HANDBOOK

ON THE INCLUSION AND SUPPORT OF HIGHLY VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE

IN INTERNATIONAL NON-FORMAL LEARNING PROGRAMMES

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

An introduction to the Ladder project

LADDER to Inclusion is a KA2 strategic partnership project of the European Union.

Ensuring the inclusion of highly vulnerable young people[1] in Erasmus+ programs is vital for their development. It fosters their social inclusion, enhances emotional and mental well-being, and builds pathways for their future success. At the same time, addressing their needs and improving their social position requires tailored strategies, complex professional support, and consistent, long-term assistance.

For this reason, Ladder to inclusion aims to empower youth workers and organizations to make international mobility programs, especially Erasmus+, more accessible and inclusive for highly vulnerable young people.

This initiative is critical because highly vulnerable young people often face significant barriers, such as a lack of resources, social isolation, and low self-esteem, that prevent them from participating in and benefiting from these valuable international opportunities.

For this reason, Ladder to Inclusion aims to empower youth workers and organizations to make international mobility programs, especially Erasmus+, more accessible and inclusive for highly vulnerable young people.

In response to the significant challenges youth organizations face in involving marginalized youth in international opportunities, LADDER brings together experienced organizations from across Europe. Our core aim is to:

- Break down barriers that prevent highly vulnerable young people from participating in international mobilities.
- Develop tailored strategies and tools that prioritize their inclusion, safety, and well-being.
- Foster personal development and improve the social position of marginalized youth through non-formal learning.
- Enhance the quality and effectiveness of youth work by creating comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

Through collaboration and shared expertise, the LADDER to Inclusion project is building pathways for the future success and social inclusion of all young people.

Youth Mobility in a nutshell

Youth Mobilities are opportunities provided to young people across Europe to engage in learning, volunteering and cultural exchange in different countries, with costs covered by EU funds. It aims to foster personal development, intercultural understanding, and active citizenship by enabling youth to gain new skills, improve language competences, and broaden their perspectives through international experiences..

Erasmus+ is the EU's flagship initiative supporting education, training, youth, and sport, promoting cooperation and mobility among participating countries. It targets young people typically aged 13 to 30, supporting formal, non-formal, and informal learning mobility. It offers not only school and university opportunities, but also the possibility to get engaged out of the school system, through youth exchanges: this represent a big inclusion opportunities for many young people who are out of the school system.

[1] The International Network for Inclusion of Associazione Joint defined "highly vulnerable young people" as those who face at least two significant barriers in life, one of which is chronic, systemic, or particularly difficult to overcome. These individuals encounter challenges far beyond those faced by young people with fewer opportunities.

However, mobility opportunities, in the field of volunteering, are offered by the **European Solidarity Corps (ESC)** programme. Under this programme, young people aged 18-30 can live a volunteering experience abroad or in-country, both individually in an organisation (2-12 months) or as members of a team (2 weeks – 2 months).

Youth mobilities represent an opportunity for:

- **Personal growth and confidence:** chance to live independently abroad, building self-confidence, adaptability, and resilience in new environments.
- **Intercultural understanding**: participants engage directly with peers from diverse cultures, breaking down stereotypes and fostering openness, respect, and a sense of European identity.
- **Skill development**: develop practical and soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership.
- **Language improvement:** immersion in a foreign country naturally improves language skills.
- **Active citizenship and Civic engagement:** Erasmus+ encourages young people to participate in democratic life, understand European values, and become socially engaged citizens who can influence their communities and society at large.
- **Inclusion and equal access:** the programme supports young people with fewer opportunities (e.g., from disadvantaged backgrounds, refugees), ensuring mobility is accessible and inclusive for all.
- **Networking and long-term connections:** lasting friendships and professional networks across Europe, opening doors for future collaborations, studies, or work opportunities.
- **Youth empowerment:** young people are often involved in planning and implementing their mobility projects, which fosters leadership, responsibility, and a stronger voice in shaping their own experiences and futures.
- **Support for youth workers:** Erasmus+ also supports youth workers' professional development, indirectly benefiting young people by improving the quality of youth work and support they receive

At national level, youth mobility projects are managed by National Agencies, which are national extensions of the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).
You can find the contacts of the National Agencies in the EU in this list[2].

Inclusion: what do we mean?

Inclusion is a fundamental value of the LADDER project. It means creating spaces and opportunities where all young people—especially those facing multiple and long-term disadvantages—can access, participate in, and benefit from international mobility experiences.

Local Level

At the local level, inclusion starts with recognising the barriers young people face in their daily lives—such as poverty, discrimination, unstable family conditions, or limited access to education and information. Many young people don't even consider international mobility as an option. This is why local youth workers play a key role: they build trust, prepare participants, involve families and communities, and support young people through every phase of the process.

International Level

At the international level, inclusion means designing mobility projects that are accessible, responsive, and supportive. It includes:

- adapting communication and facilitation to different needs and learning styles,
- ensuring accessible logistics,
- creating safe and respectful group dynamics, and
- involving young people not only as participants, but as co-creators of the experience.

[2]This page provides contact details and links to the official National Agencies responsible for managing Erasmus+ in each participating country. These agencies offer information, support, and guidance for applicants and beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ programme.

Inclusive mobility goes beyond inviting disadvantaged youth—it means restructuring the environment so they can truly thrive.

Who Are Highly Vulnerable Young People (HVYP)?

The LADDER project uses the definition from the International Network for Inclusion of Associazione Joint which describes "highly vulnerable young people":

> *as those who face at least two significant barriers in life, one of which is chronic, systemic, or particularly difficult to overcome.*

These individuals encounter challenges far beyond those faced by young people with fewer opportunities. They often need more preparation, deeper support, and long-term mentoring to participate safely and meaningfully in mobility.

Inclusion in Erasmus+

The Erasmus+ Programme names Inclusion and Diversity as one of its key priorities. It calls on youth organisations to go beyond minimum access, and to actively remove barriers—especially for those facing the greatest exclusion.
Inclusion is not a fixed target—it's a continuous commitment to adapt, listen, and create space where everyone feels they belong.

About this Handbook

This Handbook is designed for youth workers and organisations aiming to make their mobility projects more accessible, inclusive and safer for Highly Vulnerable Young People. Its goal is to create a learning environment that is as responsive as possible to the specific needs of this target group.

The structure of this Handbook has been carefully designed to meet the practical needs of youth workers and organisations working with highly vulnerable young people in mobility projects, being both comprehensive and flexible. It draws on the collective expertise of practitioners involved in the Ladder project during the Experience Sharing Seminar held in Italy in February 2025, and partially tested during the Youth Exchange "Find your voice through creativity", implemented in March 2025 in Italy.

The core chapters of the Handbook are thematic, each addressing a crucial aspect of inclusive youth mobility. For example, there is an in-depth exploration of intercultural diversity, focusing on how to create genuinely inclusive environments that respect and celebrate the full spectrum of participants' identities and backgrounds. *Each chapter combines theoretical context with practical tools, methods, and real-life examples, making it possible to use the manual either as a step-by-step guide or to dip into specific topics as needed.* Good practices and reflective questions are included throughout to encourage critical thinking and self-assessment among youth workers. The handbook also provides toolkits and methodologies for addressing common challenges, ensuring that every section is actionable and grounded in lived experience.

Overall, the Handbook is designed to be a living resource: it supports both newcomers and experienced practitioners, offering guidance that is adaptable to different contexts and evolving needs. Whether used in its entirety or as a reference for specific issues, it aims to empower youth workers to create safer, more accessible, and truly inclusive mobility experiences for highly vulnerable young people.

Chapter 2

ADDRESSING INTERCULTURAL DIVERSITY IN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH MOBILITIES

Introduction & context

This chapter is rooted in the lived experience of the partners involved in the LADDER project, especially during the initial youth exchange in Galbiate (Italy), which revealed both the richness and challenges of cultural diversity in international youth settings. Drawing on this experience, the following sections explore how to foster real inclusion, embrace cultural differences, and build supportive intercultural communities in mobility projects—especially when working with young people with fewer opportunities.

Diversity

Diversity refers to the wide range of characteristics that make individuals unique. In the context of international youth mobilities, it encompasses far more than nationality or ethnicity. It includes differences in socioeconomic background; gender identity and expression; sexual orientation; physical, cognitive, and emotional abilities; educational attainment and learning styles; language and communication preferences; migration status and legal background; religious beliefs and cultural traditions; family responsibilities and caregiving roles; experiences related to mental health and trauma and beyond. This list is not exhaustive. Diversity is dynamic and constantly evolving. New identities, experiences, and ways of being continue to emerge as society grows and changes. It is essential to remain open, curious, and responsive to the full spectrum of human diversity—recognizing that every individual brings unique value, perspectives, and needs that may not yet be fully visible or named.

These aspects of diversity shape how young people access opportunities, engage in group dynamics, and experience inclusion. Recognizing and actively addressing this diversity is essential to designing youth mobilities that are equitable, meaningful, and transformative.

When individuals from diverse backgrounds come together—culturally, socially, economically, or personally—the group becomes richer in perspective and creativity. Different ways of thinking, learning, and expressing contribute to a more dynamic and reflective exchange experience. Diversity is a source of strength, but it also requires intentional preparation. Facilitators must be aware of varying expectations, communication styles, learning speeds, and participation patterns.

Importantly, diversity must also be reflected in the facilitation team. Representation in terms of nationality, gender identity, age, lived experience, or ability helps all participants feel seen and understood. This not only enhances inclusion, but also models a more equitable form of leadership.

However, diversity is not automatically inclusive. International mobility projects are often designed with mainstream assumptions in mind—such as fluency in English, prior travel experience, or cultural norms around behavior and leadership—which can unintentionally marginalize those who do not fit that mold. Therefore, it is not enough to say "everyone is welcome." Inclusion requires proactive adaptation of spaces, activities, and attitudes to ensure that each participant feels safe, respected, and empowered to engage fully.

This process starts even before day one, during the preparation phase, when group leaders and sending organizations should already begin addressing these aspects. Facilitators should create opportunities to learn about participants' needs, strengths, and preferred ways of learning. Asking simple questions - "What helps you feel comfortable?" "What kind of support do you need?"- can open the door to deeper engagement. It is equally important to use diverse methods of communication, including visual aids, gestures, or demonstrations, especially in multilingual or mixed-literacy groups.

Participation must go beyond presence. Participants should be given meaningful roles—not just as guests or observers, but as contributors and co-creators. Inviting them to facilitate parts of the program, share their knowledge, or help shape the activities reinforces belonging and builds confidence. Specific attention should also be paid to including participants with functional diversity or mental health challenges. This may involve offering quiet areas, adjusting the pace of sessions, or simply being flexible when someone needs to step out or engage differently.

Lastly, activities that address sexual diversity, gender roles, and cultural representation should be intentionally included in the program. These topics are often underrepresented, yet they are key to fostering awareness, mutual respect, and critical reflection within diverse groups.

In the end, being inclusive means creating a space where no one feels they have to hide or change who they are to belong. It means recognizing that each individual brings value—and that their presence is not just accepted but essential to building a stronger, more connected group.

Good practice

The activities that were managed and organised by the participants rather than the facilitators served to reinforce their sense of belonging and contributed to strengthening the bonds between them.
One helpful idea is to let participants lead small parts of each day, like starting a morning game or sharing a personal story. This gives them more confidence and helps them feel they are part of the group, not just guests. It also shows that everyone has something to offer, no matter their background or language skills.

Reflection for youth workers

Ask yourself:

- Who is represented in the group—and who is missing? Why might that be?
- Are we acknowledging and valuing different types of diversity (e.g., cultural, social, linguistic, ability, gender, sexual orientation, educational background)?
- Do our facilitation methods allow for different learning styles and communication preferences?
- Are participants encouraged to share their stories and cultural identities in a way that feels safe and empowering?
- Does the composition of the facilitation team reflect the diversity of the group?
- Are our assumptions about "normal" behaviour or participation influenced by dominant cultural norms?

Inclusivity

Inclusivity is the intentional practice of creating environments where all individuals—regardless of background, identity, or ability—can fully participate, feel respected, and contribute meaningfully. It is not enough to simply state that "everyone is welcome." True inclusion requires recognizing both structural and interpersonal barriers—and actively working to remove or reduce them.

In the context of international youth mobilities, inclusivity means moving beyond generic openness and ensuring that each young person has the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to engage in a way that feels safe, authentic, and empowering. This is especially critical when working with highly vulnerable young people (HVYP), who may face intersecting challenges such as poverty, trauma, discrimination, legal insecurity, or limited educational experience. For these participants, inclusion often begins long before the mobility itself—with careful outreach, preparation, trust-building, and accompaniment.

When working with young people who have difficult backgrounds, it is important to give extra time for preparation. Many of them may feel nervous, unsure, or even scared about joining an international group. They might worry about being different, not speaking the language, or not having experience. Organizers can help by having one-on-one conversations before the exchange, using clear and friendly language, and offering extra support if needed. A short online meeting, a welcome video, or a small group chat before traveling can make a big difference. Feeling prepared helps participants arrive with more confidence and lowers anxiety.

True inclusion can be understood across **three key dimensions**:

1. **Structural inclusion:** ensuring that physical spaces, schedules, materials, transportation, and funding mechanisms are accessible to everyone.
2. **Relational inclusion:** fostering a group dynamic where participants feel seen, heard, and valued—not only by facilitators, but also by their peers.
3. **Participatory inclusion**: actively involving young people in shaping the process, rather than simply inviting them to take part in a pre-designed program.

Moreover, inclusivity goes beyond tolerance—it is about actively embracing difference. When participants are invited to co-design activities, take part in decision-making, and contribute their ideas, it builds trust, boosts motivation, and strengthens their sense of belonging.

All activities should be designed or adapted with accessibility in mind. It is good practice to include awareness sessions on functional diversity and mental health early in the program to help build empathy and understanding. In past experiences, the most impactful moments often came from sessions or activities suggested and facilitated by the participants themselves—these not only improved communication and cohesion but also created a stronger sense of shared responsibility and collective ownership.

Another key aspect often overlooked is the role of cultural humility in promoting inclusion. Cultural humility goes beyond awareness—it involves a continuous self-evaluation and openness to learning from others, recognizing that one cannot fully understand another's experience but can remain curious and respectful. Facilitators should be encouraged to model this humility by openly acknowledging when they don't know something, and by being willing to adapt their approach based on participant feedback. This vulnerability can foster deeper trust and dismantle power hierarchies between facilitators and participants.

Ultimately, inclusion is not about lowering expectations, but about removing unnecessary obstacles and ensuring that every participant—especially those from underrepresented or marginalized backgrounds—can fully engage, contribute, and thrive.

Reflection for youth workers

Ask yourself:

- Are all participants actively engaged—or are some physically present but socially or emotionally disconnected?
- Do we know what support each participant needs in order to feel safe, heard, and included?
- Are we proactively removing barriers to participation (e.g., language, mobility, emotional safety)?
- Do we offer multiple ways to contribute beyond verbal or written expression?
- Are we unintentionally favouring the more confident, outspoken, or experienced participants?
- Are our activities and spaces accessible to people with functional diversity or mental health challenges?
- Do participants have real opportunities to shape the group process, or are they simply following along?
- Are we prepared to adapt our structure and expectations in response to the group's actual needs?

Are we really inclusive?

Inclusion is often stated as a fundamental value in international youth work—but how often do we pause to critically examine what it actually looks like in practice? Declaring that "everyone is welcome", as we already mentioned, is not the same as ensuring that every young person truly feels welcome, safe, and empowered to participate on equal terms.

In diverse youth mobilities, participants come from a wide range of countries, cultures, and life circumstances. This diversity enriches the experience by bringing multiple perspectives, lived realities, and new ways of thinking. It challenges assumptions, inspires creativity, and transforms group dynamics. But diversity alone does not equal inclusion. The presence of difference must be matched with intentional efforts to remove barriers and promote full participation.

Real inclusion requires us to look beyond the visible markers of identity, such as nationality or language, and consider the deeper, often invisible factors that shape how young people engage. It means considering personal histories, mental health, confidence levels, literacy, and the often invisible effects of trauma or marginalization, among other factors.

From our experience in this and other projects, we've learned that inclusion can be silently shaped by many dynamics. Some participants are naturally confident and adapt easily, while others need more time, space, or support to feel secure enough to engage. Language barriers can quickly create power imbalances, especially when English proficiency becomes a gatekeeper to full involvement. Facilitators may unintentionally favour those who speak more, take initiative, or conform to dominant social norms—leaving others to feel side-lined, even if physically present.
It's also important to allow space for mistakes—especially in diverse groups. When people come from different backgrounds, misunderstandings will happen.

Someone might say something that feels strange or offensive to another. Instead of blaming or shaming, facilitators can use these moments to pause, reflect, and support dialogue. This means helping participants listen to each other with care, and reminding them that we are all learning. Making a mistake does not mean someone is bad—it means they are human. What matters is the willingness to understand and grow. When young people see that it's safe to make mistakes, they feel more free to speak, share, and explore.

It is not uncommon for the most vulnerable young people to be left behind entirely. Many never reach the application stage due to limited access to information, social networks, or digital tools. Others are excluded by rigid selection criteria that prioritize fluency, previous experience, or formal motivation letters. This highlights a crucial distinction: performative inclusion says everyone is invited; transformative inclusion ensures everyone can actually attend, engage, and thrive.

Performative inclusion refers to surface-level efforts that signal openness or diversity—such as using inclusive language or displaying diverse images—without addressing the deeper structural barriers that prevent equal participation. It often centers appearances rather than impact, and can give the illusion of equity while real imbalances remain unchallenged.

Transformative inclusion, on the other hand, involves a conscious restructuring of processes, environments, and attitudes to ensure all young people—especially those with fewer opportunities—can genuinely access, shape, and benefit from the experience. It demands critical reflection, redistribution of power, and a commitment to listening and adapting based on the actual needs of the participants. Transformative inclusion is not just about inviting everyone to the table; it's about making sure the table works for all who are seated at it.

Inclusion must therefore be designed into every phase of a youth mobility—from outreach and recruitment, to facilitation and follow-up. It also needs to be reflected in the diversity of the facilitation team, ensuring participants see themselves represented and understood. When leaders bring a variety of cultural backgrounds, gender identities, abilities, and life experiences, it sends a clear message: "You belong here—not just in theory, but in practice."

However, it remains difficult to measure inclusion objectively. The loudest voices are often the easiest to hear, but they don't always reflect the experiences of everyone in the group. Evaluating inclusion requires listening to those who hesitate, struggle, or step back.

Inclusion is not a box to tick. It is an ongoing, dynamic process that requires openness, self-awareness, and a willingness to adapt. The question is not simply "are we open to everyone?" but rather: "are we creating the conditions for everyone to show up fully and be part of the experience in a way that is meaningful for them?"

Key insight

One of the most powerful lessons from the LADDER youth exchange was that real inclusion happens when young people don't feel they have to change who they are to fit in, but instead feel that their unique identity and perspective are actively contributing to the group experience.

Inclusion is a mindset and a continuous process—it's not something that can be checked off a list, but something we must commit to re-evaluating and improving at every step.

Reflection for youth workers

Ask yourself:

- Are we reaching and engaging the young people who are usually excluded or underrepresented? If not, what's preventing that?
- How accessible is our project at every stage—for those with limited language skills, low literacy, financial constraints, or neurodiverse needs?
- Are we offering participants not just presence, but power—the chance to shape, lead, and co-create?
- Do our facilitation and group dynamics allow space for quieter or less confident participants to express themselves comfortably?
- Are we unintentionally valuing certain types of communication, confidence, or leadership over others?
- When someone doesn't participate fully, do we ask ourselves why, or do we assume disinterest or lack of motivation?
- Is our inclusion work responsive and flexible—or are we applying fixed solutions to complex and evolving needs?
- Are we practicing transformative inclusion, or are we staying at a surface level?

Methods and strategies

- Track participation trends: Who speaks? Who volunteers? Who stays silent?
- Use varied facilitation styles: include small groups, one-on-one sharing, non-verbal activities, and anonymous tools.
- Use visuals, gestures, demonstrations.
- Rotate roles and offer leadership opportunities.
- Offer different leadership roles: not everyone wants to be on stage. Logistics, creativity, peer support—value all contributions.
- Balance power in the group: invite feedback from those who may feel intimidated to speak publicly.
- Peer-support pairs (e.g., buddy systems for language or emotional support).
- Diversify access to opportunities: work closely with grassroots organizations to reach youth who don't usually apply for international programs.
- Regularly ask your team and your participants: "What could help someone feel more included right now?"

Good practice

During a youth mobility, using a non-verbal system (e.g., 1-2-3 fingers for comfort with physical contact) helped participants' express boundaries safely.
When some facilitator or participant was making a mistake or misunderstood something during an activity, the rest of the group started clapping and cheering him/her up and it was very helpful to normalize mistakes and to take them as an opportunity for improvement.

What is culture? Understanding cultural differences

Culture can be broadly understood as the system of values, beliefs, customs, behaviours, and symbols that a group of people share and that shape their worldview and interactions. It influences how we communicate, express emotions, solve problems, define respect, relate to authority, and understand concepts like time, space, gender roles, and community.

In the context of international youth mobility, culture is often mistakenly reduced to nationality or ethnicity. However, it is much more complex. Culture also encompasses regional, generational, linguistic, religious, socioeconomic, and subcultural identities, among others. For example, a young person from a rural area may experience and interpret group dynamics in a very different way than someone raised in an urban environment—even if they come from the same country. Similarly, personal and family traditions, religious practices, and local customs all contribute to shaping how young people think, feel, and behave in group settings.

Understanding cultural differences is not about memorizing etiquette or avoiding mistakes. Rather, it's about cultivating cultural awareness and sensitivity—the ability to recognize that others may see and navigate the world through entirely different lenses, influenced by their own unique life experiences and environments. Recognizing this diversity is key to building mutual respect and trust within a group.

In diverse group settings, cultural differences often become visible through everyday interactions. What one participant considers normal—like direct eye contact, physical closeness, or speaking openly about emotions—might make another feel uncomfortable, disrespected, or unsafe. Similarly, attitudes towards punctuality, personal space, feedback, or even participation in group activities can vary widely between cultures. These differences can easily lead to misunderstandings or tension—but they also offer rich opportunities for learning, growth, and intercultural dialogue.

Facilitators play a key role in navigating this terrain. It is essential to acknowledge cultural diversity openly and respectfully from the beginning of any program. Instead of avoiding friction, facilitators should create safe spaces for participants to share, reflect on, and discuss their own cultural norms—and to explore how those norms shape their behaviours, communication styles, and expectations in the group.

It's helpful to remind the group that no one holds complete knowledge about their own culture. We are all continuously learning—even about ourselves. Often, we only become aware of certain habits or traditions when we see them in contrast with those of others. This is why sharing experiences and asking questions with respect and curiosity can be such a powerful learning tool.

Recognizing that there is no "better" or "worse" culture—only different ways of living, seeing, and doing—fosters a group culture based on curiosity, empathy, and mutual learning. This approach has proven essential in the LADDER project, where partners from different countries and backgrounds have worked together with a shared commitment to intercultural understanding and inclusion.

Key insight

Culture is not static. It is dynamic, personal, and evolving. Participants should be encouraged to see themselves not only as "carriers" of their culture, but as individuals who actively shape and reinterpret it.

By exploring cultural differences with openness and curiosity—not judgment—we move from simply coexisting in diversity to truly learning from it. This is a crucial step in creating inclusive, respectful, and enriching international mobility experiences.

Reflection for youth workers

Ask yourself:

- How do I interpret silence, punctuality, or disagreement?
- Do I interpret silence or disagreement through my own cultural lens?
- Am I assuming "normal" is universal?
- What assumptions do I make about what is "normal" in communication or group behaviour?
- How do I react when a participant's behaviour challenges my expectations?
- Are we creating a space where different cultural expressions are acknowledged and respected?

Methods and strategies

- Cultural bingo: fun icebreaker to explore habits and traditions.
- Cultural mapping: create visual maps of cultural values (e.g., attitudes toward time, hierarchy, gender roles) to compare and reflect on different perspectives.
- Story circles: invite participants to share moments when their cultural background helped or hindered their understanding in a new context.
- Stereotype exploration: use guided activities to deconstruct assumptions and highlight the diversity within cultures.
- Culture beyond borders: discuss how family traditions, religion, urban/rural context, or subcultures (e.g., hip-hop, gaming, activism) also shape identity.

Creating community and safer space in a diverse group

Building a genuine sense of community and safety is a foundational element of any successful youth mobility, especially when working with diverse groups. For young people with fewer opportunities—who may come with previous experiences of exclusion, discrimination, or trauma—this is not a bonus, but a necessity.

A "safer space" goes beyond physical comfort. It refers to an environment where participants feel emotionally secure, free from judgment, and respected in their identity, values, and boundaries. In intercultural groups, safety also involves explicitly addressing differences in communication styles, physical interaction, emotional expression, and concepts of respect and privacy.

Some participants may arrive with low trust or confidence, especially if they have faced rejection or exclusion in the past. For them, it's not easy to join group games, speak in front of others, or share personal stories. That's why it helps to create "entry points" into the group that feel low-pressure and safe. For example, offering quiet roles like timekeeper, photographer, or mood observer gives them a way to participate without needing to perform or speak. Facilitators can also check in privately and gently ask, "What would help you feel more comfortable?" These simple actions show that every person matters—even those who need more time to feel ready.

Setting the tone from the beginning:

From the very first day, facilitators should work with the group to co-create a shared code of conduct or group agreement. This process allows everyone to contribute to defining what kind of environment they want to build together. It also introduces the key idea that participation includes the right to set boundaries.

Agreements should cover topics such as: respect for all identities and experiences; openness to difference; active listening; respect for personal space and consent; freedom to speak - or not to speak; zero tolerance for discrimination or harassment; etc.

These principles should not be imposed, but built with the group through dialogue, so that everyone understands and feels ownership of them.

Physical boundaries and cultural sensitivity:

In intercultural settings, behaviours around touch, proximity, eye contact, and gestures vary significantly. What feels like a friendly pat on the back to one person may feel invasive or disrespectful to another. Some participants may come from cultures where physical closeness is a sign of warmth and trust; others may find it uncomfortable due to personal, cultural, or trauma-related reasons.

Facilitators should acknowledge these differences early on to normalize diverse responses, encouraging participants not to make assumptions about others' comfort levels. Emphasize that asking for consent is a form of respect, not rejection, and discuss that consent is ongoing and can be withdrawn at any time-"yes" once doesn't mean "yes" forever.

A useful tool we used during the LADDER exchange was the "finger system" for non-verbal consent. At the beginning of the program, each participant could show how comfortable they were with physical contact by holding up 1, 2, or 3 fingers:

1 finger =
No physical contact, please.

2 fingers =
Handshakes or high-fives are okay.

3 fingers =
Hugs and friendly touch are welcome.

This system made it easy for everyone to express their personal boundaries without pressure or awkwardness. It also reminded the group that comfort levels are different for everyone—and that it's okay to change your mind at any time. Consent is not a one-time thing; it's something we check in on regularly. Using this method helped create a safer, more respectful environment for everyone.

Emotional safety and belonging:

Creating emotional safety is just as important as managing physical boundaries. This means allowing time for people to settle into the group dynamic at their own pace; validating emotions without rushing to fix or minimize them; encouraging empathy and curiosity over judgment; making space for silence and non-verbal contributions; offering individual support or private check-ins when needed... and taking all other actions necessary to ensure that each participant feels seen, heard, and respected throughout the process.

Some young people may take more time to open up. That's okay. Not everyone feels safe in a group right away, especially if they have faced bullying, discrimination, or rejection before. Facilitators should not rush this process or push people to talk or participate too fast. It's more helpful to create a calm, respectful space and let people join at their own pace. Quiet people are still learning, watching, and feeling the group energy. Their silence does not mean they are not involved—it might mean they are taking care of themselves or waiting until they feel ready.

Encouraging mutual care - where participants look out for one another, not just for themselves - helps transform the group from a collection of individuals into a real community.

The concept of safer spaces—especially in relation to risk management, safeguarding, and trauma-informed approaches—will be explored in more detail in a dedicated chapter later in this handbook.

It's also valuable to intentionally recognize and validate different cultural expressions of care and connection. In some cultures, offering help quietly or being physically present without speaking is a strong gesture of solidarity. In others, verbal encouragement or expressive emotional support is more common. Creating space for all forms of relational expression—and making them visible in group reflections—helps build a sense of community that honors the diversity of emotional languages.

Key insight

A safe and inclusive group space is not built by chance—it is built through conscious choices, shared agreements, and ongoing care. When participants feel they can show up fully - without having to defend, hide, or adapt their identity - they not only feel safer but also more willing to connect, take risks, and grow.

Reflection for youth workers

Ask yourself:

- Have we co-created group agreements with input from all participants?
- How do we handle boundary-crossing or discomfort when it arises?
- Are different comfort levels with touch, space, and emotional sharing respected and normalized?
- Are we modelling consent - by asking before touching, hugging, or sharing personal stories?
- Are there spaces and structures in place for private support when someone feels overwhelmed?

Methods and strategies

- Addressing all these topics openly, with humor and empathy, can help ease tension, avoid awkward situations, and foster a shared understanding of respectful boundaries.
- Group agreement poster: visualize agreements and revisit them regularly.
- Personal space exercise: invite participants to physically demonstrate their comfort zone and explain what feels okay for them.
- Consent cards: distribute color-coded cards or icons to signal physical boundaries.
- Silent signals: create and agree on non-verbal signs to express discomfort or the need for space.
- Community circles: use regular check-ins in a circle format to build emotional trust and group cohesion.

Communication barriers

In international youth mobilities, communication is not only about language—it's about access, expression, and understanding. While language barriers are often the most visible obstacle, communication challenges can also stem from differences in expression styles, confidence, literacy levels, emotional readiness, or neurodivergence.

When participants cannot understand or express themselves clearly, it can lead to frustration, isolation, or disengagement. These barriers often reinforce existing inequalities, as those who speak the dominant language (often English) or who are more confident communicators gain more influence in the group. Others may withdraw or feel less valuable—not because they have less to say, but because the environment doesn't support their way of expressing it.
There is a strong link between language, power, and participation, and in many exchanges, participants with stronger English skills often unintentionally dominate group conversations.

This can create unequal dynamics, especially in the early days. Facilitators and leaders should be mindful of this and take proactive steps to redistribute space and power. They can rotate spokespersons in group work; assign roles that don't require language (e.g., timekeeper, visual artist, mood tracker); use bilingual team leaders or peer translators, especially in the first days, to support integration; repeat instructions slowly, using gestures and visuals, and checking understanding in multiple ways; encourage informal peer support systems where participants can help translate or explain concepts in small groups; etc.

It's important to note that not all participants need to speak English, and sometimes the most impactful exchanges happen without words. What matters most is creating multiple, equally valued ways to communicate. Also important: to notice body language and energy in the room. Sometimes, people smile or nod even if they don't understand, just to avoid standing out. Others might stay quiet because they don't feel safe to speak in another language. Facilitators can gently ask if the message was clear, or invite someone to explain it in their own words. Using drawings, role play, or physical movement can help everyone understand better. This way, we don't only focus on words but on the message and the feeling behind them.

> Effective communication is not just about speaking—
> it's about making sure everyone is heard.

Key insight

Communication is not only about language proficiency—it's about access, connection, and respect. When participants feel understood, even without perfect words, they are more likely to engage, build confidence, and contribute authentically. Reducing communication barriers is not about simplifying the content—it's about expanding the methods so that every voice can be heard.

Facilitators should also remain sensitive to participants with neurodivergent communication styles, such as those on the autism spectrum or with processing disorders. These individuals may need more time to formulate responses, prefer written to spoken communication, or struggle with group discussions. Simple adjustments like providing written prompts ahead of time, allowing extra silence after questions, or offering alternative formats for sharing ideas can significantly improve their engagement. Inclusivity in communication means designing for cognitive diversity—not just linguistic diversity.

Reflection for youth workers

Ask yourself:

- Who is doing most of the talking—and who remains silent?
- Are we assuming participants understand, just because they nod or smile?
- Are we using vocabulary and pacing that everyone can follow?
- Are we offering multiple ways to participate beyond speaking?
- Are language differences creating unintended power imbalances?

Methods and strategies

To embrace and celebrate cultural differences, it's essential to create intentional moments of sharing, listening, and expression—in many forms. These activities help break through language limitations and create trust through alternative channels of communication.

- **Intercultural evening**: each group presents aspects of their country, region, or identity - through food, music, dance, traditional clothing, or games. This helps break stereotypes and encourages connection beyond language.
- **Language games:** interactive activities where participants teach each other useful or funny phrases in their native languages. It promotes mutual curiosity, reduces pressure, and encourages laughter and connection.
- **Storytelling circles:** in small groups, participants share personal stories related to identity, family, migration, or local traditions. Use visuals, gestures, or objects to support understanding. Facilitators or peers can act as informal translators.
- **Art workshops:** creative, non-verbal expression (e.g., painting, collage, theatre, sculpture, movement) offers powerful ways to explore identity, emotions, and community across language divides.
- **Visual journals or symbol cards:** participants express how they feel through drawings, emoji-style cards, or symbolic objects instead of words.
- **Intercultural debate:** groups explore cultural dilemmas (e.g., gender roles, public affection, punctuality) from different cultural perspectives. Use clear language support and provide optional written materials in participants' native languages.
- **Movement-based or body expression activities:** exercises like mirroring, role-play, or body sculpture allow for shared understanding through non-verbal forms.

Building bridges

In the early days of a youth mobility, especially when working with a diverse group, communication can feel challenging and connections may take time to form. But often, bridges are built through the most universal forms of expression—music, sport, food, laughter, and shared moments.
During the LADDER youth exchange, football and music became key tools for connection. They offered non-verbal ways for participants to interact, collaborate, and bond across linguistic or cultural divides. Singing together, dancing, kicking a ball around, or simply listening to each other's favourite songs created moments of joy, trust, and equality.

As the days passed, many participants found creative ways to communicate—through mimics, body language, translation apps, drawing, or simply sharing objects and gestures. These informal, spontaneous interactions were often more impactful than structured dialogue. They helped break down barriers, ease tension, and lay the foundation for deeper understanding.
These small habits help the group feel more united and give a sense of rhythm and belonging. They also make space for everyone to share a little piece of themselves in a relaxed way, even if they don't talk much during activities. Giving time for fun, unplanned moments is very important. These can happen while cooking together, playing games, or just sitting and talking. Many strong friendships start during these quiet, relaxed times. Try not to plan every hour—leave some open space for natural connections to grow.

Key insight

The most powerful connections often happen outside the workshop space—on the dance floor, in the football field, during shared meals, or through simple gestures of care. Building bridges means creating space for spontaneous human connection, where participants feel safe to be themselves, explore common ground, and appreciate each other beyond the labels.

Reflection for youth workers

Ask yourself:

- What shared activities can help participants connect beyond words?
- Are we leaving enough unstructured time for informal bonding?
- Do we recognize and value non-verbal forms of connection as part of the learning process?
- Are we creating space for participants to contribute their own culture, interests, or talents to the group dynamic?

Methods and strategies

- **Shared playlist:** ask each participant to contribute a favourite song to a group playlist—use it during breaks or energizers.
- **Intercultural football or group games:** use physical, cooperative games that require minimal explanation but foster teamwork.
- **Talent night or open mic**: let participants share music, poems, dances, or jokes from their cultural background.
- **Common interests wall:** early in the week, create a poster where participants can write or draw hobbies they enjoy—visual overlaps spark conversation.
- **Creative challenges**: organize small team activities that involve building something together (e.g., a sculpture, a skit, a flag)—no language required.
- **Free time with purpose**: encourage informal bonding by providing sports equipment, art supplies, or games during breaks.

Embracing cultural differences

In a truly intercultural youth mobility, the goal is not to ignore cultural differences or pretend they don't matter, but to welcome them as a resource for learning, dialogue, and personal growth. Embracing cultural differences means shifting from mere tolerance to active curiosity, empathy, and mutual respect.

Differences in communication styles, time perception, emotional expression, authority dynamics, gender roles, or conflict resolution can sometimes generate misunderstandings, discomfort, or even conflict in a group. But when these differences are approached with openness rather than judgment, they become opportunities to question assumptions, expand perspectives, and deepen relationships.

It's normal to feel confused or uncomfortable sometimes when facing cultural differences. That's part of the learning. When this happens, it helps to pause and ask, "Why do I feel this way? What am I used to?"

Talking to someone about it, or writing in a journal, can help us understand our own habits better. Facilitators can also use these moments as learning opportunities. If two people see things differently, it's not a problem—it's a chance to explore. Instead of saying one way is right, ask, "What can we learn from each other?"

Sometimes, the most meaningful cultural learning happens in small, everyday moments. It might be how people share food, how they wait their turn, or how they say thank you. These moments may seem simple, but they show deep values and habits. That's why it's important not to rush or control everything during a youth mobility. Leave time for cooking together, doing chores, or just sitting in silence. These "ordinary" experiences help participants notice real cultural differences—and also real similarities. When young people see that others care for their family, laugh at the same jokes, or enjoy the same music, it becomes easier to connect across cultures.

During the LADDER project, many learning moments came precisely from situations where participants realized that things they had taken for granted were perceived differently by others. These moments—when someone feels challenged, surprised, or unsure—can lead to genuine intercultural learning if handled with care and reflection.

Key insight

Embracing cultural differences doesn't mean agreeing on everything—it means creating space where disagreement, contrast, and diversity can exist without fear, and where everyone is encouraged to explore, reflect, and learn from each other. When handled with honesty, humility, and care, cultural differences become a powerful engine for solidarity, inclusion, and growth.

Reflection for youth workers

Ask yourself:

- How do I respond when something feels "strange" or "uncomfortable" to me?
- Are we making space to talk about cultural values and habits beyond national clichés?
- Am I modelling openness, humility, and curiosity when faced with cultural misunderstandings?
- Do I treat cultural differences as a challenge to manage—or a gift to explore?

Methods and strategies

- **"That's normal for me" game**: participants share something they consider totally normal at home - others react, ask questions, and compare with their own norms.
- **Intercultural dilemmas**: present short stories or case studies involving cultural clashes (e.g., in teamwork, time management, gender norms). Invite group discussion on what's behind each behaviour and how different perspectives can coexist.
- **Culture swap corners:** set up rotating stations where participants share food, music, sayings, or habits from their cultural context.
- **"Unpack the conflict" role-play**: re-enact minor misunderstandings or clashes from earlier in the exchange. Use this to explore deeper values, emotions, and possible resolutions.
- **Silent discussion posters:** display provocative questions on cultural identity, pride, or stereotypes. Participants respond in writing or drawings, and read others' contributions silently.

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Addressing Intercultural Diversity

in International Youth Mobilities

centre marta · Las Niñas del Tul · JOINT · Co-funded by the European Union

LADDER TO INCLUSION

DIVERSITY IS A STRENGTH, BUT INCLUSION TAKES WORK

WHAT?

BASIC PRINCIPLES

Diversity ≠ just nationality: includes gender, ability, mental health, learning styles, migration background, etc.

Inclusion = adapting spaces, activities & attitudes so everyone feels safe, respected and valued.

KEY ASPECTS OF INCLUSION

Structural accessible spaces, schedules, funding.

Relational participants feel seen, heard and valued.

Participatory youth shape the process, not just attend.

PERFORMATIVE INCLUSION is saying "everyone is welcome."

VS

TRANSFORMATIVE INCLUSION is removing real barriers so everyone can attend & thrive.

HOW?

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY & LEARNING

- **Culture** ≠ only nationality - also regional, generational, socioeconomic.
- **Misunderstandings** = learning opportunities (pause, reflect, explore, not blame).
- **Cultural humility** - admit you don't know everything, stay curious, ask questions.
- **Encourage sharing** - food, music, games, daily habits.

COMMUNICATION & PARTICIPATION

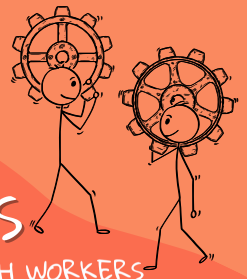
- **Barriers beyond language** - confidence, literacy, neurodivergence.
- **Distribute power** - rotate group speakers, assign non-verbal roles (timekeeper, visual artist).
- **Multiple formats** - drawings, role-play, written prompts, peer translation.
- **Body language matters** - check understanding, not just nods or smiles.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

- **Small, low-pressure roles for shy participants** (photographer, mood observer).
- **Shared activities** - cooking, music, sports, unstructured free time for bonding.
- **Normalize mistakes** - use clapping/cheering when someone tries, not just succeeds.

CREATING SAFER SPACES

- **Co-create** group agreements
- **Normalize** boundaries
- Emotional **safety**
- Create a simple system to check consent and **respect personal boundaries**



KEY ASPECTS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

- **Inclusion is designed, not assumed –** check who is missing and why.
- **Representation matters –** diverse team = diverse role models.
- **Listen to quiet voices –** silence ≠ disinterest.
- **Leave unstructured time –** real connections happen in informal moments.
- **Be ready to adapt –** ask: "What would help someone feel more included right now?"

Chapter 3

RECOGNIZING AND PREVENTING VIOLENCE IN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH MOBILITIES

What is violence?

Violence is any action—or failure to act—that causes or threatens to cause harm to a person's body, mind, dignity, or wellbeing. It can be intentional or unintentional, visible or hidden, and may occur through words, actions, silence, or neglect. Importantly, violence is not limited to physical harm—it includes emotional manipulation, economic control, sexual coercion, and other forms of abuse. In the context of youth work, violence also includes the misuse of power or trust in a way that harms or exploits a young person. Whether subtle or overt, normalized or extreme, all forms of violence undermine safety, participation, and learning.

Why it matters in youth mobilities

International youth mobilities bring together young people from diverse cultural, social, and personal backgrounds. While these projects can be deeply transformative, they also place young people in unfamiliar environments, often away from their usual support networks. This can make them more vulnerable to various forms of violence - from bullying and exclusion to emotional abuse or even exploitation. Many environmental factors can contribute to violence. These include adverse childhood events such as abuse, neglect, trauma, loss, and abandonment. Many of the participants who are involved in training, youth mobilities, contact making seminars, volunteering projects, and other mobilities might come with this kind of "baggage". Questionnaires and interviews in the preparation process of the participant will most likely not show these traumas or experiences. What might appear during the mobility is violent or abusive behaviour, or particular vulnerability to negative experiences. At the same time, youth workers, peer leaders, and other participants may not always recognize harmful behaviors - especially when boundaries, norms, or communication styles differ.

Before talking about violence and bullying prevention techniques, it is important to know - what are we actually preventing? What types of violence are there? How to distinguish between teasing, hassling, harassment, conflict, and bullying? And what to do when witnessing violent behaviour in a mobility we are in charge of? It helps us:

- Recognize when a young person may be experiencing harm
- Reflect on our own behaviors and assumptions
- Create group cultures where safety and respect are the norm
- Respond quickly and appropriately when things go wrong

The main types of violence

Violence can take many forms—some are visible and immediate, while others are subtle and cumulative. All types of violence are harmful and must be taken seriously, regardless of the intent behind them. In youth mobilities, it is especially important to recognize how these forms of violence may be experienced differently across cultural and personal contexts.

Sexual violence: includes any sexual act or behavior carried out without clear, informed, & enthusiastic consent. Examples: sexual assault, such as rape, forced or violent sexual intercourse, violent or pressured involvement in sexual activities, sexual acts against the will of a victim (e.g. unwanted touching, sexual comments, or jokes, sharing sexual content without consent (including images or messages)). In case of minors, the term used is sexual abuse, including any sexual activity with a child for the purpose of providing or obtaining sexual stimulation or sexual gratification, or other benefit. Perpetrated by an adult or another child. Positions of power in relation to the victim: age, development, responsibility, trust, physical strength. It can occur with or without physical contact with the child's body, including exposing the child to the sexuality of others or using information or communication technologies. Sexual violence is a serious breach of trust and safety. In international youth settings, it may be harder for young people to disclose abuse due to shame, fear, cultural stigma.

Emotional/psychological violence: involves behaviors that damage a person's sense of self-worth or emotional wellbeing. Examples: any verbal, emotional or psychological harassment, such as regular threats, threats of physical or sexual abuse, name calling, belittling, and shaming, stalking (following someone, waiting for someone at their home or workplace, regular and unwanted calls, texts or emails), prohibiting someone from seeing their friends and relatives, ignoring/not talking to you "as punishment", etc. It often goes unnoticed but can deeply affect confidence, trust, and participation. Emotional violence can be long-lasting and is often a warning sign of other abuse.

Physical violence: the use of physical force that results in - or risks - injury or harm. Examples: any physical assault such as beating, kicking, slapping, hair pulling, strangling, choking, pushing, grabbing, use of weapons, etc. Even minor physical aggression in group settings sets a dangerous precedent. Physical violence is never acceptable in youth work under any circumstance.

Economic violence: occurs when a person's access to money, resources, or opportunities is deliberately restricted or exploited. Examples: any action aimed at trying to control a victim or bringing them into submission by using one's financial situation, such as hiding income, depriving the victim of income, attempting to prevent the victim from gaining money, giving the victim money after they have fulfilled certain requirements, etc. Young people in mobility programs may already face financial insecurity. Economic violence can isolate individuals and limit their ability to fully participate.

In respect to minors, another form of abuse is distinguished - **neglect**. Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and the most common form of child abuse. A child might be left hungry, dirty, or without proper clothing, shelter, supervision, health care. This can put children, young people in danger. And it can also have long term effects on their physical & mental wellbeing. Neglect can be a lot of different things, which can make it hard to spot. But broadly speaking, there are 4 types of neglect: physical (basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter are not met or they are not properly supervised/kept safe); educational (child is not given an education); emotional (lack of nurture, stimulation, through ignoring, humiliating, intimidating, isolating); medical (lack of proper health care, ignoring medical recommendations). Neglect is often overlooked but can have serious consequences, especially in international contexts where youth may not know how to ask for help or who to turn to.

These different forms are not mutually exclusive and multiple incidences of violence can be happening at once and reinforcing each other. Inequalities experienced by a person related to their race, (dis)ability, age, social class, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity can also drive acts of violence.

- **Difference between violence and abuse:** Violence can be a single act or a pattern; can be physical or non-physical. Abuse often involves repeated harmful actions in the context of a power imbalance or ongoing relationship (e.g., emotional manipulation, coercion).
- **Important Note on Overlapping Forms:** In real situations, multiple forms of violence often overlap. For example, grooming typically includes emotional manipulation, neglect of safeguarding, and sexual abuse. It's essential to look at the full context - not just individual actions.

What is bullying and how to spot it in mobility projects?

Bullying - unwanted, aggressive behaviour (mostly among school aged children and young people, but can also be widespread among colleagues in work settings etc.) that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both persons who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

Cyberbullying – abuse that occurs by using digital devices such as mobile phones, computers, and tablets. Cyberbullying can happen via SMS and other messages (Whatsapp, Viber, Snapchat, etc.) as well as online on social networks, games or forums where people can view, contribute with or share content. This type of abuse involves the sending, posting or sharing of negative, harmful or false content about another person. This may include sharing someone's personal or private information, causing shame or humiliation.

It can be hard for educators, youth workers, facilitators, bystanders and the wider community to consistently identify and deal with bullying when it happens. Whether bullying is physical, verbal, or social (relational), four widely-accepted factors can be used to identify it:

- Bullying is deliberate - harming another person intentionally
- Bullying involves a misuse of power in a relationship
- Bullying is usually not a one-off - it is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated over time
- Bullying involves behaviour that can cause harm - it is not a normal part of growing up, group process or "identity characteristic".
- Bullying can happen anywhere, in person or online (cyberbullying), at any time, and can be verbal, physical or social (relational). It can be obvious or hidden.

Persons who bully use their power - such as physical strength, knowing something embarrassing, or popularity - to control or harm others. Bullying is when one person (or a group of persons) keeps picking on another youngster again and again to make them feel bad. They say or do things to upset them, make fun of them, stop them from joining in, or keep hitting or punching them.

Some examples of in-person (and remote) bullying:

- Messages containing sexist or discriminatory remarks
- Embarrassing social media posts
- Threatening comments, messages or emails
- Demeaning, belittling, or talking over someone during meetings, group work or video calls
- Micromanaging every detail of co-worker or other participant

- Spreading gossip or rumours about co-workers or other participants
- Taking credit for someone else's work
- Withholding necessary resources for someone to get their job done or understand the task
- Yelling at a participant in front of others
- Gaslighting and making participant second guess themselves

What is bullying and how to spot it in mobility projects?

Conflicts can be resolved, bullying has to be reported!

Conflict is different from bullying. Not all disagreements and fights are bullying. Conflict is a normal part of human interaction and arises frequently in day to day life. Part of learning to be independent and grown up is learning how to deal with and respond appropriately to conflict in various environments of everyday life. Recognising the difference between conflict and bullying will help participants and organisers of the mobility know how to respond.

Conflict:

- All parties have equal power to solve the problem
- All parties have an equal interest in the outcome
- All parties are of relatively equal size, age or status
- A conflict can be resolved by talking or working things out together or with help from others.

Bullying:

- Involves a repeated form of mistreatment where the victim cannot defend themself
- Includes an imbalance of power – usually one person considers themselves (or perceived by others) as somewhat "better" than the other, has a higher social standing (is more popular), and uses this against the other person
- Usually involves repeated acts of harassment, harm, or humiliation.

What to do if bullying happens in a mobility you are in charge of

- Talk with the victim (separately!)
- Talk with the bully (separately!). Remind them of the rules and group agreement.
- Explain that this behaviour will not be tolerated in this group.
- If the bullying continues – inform that the bully will not be allowed to participate in the group if they will not change their behaviour. Consider informing the sending organisation.
- Look for support mechanisms: mentors, services, resources for victims and abusers.
- Address this topic in the group, especially focusing on the bystander effect

Grooming: A hidden risk in international youth mobilities

While youth mobilities offer incredible opportunities for learning, growth, and intercultural dialogue, they also carry unique safeguarding challenges. One of the more insidious risks in these settings is grooming—a process by which someone builds a relationship with a young person (and often with adults around them) to gain access, manipulate, and ultimately exploit the child or young adult.

What is grooming?

Grooming is a deliberate and often gradual manipulative process in which an individual gains a young person's trust and emotional dependence for the purpose of manipulation, abuse, or exploitation—most commonly sexual abuse. It involves establishing a connection and gradually breaking down the victim's defenses to prepare them for exploitation. Grooming may happen in person or online, and can be carried out by peers, adults, or even people in positions of trust, such as youth workers or group leaders. In youth mobilities, where participants often live, travel, and share space together, boundaries can blur. This context can make it easier for grooming behaviors to go unnoticed.

Grooming can be sexual, romantic, financial or for criminal or terrorism purposes, and can target both children and adults. The common aspect is that a perpetrator gradually manipulates a victim by building trust and rapport. The key to grooming is a power dynamic within the relationship: age, gender, physical strength, economic status or another factor.

How grooming happens: behaviors and patterns

1. **Targeting the victim** - Offenders often look for vulnerable youngsters and choose them based on ease of access to them or their perceived vulnerability. Offenders may use frequent places where minors gather, both online and offline, such as social media platforms, gaming sites, schools, or parks. Predators gather information about the child, such as their interests, family background, and emotional needs, to better tailor their approach.

2. **Building trust and gaining access:** The groomer may be seen as charismatic, generous, or "cool," and works to gain the trust of the victim by offering attention, emotional support, praise, gifts, or special privileges. Offenders often pose as friends, mentors, or someone the youngster can confide in. They may share common interests or pretend to be of a similar age to create a bond. Gradually, they start pushing boundaries to see how the youngster reacts, often under the guise of affection or friendship.

3. **Fulfilling needs of the victim:** Groomers exploit the youngster's emotional needs by providing support, understanding, and attention that the youngster may not receive elsewhere. They may give gifts or favors to make the person feel indebted or to create a sense of obligation.

4. **Isolating the target:** The predator encourages the victim to keep their relationship secret, often by making them feel special or by creating a sense of fear or shame about others finding out. They work to isolate the victim from their friends and family, making the victim more dependent on them.

5 **Testing boundaries, sexualization**: Gradually pushing limits—physical, emotional, or digital - introducing sexual content or conversations to normalize the behavior. (e.g. touching inappropriately, sending private messages, or asking personal questions). Progressing to physical contact, explicit images, or sexual acts. Sometimes abuse is disguised as jokes, games, or "accidents".

6 **Control and Manipulation**: Using psychological manipulation, threats, guilt or blackmail to maintain control over the victim and ensure their compliance and silence. The ultimate goal is to exploit the victim sexually, often resulting in long-term psychological and emotional damage.

Risk factors (vulnerabilities)

As the adolescent brain is still developing, areas that control decision-making, threat detection, and responses may still be maturing and particularly vulnerable. Relationship development is a central task of adolescence, and thus youth may be vulnerable in situations with older adults who initiate relationships and offer the youth attention they may otherwise not receive. When child abuse happens, it's influenced by factors within the individual, their family, and surrounding environment. Research shows there isn't a single risk factor that causes abuse. Instead, a combination of multiple risk factors reduces a child's resilience, making them more vulnerable to abuse.

- **Gender**: Girls are more likely to be targeted than boys. However, it is crucial to challenge the assumption that boys are not at risk of sexual abuse.
- **Age**: Some studies suggest that abuse is most common before puberty, while others say the risk is highest during adolescence. However, in the online world, teenagers might be more likely to receive unwanted sexual solicitations than younger children or adults.
- **Interpersonal features**: Victims of sexual abuse may have low self-esteem, are easily persuaded, have behavior difficulties, emotional suffering, and immaturity. Research shows that certain personality traits increase the risk of grooming. Specifically, traits like low self-confidence and low self-esteem make young people more vulnerable to being targeted by offenders.
- **Family**: Various factors within a family can increase the risk of grooming. These include single-parent families, poor relationships between parents or between a parent and child, and dysfunctional family dynamics.
- **Relationships and friends:** Young people who have difficulty with social interactions, have few or no friends, and feel alienated are more likely to be vulnerable to grooming.

***Red flags* in young people:**

- **Sudden change in behavior: withdrawal, anxiety, secretiveness, or increased dependence on one adult**
- **Fear or discomfort around a particular person**
- **Unexplained gifts, money, or access to resources**
- **Talking about someone as "special" or "the only one who understands me"**
- **Use of sexualized language or behaviors that seem out of context**

> *Not all of the mentioned above signs show that the child or teenager is being groomed. This is not a final list of signs and there might be other red flags.*

Particular vulnerabilities in youth mobilities:

- Young people are often far from home, family, or familiar support systems
- There may be mixed-age groups (including minors and legal adults), leading to blurred roles
- Language or cultural barriers can make disclosure difficult
- Living arrangements (shared accommodations, common travel) can allow increased access and isolation
- A culture of informality or hierarchy can create environments where youth feel unsure about when and how to report concerns

Why young people struggle to speak up

Grooming creates long-lasting harms while preventing the likelihood of disclosure. Victims are often manipulated to "acquiesce" to the abuse. Many grooming victims report feelings of shame or guilt about complying, which stopped them from disclosing. In contrast, adult victims of offenses that do not involve grooming (which are more likely to be committed by strangers) do not report the same levels of shame or responsibility.

Grooming has a gendered angle as well. It has been shown through research that depending on the gender of the victim, the aftermath of the abuse shows differently. For instance, male victims of grooming often face stigma and shame due to societal norms that demand men to embody strength and invulnerability. This stigma can deter male victims from seeking help or reporting abuse, allowing perpetrators to continue their harmful actions without consequences. Conversely, female victims, particularly adolescents and young female adults, are often subjected to victim-blaming attitudes. Their experiences risk to be untrusted and belittled via well known misogynistic arguments often associated with assault, such as "she was asking for it" with their behavior, attire, and communication style scrutinized and held responsible for their own sexual assault. This blame-shifting away from the perpetrator exacerbates the trauma and obstructs the pursuit of justice and support.

Cultural norms surrounding privacy and family honor may discourage individuals from speaking out about instances of grooming or seeking assistance, fearing a lack of credibility and facing the burden of providing evidence. This culture of silence emboldens perpetrators, who operate without being held accountable, knowing their actions are less likely to be exposed or challenged. Victims often lack the information and support needed to navigate these situations and do not know where or to whom to turn for help. Insufficient sex education in schools exacerbates the problem by fostering a lack of awareness and understanding of healthy relationships, consent, and boundaries, leaving individuals more vulnerable to grooming tactics.

Besides that:

- They may not recognize grooming for what it is
- They may feel flattered, chosen, or special
- They may be confused by feelings of attachment or guilt
- They may fear causing trouble or being disbelieved
- They may worry about group cohesion or being excluded

Prevention and protection

Grooming thrives in silence and ambiguity. By fostering a culture of openness, reflection, and clear boundaries, youth workers can play a crucial role in preventing harm and protecting the young people in their care.

Key principles of prevention:

- Establish clear safeguarding protocols before any mobility begins, including reporting channels and codes of conduct
- Train all staff and volunteers on grooming warning signs and safe practices (including digital conduct)
- Ensure visibility and transparency: Avoid one-on-one closed situations; use two-deep leadership
- Empower participants to speak up, ask questions, and understand that no topic is off-limits
- Create a culture of consent and boundaries, where healthy relationship practices are modeled and discussed openly
- Monitor dynamics within the group—trust your gut if something feels "too close," "too intense," or "off"

Reflection questions: grooming awareness for youth workers

These questions can be used individually or as part of a team debrief, supervision session, or training workshop.

Self-awareness & boundaries:

- Have I ever witnessed a situation where an adult's relationship with a young person felt "too close"? How did I respond?
- How do I manage being friendly & approachable while maintaining professional boundaries?
- Would I feel comfortable if another youth worker behaved with a participant the way I do?

Recognizing risk:

- What behaviors might I overlook as "just being nice" that could actually be early signs of grooming?
- Do I know what red flags to watch for—in both young people and adults?
- Are there power dynamics in my team or group that might make it hard for a young person to speak up?

Team culture & accountability:

- Is there a culture of open discussion in my team about boundaries, ethics, and safeguarding?
- Would I feel comfortable raising a concern about a colleague's behavior—even if it wasn't clearly abusive?
- Do we review incidents or "gut feeling" situations as a team and treat them as learning opportunities?

Prevention readiness:

- Does my organization have clear safeguarding policies in place for international mobilities?
- Have we discussed grooming risks and protective practices with all staff, volunteers, and leaders?
- Are young people & team members aware of how to report a concern, and do they feel safe doing so?

Suggested team activity: "Spot the grey zones"

Objective: Raise team awareness of grooming risks and early boundary-crossing behaviors in international mobility contexts.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Prepare a few short scenarios (realistic, anonymized if based on past experience), such as:
   - A group leader spends extra time with one young person, often taking walks alone together.
   - An 18-year-old participant starts confiding in a 25-year-old volunteer late at night, and they begin messaging privately.
   - A youth worker is frequently complimenting a participant's appearance and giving small gifts.
   - A participant withdraws from group activities after becoming close to an older peer, but no one knows why.
2. In small groups, ask team members to discuss:
   - What's happening here? Could this be grooming - or something else?
   - What are the red flags?
   - How might we respond? What would we say or do?
   - Is there anything we should change in how we prepare or supervise our staff?
3. Debrief as a whole group:
   - Highlight common early warning signs and grey areas
   - Reinforce the importance of not ignoring instincts or uncertainty
   - Discuss safe, respectful ways to challenge or raise concerns among peers

Optional add-on: Ask each group to write one preventive action that could reduce risk in their scenario (e.g., training, check-in systems, supervision adjustments).

Who's who in violence situations?

Recognizing the victim

[The person]: participant, colleague, partner, spouse, classmate, sibling etc.

- A victim of violence or bullying may:
- feel afraid of [the person] much of the time
- avoid certain topics out of fear of angering [the person]
- feel that they cannot do anything right for [the person]
- believe that they deserve to be hurt or mistreated
- wonder if they are the one who is crazy
- feel emotionally numb or helpless

Recognizing the abuser

An abuser may:

- humiliate or yell [at person]
- criticise and put [the person] down
- treat [the person] so badly that they are embarrassed for their friends or peers to see
- ignore or put down [the persons] opinions or accomplishments
- blame [the person] for their own abusive behaviour
- see [the person] as property or a sex object, rather than as a valuable human being

- reveal their feelings through body language
- have unexplained scars or bruises
- have a strong reaction to noises and sudden movements
- display they are being abused when they text or have phone calls

- act excessively jealous and possessive
- control where [the person] goes or what they do
- keep [the person] from seeing other group members or friends
- limit [the persons] access to money, the phone, or the car
- constantly check up on [the person]

What to say to support someone who says they were abused?

"Thank you for trusting me."
"It's not your fault."
"I want you to be safe."
"You don't deserve this. You deserve to be treated with respect."
"This is important."
"What do you need?"
"I am glad you told me."
"I'm here if you need me or ever want to talk."

How to talk to the abuser?

- [Choose the right time and place to have a full discussion.
- Approach the abuser when they are calm.
- Be direct and clear about what you have seen.
- Tell the abuser that their behaviour is their responsibility. Avoid making judgmental comments. Do not validate any attempts to blame others for their abusive behaviour.
- Inform the abuser that their behaviour needs to stop.
- Do not try to force the abuser to change or to seek help. If the situation allows - encourage them later on to seek help and support.
- Tell the abuser that you are concerned for the safety of the person you saw being abused.
- Never argue with an abuser about their abusive actions. Recognise that confrontational, argumentative approaches may make the situation worse and put an abused person at higher risk.
- Call the police if the abused person's immediate safety is in jeopardy.

Concluding comments:

- If abuse does ever occur and is not discussed and revealed, it has a high possibility to continue and grow.
- It is not normal for a person to behave violently in any kind of relationship.
- The perpetrator usually denies the fact of violence or describes it as nothing special.
- The perpetrator usually blames the victim, other people, and their surrounding environment.
- Violent or abusive behaviour does not occur because the perpetrator failed to control themself. It is their own choice to act violently.

- People can sometimes appear very pleasant and attractive, and it can be nearly impossible to tell from the outside that their behaviour is actually violent.
- Keeping silent about an occurrence of violent behaviour that you have witnessed can strengthen the perpetrator's sense of dominance and encourage them to continue with this type of behaviour.

What about bystanders?

Everyone has experienced witnessing an unpleasant situation – when someone else's boundaries are violated, someone is physically or emotionally offended, called names or mocked. For example, a situation where a participant is receiving offensive remarks from another participant, or there is an obvious rising tension between your fellow colleagues. It is easy to realise that this is not OK, but at that moment it might be difficult to know what to say. Being witness to these situations may create feelings of helplessness, confusion and uncertainty of how to act.
Getting these feelings in these situations is known as the bystander effect.

The bystander effect occurs when the presence of other people discourages an individual from intervening during an emergency. The greater the number of people, the less likely it is that any of them will help a person in distress. People are far more likely to act to help others in times of crisis when there are few or no witnesses around. Adults, children, young people – anyone can unwittingly become a witness to violent or critical situations.

The social paralysis which is part of the bystander effect (wanting to help someone but not helping) has a profound impact on behaviour both on city streets filled with strangers and all work, study, or social places. There are plenty of examples of how individuals refuse to deal with a problem and its possible negative consequences. The reasons why people do not get involved and do not help the distressed person can be very different, but most often they are related to fear: fear of making mistakes; fear of taking responsibility for the situation; fear of losing social status; fear for personal safety; fear of "what others might say/think about me"; fear of being the victim of ridicule, violence, retaliation, or revenge. Or someone might think to themselves that somebody else will address the situation and help instead. Therefore, it is important to be able to critically assess the situation and find a solution without being indifferent.

How to be an active bystander

The intervention of bystanders is often the only reason why violence and other crimes cease. The social and behavioural paralysis described by the bystander effect can be reduced with awareness and, in some cases, explicit training. Participants should always be encouraged to speak up when witnessing an act of violence or a potential assault.

One technique is to behave as if the person seeing abuse is the first or only person witnessing a problem. Often, when one person takes action, if only to shout, "Hey, what's going on?" others may be emboldened to take action as well. That said, an active bystander is most effective when they assume that they themselves are the sole person taking charge, so giving direction to other bystanders to assist can be critically important.

It is best not to expect others to be the first to act in a crisis—just saying "Stop" can prevent further harm. It is good to speak up using a calm, firm tone. Giving others directions to get them involved in helping too can make a big difference. It is important to try to ensure the safety of the victim, and to not be afraid to seek assistance when needed.

When training to be an active bystander, it helps to cultivate qualities like empathy, such as trying to see the situation from the victim's perspective. It is important to worry less about the consequences of helping and more about the example helping will set for others. As a victim, it can help to pick out one person in the crowd and make eye contact. People's natural tendencies towards altruism may move them to help if given the chance.

What to do as a bystander:

- **Show it's not OK**: Use body language to show your disapproval (roll your eyes, shake your head); don't laugh along; walk away; stand between the person being disrespectful and the person who has been disrespected.
- **Support the person who has been disrespected:** Ask if they are OK (in person or in a message); acknowledge what happened ("Hey, I'm sorry. That wasn't cool"); back up people doing something to help; support people who report the situation.
- **Speak up:** Question discriminatory or otherwise harmful jokes ("I don't get what's funny?"); focus on the behaviour ("That comment was out of line"); purposely change the topic ("Seriously? Let's move on"); make a joke ("C'mon, aren't we better than that?"); ask them to stop ("Alright, that's enough.").

Reacting responsibly

TIt's our responsibility to react appropriately to suspicion, disclosure, or discovery of abuse. Suspicion of abuse means you've seen signs in a youngster, or you've witnessed boundary violations by adults or other youth toward that person.

Key principles when someone discloses an experience of violence or abuse

- Believe the person
- Make sure they understand it's not their fault
- Listen without judging the person
- Be supportive, encouraging, open and honest
- Ask if they need help from a support service and discuss their options
- Help them get advice and support
- Offer to go with the person if they meet with a support service
- Keep in touch with the person to see how they are going

Steps to take, when hearing disclosure of violence:

1. ***Stay calm and listen:*** If a youngster discloses abuse, remain calm, listen carefully, and avoid expressing shock or disbelief. Your reaction can influence the person's willingness to share details or seek help.

2. ***Provide reassurance*:** Reassure the youngster that they did the right thing by telling you and that the abuse is not their fault. Let them know that you believe them and that they are not to blame for what happened.

3. ***Avoid interrogation:*** Don't ask leading questions or press for details. Allow the youngster to share what they are comfortable with. Instead of interrogating, let the person speak freely to avoid contaminating the investigation.

4. ***Ensure safety***: Ensure the youngster's immediate safety by removing them from the environment if the abuser has access to them. Seek help from authorities or child protection services if necessary.

5. ***Document observations***: Document your observations and what the youngster disclosed as accurately and thoroughly as possible. Include dates, times, and descriptions of behaviors or physical signs that led to your suspicion.

6. ***Report to authorities:*** Follow your local protocols for reporting suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities, such as child protective services or law enforcement. Reporting is not only a moral obligation but also a legal requirement when dealing with minors.

7. ***Seek professional support:*** Encourage the youngster and their family to seek professional support, including counseling and legal assistance, to address the emotional and psychological impacts of the abuse.

8. ***Follow up:*** Stay engaged and supportive. Follow up to ensure that appropriate actions are taken and that the youngster receives ongoing support and care.

9. ***Maintain confidentiality:*** Protect the youngster's privacy by not discussing the disclosure or your suspicions with others who do not need to know. Share information only with those directly involved in the investigation and care of the person.

10. ***Know your limits:*** Recognize the limits of your role and seek guidance from professionals who specialize in handling cases of abuse. Don't try to handle the situation on your own.

11. ***Seek immediate medical attention:*** If you find physical signs that you suspect are sexual abuse, have the youngster physically examined immediately by a professional who specializes in child sexual abuse. Utilize social services and, if possible, the Barnahus model in your country, which offers child-friendly multidisciplinary support and assessment in such cases.

Preventing violence through boundaries, grey zone awareness, and consent

Preventing violence in youth mobilities isn't just about recognizing violence and responding when harm happens, it's about creating environments where harm is far less likely to occur in the first place. This begins with clear boundaries, open communication, and shared understanding of consent.

In international youth settings, young people live and learn closely with others from different backgrounds, values, and comfort zones. The informal, often intense nature of these mobilities can blur lines between roles, relationships, and responsibilities. What starts as friendly or well-intentioned behavior can cross into grey zones – spaces where power dynamics, cultural norms, or emotional closeness may cloud judgment and weaken boundaries.

That's why youth workers must be intentional in creating safe group cultures where respect, consent, and boundaries are visible, discussed, and modeled from the start.

This means more than just setting rules – it means helping young people understand their rights, build confidence to speak up, and navigate social interactions with empathy and clarity.
Equipping staff and participants to recognize early warning signs, question dynamics that feel "off," and speak openly about boundaries isn't just best practice – it's a protective strategy. When young people learn that "no" is respected, that checking in is normal, and that everyone deserves space and safety, we reduce the risk of emotional, physical, or sexual harm.

This section explores practical ways to prevent violence before it starts: by talking about boundaries, addressing grey zones head-on, and creating a culture of active, ongoing consent.

Group norms and consent: creating safe, respectful spaces

Establishing shared group norms and understanding consent are essential foundations for any international youth mobility. Group norms and consent are not just rules – they are tools for building trust, dignity, and responsibility. They help young people feel safe, seen, and respected – especially in diverse groups where participants may have different expectations around personal space, communication, and behavior. When group norms and consent are clearly introduced and regularly revisited, they create a culture of mutual respect, safety, and accountability – not just for participants, but for youth workers and any volunteers as well.

What are group norms?

Group norms are the informal "rules of the road" that guide how people behave with one another in a group. Unlike top-down rules, norms are ideally co-created with the participants and adapted to fit the group's values, goals, and cultural contexts.

Examples of group norms:
- We listen without interrupting.
- We ask before touching someone or their belongings.
- We respect "no" and don't pressure each other.
- We make space for everyone to speak.
- We take care of our shared environment.

Group norms are most effective when they are:
- Co-created with the group (not just imposed)
- Visible (e.g., written on a poster or flipchart)
- Revisited during the program, especially after incidents
- Connected to broader values like inclusion, safety, and dignity

What is consent?

Consent is about clear, informed, and voluntary agreement to something – whether it's being hugged, having a photo taken, sharing personal information, or engaging in physical intimacy.

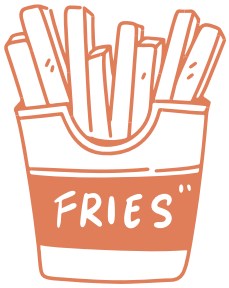
In youth work, teaching and modeling consent helps young people understand that:
- Everyone has the right to say yes, no, or change their mind.
- Consent must be explicit, not assumed.
- Power differences (like age or leadership roles) can affect consent.
- Respecting someone's boundaries is non-negotiable.

Talking about consent with youth groups

Consent might feel like a heavy or awkward topic – but it doesn't have to be. Frame it in everyday terms, and use interactive methods to build understanding.

Practical ways to explore consent:

- Use the **FRIES model**: Consent is *Freely given, Reversible, Informed, Enthusiastic, Specific.*
- Run role-play scenarios (e.g., asking to borrow a phone, give a hug, share a story).
- Normalize asking: "Is it okay if I...?"
- Discuss the difference between real consent and peer pressure.
- Reinforce that it's always okay to say no – or to change your mind.



Freely given
Reversible
Informed
Enthusiastic
Specific

Why this matters in international settings?
In multicultural groups, assumptions about touch, humor, gender roles, privacy, or emotional sharing can vary greatly. What's seen as friendly in one culture might feel intrusive in another. By grounding the group in shared norms and a culture of consent, youth workers can reduce misunderstandings, prevent harm, and foster a more inclusive atmosphere.

Talking about boundaries

Discussing boundaries with young people is essential for creating safe, respectful group dynamics—especially in international youth mobilities, where cultural norms, personal comfort levels, and expectations can vary widely. Boundaries are the personal limits we set to protect our physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Helping young people understand, express, and respect boundaries lays the foundation for trust, safety, and mutual respect in any group setting.

Start by normalizing the concept of boundaries as something everyone has and is entitled to. Use simple, relatable examples: "Some people like hugs, others prefer a high-five," or "It's okay to say no if you don't want to share your snack or talk about something personal." Encourage young people to tune into their own comfort zones and validate their right to speak up or step back when something doesn't feel right.

Interactive activities—like role-playing how to say "no," or discussing scenarios involving personal space, privacy, or peer pressure—can help participants build confidence in asserting their boundaries. Reinforce that saying "no" doesn't make them rude or selfish, and that listening to someone else's "no" is a sign of respect and maturity.

Cultural sensitivity is key: create space to talk about how boundaries may look different across cultures, and encourage open dialogue about these differences. Emphasize that even in diverse groups, the group culture must be rooted in safety, respect, and consent.

Youth workers should model healthy boundaries themselves, clearly communicating their own limits and consistently respecting those of others. When a boundary is crossed—intentionally or unintentionally—address it calmly and constructively, helping everyone reflect and learn without shaming or blaming.

Ultimately, teaching boundaries isn't just about preventing harm—it's about empowering young people to understand themselves and relate to others with empathy, clarity, and confidence.

Types of boundaries

There are commonly recognized categories of boundaries that are useful to understand and discuss both among staff teams and with young people. Each type helps define different areas of our lives where we need safety, respect, and clarity. Understanding these categories helps us to name, protect, and respect boundaries in themselves and others - and support young people in developing those skills, too.

Physical boundaries: relate to your personal space, physical touch, and bodily autonomy.

Examples:

- Comfort with hugging, handshakes, or sharing a room
- Needing space or rest without being touched or disturbed
- Consent around photos or videos

In youth work: Always ask before initiating touch; respect personal space and cultural norms.

Emotional boundaries: Emotional boundaries protect your feelings, energy, and ability to process emotions without being overwhelmed or manipulated.

Examples:

- Not being responsible for someone else's emotional wellbeing
- Choosing not to share something deeply personal
- Asking someone not to vent or trauma-dump without your consent

In youth work: Respect when someone doesn't want to open up, and avoid placing emotional burden on participants or colleagues.

Relational/ Role boundaries: These help maintain appropriate relationships and roles, especially when there are power differences.

Examples:

- Keeping professional distance from participants
- Avoiding favoritism or blurred lines between friend and leader
- Not sharing personal struggles with minors

In youth work: Clear roles help protect both adults and young people from confusion and harm.

Other types of boundaries: **time** (how you protect and manage your availability and time), mental (your ability to hold different opinions and beliefs without feeling attacked), **material** (decisions about sharing your possessions, finances), **digital** (engaging with others in digital spaces).

Tips for talking about boundaries:

- Use relatable examples (e.g., sharing personal items, hugs, phone access)
- Teach young people to recognize their own boundaries and respect others'
- Practice saying and hearing "no" in role-plays
- Encourage journaling or check-ins to reflect on feelings and comfort levels
- Reinforce that setting boundaries is a form of self-respect, not rejection
- Provide scripts or phrases youth can use to assert themselves

Reflection questions for youth workers

1.*Personal boundaries:*

- What are your own boundaries when working with young people? How do you communicate them?
- Have you ever felt your boundaries were challenged in a youth mobility setting? How did you handle it?

2. *Recognizing boundaries in others:*

- How do you usually recognize when a young person is uncomfortable, even if they don't say it out loud?
- What signs do you look for that might indicate a boundary has been crossed?

3. *Creating safe space:*

- What have you done in past mobilities to create an environment where young people feel safe expressing their needs or saying "no"?
- How do you respond when someone in the group sets a boundary you weren't expecting?

4. *Cultural sensitivity:*

- How do your own cultural norms influence your understanding of boundaries?
- How do you ensure that boundary discussions are inclusive of diverse cultural perspectives without compromising safety?

5. *Facilitation and role modeling:*

- How comfortable are you facilitating conversations about consent and personal space? What support or resources would help you feel more prepared?
- How do you model healthy boundaries in your everyday interactions with young people and colleagues?

6. *Growth and learning:*

- What situations or challenges have taught you the most about working with boundaries?
- What would you like to improve or explore further in your practice around supporting young people to define and defend their boundaries?

Activity: "The line between" – Exploring boundaries together

Objective: To help youth workers (and optionally, young people) reflect on what boundaries are, where they differ from person to person, and how to navigate them respectfully in diverse, international group settings.
Duration: 45–60 minutes (adjustable depending on group size)

Materials:

- masking tape or rope to create a line on the floor (or use an imaginary line)
- a set of "boundary statements" (provided below or adapted)
- space for people to move freely

How to Facilitate:
1. Set the Scene (5-10min): Introduce the idea of personal boundaries as the invisible lines that define what's OK and not OK for us - physically, emotionally, socially. Emphasize that everyone's boundaries are valid, but they may differ based on personality, culture, experience, or context.

2. Create the Line: Use tape or rope to mark a line across the room. One side represents "Yes, I'm comfortable with that," the other side "No, that crosses my boundary." The middle is "It depends" (a grey zone).

3. Read Boundary Statements (25-30min): Read each statement aloud one by one. Participants choose where to stand on the line, depending on their comfort level. After each one, invite (voluntary) discussion:

- What makes that OK or not OK for you?
- Would your answer change in a youth work context?
- How might someone from a different background experience this differently?

Sample Statements:

- Someone hugs me without asking.
- A participant adds me on social media during a youth mobility.
- I share a room with someone I don't know well.
- A group leader jokes about my appearance.
- I'm asked to share something personal in a group discussion.
- A colleague vents emotionally to me late at night.
- I stay in touch with a participant after the project ends.
- A youth worker joins the group's private chat without asking.

4. Debrief & Reflect (10-15min): Facilitate a discussion using questions such as:

- What did you notice about how different people responded?
- Were there situations that felt especially "grey"?
- How can we use this awareness to better respect one another's boundaries in international settings?
- What structures or agreements could help protect boundaries in our teams or groups?

Variation for young people:
This same activity works well with youth participants—just adapt the language and be ready to guide reflections gently. Use it to open conversations about consent, respect, and saying "no."

Sources and further reading

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- Manual on Professional Boundaries in Mobile Youth Work (Latvian Mobile Youth Work Example).This publication highlights the importance of maintaining clear boundaries between youth workers and participants—especially in mobile and international settings—where roles can easily blur. Available: https://jaunatne.gov.lv/wpcontent/uploads/2021/10/Mobile-YW-print_Final.pdf
- Rotary Youth Protection Guide. Comprehensive manual detailing how to design, implement, and maintain youth protection programs—including clear boundaries and reporting mechanisms—adaptable for varied cultural settings. Available: https://dacdb.com/Rotary/Accounts/5960/Downloads/0/Resources/Youth_Service/775-rotary-youth-protection-guide.pdf
- Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide. VIRTUS. A practical guide offering exercises and tools to help adults teach boundary safety, with emphasis on preventing child sexual abuse. Available: https://www.virtusonline.org/educators/Teaching-Boundaries-and-Safety-Guide-English.pdf
- We-Consent is a new long-term national programme to inform, educate and engage with all members of our society about consent. Webpage with many valuable resources: https://www.we-consent.ie/

Recognizing and preventing violence

in International Youth Mobilities

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LADDER TO INCLUSION

WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

Violence is
any act - or lack of action -that harms or threatens a person's body, mind, dignity, or wellbeing.

It can be visible or hidden, intentional or unintentional, expressed through words, actions, silence, or neglect.

Why it matters in youth mobilities

- Distance from family or familiar supports
- Mixed-age groups leading to blurred roles
- Language or cultural barriers can make disclosure difficult
- Shared living/travel arrangements can allow increased access and isolation
- A culture of informality or hierarchy can create environments where youth feel unsure about when and how to report concerns

RECOGNIZE
signs of harm

WATCH FOR:

Sexual harassment
any unwanted sexual behavior or comment

Grooming
slow manipulation to gain trust for exploitation

Bullying
repeated, intentional harm using power

RED FLAGS

- Sudden change in behaviour
- Strong attachment to one adult or avoiding particular person or setting
- Unexplained gifts
- Use of sexualized language or behaviors that seem out of contex

REFLECT
on your own behavior and assumptions

- How do my cultural norms influence my understanding of boundaries?
- How do you usually recognize when a young person is uncomfortable, even if they don't say it out loud?
- What are your own boundaries when working with young people? How do you communicate them?
- Are there power dynamics in my team or group that might make it hard for a young person to speak up?
- Does my organization have clear safeguarding policies in place for international mobilities?
- Are young people and team members aware of how to report a concern, and do they feel safe doing so?

CREATE
safe, respectful group cultures

- Create safe, respectful group cultures
- Safeguarding policies & reporting systems
- Team training on risks & red flags
- Visibility - avoid 1:1 closed settings
- Peer leader guidance
- Encouraging participants to speak up
- Culture of consent and boundaries

RESPOND
quickly and appropriately

- Stay calm and listen
- Believe and thank them
- Reassure ("It's not your fault")
- Listen without judgment
- Offer help and discuss options
- Stay in touch and provide ongoing support

Steps to take after disclosure:

- Avoid interrogation
- Ensure immediate safety
- Document what was said
- Report through official channels
- Connect to professional support
- Follow up on care and actions
- Keep confidentiality
- Know your limits - seek expert help
- Seek medical attention if needed

Be an active bystander

Show it's not OK: body language, intervene calmly

Support the person: check in, validate, back up others helping

Speak up: call out harmful jokes, change the subject, set limits

Chapter 4

RISK MANAGEMENT AND CREATION OF SAFER SPACES IN YOUTH MOBILITIES

Creating safer spaces: Risk management vs. Safeguarding

Creating safer spaces is essential in youth work and particularly vital in contexts like Erasmus+ youth mobilities, where young people engage in unfamiliar environments away from their usual support systems. While both risk management and safeguarding aim to protect participants, they serve distinct but complementary roles in fostering safety.

Risk management focuses broadly on identifying, assessing, and mitigating potential hazards that could cause physical, emotional, or logistical harm. It involves practical measures such as conducting risk assessments, ensuring safe transportation, maintaining equipment, and establishing emergency procedures. Risk management is about minimizing the likelihood and impact of incidents through planning, supervision, and ongoing monitoring.

Safeguarding, on the other hand, centers specifically on protecting children, young people, and vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and maltreatment. It encompasses creating an environment where participants feel respected, valued, and free from discrimination or harm. Safeguarding policies set clear standards of behavior, define roles and responsibilities, and establish confidential reporting and response mechanisms. It promotes a culture of vigilance and active responsibility, ensuring that everyone involved understands their duty to protect and support young people (National Youth Agency, 2023).

Together, these approaches contribute to the creation of safer spaces—dynamic environments where individuals can participate fully without fear of harm or discrimination. Safer spaces are not static; they require continuous attention, reflection, and adaptation. This includes fostering open communication, promoting inclusivity, and embedding safeguarding principles into all organizational policies and practices (Empower, 2023; EUROPARC, 2023).

In practice, creating safer spaces involves:

- Developing interconnected policies (e.g., safeguarding, standards for safer recruitment and preparation, code of conduct) that clarify expectations and responsibilities.
- Identifying vulnerabilities for participants' wellbeing, by conducting thorough safeguarding risk assessments.
- Training staff, volunteers, and subcontractors to recognize risks, uphold the code of conduct, and respond appropriately to concerns.
- Maintaining vigilant supervision and monitoring, especially in high-risk areas such as accommodation, transport, and transition times.
- Engaging participants and communities in shaping safety measures, respecting cultural contexts and individual needs.

By distinguishing and integrating risk management and safeguarding, organizations can build environments that not only prevent harm but also empower young people to learn, engage, and grow confidently and securely.

The domains of risk management

Before going deeper into the structure of an effective risk management strategy, it is important to understand what are the elements to be kept in mind when working on this topic. We could consider them as key areas or (in some cases) actors to be considered when structuring a strategy.

Example

- ***Participants***: focuses on the selection, preparation, and support of young people taking part, considering their individual needs and vulnerabilities.

Screening participants for suitability and ensuring clear communication of rules and expectations helps prevent incidents. This can happen through well structured pre-departure meetings and mentoring by the sending organisations.

- ***Staff***: refers to the recruitment, training, and supervision of all adults involved in the youth mobility to ensure they are qualified and suitable to work with young people.

All adults involved must be vetted through background checks and trained in safeguarding. For instance, group leaders must be at least 18 years old and equipped to handle emergencies and support participants.

- ***Subcontractors***: involves managing risks associated with external service providers, such as transport companies or accommodation hosts, who support the delivery of the youth mobility.

When using external service providers (e.g., transport companies, accommodation hosts), contracts should specify safety standards and liability insurance requirements.

- ***Activities and programme***: covers the planning and implementation of all activities to ensure they are appropriate, safe, and aligned with participants' needs and abilities.

Activities must be age-appropriate and risk-assessed. For example, adventurous activities should have qualified supervisors and safety equipment checked regularly (YouthSafe, 2022).

- ***Equipment***: concerns the use, maintenance, and safety checks of all physical resources and materials used during the exchange.

Regular maintenance and safety checks are mandatory to prevent accidents.

- ***Transportation***: addresses the safety and logistics involved in moving participants between locations, including vehicle safety and driver vetting.

Safe transport arrangements include vetted drivers, vehicle safety checks, and emergency procedures.

- ***Culture***: encompasses the organizational values, attitudes, and behaviors that promote a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all participants.

Promoting an open, respectful culture encourages participants to voice concerns. Organizers should foster inclusivity and non-discrimination.

- ***Business administration***: includes documentation, insurance, legal compliance, and financial management that underpin safe and accountable project delivery.

Proper documentation, including parental consent forms for minors and emergency contact lists, must be maintained.

Developing an efficient risk management plan for a youth mobility

1

Conduct a thorough risk assessment early

Start by identifying and assessing all potential risks related to the youth mobility. This includes risks linked to travel, accommodation, activities, participants' health and behavior, cultural differences, and local environment. Use checklists and guidelines such as the Good Practice Guidelines for Young Person's Safety in Youth Exchanges to cover all relevant areas (SALTO-YOUTH, 2008).

2

Involve all stakeholders in risk identification

Start by identifying and assessing all potential risks related to the youth mobility. This includes risks linked to travel, accommodation, activities, participants' health and behavior, cultural differences, and local environment. Use checklists and guidelines such as the Good Practice Guidelines for Young Person's Safety in Youth Exchanges to cover all relevant areas (SALTO-YOUTH, 2008).

3

Define clear roles and responsibilities

Assign specific tasks related to risk management to staff members and group leaders. Clarify who is responsible for monitoring safety during activities, handling emergencies, and reporting incidents. This is a key quality standard in Erasmus+ youth exchanges (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2024).

4

Develop preventive measures and safety protocols

Based on the risk assessment, create concrete measures to reduce risks. Examples include:

- Ensuring proper supervision ratios (e.g., one adult per 5–6 participants).
- Conducting safety checks of accommodation and activity venues.
- Providing participants with safety briefings and emergency contact information.
- Providing staff members with the necessary information about the mental and physical health conditions of the participants.
- Vetting and training subcontractors and other adults involved.

5

Prepare emergency response plans

Develop detailed procedures for handling emergencies such as accidents, illness, lost participants, or safeguarding concerns. Include contact details for local emergency services, embassies, and project coordinators. Make sure all staff and participants know these procedures (see Safeguarding, later in this chapter).

6

Ensure adequate insurance coverage

Verify that all participants have appropriate insurance covering travel, accidents, third-party liability, illness, and repatriation if necessary. The insurance coverage should also be calibrated to the level of risk connected to the activities you are implementing. The Erasmus+ Programme Guide requires organizers to ensure insurance is in place, either through project-specific policies or existing coverage (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2024).

7

Provide training and preparation

Train group leaders and staff on risk management, safeguarding, cultural sensitivity, and emergency procedures before the exchange. Prepare participants by informing them about safety rules, cultural differences, and how to seek help (Léargas, 2019).

8

Monitor and review throughout the exchange

Risk management is an ongoing process. Continuously monitor the situation during the exchange, hold regular team meetings to discuss safety, and be ready to adapt plans as needed. Promptly report and document any incidents or near misses (Erasmus+ Guide for Experts, 2024).

9

Foster a culture of open communication and respect

Encourage participants to express concerns and report unsafe situations without fear of judgment or reprisal. Promote inclusivity and respect to reduce risks related to bullying, discrimination, or exclusion (YouthSafe, 2022).

10

Document everything

Keep detailed records of risk assessments, safety checks, training sessions, incident reports, and communication with participants and partners. This documentation supports accountability and helps improve future exchanges (SALTO-YOUTH, 2008).

From risk management to safeguarding policy, step-by-step

Developing effective safeguarding policies for Erasmus+ youth mobilities involves translating comprehensive risk management into clear, actionable measures tailored to the specific context —whether participants stay with host families or in group accommodation. This process ensures that identified risks are systematically addressed through prevention, supervision, and response protocols. By anchoring safeguarding policies in risk management, organizations create environments where safety is systemic, not incidental, fostering trust and well-being throughout the exchange.

But HOW TO DO IT?

1

Start with a comprehensive risk assessment

Risk management begins with identifying and assessing risks that could harm participants.

For safeguarding, this involves:

- *Context-specific risks:* use available tools and templates, such as safeguarding checklists and risk assessment forms recommended by Erasmus+ and SALTO-YOUTH, to systematically identify risks like unsupervised activities, cultural misunderstandings, or gaps in staff vetting (SALTO-YOUTH, 2008). These tools help ensure no critical area is overlooked.
- *Stakeholder involvement:* actively engage your team, partner organizations, and participants themselves to gather insights on possible risks. This inclusive approach uncovers hidden risks such as language barriers or unsuitable accommodation that might not be evident from a management perspective alone (Léargas, 2019).
- *Prioritization of risks:* use simple risk matrices or scoring systems to evaluate risks based on their likelihood and potential impact. Frameworks like ISO 31000 or COSO can guide this process, but NGOs can adapt them to fit their scale and resources (see SixSigma.us, 2024). Prioritizing risks helps focus limited resources on the most critical safety concerns.

2

Identify safeguarding-specific risks

Not all risks are safeguarding risks. Focus on vulnerabilities affecting children, young people, or vulnerable adults.

Examples of safeguarding risks from youth mobilities:

- Inadequate supervision ratios (e.g., 1 adult per 10 participants)
- Lack of background checks for staff/host families.
- Activities with high physical/emotional risk (e.g., adventure sports without qualified instructors).

3

Integrate safeguarding into risk mitigation strategies

Translate risk assessment findings into safeguarding measures, developing mitigation actions, such as:

- *Staff vetting*: mandate criminal record checks and reference verification for all adults involved.
- *Training*: provide safeguarding training for staff, volunteers, and subcontractors (e.g., recognizing signs of abuse, cultural sensitivity) (Léargas, 2019).
- *Supervision protocols*: define supervision ratios and safe interaction guidelines (e.g., no one-on-one meetings between adults and minors) (Erasmus+ Guide for Experts, 2024).
- *Reporting mechanisms*: establish confidential channels for reporting concerns (e.g., hotlines, designated safeguarding officers).

4

Draft the safeguarding policy

Starting from the risk mitigation strategies, shape the core components of your Safeguarding policy. Your policy should include the following sections:

***a. Purpose and scope*:** the safeguarding policy should clearly state the organization's commitment to protecting all participants, particularly children and vulnerable young people, in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Erasmus+ values such as inclusion, diversity, and respect. For Erasmus+ youth mobilities, this means ensuring that all activities promote a safe, inclusive, and non-discriminatory environment where young people can learn and engage without fear of harm. The scope typically covers all adults involved (staff, volunteers, host families, subcontractors) and all participants, regardless of nationality, background, or ability.

> *Example: an organisation working in Erasmus+ projects may explicitly include in its safeguarding policy that it applies to all phases of the exchange—from recruitment and preparation through to follow-up—and covers both on-site activities and off-site excursions, including virtual interactions.*

b. Definition of forms of violence (Concerning vs Abusive behaviours): to create a shared vocabulary and understanding, the policy should define various forms of violence, including physical, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect, bullying, grooming and exploitation. It should also distinguish between concerning behaviors (which may require monitoring or early intervention) and abusive behaviors (which require immediate action and reporting). This clarity helps all involved recognize risks and respond appropriately.

> *Example: In an Erasmus+ exchange, group leaders are trained to differentiate between a participant's occasional emotional distress (concerning behavior) and signs of sustained emotional abuse that must be reported.*

c. Roles and responsibilities: clear assignment of safeguarding roles ensures accountability and effective response. In Erasmus+ youth mobilities, this often involves:

- Designated caregiver (safeguarding officer): a trained individual responsible for overseeing safeguarding implementation, providing advice, and managing reports.
- Group Leaders: responsible for daily supervision, creating a safe atmosphere, and acting as first points of contact for participants.
- Facilitator: responsible for the activity flow and in charge of making them safe and adapting them to the needs of the participants.
- Partner Organizations: Must comply with safeguarding standards and cooperate in risk assessments and incident management.

d. Code of conduct: the code of conduct defines acceptable and unacceptable behaviors to protect participants and staff. For Erasmus+ youth mobilities, this includes:

- Prohibiting physical punishment, humiliating language, or any form of discrimination.
- Setting boundaries for appropriate communication, including digital interactions (e.g., no private messaging between adults and minors outside official channels).
- Encouraging respectful and inclusive behavior among participants.
- Defining clear procedures for managing breaches of conduct.

Example: A code of conduct may specify that group leaders must never be alone with a single participant in private settings and that any physical contact must be appropriate and consensual (e.g., comforting gestures only).

e. Incident response: safeguarding policy must outline clear, step-by-step procedures for handling disclosures or suspicions of abuse, including:

- Ensuring the immediate safety and emotional support of the affected participant.
- Documenting the disclosure accurately and confidentially.
- Reporting to the designated safeguarding officer and, where required, to local child protection authorities (e.g. Municipal Social Services) or law enforcement (e.g. Police). A list of local child protection authorities and law enforcement is available at the end of the chapter. Some examples are:
- Maintaining confidentiality while sharing information strictly on a need-to-know basis.
- Providing follow-up support and monitoring.

Example: If a participant discloses bullying during an Erasmus+ exchange, the group leader documents the report, informs the Safeguarding officer, and the organization liaises with local authorities and the participant's sending organization to ensure protection and resolution.

f. Protection of privacy: safeguarding policies must include provisions to protect participants' privacy and personal data. This involves secure handling of sensitive information, confidentiality in reporting and responding to concerns, and respecting participants' dignity. Data sharing should comply with GDPR and only occur on a need-to-know basis (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2024).

Example: Incident reports are stored securely, and only designated safeguarding officers and relevant authorities access them.

5

Implement and monitor

- Training and awareness: conduct workshops using real-world scenarios (e.g., role-playing responses to bullying) (Léargas, 2019).
- Continuous improvement: Update the policy based on incident reports, participant feedback, and changes in legislation (e.g., new child protection laws).

From the risk to the policy

Starting from an identified risk (or group of risks) and its related mitigation strategies, we need to translate it into the Safeguarding policy. In this way, it will be possible to make a safety measure systemic.

EXAMPLE

Risk assessment:
Identified risks include inadequate supervision during free time and cultural excursions, potential conflicts in shared accommodation, and challenges related to participants' privacy and safety in communal living spaces.

Mitigation strategies:

- Require a minimum of 2 trained adults to accompany and supervise groups during all off-site activities and free time periods to ensure participant safety and quick response to incidents.
- Conduct thorough safety checks of accommodation facilities, including fire safety, secure locks on doors, and separate sleeping areas for different genders and age groups.
- Establish clear rules regarding curfew, room-sharing, and visitor policies to protect participants' privacy and well-being.
- Provide participants with detailed safety briefings on accommodation rules, emergency exits, and contact information for group leaders and local emergency services.

Policy inclusion:

- An "Accommodation Safety Checklist" included in the policy annex to guide staff in assessing and monitoring accommodation safety throughout the exchange.
- Clear supervision ratios maintained at all times, including evenings and free time.
- Emergency contact protocols specifying how and when participants can reach group leaders or safeguarding officers, including out-of-hours contacts.

Why does it work?

- Proactive vs. reactive: risk management identifies hazards before they escalate into safeguarding failures.
- Accountability: structured frameworks ensure consistency across projects.
- Cultural shift: Embedding safeguarding into risk processes fosters a "safety-first" mindset.

What to keep in mind when approaching different groups?

When working with diverse groups in youth mobilities, safeguarding approaches must be tailored to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of participants. Recognizing these differences helps create inclusive and effective protection measures.

Some examples:

- Minors: require parental consent, accompaniment by trained adults, and age-appropriate activities and communication.
- Marginalized or Minority groups: Safeguarding must actively address risks of discrimination, exclusion, or cultural misunderstandings, promoting respect and equality.
- Participants from different Cultural backgrounds: cultural sensitivity training for staff and participants helps prevent misunderstandings and fosters a respectful environment.
- LGBTQ+ Youth: ensure policies explicitly protect against discrimination and harassment, creating safe spaces for self-expression.
- Young people with Disabilities: may need additional support, accessible environments, and specialized safeguarding measures to address their specific vulnerabilities.
- Adults with vulnerabilities: when adults with specific needs participate, safeguarding must also consider their protection and support.

General Tips:

- Engage with participants to understand their specific needs and perspectives on safety (e.g., through anonymous surveys, group discussions, or individual check-ins)..
- Promote open communication, encouraging participants to voice concerns without fear (e.g., suggestion boxes, regular feedback sessions, or confidential reporting channels).
- Adapt safeguarding policies and training to reflect the diversity of the group.
- Monitor and evaluate safeguarding effectiveness continuously, adjusting approaches as necessary.

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Risk management and Creation of safer places in Youth Mobilities

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CREATING SAFER SPACES

- Continuous attention, reflection, and adaptation of policies and practices.
- Engaging participants and communities, respecting cultural contexts and individual needs.
- Promoting a culture of vigilance, inclusivity, and active responsibility.

STEPS TO DEVELOP A RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. **Conduct** careful risk assessments early, on all aspects of the youth exchange.
2. **Involve** all stakeholders (staff, partners, participants) in identifying risks.
3. **Define** clear roles and responsibilities for safety monitoring and incident management
4. **Develop** preventive measures (supervision ratios, safety checks, briefings).
5. **Prepare** detailed emergency response plans and ensure all know procedures.
6. **Verify** adequate insurance coverage for all participants and activities.
7. **Provide** training on risk management, safeguarding, and cultural sensitivity.
8. **Monitor** and review safety continuously during the exchange.
9. **Foster** open communication and respect to encourage reporting concerns.
10. **Keep** detailed documentation for accountability and learning.

RISK MANAGEMENT

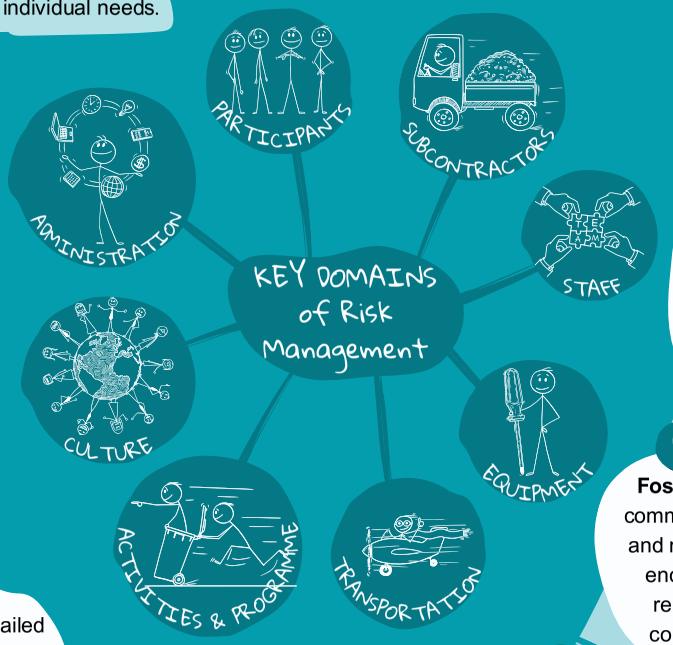
Identifies, assesses, and mitigates hazards to prevent physical, emotional, or logistical harm.

VS

SAFEGUARDING

Focuses on protecting children, young people, and vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation, creating respectful and inclusive environments.

KEY DOMAINS of Risk Management



INTEGRATING SAFEGUARDING INTO RISK MANAGEMENT

1. **Identify safeguarding-specific risks**
2. **Implement safeguarding measures**
3. **Develop a safeguarding policy with** Purpose & Scope, Definitions, Roles & Responsibilities, Code of Conduct

LADDER TO INCLUSION

Chapter 5

SOLUTION-FOCUSED APPROACH

The solution-focused approach (SFA) is a strengths-based, goal-directed method of working with individuals that emphasizes solutions rather than problems. Originating from brief therapy models developed by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg in the 1980s, this approach focuses on identifying what works, envisioning preferred futures, and building on existing resources and competencies (de Shazer, 1985; Berg, 1994). Unlike traditional problem-focused approaches that dwell on causes and deficits, SFA encourages to articulate goals and recognize small, achievable steps toward change.

SFA in the context of youth work: why is it powerful with young people facing barriers?

In youth work, the solution-focused approach is particularly valuable because it empowers young people to take an active role in their own development. It respects their agency and resilience, even when they face significant barriers. By focusing on strengths and future possibilities rather than past failures or obstacles, youth workers can foster hope, motivation, and practical progress (Franklin, Trepper, Gingerich & McCollum, 2012).

The solution-focused approach (SFA) holds a unique and powerful place in youth work because it fundamentally shifts the narrative from one of deficit and limitation to one of possibility and strength. This shift is especially critical when working with young people who face significant barriers - whether these are social exclusion, mental health struggles, educational challenges, or intersecting forms of disadvantage.

The main strengths of this approach, when working with young people facing barriers can be identified in the following features:

- **It respects agency and resilience despite barriers**: young people facing barriers often experience multiple layers of marginalization that can erode their sense of agency (i.e. the desire and ability of young people to make decisions and drive change in their own lives, communities, and beyond, becoming architects of their own future) and self-worth. Traditional problem-focused approaches, which emphasize deficits, risks, and pathology, may inadvertently reinforce feelings of helplessness or stigmatization. In contrast, SFA explicitly centers the young person as the expert of their own life, capable of identifying solutions and enacting change despite obstacles (Franklin, Trepper, Gingerich & McCollum, 2012).
  This recognition of agency is not naïve optimism but a deliberate, respectful stance that acknowledges resilience as a dynamic process. Many young people develop adaptive coping strategies and strengths precisely because of the challenges they face. SFA invites youth workers to uncover and amplify these hidden or overlooked capacities, transforming barriers into stepping stones for growth.

- **It focuses on strengths and future possibilities:** for young people who have experienced repeated failures, exclusion, or trauma, focusing on past problems can be retraumatizing and demotivating. SFA redirects attention to what is working, no matter how small, and to the young person's vision of a preferred future. This future-oriented focus cultivates hope, a critical ingredient for motivation and sustained engagement.
  For example, a young person struggling with school attendance due to anxiety may feel overwhelmed by the problem's size. A solution-focused youth worker might ask, "Can you tell me about a day recently when you managed to attend school or a class? What was different about that day?" This question helps the young person recognize their own successes and identify practical strategies that can be built upon.

- **It fosters the setting of goals in a collaborative and practical manner:** SFA facilitates collaborative goal-setting that is realistic and tailored to the young person's context. This is particularly important for those facing barriers, as their goals may need to accommodate complex life circumstances such as unstable housing, family conflict, or health issues.
  Youth workers using SFA help young people break down larger aspirations into manageable, achievable steps. This incremental progress builds confidence and a sense of mastery, which can counteract the feelings of stagnation or failure common among marginalized youth.

- **It enhances motivation and engagement:** by validating the young person's voice and focusing on their strengths and preferences, SFA fosters intrinsic motivation. Young people are more likely to engage actively in their development when they feel respected and when the process acknowledges their lived realities.
  Moreover, SFA's flexible, non-pathologizing approach is well-suited to the diversity of youth experiences, including those from different cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. It allows youth workers to adapt their interventions in ways that are culturally sensitive and relevant.

- **It supports holistic wellbeing:** the solution-focused approach aligns with holistic youth work principles by addressing not only behavioral or educational outcomes but also emotional and social well-being. By focusing on solutions, youth workers can support young people in building positive relationships, developing self-regulation skills, and enhancing their sense of belonging —all critical factors for overcoming barriers.

The SFA in the reality of Erasmus+ youth mobilities

Erasmus+ youth mobilities bring together diverse groups of young people from different countries to live, learn, and work together for up to 21 days through non-formal education activities such as workshops, role-plays, debates, and outdoor experiences. These activities can involve young people from very diverse backgrounds and, mostly in recent years, it is appearing the urgence of setting the ground to more effectively involve young people facing fewer opportunities and Highly Vulnerable Young People (Youthnetworks, 2022). This creates new challenges to be addressed and faced, since it increases the probability of conflicts and crises during youth mobility.

In this context, SFA is a useful tool in the toolbox of the youth workers involved in the management of a youth mobility (facilitators, group leaders, accompanying people, caregivers), because it:

- **Empowers young participants:** by focusing on their strengths, resources, and goals, SFA helps young people take ownership of their learning and personal development during the exchange, fostering active citizenship and intercultural dialogue.
- **Supports inclusion of the young people facing barriers:** Erasmus+ prioritizes participants with fewer opportunities. SFA's strengths-based, non-judgmental stance helps overcome barriers related to social exclusion, language, or confidence, enabling these young people to engage fully (Erasmus+, 2024).
- **Facilitates conflict resolution**: in the diverse and intense environment of youth mobilities, conflicts or misunderstandings may arise. SFA provides a practical framework for youth workers to help participants focus on solutions and shared goals rather than blame or problems.

- **Enhances motivation and Goal setting:** youth mobilities involve setting personal and group learning objectives. SFA techniques such as scaling questions and exception-finding help participants reflect on progress and identify actionable next steps.
- **Supports crisis management:** unexpected crises—such as interpersonal conflicts, health issues, or logistical problems—can disrupt exchanges. SFA's focus on immediate coping strategies, existing resources, and collaborative planning aligns well with the phases of crisis management in Erasmus+ projects (prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, mitigation) (NaturKultur, 2021).
- **Encourages reflective learning:** SFA complements non-formal education methods by encouraging participants to reflect on what works, reinforcing learning outcomes and personal growth.

Practicing the solution-focused approach

The Solution-Focused Approach in practice centers on identifying and understanding the problem just enough to collaboratively explore practical, achievable solutions. It emphasizes patience and the importance of not taking setbacks personally, while fostering active listening and supportive, respectful communication. This approach empowers young people to build on their strengths and resources, enabling meaningful progress toward their goals in a positive, future-focused way.

First of all, keep in mind...

Locate the problem, analyse it and find a solution

Although the solution-focused approach prioritizes solutions, understanding the context of the problem is essential. In youth work, this means listening carefully to the young person's experience and identifying the specific barriers they face—whether these are familial, social, economic, or psychological. However, the analysis is not about assigning blame or dissecting the problem in depth; rather, it is about clarifying the issue enough to move toward actionable solutions.

For example, if a young person struggles with school attendance, the youth worker might explore what factors contribute to this (e.g., bullying, lack of motivation, family responsibilities) but quickly shift focus to what has helped in the past or what small changes could improve attendance. Questions such as "When have you been able to attend school regularly?" or "What's different on days when you feel more motivated?" help locate exceptions and potential solutions.

The key is to co-create solutions that are realistic, achievable, and tailored to the young person's unique situation. This collaborative problem-solving builds confidence and ownership of change

Patience and time: don't take it personally

Working with young people facing barriers requires patience and an understanding that progress may be slow and non-linear. The solution-focused approach encourages workers not to take setbacks personally but to maintain a hopeful and supportive stance. Change often happens in small increments, and young people may need time to build trust and develop new skills.

Youth workers should recognize that their role is to facilitate and support, not to fix or rescue. This mindset helps maintain professional boundaries and prevents burnout. Patience also means celebrating small successes and reinforcing the young person's strengths, which sustains motivation over time (Franklin et al., 2012).

Active listening and support

Active listening is a cornerstone of the solution-focused approach. It involves fully concentrating on the young person's words, reflecting back understanding, and validating their feelings and experiences. This creates a safe space where young people feel heard and respected.

In practice, active listening means asking open-ended questions, summarizing key points, and avoiding judgment or unsolicited advice. For example, a youth worker might say, "It sounds like you've been feeling really overwhelmed lately. What's helped you cope in the past?" This invites the young person to explore their own resources and solutions (Berg & Miller, 1992).

Support in this context is not about giving answers but about facilitating discovery and reinforcing the young person's capacity to solve problems. Encouragement and positive feedback are vital to build self-efficacy.

Respectful communication

Respectful communication is essential when working with young people, especially those facing barriers that may affect their self-esteem and trust in adults. The solution-focused approach promotes language that is non-judgmental, empowering, and collaborative.

This means avoiding labels or negative stereotypes and instead focusing on strengths and possibilities. For example, instead of saying "You have a problem with anger," a youth worker might say, "You've shown a lot of energy and passion; how can we channel that in a way that helps you achieve your goals?"

Respectful communication also involves being honest, clear, and consistent. It acknowledges the young person's autonomy and encourages mutual respect in the relationship (Franklin et al., 2012).

The main ingredients...

Applying the solution-focused approach with young people, especially those facing barriers, involves a combination of mindset, communication techniques, and practical tools designed to engage, empower, and guide young people toward their preferred futures. The following outlines key steps and strategies for effective practice:

1. Establish hopes and goals

Begin by inviting the young person to articulate their hopes for the work together. This means asking questions that help them envision what they want to achieve, rather than focusing on what is wrong. For example, *"What would you like to be different in your life?" or "If things were going really well, what would that look like?"* (NSPCC, 2015).

This step is crucial because it positions the young person as the expert on their own life and future, fostering ownership and motivation.

2. Use "Problem-free talk" to identify strengths

Early in the engagement, spend time talking about the young person's interests, skills, and positive experiences unrelated to the problem. This "problem-free talk" helps build rapport and uncovers hidden strengths and resources. For instance, asking "What do you like doing?" or "Tell me about a time when you felt proud of yourself" encourages reflection on capabilities (NSPCC, 2015).

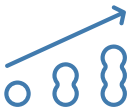
Visual tools such as drawing "My Likes and Strengths" can be effective, especially with youth, to make this process engaging and concrete.

3. Explore exceptions and small steps

Rather than dwelling on problems, help the young person identify exceptions—times when the problem was less severe or absent—and what they did differently then.

Questions like "When was the last time this problem didn't happen?" or "What was different about that day?" help reveal strategies that are already working (Leeds Safeguarding Children Partnership, n.d.).

Encourage the young person to think about small, manageable steps they can take to move closer to their goals. This incremental approach builds confidence and momentum.



4. Ask scaling questions

Scaling questions are a practical tool to assess progress and motivation.

For example, ask "On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means things are really difficult and 10 means everything is going well, where are you now?" Follow up with "What would it take to move up one point?"

This technique helps clarify current status and next steps (NSPCC, 2015).

5. Use creative and playful techniques

Especially when working with children and young people, incorporating games, drawings, storytelling, or physical activities can make the process more accessible and engaging. For example, walking conversations or using metaphors can help young people express themselves more freely and explore solutions in a non-threatening way (Milner, 2025).

6. Maintain a collaborative and respectful stance

Throughout the process, maintain respectful communication that validates the young person's experiences and choices. Avoid imposing solutions; instead, facilitate discovery by asking open-ended questions and reflecting their ideas back to them. This reinforces their role as the agent of change (Franklin et al., 2012).

7. Review progress and reinforce strengths

Regularly review what has been achieved and recognize progress, no matter how small. Reinforcing strengths and successes sustains motivation and helps the young person see their own capacity for change. Questions like "What's better since we started working together?" or "What have you learned about yourself?" support this reflection (NSPCC, 2015).

8. Adapt tools to individual needs

Use and adapt a variety of worksheets, activities, and exercises to suit the age, interests, and developmental level of the young person. The NSPCC's solution-focused practice toolkit offers a wide range of resources designed for children and young people aged 5 to 19, which can be tailored to individual circumstances (NSPCC, 2015).

Case studies: SFA during youth mobilities

Case 1: Managing an individual crisis of homesickness in a young participant

Scenario: a young participant in an Erasmus+ Youth Mobility expresses feeling overwhelmed and deeply missing home. It is their first time away from their community, and they are struggling with anxiety and loneliness.

Step 1: Establish a safe and supportive space
The youth worker begins by actively listening with empathy and validating the participant's feelings: *"I can hear how much you're missing home right now, and that's completely understandable given this is your first time away."* This creates safety and acknowledges the participant's experience without judgment (SolutionFocused.net, 2025).

Step 2: Explore exceptions and coping strategies
The youth worker asks solution-focused questions to identify moments when the participant managed their feelings better or found some relief: *"Can you think of a time recently, even if brief, when you felt a little better or more connected? What was different then?" "What have you done in the past when you felt homesick or anxious that helped, even a little?"*
This helps the participant recognize their own resilience and existing coping skills, reinforcing their agency (SolutionFocused.net, 2025; Brisbane Youth Service, 2022).

Step 3: Define a "good enough" way to manage the crisis
Acknowledging that the participant may not feel fully comfortable yet, the youth worker collaboratively explores what would make the situation more bearable: *"What would need to happen for you to feel just a little bit better today or tomorrow?" "Is there something small you can do right now or soon that might help you feel more connected or supported?"*
This pragmatic focus on manageable steps helps reduce overwhelm and builds hope (SolutionFocused.net, 2025).

Step 4: Use scaling questions to assess and build confidence
The youth worker asks: *"On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means you're feeling really homesick and 10 means you're feeling okay, where are you now?" "What would it take to move up one point on that scale?"*
This technique clarifies progress and encourages incremental change, helping the participant envision and work toward improvement (NSPCC, 2015).

Step 5: Co-Create a plan to enhance support and connection
Together, they identify concrete actions, such as:

- Scheduling regular video calls with family or friends.
- Engaging in group activities or hobbies that the participant enjoys.
- Identifying a trusted peer or youth worker to talk to when feeling low.

This plan leverages the participant's strengths and social supports, fostering a sense of control and hope (SolutionFocused.net, 2025).

Step 6: Reinforce Strengths and celebrate small successes
The youth worker acknowledges the participant's courage in sharing and taking steps forward: *"You've already shown a lot of strength by talking about this and thinking about ways to cope. That's a big step."*
This positive feedback sustains motivation and resilience (Brisbane Youth Service, 2022).

Case 2: Managing a crisis between 2 participants

Scenario: During a 7-day Erasmus+ Youth Exchange, 2 participants from different countries have a heated argument that escalates to violence, threatening the group's atmosphere and the continuation of activities.

Step 1: Immediate response with active listening and validation
TThe youth worker intervenes promptly by separating the participants and actively listening to each person's perspective without judgment. They validate feelings and acknowledge the stress of living in a new environment with cultural differences, creating a safe space for expression (NaturKultur, 2021).

Step 2: Focus on solutions and exceptions
Instead of focusing on the conflict's causes or assigning blame, the youth worker asks solution-focused questions such as:

- "Can you remember a time during this exchange when you worked well together or got along?"
- "What helped you manage disagreements in the past?"
- "What would need to happen for you to feel comfortable participating again?"

This helps participants recall positive interactions and identify personal strategies that have worked before.

Step 3: Collaborative problem-solving and safety planning
Acknowledging that the participant may not feel fully comfortable yet, the youth worker collabTogether, the youth worker and participants co-create a plan to rebuild trust and improve communication. This might include:

- Agreeing on respectful ways to express disagreement.
- Setting boundaries for group interactions.
- Planning joint activities to foster cooperation.

The youth worker also checks if either participant needs additional support or a temporary break from group activities to regain composure (NaturKultur, 2021).

Step 4: Use of scaling questions to monitor progress
The youth worker uses scaling questions to assess how ready participants feel to re-engage:

- "On a scale from 1 to 10, how comfortable do you feel about joining the group activities again?"
- "What small step could move you one point higher?"

This encourages incremental progress and ongoing reflection.

Step 5: Follow-up and recovery
After the immediate crisis, the youth worker facilitates group reflection sessions to discuss lessons learned and reinforce positive communication strategies. This supports recovery and strengthens group cohesion for the remainder of the exchange (NaturKultur, 2021).

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Solution-Focused Approach

WHAT IS SFA?

A strengths-based, method focusing on the future the other person wants solutions, not their problems.

Treats the person receiving support as experts of their lives.

Identify what works, envision preferred futures and build on existing strengths and ways of coping.

SFA IN ERASMUS+ YOUTH

- Empowers participants to take ownership of learning and development.
- Facilitates conflict resolution by focusing on solutions and shared goals.
- Enhances motivation through goal setting and reflection techniques.
- Assists in crisis management by leveraging existing resources and coping strategies.
- Supports inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities or vulnerabilities.
- Encourages reflective learning to reinforce growth.

WHY IS SFA POWERFUL?

- Respects young people's agency and resilience despite challenges.
- Fosters hope and motivation, shifting focus from deficits and problems to strengths and future possibilities
- Encourages collaborative, realistic goal-setting tailored to complex life circumstances, building on small successes and practical strategies.
- Enhances motivation, confidenc and engagement by validating young people's voices and experiences, encouraging incremental progress.
- Supports holistic wellbeing, including emotional and social aspects and is adaptable to diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES AND TECHNIQUES

Listen and communicate respectfully
Create a safe space through active listening and a focus on strengths.

Be patient and recognize effort
Progress can be slow and non-linear. Acknowledge that coping itself may require significant skills.

Set goals together
Start from the young person's vision for change and define achievable steps.

Explore resources and exceptions
Look for strengths, interests, and moments when challenges are less present.

Use scaling questions
Help young people assess progress and identify next steps.

Incorporate creative methods
Games, stories, and playful approaches can foster engagement.

Review and celebrate progress
Reinforce motivation by recognizing even small successes.

practice

Chapter 6

TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACH

Theoretical background

A trauma-informed approach recognizes that trauma – whether acute, chronic, or developmental – deeply influences how people think, feel, and behave. For many young people, especially those growing up in adversity, these impacts shape their entire worldview. Trauma can be a single overwhelming event or the result of long-term adverse experiences – both of which may leave individuals in a state of emotional and physiological dysregulation.

Trauma-informed care has emerged as a pivotal paradigm within social services and youth work, emphasizing the pervasive impact of traumatic experiences on human development, behavior, and interpersonal functioning (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). Trauma is broadly conceptualized as an event or series of events that overwhelm an individual's capacity to cope, resulting in enduring psychological, physiological, and social sequelae (Herman, 1992; van der Kolk, 2015).

Defining trauma

Trauma is not just the event itself, but how an individual experiences it. It overwhelms the person's ability to cope, often leaving lasting psychological and physical imprints. Trauma may result from abuse, neglect, violence, loss, or any experience that undermines a person's sense of safety, control, or worth.

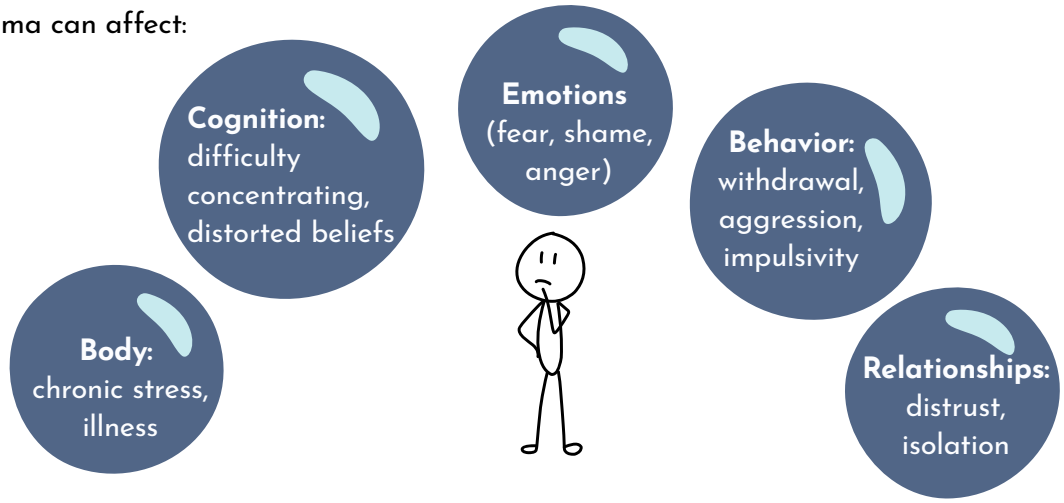
We distinguish between:

- **"T" Trauma** – severe events like war, natural disasters, or abuse.
- **"t" trauma** – repeated, smaller-scale adverse experiences like humiliation, exclusion, emotional neglect.

Trauma might be:

- **A single shocking event** (e.g., accident, assault),
- **Chronic experiences** (e.g., long-term neglect or instability), or
- **Developmental trauma,** which occurs in early childhood and disrupts attachment, emotional regulation, and the sense of safety.

Trauma can affect:



A trauma-informed approach assumes that anyone could be a trauma survivor. Thus, all interactions – whether in schools, youth centers, or social services – must prioritize safety, trust, empowerment, collaboration, and choice. The goal is not to diagnose, but to create environments that avoid retraumatization and promote healing.

The American Psychiatric Association (2013) characterizes trauma as exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence, which elicits intense fear, helplessness, or horror. However, contemporary trauma theory expands beyond discrete incidents to include chronic, cumulative, and developmental trauma forms (Cook et al., 2005). These may involve sustained adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as neglect, emotional abuse, or familial instability, which profoundly disrupt normative attachment and neurodevelopment (Perry, 2009).

Trauma's effects manifest across multiple domains. Neurobiologically, dysregulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and alterations in brain structures related to emotion regulation (e.g., amygdala, prefrontal cortex) are well-documented (Teicher et al., 2016). Psychosocially, trauma is associated with affective dysregulation, impaired executive functioning, and difficulties in interpersonal relationships (van der Kolk, 2015).

Given the high prevalence of trauma among youth populations engaged in social services (Felitti et al., 1998), a trauma-informed approach advocates for universal precautions: treating all clients as potentially trauma-exposed to minimize retraumatization and promote resilience (SAMHSA, 2014).

Understanding crisis vs. trauma

When planning and running youth mobilities for vulnerable youth, it's important to know the difference between a crisis and trauma. These terms are often confused, but they involve very different needs and responses. This quick guide helps you support young people with the right approach at the right time.

Crisis	V/S	***Trauma***
A crisis is a short-term, ***intense moment of stress or overwhelm***. It can happen to anyone and usually occurs when a person temporarily cannot cope with a situation.		Trauma is ***the lasting impact*** of deeply distressing or threatening experiences—especially when someone felt helpless or unsupported during the event.
Examples of crisis during youth mobilities: • A panic attack before an activity. • Emotional outburst after a conflict. • News from home causing distress.		Examples of trauma in vulnerable youth: • Past abuse, neglect, or violence. • Growing up in unstable environments (e.g., foster care, war zones). • Repeated bullying or exclusion.
People usually recover from a crisis with emotional support, calm presence, and time to regroup. Use Psychological First Aid (PFA) strategies like creating safety and calm.		Trauma may not be visible but affects behaviour, trust, and regulation. Focus on creating a trauma-informed environment: safety, choice, and consistency

Summary table

Term	What it is?	Duration	Support Needed
Crisis	Sudden, overwhelming moment of stress	Short-term	Immediate calm, grounding, presence
Trauma	Lasting impact of past harm or distress	Long-term	Safety, trust-building, trauma-informed care

***Tip**: A youth's crisis can be a trauma trigger for another. Always respond with patience, empathy, and awareness of different lived experiences.*

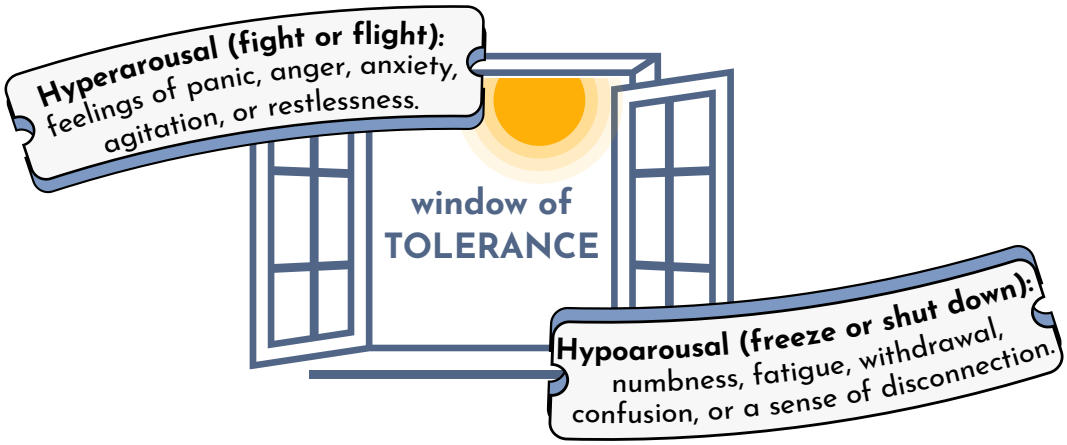
Reflection for youth workers

The window of tolerance: what it is and why it matters

The **window of tolerance** is a simple but powerful concept that helps us understand how people respond to stress and overwhelming emotions.

It refers to the optimal zone of arousal where a person can function and cope well with everyday challenges. Inside this "window," young people can think clearly, manage their emotions, and engage with others.

But when young people are pushed **outside** this window—especially those who have experienced trauma—they may shift into:



Why is it important for youth workers?

- **Recognizing signs of stress:** Understanding the window helps you identify when a young person is overwhelmed rather than "misbehaving."
- **Adjusting your approach:** You can use calming or activating strategies depending on whether a young person is in hyper- or hypoarousal.
- **Preventing escalation:** Early recognition allows for timely interventions—like grounding or co-regulation—before things spiral.
- **Supporting recovery:** Helping young people expand their window over time builds resilience and emotional regulation skills.

We may never know if a young person has experienced trauma – and we don't need to know. The trauma-informed approach assumes that anyone might have and therefore ensures that every interaction promotes:

- **Safety**: Ensuring physical and emotional security.
- **Trustworthiness and Transparency**: Clear, consistent communication and practices.
- **Empowerment**
- **Choice**
- **Peer Support and Collaboration:** Engaging clients in shared decision-making. This approach reduces the risk of retraumatization and helps young people feel seen, heard, and respected.

> *The core shift is from asking*
> *What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?"*

Working with trauma-aware sensitivity starts with ourselves.
These questions can guide personal reflection:

- *How do I interpret challenging or disruptive behavior? Do I consider what unmet need or past experience might be behind it? Do I see it as a form of communication rather than defiance?*
- *When I feel irritated, owerhelmed, or powerless, how do I regulate myself (before responding)?*
- *Do I communicate predictability and safety through my words and actions?*
- *Am I giving young people meaningful choices and control where possible?*
- *What does "repair" look like after a conflict or rupture with a young person?*
- *How do I take care of myself emotionally while caring for others?*
- *Am I creating an environment that feels safe and predictable for all young people?*
- *Do I leave space for choice, empowerment, and self-expression?*
- *How do I build trust, especially with those who might not trust easily?*

***Tip**: Think of behavior as communication.*
What is the young person trying to say or protect themselves from?

Also consider your **relational role**: healing from trauma happens in safe relationships. As a youth worker, your presence, consistency, and empathy can become part of that healing process – even in small, everyday interactions.

- Professional reflexivity is essential in trauma-informed youth work, as practitioners' awareness of their own responses and biases profoundly influences service quality and outcomes (Beddoe, 2010). Youth workers must engage in ongoing self-reflection regarding their emotional reactions, implicit assumptions, and interpersonal dynamics with trauma-affected individuals.

- Key reflective considerations include:

1.Interpretation of behavior: Recognizing that behaviors often labeled as "challenging" may function as adaptive responses to trauma, serving protective or communicative purposes (Ford & Blaustein, 2013).

2.Self-Regulation: Monitoring and managing one's emotional arousal to avoid retraumatizing or escalating conflict situations (Siegel, 2012).

3.Establishing safety: Assessing how verbal and non-verbal cues contribute to an environment that feels predictable and secure for young people (Bath, 2008).

4.Empowerment and autonomy: Reflecting on the degree to which youth are afforded meaningful choices and agency within programmatic structures (Bloom, 2013).

5.Repairing ruptures: Understanding conflict and disconnection as opportunities for relational repair, which is fundamental to trauma recovery (Herman, 1992).

- Moreover, the risk of secondary traumatic stress and burnout among youth workers necessitates reflective practice as a form of professional self-care (Figley, 1995). Supervisory support, peer consultation, and organizational policies that promote well-being are critical components to sustain workforce resilience.

Also reflect on the concept of **rupture and repair.** Conflict or disconnection happens — the healing lies in how we come back from it. Demonstrating care, acknowledgment, and responsibility models healthy relationship repair.

Non-Formal Learning (NFL)activities

In trauma-informed youth work, non-formal learning activities serve primarily as tools for emotional literacy, empathy development, and group cohesion, rather than direct trauma processing interventions. Activities must be carefully designed to foster a **safe atmosphere, avoid triggering, and respect participants' boundaries**.

It is imperative that these activities uphold:
- voluntary participation,
- maintain confidentiality,
- and emphasize emotional safety.

Facilitators must be trained to recognize signs of distress and have protocols in place to support participants if needed.

Adaptation tip: Always make sharing voluntary and emphasize that no one is required to disclose personal experiences. Prioritize emotional safety.

Important!
Never ask youth to share trauma stories. Activities should be designed **reflective, metaphoric**, and focus on **strength and safety** — not disclosure or therapy.

Tips, practices, and examples

Implementation of trauma-informed principles requires contextual adaptation and reflective integration into existing youth work practices.

- **Micro-connections matter:** Routine behaviors—such as consistent greetings, attentive listening, and honoring preferences—can contribute significantly to relational safety. A kind tone, remembering names, offering choices – these create safety. Sometimes small moments – offering a snack, remembering a name, holding eye contact – are powerful acts of connection.
- **Calm corners:** Youth spaces can benefit from having quiet areas with sensory or grounding tools.
- **Check-in rounds:** Incorporating structured but flexible opportunities for emotional expression, such as mood check-ins or metaphorical reflections. Use cards or simple metaphors ("What's your inner weather today?") to support self-expression.
- **Rupture and repair:** Conflict happens – how we come back from it is what builds trust. Encouraging a culture that normalizes mistakes and prioritizes relational repair aligns with trauma recovery models and strengthens trust.

Working in trauma-exposed environments can lead to **secondary trauma**, **vicarious trauma**, or **burnout**. Reflect, set boundaries, seek supervision, and practice self-care. You can't pour from an empty cup.

Take care of yourself, too.

Sources and further reading

Videos:

- TED Talk by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris: "How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime"
- ACEs Explained: [YouTube: Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACE Study)]
- Dr. Nadine Burke Harris TED Talk: "How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime"

Books:

- Bessel van der Kolk – The Body Keeps the Score
- Judith Herman – Trauma and Recovery
- Bruce Perry & Oprah Winfrey – What Happened to You?
- Bruce Perry - The Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics.
- Bruce Perry - The boy who was raised as a dog.

Websites:

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network – www.nctsn.org
- CHCS Trauma-Informed Care Toolkit – www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org

Organizations and Toolkits:

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Trauma-Informed Care Toolkit: https://www.samhsa.gov/trauma-informed-care
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN): https://www.nctsn.org

Trauma Informed Approach

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LADDER TO INCLUSION

CORE PRINCIPLES

A trauma-informed approach recognizes that trauma -whether acute, chronic, or developmental - has a deep impact on how young people think, feel, and act.
Trauma can result from events such as abuse, neglect, violence, or loss, and it affects emotions, cognition, behavior, relationships, and even the body.

Safety
Physical & emotional security.

Trust
Consistent, clear communication.

Empowerment
Build on strengths, not deficits.

Choice
Support autonomy.

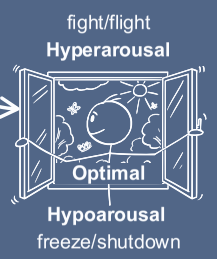
Collaboration
Peer support & shared decisions.

KEY CONCEPTS

TRAUMA
Lasting harm from distressing experiences, often involving helplessness or lack of support.

CRISIS
Short-term overwhelm that can happen to anyone.

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE
The optimal emotional state where a person can think clearly and manage stress. Youth may shift into Hyperarousal Hypoarousal.



REFLECTION FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Interpret behavior as communication of unmet needs.

Regulate yourself to avoid escalating situations.

Offer predictability and emotional safety.

Create space for repair after conflict.

Prioritize your own emotional care (burnout is real).

NON-FORMAL LEARNING (NFL)

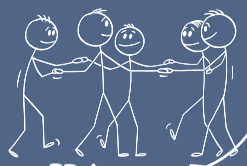
Never ask youth to share trauma stories.

Use activities for emotional awareness, empathy, and group bonding—not trauma processing.

Sharing must always be voluntary.

Activities should be metaphorical, strength-based, and emotionally safe.

PRACTISE IN ACTION



Micro-connections
Kind tone, remembering names, offering snacks.

Rupture & Repair
Normalize conflict; focus on healing disconnection.

Calm corners
Spaces with grounding tools.

Check-ins
Simple emotional reflections like "What's your inner weather?"

Chapter 7

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID (PFA) FOR YOUTH WORKERS

What is Psychological First Aid (PFA)?

PFA is an evidence-informed approach designed to reduce initial distress and foster adaptive functioning in individuals affected by acute stressors or potentially traumatic events. Drawing inspiration from physical first aid and crisis intervention practices, it provides immediate, compassionate, and non-intrusive support.

Unlike professional counseling or psychological therapy, PFA is not about diagnosing or treating mental disorders. Rather, it offers practical care, emotional presence, and connection to resources, while respecting the autonomy and dignity of those affected.

PFA is guided by core principles:

When a young person is stressed, overwhelmed, or triggered, these five principles will guide you in offering effective and respectful support. You don't need to be a mental health professional to use these tools—they are based on evidence, but made for everyday situations.

1. Create a sense of safety

Young people who have experienced trauma often feel unsafe—even when danger is no longer present. Your first task is to help their nervous system feel that "the threat is over."

How to do it

- Gently move them away from overwhelming or loud spaces.
- Use a calm voice: *"You're safe now. You're not alone."*
- Show them safety: *"We're in a quiet room now. No one will interrupt us here."*
- Avoid sudden movements, shouting, or confrontation.

Why it matters

Their brain might still be in fight/flight/freeze mode. Your calm presence can tell their body it's safe to relax.

2. Create calm

Your energy matters. Before you try to calm a young person, check your own state. Calmness is contagious.

How to do it

- Speak slowly and gently.
- Sit at their level. Give space, don't crowd them.
- Offer simple breathing: "Let's take a deep breath together—breathe in for 4... and out slowly."
- Suggest grounding: "Can you name 3 things you see?"

Why it matters

Highly vulnerable youth may panic or shut down. Your tone and presence help regulate their overwhelmed system.

3. Support self and group efficacy

"Efficacy" means feeling able to influence what happens to you. Traumatized youth often feel helpless or out of control. You can change that.

How to do it

- Let them choose: "Would you like to sit here or go for a walk?"
- Remind them of their strengths: "You've handled tough things before."
- Involve them: "Can you help set up a calm space for the others?"

Why it matters

Giving small choices builds a sense of control, which reduces helplessness and supports healing.

4. Create connection

Connection is protective. Even just knowing that someone cares can relieve stress and fear.

How to do it

- Use their name. Make eye contact (gently).
- Remind them they're not alone: "I'm here with you. You don't have to handle this on your own."
- Support reconnection: "Would you like to talk to a friend or someone from your group?"
- If they're far from home, help them message or call someone familiar.

Why it matters

Young people with unstable or broken relationships need connection the most—but may also struggle to trust. Be patient.

5. Create hope

Hope doesn't mean pretending everything is fine. It means helping them believe things can improve—and that they won't always feel this way.

How to do it

- Be realistic but kind: "Right now it's hard, but this will pass."
- Show a next step: "After a break, we'll check in again, and you can choose what you need."
- Share truth-based reassurance: "You're not broken. You're having a very human reaction to a hard situation."

Why it matters

Hope is a buffer against despair. Even a small flicker can help a young person hold on.

Summary of PFA steps

1. **Create a sense of safety**
2. **Create calmness**
3. **Support Self and Group Efficacy**
4. **Create Connection**
5. **Create Hope**

Reflection for youth workers

If a **vulnerable young person becomes stressed or overwhelmed during a youth mobility**, applying **psychological first aid (PFA)** can make a significant difference. Here's a practical, step-by-step guide for youth workers based on the core actions of PFA. These steps are designed to be supportive, respectful, and non-intrusive for young people who may face emotional overwhelm, culture shock, homesickness, interpersonal tension, or trauma triggers.

1. Prepare

Know your role and limits

- You are not a therapist. Your role is to be a calm, supportive adult who helps manage distress and connects the young person to further help if needed.

Know your resources

- Before the exchange, prepare a list of contacts (e.g., mental health professionals, local services, emergency support) and ensure your team is trained in basic support techniques.

Create a safe environment

- Design the program to include chill zones, flexibility, and access to trusted adults.

2. Look – assess the situation

Be observant

- Look for **signs of distress:** crying, silence, withdrawal, restlessness, panic, irritability, confusion, or sudden isolation.

Assess safety

- Is the young person or anyone else in danger? If yes, prioritize physical safety first.

Approach gently

- Respect personal space, go slowly. Use body language that communicates calmness and care (e.g., open posture, soft voice).

3. Listen – be present and supportive

Offer presence, not pressure

- Don't force them to talk. Simply say something like:
  "I see you're having a hard time. I'm here if you'd like to talk or if there's anything you need."

Practice active, empathetic listening

- Be attentive. Reflect back what they share, validate their feelings.
  "It makes sense that you're feeling overwhelmed right now."

Avoid interrogation or debriefing

- Don't ask for detailed stories or analysis of what happened. Focus on the present moment and their needs.

Be age-appropriate

- Adapt your communication to the age and emotional state of the youngster.

4. Link – provide practical support and connection

Help with basic needs

- Offer water, a snack, a blanket, quiet space, or time with a trusted person.

Connect them to resources

- Maybe they need to contact home, speak to a team leader, or talk to someone in their language. Support this gently.

Guide, don't take over

- Involve them in decisions:
  "Would it help to go for a walk or take a break in a quiet space?"

Refer when needed

- If their distress is intense, prolonged, or you're unsure how to support them, connect with professionals or use the emergency contacts you prepared..

5. Aftercare – support continuity and reflection

Check in regularly

- Don't assume one conversation is enough. Ask later how they're feeling, offer ongoing support.

Encourage self-regulation tools

- Teach or revisit grounding and breathing techniques (like 5-4-3-2-1 or box breathing - you will find some of the specific techniques explained later in the chapter)

Foster peer support

- Help re-establish connection with peers when they're ready. Social belonging can be very healing.

Debrief with your team

- Reflect as a team (after the situation, not during) on what worked, what to do differently, and how to care for yourselves.

Summary of PFA steps	1. **Create a sense of safety** 2. **Prepare → Know your role and build a safe environment** 3. **Look → Recognize signs of distress** 4. **Listen → Offer calm, compassionate presence** 5. **Link → Provide comfort, support and connect to help** 6. **Aftercare → Follow-up and promote coping strategy**

Self-reflection questions for youth workers:

- How do I respond to emotional distress in young people?
- What is my own relationship with stress and trauma?
- Do I feel confident in offering emotional support without needing to "fix" or solve things?
- Am I aware of my limits, and do I know when to refer to professionals?
- Do I have a support network I can rely on after emotionally taxing situations?

Considerations

- Being present is often more powerful than solving the problem.
- Young people's reactions vary—don't assume everyone will want or need support.
- Your own wellbeing is crucial. Peer support and supervision matter.
- Confidentiality is key—but remember your safeguarding duties.

Tips, good practices and examples

- **Adapt language and tone**: Use simple, age-appropriate language. Stay calm and kind.
- **Build a support team**: Know who you can call or consult when needed.
- **Prepare ahead**: Map available resources and contacts before a crisis.
- **Practice grounding regularly**: Teach techniques like the 5-4-3-2-1 method in everyday settings so they become accessible in emergencies.
- **Good practice example**: During a youth camp, a participant witnessed a peer injury. A youth worker used PFA—sat quietly nearby, offered a drink, and calmly explained what would happen next. The participant later said that small gestures like being offered a warm drink and calm presence helped the most.

Extra techniques

Grounding techniques

Grounding helps a person reconnect with the present moment. It is useful when someone is overwhelmed, anxious, or feeling disconnected from reality.

	Why it works
1. 5-4-3-2-1 Technique (sensory awareness) Ask the person to name: • 5 things they can see • 4 things they can touch • 3 things they can hear • 2 things they can smell • 1 thing they can taste	*Redirects attention to the environment using the 5senses.*
2. Object grounding (tactile grounding) Give the person a small object to hold (e.g., a stone or stress ball) and ask them to focus on how it feels.	*Engages touch to help ground attention in the present.*
3. Body scan with movement Guide the person to tense and release each body part from toes to head.	*Encourages awareness of bodily sensations and releases tension.*
4. Describe your space Ask the person to describe what they see in the room or environment.	*Shifts focus from internal distress to external surroundings.*
4. Describe your space Ask the person to describe what they see in the room or environment.	*Shifts focus from internal distress to external surroundings.*
5. Grounding through movement Encourage actions like stomping feet, clapping, or walking.	*Activates the body to anchor awareness in the present moment.*

Breathing techniques
Breathing exercises calm the nervous system and regulate emotions.

	Why it works
1. Box breathing (square breathing) Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds. Repeat.	*Structured breathing reduces stress.*
2. Smell the flower, blow the candle Inhale through the nose (like smelling a flower), exhale through the mouth (like blowing a candle).	*Fun, easy for anyone to follow.*
3. 4-7-8 Breathing Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7, exhale for 8 seconds.	*Calms the mind and lowers anxiety.*
4. Extended exhale breathing Inhale for 3-4 seconds, exhale for 6-8 seconds.	*Longer exhales activate the body's calming response.*
5. Breath + movement (breath anchor) Place one hand on the chest and one on the belly. Focus on slow, deep breathing into the belly.	*Builds awareness.*

Sources and further reading

- WHO Field Guide for PFA: link
- American Psychological Association PFA Guide: link
- Podcast: Rescuer MBS – Laura McGladrey Interview with Tod Schimelfpenig, Spotify Episode
- NOLS Guide https://blog.nols.edu/2017/05/22/5-components-psychological-first-aid

Psychological First Aid (PFA) for Youth Workers

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Psychological First Aid (PFA) is part of first aid generally. It is an evidence-based approach designed to reduce distress and support adaptive functioning after acute stress or trauma. It is not therapy or diagnosis—it provides immediate, compassionate, practical care while respecting the young person's dignity and autonomy.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF PFA

Create Safety
Help the young person feel safe again. Use a calm voice, avoid sudden movements, and provide a quiet space.

Create Calm
Regulate your own energy. Speak gently, offer grounding or breathing exercises.

Support Efficacy
Offer choices and involve them. Even small decisions restore a sense of control.

Create Connection
Be present. Use their name, make gentle eye contact, and reassure them they are not alone. Connect them with the people who are the most important to them. Offer a phone call, chat ect.

Create Hope
Acknowledge their struggle while gently reinforcing things can improve. Provide specific, accurate positive facts about the situation.

HELPFUL TECHNIQUES

BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Belly Breathing
Hands on chest and belly, deep breathing into the belly.

Extended Exhale
Longer exhalation to calm the nervous system.

Box Breathing
4-inhale, 4-hold, 4-exhale, 4-hold.

GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

Tactile object
Focus on holding a small object.

Movement & body scan
Tense and release muscles.

5-4-3-2-1
Name 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, etc.

Move
Walking or stomping to reconnect with the body.

PFA IN PRACTICE STEP-BY-STEP FOR YOUTH WORKERS

1 PREPARE
Know your limits—you're not a therapist. Identify emergency contacts and services, available safe spaces ahead of time

2 LOOK
Observe signs of distress (e.g., withdrawal, panic). Prioritize physical safety if needed.

3 LISTEN
Listen and be with the person. Validate feelings without pushing for stories.
Use age-appropriate language.

4 LINK
Offer comfort items (water, blanket), and connect them to support or home.
Involve them in decisions; refer to professionals if necessary.

5 AFTERCARE
Follow up. Offer later support, encourage self-regulation tools, and reconnect them with peers.
Debrief with your team and care for yourself.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

- **Presence matters** more than fixing the problem.
- **Reactions vary** - don't assume everyone needs the same support
- **Respect confidentiality** but prioritize safeguarding.
- Take care of your own wellbeing and **use peer support.**

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: NAVIGATING GREY ZONES IN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH MOBILITIES

In international youth mobilities, roles and relationships can sometimes become blurred. Youth workers may simultaneously act as facilitators, mentors, supervisors, and companions. Participants may include minors, legal adults (18+), and peer leaders - all within the same group. This complex web of roles can lead to grey zones in boundaries, power dynamics, and appropriate behavior.

Why grey zones happen

- Age range and legal status: An 18-year-old may legally be an adult but is still developing emotionally and socially. Meanwhile, a 17-year-old may be nearly indistinguishable in maturity, but legally considered a minor. The legal line doesn't always reflect relational dynamics.
- Blurred roles: Youth workers might eat, sleep, and travel with the group—blurring the line between professional and personal interaction.
- Informality in youth work: The non-formal education setting encourages closeness and trust, which can unintentionally blur boundaries.

Examples of grey zone situations

- A youth worker developing a close friendship or romantic interest in an 18-year-old participant.
- A young adult (18–22) acting as a peer leader but lacking formal training in boundaries or safeguarding.
- A participant consistently confiding in a group leader about personal issues, creating an imbalance of emotional responsibility.
- A youth worker sharing personal stories or joking in ways that shift from professional to overly personal or inappropriate.

What to watch out for

- **Power imbalance:** Even when both people are adults, a youth worker has institutional power—this affects consent and autonomy.
- **Emotional enmeshment**: Feeling "special" to a participant or becoming their primary emotional support may feel helpful but can be risky.
- **Mixed messages:** When group leaders act like friends one moment and disciplinarians the next, it can confuse expectations and boundaries.

Strategies for navigating grey zones

- Clarify roles early and often, for both staff and participants. Define what group leaders are for - and what they're not.
- Hold boundaries even with 18+ participants. Just because a participant is legally an adult doesn't eliminate your duty of care or power difference.
- Avoid one-on-one isolation with young people, especially in personal or emotional conversations. Use shared spaces or include co-leaders.
- Check in with colleagues if a relationship with a participant starts to feel too intense, personal, or complicated.
- Model professional warmth: Be kind, supportive, and fun without becoming a peer, therapist, or friend.
- Equip peer leaders or young adults in mixed roles with guidance, training, and support so they understand their responsibilities and limits.

When in doubt

If something feels "off" or too personal—pause and reflect:

- Am I in a position of influence over this young person?
- Would I feel comfortable if someone else in the team behaved this way?
- Is this dynamic transparent and respectful of everyone's safety and dignity?

Clear policies, supervision, and open team communication are key to navigating grey zones safely. Youth workers must be especially vigilant in these in-between spaces, where good intentions are not always enough to ensure safe practice.

APPENDIX 2: WHAT TO PUT IN A FIRST AID KIT

Medical first aid

First aid is a medical intervention that anyone—whether a layperson or someone with some medical training—can perform before emergency care begins in order to avert the consequences of an accident or sudden health impairment.

Rapid recognition, effective emergency calls, and skillful intervention are paramount. The first responder's responsibility extends beyond mere physical assistance: appropriate communication and psychological support are equally crucial tasks. A calm word or a reassuring touch can reduce the patient's anxiety and increase their chances of recovery.

In the event of illness or injury, the first person on the scene—and often the one who fundamentally determines the fate of the person in need—is the bystander who is present at the incident or who first notices it. In this sense, the first responder plays an important role, as it is their responsibility to recognize the situation, call for help as quickly and informatively as possible, and intervene with the necessary skills. In addition, first responders also have other tasks, such as communicating appropriately and providing psychological support to the patient/injured person.

In simple terms, first aid consists of the following parts:

1. Recognition - Quickly identify the problem and any potential hazards.
2. Emergency call - Provide immediate and accurate information to emergency services.
3. Providing assistance - Perform the necessary interventions to stabilize the injured or ill person's condition.

Before you begin any intervention, keep these fundamental principles in mind, which are crucial during any first aid situation:

1. Safety: Always ensure your own safety and the safety of the environment first. Only begin to help if the scene is safe and no further danger threatens you or the injured person.
2. Assess: Quickly assess the injured person's condition and the severity of the situation.
3. Call for Help: As soon as you've assessed the situation, immediately call for help using the appropriate emergency number. Be precise and concise.
4. Intervene: Begin the necessary first aid interventions to stabilize the injured or ill person's condition.
5. Monitor Continuously: Do not leave the injured/ill person alone. Continuously monitor their condition and respond to any changes until professional help arrives.

There are many cases where it is not necessary to call an ambulance or doctor. Here are some suggestions for what to put in your first aid kit so that you can respond quickly in case of pain and continue with your plans without having to visit a pharmacy or doctor to relieve the pain. Below, we've compiled a suggested list of the most important supplies and medications to help you respond quickly and effectively to unexpected situations.

Fundamental elements

Medicines:

- Antihistamine
- Against diarrhoea (Diosmectite - for example: Smecta)
- Aspirin, Ibuprofen, Acetaminophen (Paracetamol) – against fever and pain three different active ingredients for possible allergies
- Placebo (vitamin B, C or D)
- Daedalon (anti-nausea)
- Laxative

Others:

- Menstrual pads and tampons
- CPR mask
- Octenisept (wound disinfectant)
- Glucose
- Plaster
- Elastic bandage
- forceps (for removing splinters and ticks)
- Disposable gloves

The internal medicine patient: abdominal pain, chest pain, respiratory distress

Treatment principles

1. Reduce anxiety and activity.
2. Place the patient in a comfortable position.
3. if the patient is prescribed nitroglycerin or aspirin, allow/encourage him/her to take it for chest pain.
4. In case the patient is prescribed an inhaler, allow/encourage its use in case of breathlessness.
5. In case of altered mental status and possible diabetes, give sugar.
6. Check the patient's level of responsiveness: the patients' initial state, the stimulus required, and the patient's response. Note how they responded and to what stimulus, e.g., "The patient flinched to a pinch." or "The patient opened their eyes to a loud verbal stimulus."

A + O x 4	*Awake and Oriented to Person, Place, Time, and Events.*
A + O x 3	*Awake and Oriented to Person, Place, and Time.*
A + O x 2	*Awake and Oriented to Person and Place.*
A + O x 1	*Awake and Oriented to Person.*
A + O x 0	*Awake, but not Oriented, not responding appropriately.*
V Responsive to Verbal	*Not awake. Responds to a verbal stimulus.*
P Responsive only to Pain	*Not awake. Responds only to a painful stimulus.*
U Unresponsive	*Patient does not respond to any stimulus.*

Medical notification

Call a physician for any patient who has chest pain that is not clearly musculoskeletal in origin; dyspnea of increasing frequency or severity; altered state of consciousness; abdominal pain that has been present for more than 12 hours, is localized, in a guarding position, tender, expansive, or rigid abdominal wall, or that worsens with movement, shaking, or leg tapping.

Burn injury

Excluding sunburn, the most common burn injury is from hot water spills.

Treatment principles
Safety

- Ensure the safety of the scene.
- Remove the injured person from danger. Stop the burn process - help prevent further contact with the hot/burning object
- Cold water rinsing can reduce pain and injury. Avoid hypothermia. Do not use ice to cool the burn. Remove clothing and objects that may be in distress (e.g., jewelry, watches, belts).
- Airway and breathing: Be suspicious of face/neck burns, soot in the mouth/nose, singed hair and dry cough.
- Do not drain intact blisters.
- Pain medication as needed (Anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin or ibuprofen are often recommended.)
- Keep the patient hydrated.
- Monitor.

Wound care

Minor injuries are common. Preventing infection and promoting healing are important skills.

Short-term care: controlling bleeding
Life-threatening bleeding splashes or soaks through clothing, or forms puddles on the floor, or is associated with missing body parts- and altered mental status.

Bleeding control techniques

- Manual direct pressure and lifting: most often an effective technique. Pressure should be focused on the source of bleeding with fingers or gauze. Lifting can help to control bleeding.
- Wound packing, sealing: pack (compress) the wound with an anti-bleeding agent, simple gauze or a clean cloth and then apply direct pressure.
- Pressure dressing: freeing the hands for another task, or safety dressing after bleeding has been controlled.

Allergic Reaction and Anaphylaxis

Allergic reactions are caused by the excessive release of histamine and other substances in response to the presence of foreign allergens in the body's immune system, such as pollen, animal hair, foods, vegetable oils, insects and drugs. Allergic reactions may range from mild (e.g. hay fever) to severe (e.g. anaphylaxis). Severe allergic reactions are treated by the administration of epinephrine (a prescription medicine).

Mild to moderate allergic reactions
An allergen introduced by ingestion, injection, inhalation or absorption may be dispersed throughout the body, causing histamine overproduction and an allergic reaction.

Signs and symptoms: mild to moderate allergic reaction

- Swelling at the injection site (sting).
- Signs and symptoms of hay fever (pollen reaction).
- Flushed and itchy skin.
- Hives and/or loops on the skin.
- No difficulty breathing.

Treatment principles for mild to moderate allergic reactions.
1. Remove the allergen or patient from the offending environment.
2. Give oral antihistamine.
3. Monitor closely for facial swelling and signs of respiratory compromise.

Anaphylaxis
Anaphylaxis is a life-threatening allergic reaction characterised by the release of histamine and other mediators that cause bronchospasm (extreme difficulty breathing), leaking blood vessels and massive vasodilatation (vasogenic shock). Death can result from asphyxiation, shock, or both.

Signs and symptoms: anaphylaxis
- Mild to moderate allergic reactions: flushed and itchy skin, hives and/or loops on the skin.
- Swelling of large areas, typically involving the face, lips and possibly the hands and feet.
- Difficulty swallowing.
- Difficulty breathing, inability to speak in groups of only one or two words.
- Gastrointestinal symptoms such as cramping abdominal pain.
- Signs and symptoms of shock.

Treatment principles for anaphylaxis
1. Inject epinephrine (adult dose = 0.3ml/1:1000 intramuscular) to all patients who have a severe allergic reaction/anaphylaxis:
- any airway swelling (lips, tongue, uvula, altered voice);
- large areas of swelling;
- respiratory compromise or shock.
2. Continue to give oral antihistamine at the recommended dose during waiting for the physician.
3. In the event of a recurrence of the reaction, continue the administration of epinephrine.
4. Call a physician.

Legal regulation - The rules on administering epinephrine vary from country to country.

How to call an ambulance?

It is essential to provide accurate and concise information. When you call the emergency number (e.g., 112 in Hungary), try to remain calm and provide the following details to the emergency operator in order for the emergency services to arrive at the scene as prepared as possible:

1. Where did the incident occur? - If the address is unclear, try to explain how to get to the location and arrange for someone to guide them there.

2. Provide your name and a phone number where you can be reached! - If the line is disconnected or new information is needed, we will be able to call you back. Remember, if the address is inaccurate, the emergency services will not be able to find you without your help.

3. What kind of emergency is it, what happened? - Stick to the facts; the shorter and more accurate your description of the problem, the sooner help can arrive. It is important for the emergency services to know what complaints or symptoms are noticeable in those who need rescue. They may be complaining of pain in their legs or stomach, they may be pale or even unconscious. Every symptom may be important.

4. Provide any other information - (e.g., there are multiple casualties, firefighters are also needed, etc.) that may be important.

5. Provide first aid until the ambulance arrives! - Do not hang up, as you can follow the rescue coordinator's instructions over the phone even if you are not trained.

APPENDIX 3: UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Every relationship is different, but unhealthy and offensive relationships always have something to do with abuse of power and control over the other person. Violent words and actions are tools used by violent partners to maintain power and control over the partner. Any young person can end up in unhealthy relationships and experience violence from close people, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, social class, religion, culture or ethnicity. Violence in relationships is more common than we might think. One should never forget that violence is never the victim's fault and the victim should never feel shame about seeking help!

Recognizing healthy, unhealthy, and violent relationships can sometimes be much harder than we think. No relationship is the same – something can be perceived as unhealthy in one relationship and be perceived as violent in the next. Youth mobilities can be both - safe space to gain perspective and distance for a young person to reflect on their relationships and learn other options, but can also be a breeding ground for unhealthy relationship dynamics when youth dating practices are left unsupervised during mobilities.

Warning signs indicating that a relationship may be unhealthy or violent:

- monitoring of one's telephone, email, social networks without the owner's consent
- extreme jealousy or insecurity
- constant humiliation
- "explosive" temper
- isolating someone from one's family and friends
- false accusations
- constant mood swings towards one's partner
- causing physical pain and abuse to someone
- a feeling of ownership towards someone
- specifying what one's partner can and cannot do
- forcing someone to have sex

How can I help someone who is in an unhealthy relationship?

One should realize that helping another person in an unhealthy relationship may not be easy. Perhaps you may have already tried to talk to them, but they were not ready to hear you out or take action to change something. When people are in unhealthy relationships, they may not always be able to recognize and see the warning signs themselves. Furthermore, even if they recognize the signs, they often fear their partner or feel too threatened, ashamed, or hopeless in their situation, making leaving such relationships difficult and even dangerous.

Tips to helping someone

1

Start the conversation:
Let them know you have noticed certain things that concern you. Ask them if they have noticed the same and how that behavior makes them feel. Help your friend identify these behaviors by connecting them to resources or sharing information about healthy relationship signs.

2

Be supportive:
Remember the person may not recognize the abuse or even want to leave or stop. This is difficult when you clearly see the signs. When talking to the person or if they approach you with concerns, be supportive. Don't judge them, keep an open mind and help them get the resources they need like creating a safety plan.

3

Keep your communication door open:
They need you to listen and be supportive. What you see or hear may make you frustrated and upset. If this happens try to stay calm. If you give them an ultimatum like "if you don't leave, I won't talk to you again" that closes the door of communication. People in abusive relationships will most commonly speak out to a friend first and sometimes they won't talk to anyone else. If you shut your door and tell them that you won't talk to them again, you may be shutting down their only resource or connection to help. Instead, let them know that you want to help and can connect them to resources when they are ready.

4

When in need get support:
If you feel that the person is in immediate danger or that their life is at risk or has been threatened, you may want to get emergency support by calling 112. It may not be your first choice for help, but if things are serious it's important to call professionals for support. You may also consider talking to a counselor, trusted person, or legal aid if there is no immediate danger present. Remember boundaries, warning signs and healthy relationships are not as clear when you are in an abusive relationship. That's why it's important to educate your community about dating abuse and how to have a healthy relationship.