



Agency for International
Programs for Youth
Republic of Latvia

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



INTO LOVE

A Manual for Emotionally Resilient Youth Work

KALM
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TRAININGS



Welcome to the Emotional Resilience Toolkit: INTO LOVE

This toolkit was born from an Erasmus+ youth worker mobility project that brought together passionate individuals from across Europe. Our shared journey explored the deep waters of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and how it can transform not just our professional youth work, but our everyday human connections.

At its heart, this manual is about **emotional resilience - the ability to stay grounded, connected, and compassionate, even in the face of stress or conflict**. We believe that learning to recognize, express, and honor our emotions and needs is a radical act of self-care and powerful youth work.

The tools, stories, and practices in this guide are created by participants, for participants - rooted in real experiences, shaped by real challenges, and designed to support you in your personal and professional life.

Whether you're looking for a quick breathing exercise before a tough conversation, a deeper understanding of NVC principles, or inspiration from someone else's emotional journey - we hope this toolkit will feel like a trusted friend.



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Chapter 1: Understanding emotional resilience

What is emotional resilience?

Emotional resilience is the ability to adapt to stressful situations, bounce back from emotional setbacks, and remain centered in the face of challenges. For youth workers, this means staying connected to empathy, values, and authenticity even when navigating complex or emotionally charged environments.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), resilience involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that anyone can learn and develop. It's not about avoiding pain, but about facing it with tools that protect our inner well-being and foster growth.

In NVC terms, emotional resilience is deeply connected to staying in touch with our feelings and needs, and being able to respond rather than react. As Marshall Rosenberg wrote:

"Every message, regardless of form or content, is an expression of a need."

— Marshall B. Rosenberg

Through awareness and connection to our needs, we develop resilience. And not by suppressing emotion, but by giving ourselves empathy and space to process them.

Key Concepts from NVC

1. Feelings vs. Thoughts

In NVC, it's crucial to distinguish what we feel from what we think. Often, we mix evaluations or judgments into what we call "feelings."

- ❌ "I feel like you're ignoring me." → (a thought)
- ✅ "I feel sad because I have a need for inclusion." → (a feeling + need)

Rosenberg explains that feelings are not being caused by another person, but by our own needs being met or not met.

This understanding builds resilience by helping us own our emotional experiences and take responsibility for them.



2. Needs vs. Strategies

One of the most transformative NVC insights is the distinction between universal human needs and the specific strategies we use to meet them.

- **Needs:** autonomy, connection, safety, meaning, play, rest, empathy
- **Strategies:** asking someone to be quiet, demanding attention, quitting a job

Conflicts often arise not because of differing needs, but because of rigid or conflicting strategies.

“Every criticism, judgment, diagnosis, and expression of anger is the tragic expression of an unmet need.”

— *Marshall Rosenberg*

Recognizing this allows youth workers to depersonalize tension and look deeper (into feelings & needs) — building compassion and resilience instead of blame.

3. Empathy and honest expression

NVC rests on two pillars:

- **Empathy:** the capacity to be present with another person's feelings and needs without fixing, advising, or reacting.
- **Honest Expression:** expressing our own feelings and needs clearly and vulnerably without blame or judgment.

Empathy gives us the precious gift of connecting deeply with others, without the need to fix, solve, or rescue.

Empathy for self and others is one of the strongest protective tools for emotional resilience.

4. Jackal vs. Giraffe consciousness

NVC invites us to shift from judgmental “jackal” thinking to compassionate “giraffe” listening and speaking.



Jackal Language:

- Focuses on blame, punishment, who's right/wrong

- Uses shame, guilt, or labels
- Externalizes responsibility ("You made me feel...")

 Giraffe Language (the language of the heart):

- Seeks to understand feelings and needs
- Takes ownership: "I feel __ because I need __"
- Values curiosity over judgment

In NVC, the giraffe — known for its strong heart and long vision — is a symbol of compassionate communication and big-hearted connection.

When youth workers notice "jackal voices" in their self-talk ("I failed," "They're so rude"), they can consciously shift to "giraffe" by connecting to the needs underneath the judgment — creating space, empathy, and emotional regulation.

5. Requests vs. Demands

In NVC, the way we ask matters. Emotional resilience grows when we can express our needs *clearly* but *without attachment to result or control*.

Requests are:

- Voluntary
- Based on connection
- Open to negotiation

Demands are:

- Rooted in control or fear
- Trigger guilt or punishment if unmet

"We want others to respond to our requests not out of fear of punishment, but from the heart."

— Marshall B. Rosenberg

When youth workers express needs as open-hearted requests, they reduce tension, disappointment, and burnout because they stay grounded in shared humanity, not control. And when they hear a “no,” they’re more likely to seek *alternative strategies* rather than collapse or explode.

Example:

- Demand: “You need to stop interrupting — it’s disrespectful.”
- Request: “When I’m speaking, would you be willing to wait until I finish? I’m needing more space to express fully.”

6. Self-empathy as a daily practice

One of the most overlooked but powerful NVC tools is self-empathy: turning the process inward to meet our own feelings and needs with presence.

It’s not self-pity or indulgence — it’s a clear, conscious pause to say:

“What’s alive in me? What am I needing right now?”

Instead of reacting or numbing, we get curious and compassionate toward ourselves like we would toward a close friend.

 **How to practice:**

1. Pause during emotional moments.
2. Name your feeling (using a list if needed).
3. Identify the unmet need.
4. Ask: “How can I care for this need right now?”
5. Offer warmth not fixing.

Self-empathy strengthens emotional flexibility, reduces self-blame, and builds a compassionate inner voice. Essentially it supports youth workers navigating stress, mistakes, or emotional labor.

7. Protective use of force

In emotionally intense environments (like youth work), sometimes **boundaries** must be set clearly and quickly. NVC doesn’t mean passive softness, rather it teaches how to use protective force without violence.

Protective force (vs. punitive force) means:

- Acting to prevent harm or protect safety
- Without blame, moral judgment, or punishment
- While still honoring all parties' humanity

"We use protective force when our intent is to protect, not to punish."

Marshall Rosenberg

Protective force allows youth workers to take firm action (like stopping harm or setting limits) without sacrificing connection — crucial in self-care and well-being of oneself and others.

How emotional resilience improves youth work

Youth work often places professionals in emotionally intense situations, supporting young people who may be struggling with identity, trauma, social pressures, or marginalization.

By cultivating emotional resilience through NVC, youth workers can:

- Stay present in moments of crisis or conflict
- Model healthy emotional expression
- Create emotionally safe spaces
- Avoid burnout by meeting their own needs while supporting others
- Transform difficult relationships into meaningful connections

When we are in touch with our needs, we have more power to choose life-serving strategies.

Exercises to practice NVC

1. "Tracking my emotional triggers"



Instructions:

1. Think of a recent moment when you felt emotionally reactive in your work.
2. Write down:
 - What happened (just the facts)
 - What you thought at the time
 - What you felt
 - What need was alive in you
 - How you responded
 - What you might choose next time with more awareness

This activity supports **self-connection and learning**, which are core to resilience.

2. "Needs behind the emotion" mapping

Instructions:

1. Choose an emotion you've recently felt strongly (e.g., frustration, anxiety, excitement).
2. Sit quietly and ask yourself:
 - *"What was I needing at that moment?"*
 - *"Was there more than one need?"*
3. Use a **needs list** and circle 2-3 needs that fit.
4. Write it as a sentence:
"When I felt ___, I was needing ___."
5. Reflect: Did this understanding change how you see the situation?

3. Empathy buddy practice

Setup:

- Pair up with a partner (another youth worker or friend).
- Take 10–15 minutes per person.

Instructions:

1. One person shares about a recent emotionally difficult or joyful moment.
2. The listener's only job is to:
 - Reflect feelings and needs (e.g., *"It sounds like you felt disheartened because you needed acknowledgment?"*)
 - Avoid fixing, advising, or storytelling.
3. Switch roles.

Why it works: Practicing empathy with others builds emotional safety, resilience, and relational trust.

4. Micro-moment meditation: "Name it to tame it"

Instructions:

1. When you feel overwhelmed, pause for 60 seconds.
2. Close your eyes or soften your gaze.
3. Silently name:
 - One emotion you're feeling (e.g., "sadness")

- One sensation in your body (e.g., “tight chest”)
- One unmet need (e.g., “belonging”)

4. Breathe gently and say inwardly:
“It’s okay. I’m allowed to feel this.”

Adaptation: Use this as a daily practice at the start or end of your youth work day.

“When we listen with our whole being, we don’t just hear — we connect.”
— *Marshall Rosenberg*

5. “From Jackal to Giraffe” self-talk shift

Instructions:

1. Write down a recent critical thought you had (e.g., “I always mess up with this group.”)
2. Identify the judgmental or blaming language (Jackal mode).
3. Translate it into Giraffe language (NVC’s symbol of the language of the heart), focusing on unmet needs.
 - Jackal: “You’re lazy.”
 - Giraffe: “Are you feeling overwhelmed because you need support and rest?”
4. Read the giraffe version aloud slowly.
5. Reflect on how the two versions feel differently in your body.

Chapter 2: Practices – body, breath, and mind tools

Why body, breath, and mind?

Emotional resilience isn't only about mindset, it's deeply connected to how we inhabit our bodies. Youth workers often operate in high-stress environments, so developing somatic awareness (body), conscious breathing (breath), and mindful attention (mind) helps restore balance.

"In order to give empathy to others, we first need to be connected to ourselves."

— Marshall Rosenberg

This chapter offers tools to:

- Pause and re-center
- Access calm in the body
- Reduce emotional overwhelm
- Prevent burnout

1. "Self-empathy check-in" (5 mins)

Focus: Emotions, needs, self-compassion

Instructions:

1. Sit comfortably, eyes closed or soft gaze.
2. Take 3 deep breaths.
3. Ask inwardly:
 - What am I feeling right now?
 - What do I need?
 - Can I offer kindness to this part of me?
4. Breathe with this awareness for 1 minute.
5. Place your hand on your heart and say inwardly:
"This feeling matters. I matter."

2. Practice: The inner need space (8 mins)

Goal: Connect with unmet needs behind current emotional states

1. Sit or lie down comfortably. Begin with three deep, natural breaths.

2. Visualize yourself entering a quiet “room” within your heart. It’s calm, safe, and welcoming.
3. Ask: *“Is there a feeling that would like to speak?”*— Wait.
4. Ask: *“What is this feeling needing from me right now?”*— Listen gently.
5. Imagine placing that need into your hand, as a glowing orb. Observe it with curiosity, not judgment.
6. Offer it compassion: *“Of course you’re here. I’m listening.”*
7. Rest in that space with the need. End by thanking it for showing up.

3. “Empathic body scan” (7 mins)

Goal: Listen to the body with emotional awareness

Rather than scanning for tension only, bring empathy to each body part. As you breathe into each area, say silently:

- *“How are you feeling here?”*
- *“What might this part be needing?”*

Example:

👉 *“Feet — you feel heavy. Are you needing rest?”*

💖 *“Heart — you feel tight. Are you needing reassurance?”*

4. “Need-focused breathing”

Goal: Regulate breath *while connecting to unmet needs*

1. Breathe in deeply and say inwardly:
“I’m breathing in calm.”
2. Breathe out slowly and say:
“I’m releasing confusion.”
3. On the next few breaths, replace the words with the needs you’re feeling:

- “I’m breathing in clarity.”
- “I’m breathing out frustration.”

4. Customize based on your moment-to-moment state.

5. “Anchor word drop”

Goal: Ground yourself through a felt-sense word

1. Choose one NVC need word that resonates (e.g., “belonging”, “peace”, “freedom”).
2. Sit and repeat it silently with each exhale, like a mantra.
3. Imagine the word dropping like a pebble down a deep well.
4. As it drops, feel the vibration of that need expanding inside you.

This builds emotional neuroplasticity — wiring calm and clarity through repetition and somatic anchoring.

6. Practice: “Box breathing”

Focus: Emotional regulation and inviting calm into your body

1. Inhale (count to 4)
2. Hold (count to 4)
3. Exhale (count to 4)
4. Hold (count to 4)

Repeat for 4 rounds.

Used by Navy SEALs and trauma therapists alike, this technique lowers cortisol and boosts calm.

Physical embodiment practices

These exercises invite movement to process and transform emotion. Inspired by somatic therapy, dance medicine, and trauma-sensitive youth work. Emotions live in the body. Simple physical movement helps release stuck energy and restore emotional balance.

1. “Shake it out”

Focus: Stress relief through the body

1. Stand with feet grounded.
2. Start gently shaking your hands → arms → shoulders → whole body.
3. Let your breath move naturally.
4. Shake for 2–5 minutes with music if desired.
5. Stand still and notice sensations.

Shaking activates the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing trauma responses (source: Peter Levine, *Somatic Experiencing*).

2. “Mindful walking”

Focus: Grounded awareness and emotional reset

1. Walk slowly in a quiet place, barefoot if possible.
2. With each step, silently say:
 - “Here” (step left)
 - “Now” (step right)
3. Breathe deeply and gently.
4. Walk for 3–10 minutes.

You don’t need to change anything — just witness your presence in motion.

3. “Sound & movement expression”

Goal: Express and release tension using voice + body

1. Choose a private space where you feel safe.
2. Begin moving however your body wants: slow, fast, stiff.
3. Let sounds emerge hums, sighs, words, growls.
4. Ask: *“If this movement had a feeling, what would it be?”*
“If it had a need, what would that be?”

This releases blocked energy, enhances authenticity, and increases creative confidence.

4. “Posture of the need”

Goal: Embody and amplify an unmet need through shape

1. Choose a need you want to explore (e.g., “support”).
2. Let your body slowly shift into a posture that represents that need.
3. Hold that posture and breathe into it for 1-2 minutes.
4. Reflect: How does your body feel? What does it want next?

You can do this with groups — each person becomes a “sculpture” of a need. Others guess or reflect.

5. “Daily support”

“What helps me come home to myself — especially when I don’t feel like it?”

Write down:

- 1 practice for body
- 1 practice for breath
- 1 practice for mind

And commit to doing one of them every day for a week.

6. “Emotional first-aid kit”

Write down on paper or phone a toolkit for when emotions feel overwhelming.

What to Include:

- One grounding exercise (any you know or from this toolkit)
- One empowering affirmation
"I am doing the best I can with care and heart."
- A go-to song that soothes you
- A drawing, image, or word that calms you
- A list of 3 needs you most often forget to meet (e.g., rest, appreciation, support)
- An "Empathy sentence starter"
"Right now I'm feeling ___ because I need ___."

7. "Emotions in motion"

Goal: Move through stuck emotions and connect with needs physically

1. Choose one emotion you're currently feeling.
2. Ask yourself:
"If this emotion had a movement, what would it be?"
3. Begin moving in a way that reflects that emotion (e.g., trembling, curling, shaking, stomping).
4. After 1-2 minutes, ask:
"What is this emotion needing from me?"
Let your movement shift to express that need (e.g., openness, reaching, softening).
5. Let the movement evolve into a final shape or gesture of integration.

 Repeat regularly to create an embodied emotional vocabulary.

8. "Butterfly touch & self-warmth"

Goal: Offer physical empathy and rewire self-soothing

1. Cross your arms over your chest, hands resting gently on your shoulders like wings.
2. Alternate tapping slowly (left-right-left...) like a soft heartbeat.
3. Say silently:
"I see you, I hear you. You're doing your best."
4. Breathe. Let the rhythm soothe your nervous system.

 Great as a preparation ritual before youth sessions or difficult conversations.

9. “Giraffe spine practice”

Goal: Embody the strength and grace of NVC’s symbol - the giraffe

1. Stand tall and imagine you are lengthening your spine from root to crown.
2. Visualize your heart opening outward like a beam of empathy.
3. Move your neck slowly in wide, sweeping circles — like a curious giraffe scanning the horizon. With each exhale, silently say a need you value (e.g., “truth,” “choice,” “peace”).
4. Place your hand on your chest and bow your head slightly:
“I honor my needs, and the needs of others.”

 Use this before meditations, meetings, or journaling.

10. “From reaction to response walk”

Goal: Re-pattern the transition from emotional reactivity to compassionate action

1. Mark two spots in your space:
 - Spot A = “Reaction”
 - Spot B = “Loving Response”
2. Stand on Spot A. Recall a moment when you reacted emotionally or felt triggered. Let your body feel the tightness or posture.
3. Slowly walk toward Spot B, step by step, imagining yourself gaining awareness:
 - Step 1: *“What was I feeling?”*
 - Step 2: *“What did I need?”*
 - Step 3: *“What could I say now from the heart?”*
4. When you reach Spot B, speak out loud your “giraffe response.”

 This is a living metaphor for NVC — transforming stimulus into mindful choice.



11. “Speak with the body”

Goal: Express needs and feelings physically before verbalizing them

1. Choose one need word (e.g., “belonging”).
2. Ask: *“How would my body express this without words?”*
3. Let your body explore gestures, shapes, breath, even stillness.
4. Say the word softly or aloud while doing the movement.
5. Reflect: How did it feel to let the body speak first?

This develops body-led communication, helping your nervous system and language work in harmony.

12. “Somatic mourning ritual”

Goal: Honor sadness or unmet needs with full-body compassion

Inspired by Marshall Rosenberg’s idea of “NVC mourning” (the pain of unmet needs)

1. Find a quiet space with a cushion or mat.
2. Sit or kneel and place both hands over your heart.
3. Speak aloud:
“I mourn that this need was not met: __.”
Repeat 2–3 unmet needs (e.g., “understanding,” “respect”).
4. Let your body move — maybe rocking, bowing, or simply crying.
5. When ready, shift to a shape of self-compassion: arms holding your torso, open palms, or prayer pose.

13. “Breath dance of the needs”

Goal: Integrate breath, rhythm, and awareness of needs

1. Create a short playlist (3–5 songs) — slow to upbeat to soft again.
2. Choose one need to focus on (e.g., “play,” “support,” “expression”).
3. Begin to move freely to the rhythm.
4. With each inhale, imagine receiving that need into your body.
5. With each exhale, express that need through gesture or vocalization.

Let your whole body become a living prayer for needs fulfillment.



Chapter 3: Practical tools for daily use

Making emotional regulation and NVC Work in Real Life

These tools are designed for the real world — when emotions run high, time is short, and connection matters most. Use them daily or in challenging moments to bring more empathy, clarity, and grounded action into your life and youth work.

TOOL 1: Feelings & Needs chart

What it is:

A simple and powerful list that helps you name your **feelings** and identify your **universal human needs**. This turns vague emotions into clear awareness and helps guide decisions, communication, and healing. It's the foundation of NVC.

"We can't meet our needs if we don't know what they are." — Marshall Rosenberg

How to use it:

1. When you feel "off" or emotional, pause.
2. Look at the **Feelings Chart** and circle or point to what fits.
3. Ask: *"What do I need right now?"* → check the **Needs List**.
4. Let that guide your next steps (action, expression, request).

Personal use:

- Self-check-ins
- Journaling after emotional moments
- Understanding repeated triggers

Professional use (youth work):

- Youth group check-ins
- Conflict mediation or emotional coaching
- Teaching teens emotional literacy

When to use it:

- 💬 You feel agitated → You name: "I feel discouraged — I need progress."
- 🙊 A youth participant is withdrawn → You ask: "Can you find your feeling on this chart?"

- 💡 You want more joy in your life → Realize you're needing creativity and play.

Tip: Print, laminate, or save your chart on your phone. Use it like a compass for your emotional world.

TOOL 2: Check-In / Check-Out scripts

What it is:

Short sentence structures to help you and others pause, reflect, and share emotional states - at the beginning or end of any day, session, or meeting. These rituals bring awareness, empathy, and connection into the space.

How to use it:

Check-In script examples:

- "Right now I feel ___ because I need ___."
- "What I'm bringing into this space is..."
- "One word that describes my mood is..."

Check-Out script examples:

- "I'm leaving with..."
- "One thing I appreciated today was..."
- "A need that was (or wasn't) met for me was..."

Personal use:

- Start/end your day with a short emotional reflection
- Ground yourself before conversations or meetings

Professional use (youth work):

- Begin/close group sessions
- Build team presence and cohesion
- Encourage safe expression in youth programs

When to use it:

- 🛠 Starting a staff meeting → Each person shares 1 feeling + 1 need
- 🧠 Feeling scattered after a long day → Check in: "I feel tired — I need restoration"

-  Ending a training → Everyone says what they're taking away

Bonus: Use a talking object, a digital whiteboard, or emoji cards to make it playful and visual.

TOOL 3: Empathy journaling template

What it is:

A journaling tool that uses NVC's 4-step process to help you process emotions, understand your reactions, and **offer yourself empathy**. It helps you slow down, untangle confusion, and act with more awareness.

How to use it:

Daily/Weekly prompts:

1. What happened? *(Just the facts, no blame)*
2. What am I feeling? *(Name 1-3 emotions)*
3. What need is alive in me?
4. What can I do to care for that need?
5. What do I want to express or ask for?

Personal use:

- Regular emotional reflection
- Support in moments of regret, stress, or shame
- Building inner resilience

Professional use (youth work):

- Guided journaling during sessions
- Debriefing after hard events
- Creating emotional safety through writing

When to use it:

- You regret something you said → Journaling helps clarify unmet needs
- You notice a recurring emotional pattern → Track it through your responses
- A group needs to decompress → Everyone journals with 3-5 sentence answers, then shares voluntarily

Pro tip: Create a ritual — same time each day, same spot, same pen. Let it feel grounding.

TOOL 4: Honest expression cheat sheet

What it is:

A sentence structure that helps you **spe**ak your truth with compassion. Instead of blaming, exploding, or going silent, you learn to express what you're feeling and needing clearly, without judgment.

How to use it:

NVC 4-Step formula:

1. Observation → *"When I saw/heard..."*
2. Feeling → *"I felt..."*
3. Need → *"...because I needed..."*
4. Request → *"Would you be willing to...?"*

Personal use:

- Say what's true in a grounded way
- Set boundaries with empathy
- Prepare for emotionally charged conversations

Professional use (youth work):

- Youth-to-youth conflict de-escalation
- Team communication and feedback
- Non-blaming accountability culture

When to use it:

- 🗣️ A coworker interrupts you → "When I was cut off, I felt frustrated because I need respect — could we agree to finish our points before jumping in?"
- 😞 You feel distant from a friend → "I'm feeling disconnected and needing more closeness — would you be open to talking soon?"
- 🙌 Youths learning to give feedback → Each uses the 4-step formula to express themselves with clarity and care

Tip: Print this on a sticky note or make it a lock-screen — especially if you tend to avoid hard talks.

TOOL 5: NVC Decision-making flow

What it is:

A 5-question process to help you make heart-connected decisions, especially when you're unsure, overwhelmed, or feeling pressured. Instead of saying "yes" out of guilt or "no" out of fear, you pause, check your needs, and respond with integrity.



How to use it:

5-Question Flow:

1. What am I feeling about this?
2. What do I need here?
3. What might the other person need?
4. Is there a strategy that could meet both our needs?
5. If not, how can I express my boundary with care?

Personal use:

- Decide whether to accept invitations, requests, offers
- Balance your needs with others'
- Practice empowered "yes" and "no"

Professional use (youth work):

- Make co-facilitation or project decisions
- Resolve team role dilemmas
- Support youth in building empowered decision-making skills

When to use it:

- 🧘 A colleague asks for help on a project → You feel overwhelmed → Flow reveals: "I need rest and autonomy right now." → You respond with a kind boundary
- 🤖 You're split between two options → Flow shows which aligns more with your values
- 🎯 Youths are arguing about a next step → Flow used in group to name everyone's needs → New co-created strategy

Pro tip: Practice this in low-stakes moments to build fluency before tough ones arrive.

Empathy is not an event. It's a daily practice of coming home.

Chapter 4: Daily playground

This chapter is your permission slip.

To play. To personalize. To invent your own language of care.
To make emotional resilience a living, breathing part of your everyday —
not something you read about in a manual once.

Here, we invite you to treat NVC like a creative playground rather than a strict formula. These practices are bite-sized, body-based, and soul-centered. They don't require hours of time, just a little intention, curiosity, and willingness to listen inward.

Resilience doesn't come from rigid rules. It grows in daily moments of playful, honest connection — with ourselves and with life.

Because emotional resilience isn't built in emergency moments alone. It's grown through small rituals done often that help you:

-  Stay present with your feelings and needs
-  Reconnect to your values when life feels overwhelming
-  Soften your reactions through self-empathy
-  Express your inner world through movement, sound, color, and breath
-  Respond with awareness instead of burnout or emotional shutdown

As a youth worker, you're constantly holding space for others. This chapter helps you return home to yourself — so you can keep showing up *with an open heart*.

How to use this playground

There are no rules here. Use this chapter like a buffet.

You can:

- Try one practice each morning or evening

- Create a weekly rhythm (e.g., Mondays = “check-in wall,” Fridays = “letter I won’t send”)
- Invent your own rituals inspired by these
- Invite your team or participants to join you in playful practice
- Mix embodiment with journaling, visuals with breath, tech with heart

You’ll notice many practices invite your body, creativity, and senses into the experience. That’s intentional because emotional resilience lives in your nervous system, not just your thoughts.

Some of these practices are visual. Some are silent.
Some involve sticky notes, some involve dancing.

Some may feel silly at first but remind yourself that playfulness is emotional medicine.

Trust what draws you in. Modify what doesn’t. The point isn’t to be perfect. It’s to stay connected.

“Anything worth doing is worth doing imperfectly.”
— Marshall B. Rosenberg

We’ll offer inspiration — you make it your own:

1. A 3-minute morning grounding with hand on heart and NVC mantra:
“I welcome all feelings. I listen for the need beneath.”
2. A mini check-in wall where you stick your daily emotion and need words.
3. A voice memo journal on your phone where you speak your daily 4-step NVC reflection.
4. A “needs altar” or “empathy space” - a physical corner filled with things that provide presence.
5. A weekly practice of writing a letter you’ll never send, expressing honestly what’s hard.
6. Draw a body outline and color where you feel anger, joy, shame, peace. Add words for needs connected to each sensation.
7. Practice saying “no” in the mirror using an NVC frame: *“I care about this and I also need ____.”* Say it until it feels kind *and* strong.



8. Write down your own unmet needs when triggered by others. Stick them somewhere visible. Watch how naming needs changes your story.
9. Blnhale a need (e.g., "peace"), exhale a judgment ("not enough"). 5 breaths. Repeat in high-stress moments.
10. Make a collage (like a vision board) of images that represent your core needs: connection, growth, play, etc. Use it to re-center in hard times.
11. Take a 5-minute walk where you internally name every need that comes up 'yours and others'. No fixing, just noticing. We call this a giraffe walk.
12. Try embodied agreement practice where before saying "yes" to anything, pause and ask: *"Does this yes feel like freedom or tension in my body?"*
13. Write 6 needs on a paper cube (or real dice). Roll it in the morning. Try to meet or nurture that one need throughout your day.
14. Make a playlist of songs that express different feelings like sadness, celebration, calm, power. Listen to it to process and shift emotional states.
15. When you feel reactive, place a hand on your body and repeat silently: "I see you. You're allowed to feel this. What do you need?". This is like silent empathy loop.

Chapter 5: Mini challenges: small acts, big shifts

This chapter is your invitation into everyday emotional courage.

Change doesn't always require a breakthrough. Sometimes, it just takes one honest sentence, one breath, one pause.

Each challenge here is a tiny spark: a five-minute experiment in honesty, empathy, and self-awareness. These practices aren't about perfection — they're about gently interrupting old patterns and choosing connection, again and again.

Whether you're in a high-stress day, a quiet moment between meetings, or walking to your next session, these challenges help you:

- ◆ Stay emotionally grounded
- ◆ Practice core NVC skills in real life
- ◆ Rewire reactive habits with compassionate awareness
- ◆ Build emotional flexibility and self-trust
- ◆ Experience that *small actions can create real shifts*

How to use these challenges

You can:

- Do one per day, or repeat one challenge across the week
- Pair with journaling, drawing, or voice notes
- Use them solo — or invite a friend, colleague, or youth group to try with you
- Treat them as your personal “emotional training gym” 🧘

You don't need the perfect mood or setting to begin. These are designed for **real, messy, human moments** — especially when you don't feel ready.

“Practice means we don't wait to feel good to do good. We just begin — gently, honestly, and again.”

Let each challenge be a doorway. Into clarity. Into courage. Into connection. Let it be light, let it be real, let it be *yours*.

Are you ready?

Let's begin.

Challenge 1: Speak one honest sentence

Today, speak one sentence that's emotionally true.
Even if it's scary. Even if it's awkward.

"I feel confused, and I don't know what I need yet."

Challenge 2: Translate one judgment

Notice a judgment you have about someone — now translate it into a feeling + need.

"They're so selfish!" → "I feel hurt because I need more mutual support."

Challenge 3: Giraffe body pause

Before reacting today, pause for 3 deep breaths and gently touch your chest.
Ask:

"What am I feeling? What am I needing?"

Then respond.

Challenge 4: Draw a need

Choose one need (e.g., safety, freedom, play) and draw what it feels like in your body.

You can use shapes, colors, or symbols.

Challenge 5: Record a 60-second empathy message

Open your phone and voice-record:

- What happened
- What you felt
- What you needed
- What you'd love (a wish or request)

Even if you never send it — it's medicine.



Challenge 6: Offer silent empathy

See someone in pain, tension, or anger today?

Pause.

Silently guess: *"What might they be feeling? What might they need?"*

Breathe and hold it with care — no fixing.

Challenge 7: NVC decision journal

At the end of the day, choose one moment of choice (big or small) and answer:

- What did I feel?
- What did I need?
- Did I act from fear, habit, or connection?
- What would I choose next time?

Challenge 8: Repeat a feeling

Choose **one feeling** you're experiencing today and repeat it aloud or silently **10 times**.

"Lonely. Lonely. Lonely..."

Let yourself *really feel* it — without rushing to fix it. Then gently ask:

"What do I need right now?"

Challenge 9: Send a need-inspired message

Pick someone in your life and **send a message based on a need**, not a demand or story.

"Hey, I've been missing some lightness and laughter — would you be up for a silly phone call soon?"

Let your message come from the heart of connection, not the fear of being ignored.

Challenge 10: Mirror your emotion

Stand in front of a mirror. Gently name aloud what you're feeling and needing, as if speaking to your reflection like a dear friend.

"You're tired. You've been holding a lot. You need support and peace.
I see you."

Stay for one full minute. This is a practice in **self-witnessing without shame**.

Challenge 11: Photo your present-moment need

Take a picture of something around you that represents a **need that's alive right now** — e.g. a blanket (comfort), sky (space), notebook (clarity).
Post it, journal about it, or just reflect.

Challenge 12: One honest pause

Choose one moment today where you **slow everything down** before responding.

Inhale. Ask yourself:

"What am I feeling? What am I needing?"
Then choose your response with intention.

Challenge 13: Listen without interrupting

Have one conversation today where you **only listen**, without offering advice, solutions, or stories. Just receive.

Afterwards, reflect:

"What might they have been needing?"
"How did it feel to stay silent?"

Challenge 14: Body-scan your needs

Close your eyes and scan your body slowly from head to toe. As you notice sensations, ask:

"What emotion lives here? What need is connected to that?"

You might be surprised where old needs are living in your chest, belly, or throat.

Challenge 15: Secret empathy letter

Write a letter to someone you're struggling with — without sending it.
Follow this flow:



- What I see happening
- What I feel
- What I need
- What I wish for us

Burn it, save it, or keep adding to it later.

Challenge 16: Empathy while doing nothing

Set a timer for 5 minutes.

Do absolutely **nothing** except sit or lie down.

Every time your mind wanders, return to:

“What am I needing right now?”

It's harder than it sounds — and more powerful than it seems.

Challenge 17: Choose a softening word

Pick a **soft, empathetic word** for your day (e.g., “gentle,” “curious,” “spacious,” “warmth”).

Write it down. Return to it throughout your day — in emails, decisions, interactions.

Let it shape how you show up.

Chapter 5: Reflective prompts for everyday awareness

Self-connection prompts

- “Right now I feel ___ because I need ___.”
- “What am I most needing today - physically, emotionally, spiritually?”
- “A need I often forget to care for is...”
- “What did I push away emotionally this week?”
- “What part of myself is asking for compassion?”

NVC-in-action prompts

- “Where did I practice empathy today — with myself or others?”
- “When did I speak from honesty? When did I hide?”
- “How did I respond to a challenging emotion — and what did I learn?”
- “What was alive in me when I said something I regret?”
- “When did I rush to solve instead of listening?”

Boundaries & saying No prompts

- “Where did I say yes today, even though I meant no?”
- “What’s one boundary I’ve been avoiding expressing?”
- “What emotion comes up when I imagine saying no?”
- “How can I say no with care and connection?”
- “What need am I protecting when I set a boundary?”

Tip: Explore how unmet needs for safety, belonging, or approval affect your boundary-setting.



Resilience & reconnection prompts

- “Where am I growing, even if it’s messy?”
- “What inner voice do I want to amplify today?”
- “How do I come back to myself when I’m overwhelmed?”
- “What brings me into emotional alignment — quickly?”
- “What does emotional resilience mean to me right now?”

Chapter 6: Community voices: Personal testimonials

We would like to share the real-life impact this approach and these tools have brought to youth workers.

The *Into Love* training brought together 30 youth workers from across Europe to immerse themselves in **Nonviolent Communication (NVC)** and **emotional resilience tools**. Over the course of 8 days in the Latvian countryside, participants lived, learned, and practiced together - exploring how empathy, active listening, and resilience strategies can transform both personal and professional relationships.

The experience was more than just a training; it was a living community where connection, vulnerability, and growth were embraced. For many, this was the first step into the world of NVC, while for others it was a deepening of existing practice.

Here are some of the voices and reflections from this journey:

"To be in a place, surrounded by people that are so empathically and connected makes me feel courageous enough to try, to understand and to practice NVC, in a genuine way. Not as a trainer, but the way I am. It also nurtures and heals my needs of being seen, heard and accepted. After this training I lived the feeling of emotional resilience: I had the thoughts that whatever happens I am enough to handle it."

- Diana, Romania

"This project was truly an experience of a lifetime for me. Lost somewhere in the Latvian woods, I had the opportunity to coexist and work with 30 beautiful people from around Europe on the field of NVC. I really feel that I have made the first steps on the world of Non Violent Communication while digging a lot in myself and while making nice friends!"

- Alexious, Greece



"Into Love was a truly transformative experience that gave me both clarity and concrete tools to bring more empathy into my youth work and personal life. I learned how to stop in the moments of strong emotions, recognize them and my emotional patterns and respond from a place of connection rather than reaction. The space created by the trainers was warm, non-judgmental, and deeply supportive. The team create the space where I felt seen and cared for, which speaks volumes about the quality of their work. This training gave me not only new skills, but also a deeper relationship with myself. I'm leaving with more softness, strength, and inspiration."

- Alexandra, Poland

"The Into Love project in Latvia beautifully embodies the idea that connection is a choice and love is an intentional action we take together. This training profoundly deepened my understanding of how to support children in classrooms with empathy and clarity. I learned to identify the needs behind behaviors and communicate in ways that foster genuine connection, emotional safety, and a space where children feel safe to be vulnerable, be themselves, and openly express their needs. These insights empower me to create a more peaceful and respectful environment where every child truly feels seen and heard. Throughout the training, the atmosphere was warm and collaborative—trainers, participants, and organizers worked harmoniously, both during the learning sessions and in moments of rest and reflection. I am leaving with valuable new skills and a renewed sense of purpose."

- Martina, Czech Republic

"This training was life-changing thanks to the life language method we learned, thanks to the trainers who demonstrated how strong professionalism can be expressed through heartfelt humanness. And also thanks to the organizers, team care, support and love I felt at every step. Learning in such a culturally diverse team smth so uniting as empathy—it gave hope and inspired to work towards inclusion, understanding, and connection in my professional and personal life."

And the place—Drusti, was a very special place to explore and experience the nature and flow of human emotions and needs :)"

- Ieva, Latvia

"In this training, I learned how to recognize and choose the path of empathy over the 'jackal' approach. I realized how Nonviolent Communication (NVC) can transform not only my daily interactions but my entire way of living.

What stood out the most was that the training felt like a continuous inner journey—an opportunity to understand myself more deeply and, in the process, to truly embrace and love who I am.

Self-empathy and empathy toward others are the most valuable takeaways for me, along with learning to accept a 'no' not as rejection, but as an expression of someone else's needs."

- Maria, Greece



Thank you for your curiosity and openness!

This Toolkit was developed by KALM International Trainings, within the Erasmus+ KA153 project “Transforming reactions into loving responses”. This project was organized by KALM, with the support of Agency for International Programs for Youth Republic of Latvia, and in collaboration with partners from Spain – Euducate, Poland – Fundacja Mudita, Bulgaria – Environ Mental Education, Greece – Kiposseminaria, Czech Republic – Avatar 3000, Romania – Education Studio Cluj.

This project was 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 Agency for International Programs for Youth Republic of Latvia. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.