection and writing. Soft background music helps. Circulate quietly, be available without hovering.

When most participants have written their step, invite them to read it silently once more and notice how it feels in their body. Is there excitement? Fear? Both? All of these are signs the step matters.

3 The Commitment Circle (10 mins): Invite participants to stand in a circle, each holding their brave step card.

Explain the ritual: one by one, each participant reads their brave step aloud to the group. Just the step, one sentence. No explanation required unless they want to share more.

Begin yourself, read your own brave step first. This models the vulnerability and gives permission.

After each person reads their step, the group responds with a simple collective acknowledgment, a snap, a nod, or a soft collective “we hear you.” Not applause, something quieter and more intentional.

Facilitate this with genuine warmth and attention. Every step matters, whether it is “I will call my mother this week” or “I will apply for that course I have been avoiding for two years.” Both are equally brave.

4 Celebration in Advance (10 mins): After everyone has shared their step, introduce the celebration:

"We are not going to wait to see if you succeed before we celebrate. We are celebrating now, because you identified something that matters to you, you named the barrier that has been stopping you, and you said out loud what you are going to try. That is already brave."

Invite each participant to receive one word of encouragement from the group, the person on their left says one word directly to them. Words like: courage, strength, belief, you've got this, yes. Keep it simple and genuine.

5 Debriefing (10 mins): See below.

6 Closing: See Section 5.9 *Closing Rituals*.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What barrier came up most strongly for you during the spectrum line, and did anything surprise you about where you stood?
2. What was it like to hear others' barriers, did anything resonate or feel familiar?
3. How did it feel to write your brave step down and then say it out loud?
4. What happened in your body when you read your step aloud, what did you notice?
5. What is the difference between waiting until you are ready and taking a step before you feel ready?
6. What does it mean to celebrate effort rather than outcome, why does that matter for this group specifically?
7. What support, from yourself or from others, will help you actually take your brave step this week?

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Internal vs External Barriers:** This distinction is crucial for this target group. Roma, refugee, and migrant youth often face very real external barriers, discrimination, poverty, legal insecurity, lack of access to services, that are frequently misframed as personal failings or lack of motivation. Never suggest that all barriers are internal or that positive thinking alone can overcome structural obstacles. Validate external barriers explicitly and honestly. The brave step should be something within the participant's sphere of influence, not something that requires dismantling a structural barrier alone.
- **The Brave Step Must Be Theirs:** Never suggest what someone's brave step should be. If a participant is genuinely stuck, offer prompts but never directions. The step must come from the participant, a brave step someone else chose for you is not agency.
- **Celebrating Effort Not Outcome:** This principle needs explicit facilitation, it runs counter to many participants' experience of education and achievement systems where only success is celebrated. Say it directly: *"We celebrate that you are trying. Whether it works or not is not the point. The point is that you decided to try."*
- **Sequence Tip:** If your program includes Feathers of Courage, run My Brave Step first, it builds the initial comfort with naming barriers that Feathers of Courage then takes much deeper.

Variations

- **Optional Extension for Longer Programs:** If you are running a multi-day program or ongoing group, open the next session with a 15-minute sharing circle: *"What did you try? How did it go? What did you learn?"* Celebrate every attempt, successful, partial, or unsuccessful. Participants who attempted and "failed" often have the most valuable learning to share.
- **Shorter version:** Run only Phases 2 and 3, brave step identification and commitment circle, as a 20-minute session opener or closer. Works well at the start of a program day to set an intentional tone.

Resources

Grounded in self-efficacy theory.
See: Bandura, A. (1997)



Theme

- Agency
- Participation
- Resilience
- Advocacy



Duration

90-100



Group Size

10-40



Emotional Intensity

High

Note: This is a psychologically demanding activity. It requires facilitator readiness assessment before use. See Appendix X and the note at the start of Tips & Considerations.

ACTIVITY 52

Feathers of Courage

Feathers of Courage is a deeply personal and collectively powerful activity that guides participants through the process of identifying a postponed dream, naming the fear or internal barrier that has been holding them back, and taking one real concrete step toward it, all within the session. Working on two symbolic feathers, a Shadow Feather and a Light Feather, participants move from naming what holds them back to reframing it and acting despite it. The activity closes with a collective reveal: individual feathers are joined together to form a shared wing, a symbol of liberation, collective strength, and the understanding that personal courage and collective solidarity are not separate things.

Objectives

- To guide participants through the process of identifying and naming internal barriers and postponed dreams.
- To practice reframing fear and hesitation into stories of empowerment and possibility.
- To bridge the gap between intention and action through one immediate, concrete step taken during the session.
- To create a collective symbol of liberation and shared strength through the wing reveal.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify and articulate a specific dream or goal they have been postponing, and the fear or belief that has been holding them back.
- practice reframing limiting beliefs into more empowering perspectives.
- experience the shift from intention to action by taking one real step during the session.
- develop a sense of collective courage and solidarity through the shared wing creation.



Preparation

- Prepare the feather booklets in advance, cut two feather shapes from cardboard per participant and staple them together. The inner feather (Shadow) should be slightly smaller so the outer feather (Light) frames it when opened.



Materials

- Two cardboard feather shapes per participant, stapled together as a small booklet (Shadow Feather inside, Light Feather outside)
- Pens and markers
- Pre-printed A4 guiding question sheets, one set per phase, placed on the floor as a visual path during facilitation
- A collective wing structure, made from rope, branches, reused cardboard, or any eco-friendly materials the facilitator prepares in advance
- String or clips to attach individual feathers to the wing structure
- Ambient background music, 60–70 bpm, calm and atmospheric

Optional: clothespins for attaching feathers to the wing.

- Prepare the collective wing structure in advance, this is the surprise reveal of Phase 5. Keep it hidden or folded until the reveal moment. It can be made from rope stretched between two points, a large cardboard frame, or branches woven together. The wing should be large enough to hold all participants' feathers.
- Print the guiding questions on A4 sheets, one question per sheet. These are placed on the floor one at a time during the session, creating a visual path for participants to follow.
- Practice the full activity yourself before facilitating it, know every question from the inside. Your own depth of engagement with the material is your primary facilitation tool.
- Set up the room with enough space for participants to work individually and privately during Phases 2 and 3.
- Emotionally prepare yourself, this activity touches postponed dreams, fear, and the gap between who participants are and who they want to be. Some participants may connect very deeply. Have grounding exercises ready and know your referral pathway.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction and Settling (5–7 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the activity with warmth and genuine presence. Explain that today they will work with two feathers, one for the **shadow**, one for the **light**, and that by the end of the session, those feathers will become part of something larger.

Explain the feather booklet: the inner feather is private, it will never be shared or displayed. The outer feather will eventually join a collective wing. Ask participants to hold their booklet for a moment before beginning, feel the weight of it, notice what it brings up.

Begin the ambient music. Ask participants to find a comfortable position, sitting, lying, or standing, wherever they feel most at ease for private reflection.

2 The Shadow Feather - Naming What Holds Us Back (20–25 mins): Explain that the inner feather, the Shadow Feather, is for private reflection only. Nobody will see it. It is a space for complete honesty.

Place the first guiding question sheet on the floor and read it aloud slowly. Allow 1–2 minutes of silence for reflection and writing before placing the next sheet. Continue through all six questions, building a visual path on the floor as you go.

Guiding Questions - **Shadow Feather:**

1. What is that one dream or action that you keep postponing because it seems impossible or out of reach?
2. How long has this been waiting for you in the back of your mind?"
3. When you think about taking this step, what do you feel in your body? Where is that feeling located?
4. If this hesitation or fear had a color or a texture, what would it look like?

5. What is the specific thought or voice that stops you right before you act?, 'I'm not ready,' 'I will fail,' 'It's too late.'
6. If you could name the hidden belief behind this fear in one sentence, what would it be?

After the final question, allow a full minute of silence. Then say gently: *"Whatever is on that feather, you named it. That takes courage. Now we turn to the other side."*

3 The Light Feather - Reframing (15–20 mins): Ask participants to turn to the outer feather, the Light Feather. Explain that this feather will eventually become part of the collective wing. It is not private, but participants choose what to put on it.

Continue placing question sheets on the floor, extending the visual path.

Guiding Questions - **Light Feather:**

1. What if the belief you just wrote was not the absolute truth, but just a story you have been told, or a story you have told yourself?
2. What would you do differently today if you didn't have to carry the weight of that thought?
3. Imagine the version of yourself who has already taken this step. How does that person stand? How do they breathe?
4. What new quality or state does that version of you embody? Courage, trust, boldness, flow.
5. What do you need to tell yourself right now to give yourself permission to move forward?

After the final question, allow a moment of silence. Then say: *"The shadow feather holds what has been holding you. The light feather holds what is possible. Both are true. Both are yours."*

4 The 10-Minute Leap (10–12 mins): This is the most distinctive and important phase of the activity. Explain:

"Now you are going to take one real step, not imagine it, not plan it, actually do it. Right now, in the next 10 minutes. It might be sending a message, making a note, writing an email draft, making a plan, or simply saying out loud what you are going to do next. Whatever your dream needs, find the smallest possible real action and take it now."

Give participants 10 minutes to take their step. The facilitator circulates quietly and is available but does not intervene. The ambient music continues.

If a participant seems stuck, approach gently: *"What is the tiniest possible action, so small it almost seems silly? Start there."*

After 10 minutes, invite participants to return to the circle with their feather booklet.

5 The Reveal and Collective Wing (10–12 mins): Bring participants together. Before revealing the wing, acknowledge what just happened: *“You named your fear. You reframed it. And you took a step. That is not a small thing.”*

Now reveal the collective wing structure, unfolding or unveiling it in the center of the space. Allow a moment of surprise and appreciation.

Invite participants to detach their Light Feather from the booklet and attach it to the wing, choosing the left or right wing intuitively. As feathers are added one by one, the wing grows from bare structure to full and alive.

When all feathers are attached, invite everyone to step back and look at what they created together.

Say simply: *“Every feather here represents one person’s courage. One dream. One step taken. Together they make something that can fly.”*

6 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

7 Closing: See *Section 5.9 Closing Rituals*. The wing can remain displayed throughout the remainder of the program as a collective symbol of agency and shared courage. Participants keep their Shadow Feather, both sides of the story, together.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What did you notice while working through the Shadow Feather questions, what came up?
2. What happened during the 10-minute leap, what step did you take?
3. What shifted when you moved from the Shadow Feather to the Light Feather, how did the reframing feel?
4. What was it like to place your feather on the collective wing and watch it become part of something larger?
5. What does the collective wing represent about courage and community?
6. What does it tell us that so many people in this room are carrying postponed dreams, that hesitation and fear are so widely shared?
7. What is the difference between a dream that stays in your head and one that has had even one small step taken toward it?
8. What is the next step, after today, that will keep your dream in motion?



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** It should only be facilitated with groups that have already established strong trust and have spent significant time together. A co-facilitator is strongly recommended. Facilitators should be familiar with trauma-informed practice and confident using grounding techniques before running this activity. Do not use it with a new group or as a standalone session without prior relationship-building. If you are unsure whether you, or your group, are ready, choose a lighter activity first.
- **The Shadow Feather Is Sacred:** Emphasize multiple times that the Shadow Feather is completely private. Nobody will see it, ask about it, or reference it. This absolute privacy is what makes genuine honesty possible. Never glance at participants' Shadow Feathers as you circulate, face away or look at the floor when near someone writing.
- **Structural vs Internal Barriers:** As with My Brave Step, be careful not to frame all barriers as internal beliefs that can simply be reframed. For participants facing genuine structural barriers, legal status, poverty, discrimination, "what if this belief wasn't true?" can feel dismissive. The reframing questions are an invitation, not an instruction. Participants may reframe some barriers and simply acknowledge others as real. Both are valid.
- **The Wing Reveal:** Prepare the wing with genuine care, it is the emotional peak of the activity. A well-made wing that participants are proud to attach their feather to creates a very different experience from a hastily assembled structure. The materials matter: rope, branches, natural elements create a more meaningful aesthetic than cardboard alone.
- **Emotional Intensity:** This is the highest-intensity activity in the Agency section. Have grounding exercises ready and know your referral pathway. If a participant becomes significantly distressed during the Shadow Feather phase, approach quietly and offer a gentle alternative: *"You can leave the feather blank, or draw an abstract symbol, or simply sit with the music for a moment."*
- **Sequencing Tip:** This activity works best after participants have already had some experience naming barriers, for example through My Brave Step. Do not use it as a first session activity.



Variations

- **Outdoor version:** The wing reveal happens outdoors, feathers attached to a structure between two trees. The natural setting deepens the metaphor of flight and liberation.
- **Alternative symbols:** The feather and wing metaphor can be replaced with other symbols that resonate more strongly with specific cultural groups, seeds and a tree, stones and a cairn, threads and a weaving. The structure of the activity remains identical.
- **Shorter version:** Run only Phases 2 and 3, Shadow and Light Feather, as a 40-minute reflective activity without the 10-minute leap or wing reveal. Less powerful but more accessible for groups with limited time or trust.



Resources

Grounded in narrative reframing, somatic awareness, and behavioral activation approaches.

See: *White & Epston (1990), Bandura (1997).*



Theme

- Agency
- Solidarity
- Inclusion
- Capacity Building



Duration

45–60



Group Size

9–25

Note: divided into teams of 3–5.



Emotional Intensity

Medium to High

Note: This activity touches emotionally sensitive territory. We advise completing the Facilitator Readiness Check (Appendix X) before use.

ACTIVITY 53

Build It Together

Build It Together is a hands-on team challenge that uses the simple act of building a structure from limited materials to create a direct, felt experience of inequality, collective response, and solidarity. By deliberately giving different teams different quality materials, some teams well-resourced, others severely under-resourced, the activity generates a genuine emotional and physical experience of starting from an unequal position. The debrief connects this experience explicitly to the structural inequalities that many Roma, refugee, and migrant youth navigate in real life, and asks the most important question of the Agency section: when we face an unequal system, what do we do together?

Objectives

- To create a direct experiential parallel between a team challenge and the structural inequalities participants navigate in real life.
- To explore how groups respond collectively to unfair starting conditions.
- To strengthen cooperation, communication, and shared leadership within diverse teams.
- To reflect on what collective solidarity and mutual support look like in the face of systemic disadvantage.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- experience and reflect on the emotional impact of starting from an unequal position.
- identify different collective responses to inequality, acceptance, resistance, creativity, solidarity.
- recognize parallels between the building challenge and real-world structural barriers.
- develop greater awareness of their own natural role in collective problem-solving and solidarity.



Materials

Well-resourced teams:

- 20 sheets of A4 paper
- Tape
- 5 Cardboard sheets
- Scissors

Under-resourced teams:

- 20 sheets of A4 paper
- 2 cardboard sheets
- No scissors

Timer or stopwatch,
Measuring tape,
Flipchart and markers
for debrief



Preparation

- Prepare material kits in advance, clearly separated and labeled for each team. Keep the inequality between kits visible and significant, the contrast needs to be felt, not just noticed.
- Decide how many teams will be well-resourced and how many under-resourced. For groups of 3 teams, one well-resourced, two under-resourced works well. For larger groups adjust accordingly but always have more under-resourced teams than well-resourced ones, this mirrors reality.
- Do NOT tell participants about the inequality before distributing materials, the discovery moment is part of the experience.
- Clear enough space for teams to work without interfering with each other.
- Prepare the debrief carefully, this is where the real learning lives. The building challenge is the experience; the debrief is the meaning-making.
- Think about how to hold the emotional responses that emerge, frustration, anger, resignation, creative resistance. All of these are valid and valuable data for the debrief.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction (5 mins): Welcome participants and introduce the activity. Explain that teams will work together to build the tallest free-standing tower possible using the materials provided, in 20 minutes.

Emphasize collaboration and process over winning. Divide participants into teams of 3–5.

2 Material Distribution (2–3 mins): Distribute material kits simultaneously to all teams. Allow the discovery to happen naturally, teams will notice the inequality almost immediately.

Do not respond to complaints or questions about the unfairness yet. If teams ask “why do they have more?” simply say: “Work with what you have.”

Facilitator’s role: *Observe carefully during this phase. Notice how different teams respond to the inequality, anger, resignation, creative adaptation, attempts to negotiate or trade. These responses are the raw material of the debrief.*

3 Building (20 mins): Teams work simultaneously. Call out time warnings, “10 minutes left,” “5 minutes left,” “1 minute.”

Facilitator’s role: *Step back and observe. Notice:*

- How do under-resourced teams respond, do they give up, get creative, try to negotiate?
- How do well-resourced teams respond, do they notice the inequality, ignore it, or offer to share?
- What kinds of leadership emerge under pressure?
- What happens to team dynamics when resources are unfair?

Do not intervene in the dynamics of inequality, frustration, negotiation attempts, resignation, and creative resistance are all valuable responses to observe. Do intervene if: physical conflict emerges, a participant becomes significantly distressed, or a team completely disengages and needs a gentle prompt to stay in the experience.

4 Evaluation and Transition (3–5 mins): Signal the end of time. Briefly measure and acknowledge structures, without excessive celebration of the well-resourced teams' likely advantage. Immediately transition into a circle for the debrief.

Before the debrief, name what happened explicitly: *"Some teams had significantly more resources than others. That was intentional. Let's talk about what that felt like, and what it means."* and invite participants to take a slow breath and shake out their hands, a brief physical reset after the intensity of the building phase. Allow 1-2 minutes of quiet before the first debrief question. The emotional charge of the activity needs a moment to settle before it can be reflected on.

5 Debriefing (15 mins): See below.

6 Closing: See Section 5.9 Closing Rituals.

Discussion & Debriefing

1. What happened in your team when you first opened your materials kit, what did you notice?
2. How did your team respond to the inequality, what did you try to do?
3. How did it feel to work with significantly fewer resources than another team, or to have significantly more?
4. What emotions came up during the challenge, frustration, resignation, creative energy, anger?
5. What does this experience tell us about how inequality affects people's capacity to participate and contribute?
6. How does starting from an unequal position in this challenge mirror what Roma, refugee, and migrant youth experience in real life, in education, employment, housing, participation?
7. What did you notice about solidarity, did any team try to support another? What happened?
8. What collective responses to inequality did you see today, and which of those are available to us in real life?

Resources

Inspired by inequality simulation methodologies, including Star Power (Shirts, 1969). Grounded in experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970)

Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** This activity works best with groups that have some existing trust and familiarity. Facilitators should feel comfortable holding space for strong emotions and have at least one grounding technique ready. A co-facilitator is advisable if available. If the group is new or trust has not yet been established, consider using a lighter activity first or running this later in the program.
- **The Inequality Must Be Felt:** The material difference between teams needs to be significant enough to genuinely impact the experience. A small difference in resources produces a mild inconvenience. A large difference produces frustration, creative adaptation, and solidarity, which is what the debrief needs. Don't soften the inequality.
- **The facilitator as the system:** During Phases 2 and 3, your role is deliberately non-responsive to complaints about inequality. This is intentional, you are embodying the indifference of a system that distributes resources unequally and expects everyone to simply "work with what they have." Breaking this role to offer comfort or explanation would undermine the core experiential learning of the activity. Stay in the role. The debrief is where you return to yourself as a warm, reflective facilitator.
- **Holding the Emotional Responses:** Under-resourced teams may feel genuinely frustrated or angry, validate this explicitly in the debrief. These are appropriate responses to unfairness. Never suggest that under-resourced teams should simply "work harder" or "be more creative", that mirrors the harmful narrative that marginalized groups just need to try harder to overcome structural disadvantage.
- **Debriefing Tip:** The best debrief for this activity is one built on what you actually observed, which teams gave up, which got creative, whether solidarity emerged, what the emotional temperature was. If you watch closely during the building phase, you will already know which questions will land. Trust that.
- **Well-Resourced Teams:** Pay attention to how well-resourced teams respond to the inequality. Do they notice? Do they offer to share? Do they feel uncomfortable? Their responses are as valuable as under-resourced teams' responses, and often more revealing.
- **The Solidarity Moment:** If any team spontaneously tries to share resources or support another team during the building phase, celebrate this explicitly in the debrief. This is the most important moment in the activity. Unprompted solidarity in the face of inequality is exactly what the section is building toward.
- **Naming the Real-World Parallel:** Don't leave the parallel implicit, name it directly in the debrief. The building challenge is a metaphor and participants deserve to have it named clearly: *"This is what unequal access to education looks like. This is what happens when some people start with more and others start with less."*

Variations

- **Equal materials version:** Run the activity with equal materials as a straightforward team-building challenge, without the inequality dimension. Works well in Section 5.1 Safer Spaces and Icebreakers as an energizing early session activity.
- **Silent version:** For the first 10 minutes of building, no speaking allowed. Forces non-verbal communication and reveals how teams coordinate under pressure and inequality without language.
- **Resource sharing option:** Explicitly allow teams to trade or share resources after 10 minutes, observe what happens. Does the well-resourced team offer? Do under-resourced teams ask? What are the dynamics of asking for help?



Theme

- Agency
- Advocacy
- Participation
- Inclusion



Duration

90–120



Group Size

10–30

Note: works in small groups of 4–6.



Emotional Intensity

High

Note: This is a psychologically demanding activity. It requires facilitator readiness assessment before use. See Appendix X and the note at the start of Tips & Considerations.

ACTIVITY 54

Change Starts Here

Change Starts Here is a community organizing activity that guides participants through the full cycle of collective advocacy, from mapping their community and identifying a shared issue, to analyzing power, designing a collective response, and writing a letter to someone with the power to change things. Rooted in community organizing methodology, the activity is built on a simple but radical premise: that young people who have been excluded from decision-making spaces already have the knowledge, experience, and capacity to identify what needs to change - and to begin changing it. This is where individual voice becomes collective action.

Objectives

- To help participants identify and analyze a real shared issue in their community through collective mapping and power analysis.
- To introduce community organizing as a practical, non-violent approach to challenging unfair systems and redistributing power.
- To design a collective response to a specific community issue, grounded in real needs and realistic action.
- To practice advocacy through writing a letter to someone with the power to create change.



Learning Outcomes

Participants may:

- identify and articulate a specific shared issue in their community using community mapping.
- analyze the power dynamics around that issue, who holds power, who is affected, who are potential allies.
- design a realistic collective response and formulate a specific, evidence-based request.
- practice advocacy through first-person, collective written communication directed at decision-makers.



Materials

- Large sheets of paper, one per group for community mapping
- Large sheets of paper, one per group for power mapping
- Markers in different colors
- Pens and A4 paper for letter writing, one set per group
- Flipchart for whole group synthesis

Optional: sticky notes for the mapping phases.



Preparation

- Prepare large paper sheets for both community mapping and power mapping in advance, one per group.
- Prepare 2–3 backup case studies for groups who genuinely cannot identify a community issue of their own. Use real, locally relevant examples, or adapt the following:
 - A Roma community on the outskirts of a village whose waste is not collected by the municipality, the official reason given is that children run near the trucks and create a safety risk.
 - A family in a segregated community whose blind child has been offered a scholarship at a school in the city, but nobody is available to escort the child daily and the family refuses a boarding arrangement.
- Think carefully about issue selection; see *Tips*. Have a gentle facilitation plan ready if groups surface issues that are too complex, too personal, or require immediate professional intervention.
- Familiarize yourself with basic community organizing principles before the session; see *Resources*. You don't need to be an expert but you should be able to answer: "What is community organizing and how is it different from complaining?"
- Emotionally prepare yourself, naming real community issues can surface genuine anger, grief, or hopelessness. Hold these with care while consistently redirecting toward collective agency and realistic action.



Step-by-Step Instructions

1 Introduction — How Do We Usually Respond? (10 mins):

Welcome participants and open with a simple question, no theory, just lived experience:

"When you face a situation that is unfair, in your school, your neighborhood, your community, what do you usually do?"

Invite responses freely. As participants share, you will likely hear three kinds of responses:

- "I leave / I ignore it / I find a way around it"; **individual adaptation**
- "I tell myself it's not that bad / at least it's not as bad as..."; **reframing**
- "I fight it / I protest / I get angry"; **direct confrontation**

Acknowledge all three and others as understandable human responses. Then introduce a fourth possibility:

"Community organizing is another way. It is not about leaving, reframing, or fighting alone. It is about coming together, understanding the issue, finding allies, building collective power, and making a specific ask to the people who have the power to change things. It is non-violent, it is strategic, and it starts with listening."

Write on the flipchart: Listen → Map → Analyze → Respond → Act

Explain that today they will work through this cycle together.

2 Community Mapping (25–30 mins): Divide participants into small groups of 4–6. Distribute large paper sheets and markers.

Explain the task: each group will create a map of their community, not necessarily a geographical map, but a social map. What exists in your community? What is missing? What works? What is unfair or broken?

Guide the mapping with gentle prompts, one at a time, allowing groups to discuss and add before moving to the next:

- What are the strengths and assets of your community, what already exists that supports people?
- What are the gaps, what is missing that people need?
- What is unfair, where do people face barriers, discrimination, or unequal treatment?
- Who is most affected by these gaps and barriers?
- What is one specific issue that affects multiple people in your community right now?

The final question is the most important, groups should identify one concrete, specific, shared issue to work with for the rest of the activity. Not a general problem (“discrimination is everywhere”) but a specific, nameable situation (“young people from our community are systematically placed in lower-track classes at school regardless of their ability”).

Facilitator’s role: *Circulate between groups. Help groups move from general observations to specific issues, the more concrete the issue, the more powerful the subsequent phases. If a group is genuinely stuck, offer a backup case study.*

3 Power Mapping (15–20 mins): Once each group has identified their issue, introduce power mapping.

Explain: *“Every issue involves power, people and institutions who have the authority, resources, or influence to change things. Understanding the power landscape around your issue is essential before you can act effectively.”*

Ask groups to create a simple power map on a new sheet of paper, drawing circles of different sizes representing different actors:

- **Who has power over this issue?;** decision-makers, institutions, authorities (large circles)
- **Who is directly affected?;** the community members experiencing the issue (medium circles)
- **Who are potential allies?;** people or organizations who might support change (smaller circles)
- **Who benefits from keeping things the same?;** those with an interest in maintaining the status quo

Draw connecting lines between circles, showing relationships, influence, and potential leverage points.

After mapping, ask groups to identify: *“Who is the most important person or institution to reach, the one whose decision could actually change this situation?”* This becomes the recipient of their letter.

4 Collective Response (25–30 mins): Now groups move from analysis to action planning. Introduce the community organizing question:

“You understand the issue. You understand the power. Now, what do you want to happen, and how do you build the collective response to make it happen?”

Guide groups through four questions:

1. What is your specific request, the concrete change you want to see? Be as specific as possible. Not ‘treat us fairly’ but ‘include our community in the municipal waste collection route starting from next month.’
2. What evidence supports your request, what do you know about this issue that the decision-maker needs to hear?
3. Who in your community could lead this, who has credibility, relationships, and the trust of others?
4. What is the first collective action, the smallest real step that moves toward change?

Facilitator’s role: *Help groups sharpen their request, the more specific, the more powerful. A vague request (“respect our rights”) gives decision-makers nowhere to go. A specific request (“collect waste from our community every Tuesday as per our legal entitlement”) demands a concrete response.*

5 The Letter (15–20 mins): Each group writes one collective letter to the decision-maker they identified in the power mapping phase. The letter follows a simple structure:

- **Opening:** Who we are and why we are writing
- **The issue:** What the problem is, who it affects, and what evidence supports this
- **The request:** What specific change we are requesting, concrete, realistic, time-bound
- **The closing:** What we will do next if we don’t receive a response

Offer the following guidance:

Write in the first person plural; “We” not “Young people” or “The community”

Be specific; names, places, numbers where possible

Be respectful but firm; this is not a request for charity, it is a demand for rights

Be clear about the request; one specific, concrete, achievable change

Give groups 15 minutes to write. Circulate and support, help groups find the right tone between assertive and respectful, between personal and evidence-based.

6 Sharing and Debrief (15–20 mins): See below.

7 Closing: See *Section 5.9 Closing Rituals*. The letters can be displayed, shared with a wider audience, or, if participants choose, actually sent. The possibility of sending the letter is itself an act of agency.



Discussion & Debriefing

5. What issue did your group identify, and how did you decide on it?
6. What did the power mapping reveal, who holds power over your issue and who are potential allies?
7. How did it feel to move from identifying a problem to designing a collective response?
8. What was the most challenging part, mapping, analyzing power, or writing the request?
9. What is the difference between complaining about an unfair situation and organizing a collective response to it?
10. What does it mean that young people who are affected by an issue are often the most qualified to identify what needs to change, and the least likely to be consulted?
11. What is one real step, beyond today, that could move your collective response forward?



Resources

Grounded in community organizing methodology, participatory action research, and youth participation approaches.
See: *Alinsky (1971)*, *Sen (2003)*, *Hart (1992)*.



Tips & Considerations for Facilitators

- **Important:** It should only be facilitated with groups that have already established strong trust and have spent significant time together. A co-facilitator is strongly recommended. Facilitators should be familiar with trauma-informed practice and confident using grounding techniques before running this activity. Do not use it with a new group or as a standalone session without prior relationship-building. If you are unsure whether you, or your group, are ready, choose a lighter activity first.
- **For less experienced facilitators:** Consider dividing this activity into two 90-minute sessions, community mapping and power mapping in Session 1, collective response and letter writing in Session 2. This allows participants time to gather evidence between sessions and gives the facilitator space to reflect and prepare between phases. The two-session format consistently produces stronger letters and deeper learning.
- **Issue Selection:** The community mapping phase is the most critical facilitation moment. Groups need to identify an issue that is:
 - Real and shared; affecting multiple people, not just one individual
 - Specific and concrete; nameable, describable, evidence-based
 - Within reach of collective action; not so large that it feels impossible
 - Appropriate for this setting; not requiring immediate professional intervention

If a group identifies an issue that is too personal, too acute, or beyond the scope of youth work, acknowledge it and gently redirect: *“That is a real and important issue, and it may need a different kind of support. For today, can we identify an issue that the group could collectively address?”*

- **The Specific Request:** The most common facilitation challenge in community organizing activities is the vague request. Groups will naturally gravitate toward general demands, “respect our rights,” “treat us equally,” “stop discrimination.” Help them get specific: *“Who specifically? To do what specifically? By when?”* A specific request is not a compromise, it is a strategy. It gives decision-makers a concrete path to respond and gives the community a clear measure of whether change has happened.
- **Community Organizing Is Not Complaining:** Make this distinction explicitly in Phase 1 and return to it in the debrief. Complaining identifies a problem and stops there. Community organizing identifies a problem, analyzes the power around it, builds a collective response, and makes a specific ask to the people with the power to change it. The difference is strategic, and it is empowering.
- **Facilitator’s Own Position:** Community organizing is inherently political, it is about challenging power and demanding change. As a facilitator you are not neutral on whether discrimination, exclusion, and inequality are acceptable. Be clear about your values while remaining focused on process rather than prescribing specific political positions.



Variations

- **Shorter version:** Run only Phases 1-3, introduction, community mapping, and power mapping, as a 45-minute awareness-raising activity. Participants leave with a clearer understanding of the issue and the power landscape but without the letter. Works well as a session opener for a longer advocacy program.
- **Extended version:** After the letter-writing phase, groups present their letters to a mock decision-maker, another facilitator or youth worker playing the role. The decision-maker responds and groups practice negotiating and responding to pushback. Adds 20-30 minutes but significantly deepens the advocacy practice.
- **Multi-session version:** Run the activity across two sessions, community mapping and power mapping in Session 1, collective response and letter writing in Session 2. Participants have time between sessions to gather evidence, consult community members, and sharpen their request. Produces significantly stronger letters and deeper learning.



5.9 Activity / Session Closing Rituals

Every session needs a closing - a moment that signals the transition from the shared space of the group back to individual daily life. Closing rituals serve several important functions: they ground participants after emotionally or physically demanding work, they create a sense of collective completion, they honour what was experienced together, and they offer a gentle bridge between the intensity of the session and the world outside.

In this handbook, closing rituals are not optional extras - they are an essential part of trauma-informed facilitation practice. Without a proper closing, participants may carry unprocessed emotions, feel abruptly disconnected from the group, or find it difficult to transition back into their daily environment. A well-chosen closing ritual - even one that takes only two minutes - makes a significant difference.

This section offers a menu of closing rituals at different lengths, in different registers, and for different purposes. Facilitators choose the ritual that best fits the session's emotional tone, the group's energy, and the time available. Some sessions need grounding and stillness. Others need celebration and connection. Others need a moment of collective reflection. The menu below covers all of these.

A Note on Cultural Diversity

For intercultural groups, facilitators are encouraged to invite participants to share a closing ritual from their own cultural background — a gesture, a collective breath practice, a phrase, a moment of movement, or any other form of closure that carries meaning in their culture. If the group agrees, this becomes the closing for that session. This simple invitation honours the cultural wealth in the room and creates moments of genuine exchange that no facilitated activity can manufacture. Before choosing from the menu below, always ask first: *"Does anyone want to offer a closing from their own culture or tradition?"*

The Closing Rituals

Facilitators are encouraged to intentionally match the closing ritual to the emotional intensity and purpose of the session — grounding after heavy work, reflection after learning, and activation after action-focused sessions. Participation in closing rituals should always remain voluntary. Participants may choose to pass, observe, or engage in their own way.

1 Collective Breath

- **Register:** Grounding
- **Duration:** 2–3 minutes
- **When to use:** After any session with medium to high emotional intensity. Particularly important after activities involving personal disclosure, inner critic work, or internalized discrimination.

Invite participants to sit or stand comfortably – feet flat on the floor, hands resting. Guide three slow collective breaths together:

“We are going to take three breaths together. Breathe in through your nose for four counts – hold for two – breathe out through your mouth for six. Let the exhale be longer than the inhale.”

After the third breath, allow a moment of quiet. Then say simply: *“We did something meaningful today. Carry that with you.”*

The power of this ritual is in the collectivity – breathing together at the same rhythm creates a moment of shared embodied presence that is calming, grounding, and deeply connective.

2 A Gesture

- **Register:** Grounding / Connection
- **Duration:** 5–10 minutes
- **When to use:** After activities that worked with identity, belonging, or collective strength. Works particularly well as a closing for multi-day programs.

Invite the group to create or choose one collective gesture that represents something from the session — or from the program as a whole. This could be:

- A hand placed on the heart
- An open palm extended forward
- A raised fist
- Arms crossed over the chest
- Any movement that feels meaningful to the group

If the group has been together for several days, invite them to design their gesture collectively — a brief discussion followed by a vote or consensus. If time is short, the facilitator can offer two or three options and invite the group to choose.

Once the gesture is agreed, the group performs it together — once, twice, or three times — in silence or with a shared phrase. The gesture becomes a collective symbol that participants can carry with them and return to independently.

3 A Moment of Silence

- **Register:** Grounding / Reflection
- **Duration:** 1–2 minutes
- **When to use:** After any session. Particularly powerful after high-intensity activities or at the close of a full program day.

Simply invite the group to sit together in shared quiet for 60–90 seconds. No instruction, no prompt — just collective silence.

“Before we leave today — let’s just sit together for a moment. No need to do anything. Just be here.”

Silence is often the most underused facilitation tool. For groups that have been talking, moving, and processing intensely, the gift of shared quiet is profound. Some participants will close their eyes. Others will look around the room. All of it is right.

After the silence, close with one simple sentence — whatever feels true in the moment:
“Thank you for being here today.”

4 One Word

- **Register:** Reflection
- **Duration:** 5–10 minutes depending on group size
- **When to use:** After any session as a quick, light closing check-out. Works for any group size and any emotional register.

Invite participants to stand or sit in a circle. Each person shares one word — and only one word — that captures how they feel, what they are taking away, or what the session meant to them.

No elaboration, no explanation, no response from the group — just the word, received in silence.

The facilitator goes first — modeling that one word is genuinely enough. After everyone has shared, close with: *“All of those words together — that is what this session was.”*

This ritual is particularly powerful because of its constraint. The single word forces participants to distil their experience to its essence — and the collection of words that fills the room is often quietly beautiful.

5 Emotions Circle Check-out

- **Register:** Reflection / Connection
- **Duration:** 10–15 minutes depending on group size
- **When to use:** After sessions with significant emotional content. Works particularly well as a mirror to the *Emotions Circle Check-in* from Activity Nr.2 — opening and closing a program with the same ritual creates a beautiful sense of arc.

Invite participants to stand or sit in a circle. Each person names one emotion they are carrying as they leave the session — using feeling vocabulary rather than thoughts or judgments.

The facilitator models first: *“I am leaving feeling [emotion].”* Encourage specificity — not just “good” or “fine” but “grateful,” “moved,” “tired,” “lighter,” “unsettled,” “hopeful.”

After everyone has shared, briefly acknowledge the range: *“We are leaving with different emotions — and all of them are valid.”*

6 Compliment Web

- **Register:** Celebration / Connection
- **Duration:** 15–20 minutes
- **When to use:** Near the end of a longer program — not in the first session, as it requires genuine familiarity. Works beautifully as a closing ritual for the final day of a multi-day program.

Participants stand in a circle. The facilitator holds a ball of yarn and begins — holding the end of the yarn, saying one genuine appreciation to someone in the circle, and passing the ball to them. That person holds their section of yarn, says an appreciation to someone else, and passes the ball. The web grows across the circle until everyone is connected.

When the web is complete, ask the group to look at what they created together. Then say: *“This web is your connections — everything you have built in this room. Pull gently on your section — feel that? When one of us moves, all of us feel it.”*

Participants can then gently lower the web to the floor — releasing it together — or hold it for a moment in shared appreciation before letting go.

7 Gratitude Wall

- **Register:** Reflection / Celebration
- **Duration:** 10 minutes to establish, then ongoing
- **When to use:** As an ongoing practice across a multi-session program. Introduced in the first or second session and added to throughout.

Designate one wall or large sheet of paper as the Gratitude Wall — available throughout the program. Participants add sticky notes at any point — things they are grateful for, moments they want to remember, things they noticed in themselves or others.

At the close of each session, invite participants to add one note before they leave. At the close of the final session, read some of the notes aloud — with permission — as a collective celebration of what was experienced together.

The Gratitude Wall works because it is cumulative — it grows across the program and becomes a visual record of what the group noticed and valued. By the final session it is full, colorful, and genuinely moving.

8 The Gift

- **Register:** Connection / Celebration
- **Duration:** 5–10 minutes
- **When to use:** Near the end of a program — after enough time together for genuine appreciation to have developed. Works well as a light alternative to the Compliment Web when time is limited.

Participants stand or sit in a circle. Each person turns to the person on their left and offers one word — a quality they have witnessed, an appreciation they want to give, or simply a word they think that person needs to hear today.

No response required — just receiving. The facilitator goes first, modeling genuine specificity: not “you are nice” but “I give you the word courage.”

The round completes when every person has received their gift.
Close with: *“Carry your word with you.”*

9 Fist to Five

- **Register:** Grounding / Reflection
- **Duration:** 2–3 minutes
- **When to use:** As a quick energy and mood check-out after any session. Particularly useful for facilitators who want a rapid read of where the group is before they leave.

Invite participants to show their current energy or mood on their hand — on the count of three:

- Fist (0) — completely depleted, overwhelmed, or struggling
- 1 finger — very low energy or difficult feelings
- 2 fingers — below neutral
- 3 fingers — okay, neutral
- 4 fingers — good, energized
- 5 fingers (open hand) — excellent, full of energy

Everyone shows their number simultaneously — so nobody influences anyone else.

The facilitator acknowledges the range without judgment: “*We are leaving at different places — and that is completely okay.*” If several participants show a fist or one finger, offer a brief grounding moment before dismissing.

10 Letter to My Future Self

- **Register:** Reflection / Intention
- **Duration:** 10–15 minutes
- **When to use:** At the close of a significant session or at the end of a multi-day program. Particularly powerful after activities that involved personal declarations or commitments — My Personal Manifesto, My Brave Step, Feathers of Courage.

Invite participants to write a short letter to themselves — to be read in one week, one month, or one year. The letter can include:

- Something they learned today
- Something they want to remember
- A commitment they want to keep
- A question they want to sit with
- Something they want to tell their future self

Give participants 8–10 minutes to write. Then invite them to seal their letter in an envelope addressed to themselves. Facilitators can collect letters and mail them back at the agreed time — or participants keep them and commit to opening them on the agreed date.

The letter ritual is powerful because it creates a bridge between the present moment and the future — honoring the significance of what happened while planting a seed of continuity.

11 Step Forward

- **Register:** Intention / Action
- **Duration:** 5–10 minutes
- **When to use:** After sessions focused on agency, resilience, or action — My Brave Step, Change Starts Here, Feathers of Courage, My Personal Manifesto. Creates a concrete bridge between the session and real life.

Invite participants to stand in a line or a circle. Each person names one intention — one small, concrete step they want to take before the next session or in the coming week.

After naming their intention, they take one physical step forward — literally stepping into their commitment.

The physical step matters — it transforms a verbal intention into an embodied act. The group witnesses each step in silence or with a soft collective acknowledgment.

Close with: *“You have already taken one step. That is how it starts.”*

A Final Note for Facilitators

The closing ritual is not the least important part of the session — it is often the most remembered. Participants may forget specific activities, specific discussions, specific moments of learning. But they rarely forget how a session ended — the feeling of being grounded, seen, celebrated, or released. Choose your closing with the same care you bring to everything else. And when in doubt — a collective breath, a moment of silence, and one genuine word of thanks will always be enough.

CHAPTER 6

Shared Vocabulary



Throughout this handbook, certain terms and concepts are used repeatedly to support a shared understanding among youth workers and facilitators. These words may carry different meanings depending on professional background, cultural context, or personal experience. The purpose of this glossary is not to provide rigid or academic definitions, but to offer a common language that supports clear communication and consistent practice. Definitions are written in plain, accessible language and reflect how these terms are used within this handbook and in everyday youth work practice.

The terms collected here are offered as working definitions rather than fixed truths. Many of them, trauma, resilience, wellbeing, inclusion, identity, carry different meanings across cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary contexts, and no single definition can fully capture the range of ways people name and make sense of their own experiences. We offer these definitions because shared language makes communication easier and reduces misunderstanding across diverse teams and contexts. But facilitators are encouraged to hold them lightly, as starting points for conversation rather than conclusions, and to remain open to the ways the young people and communities they work with may understand and express these concepts in their own words. The most important vocabulary in any group is often the vocabulary the group itself generates.

Accumulated Trauma: Trauma that builds over time through repeated difficult or harmful experiences, such as ongoing discrimination, instability, or loss, rather than from a single event.

Agency: A person's sense of their own capacity to make choices, influence decisions, and take meaningful action in their own life and community.

Anxiety: A persistent feeling of worry, fear, or unease that may affect how a person thinks, feels, and functions in daily life.

Belonging: The fundamental human need to feel accepted, valued, and genuinely included within a group, community, or environment, not despite who one is, but because of it.

Brave Space: A space designed for honest dialogue on challenging topics where participants are encouraged to engage with discomfort in a supported and respectful environment. Used alongside safer space to acknowledge that meaningful learning sometimes requires stepping into difficulty.

Burnout: A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from prolonged stress, often experienced by people in caring or helping professions.

Capacity Building: A long-term process of developing skills, knowledge, confidence, and resources so that individuals, groups, or organisations can act more effectively and independently.

Cultural Humility: An ongoing commitment to self-reflection and learning about one's own cultural assumptions and biases, recognising that cultural competence is a process rather than a fixed destination.

Cultural Sensitivity: The awareness, respect, and openness to the diversity of cultural backgrounds, values, communication styles, and lived experiences within a group, and the ability to adapt facilitation practice accordingly.

Discrimination: The unfair treatment of a person or group based on aspects of their identity such as ethnicity, religion, gender, legal status, disability, or sexual orientation. Discrimination can be individual, institutional, or structural.

Diversity: The presence of a range of different identities, backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives within a group or community.

Emotional Literacy: The ability to recognise, name, and express emotions in oneself and others, and to respond to others' emotions with empathy and understanding.

Emotional Regulation: The ability to manage and respond to one's own emotional reactions in ways that are appropriate to the situation.

Emotional Safety: The felt sense of being secure enough to express oneself authentically within a relationship or environment, without fear of judgment, ridicule, or harm.

Equity: The principle of fairness that recognises unequal starting points and seeks to offer responsive, differentiated support rather than treating everyone identically.

Experiential Learning: A process in which learning happens through direct experience, followed by structured reflection, meaning-making, and transfer to real life.

Fight, Flight, Freeze and Fawn Responses: The four involuntary survival responses activated by the nervous system when a person perceives threat or danger. Fight involves aggression or attempts to control the situation. Flight involves escape or avoidance. Freeze involves immobilisation or numbness. Fawn involves appeasing or people-pleasing in order to avoid conflict or harm. These are instinctual responses, not character traits or conscious choices.

Grounding: Practical techniques that help a person reconnect with the present moment and reduce distress. Examples include breathing exercises, sensory awareness, and physical anchoring.

Hyperarousal: A state of heightened nervous system activation in which the body remains in a high-alert stress response, which may appear as agitation, panic, anger, or difficulty concentrating.

Hypoarousal: A state of low nervous system activation in which the body shuts down in response to overwhelming stress or trauma, which may appear as numbness, withdrawal, disconnection, or low energy.

Identity: The ongoing, layered sense of who a person is, shaped by their experiences, relationships, values, culture, and the social contexts they navigate. Identity is not fixed or singular.

Inclusion: The active, ongoing process of creating conditions where all people feel recognised, respected, and able to participate fully. Inclusion is co-created through relationships and practice, not delivered as a service.

Internalised Discrimination: The process by which a person absorbs and begins to believe the negative messages that systems, media, or social environments communicate about their identity or group. This is not a personal failing but a human response to sustained external pressure.

Intersectionality: A framework for understanding how multiple aspects of identity, such as ethnicity, gender, legal status, class, disability, and sexuality, overlap and interact to create distinct and compounding experiences of exclusion or privilege.

Intervision: A structured, peer-led professional reflection process in which colleagues support each other in examining work-related challenges, ethical dilemmas, and emotional responses to practice.

Mental Health: A state of wellbeing in which a person can cope with the ordinary stresses of life, recognise their own abilities, and contribute to their community. Everyone has mental health, just as everyone has physical health.

Mental Health Awareness: The capacity to recognise emotional states, stress, and mental health needs in oneself and others, and to respond appropriately or seek support.

Minority Stress: The additional, chronic stress experienced by members of stigmatised or excluded groups as a result of prejudice, discrimination, and the ongoing experience of belonging to a devalued group.

Nervous System: The body's network for detecting and responding to safety or danger. When a person feels threatened, the nervous system activates a survival response. When trauma is severe or repeated, the nervous system can remain in a state of heightened alert even when no immediate danger is present. Understanding how the nervous system works helps facilitators recognise distress responses and respond with care rather than judgment.

Non-Formal Education: A structured but flexible approach to learning based on experience, participation, and reflection rather than formal instruction or accreditation.

Orientation to the Present Moment: A grounding practice that involves gently redirecting attention to current surroundings, using the senses to reconnect with where one is right now. It helps the nervous system settle by signalling that the present environment is different from a past threatening situation.

Parentification: The experience of a young person taking on adult roles and responsibilities, such as caring for siblings or acting as a family interpreter, often as a result of circumstance rather than choice.

Place in the World: A concept developed through the When Scars (!) Become Art research, referring to a person's combined sense of social connectedness, self-controllability, and freedom from internalised discrimination. When these three dimensions are strong, young people show greater resilience even in the face of ongoing discrimination.

Power Dynamics: The ways in which differences in role, authority, knowledge, or social position shape relationships and interactions within a group or organisation.

Prejudice: A negative attitude or assumption about a person based solely on their membership in a particular group, formed without direct personal knowledge or experience of that individual.

Professional Boundaries: The limits that define what is appropriate within a youth worker and young person relationship, protecting both parties and ensuring the relationship remains ethical, focused, and sustainable.

Re-traumatisation: The re-activation of intense emotional and physical stress responses when a person encounters situations, words, or dynamics that echo a past traumatic experience.

Reflection: The conscious process of reviewing thoughts, feelings, and experiences in order to learn, grow, and inform future practice.

Resilience: A dynamic process of adapting and recovering in the face of adversity, shaped as much by the quality of relationships and environments as by individual characteristics. Resilience is not the ability to endure injustice but the capacity to maintain dignity, connection, and agency in the face of it.

Right to Pass: The explicit right of every participant to decline to engage with any activity, question, or sharing invitation without needing to explain why. Silence is a valid form of participation.

Safer Space: A space in which facilitators and participants actively work to reduce harm, build trust, and support genuine participation. No space can be completely safe for everyone at all times, “safer” acknowledges this honestly while maintaining the commitment to create the best possible conditions for all.

Self-Care: The deliberate and ongoing practice of attending to one’s own physical, emotional, and psychological needs, particularly important for those working in emotionally demanding professions.

Self-Efficacy: A person’s belief in their own capacity to take action and achieve outcomes in specific situations.

Self-Worth: The intrinsic sense of one’s own value as a person, independent of achievements, performance, or external validation.

Social Connectedness: The felt sense of closeness, belonging, and genuine relationship with others, including peers, community, and wider networks. One of the three dimensions of Place in the World.

Social Inclusion: The process of improving the conditions under which individuals and groups participate in society, with particular attention to those who face barriers based on identity, status, or circumstance.

Stereotype: A fixed, oversimplified image or assumption about a particular group of people that ignores individual diversity and often reinforces discrimination.

Stress: The body’s natural response to perceived pressure, challenge, or threat. Stress becomes harmful when it is chronic, unrelieved, or rooted in ongoing structural conditions beyond a person’s control.

Structural Discrimination: Inequality embedded in institutions, policies, and social norms that consistently disadvantages certain groups, often without conscious intent.

Supervision: A structured process of professional support and reflection, typically with a trained supervisor, that helps practitioners examine their practice, manage emotional load, and maintain ethical standards.

Trauma: The lasting psychological and physiological impact of experiences that overwhelm a person’s capacity to cope. Trauma is not defined by the event itself but by how the individual experiences it, and its effects can be immediate or long-lasting.

Trauma-Informed Practice: An approach to facilitation and support that recognises the potential impact of trauma on participation, trust, and emotional regulation, and that prioritises safety, choice, collaboration, and strengths rather than focusing on problems or deficits.

Wellbeing: A multidimensional state encompassing physical, mental, emotional, social, and environmental health. Wellbeing is not simply the absence of difficulty but the presence of conditions that allow a person to function, connect, and flourish.

Window of Tolerance: The optimal zone of emotional arousal in which a person can engage, reflect, and learn. When outside this window, a person may become overwhelmed (hyperarousal) or shut down (hypoarousal). Supporting young people to stay within or return to this window is a core principle of trauma-informed facilitation.

Withdrawal: A pulling back from engagement, interaction, or participation. In a youth work context, withdrawal may be a sign that a young person is experiencing emotional overload, distress, or a hypoarousal response. It should be understood as a signal that support may be needed, not as disinterest or resistance.

CHAPTER 7

Referral and Support Contacts



Youth workers play an important role in creating safer and supportive environments, but they are not mental health professionals or crisis responders. Some situations require specialised support beyond the role and responsibility of youth work. This section provides country-specific referral information and support services that facilitators can turn to when additional professional help is needed.

The contacts listed here are intended as practical resources for situations involving emotional distress, mental health concerns, crisis, or other support needs. Youth workers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with relevant local services before running activities, so they can respond calmly and appropriately when needed.

Referral is not a failure of facilitation. It is part of ethical, responsible, and trauma-informed practice.

Whenever possible, the referral process should be a collaborative one. Explain the options to the young person, involve them in the decision-making, and ensure they understand why additional support is being sought. This respects their agency and maintains the trust you have built.

A warm handover, where the youth worker helps the young person make the first call or accompanies them to an initial meeting, can be much more effective than simply providing a contact list. It bridges the gap between the safer spaces of youth work and the formal support system.

Important Note

Be mindful that for some young people, formal institutions represent places of control or potential harm rather than support. When providing referrals, prioritise services that have experience working with diverse cultural backgrounds and those that offer anonymous or community-based support.

This handbook is not a substitute for professional mental health services. Youth workers are not expected to provide therapy or clinical intervention. Their role is to offer support, create safer spaces, and facilitate appropriate referral when necessary.

Consider referral when:

- a young person discloses suicidal thoughts or intent
- there are signs of severe depression, panic, or ongoing emotional crisis
- abuse, violence, or exploitation is disclosed
- repeated self-harm or strong risk-taking behaviours are observed
- you feel unsure, overwhelmed, or uncertain about how to proceed
- the young person is navigating acute systemic crises such as housing instability, legal or asylum insecurity, or immediate safety concerns

When in doubt, consult a supervisor, colleague, or professional service. You do not need to carry difficult situations alone.

If you are using this handbook outside these six countries, locate your own national referral contacts before beginning.

Service / Organization	Description	Contact
National SOS line for suicide prevention	24/7 free and confidential phone line offering immediate support to individuals in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.	+381117777000
Centar Srce (suicide prevention)	NGO providing emotional support and suicide prevention through phone, email, and chat services.	vanja@centarsrce.org +381800300303
UG Patria	Youth-focused organization from Novi Sad offering psychosocial support, education, and prevention programs.	ngopatria@gmail.com +381600555496
EDIT Centar	NGO providing a free youth counseling service for personal development, emotional challenges, and psychological support.	savetovaliste.infopolis@gmail.com editcentar.org
Ženski SOS centar	Support center for women experiencing violence, offering counseling, advocacy, and protection services.	soszenskicentar@gmail.com +38121422740
Mental Hub	Organization dedicated to promoting mental health, offering workshops, counseling, and awareness-raising activities.	office@mentalhub.org +381644513338
Novosadski humanitarni centar	Provides free psychological counseling and psychosocial support, especially for young people and vulnerable groups.	savetovaliste.nshc@gmail.com +38163694677
Group Come Out (Grupa Izadi)	LGBT+ organization in Novi Sad offering counseling, peer support, advocacy, and safer spaces for young people.	savetovaliste@izadji.rs izadji.rs
Pričajmo (k)od kuće	Online and phone-based counseling initiative providing free psychological support for young people.	pricajmokodkuce@gmail.com +38163694677
Omladina Jazas	Youth organization focused on sexual and reproductive health, HIV prevention, and psychosocial support for young people.	novi.sad@jazas.rs +381212454514
Iz kruga Vojvodina	Organization supporting women with disabilities, offering counseling, legal aid, and empowerment programs.	office@izrugavojvodina.org +38166447040
OPENS	Youth umbrella organization in Novi Sad, coordinating the Constellation of Support network of counseling centers and mental health initiatives.	sazvezdjepodrske@opens.rs opens.rs
XY Spectrum	Organization working on human rights and health of intersex, trans, and non-binary people, offering counseling and advocacy.	office@syspectrum.org +381606130669
Aktiv NS	Local NGO providing youth programs, mental health support, and community engagement activities, with a focus on victims (and their families) of traffic accidents.	aktivns@gmail.com aktivns.rs
UNICEF Serbia and partners	Platform Sve je OK (Everything is OK) provides free online psychological counseling, information, and resources for young people (15–30).	svejeok.rs
NADEL	National Child Helpline (116111), offering free, confidential, and anonymous support to children and adolescents.	nadel.srbija116111@gmail.com nadel-decijalinija.org

Service / Organization	Description	Contact
National SOS Line for Suicide Prevention	24/7 free and confidential phone line offering immediate support to individuals in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Operated by Klimaka.	1018 https://www.klimaka.org.gr/
KETHEA	Helpline for addiction support, including drugs, alcohol, and internet gaming.	1145 https://www.kethea.gr/en/kethea/therapeutic-programmes/helpline-1145/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
"By your side" SOS Helpline	Helpline mostly for women but also for everyone seeking mental health support.	2109700814 https://enowhumanrights.gr/%ce%b3%cf%81%ce%b1%ce%bc%ce%bc%ce%ae-sos/
Union Of Women Association Hopeline	Helpline provides 24/7, free, and confidential support and information by phone to women who suffer from violence.	801 11 16000 https://kakopoiisi.org/
ELIZA Helpline	Support for Professionals Working With Children	10454 https://eliza.org.gr/en/our-work/eliza-helpline-10454/
South Aegean Social Inclusion Observatory	Psychosocial support line for adolescents, parents, and teachers.	10306 https://socialobservatory.pnai.gov.gr/en/contact-us/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
National Helpline for Children.	The National Children's Telephone Line SOS 1056 operates from "The Smile of the Child" and is available to every child and adult to provide support on issues that concern them	1056 https://www.hamogelo.gr/
MERIMNA Thessaloniki Care Advisory Centre	Substantial and practical support and relief to children in difficult moments of grief and life-threatening illness.	2310510010 thessaloniki.support@merimna.org.gr
MERIMNA Athens Care Advisory Centre	Substantial and practical support and relief to children in difficult moments of grief and life-threatening illness.	2106463367 athens.support@merimna.org.gr
IASIS	NGO that provides therapeutic and counselling services as well as psychosocial support to people who are in need.	https://www.iasismed.eu/?lang=en
DIOTIMA	NGO that supports survivors of gender-based violence by providing specialized legal assistance, psychosocial support, and professional counseling.	https://diotima.org.gr/



North Macedonia

Service / Organization	Description	Contact
National SOS Line for Domestic Violence Victims (Centre for Crisis - Nadezh)	24/7 free and confidential helpline offering immediate support, professional assistance, and referrals for individuals facing domestic violence. The Crisis Center "Nadezh" also offers temporary crisis shelter.	15-315 (24/7, free from all operators)
First Children's Embassy in the World - Megjashi	SOS line for children and adolescents ("Alo Bushavko"), operating 24/7 since 1993, providing support and counseling. They also offer a separate SOS phone and free legal service for children and youth.	+389 70 390 632 (Alo Bushavko)
Skopje Queer Center National LGBTI+ Helpline	Offers discreet counseling and support for LGBTI+ individuals of all ages, their families, friends, and professionals. Counselors are trained professionals.	+389 75 24 11 24
Open Gate - La Strada	SOS helpline providing free and confidential service for anonymous reporting and assistance for victims of human trafficking and providing anti-trafficking awareness.	0800 11111 (SOS line)
SOS Phone for Women and Children Victims of Domestic Violence	SOS telephone line providing support for women and children victims of domestic violence, often connected with specialized shelters.	15 700
National Free Mobile SOS Line for Gender Equality	A free mobile SOS line for reporting violations of basic human rights and freedoms, often focused on gender equality issues.	141-700
SUPPORT (Mental Health Organization)	Organization dedicated to improving mental health among children and adolescents, offering various programs including individual and group sessions with trained therapists.	support.org.mk
Cortex	Counseling center for children & adolescents (youth) and psychotherapy services.	+389 70 421 150
National Child Helpline (NADEL, formerly 116111)	Confidential and anonymous support line for children and adolescents, addressing various challenges and providing guidance.	nadel-decijalinija.org
Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia - Psychosocial Support	Provides psychosocial support and psychological first aid, often in response to crises or disasters, for affected individuals and families.	+389 72 271 048

Service / Organization	Description	Contact
Gençlik Destek Hattı (Youth Support Line)	24/7 free psychological counselling for children & young people.	0850 455 00 70
Türkiye Aile İçi Şiddet Acil Yardım Hattı / Women & Children Violence Emergency Line	Free, 24/7 help for women/children facing domestic, family, or gender-based violence.	+90 212 656 96 96 or +90 549 656 96 96 (as listed)
Türk Psikologlar Derneği Mental-Health Helpline	Offers general mental-health support; a helpline you can call when in emotional distress.	+90 850 222 3727
National Emergency / Mental Health Support	For urgent mental-health crisis (suicide risk) the national emergency number and mental health support lines apply.	112 (medical/emergency) / 182 (Mental Health & Psychological Support)
SPoD – Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (LGBTI+ Helpline)	Provides anonymous peer-support for LGBTI+ people on issues of gender identity, sexual orientation, family relations, coming out, discrimination.	Phone: 0850 888 54 28 (also noted as “0850 888 LGBT”) Email: psikolojikdestek@spod.org.tr
Turkish Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (TACAP)	A professional association that supports child/adolescent mental health, useful contact for youth oriented psychological services & referral.	Email: cogep@cogepder.org.tr cogepder@gmail.com Phone: +90 312 440 1257
UNHCR Turkey Partner Services MHPSS (Refugee & Asylum-seekers)	For refugee and asylum-seeker children and adults: psychological assistance, interpreter-supported services.	Counselling line: 444 48 68
Green Crescent / Yeşilay	NGO focused on addiction (drugs, alcohol, gaming) prevention & support relevant for youth risk behaviours.	Website: https://yesilay.org.tr (Check website for hotline numbers)
Save the Children in Türkiye	Works with children & youth (including refugees) for child protection, mental health & psychosocial support (MHPSS) after emergencies.	Website: https://www.savethechildren.net/turkiye (Contact details via website)
National “Youth Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Helpline” UNICEF Turkey youth line	Special helpline for adolescents/young adults, part of national service.	Phone: +90 312 586 80 00 (Mon-Fri 9 AM-6 PM)
National Mental Health & Psychological Support Line Ministry of Health of Turkey	Free 24/7 line providing psychological support, crisis counselling, referrals.	Phone: 182 (24/7)
Gender-Based Violence & Domestic Violence Helpline Ministry of Family and Social Services (Turkey)	For women and children victims of domestic violence, also relevant for youth experiencing violence.	Phone: 183 (24/7)



Germany

Service / Organization	Description	Contact
National Suicide Prevention Helpline (TelefonSeelsorge)	24/7 free and confidential emotional support and crisis counseling via phone, chat, and email.	0800 111 0 111 / 0800 111 0 222 / 116 123 https://www.telefonseelsorge.de/
Nummer gegen Kummer Youth Helpline	Free and anonymous counseling service for children and young people facing emotional distress, bullying, family problems, or mental health struggles.	116 111 https://www.nummergegenkummer.de/
Krisenchat	24/7 WhatsApp and SMS-based crisis counseling service for young people under 25.	https://krisenchat.de/
Berliner Krisendienst	Provides immediate psychological and psychiatric crisis support for adults in emotional emergencies.	0800 1110444 https://www.berliner-krisendienst.de/ich-brauche-hilfe/
Deutsche Depressionshilfe	National foundation offering information, self-help resources, and support for people affected by depression and suicide risk.	0800 33 44 533 https://www.deutsche-depressionshilfe.de/
Hilfetelefon Gewalt gegen Frauen	24/7 support line for women experiencing violence, abuse, or forced marriage. Multilingual and anonymous.	116 016 https://www.hilfetelefon.de/
bke Jugendberatung	Online counseling platform for adolescents and young adults dealing with stress, anxiety, identity issues, or family conflicts.	https://jugend.bke-beratung.de/
LSVD Germany	LGBTIQ+ association providing support, advocacy, and counseling referrals for queer youth and adults.	https://www.lsvd.de/ +49 221 / 92 59 61 0
Youth-Life-Line	Online peer counseling platform focused on suicide prevention among young people.	https://www.youth-life-line.de/ 07071 254 281
Wildwasser e.V.	Organization supporting girls and women affected by sexual violence and abuse through counseling and crisis intervention.	https://www.wildwasser.de/ 030/48 62 82 30
Caritas Germany Psychological Counseling	Offers psychosocial counseling, family support, addiction counseling, and mental health services across Germany.	https://www.caritas.de/
Diakonie Germany	Provides social and psychological support services including crisis intervention, youth counseling, and family support.	https://www.diakonie.de/
Zentrum Überleben	Provides social and psychological support to migrants and refugees, providing intercultural counselling	https://www.ueberleben.org/ (030) 30 39 06 -0
Amaro Drom e.V.	Provides support for young Roma and Sinti	https://amarodrom.de/ +49 (0)30 61 62 00 10
KuB (Kontakt- und Beratungsstelle für Geflüchtete und Migrant*innen e.V.)	A contact point and advice center for refugees and migrants, provides psychosocial counselling, advice and support	https://kub-berlin.org/en/ 030 / 614 94 00

Service / Organization	Description	Contact
Telefonul Copilului (Child Helpline Romania)	24/7 free and confidential helpline for children and adolescents offering emotional support, counseling, and protection services.	119 / 116 111
Alianța Română de Prevenție a Suicidului (ARPS)	Romanian Alliance for Suicide Prevention providing emotional support and suicide prevention counseling.	0800 801 200
DepreHUB	Mental health support platform offering free psychological counseling and emotional crisis intervention.	0374 456 420
Teen Line Romania	Support line and online counseling service dedicated to teenagers and young adults facing emotional difficulties.	https://www.teenline.ro/
ANA – National Anti-Drug Agency	Provides addiction prevention programs, counseling, and psychosocial support for young people and families.	https://ana.gov.ro/
Necuvinte Association	NGO supporting women and children survivors of domestic violence through counseling, legal support, and shelter services.	https://asociatianecuvinte.ro/
Sens Pozitiv	Organization offering HIV/AIDS support, counseling, and mental health services for vulnerable groups and young people.	https://www.senspozitiv.ro/
MozaiQ LGBT Association	Provides support, advocacy, community programs, and counseling for LGBTQ+ people in Romania.	https://mozaiqlgbt.ro/
Accept Association	Human rights organization supporting LGBTQ+ individuals with counseling, legal support, and safe spaces.	https://acceptromania.ro/
Save the Children Romania	Supports children and youth through mental health, psychosocial support, education, and child protection services.	https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/
Romanian Red Cross Psychological Support	Provides psychosocial support and crisis intervention during emergencies and disasters.	https://crucearosie.ro/
Telefonul Vârstnicului	Free support line for elderly people experiencing loneliness, depression, or emotional distress.	0800 460 001
Blue Line for Victims of Domestic Violence	National helpline for victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender-based violence.	0800 500 333
UNICEF Romania	Mental health and psychosocial support resources for children, adolescents, and vulnerable families.	https://www.unicef.org/romania/

CHAPTER 8

Appendices



This section contains supplementary materials that support the use of this handbook in practice. All materials may be printed, adapted, and used freely within the context of youth work.

The appendices are organised in three parts.

The first part contains tools for facilitator preparation, reflection, and self-care. These seven documents are designed to be used independently of any specific activity — before sessions, after sessions, and as part of ongoing professional development. They are available as standalone printable documents.

- Appendix 1: Facilitator Readiness Check for Medium-High and High Intensity Activities
- Appendix 2: Professional Development Reflection Tool
- Appendix 3: Post-Session Facilitator Reflection Sheet
- Appendix 4: Caring for the Caregiver Worksheet
- Appendix 5: Participant Feedback Form
- Appendix 6: Youth Reflection Sheet
- Appendix 7: Regulation Toolbox Worksheet

The second part contains reference material on youth work frameworks and practices in the six partner countries that contributed to this handbook. This section is available for readers who want contextual background on the national landscapes that shaped the research and activities.

- Appendix 8: Youth Work in Partner Countries

The third part contains activity-specific materials: handouts, worksheets, cards, and templates referenced within individual activities throughout Section 4. Each item is clearly labelled with the activity and section it belongs to.

See individual items below, organised by section and activity.

PART 1

Facilitator Tools



Facilitator Readiness Check

For **Medium-High** and **High** Intensity Activities



Instructions

- Complete this check before facilitating any Medium-High or High intensity activity.
 - Rate each statement from 1 (Not ready) to 5 (Fully ready).
- 1** = Not ready **2** = Some concerns **3** = Mostly ready **4** = Ready **5** = Fully ready

Note: For High intensity activities, aim for mostly 4-5 across ALL categories before proceeding alone.

1 Emotional State

Competence Area	1	2	3	4	5
I am aware that this is a Medium-High or High intensity activity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I understand this topic may bring up difficult or traumatic experiences	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel emotionally stable today	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am not carrying unresolved personal stress that could affect the session	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel mentally present and focused	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have enough energy to hold space for others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have reflected on whether this activity's themes may personally affect me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2 Capacity to Hold Emotional Space

Competence Area	1	2	3	4	5
I feel confident managing strong emotions such as crying, anger, or withdrawal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can stay calm and grounded during emotional moments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can support participants without taking on their emotions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can use grounding or de-escalation techniques	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3 Boundaries and Role Clarity

Competence Area	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my role as facilitator, not therapist	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can stop or adapt the activity if needed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel comfortable setting limits with participants	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know what to do if a participant becomes distressed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am aware of my target group and their possible needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can maintain the distinction between emotional support and facilitation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4 Support System

Competence Area	1	2	3	4	5
I have someone I can reach out to such as a co-facilitator or supervisor	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There is a clear referral option if needed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel supported by my organisation or team	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know my referral pathway and have the relevant contact details ready	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have familiarised myself with the Referral and Support Contacts in Section 7	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5 Preparation for the Activity

Competence Area	1	2	3	4	5
I understand the emotional risks of this activity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have read the Tips and Considerations section including any High intensity warning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have a plan for opening and closing the session responsibly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can adapt the activity based on group reactions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have a debrief and reflection plan for participants	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have assessed that this group has established sufficient trust for this level of intensity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



Quick Interpretation

- Mostly 4-5 across all areas → Ready to facilitate
- Several 3s → Proceed with caution and additional support
- Any 1-2 in key areas → Do NOT facilitate alone

Before You Start — Three Questions

1. What concerns me most right now?

2. What support do I need before starting?

3. Should I adapt or postpone this activity?



This tool is for personal use before each session. Your responses are private.

Professional Development Reflection Tool

Instructions

- This tool is for personal reflection. There are no right or wrong answers.
- Use it at the start of working with this handbook, after three months of practice, and annually.

1 = I need significant support 3 = I feel moderately confident 5 = I feel very confident
2 = I need significant support 4 = I feel confident

1 Emotional Safety and Facilitation

Competence Area	1	2	3	4	5
I can create a psychologically safer group space	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can manage strong emotions in a group setting	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can recognise signs of distress in participants	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can use grounding techniques when needed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I understand how trauma may affect participation and can respond appropriately	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2 Professional Boundaries

Competence Area	1	2	3	4	5
I understand the limits of my role as a facilitator, not a therapist	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel confident redirecting personal trauma disclosures appropriately	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know when to refer a young person to professional support	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel comfortable saying I am not the right person for this	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know my referral pathway and have relevant contacts ready	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can respond appropriately if a young person becomes overly reliant on me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3 Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion

Competence Area	1	2	3	4	5
I reflect on my own biases and assumptions before facilitating	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I adapt activities to diverse cultural contexts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I create space for multiple identities and perspectives	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am aware of power dynamics in groups	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am aware of how discrimination affects young people's wellbeing and participation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4 Self-Care and Sustainability

Competence Area	1	2	3	4	5
I notice when I am emotionally overloaded	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I seek supervision or peer support when needed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I maintain clear boundaries between work and personal life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel supported in my role	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5 Empathy and Communication

Competence Area	1	2	3	4	5
I show young people I am genuinely listening through my full attention and presence	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can respond constructively when I disagree with a young person's choices or views	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can hold space for a young person who does not want to talk or engage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I build trust with young people consistently over time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6 Ethics and Decision-Making

Competence Area	1	2	3	4	5
I feel confident handling sensitive disclosures involving harm, risk, or safety concerns	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know the steps to take when I am unsure how to handle a situation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can balance respecting confidentiality with keeping young people safe	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know my referral pathway and have relevant contacts ready	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7 After completing the grid, take a few minutes to reflect:

1. Which areas feel strong for me?

2. Which areas need development?

3. What support would help me grow?

4. Do I need additional training, supervision, or mentoring?

5. What is one concrete step I will take in the next month to develop in my weakest area?



This tool is for personal use only. Your responses are private. Consider sharing reflections with a trusted colleague, supervisor, or mentor if helpful.

Post-Session Facilitator Reflection Sheet

Complete after each session — your responses are private

Session Title: _____ Date: _____ Participants: _____

1 Group Atmosphere

- Did participants appear emotionally supported throughout the session?
- Were there visible signs of distress?
- Did anyone withdraw or disengage strongly?

Notes:

2 Inclusion and Participation

- Did all participants have space to contribute?
- Were any voices dominating?
- Did cultural or language barriers appear?

Notes:

3 Boundaries and Role Clarity

- Did any participant disclose sensitive personal experiences?
- Did I remain within my role as facilitator rather than therapist?
- Was referral information needed?

Notes:

4 My Own Emotional State

- Did I feel activated or personally affected during the session?
- Am I carrying any emotional weight from this session?
- Do I need to debrief with a colleague or supervisor?

Notes:

5 Adaptation for Next Time

- What worked well?
- What should be adjusted or changed?
- Was the activity duration appropriate?

Notes:



Strong emotions do not mean the activity failed. They often indicate that meaningful themes were touched. What matters is how the situation was held and supported.

Caring for the Caregiver

A reflective worksheet for youth workers



Instructions

- Use this worksheet after a challenging week, an emotional session, or as a regular self-check-in.
- You can complete it alone, with a peer, or during supervision or intervision.
- See also *Section 2.4* of the handbook for further self-care guidance.

1 Check-In: How Am I, Really?

Energy:

Low

Neutral

Energised

Emotion:

Sad

Frustrated

Flat

Hopeful

Connected

Anxious

Inspired

Body:

Tense

Tired

Calm

Restless

Grounded

In one sentence, how would you describe your current emotional weather?

2 Recent Moments That Mattered

What moment in my recent work stuck with me the most? Why?

What emotion did I experience during or after that moment?

Was there anything I needed but did not ask for?

3 Looking at My Boundaries

Choose one boundary you held well this week. How did it feel to uphold it?

Was there a moment when I overstepped my own limit or struggled to say no? What can I learn from that?

4 Burnout Signals and Rebalancing

Have I noticed any signs of stress or burnout in myself lately?

- ☐ Constant tiredness
- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Emotional disconnection
- ☐ Self-doubt
- ☐ Skipping breaks or rest
- ☐ Physical symptoms such as headaches or sleep issues

What has helped me stay balanced recently?

What small act of self-care can I commit to this week?

It can be tiny: a walk, a no-phone dinner, saying no once, or asking for support.

5 Connection and Support

Who in my team or support network do I trust to talk to when I am overwhelmed?

Would I benefit from intervention, supervision, or just an honest chat this week?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ I feel supported already

6 My Self-Care Anchor

Write or draw one image, word, or quote that reminds you why your wellbeing matters.

What is one thing I want to do differently next week?



Your wellbeing is not separate from your work. It is the foundation of it.

Participant Feedback Form

Your voice matters — you may answer as much or as little as you wish

Session Title: _____ Date: _____

1 How Did the Session Feel?

On a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very much):

	1	2	3	4	5
I felt supported during this session	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt respected and listened to	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I could participate in a way that felt comfortable for me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The activity was meaningful or useful for me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The pace of the session felt right	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The pace of the session felt:

- ☐ Too slow
- ☐ About right
- ☐ Too fast

2 Your Reflections (Optional)

One thing I learned or realised today:

One thing I liked about this session:

One thing that could be improved:

After this session, I feel:

Is there anything else you would like to share?

3 Participation and Inclusion (Optional)

I felt that:

- ☐ My background and identity were respected
- ☐ Different perspectives were welcomed
- ☐ I felt comfortable staying silent if I wanted
- ☐ I felt I could choose not to participate in any part without judgment
- ☐ I would join a similar session again



Thank you for your feedback. You do not need to write your name.

My Reflection

You can answer in words, drawings, or symbols. You can keep this paper if you want. You do not need to write your name.

1 Something I learned about myself today

2 One strength I showed today

3 One feeling I noticed during the session

It is okay if the feeling was difficult or uncomfortable.

4 Something I want to remember from today

5 One small action I can take after today:

6 One thing I appreciated about someone else in the group today:



Well done for taking time to reflect. Your thoughts and feelings matter.

Regulation Toolbox Worksheet

For youth workers — your personal handbook for staying grounded



Instructions

- Tick the tools that already work for you. Add your own in the spaces provided.
- This is a personal reference — keep it somewhere accessible for difficult moments.

1 Mental Tools

What can help calm your mind?

- ☐ Deep breathing
- ☐ Journaling
- ☐ Reframing thoughts
- ☐ Guided meditation
- ☐ Gratitude practice
- ☐ Setting boundaries

Add your own: _____

2 Emotional Tools

How can you process or soothe difficult emotions?

- ☐ Talking to a friend
- ☐ Listening to music
- ☐ Crying or letting it out
- ☐ Art or creative expression
- ☐ Physical touch or warmth
- ☐ Butterfly hug
- ☐ 4-7-8 breathing
- ☐ Voo sound

Add your own: _____

3 Physical Tools

What can help your body reset?

- ☐ Walking
- ☐ Yoga or stretching
- ☐ Hot shower or bath
- ☐ Sleep or rest
- ☐ Drinking water and eating well
- ☐ Sport or movement

Add your own: _____

4 Environmental Tools

What places, people, or routines can help you feel grounded and supported?

- ☐ Being in nature
- ☐ Supportive spaces at work or home
- ☐ Time with trusted people
- ☐ Structured routines
- ☐ Saying no

Add your own: _____

5 Emergency Strategies

When I feel overwhelmed, I can:

- ☐ Ground myself using the 5-4-3-2-1 technique
- ☐ Take a short break
- ☐ Call a support person
- ☐ Say I need a moment
- ☐ Ask for supervision or peer support
- ☐ Reading
- ☐ Writing
- ☐ Drawing

Add your own: _____

6 My Self-Care Anchor

When I notice I am struggling, my first three go-to tools are:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____



You already carry the tools. This worksheet helps you remember where to find them.

PART 2

Reference Material



Youth Work in Partner Countries

An overview of youth work frameworks across the six project countries

Context & Background

- This appendix provides contextual background on youth work in the six countries that contributed to the When Scars (!) Become Art project.
- It is offered as reference material for readers who want to understand the national landscapes that shaped the research and activities in this handbook.



Germany

The youth work in Germany has a long history, as the first Federal Youth Plan was established in 1950 and provided young people with accommodation, education and opportunities for self-organization in the challenging post-war times. Nowadays, youth work in Germany is regulated in Child and Youth Welfare Act (Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz) included in the Social Code Book (Sozialgesetzbuch) and has the goal of offering young people opportunities that promote their development, empowering them to make their own decisions, and encouraging them to take on social responsibility. This includes out-of-school education (political, social, cultural, etc.), youth work in sports and games, recreation for children and young people, and youth counseling.

Youth work in Germany is aimed at young people from the age of 6 until the age of 27, even though older individuals may be also included in it. A big part of youth work in Germany is the youth social work, aimed at adolescents and young adults who need support due to social disadvantages or individual impairments. From the 1990s, young Sinti and Roma have been explicitly seen as one of the target groups of youth work in Europe and Germany. Initially, they were perceived primarily as a passive group and only in a few cases as a driving force behind projects and activities. This has however changed over time and through joint efforts of various Sinti and Roma youth organizations and networks. Nowadays, there are many programs and initiatives targeting antigypsyism and empowering young Sinti and Roma. Nevertheless it is not a priority of youth work in Germany and one can observe lacking cultural sensitivity and awareness of the specificity of this youth group.

According to the German Statistical Office, in 2017, there were around 147 300 publicly funded youth work programs nationwide. Youth work is a regulated profession. To work as a state acknowledged youth worker one needs to finish a state vocational training as an educator (Erzieher*in) or obtain a university degree in social work or social pedagogy. This is required especially when working at youth care facilities or with minors. However, many of the people working within the youth work, especially with youth above 18, within the area of political and social education do not have this educational profile.

Through a strong systematic inclusion in the political system and a well-established network of providers youth work is strong, both on the national and local level. The regulations and policies on the national level are coordinated by the Federal Ministry of Education, Family, Seniors, Women, and Youth, which is also responsible for topics such as Engagement and society and the Youth work on the European level, indicating a strong direction, which the field follows. Additionally, each of the Bundesland has its own State Youth Office, which oversees and supports local youth services, ensuring standards and quality. Whatmore, many of the German federal states have additionally committed to independent youth policy. Youth policy is in this context understood as a cross-cutting task within the state government. Accordingly, all departments are responsible for taking into consideration youth issues in their respective areas of activity. Municipal youth offices, there are 556 of nation-wide (in 2024), and are key players in implementing youth work locally, cooperating with non-governmental organizations.

The system supports the plurality of the youth work providers resulting in a strong cooperation between public and independent, non-governmental providers, which ensure diversity and competition of ideas and offered services. The providers can be divided into four groups: church-based organizations, welfare associations, political and civic youth organizations, as well as cultural and sports organizations. These actors work together within nation-wide and local frameworks and networks, such as the German Federal Youth Council (Deutscher Bundesjugendring) or umbrella organizations (Spitzverbände). Noteworthy are State Youth Plans, which provide each of the federal states their own funding plan for youth work, supporting infrastructure, training, and projects, or national funding programs, such as Demokratie leben! aimed at various actors (municipalities, youth centers, NGOs) to promote civic education, participation, and anti-discrimination work.

The youth work in Germany is based on three core principles: voluntary participation, where young people decide freely whether to take part in the offered activities; self-determination and co-creation, where activities are shaped with young people; and non-formal education, where learning takes place through experience, creativity, and participation.

Six main areas of youth work in Germany:

1. Open youth work happening at the local youth centers or youth clubs providing young people spaces for socializing, creativity, sports, and advice.
2. Youth work happening within youth associations and organizations, usually providing long-term educational programs, oriented at skill and leadership training, creating opportunities for democratic participation.
3. Cultural and creative youth work encourages artistic expression and access to culture, often aimed at disadvantaged youth, who may not receive cultural education otherwise.
4. Political and civic education with the focus on democracy, human rights, and civic participation, mostly carried out by (political) foundations, youth education centers, or NGOs, offering long-term projects and short-term seminars. Includes youth councils and other youth structures embedded in the decision-making processes, mostly at local levels.
5. International youth work promoting intercultural understanding through youth exchanges, voluntary services, and European cooperation. It is coordinated, co-funded and implemented by state-funded organisations on the international (IJAB or Jugend für Europa) and bilateral level (i.e. German-Polish or German-Greek Youth Office).
6. Social youth work combines social work, counseling, and empowerment approaches, targeted at disadvantaged groups such as refugees, youth with disabilities, or NEETs. It includes streetwork projects, mentoring schemes, or vocational programs. Youth social work provides appropriate support and guidance to enable children and young people from socially disadvantaged families to grow up healthy and safe.

Despite its strong structure and its diversity, youth work in Germany faces some challenges. The access to youth work remains uneven across regions and social groups. Young people from rural areas, migrant or refugee backgrounds, and low-income families often face barriers, as many of the participation structures (i.e. youth councils or associations) sometimes attract mainly already engaged or privileged groups. While youth work is legally guaranteed by the law, much of its funding depends on temporary project grants and is often dependent on the political group having the power within the area. Moreover, the professional field of youth work struggles with under-recognition compared to formal education and is within low pay scales, resulting in limited job opportunities and the sector increasingly relying on volunteers.

Nevertheless, youth work in Germany, contrary to other European countries, is well established and guaranteed by the law. It covers a broad spectrum of activities and provides comprehensive support and guidance to young people from an early age until they reach independence. The variety of offers, ranging from leisure projects, such as cultural and sports activities, through political education offers to social work, implemented at local, national, and international levels, enables young people to develop their personalities, acquire social and democratic competences, and actively participate in society. A key characteristic of German youth work is that young people are not only beneficiaries but are actively involved in shaping programs, making decisions, and taking responsibility within youth organizations and projects. Through this participatory approach, youth work fosters inclusion, equal opportunities, and empowers young people to contribute meaningfully to their communities and democratic life.

Sources: [destatis.de](https://www.destatis.de), [dji.de](https://www.dji.de), [bmbfsfj.bund.de](https://www.bmbfsfj.bund.de), [unterstuetzung-die-ankommt.de](https://www.unterstuetzung-die-ankommt.de), [drk.de](https://www.drk.de)



Greece

In Greece, although there are legal provisions concerning youth issues, there is no official definition or legal framework for youth work. Youth work exists as a social practice that constitutes an integral part of educational and welfare work and is an important element that supports young people's safe and healthy transition to adulthood. There is a wide range of activities that can be described as youth work in Greece, including health, social support, counselling, education, training, personal development etc, and are mainly related to leisure time activity, that is, artistic and cultural programmes, outdoor recreation, sports, etc., providing a space for youthful experimentation and cultural development. Youth workers in Greece work primarily with young people aged between 15 and 25, but may in some cases extend this to those aged 13-15 or 25-30 targeting disadvantaged or socially excluded groups.

In Greece a complex network of providers, community groups, non-governmental organizations and local authorities exist, sharing a common set of youth work values, that is supported by full-time or part-time youth workers or volunteers but the main state organisation responsible for the development and implementation of youth work policy in the country is the General Secretariat for Youth. The youth work values that all the above share include working with young people because they are young people, and not because they have been labelled or are considered deviant, starting with young people's view of the world, helping young people develop stronger relationships and collective identities, respecting and valuing difference and promoting the voice of young people.

Youth work is of great social value. Not only does it connect with young people's leisure and recreational interests but also complements formal educational processes, addresses contemporary social issues such as unemployment, and reflects the particular needs and tasks of young people as they move through the transitions of adolescence and young adulthood. Other types of youth work, both formal and informal, address issues relevant to young people such as drugs, sexual health or discrimination. In many instances, youth workers help young people to gain the skills to develop and lead sessions for other young people, an approach known as peer education. A non-exhaustive list of youth services in Greece includes, for example, career services, youth information, youth associations and participation education for young people with fewer opportunities, cultural education/cultural programmes, and social care services.



In Turkey, youth work is considered an integral part of educational and welfare work, supporting young people's healthy transition to adulthood. While there is no single, official legal definition or framework for youth work, its legal basis and policy direction are primarily outlined in key documents, most notably the National Youth and Sports Policy Document and the Decree Law on the Organization and Duties of the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Definition of Youth and Age Group

The official legal document defining the framework for youth policy in Turkey covers the age group of 14-29.

Key Values and Approach

Youth work in Turkey is based on values that include empowering young people, ensuring their active and voluntary participation, promoting equality and inclusion, and respecting all young people. The approach is holistic, aiming to strengthen young people in all dimensions of their lives, not just addressing specific problems.

Provider Network

A diverse network of providers exists, including the central government, local municipalities, and a growing number of civil society organizations (NGOs). The main public authority responsible for developing and implementing youth work policy is the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which operates a wide network of youth centers. However, municipalities and NGOs also play a significant role, which can sometimes lead to political competition and a variety of approaches.

Range of Activities

Youth work in Turkey encompasses a broad range of activities. These include leisure-time programs such as arts, culture, and sports, as well as initiatives focused on employment and entrepreneurship, health, democratic participation, and the social inclusion of disadvantaged youth.

Methods and Training

Youth work primarily utilizes non-formal and informal learning methods, encouraging active participation and peer-to-peer education. Since the field is relatively new and influenced by European institutions, formal training and expertise for youth workers are still developing, with many organizations offering their own training modules.



In Serbia, there are both Law on youth (2011), that defines youth work and National youth strategy 2023-2030. Local youth offices (Kancelarije za mlade) exist in municipalities. Youth work is recognized as a profession through NAPOR (National association of youth workers) standards.

However, although the legal recognition exists, the implementation is uneven and depends heavily on NGO capacitors and local government will. The laws come with the funding obligations for municipalities, but the budget allocated for youth is often misused and used to finance the ruling party.

NAPOR (National association of youth workers) developed occupational standards (youth leader, youth worker, youth work manager). Trainings are available, but there is no full academic degree in youth work. Therefore, youth work is still trained in non-formal education and often volunteer-driven.

Serbia has made steps toward recognition, but lacks systematic academic pathways and stable employment schemes.

Youth work in Serbia is project-based and precarious, with no stable, long-term funding. Local youth offices are often used for employing regime supporters, and there is no youth work within those offices.

Regarding youth participation, it is legally encouraged, but often symbolic. Trust in institutions is low, many young people do not feel their voices matter. The country has structure, but lacks real power transfer.

Serbia needs to secure stable funding for youth work at both local and national levels. Needs to develop academic and vocational pathways for youth workers. To strengthen non-formal education recognition, linking youth work to lifelong learning and employability. It needs to deepen youth participation beyond tokenistic consultation.

In short, Serbia is aligned in recognition and policy development, but behind in funding, institutionalization and professional pathways compared to EU countries.



In Romania, there is no officially recognized concept of "youth worker" defined by law or as a distinct profession, as it exists in other European countries. Activities that in other contexts would fall under the umbrella of youth work are carried out by teachers, school counsellors, psychologists, social workers, socio-educational animators, as well as by non-governmental organizations, student associations, foundations, and student cultural centres.

The areas of action are diverse and include educational and vocational support, cultural and artistic activities, volunteering, community projects, and social inclusion programmes for disadvantaged young people. However, in Romanian practice, the official recognition of the role of "youth worker" as a profession is still missing, and responsibility for youth policies lies at the national level with the Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, through county directorates for sport and youth and through student cultural centres.

In this context, young people benefit from a range of activities designed to develop their competences, support the transition to adulthood, and facilitate civic participation, but the recognition and professionalization of the "youth worker" role remain objectives still in progress.



In recent years, youth work in North Macedonia has evolved from being an informal, civil-society-driven practice into a gradually recognized component of national policy. The introduction of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies in November 2024 marked a turning point, providing for the first time a comprehensive legal definition of youth work, youth centres, youth workers, and youth councils. This law mandates the establishment of youth offices and youth centres in every municipality within five years and requires the creation of local youth councils as participatory mechanisms. With these steps, youth work has formally entered the institutional framework of the country, though implementation remains uneven and often dependent on local commitment and resources.

The reorganization of national structures in 2024 further reshaped the landscape, with the former Agency for Youth and Sports being replaced by the newly established Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth. This integration aims to connect youth policy with broader social development areas such as employment, education, and mental health, an important step toward addressing youth well-being in a holistic way.

Strategically, the National Youth Strategy 2016-2025 laid the foundation for recognizing local youth work as a policy priority, though implementation across government sectors has been limited. A new National Youth Strategy 2023-2027, currently under development by the Ministry in cooperation with

the UNDP, UNFPA, OSCE, and civil society, promises to renew attention to participation, education, employment, and health, while introducing stronger monitoring of youth rights and services.

The professionalization of youth work has also progressed. Since 2018, Youth Worker has been listed as an occupation within the National Qualifications Framework, supported by the Union for Youth Work, Coalition SEGA, and the Youth Cultural Centre Bitola. National standards for youth work have been established, and a Youth Worker Portfolio has been developed to help practitioners document and validate their learning. Despite these advancements, the absence of a dedicated Youth Work Act and lack of stable public funding continue to limit the sustainability of youth work practice.

At the structural level, the law foresees participatory bodies such as a National Youth Assembly and local youth councils, yet their functionality varies greatly. By 2023, only about one-quarter of municipalities had active youth councils, and youth centres operated in just seven municipalities. Budget allocations for youth activities remain modest, with only a small number of municipalities earmarking funds for youth policy implementation. Monitoring by the National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM) has been crucial in identifying these gaps and advocating for stronger accountability.

Civil society continues to play a central role in advancing youth work. The NYCM acts as an umbrella network for over 50 organizations, leading advocacy, research, and policy monitoring. The Union for Youth Work focuses on professionalization and standardization efforts, while international partners such as the OSCE, UN agencies, and the Council of Europe provide strategic and financial support for youth development programs.

Several local examples illustrate the potential impact of well-structured youth work. The Bitola Youth Center, supported by the municipality and run by the Youth Cultural Centre Bitola, offers free workshops, leadership training, and mental health support to hundreds of young people each year. Similarly, the certification program developed by the Union for Youth Work has trained over 100 youth workers since 2021, many of whom now operate in NGOs and local administrations. The Local Youth Council of Kavadarci stands out as a model of participatory governance, successfully advocating for youth budgets and recreational spaces through cooperation with municipal authorities.

Overall, youth work in North Macedonia is entering a new phase, one marked by legal recognition, growing professional standards, and renewed institutional attention. Yet, significant disparities remain between policy and practice. The commitment of municipalities, sustained funding, and continuous capacity building for youth workers are essential for translating these frameworks into tangible support for young people's well-being, especially in the domain of mental health. This handbook builds upon that evolving framework, offering youth workers practical tools, methods, and reflections to strengthen their role in supporting young people's resilience and inclusion across diverse communities.



Despite the different legal frameworks, from the highly regulated system in Germany to the burgeoning civil-society-led practices in Greece and Romania, one thing remains consistent: the youth worker creates conditions for development, participation, and agency, working within and sometimes against the systems that shape young people's lives.

Whether state-funded or volunteer-driven, the core mission is to support young people in becoming active subjects of their own lives.

Sources for all country sections are available from the respective partner organisations.

PART 3

Activity-Specific Materials



HUMAN BINGO

Instructions

- Find someone who fits a description below and write their name in the box. Each person can only sign your card once! When you get 5 in a row (any direction), shout **BINGO!**

Loves to cook for friends	Can whistle a tune	Has a favorite childhood book	Speaks more than two languages	Is a morning person (early bird)
Has seen to the sea/ocean	Plays a musical instrument	Has a tradition or celebration they are proud of	Prefers tea over coffee	Has a word in their language that does not translate into other languages
Can name 3 world capitals	Knows a joke in another language		Loves to dance when music plays	Has ever performed on a stage
can say hello in three languages	Likes spicy food	Can recite a poem by heart	Prefers mountains over the beach	Has a favorite sport to watch
Is left-handed	Has seen a movie more than 3 times	Feels strongly about a social issue	Loves to bake sweets	has taught someone something
Is left-handed	Has seen a movie more than 3 times	Feels strongly about a social issue	Loves to bake sweets	has taught someone something they know how to do

MY APPOINTMENT CLOCK



Instructions

- Find a partner for each hour and write their name in the slot. Don't use the same person twice!

- 12:00 _____
- 01:00 _____
- 02:00 _____
- 03:00 _____
- 04:00 _____
- 05:00 _____
- 06:00 _____
- 07:00 _____
- 08:00 _____
- 09:00 _____
- 10:00 _____
- 11:00 _____

Speed Dating - Topic Cards

1. **Music:** A song or music you love right now.
2. **Hobby:** Something you love doing in your free time.
3. **Travel:** A dream destination you'd love to visit.
4. **Movie:** A favorite film or series.
5. **Food:** A favorite food or dessert.
6. **Smile:** A memory that puts a smile on your face.
7. **Dream Job:** Your dream job – real or imaginary.
8. **Recharge:** How do you relax or recharge?
9. **Expectation:** One thing you hope to get from our time together.
10. **Talent:** A talent or something you are good at.
11. **Lottery:** If you won the lottery tomorrow – what would you do?
12. **Weekend:** How do you usually spend your weekends?

1. **Dinner Guest:** If you could have dinner with anyone in the world, who and why?
2. **Hidden Pride:** Something you are proud of that others might not know?
3. **Instant Skill:** If you could learn any skill instantly, what would it be?
4. **Small Joy:** One small thing that brings you joy every day?
5. **Understanding:** What is one thing you wish more people understood?
6. **Legacy:** One thing you would leave behind for the next generation?
7. **Tough Days:** One thing that makes you feel better on a difficult day?
8. **Childhood:** Something you enjoyed as a child but stopped doing?

Facilitators: Use this Map Layout to draw your own model on a flipchart before the session. Showing an imperfect, honest map is key.

[The Map Layout]

- **The "Sun" Area (Fuel):** Activities that give you energy (e.g., "Drinking tea," "Calling my sister," "Drawing").
- **The "Cloud" Area (Drain):** Habits that feel heavy or tire you out (e.g., "Checking news constantly," "Isolating myself," "Overthinking").
- **The "Bridge" Area (Processing):** Actions that help you move through a feeling (e.g., "Walking in nature," "Listening to loud music," "Crying to let it out").
- **The "Anchor" Area (Roots):** Cultural or spiritual practices that ground you (e.g., "Cooking traditional food," "Prayer," "Silence").

MARIAM'S STORY

Mariam waited for a few seconds before opening her eyes when the morning alarm went off. Today was an important day. She had an appointment she had been waiting for for days. Inside, she felt a slight excitement mixed with a strange tension.

She got out of bed, and as she was getting ready, she looked in the mirror. "Everything will be fine," she told herself. As she said it, she wasn't sure how much she actually believed it.

She put her documents in her bag. She checked them three times. Then, one more time.

She sat by the window on the bus. She put her headphones on, but she wasn't really listening to the music. Her mind kept drifting back to the same question: "What if something is missing?"

When she arrived at the institution, she took a deep breath. She went inside. Crowds, noises, people waiting... It felt like everyone was in a rush to get somewhere.

When her turn came, she approached the desk.

The official took the documents without even looking up. They didn't even make eye contact. Mariam wanted to say something, but the words got stuck in her throat.

The official quickly scanned the papers.

"There is a missing document," they said curtly.

Mariam froze. She wanted to ask, "What do you mean?" but her voice wouldn't come out.

"Which one is missing?" she finally managed to say, with a bit of effort.

This time, the official looked up, but their gaze was brief and distant. They didn't give a full answer. It was as if they didn't want to talk.

At that moment, Mariam felt like everyone was looking at her. Her heart raced. There was a tightness in her chest.

A part of her wanted to stay there and protest. She wanted to say, "No, I brought everything!"

But another part of her just wanted to get away.

She silently took her documents and walked out.

She stood in front of the door. She took a deep breath, but it wasn't enough.

Inside, there were so many things, but she couldn't quite put a name to any of them.

Group Task Cards

TEAM ANGER

- **Round 1 (From Mariam):** "Dear Anger, you made my face feel hot and my chest tight when that official didn't even look at me. Why did you show up then? Why do you want me to stay and protest?"
- **Round 2 (The Reply):** "Dear Mariam, I am here because you deserve respect. My job is to remind you that your effort matters. If I wasn't here, you might let people treat you like you are invisible..."

TEAM FEAR / ANXIETY

- **Round 1 (From Mariam):** "Dear Fear, you made me check my bag four times. You made my voice disappear when I needed to ask a question. Why are you making me feel so small?"
- **Round 2 (The Reply):** "Dear Mariam, I am here because this day is important and I don't want you to fail. I made you check your bag to keep you safe. If I wasn't here, you might not be prepared for the challenges of this new city..."

TEAM SADNESS

- **Round 1 (From Mariam):** "Dear Sadness, you felt like a heavy weight in my chest as I walked out the door. You made it hard to reply to my mother's message. Why are you making everything feel so heavy?"
- **Round 2 (The Reply):** "Dear Mariam, I am here because today was disappointing and it's okay to feel that loss. My job is to slow you down so you can process what happened. If I wasn't here, you would never give yourself the care you need after a hard day..."

TEAM PRIDE / DETERMINATION

- **Round 1 (From Mariam):** "Dear Determination, even when I wanted to run away, I felt a small spark inside me. Why do you stay when everything feels so difficult?"
- **Round 2 (The Reply):** "Dear Mariam, I am your fire. My job is to remind you of why you came here in the first place. If I wasn't here, you would have left those documents on the desk and never looked back..."

TEAM SHAME / EMBARRASSMENT

- **Round 1 (From Mariam):** "Dear Shame, you made me feel like everyone in that crowded room was watching me fail. Why did you make me want to hide and disappear?"
- **Round 2 (The Reply):** "Dear Mariam, I am trying to keep you from being noticed when you feel vulnerable. I wanted to protect you from the judgment of the crowd. If I wasn't here, you might not notice when a situation doesn't feel safe for your dignity..."

Body Scan Meditation

Bring your attention gently to your feet. Notice any sensations there, warmth, coolness, pressure, tingling, or simply the feeling of your feet resting. You don't need to change anything, just notice.

Now let your attention move slowly up to your ankles and lower legs. What do you notice there? Any tension, any ease, any sensation at all?

Let your awareness move up to your knees and thighs. Take a moment here, notice the weight of your legs, any areas of holding or tightness.

Bring attention to your hips and lower back. This is an area where many of us carry tension without realizing it. Just notice, no need to change anything.

Move your attention to your stomach and chest. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your breath. Notice any sensations here, tightness, openness, movement.

Bring awareness to your shoulders, an area that often holds stress. Notice what is there. If you notice tension, you might take a slow breath in, and as you breathe out, allow your shoulders to soften just a little.

Let your attention travel down your arms to your hands and fingertips. Notice any sensations there.

Finally, bring awareness to your neck and face, your jaw, your eyes, your forehead. Notice any areas of holding or tightness. Allow your jaw to soften, your eyes to rest.

Now take a moment to sense your whole body at once, from the tips of your toes to the top of your head. Just resting, just breathing, just here.

When you are ready, take a slow deep breath in, and as you breathe out, gently begin to return your awareness to the room around you.

Blow It Away Meditation

This is a moment to pause. To breathe. To listen. Nothing to prove. Nothing to achieve.

Please sit comfortably, with your back straight but not rigid. You may keep your shoes on or take them off, whatever helps you feel grounded and at ease.

Place your hands gently in your lap, one over the other. Now, I invite you to gently close your eyes, or lower your gaze softly toward the floor if that feels better.

Any sound you hear, any movement you notice, allow it to be there. You don't need to block anything out. Just remain still, present, aware of my voice.

Let's take a slow, deep breath together. Breathe in through your nose, one, two, three, four. Hold gently, one, two. Breathe out slowly through your mouth, one, two, three, four, five, six. Again, breathe in... hold... breathe out. Once more, breathe in... hold... and breathe out completely.

Now let your breath return to its natural rhythm. Don't control it. Just notice it.

Bring your awareness to the sounds around you. Sounds in the distance. Sounds closer. The sounds in this room. Simply notice them, without needing to name or understand them.

Gently bring your attention to your body. Start with your feet, relax your toes, your ankles, your calves. Move to your legs, your knees, your thighs, your hips. Relax your lower back... your stomach... your chest. Feel your shoulders soften and drop away from your ears. Relax your arms... your hands... your fingertips. Relax your neck... your jaw... the muscles around your eyes... your forehead. Your whole body is now resting.

Now notice your thoughts. Whatever is passing through your mind right now, worries, plans, memories, images. Just notice them.

Imagine your thoughts as soap bubbles, forming gently, floating upward, and then dissolving quietly into the air. Each thought appears, drifts, and disappears. You don't need to hold onto any of them. You don't need to push them away. Just watch them float.

Notice your emotions. Whatever is present, tension, tiredness, curiosity, sadness, calm. Allow it to be there. You don't need to fix or explain anything. Simply observe.

Now imagine a large, shimmering bubble forming slowly in the center of your chest. Soft and iridescent, catching the light.

Gently place everything you are carrying into this bubble. Your worries. Your tiredness. The things that felt heavy today. Place them gently inside.

Take a deep breath in through your nose, one, two, three, four. Hold, one, two. And breathe out powerfully through your mouth, releasing everything.

Once more, breathe in deeply... hold... and exhale completely. Let it go.

Imagine the bubble slowly lifting from your chest, rising, drifting, growing smaller as it moves away, and dissolving quietly into the air.

Take one more slow, natural breath. And when you are ready, gently begin to return to the room around you.

Loving-Kindness Meditation

Phase 2: Self-Compassion, Directing Warmth Inward

"Bring to mind an image of yourself, just as you are right now, in this moment. Not a perfect version of yourself, not who you think you should be, just you, as you are.

Now, silently or in a whisper, repeat these words to yourself:

May I be well. May I be safe. May I be happy. May I be at peace.

Say them slowly, one at a time. If they feel strange or awkward, that is completely fine, just stay with them gently.

May I be well. May I be safe. May I be happy. May I be at peace.

Take a moment to notice how it feels to wish yourself well, whatever comes up is okay."

Phase 3: Extending to Someone We Care About

"Now bring to mind someone you care about, a friend, a family member, someone whose face makes you feel warm when you think of them. It doesn't have to be someone you see often, just someone whose wellbeing matters to you.

Direct the same warmth toward them:

May you be well. May you be safe. May you be happy. May you be at peace.

Take a moment to feel that warmth moving outward from you toward them."

Phase 4: Extending to the Group

"Now bring awareness to the people in this room, everyone here, including yourself. We may come from different places and carry different stories, but in this moment we are here together.

May we be well. May we be safe. May we be happy. May we be at peace.

Take a moment to feel the warmth of this shared intention, all of us wishing each other well."

The Living Tree

Inner and Outer Resources

When we talk about wellbeing and resilience, we often focus on what is happening around us, the challenges, the pressures, the circumstances. But equally important is what we carry inside us and what surrounds us in our daily lives. These are our resources, the things we can draw on when life becomes difficult, when we feel overwhelmed, or simply when we want to feel more grounded and alive.

Resources are not luxuries. They are necessities. And they exist in two interconnected forms: **inner resources**, which live within us, and **outer resources**, which exist in our relationships, environments, and activities.

Understanding our own resources, and recognizing that we already have more than we might think, is one of the foundations of resilience, wellbeing, and belonging.

Outer Resources

Outer resources are the people, places, activities, and connections in the world around us that restore, nourish, and support us.

- 1. Human Relationships** Positive, meaningful, and caring relationships are the most powerful outer resource available to us. Friends, family members, mentors, colleagues, community members, people who see us, support us, and remind us that we are not alone. Research consistently shows that social connection is one of the strongest protective factors for mental health and wellbeing.
- 2. Community and Belonging** Beyond individual relationships, belonging to a community, a neighborhood, a cultural group, a youth organization, a shared tradition, provides a sense of rootedness and collective identity. Knowing that you are part of something larger than yourself is itself a resource.
- 3. Nature and the Natural World** What we see, hear, and feel in natural environments has a profound effect on our nervous system and emotional state. Sunlight, trees, water, open air, animals, these are genuine sources of restoration that are available to almost everyone in some form.
- 4. Restorative Activities** Art, music, sport, yoga, dance, cooking, gardening, reading, activities that absorb our attention and restore our energy. Self-care routines also belong here: the small, consistent practices that signal to ourselves that we matter.
- 5. Creative Expression** Making something, drawing, writing, singing, building, is a resource in its own right. Creative expression gives form to what is difficult to say and creates a sense of agency and meaning.
- 6. Therapeutic and Professional Support** Therapy, counseling, massage, and other forms of professional support are legitimate and valuable outer resources. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of self-awareness and courage.
- 7. Contributing to Others** One of the most underestimated outer resources is the act of giving, to other people, to animals, to the community. As the Dalai Lama has said, contributing to the happiness of other living beings is itself a source of happiness. Volunteering, caring for animals, helping a neighbor, these acts of contribution nourish the giver as much as the receiver.

Inner Resources

Inner resources are the capacities, qualities, and practices that live within us, the internal tools we use to navigate difficulty, find meaning, and sustain ourselves.

8. **Cognitive Resources** What we tell ourselves matters. Our capacity to reason, to put things in perspective, to remind ourselves that everything is temporary, to challenge unhelpful thoughts, these are powerful inner tools. Positive self-talk, determination, and the ability to reframe difficult situations are all cognitive resources.
9. **Cultural and Spiritual Identity** For many young people, particularly Roma, refugees, and migrants, connection to cultural heritage, language, traditions, and spiritual beliefs is a profound inner resource. Knowing where you come from, honoring what has been carried across generations, and finding meaning in cultural identity can be a source of strength that no external circumstance can easily take away.
10. **Breath Awareness** The breath is always available. Learning to notice and consciously regulate breathing is one of the most immediate and accessible inner resources we have. Slow, conscious breathing can shift the body's stress response within minutes.
11. **Meditation, Reflection, and Stillness** The ability to create inner quiet — through meditation, prayer, journaling, or simply sitting in stillness, is a resource that can be cultivated over time. These practices create space between experience and reaction, allowing us to respond rather than simply react.
12. **Prayer and Surrender** For those for whom it is meaningful, prayer and the capacity to surrender, to trust something larger than oneself, to let go of what cannot be controlled, is a genuine and powerful inner resource. This is not about passivity but about finding peace alongside effort.
13. **Self-Confidence, Self-Compassion, and Perseverance** Believing in one's own capacity, treating oneself with the same kindness one would offer a friend, and finding the determination to continue despite difficulty, these are inner qualities that can be strengthened through practice and the right conditions.
14. **Finding Meaning** Viktor Frankl wrote that meaning can be found even in the most difficult circumstances. The capacity to find purpose, in work, in relationships, in creative expression, in service to others, is one of the deepest inner resources available to human beings.
15. **Gratitude** The practice of noticing and appreciating what is good, however small, shifts attention from what is lacking to what is present. Gratitude is not denial of difficulty; it is the capacity to hold both hardship and beauty at the same time.
16. **Joy in Small Moments** The warmth of a cup of tea in your hands. The smell of rain. A song that makes you want to move. The ability to notice and savor small moments of pleasure in daily life, what psychologists call "savoring", is a genuine inner resource. It does not require special circumstances. It requires only attention.
17. **Humor and Lightness** The capacity to laugh, at life, at oneself, at absurdity, is a resilience resource that is often overlooked. Humor does not diminish difficulty; it creates a moment of relief and perspective within it.

Breaking the Myth Game



Statement Design Guide

This guide supports facilitators in designing statements about Roma, refugees, and migrants that are safe, pedagogically sound, and appropriate for use in group settings. It includes design principles, a ready-made set of example statements, and guidance on adding locally relevant statements.

Why Statement Design Matters

Naming a harmful stereotype out loud, even to challenge it, carries real risk. For participants who have lived with these myths directed at them and their communities, hearing them stated in a group setting can be activating, painful, or retraumatizing. At the same time, avoiding these myths entirely means avoiding the real conversations that inclusion work requires.

The goal is not to avoid difficulty but to design statements that open genuine critical thinking without causing unnecessary harm. This requires care, preparation, and honest reflection on who is in the room.

Core Principles

- 1. Frame statements as debatable, not as declarations of hate** There is a significant difference between "Roma people are criminals" and "Roma communities have higher rates of unemployment than the general population." The first is a dehumanizing slur. The second is a statement that requires contextual analysis, it opens discussion about systemic discrimination, structural barriers, and historical exclusion. Design statements that require thinking, not statements that simply repeat the most harmful language.
- 2. Focus on systemic and structural realities** The most useful statements are those that touch on structural issues, education, employment, housing, access to services, rather than personal or cultural characteristics. These generate richer discussion and avoid reducing people to stereotypes about their nature or values.
- 3. Balance myths and facts** Not every statement should be a myth. Including factual statements, things that are actually true, keeps participants genuinely thinking rather than assuming everything is a myth. The mix should be roughly 60% myths and 40% facts or nuanced realities.
- 4. Avoid the most dehumanizing content entirely** Some myths are so harmful and dehumanizing that stating them in a group setting, even to debunk them, does more damage than good. If a statement reduces an entire group to a single negative characteristic, or if it has been used to justify historical violence, leave it out. There are plenty of widely circulating myths that can be examined without going to those extremes.

5. **Test your statements before using them** Before the session, read each statement aloud to a trusted colleague, ideally someone with knowledge of the target group. Ask: "Could this statement cause harm if heard by a Roma young person, a refugee, or a migrant in this group?" If the answer is yes, redesign it.
6. **Have factual grounding ready for Phase 2** For each statement, prepare a brief factual response, 2–3 sentences, that participants can draw on during the small group analysis phase. This is not for the facilitator to lecture with but for the facilitator to offer as a grounding resource if groups are stuck.

Phase 1 vs Phase 2 Statements

- **Phase 1 statements** are read aloud to the full group for the spectrum line activity. They should be:
 - Immediately recognizable, myths that participants will have encountered in real life
 - Accessible, understandable without prior knowledge
 - Safe enough to state in a full group setting
 - Debatable, generating genuine different positions
 - Maximum 5–6 statements
- **Phase 2 statements** are given to small groups for deeper analysis. They should be:
 - More nuanced and complex than Phase 1
 - Different from Phase 1 statements, participants should encounter new material
 - Varied across groups, each group receives a different set so the plenary is richer
 - 4–5 statements per group

Example Statements

The following statements are ready to use or adapt. They are organized by target group and labeled as **Myth** or **Nuanced Reality**, use this labeling for your own preparation, not with participants.

About Roma Communities

- **For Phase 1** (spectrum line):
 - *"Roma families do not value education for their children."*
Myth. Roma communities across Europe consistently express high aspirations for their children's education. Barriers to educational attainment are primarily structural, school segregation, discrimination by teachers and peers, poverty, and lack of culturally responsive teaching.
 - *"Roma people prefer to live separately from non-Roma communities."*
Myth/Nuanced. Residential segregation of Roma communities is predominantly the result of historical discrimination, forced settlement policies, and systemic exclusion from housing markets, not a cultural preference.
 - *"Roma youth face higher rates of school dropout than other groups."*
Fact/Nuanced. This is statistically documented across many European countries, but it is explained by structural factors including discrimination, poverty, inadequate school support, and school segregation, not by lack of motivation or ability.

- **For Phase 2** (small group analysis):
 - *"Roma culture is incompatible with modern European values."*
Myth. Roma communities are diverse, dynamic, and have coexisted within European societies for centuries. "Incompatibility" narratives are historically used to justify discrimination and exclusion.
 - *"The Roma population's poor health outcomes are primarily the result of their lifestyle choices."*
Myth. Poor health outcomes among Roma communities are strongly linked to poverty, lack of access to healthcare, discrimination by health providers, and inadequate housing, systemic factors, not lifestyle.
 - *"Antigypsyism is a thing of the past in modern Europe."*
Myth. Antigypsyism, racism specifically directed at Roma, remains widespread across Europe in employment, education, housing, and public life, and has been formally recognized as a specific form of racism by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.

About Refugees and Asylum Seekers

- **For Phase 1** (spectrum line):
 - *"Most people who claim asylum in Europe are not in genuine danger."*
Myth. The majority of asylum seekers come from countries experiencing armed conflict, persecution, or serious human rights violations. Recognition rates in European countries, the percentage of applications granted, reflect that most claims are founded.
 - *"Refugees receive more support from the state than local citizens."*
Myth. In most European countries, asylum seekers face significant restrictions, on working, on moving freely, on accessing services, while their cases are processed. The experience of asylum is frequently one of uncertainty, poverty, and limited access rather than excessive support.
 - *"Refugees choose which country they go to based on which has the most generous benefits."*
Myth/Nuanced. Research consistently shows that the primary factors in destination choices are existing family or community connections, language familiarity, and perceived safety, not benefit levels.
- **For Phase 2** (small group analysis):
 - *"Refugees should be grateful for the support they receive and not make demands."*
Myth/Harmful framing. This statement reflects a "deservingness" framing that conditions dignity and rights on gratitude and compliance. Rights are not conditional on behavior or attitude.
 - *"Integrating refugees is primarily the responsibility of the refugees themselves."*
Myth/Nuanced. Successful integration requires mutual effort, from both the receiving society and the newcomer. Structural barriers including discrimination, language barriers, and lack of recognition of qualifications are significant factors that cannot be addressed by individual effort alone.
 - *"Trauma experienced before arriving in Europe disappears once refugees reach safety."*
Myth. Pre-migration trauma, combined with the ongoing stresses of asylum procedures, discrimination, and uncertainty, means that many refugees continue to experience significant mental health challenges after arrival.

About Migrants

- **For Phase 1** (spectrum line):
 - *"Migrants take jobs that local people want."*
Myth/Nuanced. Research consistently shows that migration has a broadly neutral or positive effect on host country employment. Migrants often fill roles that are unfilled by local workers, and contribute significantly to tax revenues and public services.
 - *"Migrants who don't learn the local language quickly are not making an effort to integrate."*
Myth/Nuanced. Language acquisition is significantly shaped by access to language learning opportunities, working conditions, age, trauma history, and social environment, not simply by effort or motivation.
 - *"Migration is a modern phenomenon driven by globalization."*
Fact/Nuanced. Human migration is as old as human history. What has changed is the scale, the regulatory frameworks around it, and the political attention it receives, not the fundamental human reality of movement.
- **For Phase 2** (small group analysis):
 - *"Migrants who commit crimes should be immediately deported regardless of how long they have lived in a country."*
Myth/Values question. This statement raises questions about proportionality, human rights, family separation, and the difference between individual behavior and community identity.
 - *"Second-generation migrants should feel fully integrated and no longer face barriers."*
Myth. Research shows that second and even third-generation migrants frequently experience discrimination based on perceived appearance, name, or cultural background, integration is not automatic or linear.
 - *"Countries have the right to control who enters their borders."*
Fact/Nuanced. This is legally established, but it exists in tension with international obligations regarding asylum, non-refoulement, and human rights. This statement opens a rich discussion about the balance between national sovereignty and universal human rights.

Adding Locally Relevant Statements

The statements above are starting points. Every local context produces its own specific myths, shaped by local history, political discourse, media coverage, and community dynamics. Facilitators are strongly encouraged to add 2–3 locally relevant statements to both Phase 1 and Phase 2 sets.

When designing local statements, ask yourself:

- **Is this myth actually circulating in my community?** If participants won't recognize it, it won't generate genuine discussion.
- **Could this statement cause harm if heard by someone from the target group in this room?** If yes, redesign it or leave it out.
- **Does this statement open systemic analysis or does it just repeat a slur?** Systemic analysis is the goal.
- **Do I have factual grounding ready for this statement?** If you can't factually ground it, don't use it.
- **Would I be comfortable if a Roma young person, a refugee, or a migrant read this statement before the session?** If not, redesign it.

A Note on Who Is in the Room

The most important variable in statement design is the composition of your group. If Roma youth, refugees, or migrants are participants, which this handbook assumes, the statements need particular care. These participants are not there to educate others about their communities or to have their lived experiences turned into a debate topic.

Some principles for mixed groups:

- Never use a statement that requires someone from the target group to publicly defend their community or their right to be treated with dignity
- Never use a statement where the "correct" answer involves someone disclosing personal trauma or legal status
- Watch carefully during Phase 1 for participants who seem activating, they may be recognizing a myth that has been directed at them personally
- After the session, check in privately with any participant who seemed distressed

The goal of this activity is not to educate Roma, refugee, and migrant youth about stereotypes they already know. It is to build critical thinking and empathy across the whole group, including participants who may not have been personally targeted by these myths.

WORKSHEET

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Co-creating a Story of Strength and Resilience

Instructions

- Every great hero goes on a journey. Today, we are going to write one together. Read the **Story Starter** below, and then work with your team to decide what happens next! You can write words, draw pictures, or use symbols to fill in the blanks. Remember, this is your story—be as creative and imaginative as you want!

1 THE STORY STARTER (The Call to Adventure)

Once upon a time, there was a young person named Leo who lived in a quiet, familiar town. One day, everything changed. A sudden and unexpected challenge arrived, meaning Leo could no longer stay in the place they called home...

What was the challenge that forced the hero to start their journey?

(Write or draw here: Did a storm come? Did the town run out of a precious resource? Did they have to cross a giant mountain to find safety?)

2 MEETING THE HELPERS

The road was long and frightening. Just when Leo felt entirely alone and unsure of which path to take, they met someone (or something) unexpected.

Who or what did the hero meet? How did this helper give them support or advice?

(Write or draw here: Was it a wise elder? A group of fellow travelers? A magical creature?)

3 FACING DIFFICULTIES

Even with the helper's advice, the journey was not easy. Before reaching their destination, Leo had to face a massive obstacle.

What difficulty tried to stop the hero?

(Write or draw here: A blocked road? A trickster? A moment of deep doubt or fear?)

4 LEARNING SOMETHING NEW

To overcome the obstacle, Leo had to use a strength they didn't even know they had.

What did the hero learn about themselves? How did they overcome the difficulty?

(Write or draw here: Did they use courage, teamwork, patience, or a hidden talent?)

5 RETURNING STRONGER (A New Sense of Home)

Finally, the journey settled. Leo didn't just survive the challenge; they grew from it. They found a place to rest and rebuild.

How does the story end? What does "home" or "safety" look like for the hero now, and how are they stronger than when they started?

(Write or draw here)

Conversations We Don't Usually Have

Facilitator Handout

- This handout supports you in facilitating the World Café of Wellbeing. It explains how each dimension is understood in this handbook, offers examples relevant to the target group, and provides guidance on sensitive dimensions. You are encouraged to adapt the language and framing to your specific group and context.

How We Understand Wellbeing

Wellbeing is not a fixed state — it is dynamic, multidimensional, and deeply shaped by both personal experience and social context. For Roma, refugee, and migrant youth, wellbeing may be particularly influenced by experiences of discrimination, displacement, and exclusion — which means that some dimensions may feel more fragile, more political, or more complex than standard wellbeing frameworks acknowledge.

In this handbook, wellbeing is understood as the overall quality of a young person's life — feeling safe, connected, valued, and able to cope with everyday challenges. The six dimensions below are not separate boxes but interconnected aspects of a whole. A challenge in one dimension almost always affects others.

The Six Dimensions of Wellbeing

1. **Physical Wellbeing:** How we feel in our bodies — energy, sleep, movement, rest, nutrition, and physical health. Physical wellbeing is not only about fitness or sport — it includes the basic conditions needed for the body to feel safe and cared for.

Relevant for this group: Displacement, poverty, and unstable living conditions can significantly impact physical wellbeing — through disrupted sleep, limited access to nutritious food, inadequate housing, or barriers to healthcare. Physical symptoms of stress and anxiety also belong here — the body carries what the mind experiences.

Facilitation note: *Avoid framing physical wellbeing purely as individual lifestyle choices. For many participants, the barriers to physical wellbeing are structural, not personal.*

2. **Mental Wellbeing:** Our thoughts, emotions, and inner experience — the ability to recognize and name what we feel, manage stress and anxiety, process difficult experiences, and maintain a generally positive relationship with our own mind.

Relevant for this group: The research underlying this handbook found that discrimination generates anxiety, depression symptoms, and trauma responses among these youth groups. Mental wellbeing is therefore both the most important and the most stigmatized dimension for this group.

Facilitation note: *Mental wellbeing does not mean the absence of difficult emotions — it means having the awareness and tools to navigate them. Normalize the full range of emotional experience from the start.*

3. **Social Wellbeing:** Our connections, relationships, and sense of belonging — feeling valued, heard, and genuinely part of a community. Social wellbeing is not about the number of relationships but their quality and depth.

Relevant for this group: Social connectedness is one of the strongest protective factors against the psychological harm of discrimination. For displaced youth, building new social connections while maintaining ties to communities of origin is a complex and ongoing process. For Roma youth, the tension between community belonging and mainstream social inclusion can shape social wellbeing significantly.

Facilitation note: *Social wellbeing includes both the relationships participants have and the barriers to connection they experience — loneliness, exclusion, language barriers, and distrust are all relevant here.*

4. **Environmental Wellbeing:** Our relationship with our physical surroundings — feeling safe in our environment, having access to space, nature, and a place that feels like home. Environmental wellbeing includes both the immediate environment (home, neighborhood) and the broader natural world.

Relevant for this group: This is often the most politically charged dimension for Roma, refugee, and migrant youth. Many participants may be living in temporary accommodation, segregated communities, or unsafe environments. Access to green space, clean surroundings, and a stable home are basic wellbeing needs that are frequently denied to communities facing systemic exclusion.

Facilitation note: *Hold this dimension with particular sensitivity. The question "what makes environmental wellbeing harder?" may surface very real and painful realities. Acknowledge them honestly — do not rush to solutions or suggest that individuals can simply change their environment.*

5. **Personal Wellbeing:** Our sense of meaning, purpose, identity, and values — feeling that our life has direction, that we know who we are, and that we are living in alignment with what matters most to us. Personal wellbeing is about the relationship we have with ourselves.

Relevant for this group: For young people whose identity has been repeatedly defined from the outside — through stereotypes, legal categories, or societal labels — personal wellbeing involves the active work of self-definition. Knowing who you are beyond the labels others give you is both a wellbeing practice and an act of resistance.

Facilitation note: *Personal wellbeing connects closely to the identity work in Section 4.5 of this handbook. If participants have already done that work, this dimension may generate richer and more confident responses.*

6. **Spiritual Wellbeing:** Connection to something larger than ourselves — whatever that means personally. Spiritual wellbeing is not synonymous with religious practice, though for many people faith and religious community are deeply important sources of spiritual nourishment.

Spiritual wellbeing can include:

- Religious faith and practice
- Connection to nature, the cosmos, or the universe
- Awe and wonder — moments that make us feel part of something bigger
- Connection to ancestors, cultural heritage, and collective memory
- A personal philosophy or set of values that gives life meaning
- Transcendent experiences through music, art, movement, or creativity
- A sense of purpose that extends beyond personal goals

Relevant for this group: For many Roma, refugee, and migrant youth, spiritual and cultural practices are a vital source of continuity, identity, and resilience — particularly in the face of displacement and loss. This dimension honors those sources of strength without requiring or assuming any specific belief system.

Facilitation note: *Introduce this dimension with genuine openness. Never assume what spiritual well-being looks like for any participant. The invitation is simply: "What connects you to something larger than yourself — whatever that means for you?" Some participants will share religious practice. Others will share connection to nature, to their ancestors, to music, or to moments of profound beauty. All of these are valid.*

Optional Additional Dimensions

Depending on your group's context and needs, you may choose to add one or both of the following dimensions as additional World Café tables:

7. Financial Wellbeing: A sense of security, stability, and agency in relation to money and material resources. Financial wellbeing does not require wealth — it means having enough, feeling in control of what you have, and not experiencing constant anxiety about basic material needs.

When to add: Particularly relevant for groups where financial insecurity is a significant daily reality — refugees navigating asylum systems with restricted right to work, young people from Roma communities experiencing generational poverty, or migrants managing complex financial obligations across borders.

8. Vocational Wellbeing: A sense of meaning, contribution, and purpose through work, study, volunteering, or any other activity through which we apply our skills and energy. Vocational wellbeing is not only about employment — it is about feeling that our time and capacities are directed toward something meaningful.

When to add: Particularly relevant for groups navigating barriers to education or employment, or for youth workers wanting to connect wellbeing to questions of participation and contribution.

A Note on Intersectionality

The six dimensions do not exist independently — they interact constantly. Financial insecurity affects mental wellbeing. Social isolation affects physical health. Environmental instability affects personal wellbeing. Discrimination affects all dimensions simultaneously.

When facilitating the World Café, notice where participants make connections between dimensions — these moments of intersectional awareness are some of the richest learning opportunities in the activity.

Using the Observational Information

At the end of the World Café, photograph all six table papers. Read them carefully after the session. They reveal:

- Which dimensions the group has language for and which feel unfamiliar
- Where the most significant challenges and barriers are concentrated
- What resources and protective factors already exist
- Which activities from the rest of the section will be most relevant and necessary for this specific group

The World Café is not just an awareness activity — it is a needs assessment. Use it as one.

PATH CARDS

Enough



Instructions

- Print multiple copies of each card. Cut and laminate if possible. Place face up on the floor or a central table before the session begins. Participants walk around, read quietly, and take a photo of the card(s) that feel most relevant. No announcement required.

PATH A — Family and Relationships

My worth comes from being approved, loved, or accepted by specific people. I feel enough when they are pleased with me. I feel not enough when they are disappointed, critical, or distant.

Questions to work through:

- Whose voice is this, and when did I first hear it?
- Did I choose to give this person power over my worth, or did it happen without me deciding?
- What would it mean to appreciate this relationship AND not let it define my worth?
- What would I say to a close friend who needed this person's approval to feel worthy?
- What would it feel like to know your worth is yours, regardless of this source?

PATH B — Achievement and Performance

My worth comes from what I achieve, produce, or succeed at. I feel enough when I am doing well. I feel not enough when I fail, make mistakes, or am not performing at my best.

Questions to work through:

- What happens to my worth when I fail or make a mistake?
- Am I working to achieve my goals, or am I working to feel like a person?
- What would I be worth if I achieved nothing today?
- Where did the belief that I must earn my worth come from?
- What would it feel like to know your worth is yours, regardless of this source?

A note: if you work hard as a strategy to achieve your goals or access opportunities — that is your choice and your agency. The question here is not whether to work hard, but whether your worth depends on it.

PATH C — Social Approval and Belonging

My worth comes from being liked, accepted, or included by others. I feel enough when I fit in and am welcomed. I feel not enough when I am rejected, excluded, or ignored.

Questions to work through:

- Whose opinion matters most to me, and why did I give them that power?
- What happens to my worth when someone rejects or excludes me?
- Is the group or standard I'm trying to belong to one I actually chose, or one I was told to aspire to?
- What would it mean to belong to myself first?
- What would it feel like to know your worth is yours, regardless of this source?

PATH D — Cultural and Systemic Standards

My worth comes from meeting standards set by society, culture, or systems, standards around beauty, productivity, education, success, or status. I feel enough when I meet these standards. I feel not enough when I fall short of them.

Questions to work through:

- Who set this standard — and who benefits if I keep trying to meet it?
- Is this standard designed for someone like me, or was it designed by and for someone else?
- What would it mean to question this standard rather than keep trying to meet it?
- What do I actually value, separate from what I was told to value?
- What would it feel like to know your worth is yours, regardless of this source?

PATH E — Discrimination and Exclusion

My worth has been undermined by repeated experiences of being told I am less than, because of my ethnicity, background, legal status, language, or identity. I have heard, directly or indirectly, that people like me are worth less.

Questions to work through:

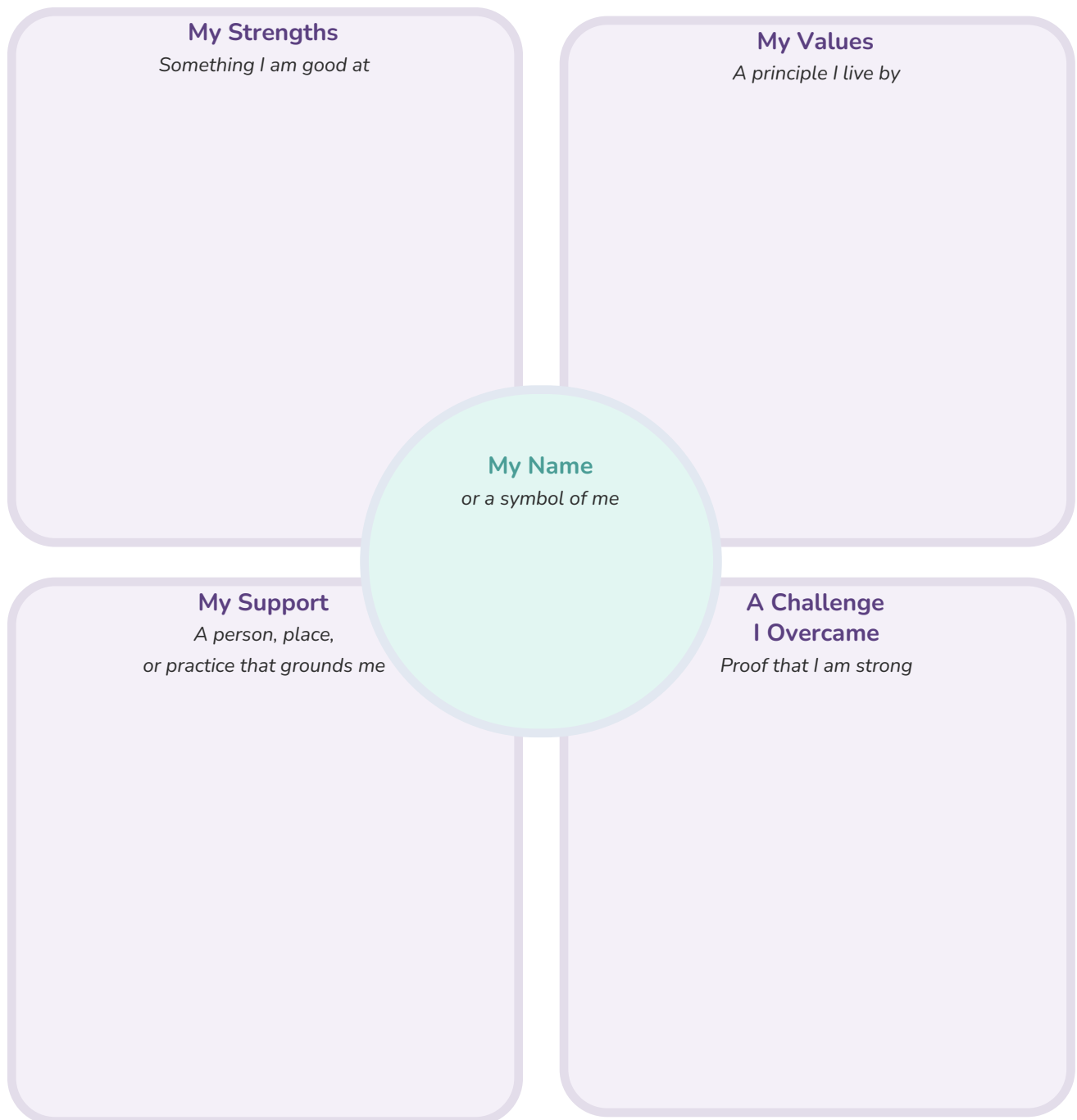
- Where did this message come from, and who sent it?
- Is this a truth about me, or a tool used by an unfair system?
- Do I want to keep carrying a belief that was never mine to begin with?
- What would I tell a younger version of myself who first heard this message?
- What would it feel like to know your worth is yours, regardless of this source?

All paths lead to the same place: the recognition that worth is not earned, not conditional, and not dependent on the approval of a world that may not always be fair.

You were enough before anyone told you that you weren't.

My Power Shield

Use words, drawings, or symbols in any language. This shield belongs to you.



The diagram is a shield-shaped template divided into five sections. A central light green circle contains the text 'My Name or a symbol of me'. Surrounding this circle are four light purple rounded rectangular boxes, each with a title and a subtitle. The top-left box is titled 'My Strengths' with the subtitle 'Something I am good at'. The top-right box is titled 'My Values' with the subtitle 'A principle I live by'. The bottom-left box is titled 'My Support' with the subtitle 'A person, place, or practice that grounds me'. The bottom-right box is titled 'A Challenge I Overcame' with the subtitle 'Proof that I am strong'.

My Strengths
Something I am good at

My Values
A principle I live by

My Name
or a symbol of me

My Support
*A person, place,
or practice that grounds me*

**A Challenge
I Overcame**
Proof that I am strong

Remember: shields tell a story. Every symbol and colour you choose tells the story of who you are.

My Power Shield — Vocabulary Support

If you are not sure what to write, here are some ideas. Use them, change them, or ignore them — they are just to help you get started.

Category	Examples and Ideas
Strengths	Good listener, fast learner, cooking, fixing things, making people laugh, patience, bravery, music, caring for others.
Values	Respect, fairness, loyalty to family, kindness, truthfulness, hard work, protecting others, honesty, courage.
Support	My mother or father, a teacher, the park, listening to music, prayer, a best friend, this group, being in nature.
Challenges	Learning a new language, moving to a new place, finishing school, helping my family through a hard time, starting over.



Facilitator Note — Alternative Options for the Fourth Quadrant

If the Challenge Overcome quadrant feels too heavy for your group, you may offer one of these alternatives instead:

- **Option A:** A Dream for the Future — What am I building or protecting?
- **Option B:** Something I am Proud of — A small win from this week.
- **Option C:** My Hidden Talent — Something people do not always notice about me.

Peer Support Circles

Instructions

1. The Helping Hand Template (Individual Reflection)

Print one per participant. Ask them to write their responses inside or next to each finger.

- **Thumb (Observation):** One thing I can notice:
What are the signs that a friend or peer is struggling? e.g., They become very quiet or They stop showing up.
- **Index Finger (Inquiry):** One thing I can ask:
A "door-opening" question. e.g., "I've noticed you've been quiet lately; would you like to talk, or just sit together?"
- **Middle Finger (Presence):** One way I can listen:
How do I show I'm there? e.g., Turning off my phone or Making gentle eye contact.
- **Ring Finger (Offering):** One way I can offer support:
Without "fixing." e.g., "I can go for a walk with you" or "I can bring you a tea".
- **Little Finger (Self-Care):** One thing I do for myself:
So I don't take the weight home. e.g., "Listening to my favorite music after the session" or "Taking a deep breath before I leave".

2. The Listening Protocol (Circle Cards)

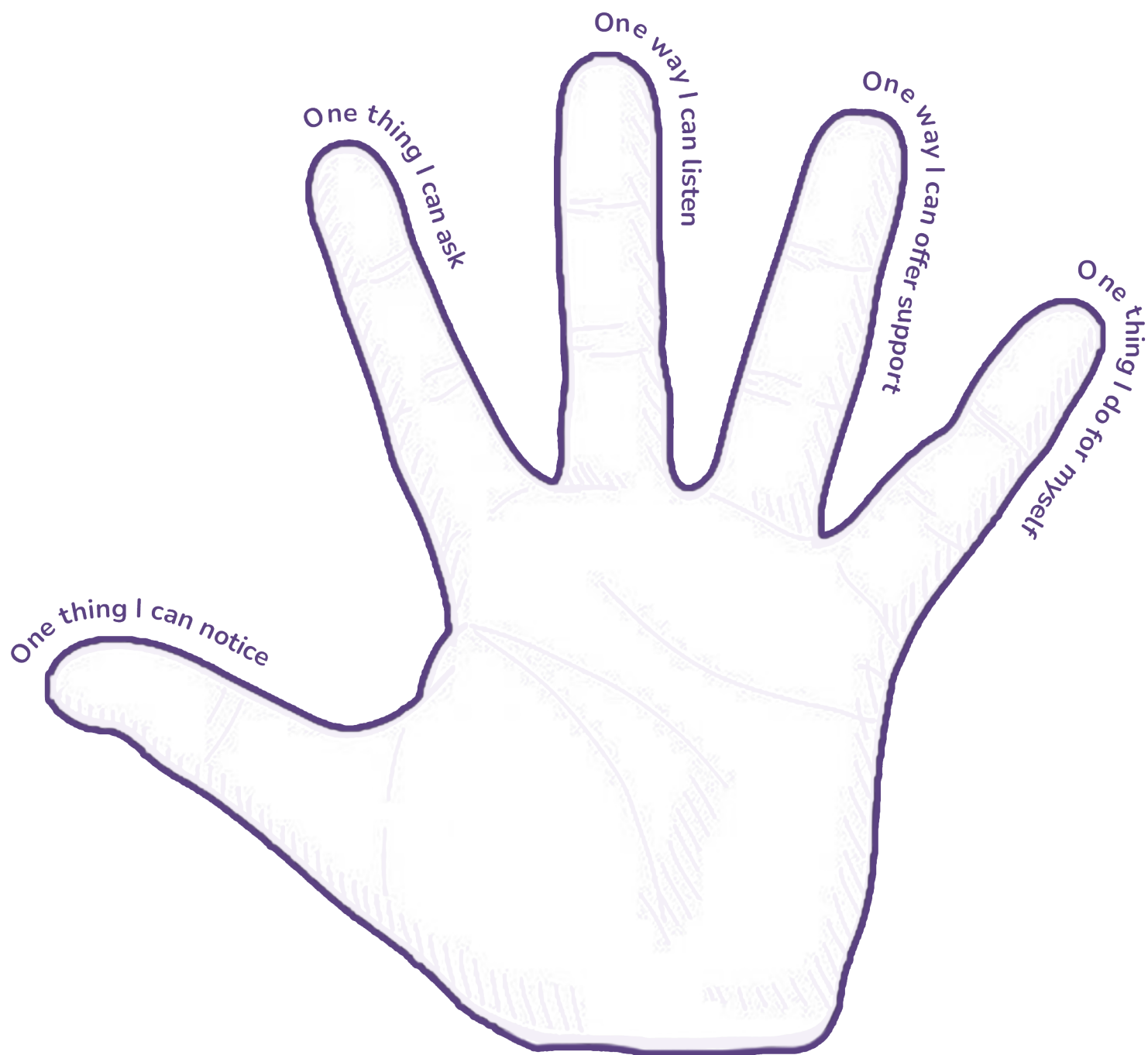
Print these "Rule Cards" and place one in the center of each small circle as a reminder.

- **ONE VOICE:** Only the person holding the "Talking Object" speaks.
- **LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND:** Do not plan your reply while the other person is speaking. Just take in their words.
- **NO ADVICE (Unless Asked):** We are here to offer presence, not solutions. "Thank you for sharing" is the most powerful response.
- **CONFIDENTIALITY:** What is said in the circle stays in the circle. This is our shared secret of safety.

3. Role Description Cards

Cut these out and give them to the assigned roles in each group.

- **THE SHARER:** Holds the talking object. Shares a current challenge they feel comfortable talking about.
- **THE TIMEKEEPER:** Keeps an eye on the clock. Gently signals when 3 minutes are up so everyone gets a turn.
- **THE CIRCLE HOLDER:** Watches the "vibe." If someone looks very distressed, they catch the facilitator's eye or give a pre-arranged signal.



ONE VOICE

Only the person holding the
"Talking Object"
speaks.

LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND

Do not plan your reply.
Just take in their words.

NO ADVICE (Unless Asked)

We are here to offer
presence,
not solutions.
"Thank you for sharing"
is the most powerful response.

CONFIDENTIALITY

What is said in the circle
stays in the circle.
This is our shared secret
of safety.

THE SHARER

•
You hold the talking object.

•
Share a current challenge
you feel comfortable
talking about.

THE TIMEKEEPER

•
Keep an eye on the clock.

•
Gently signal when 3 minutes
are up so everyone gets
an equal turn.

THE CIRCLE HOLDER

•
Watch the "vibe" of the group.

•
If someone looks very distressed,
catch the facilitator's eye
or use the pre-arranged signal.

Self-Care Exploration Stations

Instructions

- There is no right way to move. Choose one or two of these stretches. Stay with each one for 3 to 5 slow breaths. Listen to your body—if something doesn't feel good, stop and try a different one.

The Sky Reach

WHOLE BODY STRETCH

How to do it

Stand or sit tall. Inhale as you slowly reach both arms up toward the sky. Imagine you are picking a piece of fruit from a high branch.

Benefit

Opens the chest and lengthens the spine.

The Gentle Neck

RELEASE

How to do it

Drop your right ear toward your right shoulder. Keep your shoulders relaxed and down. Hold for 3 breaths. Slowly switch to the left side.

Benefit

Releases tension held in the neck from stress or worry.

Shoulder Rolls

TENSION RELEASE

How to do it

Breathe in and lift your shoulders up toward your ears.
Breathe out and roll them back and down. Repeat 5 times.

Benefit

Loosens the "weight" we carry on our shoulders.

The Hug

UPPER BACK STRETCH

How to do it

Wrap your arms around yourself as if giving yourself a big hug. Tuck your chin slightly toward your chest. Breathe into the space between your shoulder blades.

Benefit

Creates a sense of safety and stretches the upper back.

Side Bend

THE CRESCENT MOON

How to do it

Reach one arm up and lean gently to the opposite side.
Keep your feet firmly planted on the floor. Repeat on the other side.

Benefit

Opens the ribs and helps with deeper breathing.

The Seated Fold

GROUNDING

How to do it

While sitting, slowly lean forward and let your hands hang toward your feet. Let your head hang heavy like a piece of fruit.

Benefit

Calms the nervous system and releases the lower back.

Ankle & Wrist

CIRCLES

How to do it

Simply rotate your wrists and ankles in slow circles.
Five times to the left, five times to the right.

Benefit

Improves circulation and "wakes up" the joints.



Facilitator's Setup Tip for Station 7:

- **Privacy:** If possible, place this station in a corner or behind a screen. People are more likely to move freely if they don't feel "watched."
- **No Mirror:** Avoid placing this station in front of a mirror; the goal is to feel the movement from the inside, not to critique how it looks.
- **Floor Mat:** Even if participants stay standing, having a yoga mat or a soft rug marks the "sacred space" for movement.

CHAPTER 9

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WHEN SCARS BECOME ART

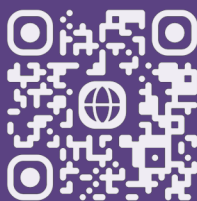
This handbook was created in the belief that every young person deserves to be seen, heard, and valued, not despite who they are, but because of it.

For many young Roma, migrants, and refugees, the path to belonging is not straightforward. It is shaped by discrimination, displacement, and the accumulated weight of being told, in countless ways, that you do not fully belong. Youth work cannot undo those experiences.

But it can create spaces where a different story becomes possible.

This handbook is dedicated to every youth worker who shows up, every day, to make that possible. Who listens when it would be easier not to. Who holds space for difficult emotions, complicated histories, and fragile moments of trust. Who believes, even on the hardest days, that what they do matters.

Because it does.



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