

Inclusion in Circus Pedagogy

Creative Tools for Inclusive Youth Work



Co-funded by
the European Union



Agency for International
Programs for Youth
Republic of Latvia

eurodesk



About the Project

Solidarity Circus 2025 was an Erasmus+ KA1 training course organised by Kultūras biedrība “Alternatīvā Realitāte” in Riga, Latvia. It brought together 32 youth workers from 9 countries to explore non-verbal, physical, and inclusive methods of working with young people. This toolkit captures practical methods and reflections that emerged from the training, with a special focus on supporting youth with fewer opportunities, including those from conflict-affected regions.

Purpose of the Toolkit: To provide accessible, low-resource, and impactful tools for youth workers, educators, and volunteers working in diverse and often challenging environments. This toolkit is designed to be usable offline and adaptable to different group sizes, settings, and cultural contexts

Method 1: Silent Mirroring

This activity is called Mirroring, and some of you may have done something like this before. Even if it feels familiar, we'll go through our version together.

First, everyone should pick a partner and find some space in the room so that you won't bump into others. Stand facing your partner, about an arm's length apart — around 80 cm is great.

Now decide who will be the leader and who will be the mirror. The mirror will copy the leader's movements as closely and at the same time as possible.

Start by standing still, with no movement at all. Just breathe and look at each other. When you're both ready, the leader can begin to move slowly — maybe raising a hand, turning the head, or shifting weight — and the mirror should follow, copying the exact movements in real time.

Important: Go slow at first. If it's hard to keep up or you feel out of sync, just pause or use a small gesture to show that something's off — like saying with your hands:

- ☞ "Too fast,"
- ☞ "Too many movements,"
- ☞ or "The mirror is leading instead!"

The goal is to find a rhythm where you're totally in sync — moving together almost like one person.

Once you feel connected, you can try to speed up a little, add small and detailed movements (like with your fingers, elbows, shoulders — even your tongue if you're brave!), and see how well your partner can keep up.

No talking during the whole game! Just focus, breathe, and connect.

🕒 Suggested time: 5 to 10 minutes, or a little longer if everyone's into it.

Why it works:

Silent mirroring helps youth — especially those who struggle with verbal expression — to build trust and connection through body language. It equalizes power dynamics and gently introduces self-awareness and attention to others in a playful yet mindful way.

Tips:

- Start with music, then remove it to deepen concentration.
- Works well as a daily check-in or group grounding tool.





● Method 2: Juggling with a purpose

Objective: Improve focus, patience, and emotional regulation while fostering play and coordination.

How it works:

Using scarves or juggling balls, introduce the basic 1-ball, 2-ball, and 3-ball cascade patterns. Break down each step clearly and celebrate small wins. Group juggling games follow — e.g. passing a ball in a circle using names or timing.

Why it works:

Juggling is universally challenging but rewarding. It supports executive function, fine motor skills, and focus. For many young people, mastering a physical skill boosts self-esteem and shows progress through repetition.

Adaptation:

- Use slow-falling scarves for beginners or those with mobility challenges.
- Ideal for building persistence in NEET youth or those with ADHD.



● Method 3: Clown identity walk

Objective: Encourage playful self-expression and confidence through character creation.

How it works:

Participants wear red noses (or use symbolic markers) and explore walking across the room using different emotional states: shy, proud, confused, joyful, angry. They exaggerate body movement and facial expressions, then introduce imaginary obstacles. The clown persona is guided by honesty and presence, not tricks.

Why it works:

Clowning allows youth to be seen — without needing to perform perfectly. It's powerful for breaking social anxiety and connecting groups through shared laughter.

Facilitation notes:

- Always debrief: What did you feel? What surprised you?
- Create a safe, non-judgmental atmosphere — clowning is vulnerability in motion.



● Method 4: Body freeze sculptures

Objective: Explore social issues or emotions through visual metaphor and collective expression.

How it works:

In small groups, participants create a physical “sculpture” by freezing their bodies in shapes that represent a concept (e.g. democracy, fear, freedom, belonging). One by one, they step into the scene, shaping their own body in relation to others. The scene can be reflected upon or changed by audience members.

Why it works:

This is an accessible, physical method to address complex ideas — especially for youth who don’t feel confident verbalizing opinions. It blends theatre of the oppressed with street performance techniques.

Themes:

Perfect for exploring discrimination, mental health, or youth rights.



● Method 5: The Juggle jam circle

Objective: Foster inclusion, rhythm, and fun through collective improvisation.

How it works:

The group forms a circle. One person enters and starts a juggling rhythm (balls, scarves, clubs — whatever level is accessible). Others add in, one at a time, building a group rhythm. Participants can dance, clap, support, or pass props.

Why it works:

This creates a strong sense of group identity and collective creativity. Everyone contributes at their own level — from movement to timing to moral support. It's great for bonding and visibility (also adaptable for public spaces).

Pro tip:

Film or photograph this for great visual dissemination — it's dynamic, joyful, and inclusive.



● Method 6: Street whisper messages

Objective: Build confidence in public space and practice peaceful civic expression.

How it works:

Participants choose a message they want to share with the world (e.g. “Everyone belongs,” “Peace is strength,” “I see you”). They whisper or say it quietly while walking through a public or semi-public space. In later rounds, volume or movement can increase. This is done silently or in duos.

Why it works:

This is an emotional yet empowering way to help participants reclaim voice and space, especially relevant for young people who have experienced exclusion or displacement.

Debrief:

Discuss how it felt to speak in public, who they imagined receiving their message, and whether they’d like to do it again in real life.



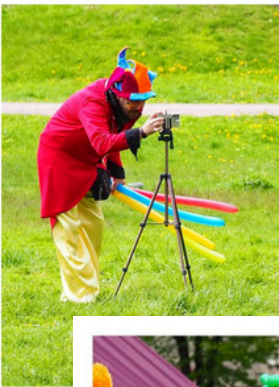
Youth Worker Reflections

Youth Worker Reflections

"I discovered how physical creativity can overcome language barriers. I'm taking this to my youth centre for refugee teens." – Youth worker from Poland

"The juggling method became our team's favourite. It teaches patience and celebration of failure." – Youth worker from Italy

"I will implement clowning for emotional literacy sessions in our rural youth group. It's engaging and easy to adapt." – Youth worker from Palestine



DISTRIBUTION AND CONTACT

This toolkit is printed and distributed offline in communities with limited internet access and will be shared digitally via partner networks when possible.

For more information:

Kultūras biedrība "Alternatīvā Realitāte"

Website: www.alternativa.lv

Email: alternativarealitate@gmail.com



Co-funded by
the European Union



Agency for International
Programs for Youth
Republic of Latvia

eurodesk



Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, European Commission or Latvian National Agency (Agency for International Programs for Youth) neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.