Curriculum for Youth Workers

Supporting Youth with Challenging Behaviour

PUBLISHER

National Association of Resource Teachers Bulgaria (NART)

About the project

Project Title

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

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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

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1 Project overview

The **C-C-B-Y project** aims to enhance the capacity of youth workers to effectively cope with challenging behaviour in young people. Through the development of innovative educational tools, body–mind techniques, and digital storytelling platforms, the project fosters inclusion, emotional resilience, and mental well-being for both youth and youth professionals.

As a transnational initiative involving six European countries, C-C-B-Y responds to the growing need for holistic, empathy-driven, and sustainable solutions for addressing behavioural challenges in youth work, particularly in the context of mental health, marginalisation, and social exclusion.

Strategic Objectives

1. Support young people with challenging behaviour by fostering their social inclusion and reintegration into community life.

2. Strengthen the capacities of youth workers to manage stress, build trust, and promote resilience and self-confidence among youth.

3. Educate youth workers and educators on the causes, manifestations, and interventions related to challenging behaviour.

4. Develop innovative digital tools and methodologies, including a storytelling platform and body–mind techniques for self-regulation and emotional expression.

Key Activities and Intellectual Outputs

1. Digital Storytelling Platform

A web-based tool enabling youth workers and young people to share personal stories, effective interventions, and practices dealing with behavioural challenges. The platform promotes empathy, peer learning, and reflective practice by highlighting real-life experiences and community narratives.

2. Body–Mind Toolkit

An integrated programme comprising online and offline activities designed to support emotional regulation, stress management, and psychosocial well-being. Outputs include five multilingual instructional videos with practical exercises (breathing, meditation, theatre methods), a digital guidebook, and workshops piloted across the partner countries.

3. Training Programme for Youth Workers

A structured curriculum combining theoretical and practical modules. Topics include:

- Understanding behavioural patterns and emotional needs in youth

- Intervention strategies and cognitive-behavioural frameworks

- Experiential learning through case studies, role-play, and scenario-based analysis

The training programme was piloted in North Macedonia, refined through participant feedback, and structured for sustainable, long-term application.

Methodology

The C-C-B-Y curriculum adopts an interdisciplinary, learner-centred approach grounded in:

- Experiential learning

- Narrative pedagogy

- Body–mind awareness techniques

- Emotional intelligence theory and positive psychology

The methodology is co-created with input from youth workers, educators, psychologists, and young people themselves. All outputs are designed to be inclusive, adaptable, and sustainable in various national and local youth work contexts.

Expected Outcomes and Long-term Impact

- Enhanced skills and confidence of youth workers in addressing and managing challenging behaviour

- Improved emotional well-being and inclusion of vulnerable or marginalised youth

- A transnational network of professionals sharing practices and resources

- Sustained access to open-source digital and methodological tools beyond the project's lifecycle

Resources and Links

- Official Website: `https://ccbyerasmus.com`

- Digital Toolkit & Videos

- Body–Mind Toolkit (PDF): Direct Download

- Multiplier Events & Dissemination Activities (2025–2026): Scheduled in all partner countries

Conclusion

The C-C-B-Y project provides an innovative, practical, and human-centred contribution to the youth work field in Europe. By empowering professionals and supporting at-risk youth through creativity, self-expression, and emotional awareness, the project fosters stronger, more resilient, and inclusive communities.

2 Background of the Curriculum

Context and Relevance

In recent years, youth workers across Europe have faced growing challenges in addressing the increasingly complex behavioural and emotional needs of young people. Rising mental health issues, emotional dysregulation, social exclusion, and behavioural disorders have significantly impacted the dynamics of youth engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these issues, revealing gaps in support systems and highlighting the urgent need for youth professionals to be equipped with specific tools to address challenging behaviours in a holistic and informed manner.

The curriculum developed within the **C-C-B-Y (Coping with Challenging Behaviour in Youth Work)** project addresses this urgent societal need directly. Funded through the Erasmus+ KA220-YOU Cooperation Partnerships in Youth and implemented by a consortium of six organisations from Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Denmark, Italy, and Poland, the curriculum draws on cross-national expertise, research, and experiential practices to build capacity among youth workers.

This curriculum provides structured learning for youth professionals, focusing not only on identifying and responding to challenging behaviours but also on fostering resilience, empathy, self-regulation, and inclusion. The curriculum's design is grounded in empirical research, experiential learning, and narrative methodologies that place both the youth worker and the young person at the centre of the learning and behavioural process.

Defining Challenging Behaviour

"Challenging behaviour" is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of actions that may interfere with the social, educational, or developmental environment. These may include aggression, defiance, withdrawal, impulsivity, disassociation, or disruptive tendencies. While these behaviours can be symptomatic of underlying mental health conditions, trauma, or adverse socio-economic environments, they are often misunderstood or inadequately addressed within the youth work sector.

The C-C-B-Y curriculum posits that rather than being viewed merely as problems to be controlled, challenging behaviours should be seen as forms of communication—indicators of unmet needs, unresolved trauma, or contextual stressors. This humanistic approach underlines the importance of shifting from punitive responses to compassionate and proactive intervention strategies.

Gaps in Existing Training and the Need for Innovation

Prior to the project's implementation, a needs assessment was conducted across partner countries. It revealed a critical lack of formal training among youth workers in managing complex behaviour patterns. Existing programs either focused on general communication skills or theoretical concepts without offering practical, embodied, and context-specific tools.

Moreover, many youth workers expressed the need for support in managing their own emotional regulation and mental health while engaging with high-stress environments. Traditional curricula in youth work rarely account for the psychological toll that working with emotionally distressed youth can have on practitioners.

To bridge these gaps, the C-C-B-Y project designed a curriculum that incorporates:

- Theory and practice on emotional regulation and stress management

- Trauma-informed and inclusive pedagogical principles

- Culturally adaptable and digital tools

- Body–mind awareness techniques

- A narrative approach to behavioural understanding

The result is a modular, flexible, and experiential curriculum that prepares youth workers for real-world scenarios, while promoting their own well-being and professional development.

Theoretical Foundations

The curriculum is informed by interdisciplinary frameworks that include:

1. **Emotional Intelligence Theory** – As pioneered by Daniel Goleman, emphasizing self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and relationship management.

2. **Positive Psychology and Resilience Theory** – Strength-based approaches helping young people develop internal capacities for coping and thriving.

3. **Narrative Therapy and Pedagogy** – Personal storytelling and reflective practice for healing, understanding, and identity formation.

4. **Body–Mind Integration Models** – Drawing from somatic psychology, mindfulness, yoga, and theatre techniques to integrate body awareness for emotional regulation.

5. **Cognitive-Behavioural Approaches (CBT)** – Basic CBT tools for identifying thought-emotion-behaviour cycles and supporting behavioural change.

Methodological Approach

The C-C-B-Y curriculum is based on non-formal education principles and utilizes experiential learning as its core methodology. It incorporates:

- Interactive workshops and simulations

- Role-play and scenario analysis

- Digital storytelling tools

- Mindfulness and embodiment exercises

- Group reflections and peer learning

- Facilitated discussions and co-creation activities

Each training module is designed to be learner-centred, promoting a participatory environment where youth workers build competencies through experience, feedback, and guided reflection. The content is adaptable for both in-person and digital settings, allowing for broader accessibility.

Co-Creation and Piloting

A distinctive feature of the curriculum is that it was co-developed with direct input from youth workers, psychologists, educators, and young people themselves. Pilot training was conducted in North Macedonia (September 25–28, 2025), providing real-time feedback and cultural validation of the curriculum content and methodologies.

The iterative design process ensured that the curriculum was not only theoretically robust, but also practically relevant and culturally sensitive to different youth work contexts across Europe.

Alignment with European Youth Goals

The C-C-B-Y curriculum aligns with several EU Youth Goals:

- #3 Inclusive Societies – Promoting inclusive practices and addressing behavioural challenges compassionately

- #5 Mental Health & Well-being – Providing youth workers with tools for emotional care and regulation

- #9 Space and Participation for All – Encouraging youth-led storytelling and participatory engagement

Contribution to the Field

By filling a crucial gap in youth work education, the C-C-B-Y curriculum contributes to the professionalization of the sector. It represents:

- A shift from control-based to care-based interventions

- A framework for interdisciplinary collaboration among educators, psychologists, and community/youth workers

- A model for sustainable, well-being-centred education for both youth and professionals

- A commitment to open-source and digital accessibility, with resources available in six European languages

The curriculum can be adapted for formal education, non-formal settings, training-of-trainers, and peer-led initiatives, ensuring scalability and long-term impact.

Policy and Advocacy Potential

Beyond training youth workers, the curriculum can inform institutional change and policy dialogue:

- Raise awareness of youth behavioural needs among decision-makers

- Advocate for better working conditions and emotional support for youth professionals

- Promote competence-based recognition (aligned with Youthpass, ETS, etc.) to support professional mobility

The C-C-B-Y curriculum offers a transformative opportunity to shift how youth workers, educators, and community leaders engage with young people facing behavioural challenges. It is designed as a *living educational tool*—flexible, inclusive, and rooted in the lived realities of youth and practitioners.

3 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

4 Competences to be Developed by the Educational Programme

The C-C-B-Y curriculum is designed to build a comprehensive set of competencies among youth workers that are essential for recognising, understanding, and constructively addressing challenging behaviour in young people. These competences are grounded in interdisciplinary research and practice, and are aligned with the European Youth Work Competence Framework and the ETS Competence Model for Youth Workers developed by the European Commission.

The competences developed through this educational programme are grouped into five interrelated domains.

Competence Domains

1. Personal and Intrapersonal

These competences support the self-awareness, emotional resilience, and professional sustainability of youth workers, especially when dealing with complex and high-stress situations:

- **Emotional self-regulation:** Ability to manage one's emotional responses during challenging interactions and avoid burnout.

- **Resilience and stress management:** Techniques for maintaining personal well-being and mental health in emotionally demanding work.

- **Self-reflection and critical thinking:** Capacity to assess one's own reactions, biases, and assumptions when working with behavioural challenges.

- **Growth mindset:** Openness to lifelong learning and personal development in the face of evolving youth work contexts.

2. Interpersonal and Relational

These competences enhance the ability of youth workers to build trusting, empathetic, and inclusive relationships with young people, particularly those exhibiting challenging behaviour:

- **Empathy and active listening:** Deep understanding of youth experiences through non-judgmental communication and presence.

- **Conflict transformation and de-escalation:** Skills to respond to conflict constructively and defuse tense or aggressive situations.

- **Trust-building and rapport:** Developing safe relational spaces where young people feel heard, seen, and supported.

- **Cultural and social sensitivity:** Awareness of intersectional factors (e.g., socio-economic background, migration, trauma) influencing behaviour.

3. Behavioural and Pedagogical

The curriculum equips youth workers with pedagogical tools and behavioural frameworks that enable more effective and informed interventions:

- **Understanding of challenging behaviour:** Knowledge of root causes (e.g., trauma, mental health, systemic exclusion) and how they manifest.

- **Behavioural observation and analysis:** Ability to identify patterns, triggers, and potential strategies for positive behavioural change.

- **Intervention design and implementation:** Planning and applying context-sensitive approaches tailored to individual needs.

- **Non-formal education methodologies:** Designing inclusive, experiential, and participatory learning activities that support behavioural development.

4. Creative and Expressive

Creativity and expression are core to the C-C-B-Y approach, which integrates narrative practices, digital storytelling, and body–mind techniques:

- **Facilitation of storytelling and self-expression:** Guiding young people in articulating personal narratives as a means of healing and growth.

- **Use of body–mind techniques:** Application of mindfulness, theatre, movement, and relaxation exercises to support emotional regulation.

- **Digital literacy in youth work:** Competence in using digital platforms and tools to foster engagement, inclusion, and reflection.

- **Art-based facilitation:** Integration of visual, verbal, and performative arts in building youth voice and identity.

5. Professional and Ethical

Ethics and responsibility are foundational for working with vulnerable populations. The curriculum strengthens the following:

- **Ethical practice and safeguarding:** Respecting confidentiality, boundaries, and the rights of young people, particularly those in distress.

- **Inclusive and non-discriminatory practice:** Promoting diversity, equity, and access in every aspect of youth work.

- **Teamwork and collaboration:** Working effectively with peers, educators, psychologists, and community stakeholders.

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Ability to reflect on and assess the impact of interventions and continuously improve practice.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the C-C-B-Y training programme, participants will be able to:

- Demonstrate emotional competence and resilience in challenging settings.

- Identify, interpret, and respond effectively to various forms of challenging behaviour.

- Facilitate inclusive, trust-based relationships with diverse youth populations.

- Apply storytelling and body–mind practices in youth engagement and behavioural support.

- Uphold professional ethics and engage in reflective, evidence-informed practice.

Transferability and Recognition

The competences developed through the C-C-B-Y curriculum are transferable across diverse youth work contexts, including schools, NGOs, shelters, community centres, and informal education programmes. The training is compatible with the **Youthpass** framework, enabling learners to document their competencies in a recognised format and enhance their career progression within the youth work sector.

The C-C-B-Y curriculum fosters a well-rounded competence profile that goes beyond behavioural management and into transformational youth work—centred on inclusion, emotional depth, and authentic connection. It prepares youth workers to be not just facilitators of change, but also co-travellers in the developmental journeys of young people navigating behavioural and emotional complexity.

5 Recommendations for Organising Similar Training Courses

The C-C-B-Y curriculum provides a flexible, adaptable framework for training youth workers to effectively respond to challenging behaviours among young people. To maximise the curriculum's impact and ensure sustainability, this section outlines recommendations for its practical application, implementation, and replication across diverse educational and community contexts.

Recommendations for Implementation

1. Adopt a Modular and Flexible Approach

The C-C-B-Y curriculum is designed to be modular, enabling facilitators and organisations to tailor training programmes to the specific needs, capacities, and time constraints of their target groups:

- **Use as full training or in parts:** The curriculum can be delivered as an intensive training course (e.g., 5–7 days) or broken down into weekly or monthly sessions.

- **Blend digital and in-person learning:** Depending on the context, elements of the curriculum (especially storytelling and body–mind techniques) can be facilitated online using interactive platforms, or delivered in person to deepen engagement.

- **Contextualise content:** Trainers are encouraged to adapt case studies, examples, and exercises to fit local cultural realities, language, and social challenges.

2. Ensure Skilled Facilitation and Peer Learning

The success of this curriculum is heavily dependent on the quality of facilitation. Trainers should ideally possess prior experience in youth work, mental health, or non-formal education methodologies:

- **Engage multidisciplinary facilitators:** Combine expertise from psychology, social work, education, and the arts to enrich the learning experience.

- **Use co-facilitation models:** Pair facilitators with complementary skill sets to model collaboration and create safe learning spaces.

- **Encourage peer-to-peer exchange:** Activities should allow participants to share field experiences, reflect collectively, and co-create new strategies.

3. Create a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment

Given the emotionally sensitive nature of working with challenging behaviours, it is critical to establish psychological safety and inclusive principles from the outset:

- **Use clear group agreements:** Co-develop ground rules on confidentiality, respectful dialogue, and non-judgmental communication.

- **Be trauma-informed:** Facilitators must be attuned to participants' own emotional experiences, particularly if they have encountered vicarious trauma through their youth work practice.

- **Foster inclusion:** Ensure that all voices—including those from underrepresented groups—are included and valued in the training space.

4. Integrate Body–Mind and Storytelling Practices Holistically

Two pillars of the C-C-B-Y curriculum are body–mind regulation techniques and narrative approaches. These should be integrated throughout the training:

- **Begin and close sessions with grounding techniques:** Simple mindfulness, breathing, or movement exercises help participants process emotionally intense content.

- **Use storytelling for reflection and assessment:** Invite participants to reflect on their learning journey through personal or professional stories.

- **Demonstrate rather than explain:** Facilitate embodied experiences and discussions rather than relying only on presentations or lectures.

5. Pilot, Evaluate, and Adapt Continuously

The curriculum was developed through a co-creative and iterative process. This philosophy should continue during implementation:

- **Pilot before scaling:** Test the curriculum with small groups to gather feedback on content relevance, accessibility, and participant impact.

- **Use participatory evaluation methods:** Include visual tools, journaling, group discussions, and feedback forms to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes, and confidence.

- **Document adaptations:** Encourage facilitators to record what worked, what didn't, and what could be improved for future use.

6. Build Strategic Partnerships for Broader Impact

To sustain and expand the use of this curriculum, organisations are encouraged to work with public institutions, educational bodies, and community stakeholders:

- **Engage youth centres and CSOs:** Ideal settings for piloting and embedding the training.

- **Collaborate with schools and local authorities:** Position the curriculum as a complement to formal education or social services, especially in underserved areas.

- **Train the trainers:** Build a pool of certified facilitators capable of replicating the programme regionally or nationally.

7. Support Learners Beyond the Training

A one-time training is not sufficient for long-term behavioural change. Participants should be offered follow-up opportunities, peer networks, and access to ongoing resources:

- **Create alumni or peer learning circles:** Regular check-ins, online meetups, or communities of practice can support sustained engagement.

- **Provide access to digital tools:** Leverage the digital storytelling platform and online body–mind resource hub developed in the C-C-B-Y project.

- **Encourage reflective practice:** Promote journaling, supervision, and mentoring as part of professional development.

6 Introduction and Theoretical Foundation Methodology

Why Focus on Youth with Challenging Behaviour

In recent years, educators, youth workers, and policymakers have increasingly recognized the urgency of addressing the needs of young people who display challenging behaviour. These behaviours are complex forms of communication rooted in psychological, social, and environmental influences. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), up to 20% of adolescents worldwide experience a mental health condition, many of which manifest as aggression, impulsivity, or withdrawal from learning and social contexts. If not addressed early, these behaviours can escalate, leading to school exclusion, involvement with the justice system, or long-term social marginalisation.

In North Macedonia and the wider Balkan region, youth with behavioural challenges often fall through systemic gaps. Educational systems frequently lack inclusive strategies, while youth services face resource limitations. Social stigma surrounding "problematic youth" reinforces exclusion rather than support. Research shows that punitive approaches rarely solve behavioural issues and instead deepen cycles of disadvantage [6]. This highlights the need for theoretical and practical foundations for youth workers that emphasize early intervention, empathy, and holistic understanding.

Who Are Youth with Challenging Behaviour?

The term "challenging behaviour" describes patterns of conduct that place significant demands on others and limit the individual's participation in everyday life. It refers to behaviours that challenge systems, families, or communities, not to the young person as inherently difficult.

Definition:

> "Culturally abnormal behaviour(s) of such intensity, frequency, or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is placed in serious jeopardy, or behaviour which is likely to seriously limit or deny access to ordinary community facilities."

Key points:

- **Context matters:** What is seen as challenging in one culture, family, or school may not be in another.

- **Impact matters:** Behaviour is defined by the risks it creates, not simply by social inconvenience.

Types of Challenging Behaviour

- **Physical Aggression:** This involves actions such as hitting, pushing, throwing objects, or damaging property. For many young people, especially those with learning disabilities or trauma histories, physical aggression may serve as a way to express frustration, escape overwhelming situations, or gain immediate attention. Studies show that without supportive intervention, these behaviours often increase stress for families and reduce opportunities for youth to engage in community life [1].

- **Verbal Aggression:** Shouting, swearing, making threats, or persistent defiance are typical forms of verbal aggression. While these behaviours may not cause physical harm, they erode trust in relationships and can escalate conflicts. In schools, verbal aggression is often a leading reason for disciplinary measures. However, research suggests that such behaviours frequently reflect difficulties in emotional regulation or social communication, rather than intentional hostility (NCBI, 2023).

- **Self-Injurious Behaviour (SIB):** This refers to behaviours where young people deliberately harm themselves, such as head-banging, cutting, or hair-pulling. SIB can serve various functions: coping with overwhelming emotions, exerting control, or expressing distress. For some youth with developmental differences, repetitive self-injury may also provide sensory stimulation. Interventions here require both compassion and specialist support, as self-injury is linked to higher risks of depression and suicide (WHO, 2023).

- **Disruptive or Non-Compliance Behaviours:** These include refusal to follow instructions, constant interruptions, or behaviours that significantly disrupt group activities such as classrooms or youth programs. Disruption often masks deeper issues such as learning difficulties, unmet sensory needs, or feelings of exclusion. Viewing disruption as a signal rather than defiance helps youth workers and teachers respond constructively.

Causes of Challenging Behaviour

Psychological Factors

- Emotional distress and mental health difficulties (anxiety, depression, PTSD, ADHD).

- Trauma and attachment disruptions from early neglect or inconsistent caregiving.

- Temperament and cognitive traits (impulsivity, high sensitivity, low frustration tolerance).

- Learned behaviours through reinforcement.

Social Factors

- Family dynamics, including inconsistent discipline or high-conflict households.

- Peer relationships, including rejection, bullying, or antisocial peer influence.

- School environments, with rigid or punitive discipline versus inclusive practices.

Environmental Factors

- Sensory environments (over- or under-stimulating).

- Institutional and organisational factors (staff turnover, lack of training).

- Poverty and community disadvantage (unstable housing, neighbourhood violence).

- Cultural and societal norms affecting behaviour interpretation.

Theoretical Foundations

Behavioural and Learning Theories

- **Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA):** Analyses triggers and consequences of behaviour.

- **Operant Conditioning:** Behaviour shaped by reinforcement or punishment.

- **Positive Behaviour Support (PBS):** Focuses on proactive strategies and teaching skills.

Ecological and Systems Models

- **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory:** Behaviour influenced by family, peers, school, community, and society [3].

- **Bandura's Social Learning Theory:** Behaviour learned through observation of others.

Trauma-Informed Care

Focuses on safety, trust, empowerment, peer support, and cultural sensitivity [10]. Polyvagal theory [8] provides insight into nervous system responses, with co-regulation techniques supporting recovery.

Strengths-Based and Positive Psychology Approaches

Emphasises identifying youth skills, interests, and resilience [9], building positive identity and engagement.

Importance of Early Intervention and Prevention

Why Early Intervention Matters

1. **Brain Development and Plasticity:** Support during childhood and adolescence has lasting positive effects [7].

2. **Preventing Escalation:** Early challenges predict later involvement with justice systems.

3. **Reducing Long-Term Costs:** Prevention saves public resources in health, education, and social care.

4. **Building Protective Factors:** Strengthens resilience and promotes safe, positive coping mechanisms.

Practical Models of Early Intervention

- **Universal Programs:** School-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula.

- **Targeted Interventions:** Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and trauma-informed school practices.

- **Family-Based Approaches:** Evidence-based parenting programs like Triple P or Functional Family Therapy.

- **Community Youth Work:** Outreach and trust-based engagement for disconnected youth.

The Role of Youth Workers

Youth workers operate in flexible, informal, and relational contexts. Key contributions include:

- Building trust and relationships.

- Seeing behaviour as communication.

- Providing safe spaces.

- Acting as bridges between youth and systems.

- Using creative tools such as arts, sports, storytelling, and peer learning.

Skills and Knowledge Required

- Understanding trauma, attachment, and neurodiversity.

- Conflict resolution, restorative practice, and de-escalation skills.

- Cultural humility and systemic awareness.

- Cross-sector collaboration.

- Reflective practice and supervision [2].

Trauma-Informed and Strengths-Based Approaches

Trauma-Informed: Safety, trust, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity [10].

Strengths-Based: Identifying talents, co-creating goals, celebrating success, and promoting youth leadership [9].

Bridging to Training Curriculum and Policy Frameworks

The curriculum translates theory into practical strategies including trauma-informed care, positive behaviour support, and strengths-based approaches, aligning with EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 and the European Training Strategy (ETS).

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7   Developed Sessions of a Training Course

1   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
     - 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?"
   - 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.

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).

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

$$\text{Self-awareness} \rightarrow \text{Self-acceptance} \rightarrow \text{Healthy self-esteem} \rightarrow \text{Positive behaviours}$$

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

2   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.).

   • 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)**

   • 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.

- • 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

3 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 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.

   - 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).

4   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

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.

Annex A: Evidence of Promising Practices Supporting the Curriculum

Purpose

This annex presents selected examples of evidence-based and innovative practices that can be integrated or adapted to strengthen the curriculum's approach to emotional literacy, resilience, and social inclusion among children and young people. Each practice demonstrates effective methods for coping with challenging behaviour and promoting positive mental health.

The identification and selection of promising practices helped to present a general overview of the topic in the different countries of the partnership, which will support the further development of the training material.

What is a Promising Practice?

Promising practices are approaches, activities, procedures, or policies that have demonstrated positive outcomes and increased efficiency in helping individuals—particularly those exhibiting challenging behaviour—achieve their goals. These practices are supported by research and evidence, confirming their effectiveness in improving lives.

By understanding and incorporating these promising practices into your work, you can leverage proven strategies to enhance outcomes for children, families, and communities, while ensuring the delivery of high-quality, evidence-based information.

Methodology

Each partner conducted desk research using a unified template. The practices were gathered, reviewed, and summarised in a structured format, including name, location, methods, outcomes, and materials used.

1. Bulgaria – Animus Association (NGO): "Zippy's Friends"

Description: A school-based mental health promotion programme for children aged 5–7. Through storytelling and interactive activities, children learn to manage emotions, communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and develop empathy.

Relevance to Curriculum:

• Supports early emotional education and social skills.

• Promotes inclusive classroom environments.

• Encourages positive coping strategies and non-violent communication.

Key Outcomes:

• Increased emotional resilience.

- Improved peer relationships.

- Reduction in aggression and bullying.

Sources:

- `https://whatworks.gov.ie/hub-search/report/13/Zippy's%20Friends`

- `https://eeagrants.org/archive/2009-2014/projects/CZ11-0059`

- `http://www.animusassociation.org`

2. Denmark – Digital Storylab (NGO)

Description: Digital storytelling empowers youth to express personal experiences through short digital films, using narrative and creative tools in a safe and reflective environment.

Relevance to Curriculum:

- Integrates media literacy with emotional expression.

- Promotes empathy and social connection among peers.

- Encourages creative coping mechanisms instead of risky behaviours.

Key Outcomes:

- Enhanced emotional regulation and self-awareness.

- Strengthened identity-building and self-expression.

- Development of digital and communication skills.

Sources:

- `https://digitalstorylab.com`

3. North Macedonia – MladiHub (NGO)

Description: MladiHub developed manuals addressing youth mental health topics such as anxiety, stress, trauma, and depression. The materials are designed for self-use and peer education.

Relevance to Curriculum:

- Provides adaptable educational materials for youth and educators.

- Promotes mental health literacy and reduces stigma.

- Supports independent learning and peer-led approaches.

Key Outcomes:

- Improved emotional management among youth.

- Strengthened support networks in educational settings.

- Empowered youth participation in mental health promotion.

Sources:

- `https://mladihub.mk/resourcesc/1`

4. Poland – Fundacja SOK (NGO)

Description: A psychosocial support programme for refugee children combining teacher training on emotional regulation with language and adaptation workshops for children.

Relevance to Curriculum:

• Integrates emotional and linguistic learning.

• Provides teachers with practical support strategies.

• Encourages inclusion of migrant and refugee children.

Key Outcomes:

• Easier adaptation to new environments.

• Improved communication and social integration.

• Strengthened teacher capacity for inclusive education.

Sources:

• https://fundacjasok.org.pl/en/about

5. Italy – ASD CYB (NGO): "Sport & Support"

Description: A programme combining physical activity with personal coaching for youth aged 14–19, promoting self-discipline, goal setting, and inclusion through mentoring and sport.

Relevance to Curriculum:

• Encourages holistic development (mind–body balance).

• Promotes teamwork and goal-oriented behaviour.

• Reduces risk behaviours and supports positive youth identity.

Key Outcomes:

• Enhanced self-confidence and motivation.

• Improved social inclusion and cooperation skills.

• Effective engagement of vulnerable youth.

Sources:

• Experience from ASD CYB, based on models such as Sported UK and the Positive Coaching Alliance.

Conclusion

These promising practices provide evidence-based models that can be adapted or replicated within the curriculum framework to foster emotional resilience, inclusion, and personal growth among young learners. Their integration can enhance both preventive and developmental aspects of youth work and education.