

Mental Health Journal

Youth Mental Health Matters



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How can I get the most out of this journal?

This Journal is designed as a space for reflection, self-discovery, and emotional growth.

It can be used individually or together with others, in a training setting, a youth group, or as part of your personal wellbeing practice.

You can read it in order or open any chapter that speaks to what you feel today.

Each section explores one dimension of mental health - **Emotions, Values, Relationships, Behavioral Patterns, and Boundaries** - followed by reflection spaces and practical exercises.

You are encouraged to **write directly** in the Journal. The interactive version allows you to type in the blank boxes or fill it by hand if printed.

There are no right or wrong answers - only moments of honesty and curiosity about yourself.

Take your time.

Read slowly.

Notice what resonates with you.

Return to certain pages whenever you need them - your reflections may evolve over time.

You can use this Journal to:

- strengthen self-awareness and emotional literacy;
- identify personal triggers, values, and patterns;
- develop small, practical steps toward emotional balance;
- support the young people you work with by first understanding yourself.

This Journal belongs to you. It is not for assessment or judgment. It is a private space for reflection, growth, and self-kindness.

Foreword

This journal was created as a result of the Erasmus+ KA153 Mobility of Youth Workers project "Youth Mental Health Matters", implemented by Copenhagen Youth Network in June 2025 in Denmark.

The project brought together youth workers, educators, psychologists, and trainers from partner organizations in Denmark, Georgia, Poland, Greece, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Turkey, France, and Jordan, who spent intensive 10-days exploring mental health in youth work, body-mind connection, emotional awareness, and trauma-informed approaches.

The Journal provides practical and reflective space to explore essential dimensions of mental wellbeing - emotions, values, relationships, behavioral patterns, and boundaries, through methods of non-formal education.

It aims to help youth professionals, educators, and young people engage in self-reflection, reconnect with their emotional balance, and apply psychosocial tools in their daily and professional lives.

This publication is not an academic textbook. It is a living document; part learning tool, part personal diary - designed to guide the reader toward awareness, presence, and growth.

The journal is designed to be interactive. You are encouraged to write your own thoughts, feelings, and insights directly into the spaces provided.

There are no right or wrong answers.

The aim is reflection, not perfection.

Take your time.

Breathe.

Read a few lines.

Then listen to what your mind and heart want to say.

This is your space.



This Journal Belongs To:

Name:

Country / Organization:

Date Started:

My Intentions for Using This Journal are:

.....

.....

.....

Through this Journal, I want to understand myself better by

.....

If this Journal could speak back to you, what would you want it to say?

.....



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Background of the journal

The Mental Health Journal – Youth Mental Health Matters was developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ memo (Key Action 153 – Mobility of Youth Workers), financed by the European Commission and implemented by Copenhagen Youth Network (CYN) in cooperation with Youth for Society (Georgia) and partner organizations from Greece, Bulgaria, Poland, France, the Netherlands, Turkey and Jordan.

The international training course took place from 4-13 June 2025 in Denmark, bringing together 30 youth workers, educators, psychologists, and community leaders with a shared purpose, to explore how youth work can actively support mental health and wellbeing through non-formal education. The program combined theoretical learning with experiential practices, integrating methods such as mindfulness, reflective writing, creative group work, and body-based activities.

Throughout the nine days of the course, participants examined key aspects of mental health, including emotions, values, relationships, behavioral patterns, and boundaries. Working in small thematic groups, they translated their learning into practical exercises and reflective tools, each contributing to one section of this Journal. These collaborative results from the heart of the publication and demonstrate the impact of learning by doing - a core principle of non-formal education.

The Journal is therefore more than a written document; it is a collective outcome of lived experience, shared dialogue, and professional exchange. It serves as both a learning resource and a reflective companion, inviting readers to engage with the same practices that shaped the participants' journey in Denmark.

By presenting the authentic voices and creative outputs of youth workers from across Europe and its neighborhood, this Journal continues the project's mission - to promote awareness, resilience, and emotional literacy among young people and those who support them.

With gratitude to all project participants whose commitment and insight shaped this journal. We believe that your work will continue to inspire and empower the youth you reach – spreading understanding, empathy and positive change.

Project Execution Team



Halmat Faraidon	Tamta Khutshishvili	Nino Chaladze	Tamara Jananashvili
Director and founder of Copenhagen Youth Network, Halmat established Copenhagen Youth Network in 2014. Halmat's family has a refugee background making him a role model for youth belonging to marginalized minorities. Halmat has been actively working on youth projects at the national and global levels since 2008, promoting youth work and non-formal education, social inclusion, and intercultural dialogue in Europe and beyond.	Project management and training consultant with a demonstrated experience in training management, international relations, and project management across public, non-governmental, and private sectors. As a PMP certified professional, Tamta excels in grant writing and boasts over 10 years of experience in youth affairs, state, and donor-funded projects and programs. She is a founder and director of Youth for Society Georgia. Tamta joined the CYN team in 2018 and is passionate about cross-sectional and human-rights opportunities.	Nino is a psychologist, psychotherapist, and soft skills trainer. She is a member of the Society of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy of Georgia and participant in the Biosynthesis international accredited psychotherapeutic post-graduate training program. Nino works with various mental health issues as a therapist and focuses on psychoeducation. Since 2018 she has been involved in projects organized by Copenhagen Youth Network and Youth for Society Georgia as a trainer and facilitator.	Tamara is a practitioner therapist-student working in Gestalt therapy. Certified facilitator of Bert Hellinger's Family Systemic Constellations and participant in the Biosynthesis international accredited psychotherapeutic post-graduate training program. Tamara is a PhD student in Psychology at Tbilisi State University. She has over ten years of experience in the field of non-formal education and training, actively engaged in designing and implementing educational programs. Since 2018 she has been involved in projects organized by CYN as a facilitator.

Self Mastery

Self-regulation, often termed **self-mastery**, is a foundational component of psychological well-being. This capacity is fundamentally predicated upon the development of self-awareness, which can be operationally defined as the multi-layered process of monitoring one's internal state.

This process involves:

- The accurate perception of one's affective states (emotions).
- The metacognitive ability to identify cognitive biases and heuristics.
- An understanding of the underlying motivational drivers (e.g., core needs, fear responses) that inform behavior.

A critical mechanism in this process is interoceptive awareness, which involves attuning to somatic and physiological signals. These signals function as an endogenous feedback system for internal impulses. The cultivation of self-awareness is an iterative process, requiring deliberate observation, applied practice, and empirical self-investigation.

Outcomes of Enhanced Self-Regulation

The successful development of these processes enables a crucial cognitive shift: individuals move from reactive, stimulus-driven behavior (often limbic-based) to deliberate, regulated responses (mediated by the prefrontal cortex). This facilitates enhanced personal autonomy and the maintenance of psychological homeostasis (inner stability).

Consequently, the individual achieving self-regulation experiences a more conscious and intentional existence. This heightened state of awareness enhances their adaptive capacity in response to environmental stimuli and promotes a sustained sense of psychological coherence and affective balance.



What is EMOTION and why is it important?



What?

Emotions are the feelings we have every day. Sometimes they are good (like happiness, love, or excitement), and sometimes they are hard (like sadness, anger, or fear). Emotions are neither good nor bad - they simply exist as part of being human.

They come from our brain and body when something happens. For example: if someone shouts at us, we might feel scared or angry. If someone hugs us, we might feel safe and happy. Our emotions help us understand what is going on around us. They are like messengers. They tell us what we need, what we love, or what hurts.

We made a mind map in our group to show what emotions mean to us. It was full of words like feelings, reactions, memories, family, excited, sad, confused.

Why?

Emotions are a big part of our mental health.

Emotions tend to accumulate when we do not express them. We cannot control their emergence, but it is important to express existing emotions in adaptive and healthy ways. Otherwise, unexpressed emotions can affect our psychological, emotional, and physical well-being.

If we understand our emotions, accept and express them, we can feel better. It helps us stay in balance.

EXAMPLE:

If we feel sad, it's okay to cry.

If we feel angry, we can talk about it or move our body.

If we feel happy, we can share it with others.

Knowing our emotions helps us:

- connect with people
- understand ourselves
- make better choices
- feel safe and calm

How can we practice it?

Here are three simple ways to explore emotions, which we practiced and recommend:

1. Deep Eye Contact Exercise

We did this in our project. We looked into each other's eyes in silence. No words, just looking.

At first, it felt strange. But then, we started to feel something deep memories, emotions, even tears. This exercise showed us how strong emotions can be.

You can try this with someone you trust, a family member or friend.

Just sit, look into their eyes, and feel.

Maybe add to this exercise walking to each other really, really, really slow, as we did in our sessions, which make the exercise more...deep.

2. Time in Nature & Breathing

Go to a quiet place in nature, it could be a park, a forest, or by water.

Sit down, close your eyes, and listen to the sounds. Focus only on your breath.

You can play soft music or just enjoy the silence. Nature helps us feel calm. It helps us connect with our emotions without stress.

3. Name Your Feelings (Check-in Practice)

Do this 2-3 times every day. Ask yourself:

- How do I feel right now?
- How did I feel this morning?
- Why do I feel like this?

Say it out loud: "I feel tired." or "I feel excited." Naming your emotion helps make bad emotion smaller and easier to understand every emotion.

"When monsters come into the light, they usually disappear."

This means: When we face emotions, they stop being scary.

What are our final thoughts:

Emotions make us human. They help us grow, connect, and understand life. They are not a problem; they are a gift. Let's learn to feel them, name them, and take care of them.

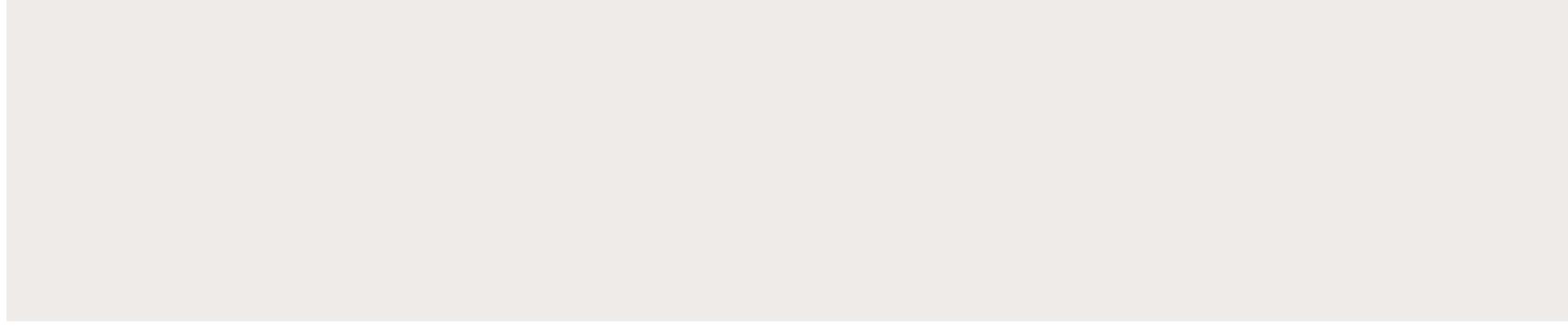
Reflection Space

Use this space to connect the ideas above with your own experience.

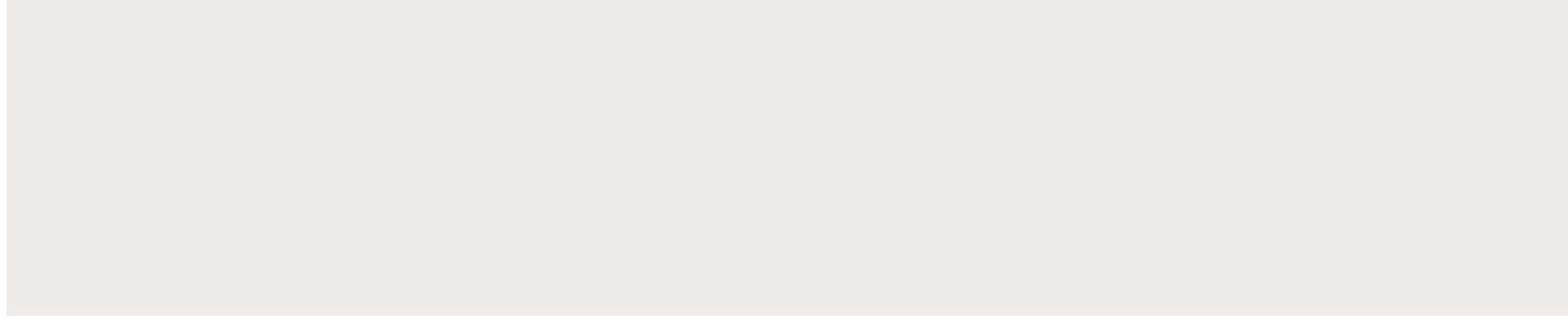
- Today I feel...

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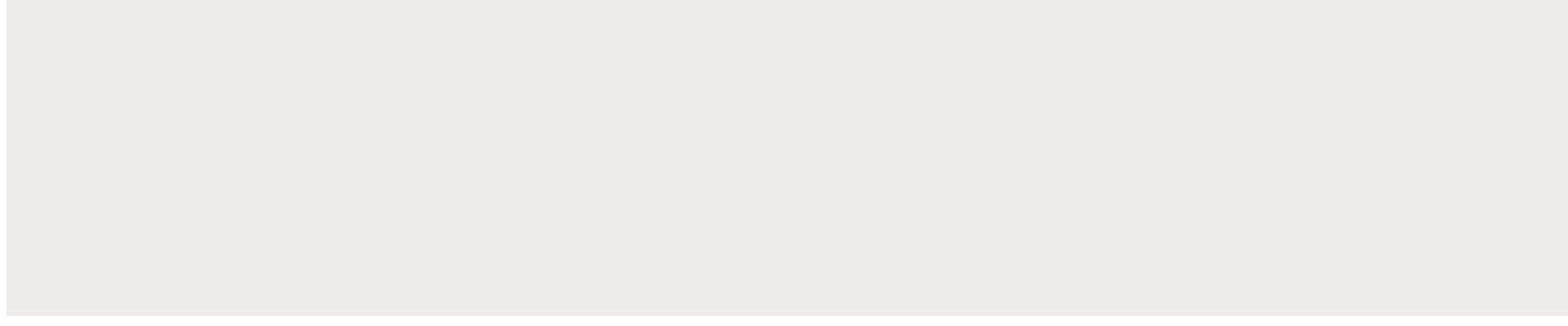
- One emotion that often visits me is...

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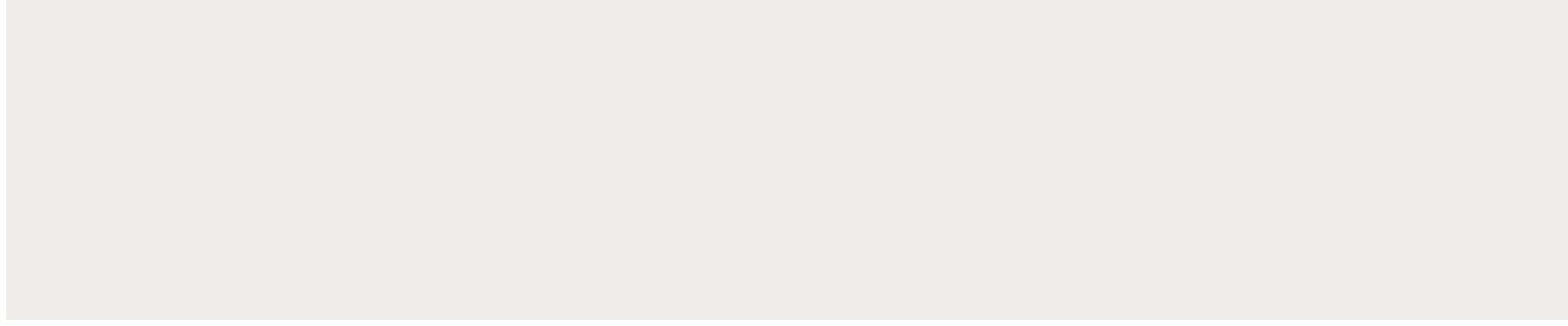
- When I feel this way, I usually...

A large, light gray rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for the user to write their responses to the reflection questions.

- What helps me express emotions in a healthy way?

A large, light gray rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for the user to write their responses to the reflection questions.

- How do I show care and kindness to myself when emotions are strong?

A large, light gray rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for the user to write their responses to the reflection questions.

Final Remarks

Emotions are not signs of weakness.

They are proof that you are alive, connected, and capable of change.

Allow yourself to feel them fully, without fear or shame.

Every emotion carries a message; your role is to listen.

What is VALUES and why is it important?

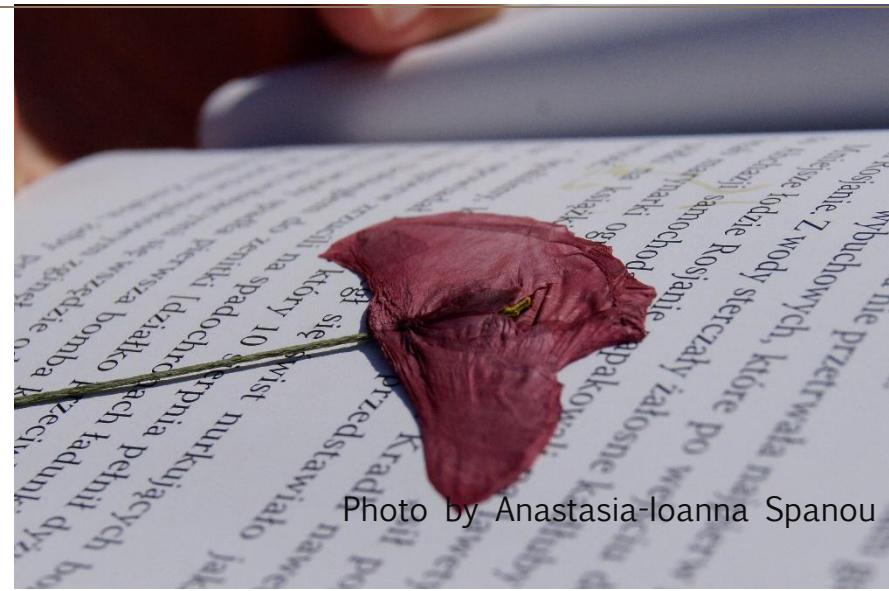


Photo by Anastasia-Ioanna Spanou

What?

Our values form the invisible architecture of our choices. When we understand what drives us, our actions begin to feel aligned and meaningful. Values are personal beliefs and thoughts that represent you.

Values are core rules for life - like honesty, kindness or bravery. They are what make you say: "This feels right for me".

Why?

Values aren't being perfect, just being true to you.

- ✓ Feel happier when your choices match values
- ✗ Feel unsettled or unfulfilled when you ignore them.

How can we practice it?

1. First Practice - Find and Feel

Instruction:
Number of players: 1 to 20 players
Duration: 15 min
Materials: Pen and paper

Pick three or more words that define you and write them down. (Examples: Kindness, loyalty, creativity, fun, freedom, etc..)

Ask yourself "Does this feel like me?"

Example: Choosing to help a friend (even when you are busy) means being kind is important to you.

Experiment: Cut the papers and keep only one.

How did you feel when you cut them?

2. Second practice - Messy Moments

Instruction:
Number of players: 1-4 players
Duration: 10 min
Materials: Pen and paper

When you are upset, ask: "Which value of mine was ignored here?" Write your feelings down and reflect on it.

Example: Angry at cheater? Maybe you value fairness and honesty..

3. Third practice - Values Charades

Instruction:
Number of players: 4-20 players
Duration: 5 min per person
Materials: Imagination & good mood

Write values on paper (such as adventure, fairness). Act them out without speaking, and let friends guess.

Discuss times you have seen those values in real life.



1. Reflection Space - Living Your Values

Use these prompts as gentle invitations to explore what truly matters to you. Take a few minutes to pause, write, and notice what comes up, without judgment:

- Which three words describe what's most important in your life right now?

- Why do these values matter to you personally?

- When in your life did you first realize these things were important to you?

2. Alignment and Everyday Choices

- Think of a recent situation where your actions matched your values. How did that feel?

- Now recall a moment when you acted against your values — what happened, and what did you learn from it?

- What helps you stay true to your values, even when it's difficult?

3. Values in Connection with Others

- Which of your values are shared by your friends or loved ones?

- Which of your values sometimes create tension or difference with others?

- How can you communicate your values respectfully when others don't share them?

4. Reflective Practice

“Values are not about being perfect, they are about being true to yourself.”

- What does this sentence mean to you?

- Which one of your values needs more attention or space in your life right now?

- How could you practice that value in the next week — through a small, real action?

Final Remarks

Our values guide us quietly - like an inner compass. When we learn to listen, we start walking in the direction that feels right for us.

- What would your inner compass say to you today?

What is RELATIONSHIP and why is it important?

What?

Relationships are a bit like WiFi, when they're strong, everything works better! Sometimes they're smooth and easy, like hanging out with a good friend, and other times they can feel a bit glitchy. No one has all the answers, and that's okay! In this section, let's explore, understand, and have some fun with all the different connections in your life. As you start thinking about your relationships, it helps you to know that each type of relationship plays a unique role in your mental health and how you see yourself.



Why?

The role of interpersonal dynamics in identity formation and psychological well-being

interpersonal relationships are fundamental determinants of identity formation. An individual's self-concept, their perception of self is significantly molded by their primary social connections and interactions.

Supportive and validating relationships function to enhance self-efficacy and reinforce feelings of inherent self-worth. Conversely, dysfunctional, toxic, or distant relationships can induce significant cognitive dissonance, prompting individuals to question their core identity.

This phenomenon aligns with principles of Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals often model behaviors and construct their self-image based on observations of significant others.

How can we practice it?

Building a healthy relationship with yourself is about understanding who you are and feeling comfortable in your own skin. This is a big part of growing up and figuring out your identity, and it's linked to feeling happier and more confident overall. It means being gentle to yourself, accepting your strengths and mistakes, and learning to listen to your own needs and feelings. When you treat yourself with respect and care, it becomes easier to handle challenges and build healthy relationships with others. Developing this self-awareness is like laying the foundation for everything else in your life¹.

Your relationship with your caregiver(s) is also super important. When you feel supported and understood at home, it gives you a safe base to explore new things and handle life's ups and downs. Studies show that having a strong, positive bond with your caregivers can actually protect you from stress and mental health struggles, especially during tough times like the pandemic².

Humans are fundamentally wired for connection. Feeling close to others provides a vital sense of belonging and combats isolation. High-quality friendships are directly linked to feeling less lonely and experiencing lower rates of anxiety and depression.

While no relationship is perfect, healthy connections are essential for a healthy you. What matters most is a foundation built on trust, respect, support, and open communication. These elements foster personal, mental, and emotional growth. Relationships aren't just background noise; they play a major role in your well-being and deserve attention.

We can actively practice and improve these connections. Activities and "games" can help us better understand our relationships, revealing areas that need improvement or confirming what is already working smoothly. It is normal to find a bit of both. The goal of these exercises is to learn and be in control of the connections we have in our lives.

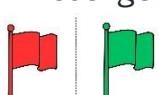
Here are some games and activities you can practice together to better understand the relationships in our lives. Maybe they will show you that some aspects of your relationships need improvement, or perhaps you will be pleased that some things are working smoothly already. It is normal to have a little bit of both, so don't be disheartened by the results. These games are all about learning and being in control of the relationships we have in our lives.

Let's get started!

How can we practice it?

Here are some games and activities you can practice together to better understand the relationships in our lives. Maybe they will show you that some aspects of your relationships need improvement, or perhaps you will be pleased that some things are working smoothly already. It is normal to have a little bit of both, so don't be disheartened by the results.

These games are all about learning and being in control of the relationships we have in our lives.
~Let's get started!



Game 1: RED Flag or GREEN Flag

Objective: Identifying healthy and unhealthy behaviors in friendships and romantic relationships by using visual, relatable examples.

Materials:

- Two signs per participant: "Red Flag" & "Green Flag". They can be printed or drawn.
- Prepared behavior statements (on slips or read aloud)

Optional: sticky notes for personal reflections

Instructions:

Set the Scene (2-3 min). Explain that in relationships, some behaviors **help us feel respected and safe** (green flags), while others signal **danger or discomfort** (red flags). This activity helps us notice the difference.

Movement Activity (15–20 min)

- Read one behavior statement at a time.
- Participants move to the "Green Flag" or "Red Flag" sign depending on how they view it.
- After each round, ask:
 - Why did you choose this side?
 - Would it depend on context?
 - Can something start green but turn red?

Example Statement:

"They support your goals and listen to you."

"They check your phone without asking."

"They celebrate your successes."

"They guilt you for spending time with others."

¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11403174/>

² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9864497/>

Game 2: Relationship Mapping

Objective: To help young people explore and reflect on the key relationships in their lives, recognize sources of support, and identify areas needing attention or boundaries.

Materials:

- A4 or A3 paper
- Colored pens or markers
- Sticky notes (optional)
- Ruler or circle template (optional)

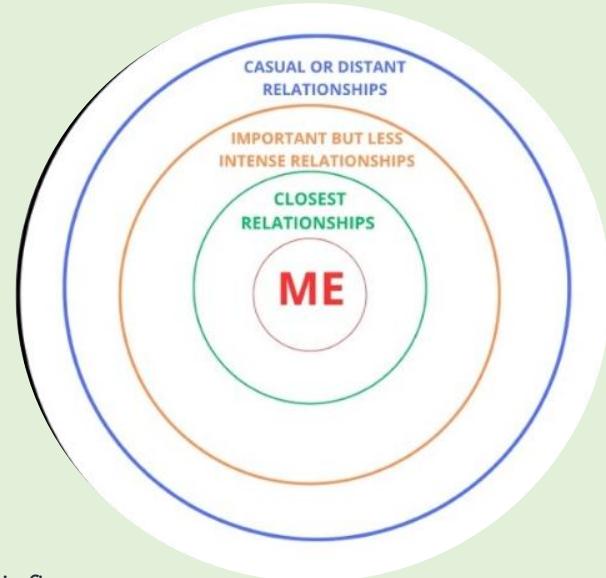
Instructions:

Draw Your Map (10–15 min)

- In the center of the page, write or draw “ME” (can also draw a small self-portrait).
- Around it, draw 3–4 circles, each getting wider like a target.
- Label the circles:
 - o Inner circle = Closest relationships (strongest emotional ties)
 - o Middle circle = Important but less intense
 - o Outer circle = Casual or distant relationships
- Have participants place names or initials of people in their lives in the appropriate circles: family, friends, classmates, mentors, teachers, partners, etc.

Color Coding (5–10 min). Use colors or symbols to mark:

- Supportive relationships
- Stressful/conflictive ones
- Those who are wished to strengthen or set boundaries with
- Use stickers/dots to add emotional tone (happy, confused, hurt) in Color Coding



Debriefing:

- What did I learn about my relationships today?
- What's one small action I can take to improve or protect a relationship?
- How does my relationship map affect my mental health?

Game 3: Emoji Reactions

Objective: Exploring emotions and reactions in relationships using humor and creativity.

Materials:

- Printed emoji cards/Drawings
- Scenario slips (funny or awkward relationship moments)
- Optional: a whiteboard or screen to display emojis

Instructions:

(1) Set Up (5 min)

Give each group or participant a set of emoji cards (😊 😔 😢 😋 etc.).

(2) Read Scenarios (10–15 min)

Read out or hand out funny or awkward situations, like:

- “Your crush likes your 3-year-old photo at 3 a.m.”
- “Your friend tags you in an embarrassing meme.”
- “Your sibling reads your messages out loud.”
- “Someone calls you the wrong name all day.”

(3) Emoji Reaction Time

Participants hold up the emoji that best shows how they'd feel or react.

Share & laugh!



Bonus instructions:

Have teams act out a scene using only emojis (facial expressions and body language) while others guess the emotion or scenario.

Questions for Reflection:

One person who makes me feel safe is:

The boundary I want to strengthen in a relationship is:



Boundaries

“We become better through connection, stronger through softness, wiser through trust.”

What?

Our behavioral patterns are learned responses - they once protected us but can also limit us if they go unexamined.

The personal space, emotionally, physically and mentally, you allow to have between yourself and others. It marks your personal limits in relationships to others and to yourself and has direct relations to one's actions and thoughts. Boundaries help us maintain our identity, protect our wellbeing and build healthy relationships with others.

There are different types of boundaries:

Emotional boundaries protect our right to feel our own feelings without being manipulated or overwhelmed by the emotions of others. They allow us to express our needs, desires, and vulnerabilities without fear of judgment, shame, or invasion. For example, setting an emotional boundary might involve telling a friend that you're not available to listen to their problems 24/7, or that you need time to process your own emotions before being available for someone else's.

Physical boundaries involve our personal space, privacy, and body. They help us define what kind of touch or physical proximity is acceptable. A physical boundary might be as simple as not wanting to hug someone or needing space in crowded environments. It also includes decisions about who enters our home, uses our belongings, or invades our quiet time.

Mental boundaries protect our thoughts, values, opinions, and beliefs. They allow us to think for ourselves and make independent decisions without being coerced or pressured. When someone challenges our beliefs in a disrespectful way or tries to gaslight us, it's a violation of our mental boundaries. Healthy mental boundaries allow us to disagree without disrespecting or being disrespected.

Time and energy boundaries are about how we spend our time and where we focus our efforts. They help us prevent burnout and maintain balance in our lives. Saying “no” to activities that drain us or setting limits on work hours are examples of asserting these boundaries.

Relational boundaries define the rules and expectations in our interactions with others. They help us protect ourselves from manipulation, abuse, or unhealthy dynamics. Setting boundaries in relationships might mean not tolerating dishonesty, being clear about communication needs, or distancing from toxic behavior.

Setting boundaries can be challenging, especially for people who fear rejection, confrontation, or being seen as selfish. But boundaries are not barriers meant to push people away, they are bridges that create the conditions for safe, respectful, and meaningful relationships. They are a form of self-love and self-protection, not punishment or withdrawal.

Healthy boundaries require self-awareness, courage, and consistency. They often begin with recognizing our own limits and learning to communicate them clearly and respectfully. It also means respecting the boundaries of others and being open to compromise when appropriate.

In essence, boundaries are a form of personal empowerment. They remind us that we have a right to our space, voice, and peace. They help us navigate life with integrity, staying true to who we are while engaging with others from a place of strength, not sacrifice.

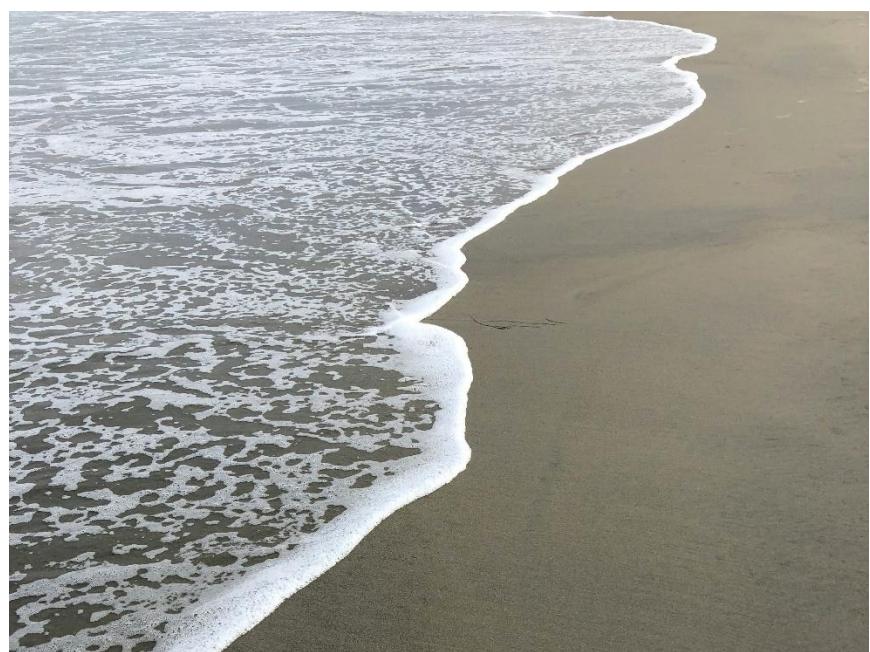


Photo by [René Molenkamp](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Why?

It is important because it allows someone to prioritize themselves while still being respectful to others. This will establish a healthy balance in one's life and helps protect emotional wellbeing. It can also improve mental status by reducing anxiety and establishing self-worth. The individual would be able to express themselves while also promoting healthy communication, trust and respect.

1. They protect your emotional and mental health

Boundaries act like a filter, protecting you from emotional exhaustion, manipulation, or being overwhelmed by the demands of others. Without them, you can easily lose yourself in other people's needs, constantly giving while neglecting your own. Boundaries create space for emotional rest and self-care, allowing you to recharge and stay balanced.

2. They define your identity and self-worth

Knowing your boundaries means knowing who you are, what you value, what you need, what you will and won't tolerate. It's a way of honoring your sense of self. Boundaries reinforce the idea that your feelings, opinions, and experiences are valid. They help you stand in your truth without needing to please everyone or constantly seek approval.

3. They build trust and respect in relationships

Healthy boundaries actually bring people closer. They create clarity and safety. When you're clear about your limits and you respect the limits of others, relationships become more authentic, respectful, and balanced. Without boundaries, relationships can easily become toxic, one-sided, or codependent.

4. They prevent resentment and burnout

When you constantly say "yes" out of guilt or fear, you begin to feel drained, used, and unappreciated. Over time, this leads to deep resentment. Boundaries help you say "no" when you need to, without guilt so your "yes" becomes genuine and joyful, not forced

5. They allow you to focus your time and energy wisely

Without boundaries, you can easily get pulled in a hundred directions, distracted by the needs and expectations of others. Boundaries help you prioritize what truly matters. They free up your time and energy so you can invest in your goals, passions, and personal growth

6. They teach others how to treat you

You set the standard for how others engage with you. When you uphold healthy boundaries, you send a clear message: "I value myself, and I expect to be treated with respect." People learn what's okay and what's not based on what you tolerate.

7. They are essential for independence and self-growth

Boundaries give you the space to make your own decisions, learn from your mistakes, and grow as an individual. They allow you to live in alignment with your values rather than being overly influenced by others' opinions, needs, or judgments.

How can we practice it?

1. Psychosocial group exercises that allow you to establish or rethink healthy boundaries in relation to others, e.g. circle exercise.
2. Encourage parents to teach their children about healthy boundaries and include the importance of personal space in school activities.
3. Reflective personal exercises like journaling that allow you to reflect on your behavior and rethink your boundaries with others.

Example of an exercise: Let's take a moment to reflect on what we learned today regarding boundaries by asking the following questions and practicing the following exercises:

1. How do you define boundaries?

2. What are some healthy boundaries I have implemented in my life?

3. What are some areas of my life that need stronger boundaries?

4. Why have I not implemented these yet?

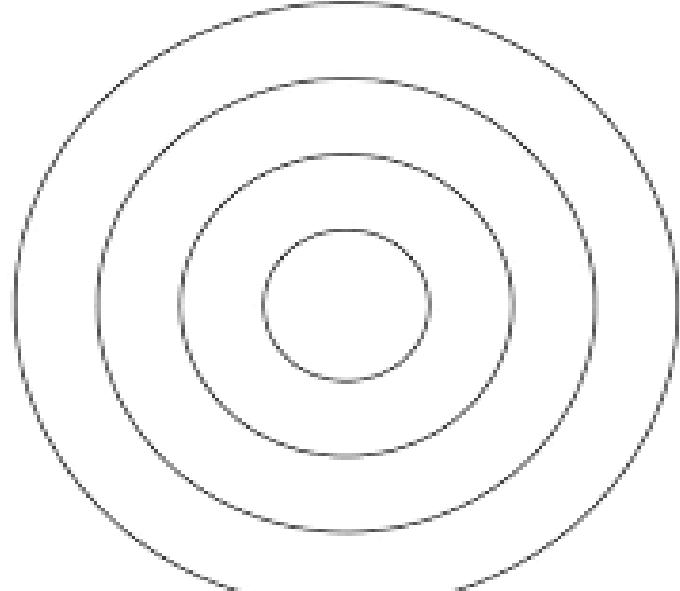
4. What can I do to implement these boundaries in areas of my life that needs rethinking?

Boundaries mapping Exercise

Objective: Identifying the personal boundaries in different areas.

Instructions:

1. Take a paper and pencil and draw four labeled circles
 - Physical boundaries
 - Emotional boundaries
 - Mental boundaries
 - Time and energy boundaries
2. Inside each circle write down what makes you feel safe.
3. Outside each circle, write down what crosses the line regarding your boundaries.



Reflection time

What patterns do you see? Are your boundaries clear or blurry?

Behavioral Patterns

Our behavioral patterns are automatic responses we develop to cope with difficult or stressful situations. These patterns are not random; they often arise from deeper mental structures called schemas.

Schemas are deeply held mental and emotional frameworks we develop through life, particularly in childhood. They form from:

- ★ Repetitive experiences
- ★ Unmet emotional needs
- ★ Core beliefs
- ★ Emotional and bodily memories

They influence how we interpret the world, ourselves, and others. They often show up in our relationships, work, self-talk, and reactions.

Schemas are not behaviors. When a schema is triggered, it activates a coping mechanism, often without our conscious awareness.

Spot your schemas

Read the list of common schemas below. Choose one that you mostly identify with. Then, write a few thoughts about how they show up in your life.

Common Maladaptive Schemas:

- ★ Abandonment/Instability
- ★ Defectiveness/Shame
- ★ Emotional Deprivation
- ★ Social Isolation/Alienation
- ★ Failure
- ★ Dependence/Incompetence
- ★ Vulnerability to Harm or Illness
- ★ Subjugation
- ★ Unrelenting Standards/Hyper criticalness

Reflection

1. Schema I relate to most:

2. This shows up in my life through...

3. A situation where I noticed this schema recently:

Coping Style	Description	Example
Fight (Overcompensation)	Actively resist the schema by acting in the opposite way.	“I feel unlovable, so I seek constant validation.”
Flight (Avoidance)	Escape or distract from the schema.	“I numb myself with social media or work.”
Freeze (Surrender)	Give in to the schema as if it were true.	“I believe I’m a failure, so I don’t even try.”

What is your style?

Think about how you typically respond when you're emotionally triggered or stressed.

My dominant coping style is:

- Fight (Overcompensation)
- Flight (Avoidance)
- Freeze (Surrender)

• This style shows up when....

• How has this coping style helped me in the past?

• How might it be limiting me today?

Reflection

Now recall the last time, the situation that triggered you.

1. How did you react?

2. How would you like to react in the future?

Take a moment to appreciate this coping style. It helped you survive.

1. How has it helped you so far?

2. Will it help you in the future?

3. In what ways is it not helping you anymore?

Realistic Changes

Choose one behavior you want to change. Then brainstorm a small shift you can make next time the schema is triggered.

1. Behavior that I want to change:

2. Schema that drives this behavior:

3. One small change I can try:

Instead of:

I will try:

Example:

Instead of withdrawing when I feel judged (Freeze),
I will try texting one trusted friend.

The Paradox of Change

“True change happens not when we try to become something we are not, but when we fully accept who we are right now.”

Reflection Exercise: Accepting Before Changing

Take a few moments to answer the prompts below honestly and gently.

1. What is one part of yourself or your life that you find hard to accept?

2. Why do you think this is difficult for you to accept?

3. What would it feel like to offer this part of yourself some compassion, instead of judgment?

Visualization: Releasing Old Patterns

Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Imagine holding a box.

Place inside it one behavior or thought pattern that no longer serves you.

.....



.....Now, picture yourself placing that box into a fire.
Watch it burn, slowly and completely.

As the box disappears, imagine yourself feeling lighter, freer, and more grounded.

1. What did I put in the box?

2. How did it feel to let it go?

Expressive Exercise:

Draw Your Schema

Sometimes words aren't enough.

Let your inner world speak through image.

Using pens, crayons, markers, or even digital tools, create a visual representation of your schema or emotional state. There's no "wrong" way to do this, be creative.

Coming Back to Yourself

Take a moment to pause and look back on your journey through this Journal. You have explored your emotions, values, relationships, behavioral patterns, and boundaries. You have written, reflected, and perhaps discovered parts of yourself that needed attention, patience, or kindness.

Growth does not happen overnight — it happens through small steps, through awareness, and through the courage to stay honest with yourself.

This Journal does not end here. You can return to it whenever you need a quiet moment to reconnect, or when life feels noisy and unclear.

“Healing is not about becoming someone new; it’s about remembering who you were before the world taught you to forget.”

What have I learned about myself through this Journal?

What one thing do I want to keep practicing in my everyday life?

Who or what gives me strength when I need it most?

A message to my future self:

As you close these pages, remember that every reflection can grow into an action.

Every small moment of awareness can inspire positive changes in yourself, in your community, and in the young people you work with.

We invite you to keep sharing, reflecting, and acting, because youth work changes lives when it begins with understanding.

~

Thank you all for weaving your talents together to create this journal:

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