



Curriculum for Youth Workers

# Supporting Youth with Challenging Behaviour



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PUBLISHER

National Association of Resource Teachers Bulgaria (NART)

# About the project

## **Project Title**

Coping with Challenging Behaviour in Youth Work (C C B Y)

## **Project Duration**

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## **Funding Programme**

Erasmus+, Key Action 2 – Cooperation Partnerships in the field of Youth (KA220-YOU)

## **Project Reference**

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## **Coordinating Organisation**

National Association of Resource Teachers (Bulgaria)

## **Partner Organisations** • Copenhagen Youth Network – Denmark

- Center for Youth Activism CMA KRIK – North Macedonia
- ASD CYB SPORT YOGA DANZA E BENESSERE – Italy
- Regional Volunteer Centre – Poland
- Monikom-Trejd Katerina DOOEL – North Macedonia

## Programme of the training course

Session	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
I	Opening Session: Welcome, Introductions, Programme Overview, and Expectations	Building Resilience Skills and Managing Stress, World Café and Definition of Resilience	Integration and Use of Existing Tools, Introduction and Building Safety	The Role of the Youth Worker: Building Safe, Supportive Relationships
II	Understanding Youth with Challenging Behaviour: Foundations for Trauma-Informed and Strengths-Based Practice	Mapping Strengths and Recognizing Stress	Digital Personal Narrative Toolkit – Foundations	Facilitation Skills for Youth Workers: Creating Safe, Engaging Spaces
III	Exploring Self-Awareness and Healthy Self-Esteem: Foundations for Positive Youth Development	Coping Skills and Emotional Regulation	Exploring Stories and Emotional Regulation	Tips for motivating and supporting youth workers
IV	Exploring Self-Awareness and Healthy Self-Esteem	Integration and Mindfulness	Integration, Evaluation and Sustainability.	Planning Follow-up. Closure. Completion of Feedback Forms

# Developed Sessions of a Training Course

## Day 1: Welcoming Training Course

**Duration:** 4 × 90 minutes (6 hours total, including breaks)

**Target Group:** Youth workers, educators, or young people in training programmes

**Prerequisites:** None

### Materials Needed

The session uses a flipchart with paper, markers in different colours, sticky notes, and blank A4 sheets for drawing and writing tasks. Adhesive tape supports group work displays. Printed handouts guide the activities. A camera supports documentation. A projector and screen support slides or videos when needed.

### Competencies Addressed

- Knowledge of educational goal setting and reflective practice
- Understanding of personal states and their effect on interaction
- Ability to manage time, collaborate constructively, stay resilient, and self-direct learning
- Understanding definitions and types of challenging behaviour, including contributing psychological, social, and environmental factors
- Awareness of early intervention, prevention strategies, and the role of the youth worker
- Familiarity with trauma-informed and strengths-based approaches
- Understanding self-awareness and self-esteem in the context of youth work, including:
  - CASEL’s five elements of self-awareness
  - The link between self-awareness and healthy self-esteem
  - Strategies to help young people challenge negative self-beliefs
  - Facilitating reflective exercises that build confidence and recognize strengths

## Session 1: Introductions, Programme Overview, and Expectations

**Objective:** Welcome participants, build connections, and establish a shared understanding of the program’s purpose and group expectations.

### Flow & Activities

#### 1. Welcome & Opening (15 min)

- Facilitator/organiser gives a short welcome.
- Invite official guests/partners to greet the group (if applicable).
- Present the purpose and goals of the training (note them on flipchart and display).

#### 2. Getting to Know Each Other: Circle Introductions (20 min)

- Sit in a circle so everyone can see each other.
- Each participant shares:
  - Preferred name

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- Job/role or field of work
  - Hobby/favourite activity
  - Facilitator models first, then continue clockwise.
- 3. Interactive Introduction: “I’m Good At…” (15 min)**
- Participants stand in a wide circle.
  - One person steps forward: “I’m [Name] and I’m good at [Skill/Talent].”
  - Group repeats: “This is [Name], and they are good at [Skill/Talent].”
  - Repeat with as many participants as possible.
- 4. Program Presentation (10 min)**
- Present structure: dates, sessions, breaks, key themes, and mandatory parts.
  - Visualise agenda using flipchart/projector.
  - Post programme visibly for reference throughout the training.
- 5. Expectations & Concerns (10 min)**
- Divide into small groups of four.
  - Each person shares their expectations and concerns.
  - Back in plenary:
    - Each group shares one unique expectation.
    - Repeat for concerns.
  - Note on flipchart and post visibly.

### Advice to the Facilitator

- Be warm, inclusive, and set the tone for safety and openness.
- Allow for questions after welcome speeches.
- Get consent before taking photos.
- Consider blending rule-setting into this session.

### Optional Follow-Up Sessions

- Understanding Youth with Challenging Behaviour
- Building Strength-Based Individual Support Plans

## Session 2: Understanding Youth with Challenging Behaviour

**Objective:** Explore who youth with challenging behaviours are, contributing factors, and trauma-informed and strengths-based approaches.

### Flow & Activities

- 1. Opening & Framing the Session (10 min)**
- Briefly present the session objectives on a flipchart or slide:
    - Who is youth with challenging behaviours.
    - Contributing factors.
    - Importance of early intervention.
    - Youth worker’s role in supporting these youth.
    - Trauma-informed and strengths-based perspectives.
  - Ask: “When you hear challenging behaviour, what comes to mind?”

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- Record a few keywords on the flipchart.
- 2. Interactive Input: Who Are Youth with Challenging Behaviour? (15 min)**
- Present definitions (WHO, psychological/educational sources). Examples may include:
    - Externalising behaviours (aggression, defiance, disruption)
    - Internalising behaviours (withdrawal, anxiety, self-harm)
  - Discuss how behaviours may be expressions of unmet needs or trauma.
  - Invite short reflections:
    - “Have you encountered this in your work? What did it look like?”
    - Use real-life (anonymous) examples where possible.
  - Optional: Show a 2-minute video or case vignette for grounding.
- 3. Group Activity: Mapping the Roots (20 min)**
- Divide into 3 small groups. Assign each group one of the following:
    - a) Psychological factors
    - b) Social factors
    - c) Environmental factors
  - Each group discusses and lists examples on flipchart paper:
    - What kinds of issues fall into this category?
    - How do they affect a young person’s behaviour?
  - After 10 minutes, each group shares their findings (2–3 mins per group).
  - Facilitator connects findings to a model (e.g. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems).
- 4. Mini-Lecture: Early Intervention & the Role of the Youth Worker (15 min)**
- Why early intervention matters (reducing escalation, improving outcomes)
  - The role of the youth worker:
    - Building trust and safe relationships
    - Acting as a bridge to other services (school, health, family)
    - Observing and responding to early warning signs
    - Promoting strengths and protective factors
- 5. Activity: Introduction to Trauma-Informed and Strengths-Based Approaches (20 min)**
- Provide short definitions of:
    - **Trauma-informed care:** Safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment
    - **Strengths-based approach:** Focus on capabilities, interests, potential
  - In pairs, ask participants to reflect:
    - “How do these approaches differ from traditional ‘fixing’ or punitive methods?”
    - “What could change if these approaches were central to our work?”
  - Reconvene and share a few key insights (write on board or flipchart).
- 6. Summary and Reflection (10 min)**
- Recap key themes covered: definitions, contributing factors, importance of early support, and key approaches.
  - Ask each participant to write on a sticky note:
    - “One thing I’m taking with me today”
  - Participants place their notes on a “Learning Wall” or poster to be kept visible during training.
  - Briefly introduce the next session/topic if applicable.

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## Advice to the Facilitator

- Use language sensitively.
- Balance input with discussion.

## Optional Follow-Up

- Provide readings or videos on trauma-informed practice.

## Session 3: Exploring Self-Awareness and Healthy Self-Esteem

**Objective:** Understand the importance of self-awareness and self-esteem and explore strategies to strengthen these skills.

### Flow & Activities

#### 1. Opening & Framing the Session (10 min)

- Facilitator welcomes participants and introduces the session focus: two interconnected foundations for personal growth and youth development—self-awareness (knowing yourself) and self-esteem (valuing yourself).
- Present session objectives on a flipchart or slide:
  - Understand what self-awareness is and why it matters.
  - Explore the link between self-awareness and healthy self-esteem.
  - Identify practical strategies for boosting self-esteem in youth.
  - Experience reflective activities that build confidence.

#### 2. Icebreaker Question: “When you hear the words ‘self-awareness’ or ‘self-esteem’, what comes to mind?” (15 min)

- Record responses on a flipchart, grouping words into positive, negative, or neutral associations.
- Connect responses to youth work: many young people struggle with knowing and valuing themselves, influencing choices, relationships, and resilience.
- *Facilitator tip:* Remain non-judgmental—participants may share negative associations or personal experiences.

#### 3. Interactive Input: Understanding Self-Awareness (15 min)

- Present CASEL’s definition of self-awareness:

“The ability to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behaviour across contexts.”
- Show the five sub-skills:
  - **Identifying emotions** – Recognising and naming one’s emotions.
  - **Accurate self-perception** – Seeing oneself realistically.
  - **Recognising strengths** – Knowing and valuing one’s abilities.
  - **Self-confidence** – Maintaining a realistic, positive self-image.
  - **Self-efficacy** – Believing in one’s ability to achieve goals.
- Relatable youth examples:
  - Identifying emotions: “I’m not just angry, I’m frustrated because I feel ignored.”
  - Recognising strengths: “I may not be good at maths, but I’m great at helping others solve problems.”
- Ask participants: “Which of these five do you see young people struggling with the most? Why?”
- Encourage short group discussion (2–3 minutes).

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#### 4. Group Activity: Discovering My Value (40 min)

Handout 1, Handout 2

- Distribute the *Discovering Myself – My Value* worksheet.
- **Self-portrait or symbolic drawing** – Encourage creativity, no artistic skill required.
- Include instructions (Handout 1):

Take a moment just for yourself. This activity will help you connect with your thoughts, emotions, and what truly matters to you. Some things in life are outside our control; they may make us feel sad, scared, angry, or worried. Other things remind us of our joy, importance, and uniqueness. Draw freely—no perfection needed. Choose your colours and style. This is your space to express how you feel right now.
- **I feel proud of...** – List three achievements or qualities (Handout 2).
- **Secret Thoughts** – Choose 3–4 prompts (e.g., “Best gift I’ve given”, “What do others like about me?”).
- Allow 10 minutes for silent personal reflection.
- Pair participants and have them share one insight they are comfortable revealing.
- Debrief question: “How did it feel to reflect on your strengths and values?”
- *Facilitator tip:* Normalise discomfort—some people are not used to naming their strengths.

#### 5. Summary & Reflection (10 min)

- Recap key points:
  - Self-awareness = knowing yourself.
  - Self-esteem = valuing yourself.
  - Link: greater self-awareness supports healthier self-esteem.
  - Strategies: reflection, positive self-talk, celebrating achievements.
- Ask participants to write on a sticky note: “One practical way I can help a young person recognise their strengths.”
- Post notes on the Learning Wall.
- Introduce Session 4 to maintain continuity.

#### Advice to the Facilitator

- Model openness by sharing one personal example of identifying strengths.
- Emphasise that self-esteem is realistic self-acceptance, not arrogance.
- Be prepared for emotional reactions during reflection activities.

#### Optional Follow-Up

- Assign journaling prompts from the “Secret Thoughts” section.
- Share NHS self-esteem tips and CASEL self-awareness resources.
- Encourage the Positive Self-Talk Challenge before next session.

## Session 4: Exploring Self-Awareness and Healthy Self-Esteem

**Objective:** Help participants gain a clear understanding of what self-esteem is, how it develops, and why it matters. The activity supports building community through shared identity exploration.

### Flow & Activities

#### 1. Mini-Lecture: Understanding Self-Esteem (10 min)

Handout 3

- **Definition:** One's self-opinion, shaping confidence and resilience.
- **Healthy self-esteem:** Balanced self-view, openness to feedback, ability to handle setbacks.
- **Low self-esteem:** Linked to avoidance, negative self-talk, anxiety, depression.
- **Causes:** Early life experiences, social comparison, criticism, failure, trauma.
- Strategies for building self-esteem:
  - Challenging negative beliefs.
  - Recognising and celebrating achievements.
  - Building positive relationships.
  - Setting realistic goals.

Optional visual: a diagram showing

Self-awareness → Self-acceptance → Healthy self-esteem → Positive behaviours

## 2. Activity: Positive Self-Talk Challenge (30 min)

- Give each participant two sticky notes.
- On the first, write a negative belief they've heard from youth (or from themselves). Examples: "I'm useless at everything"; "Nobody cares about me."
- Swap notes with a partner.
- On the second note, reframe the statement into a positive affirmation:
  - "I am learning and improving with practice."
  - "There are people who care about me and want me to succeed."
- Share examples in the large group.
- Discuss: "How can reframing help young people develop a healthier self-view?"

## 3. Personal Identity Wheel (30 min)

*Handout 4*

**Objective:** Encourage reflection on personal identifiers using the identity wheel

- Distribute the worksheet.
- Give 10 minutes to complete.
- In pairs/small groups, participants share their wheels.
- Suggested debrief questions:
  - Which components were harder to share?
  - Can someone share a skill they are proud of?
  - Who wants to share the three adjectives they used to describe themselves?
  - What commonalities emerged?
  - Which parts were hardest to fill in?

## 4. Summary & Reflection (10 min)

*Handout 5*

**Objective:** Consolidate learning about self-esteem, self-talk, and identity.

- **Individual reflection:** Write:
  - One insight from today.
  - One action to help themselves or youth build positive self-esteem.
- **Closing circle:** Volunteers share one positive affirmation or strength identified today.
- Closing reminder:
 

"Building self-esteem starts with recognizing our worth and speaking kindly to ourselves."
- Reflection prompt for sticky notes: *One practical way you can help a young person recognise their strengths.*

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- *Facilitator reminder:* Model openness, normalise self-acceptance, and allow space for emotions.

## Day 2: Building Resilience Skills and Managing Stress

**Duration:** 4 × 90 minutes (6 hours total, including breaks)

**Target Group:** Youth workers, educators, or young people in training programmes

**Prerequisites:** None

### Materials Needed

The session uses a flipchart with paper and markers in various colours to support visual facilitation. Adhesive tape is available for displaying group outputs. Printed handouts (1-5). A music or breathing app can be used to support guided relaxation exercises. Access to an outdoor or green space enables the mindfulness walk component. Optional printed materials, such as the Stress Thermometer and Mood Journals, offer additional reflection tools. A projector and screen may be used for presenting theory elements when helpful.

### Competencies Addressed

- Understanding resilience theory and stress responses
- Building self-awareness of stress and emotional states
- Developing coping strategies and grounding techniques
- Strengthening internal locus of control and growth mindset
- Enhancing capacity for collaboration, reflection, and self-regulation

## Session 1: World Café and Definition of Resilience

**Objective:** Normalizing the power of feelings, introducing resilience theory, and establishing a shared understanding of stress and coping.

### Flow & Activities

#### 1. Introduction (10 min)

*Handout 6*

- Introduce the five feelings: joy, sadness, shame, fear, anger.
- Split participants into five groups (one feeling per group).
- One host remains at each table to facilitate a discussion on strengths and shadows.

#### 2. World Café and Wrap-Up (25 min)

- 3–4 rounds to explore strengths and shadows of each feeling.
- Hosts present the outcomes of their group discussions.
- Group wrap-up: What did participants learn?
- Optional recommendation: the “How We Feel” app.

#### 3. Theoretical Input: Resilience & Stress (25 min)

*Handout 7, Handout 8*

- Short presentation on resilience [emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, growth mindset].
- Short first introduction to the 7 Cs of Resilience and the Stress-Resilience Continuum. (*in depth work, in the next session*)
- Quick reflection: “Which concept feels most relevant to you?”

#### 4. Small Group Reflection: Youth Challenges (20 min)

- Groups discuss contemporary youth challenges (academic pressure, social media, uncertainty, etc.).

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- Key points shared in plenary.

#### 5. **Plenary Wrap-Up (10 min)**

- Emphasise the role of resilience in youth work.
- Connect the discussion to upcoming sessions.

## Session 2: Mapping Strengths & Recognizing Stress

**Objective:** Build personal awareness of resilience strengths and stress levels.

### Flow & Activities

#### 1. **Activity: Resilience Mapping (7 Cs Wheel) (30 min)**

*Handout 7*

- Individual task: draw a circle divided into seven wedges, labelled:
  - Competence – What am I good at?
  - Confidence – What makes me believe in myself?
  - Connection – Who supports me?
  - Character – What values guide me?
  - Contribution – How do I help others?
  - Coping – What strategies help me manage stress?
  - Control – What choices do I have?
- Reflection questions:
  - Which “C” is strongest for me right now?
  - Which “C” do I want to strengthen?
  - What actions can I take to grow this area?
- Pair sharing and group debrief.

#### 2. **Stress Continuum Check-In (25 min)**

*Handout 8*

- Present the Green–Yellow–Orange–Red zones.
- Participants identify their current zone and signs.
- Group brainstorm: coping strategies for each zone.

#### 3. **Tool Practice: Stress Thermometer / Mood Journals (20 min)**

*Handout 9*

- Introduction to visual daily check-in tools.
- Participants design their own thermometer or journal page.
- Recommended apps: *How We Feel*, Calm, Headspace, Breathwrk, Insight Timer.

#### 4. **Debrief & Reflection (15 min)**

- Group discussion: What did you learn about your resilience and stress patterns?

## Session 3: Coping Skills & Emotional Regulation

**Objective:** Learn and practice practical tools for managing stress.

### Flow & Activities

#### 1. **Box Breathing Exercise (20 min)**

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- Group practice with optional visual or music support.
  - Reflection: “When could you use this?”
2. **Activity: In My Hands, Out of My Hands (30 min)**  
*Handout 10*
- Participants sort scenarios into two circles:  
**Inner Circle (In My Hands):** effort, attitude, choices, breathing, asking for help, behaviour toward others.  
**Outer Circle (Out of My Hands):** other people’s actions, the past, weather, global events, others’ opinions.
  - Reflection instructions:
    - Write down a current challenge.
    - Divide it into “In my hands” vs. “Out of my hands”.
    - Circle one small action from the “In my hands” list to try this week.
3. **Tool Exploration: Grounding Cards (20 min)**
- Practice techniques such as the 5-4-3-2-1 senses exercise and square breathing.
  - Pair exercise: teach the technique to a partner.
4. **Reflection Round (20 min)**
- Journaling or group dialogue:
    - Which coping strategies resonate most with you?
    - How could you adapt them for work with youth?

## Session 4: Integration & Mindfulness

**Objective:** Experience mindfulness practices and integrate learning into personal and professional contexts.

### Flow & Activities

1. **Nature-Based Mindfulness Walk (35 min)**
  - Silent walk with reflection prompts.
  - Closing circle: share one word or image.
2. **Reflection & Journaling (15 min)**
  - Write or draw: “What did I notice during the walk?”
  - Optional sharing in pairs.
3. **Personal Action Planning (25 min)**
  - Participants create a “Resilience Toolkit” including:
    - Two strengths (from Session 2)
    - Two coping strategies (from Session 3)
    - One mindfulness practice (from Session 4)
  - Sharing in small groups.
4. **Closing Circle & Group Photo (15 min)**
  - One-word check-out: “What do you take from today?”
  - Optional group photo with consent.

### Advice to the Facilitator

- Normalize vulnerability: stress is part of life.

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- Encourage storytelling and peer support.
  - Use energisers between blocks to maintain energy.
  - Allow flexibility: some prefer reflection, others discussion.
  - Keep outputs (flipcharts, wheels, coping lists) visible throughout the day.

### Optional Follow-Up Sessions

- Advanced Coping Strategies (progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery)
- Trauma-Informed Practice with Youth
- Building Strength-Based Individual Support Plans

## Day 3: Integration and Use of Existing Tools

**Duration:** 4 × 90 minutes (6 hours total, including breaks)

**Target Group:** Youth workers, educators, or young people in training programmes

**Prerequisites:** None

### Materials Needed

The session uses a flipchart, paper, markers, adhesive tape, handouts, laptops or tablets, or printed timeline templates. Paper symbols such as flowers and stones support the activities. Participants use the toolkit in digital or paper form. A camera supports group photos or creative outputs. Soft background music creates a calm setting. A projector and screen support presentations, and a printed programme agenda helps participants follow the flow.

### Competencies Addressed

- Understanding trauma-informed practice
- Awareness of the importance of safety and regulation before narrative work
- Knowledge of narrative-based tools for youth work
- Ability to balance positive and challenging memories
- Guiding deeper exploration of life events
- Integrating body–mind techniques during emotional activation
- Fostering resilience through meaning-making
- Reflective facilitation & impact assessment
- Planning sustainable practices

## Session 1: Introduction & Building Safety

### Session Flow & Activities

#### 1. Opening of the Training (15 min)

- Welcome and introductions; create a safe atmosphere.
- Group photo (if consent is given).

#### 2. Getting-to-Know Each Other (20 min)

- Circle introductions (name, role, hobby).
- Icebreaker “I’m good at...” to affirm strengths.

#### 3. Programme Presentation (10 min)

- Overview of the 4-session journey, described as a “roadmap” to explore narrative and body–mind

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tools.

**4. Expectations & Concerns (10 min)**

- Small-group sharing of hopes and worries.
- Collect on flipchart; facilitator addresses themes.

**5. Practical Activity: Introduction to Body–Mind Techniques (25 min)**

*Handout 11*

- Guided practice: Grounding Breath and Movement Release.
- Pair reflection: “How did you feel before/after?”

**6. Closing Reflection (10 min)**

- Debrief on safety and emotional regulation.
- Safe Place Visualisation to close the session.

## Session 2: Digital Personal Narrative Toolkit – Foundations

### Session Flow & Activities

**1. Opening & Grounding (10 min)**

- Guided Body Scan Awareness to focus and settle the group.

**2. Recap & Connection (10 min)**

- Brief review of Session 1.
- Circle check-in: “One word for how you arrive today.”

**3. Introduction to the Toolkit (20 min)**

*Handout 12*

- Explanation of “flowers” (positive events) and “stones” (challenging events).
- Demonstration of a timeline using a flipchart or projector.

**4. Practical Exercise: Building a Timeline (35 min)**

- Participants map their journeys with at least three flowers and two stones.
- Use Mindful Focus if participants feel distracted or overwhelmed.

**5. Group Reflection (10 min)**

- Voluntary sharing of one flower event.
- Facilitator emphasises resilience, resources, and meaning-making.

**6. Closure & Grounding (5 min)**

- Safe Place Visualisation.

## Session 3: Exploring Stories & Emotional Regulation

### Session Flow & Activities

**1. Opening with Movement Release (10 min)**

- Gentle stretches to energise the group.

**2. Check-in & Reflection (10 min)**

- Prompt: “Since last time, what moment stood out to you from your timeline?”

**3. Event Exploration (30 min)**

- Participants choose one flower and one stone to explore more deeply.

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- Guiding prompts: facts, emotions, meanings.
  - Integrate Body Scan Awareness before discussing a stone event.
- 4. Linking & Meaning-Making (20 min)**
    - Small-group reflection: “What strengths helped you through difficult times?”
    - Collect keywords on flipchart.
  - 5. Emotional Integration (10 min)**
    - Safe Place Visualisation or Grounding Breath.
  - 6. Closure (10 min)**
    - Group reflection on resilience.
    - Preview of next session: evaluation and sustainability.

## Session 4: Integration, Evaluation & Sustainability

### Session Flow & Activities

- 1. Opening & Grounding (10 min)**
  - Short Grounding Breath practice to begin.
- 2. Recap & Connection (10 min)**
  - Go-around: “One thing I learned about myself in this journey.”
- 3. Reflection & Integration (20 min)**
  - Guided prompts:
    - “What are you most proud of in your timeline?”
    - “What patterns or strengths do you notice?”
    - “What future direction do you see for yourself?”
- 4. Evaluation Activities (25 min)**
  - Self-assessment questionnaire.
  - Group reflection: “What changed for you since the first session?”
  - Creative output: drawing or word cloud of key insights.
- 5. Sustainability & Next Steps (15 min)**
  - Presentation of ways to embed tools in daily practice (micro-practices, peer mentoring, refresh sessions).
  - Group brainstorm: “How can we use these tools back home?”
- 6. Closing & Farewell (10 min)**
  - Collective Safe Place Visualisation.
  - Final group photo (with consent).

## Day 4: Guidance for Youth Workers

### The Role of the Youth Worker

Youth workers play a unique role in the lives of young people, especially those experiencing challenging behaviours. Unlike teachers, social workers, or psychologists, youth workers engage young people in informal, trust-based contexts where authentic relationships and growth can take place.

Your role is to:

- Build trust and create safe, supportive environments.
- Recognize behaviour as a form of communication.
- Encourage self-expression and positive coping skills.
- Provide inclusive opportunities for participation and leadership.
- Link young people to additional support when necessary.

**Remember:** You are not expected to “fix” young people. Your role is to support, guide, and empower.

## Core Principles of Practice

Principle	What It Means in Practice
Trust & Relationship-Building	Consistent presence, showing empathy, being reliable.
Strengths-Based Approach	Focus on skills, interests, and potential rather than problems.
Trauma-Informed Practice	Recognize how trauma shapes behaviour; prioritize safety and co-regulation.
Youth Participation	Involve young people in planning and decision-making.
Cultural Sensitivity & Inclusion	Respect diversity and acknowledge systemic inequalities.

## Communication and Engagement

### Do's:

- Actively listen – pay attention to both words and body language.
- Validate feelings – acknowledge emotions without judgment.
- Mirror and reflect – repeat back what you heard to check understanding.
- Use creative methods – art, storytelling, role play, sports to support self-expression.

### Don'ts:

- × Interrupt or dismiss emotions.
- × Use jargon or complicated terms.
- × Assume you know what they mean – always ask for clarification.
- × React defensively to anger or withdrawal.

## Steps for Facilitators When Working With Sensitive Topics

- Create safe spaces – set group agreements, emphasize confidentiality, and explain limits to confidentiality.
- Spot signs of distress early – fidgeting, silence, agitation, withdrawal.
- Pause when needed – stop the activity if someone becomes overwhelmed.
- Provide after-care – check in individually after a difficult session.
- Know referral pathways – have contacts for local mental health professionals or crisis lines.

**Golden Rule:** When in doubt, stop the activity and prioritize emotional safety over completing the session.

## Promoting Inclusivity and Empowerment

### Practical Guidelines:

- Acknowledge and respect all identities (gender, cultural, LGBTQ+, disability).
- Adapt activities to ensure accessibility (physical, sensory, language).
- Watch for power dynamics – by age, class, ethnicity, or role.

- Celebrate small achievements to boost self-esteem.
- Encourage peer leadership – let young people facilitate parts of sessions.

*Tip:* Use group agreements created with participants, not imposed by the facilitator. This increases ownership and respect.

## Toolbox of Practical Tips & Tricks

### Listening and Speaking with Young People

- Actively listen and observe silence/body language.
- Sit with them during activities to show equality.
- Reflect on your own biases and attitudes.

### Encouraging Self-Expression

- Use positive, energetic approaches.
- Be a role model and share healthy values.
- Allow authentic storytelling – no “right” or “wrong” way.
- Promote self-reflection to build self-esteem.

### Addressing Caution and Emotional Reactions

- Warn participants about sensitive topics.
- Provide emotional support and know where to refer.
- Check in regularly and encourage open communication.

### Feedback and Monitoring

- Create simple feedback loops (post-it notes, digital polls, reflection circles).
- Adjust sessions based on participant needs and responses.

## Self-Care and Professional Reflection

**Why it matters:** Working with challenging behaviours can be emotionally demanding. Protecting your well-being ensures sustainability and better support for young people.

### Self-Care Strategies:

- Set healthy boundaries between work and personal life.
- Use peer supervision or reflective groups.
- Keep a journal for processing difficult experiences.
- Celebrate your own progress and achievements.

**Burnout Warning Signs:** feeling emotionally exhausted, detached, or hopeless. If these occur, seek supervision and support.

## Do's and Don'ts Summary Table

Do's	Don'ts
Build trust and consistency	Make promises you cannot keep
Respect youth voices	Impose your opinion as the “truth”
Validate emotions	Minimize or dismiss feelings
Use creative, inclusive methods	Rely only on lectures/talking
Know when to refer	Try to handle crises alone
Care for yourself	Neglect your own emotional needs

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## Conclusion: From Guidance to Practice

Youth workers are agents of change. By applying these principles and tools, they can create safe, inclusive, and empowering environments where young people with challenging behaviours are understood, supported, and encouraged to thrive.

This guidance is not a recipe book—it is a flexible framework. Every group is different. What matters most is your presence, empathy, and belief in young people’s potential.

By combining theoretical knowledge (trauma-informed, strengths-based, inclusive practice) with practical facilitation tips, youth workers can bridge the gap between understanding behaviour and supporting transformation.