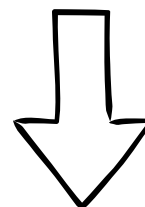
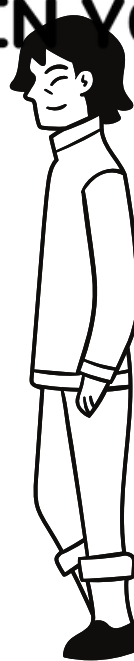
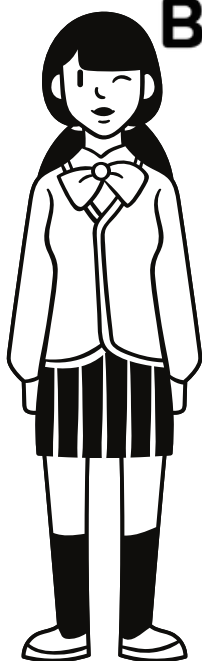
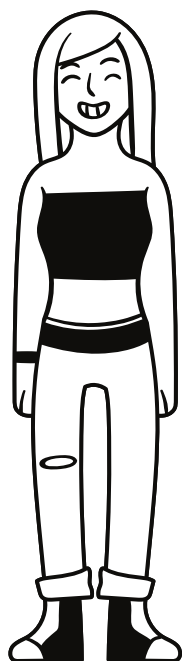
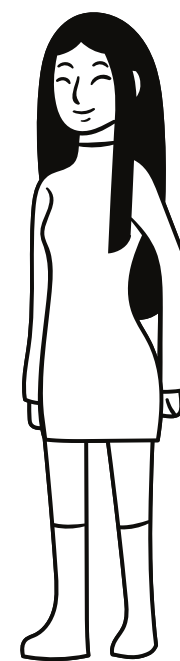


COPING WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR IN YOUTH WORK



Co-funded by
the European Union





Coping with Challenging Behaviour in Youth Work

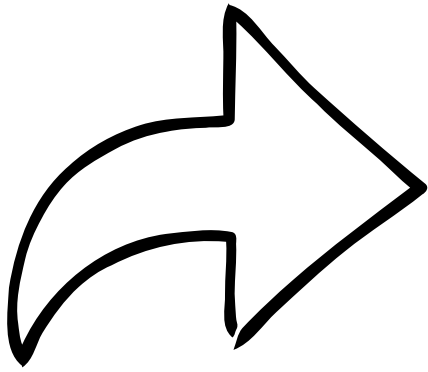
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STORY JOURNEY MANUAL



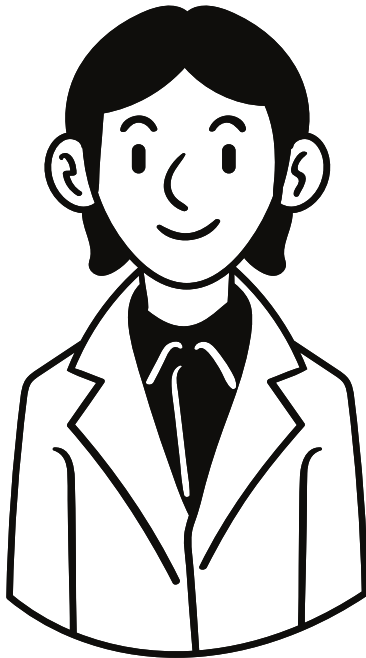
Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Human Resources Development Center – Bulgaria HRDC.

Neither the European Union nor HRDC can be held responsible for them.



Welcome to YOUR Story Journey!

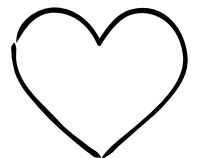
PSN (Personal Storytelling Narration) is a digital tool designed to help young people reflect on and narrate their life stories.

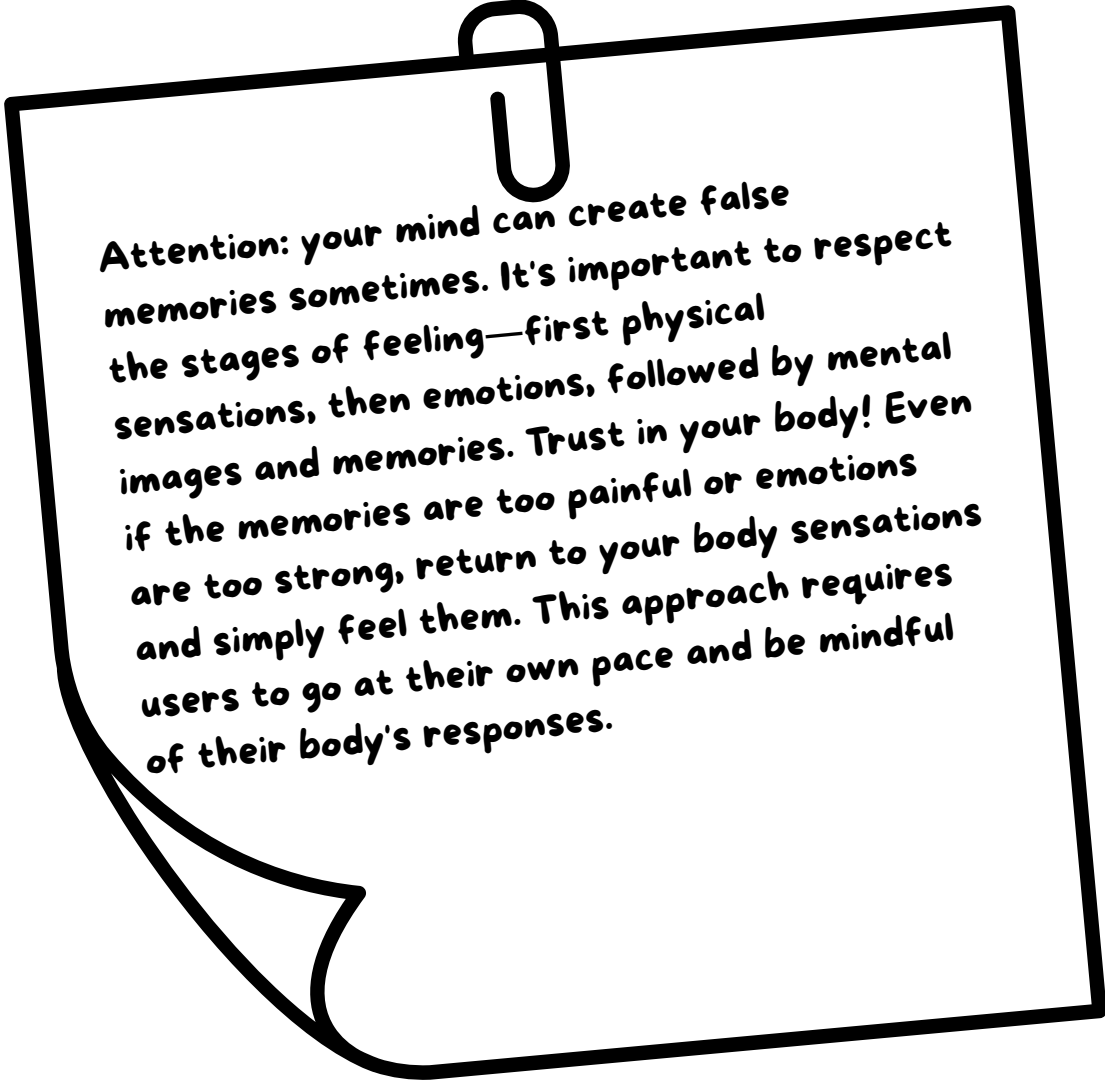


It encourages users to think of their life as a book filled with different chapters, each contributing to their growth and character.

The tool aids in **exploring significant past events, helping individuals make peace with unresolved emotions** and promoting mental health by reducing stress and enhancing clarity.

Throughout the sessions, you will be offered a **text** and an **audio file** with the same content. If you are not able to follow the instructions, listen to the podcast.





Attention: your mind can create false memories sometimes. It's important to respect the stages of feeling—first physical sensations, then emotions, followed by mental images and memories. Trust in your body! Even if the memories are too painful or emotions are too strong, return to your body sensations and simply feel them. This approach requires users to go at their own pace and be mindful of their body's responses.

PSN is offered in three formats:



1. Solo adventure

This format is for you if you feel overwhelmed or stressed with a particular feeling and are seeking support but believe that you can do it alone. Users explore their stories independently.

In this path, users are guided in this order:

- Physical sensations (such as heat, cold, shivers, tremors, cramps; but also smells, odors, tastes, sounds, and visual flashes)
- Emotions (which include anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise)
- Memories





2. 1-on-1 Journey



Users work with a youth worker for personalized guidance.

This journey provides more safety and security, allowing for deeper work on painful physical and emotional aspects.

The guide's abilities significantly impact the experience, making the path more flexible and supportive without needing strict instructions.





3. Group session:

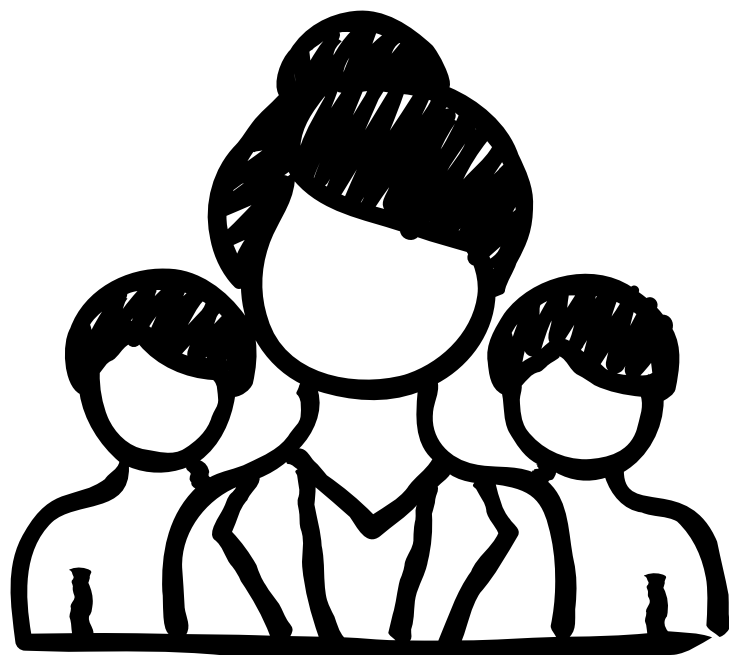
A trained youth worker facilitates sessions with a group of young people. In this case, 90% of the work is done by the group, and 10% by the facilitator.

The facilitator's role is to stimulate discussion and maintain stability within the group.

The collective energy and information shared by the group create a protective environment, enabling the expression of strong feelings and emotions.

However, individual feelings are explored in relation to the group's shared experiences, rather than in isolation.

This tool empowers individuals by providing emotional release, fostering self-discovery, and enhancing mental well-being through the power of writing and reflection.



Solo adventure

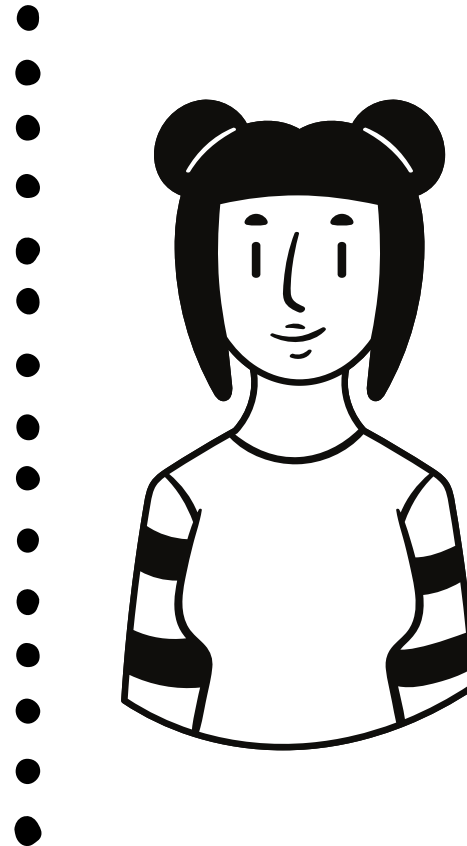
You have chosen the “**Solo adventure**” protocol. The following explanation will give you better insight into what to expect.

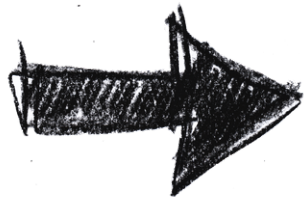
This protocol is designed to help you explore your past experiences in a structured and supportive way. It is important to engage in this exercise when you feel calm and ready to delve into your memories. By following the steps you can gain insights into your body sensations, emotional feelings, and memories in a safe and controlled manner.

The exercise consists of three main stages (each lasting 10-15 minutes):

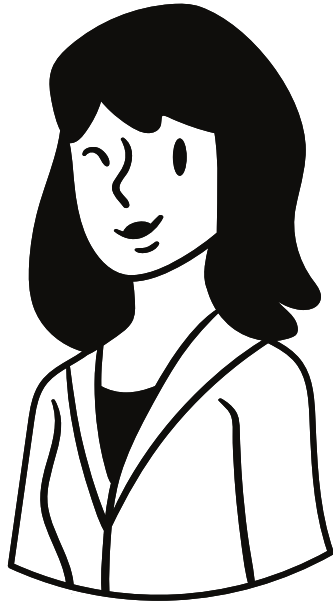
- Body sensations
- Emotional feelings
- Memories

Following this order is crucial because it helps you build a connection between your physical sensations and emotional experiences before delving into specific memories. This progression ensures a more grounded and manageable exploration of your past.





<https://ccbyerasmus.com/tool>



Managing emotional outbursts

It's natural to experience strong emotions during this exercise. If you feel overwhelmed at any point, take a break, and practice deep breathing.

Remember, it's okay to feel emotional – this is part of the healing process.

This exercise is designed to help you explore and understand the connections between your body sensations, emotions, and memories.

By taking the time to reflect on your past in a structured way, you can gain valuable insights into your emotional health and well-being. Remember to approach this exercise with a sense of calm and readiness, and always follow the order of body sensations, emotional feelings, and memories to ensure a safe and productive experience.

If the body sensation feels overwhelming or too intense, take a moment to pause and use a relaxation technique to help ground yourself.



Try focusing on your breathing: **inhale slowly** through your nose, hold for a few seconds, and **exhale gently** through your mouth.

Repeat this until you feel more centered.

You can also try **grounding techniques** like pressing your feet firmly into the floor or placing your hands on your lap, feeling the stability and support beneath you.

Remember, it's okay to **stop** and take a **break**.



If the sensations continue to feel unmanageable, consider reaching out to a mentor or trusted person who can provide additional support and guidance.

Prioritizing your comfort and well-being is essential on this journey.

Let's begin by finding a comfortable position and taking a few deep breaths to reach a pleasant state of relaxation while staying focused and attentive.

Once you're relaxed, gently allow any sensations to emerge and flow through your body.

Start at the top of your head and slowly work your way down, paying attention to each part of your body.

Notice any sensations that arise without judging or labeling them as pleasant or unpleasant, beautiful or ugly.

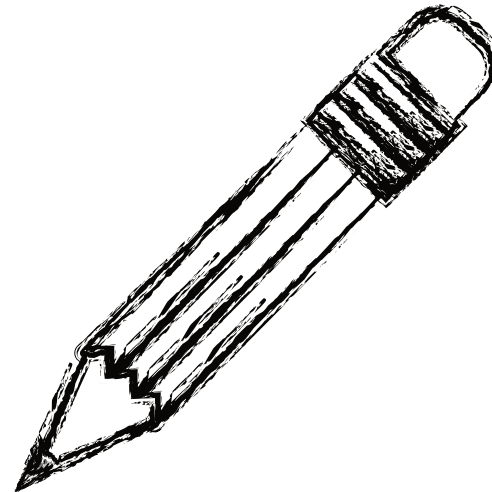
Just observe them as a neutral observer.

As you tune into each part of your body, take a moment to write down what you feel.

Be as specific and detailed as possible.

Describe the location, intensity, and quality of each sensation.

This detailed awareness helps you connect more deeply with your physical state and prepares you for the next steps in our Focusing work.



When the body is relaxed, you can let your emotions emerge.

Keep in mind:

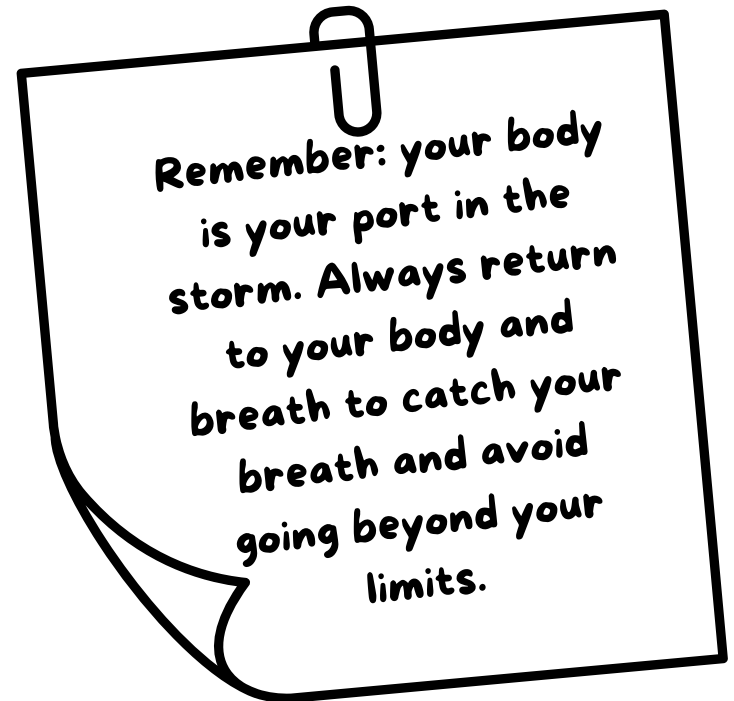
- if emotions are too strong or painful, return to physical sensations;
- let emotions arise spontaneously, like bubbles from the bottom of a glass, and allow yourself to listen to them.

It can happen that emotions follow one another, accompanied by different physical sensations, tastes, or smells.

It's OK: follow their flow without judging them.

It may happen that an emotion persists and is not what you expected. Again, don't force or change it.

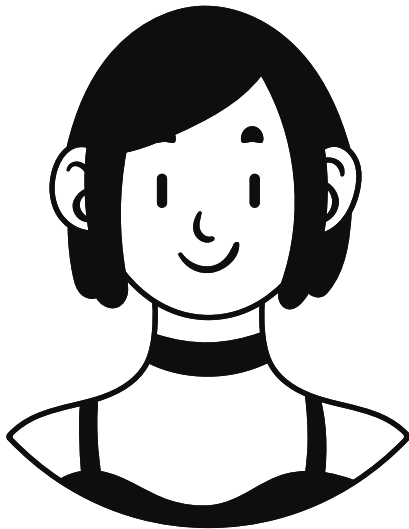
Allow that emotion to make its way and be heard.



Following the rhythm of your breathing, let emotions flow and emerge in your body. Stay grounded in your breath rhythm and your body sensations.

Recognize and name the emotions you are experiencing without judgment. Do not force: simply stay with what emerges and the effects on the body.

When emotions run high, breathe deeply. Inhale deeply through your nose, hold a little bit and then exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat this several times until you feel more centered.



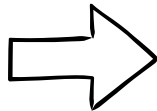
Allow yourself to fully experience your emotions without rushing to change them. Emotions, like waves, will rise and fall. Stay present with them. Find the origin of them in your body and the flow.

Try pressing your feet firmly into the ground, or your palms in your legs, focusing on the sensation. You can hold a comforting object paying attention to its texture and temperature. Stay connected to the here and now.

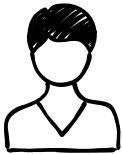
Writing is important because it allows everything that has emerged to be reconstructed in your document.



At the same time, the rational part of your mind can sort out and put in order what your body, emotions, and memories have produced.



Write simply. After all, you are the recipient of this letter.



**Your present self writes for your future self.
Write down everything that emerged, without judgment.**



On the contrary, the more precise you are in listing what you have experienced and seen, the more effective the exercise.

At the end, reread what you have written, possibly aloud. Keep your document carefully, ensuring it is not read by people you do not want to see it. You can also hand it over to your mentor. Alternatively, once you have read it, you can decide to erase or burn your writing.

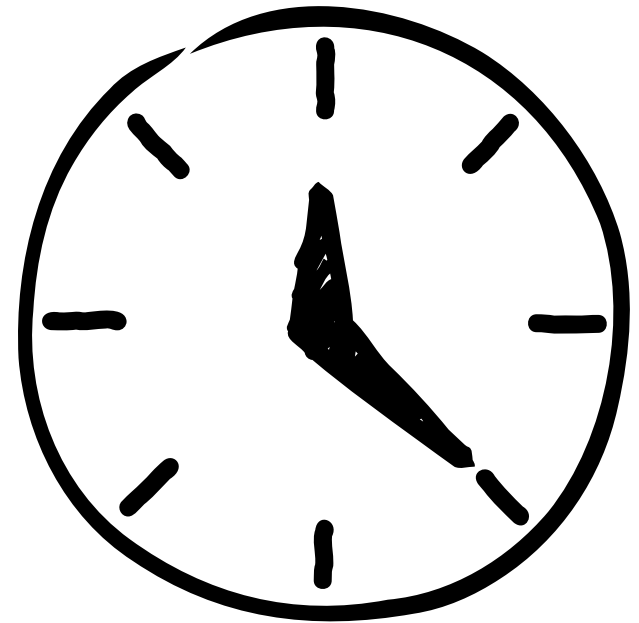
Recall connected memories

Memory is powerful—it doesn't just bring back images or events; it can also bring back the emotions associated with those experiences.

Our minds can often immerse us in a memory as if we're back in that moment. What you feel now may be exactly what you felt back then, or it might be what you couldn't allow yourself to feel at the time. This can happen with both happy and painful memories, each one giving you a chance to understand and process those past emotions fully.

There's no need to be afraid of this experience.

Although it may feel intense, these memories and emotions are safe to explore in the present moment. You are not reliving the event; you're observing it from a distance, with the safety and awareness you have now. This process of reconnecting allows you to honor and understand your past self, helping you make peace with these experiences and bring healing to your present.



Imagine being in a quiet and comfortable place where you feel safe and relaxed. Ensure this space is free from distractions and has items that bring you comfort.

Recall the body scanning technique. Focus on any sensations in your body and let these sensations guide you to a memory.

Pay attention to the emotions that arise from these sensations. Let these emotions naturally lead you to related memories.

Sensory cues like smells, sounds, or images can trigger memories. Imagine you are listening to a song, or looking at a photograph or a film. Be a spectator of what is happening.

As memories emerge, look at them like a photo or a film or as you are the public in a theater.

If it is possible, after watching and re-watching, write them down in detail. Describe not only the events but also the associated emotions and body sensations.

Stay present with your memories, even if they are challenging. Approach them with curiosity and compassion, rather than judgment. Remember, recalling memories is a process of understanding and healing, not reliving past traumas.

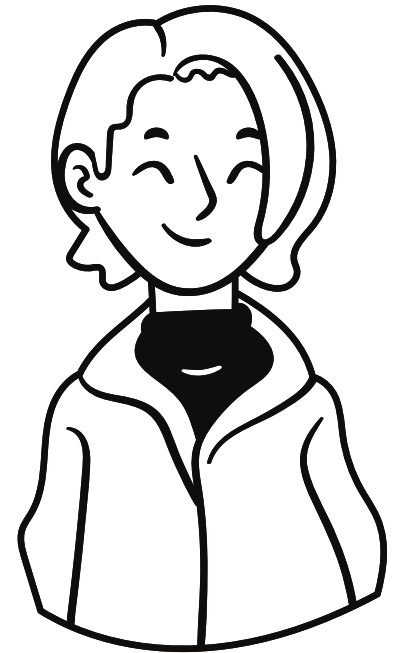
After recalling a memory, take some time to reflect on it. What does this memory reveal about your current emotions and behaviors? How can this understanding help you move forward?

Can you see in the film of memory any episodes or attitudes that are repeated in the present? Remember: memory is never accurate and consistent with reality. Remain detached and observe the film.

**Remember that those memories are part of
your life, but in the past.**

Act like a spectator.

Stay in the present moment.



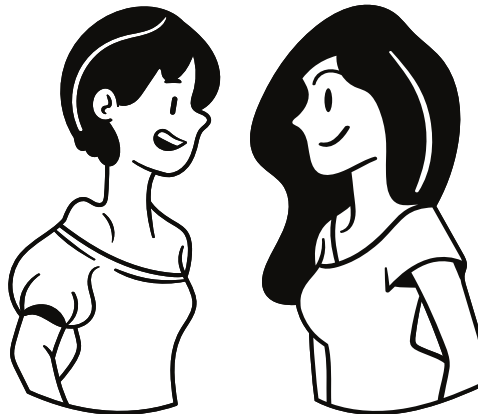
1on1

Create a safe, welcoming, and confidential space for your partner. Ensure the environment is comfortable and free from distractions, which helps people feel secure and ready to share their experiences. Avoid perfumes or smells or sounds that could be triggering.

Begin with open-ended questions and active listening to show genuine interest in your partner's life and concerns. Simple questions like, "What brings you here today?" can open up dialogue and build trust.

Clearly explain that you are not a therapist but you are helping the person to express himself/herself. Explain the structure of sessions and the confidentiality of the dialogue. This transparency helps manage their expectations and reduces anxiety about the unknown aspects of protocol.

Work with your partner to identify their goals: they must be simple, small and easy to reach. Ask questions like, "What do you hope to achieve through our sessions?"



Put in evidence this **collaborative approach** that empowers the person and provides a clear direction for your work together.

Gauge your partner's readiness and motivation for protocol. Understand their level of commitment and any potential barriers can help tailor your approach.

Set clear boundaries regarding session times (45 max 60 minutes), communication methods, and your role as a facilitator. Boundaries help create a professional and safe framework for the therapeutic relationship, ensuring mutual respect and understanding.

Start with manageable tasks and small steps.

Small achievements early on can build confidence and momentum for the therapeutic journey.



If the person has difficulty relaxing, **listen to the podcast on body relaxation** and help him/her scan the various parts of the body. Help him/her feel the contact of clothes on the skin and of the body on the chair or mat.

If he has difficulty visualizing a goal or understanding what he wants to achieve from the process, ask him this simple question: "Imagine that a miracle happens during the night and tomorrow you wake up and realize that your greatest wish has been granted. By what do you realize that it has been fulfilled?"

Start from this basis.

Take control of the course gently, but without forcing it.

Remember that the body is the base from which to start, then the emotions and then the memories. In case of difficulty, return to the physical sensations.



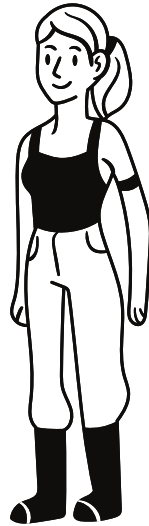
1. Establishing trust and rapport

- Building connection: spend time getting to know the young person, building a trusting relationship that encourages openness and honesty.
- Consistent presence: be a consistent and reliable presence, showing genuine care and commitment to the young person's journey.
- Do not judge, do not give advice, do not give personal opinions or relate personal examples: the person only wishes to be heard in total absence of judgment



2. Creating a safe and supportive environment

- Confidentiality: ensure that everything shared in the sessions remains confidential, creating a safe space for the young person to express themselves freely.
- Comfortable setting: arrange a comfortable and private setting for sessions, whether in person or virtual, where the young person feels at ease.



3. Personalized guidance and support

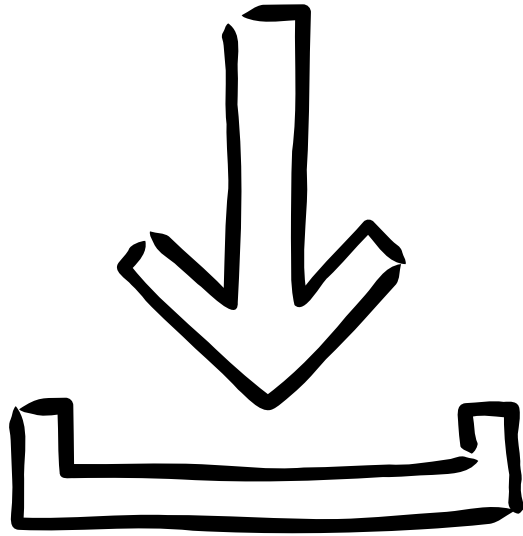
- Tailored approach: adapt your guidance to the specific needs, personality, and pace of the young person. Use flexible strategies that suit their unique situation.
- Active listening: practice active listening, giving full attention to the young person's words and feelings, validating their experiences without judgment.
- Always help the person to follow the protocol: first the physical sensations; then, when relaxed and stabilized in the body, proceed with the emotions; last the memories.
- Always return to the body when you see the person in distress.
- Help the person to identify feelings and emotions, but do not make suggestions; for example: do not say 'Do you feel anger? It is fear that you feel. It is unpleasant, I know'; but rather say: 'What do you feel? Can you identify that feeling or emotion? How does it make you feel?'

4. Exploring deep emotional and physical aspects

- Emotional support: without judgment and suggestions, help the young person explore and process his/her painful emotions and experiences as they emerge.
- Provide comfort and reassurance during difficult moments. If the person accepts physical contact, a touch on a shoulder or the back of the hand is sufficient. Do not indulge in physical contact if the person withdraws because it could lead to physical violence. It is important to look into the person's eyes, but without forcing a mutual gaze and without staring for a long time.
- Eye contact and using short phrases such as:
 - *I understand you*
 - *I can understand your pain or difficulty*
 - *I can feel within me what you feel*
 - *trust my presence now, I am listening*
 - *I am here to listen to whatever you can express*

We always use positive phrases that express empathy, sharing, and humanity. We do not pity.





Managing resilience

Start by helping people to identify their inherent strengths and external resources. Ask questions:

"What past challenges have you overcome?" or

"Who can you rely on for support?"

Recognizing these strengths and resources can boost confidence and resilience.

Reflect on past successes and how they were achieved. Discuss what strategies worked and how these can be applied to current situations. This reflection reinforces their capability to overcome challenges.

Help people to practice self-compassion, especially when they encounter setbacks. Remind them that it's okay to make mistakes and that being kind to themselves is crucial for resilience and moving forward.

Encourage people to create a vision for their future. This could involve envisioning where they want to be in a year or what they want to achieve in their personal and professional lives. Having a clear vision can provide direction and motivation.

Reprocessing and integration

Your role in creating a supportive and non-judgmental space is crucial. People need to feel safe and understood to reprocess and integrate their experiences effectively. This environment encourages openness and vulnerability, and your contribution to it is invaluable.

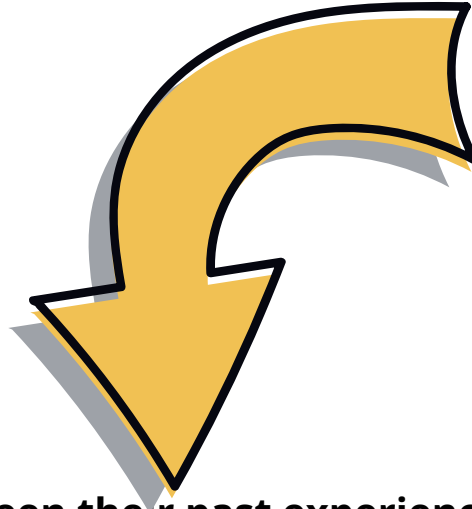


Encourage people to reflect on their experiences by asking questions that promote deeper thinking. Use clear and simple questions, such as "How does this experience affect you now?" or "What new insights have you gained?" Help people explore the impact of their past on their present.



Facilitate emotional expression: allowing people to express their emotions differently can enhance reprocessing and integration.





Help people make connections between their past experiences and current behaviors or feelings. Understanding these connections can lead to greater self-awareness and insight, which are critical for integration.



Help people remember effective coping strategies that they used in the past to manage distressing emotions or memories that arise during reprocessing. Looking at their success will affirm their resilience and survival force. Focus on building resilience and empowering people to take control of their healing journey. Highlight their strengths and past successes and encourage a growth mindset to foster a sense of agency and hope.



Encourage people to continuously integrate new insights into their daily lives, step by step. This ongoing commitment to growth and healing is vital to the therapeutic process. Tell them to write a diary where they can regularly review their progress, celebrate achievements, and adapt goals as needed to support their ongoing growth and healing.



Group work

In a group session, the youth worker plays a crucial role in facilitating a supportive and productive environment for young people to explore their life stories.



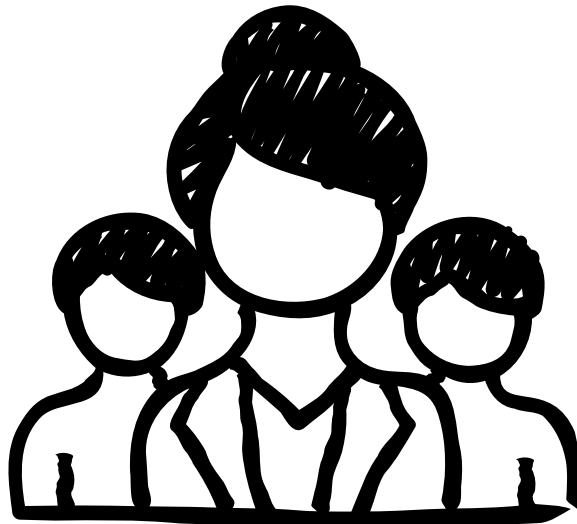
Create a safe space

Ensure the physical or virtual space is comfortable, welcoming, and free from distractions. Establish clear ground rules for respectful listening and confidentiality to create a sense of safety and trust among participants.



Stimulate discussion

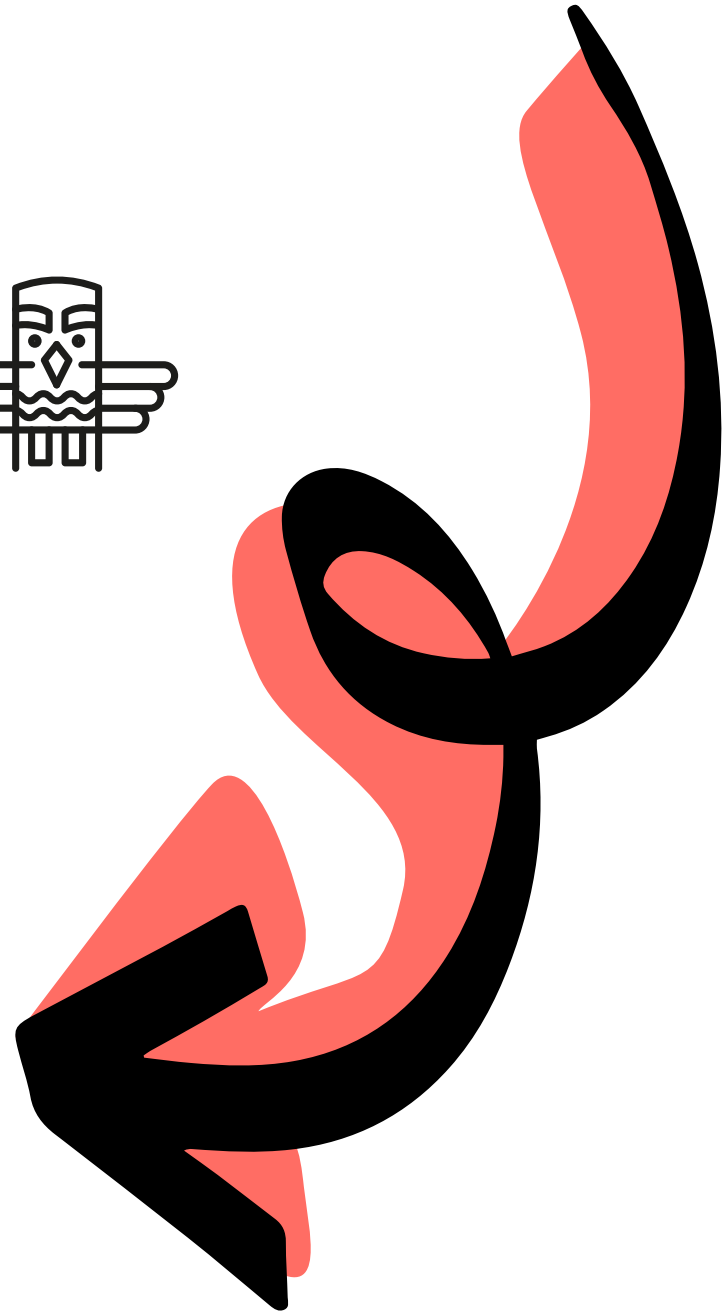
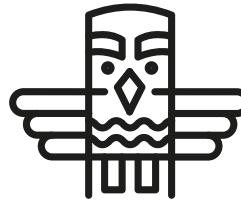
Use prompts or questions to encourage participants to share their experiences and thoughts. These can be related to specific themes, such as overcoming challenges, personal growth, or happy memories.



Demonstrate active listening by acknowledging each participant's contributions and encouraging others to do the same.

Use a totem: a totem, traditionally understood, is a symbolic object or image that holds significant meaning and represents qualities, values, or aspects of identity for an individual or group. In a group a totem can serve as a powerful symbol of inner strength and resilience.

Totem serves as a tangible affirmation of resilience and ability to cope with challenges. A totem can provide comfort and a sense of security. Use a physical object, such as a small stone, piece of jewelry, or another meaningful item, and pass it around so that the person holding it can speak. In order for another person to speak, the totem must be given to that person.



Maintain stability



Keep the discussion focused and on track. Gently guide conversations back to the main topic if they start to diverge.

Be prepared to offer support if a participant becomes emotional or distressed. Provide reassurance and suggest a brief pause or a calming activity if needed.

Foster group dynamics



Ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak and contribute. Encourage quieter members to share their thoughts without pressuring them.

Manage dominant voices in the group to ensure a balanced discussion where all perspectives are heard.

Include activities that build a sense of community and shared purpose, such as group reflections, collaborative storytelling, rituals or creative exercises.

Highlight common themes and experiences that emerge from the discussion, fostering a sense of connection and understanding among participants.



Handle sensitive topics



Approach sensitive topics with empathy and care. Be aware of potential triggers and be ready to intervene if the discussion becomes too intense.

Have resources available for participants who may need additional support, such as contact information for counseling services or crisis hotlines.

Encourage reflection and growth



Ask questions that encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and what they have learned from the discussion.

Empower participants by recognizing their strengths and the progress they have made in understanding their stories.

Facilitator self-care

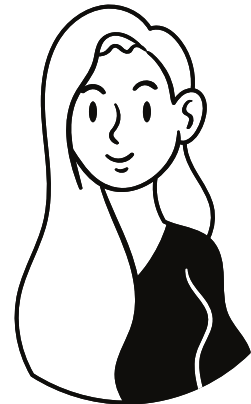
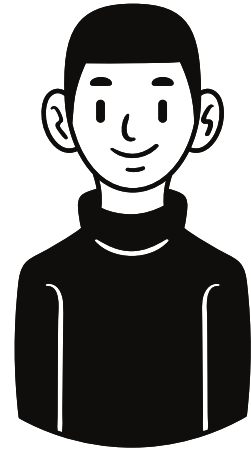
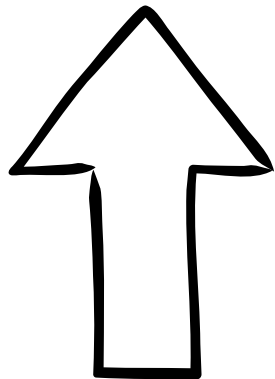


Regularly reflect on your own experiences and emotions as a facilitator. Seek supervision or peer support if needed.

Take care of your own mental and emotional well-being to remain an effective and supportive facilitator.

In a group setting, inviting each member to **recall and share** a particularly painful or bothersome event is a powerful way to begin building trust and creating a shared foundation for the group's journey.

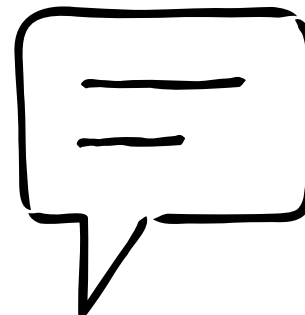
This approach allows everyone to recognize that others have also faced challenging experiences, creating a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding.

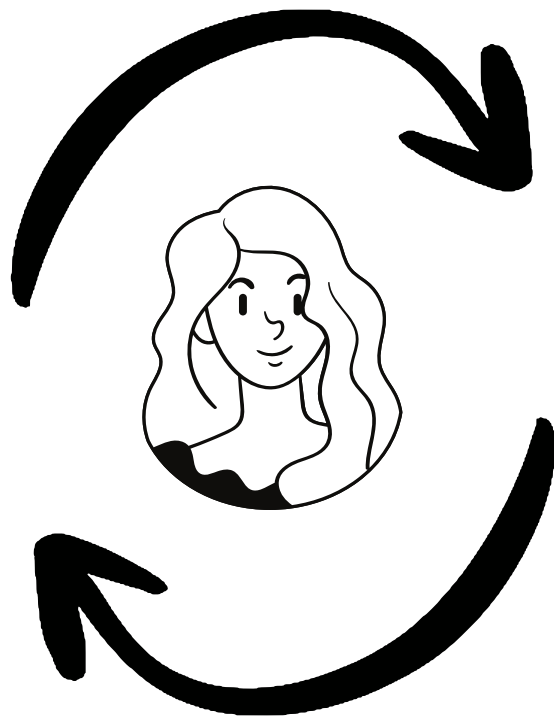


After establishing the timeline of events, the next step is to facilitate a brief **group discussion** on common themes or emotions that emerged from those events.

This discussion invites participants to reflect on connections between their experiences, helping them recognize shared feelings or challenges within the group.

Ask, “Do any of these events resonate with you or stand out?” to encourage members to engage in open, honest sharing while maintaining the focus of the discussion.

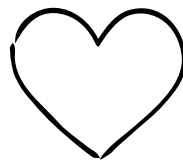




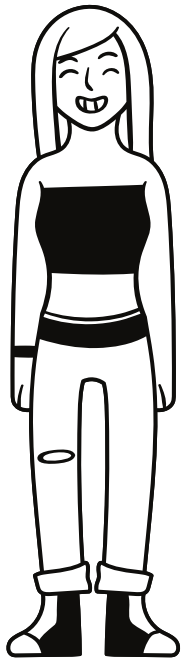
Encourage participants to **listen attentively** to others (about 70% of their focus) while also **staying aware** of their own physical and emotional responses (the remaining 30%).

Explain that tuning into their own reactions can deepen their self-understanding, as they may find that other people's stories evoke meaningful personal responses.

Ask questions such as, "As you listen to these stories, what physical sensations or emotions do you experience?"



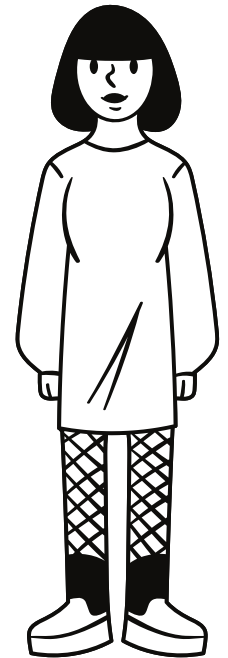
As they connect with their sensations, prompt one of them to describe these feelings **without judgment**, simply observing what emerges. You can use the totem, in that case, to mark who is the storyteller. After, pass the totem to every individual who wants to support the discussion and give a contribution. It is very important that the storyteller should feel free to express sensations, emotions and memories.



Make sure **it is not always the same people talking**. That the narratives are consistent. But it also helps those who simply want to listen to feel respected in their silence. Indulge in promoting healthy discussion, but do not overdo it or force it.

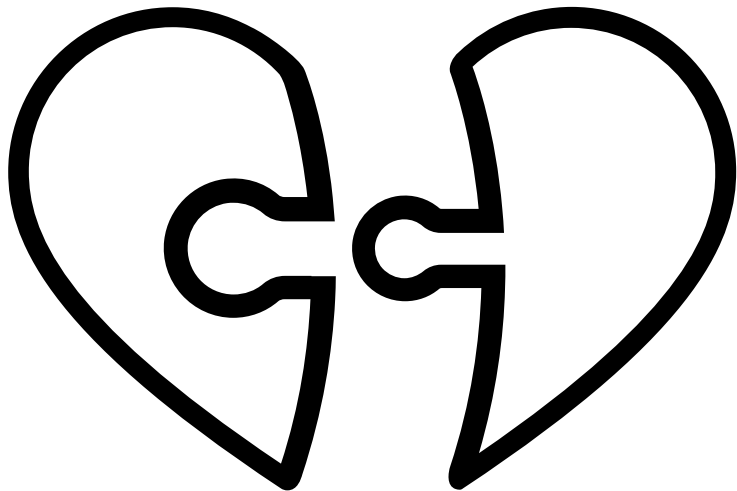
Encourage the group to **listen actively and empathetically**, without interrupting or offering advice. This practice fosters a deep sense of understanding and connection among group members.

After each person shares, **facilitate a reflective discussion** where participants can express how the shared narratives resonated with them, promoting collective healing and insight.



Encourage each member to **tune** into their body sensations and emotions, using the protocol to gauge their sense of closure or any lingering feelings. Allow space for everyone to **express** their final thoughts and feelings about the exploration process, ensuring that all voices are heard.

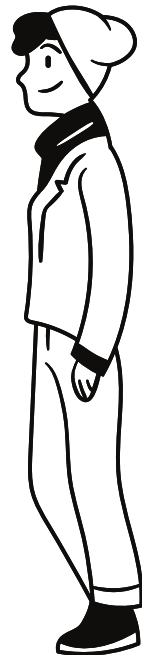
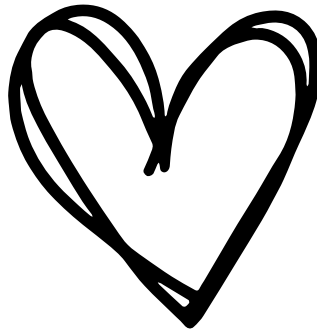
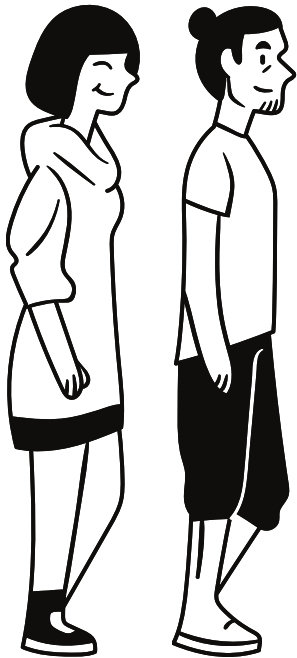
Facilitate a final discussion where the group can collectively decide if further exploration is needed or if they feel a sense of completeness.

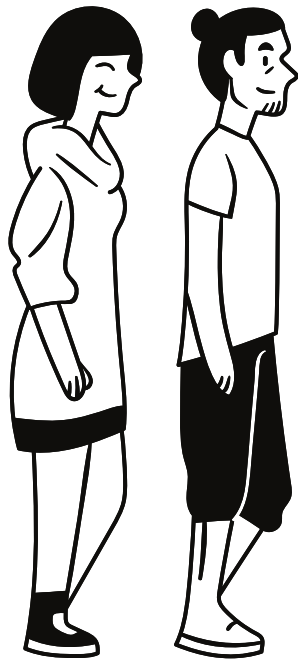


This approach not only validates individual experiences but also strengthens the group's cohesion and mutual support. By regularly assessing memory completeness through group consensus, you ensure that the process respects each member's journey, promoting a balanced and thorough exploration of their narratives.

Building group resilience and looking forward

Building resilience within a group setting is essential for empowering members to overcome challenges and look forward to a hopeful future.





Establish a safe, supportive space where group members feel valued and understood. Foster an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, encouraging open and honest communication.

Regularly highlight and celebrate the strengths and successes of group members. Acknowledge past achievements and the personal growth each member has experienced. This positive reinforcement builds confidence and resilience.

Facilitate discussions where members share their experiences of overcoming adversity. These shared narratives can inspire and strengthen the group, illustrating that resilience is possible even in the face of challenges.

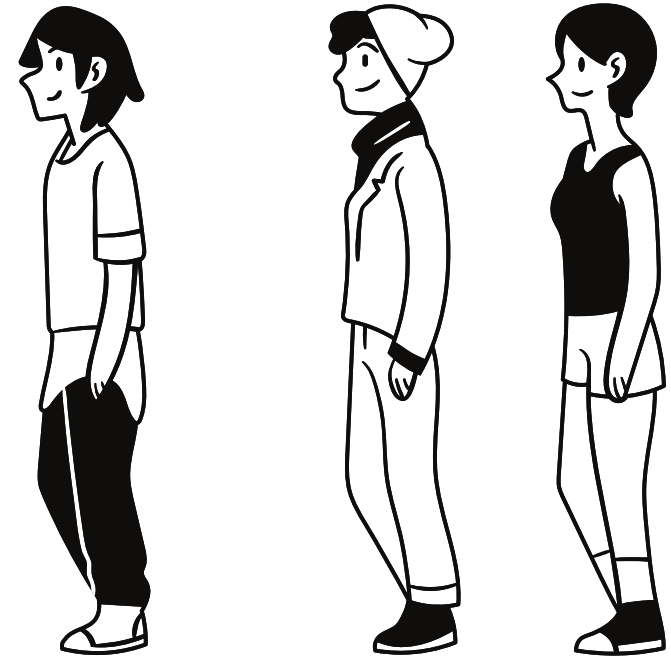
Work with the group to develop and practice coping strategies that can be used individually and collectively. Techniques such as mindfulness, deep breathing, and positive self-talk can enhance resilience and provide tools for managing stress.

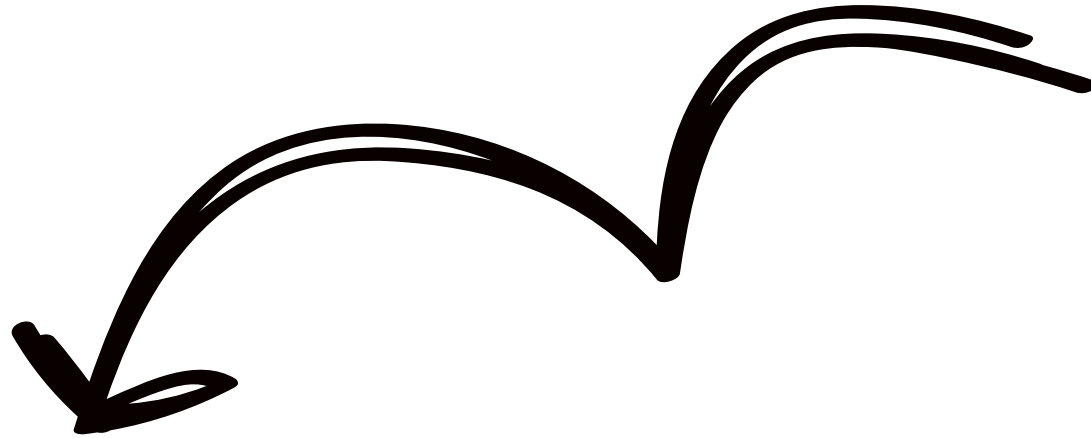
Encourage the group to set collaborative, realistic goals. These shared objectives can foster a sense of unity and purpose. Break down goals into manageable steps, celebrating progress along the way.

Instil a growth mindset within the group, emphasising that challenges are opportunities for learning and development. Encourage members to view setbacks as temporary and surmountable, fostering a resilient outlook.

Strengthen the social connections within the group by promoting supportive interactions and encouraging members to build relationships outside of therapy sessions. A strong support network is a key component of resilience.

Guide the group in envisioning a positive future. Encourage members to articulate their hopes and aspirations, and discuss the steps needed to achieve these visions. This forward-looking approach can motivate and inspire the group.





Final feedback with relaxation

The final feedback with relaxation is a key part of the group process, allowing participants to reflect on their experiences, connect with each other, and leave the session feeling calm, grounded, and supported. This closing ritual reinforces a sense of unity and completion, helping everyone to process what they've shared and learned.

The final feedback session serves several purposes:

emotional closure:

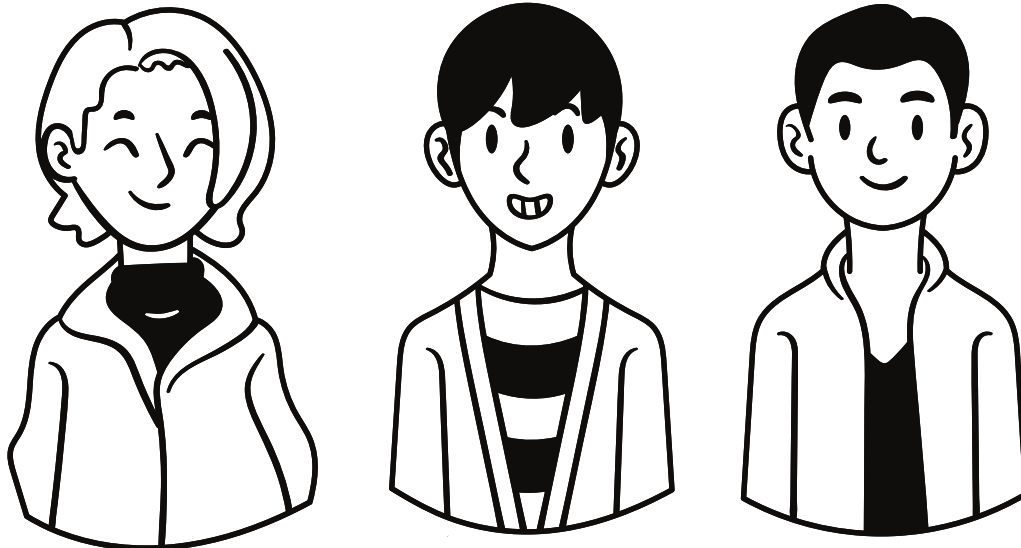
after a session where challenging or emotional topics are discussed, relaxation and feedback allow participants to re-center and transition from introspection to a sense of calm;

group connection:

it fosters a feeling of togetherness, helping participants recognize shared themes and building a sense of mutual support;

personal reflection:

by reflecting on the session, participants can consolidate insights, making it easier to carry their learnings forward.



Begin by inviting everyone to share **brief final reflections**. Ask simple, grounding questions such as, “What is one thing you’re taking away from today’s session?”

This helps participants verbalize their thoughts without diving too deeply into any unresolved feelings.

Guide the group through a relaxation exercise, such as deep breathing or a body scan. Encourage participants to close their eyes, breathe deeply, and focus on releasing any tension they may still be carrying.

You may choose to lead a short visualization, inviting the group to imagine a peaceful, comforting place.

Conclude with a few affirmations, like, “I am calm and at peace” or “I feel supported and connected.”



After the feedback session, ask if anyone noticed common themes or experiences. This can help members feel more connected, as they recognise shared struggles, triumphs, or emotions.

Language that reinforces unity, such as “we” and “us,” strengthens the sense of a collective journey.

Phrases like “We’ve each contributed to a meaningful session today” highlight their mutual support.

If possible, form a circle for the final exercise, where members can see each other and feel part of a united group. Physical proximity (if in person) can amplify this feeling of togetherness.

Thank the group for their openness and trust. Acknowledge the courage it takes to share and support each other.

Encourage them to carry the calm, reflective state from the session into their day. Remind them of any next steps or upcoming sessions, reinforcing the continuity of the process. After the relaxation, allow for a few moments of quiet. This allows participants to transition out of the reflective space and prepare to leave.

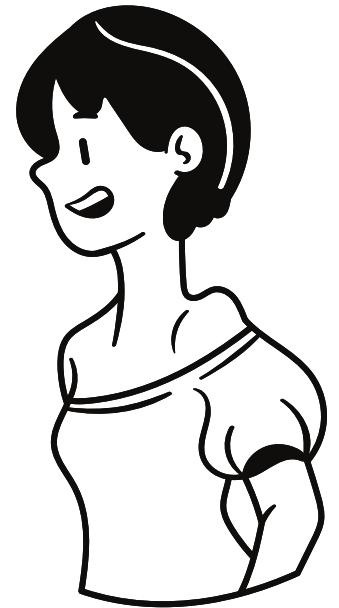


If a participant approaches you afterwards, listen briefly but avoid delving into new or unresolved topics.

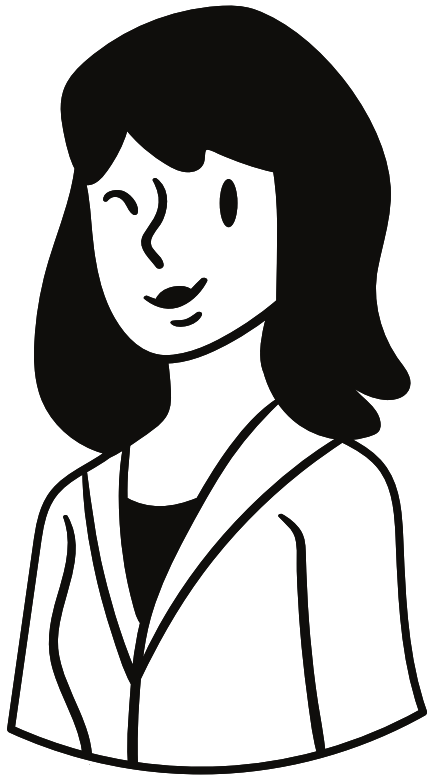
Gently redirect them to process their thoughts within the group setting or save them for the next session.

Suggest they write down any reflections or ideas that come up after the session. This gives them a productive way to engage with their thoughts without extending the session.

If someone seems unsettled, suggest grounding techniques, or if appropriate, provide resources such as mental health contacts or relaxation tools.



Here ends this manual, but starts your own journey...



You've reached the final page of this guide.
We sincerely hope it has provided you with the tools,
inspiration, and confidence you need to navigate your
experience and tackle future challenges.
Remember, the information within these pages is merely a
starting point—true learning and growth happen when you
act, stumble, learn, and connect with people.
Your journey is not just about the destination; it's about the
person you will become along the way: more open-minded,
resilient, and aware of your place in an interconnected
world.
This manual is a testament to the collaboration and
dedication that fuel the Erasmus spirit.
We wish you all the best for your adventures, your studies,
and your dreams.
Stay curious, embrace differences,
and never stop exploring.

...thank you for been with us and share this project.