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**RESCOM**

**GUIDE**

# for Youth Workers



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# **for Youth Workers**

**ResCom - Community Resiliency & Continuity**

**for Youth Affected by Crises & Disasters**

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## **1.1 Why This Guide?**

In the face of escalating crises—ranging from natural disasters to socio-political upheavals—youth workers play a pivotal role in fostering resilience among young individuals. This guide aims to equip youth professionals with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to support youth affected by crises and disasters. Drawing upon empirical research and best practices, it provides a comprehensive framework for trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and inclusive youth work.

### **The Role of Youth Workers in Crisis Contexts**

Youth workers are often at the frontline, engaging with young people who have experienced significant disruptions to their lives. Their responsibilities extend beyond recreational activities to encompass emotional support, community building, and facilitating access to essential services. Research underscores the critical role of youth work in conflict settings, highlighting its capacity to provide safe spaces for expression and participation, thereby promoting social integration and resilience among displaced youth (European Youth Work Development and Challenges, 2024).

The European Youth Forum's policy paper emphasizes the necessity for youth workers to be adequately trained and resourced to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young people in crisis situations. This includes fostering social and economic inclusion, upholding human rights, and ensuring active youth participation in recovery processes (European Youth Forum, 2023).

### **The Importance of Trauma-Informed Practices**

Trauma-informed care (TIC) is an approach that recognizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for healing. It involves integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices to avoid re-traumatization and to facilitate participation and meaningful involvement of individuals in the planning of services and programs. TIC is grounded in principles

such as safety, trustworthiness, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity (Hickle, 2020).

Implementing TIC in youth work settings is crucial, as it helps create environments where young people feel safe and supported, enabling them to process their experiences and build resilience (Bowie, 2015). Research indicates that trauma-informed practices can lead to improved outcomes for children and young people, often measured in a reduction of post-traumatic stress symptoms and behavioral problems (Bartlett et al., 2016).

### **Building Resilience in Youth**

Resilience refers to the capacity to adapt successfully to adversity. For young people affected by crises, resilience can be nurtured through various processes and support systems. Establishing or joining support groups, engaging in community or faith groups, and fostering close relationships with family and neighbors are vital. These connections provide essential emotional support, reducing stress and aiding in recovery during tough times (Time, 2020).

Community support can be more impactful than individual efforts, highlighting the importance of relationships in building lasting resilience (Time, 2020). The development of resilience is not only about individual coping mechanisms but also about creating environments that promote well-being and provide opportunities for young people to thrive despite adversities (Masten & Best, 1990).

### **The Need for Comprehensive Support Systems**

Addressing the needs of youth in crisis requires a holistic approach that encompasses not only immediate relief but also long-term support. This includes providing access to education, mental health services, and opportunities for social integration. Collaboration among various stakeholders, including youth workers, social services, educational institutions, and community organizations, is essential to create a supportive network that can effectively address the diverse needs of young people affected by crises (Freeman et al., 2020).

This guide is designed to empower youth workers with the tools and knowledge necessary to support young individuals in navigating the challenges posed by crises and disasters. By integrating trauma-informed practices, fostering resilience, and advocating for comprehensive support systems, youth workers can play a transformative role in helping young people rebuild their lives and communities. The following sections will delve deeper into the practical application of these concepts, providing actionable strategies and resources to enhance the effectiveness of youth work in crisis contexts.

## **1.2 Youth Workers in Crisis Contexts**

### **The Multifaceted Role of Youth Workers in Crises**

Youth workers operate in some of the most challenging and dynamic environments, especially during and after crises such as natural disasters, armed conflicts, pandemics, or socio-political upheavals. Their role goes far beyond traditional youth engagement activities, encompassing critical functions such as psychosocial support, community mobilization, and advocacy. They act as trusted connectors between young people and essential resources, helping navigate complex service systems and addressing the immediate and long-term needs of youth populations affected by crises (Tough, 2016).

In many contexts, youth workers are often among the first responders who establish safe spaces where young people can share experiences and emotions. This role is essential as crises disrupt established social networks, education, and family life, all of which are foundational to youth development. The flexibility and adaptability of youth workers enable them to respond quickly and creatively to changing needs, often filling gaps left by overstretched formal services (Ager et al., 2018).

### **Supporting Youth Through Vulnerabilities**

Crisis situations dramatically impact young people's mental health and well-being. Research consistently shows that youth affected by disasters or conflict experience elevated levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and PTSD (UNICEF, 2021). The

disruption of schooling, loss of homes, and fractured family structures create layers of vulnerability that complicate recovery processes. Youth workers play a vital role in providing psychosocial support, helping young people process trauma and reestablish a sense of normalcy.

Moreover, youth workers facilitate access to healthcare, education, legal aid, and social services, acting as bridges for marginalized or hard-to-reach groups. This support is particularly critical for young people who face intersectional vulnerabilities, such as refugees, those with disabilities, or members of minority groups. By creating inclusive environments, youth workers help reduce stigma and empower young people to regain control over their lives (Ager et al., 2018; UNICEF, 2021).

### **Advocacy and Youth Empowerment**

Beyond direct support, youth workers serve as advocates for young people's rights and needs during crises. They assist youth in navigating bureaucratic hurdles and ensure their voices are included in recovery planning and policy discussions. This participatory approach is aligned with the European Union's emphasis on youth empowerment and the recognition of young people as active agents of change rather than passive recipients of aid (European Commission, 2020).

Empowering youth to participate in decision-making processes fosters resilience by restoring a sense of agency and control, which can be severely diminished during crises. Studies show that youth involvement in community rebuilding efforts enhances psychological recovery and promotes social cohesion (Betancourt et al., 2015). Youth workers, therefore, are essential facilitators who nurture leadership, critical thinking, and collective action among young people.

### **Emotional Challenges and Self-Care for Youth Workers**

While youth workers are indispensable in crisis response, the emotional toll of their work is considerable. Secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout are common among professionals who regularly support trauma-affected

populations (Craig et al., 2017). In many cases, youth workers themselves may be personally impacted by the crises affecting the communities they serve, compounding emotional strain.

To sustain their well-being and maintain effectiveness, youth workers require access to ongoing supervision, peer support, and training focused on trauma-informed care and self-care strategies (Thomas & Zolkoski, 2020). Developing skills in setting professional boundaries and recognizing signs of burnout are also critical components of workforce sustainability. Agencies and funders must prioritize the mental health and resilience of youth workers as part of broader crisis response frameworks (Hickle, 2020).

### **The Importance of Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion**

Cultural competence is essential in crisis contexts, particularly where displacement and migration bring youth workers into contact with diverse cultural backgrounds. Understanding local cultural norms, values, and identities allows youth workers to provide respectful and relevant support, which fosters trust and engagement among marginalized groups (Betancourt et al., 2015).

Youth workers must adapt their approaches to be inclusive of refugees, ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ youth, and others who often face compounded discrimination during crises. Incorporating cultural sensitivity aligns with international human rights frameworks and improves the accessibility and effectiveness of psychosocial and educational interventions (European Youth Forum, 2023; UNHCR, 2022). Ongoing training and reflection on cultural dynamics are vital to avoid unintentional harm and to promote equitable support.

### **Youth Workers as Agents of Recovery**

In sum, youth workers fulfil complex and multifaceted roles in crisis contexts that are critical to the psychosocial well-being, empowerment, and recovery of young people. Their work bridges emotional support, advocacy, and community engagement, tailored to diverse cultural and social realities. The effectiveness of youth workers

depends on adequate preparation, continuous professional support, and recognition of their essential contributions within crisis response and recovery systems.



### **1.3 How This Guide Complements the Manual**

#### **Connecting Theory with Practice**

The Risk, Crisis, and Disaster Management (RCDM) Manual serves as a foundational resource, providing youth workers and professionals with a broad understanding of risk assessment, crisis intervention, and disaster recovery principles. However, the theoretical frameworks and strategic guidelines in the manual require practical translation to be fully effective in the field. This Guide for Youth Workers is designed to bridge that gap by focusing on actionable tools, techniques, and culturally sensitive practices tailored specifically to the realities faced by youth workers on the ground (Papadopoulos, 2014; van der Kolk, 2015).

While the manual introduces concepts such as emergency preparedness, trauma-informed care, and community resilience at a systemic level, this guide operationalizes these ideas in youth-centered ways. For example, it offers concrete approaches to trauma-informed youth work, highlighting safety, trust, and empowerment within direct interactions—a critical expansion for frontline practitioners working in crisis contexts (Hickle, 2020; Betancourt et al., 2015).

#### **Targeting the Unique Role of Youth Workers**

The manual addresses a wide audience, including policymakers, emergency managers, and youth professionals, which means it contains comprehensive but sometimes complex or generalized content. This guide narrows its focus to the specific responsibilities and challenges of youth workers who engage directly with young people affected by crises. It offers tailored guidance on maintaining professional boundaries, preventing burnout, and delivering psychosocial support while respecting diverse cultural backgrounds and individual vulnerabilities (Tough, 2016; UNICEF, 2021).

By complementing the manual's broader approach, the guide enhances youth workers' capacity to foster resilience and continuity within their communities, positioning them as both caregivers and advocates. It supports them in promoting peer support, community engagement, and long-term recovery strategies aligned with the manual's overarching goals (European Youth Forum, 2023).

### **Enhancing Accessibility and Practicality**

The manual is a detailed, often technical document designed to inform policy and broad crisis management strategies. Conversely, this guide prioritizes accessibility and usability for youth workers who may have varying levels of formal training or experience with crisis intervention. Using clear language, practical examples, conversation starters, and checklists, the guide ensures that youth workers can immediately apply what they learn in diverse settings, including schools, community centers, and informal youth spaces (European Youth Forum, 2023).

Additionally, the guide complements the manual by providing materials adaptable for workshops, training events, and remote learning, supporting capacity-building activities such as the Train-the-Trainer sessions. This layered educational approach ensures that knowledge flows from high-level frameworks to everyday practice, maximizing the effectiveness and sustainability of youth-focused crisis interventions (Tough, 2016; UNICEF, 2021).



## **1.4 Structure and How to Use It**

### **Designed for Accessibility and Ease of Use**

This guide is thoughtfully structured to be clear, modular, and user-friendly, recognizing the diverse needs of youth workers, including those with varying reading abilities or cognitive disabilities. Each chapter focuses on a specific theme or skill area, allowing users to easily find and engage with the content most relevant to their immediate needs. To support different learning preferences, the guide will include easy-to-read introductions for every unit, breaking down complex information into simple, digestible summaries (European Youth Forum, 2023).

The modular design also supports repeated use and ongoing learning. Youth workers can revisit sections as they gain experience or as situations change, reinforcing their knowledge and skills in a flexible, non-linear way. Early chapters introduce key concepts such as understanding youth realities and trauma-informed practice, while later chapters provide tools, adaptation strategies, and guidance on referrals (Papadopoulos, 2014).

### **Flexible Use for Various Contexts**

This guide is designed for multiple use cases: individual youth workers preparing for sessions, facilitators leading group workshops, trainers conducting capacity-building events, and supervisors supporting their teams. The guide's structure makes it suitable for both on-the-job reference and formal training contexts, offering flexibility in delivery and learning pace (UNICEF, 2021).

Additionally, the guide emphasizes the importance of self-care and professional boundaries for youth workers, recognizing that their wellbeing is essential for effective youth support. The inclusion of accessible content and attention to cognitive load aims to reduce stress for all users and create a supportive learning environment (Tough, 2016; European Youth Forum, 2023).



## **2.1 Types of Disasters and Crises Youth Encounter**

### **Natural Disasters and Environmental Crises**

Young people across Europe face a growing variety of natural disasters that disrupt their communities and daily lives, affecting their psychological wellbeing and development. Countries like Greece and Cyprus have recently experienced severe wildfires, such as those devastating parts of Greece in 2021, and extreme weather events like storms Elias and Daniel, which caused extensive flooding and infrastructure damage (European Environment Agency, 2023). Similar natural hazards, including floods in Central Europe and wildfires in Southern Europe, highlight the widespread nature of these threats (European Environment Agency, 2022). Such events displace families, disrupt schooling, and interrupt social networks that are critical for youth development.

The emotional and psychological impacts of these environmental crises are significant. Young people often experience feelings of loss, uncertainty, and anxiety related to both immediate threats and longer-term environmental degradation. The concept of eco-grief, describing distress caused by ecological loss and climate change, is increasingly recognized as a major mental health issue among youth (Albrecht, 2019). Studies indicate that young people exposed to these types of crises are at elevated risk for anxiety, depression, and trauma-related symptoms, underlining the need for trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate support (Cianconi, Betrò, & Janiri, 2020).

### **Human-Induced Crises and Socio-Political Conflicts**

In addition to natural disasters, young people are affected by a range of human-induced crises such as industrial accidents, social unrest, and conflict-driven displacement. The tragic Tempio train accident in Greece (Greek Ministry of Transport, 2023) illustrates how sudden man-made disasters can have profound psychological and community impacts, contributing to collective trauma. Across

Europe, events like social protests, economic crises, and migration flows have added layers of complexity to youth experiences during crises (Eurostat, 2022).

In Greece and Cyprus, as well as other Mediterranean countries, migrant and refugee youth face compounded vulnerabilities due to forced displacement, cultural dislocation, and integration challenges (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012). These youth often experience disrupted education and mental health challenges linked to their traumatic journeys and the difficulties of resettlement (Betancourt et al., 2015). The intersection of political instability, economic uncertainty, and social marginalization in various European contexts makes it essential for youth workers to apply systemic, culturally sensitive approaches to care.

### **Chronic and Systemic Crises Impacting Youth**

Beyond acute disasters, many young people live with chronic crises that worsen the effects of sudden emergencies. Issues such as poverty, homelessness, and social exclusion disproportionately affect marginalized youth populations, including Roma communities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and those with disabilities (European Commission, 2021). In parts of Europe, ongoing community violence and economic instability create environments of chronic stress that undermine youth wellbeing and resilience (Shields, 2020).

In Greece and Cyprus, as elsewhere, these systemic problems are often intertwined with disaster impacts. For example, disadvantaged neighborhoods may face greater exposure to hazards due to poor infrastructure, while economic pressures limit access to mental health services and social support (European Environment Agency, 2023). Understanding these overlapping crises is crucial for youth workers who aim to foster resilience through inclusive, trauma-informed interventions tailored to complex realities.



## 2.2 Emotional and Psychological Effects on Youth

### Immediate and Long-Term Psychological Impact from a Systemic Perspective

Youth affected by crises and disasters often face a wide range of emotional and psychological effects that ripple through their individual experiences and extend into their family, peer, and community systems. Immediately following an event—such as the wildfires in Greece, the floods caused by storms Elias and Daniel, or the tragic Tempi train accident—young people may show symptoms of acute stress, fear, confusion, and detachment (American Psychological Association, 2013). However, these individual reactions cannot be fully understood without considering the systemic context in which they occur. Families may themselves be traumatized and emotionally overwhelmed, altering their ability to provide stable support. Peer groups might fragment due to displacement or school closures, leaving youth isolated or disconnected from important social networks (Walsh, 2016).

This systemic view reveals that youth distress often reflects disruptions in relational and community dynamics rather than isolated psychological problems (Carr, 2019). For example, systemic counseling recognizes trauma as an event that unsettles entire systems, with effects that circulate through family roles, communication patterns, and collective meaning-making (Burnham, 2012). In the aftermath of natural and man-made disasters across Europe—such as the floods in Cyprus and wildfires in Southern Europe—these social systems are pivotal for youth recovery. Systemic trauma approaches emphasize repairing relationships and restoring community cohesion alongside individual healing (Papadopoulos et al., 2022).

Over the longer term, unresolved trauma may manifest as PTSD, depression, anxiety, or behavioral difficulties, particularly when systemic ruptures remain unaddressed (Karatzias et al., 2018). Power dynamics within families and communities play a significant role here: marginalized youth—including refugees, Roma populations, and LGBTQIA+ individuals—may experience compounded vulnerabilities as structural inequities limit access to supportive resources (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). Hence, systemic interventions seek to balance these

power imbalances by empowering youth voices within their social environments and fostering inclusive practices that recognize diverse identities and experiences.

### **Developmental, Social, and Power Dynamics**

Adolescence and young adulthood are critical phases for identity formation, autonomy, and establishing social roles within peer and community networks (Erikson, 1968; Arnett, 2014). Crises interrupt these developmental processes, often fragmenting young people's emerging sense of self and belonging. From a systemic lens, these effects are intertwined with the social and cultural power structures that shape young people's environments. For instance, the experiences of migrant and refugee youth displaced by European crises are shaped not only by trauma but also by exclusion, discrimination, and institutional barriers (Betancourt et al., 2015). These systemic inequalities influence how youth access services and participate in recovery, reinforcing cycles of marginalization.

Understanding trauma through group dynamics is vital. Youth do not experience crises in isolation but within groups whose norms, values, and roles impact recovery trajectories. Positive peer support and collective resilience-building can buffer trauma effects, fostering shared meaning and empowerment (Masten & Narayan, 2012). Conversely, exclusion or stigmatization within social groups can exacerbate distress and isolation. Thus, youth workers and systemic counselors focus on nurturing inclusive group processes and addressing harmful power relations that marginalize voices or perpetuate inequities (Hernandez & Gangsei, 2015).

### **Trauma, Systemic Counseling, and the Role of Narrative**

Systemic counseling approaches emphasize that trauma affects the coherence of individual and collective narratives, disrupting the stories that youth tell about themselves and their communities (White & Epston, 1990). Disasters like the Tempi accident or massive wildfires not only cause physical destruction but also shatter the shared meanings and rituals that give communities identity and resilience (Greek Ministry of Health, 2023). Restoring these narratives is fundamental to healing.

Narrative therapy empowers youth to externalize trauma and re-author their stories, highlighting resilience and agency within their relational contexts (Denborough, 2014). This approach recognizes that youth are embedded in multiple systems—family, school, community—and works to amplify marginalized voices while addressing power imbalances within these systems. Psychoeducation and family-based systemic interventions further support understanding of trauma as a relational experience, helping youth and caregivers collaboratively develop coping strategies and mutual support (Walsh, 2016).

By focusing on relational patterns and social justice, systemic counseling provides a framework that integrates mental health with empowerment and inclusion—critical for supporting diverse youth populations across Europe facing intersecting crises such as environmental disasters, migration, and social inequality (Burnham, 2012).



### **2.3 Eco-Grief and the Emotional Impact of Environmental Loss**

#### **Systemic Understanding of Eco-Grief**

Eco-grief, or ecological grief, refers to the profound sorrow and distress individuals experience due to environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and the erosion of familiar landscapes. This grief is not merely a personal emotional response but is deeply embedded in systemic contexts, including cultural, societal, and ecological frameworks. The loss of ecosystems and natural habitats can disrupt individuals' sense of identity, belonging, and connection to the land, leading to collective mourning and a shared sense of vulnerability (Albrecht, 2019).

From a systemic perspective, eco-grief highlights the interconnectedness of human and non-human systems. The degradation of the environment often disproportionately affects marginalized communities, exacerbating existing social inequalities. For instance, Indigenous populations, whose cultures and livelihoods are intricately tied to the land, may experience intensified grief as their ancestral territories undergo irreversible changes (Albrecht, 2019). This underscores the need

for interventions that address both the emotional and structural dimensions of eco-grief.

### **Power Dynamics and Group Responses**

Power dynamics play a crucial role in shaping individuals' experiences of eco-grief and their capacity to cope. Communities with limited access to resources and decision-making processes may feel powerless in the face of environmental destruction, leading to feelings of helplessness and despair. Conversely, empowering communities through participatory approaches and inclusive decision-making can foster resilience and collective action (Albrecht, 2019).

Group responses to eco-grief can serve as a source of strength and solidarity. Collective mourning rituals, community dialogues, and collaborative environmental restoration projects provide avenues for individuals to process their grief together, share experiences, and support one another. Such collective actions not only facilitate emotional healing but also promote a sense of agency and collective efficacy in addressing environmental challenges (Albrecht, 2019).

### **Systemic Counseling Approaches to Eco-Grief**

Systemic counseling offers valuable frameworks for addressing eco-grief by considering the broader ecological and cultural contexts in which individuals exist. Approaches such as ecotherapy and ecopsychology emphasize the therapeutic potential of reconnecting with nature and understanding the emotional impacts of environmental loss (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009). These modalities encourage individuals to explore their grief within the context of their relationship with the Earth, fostering a deeper understanding of their emotional responses and promoting healing.

Furthermore, systemic counseling recognizes the importance of cultural narratives and community practices in shaping individuals' experiences of eco-grief. By engaging with cultural traditions and community rituals, counselors can help

individuals process their grief in ways that are meaningful and culturally resonant, thereby enhancing the therapeutic process (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009).

Eco-grief is a multifaceted emotional response to environmental loss that transcends individual experiences, encompassing systemic, cultural, and collective dimensions. Addressing eco-grief requires a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of human and ecological systems, acknowledges power dynamics, and integrates systemic counseling practices. By fostering community solidarity, empowering marginalized voices, and promoting cultural sensitivity, interventions can support individuals and communities in navigating the emotional impacts of environmental change and in cultivating resilience in the face of ecological challenges.



## **2.4 Youth Narratives from Cyprus and Greece**

### **Contextualizing Youth Experiences through Crises**

Youth in Cyprus and Greece have recently faced a series of significant man-made and natural disasters, such as the catastrophic Tempri train accident, the severe wildfires that devastated large forested areas, and the destructive storms Elias and Daniel, which caused widespread flooding and displacement (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2023; Cyprus Civil Defence, 2023). These events have profoundly affected young people's perceptions of safety, community, and their own futures. Youth narratives emerging from these contexts reveal how deeply interwoven personal, familial, and societal factors are in shaping their responses to crisis.

These narratives do not exist in isolation but reflect systemic realities, including strained family dynamics, disrupted educational environments, and fragmented communities. For instance, the Tempri accident not only caused immediate trauma but also exposed institutional weaknesses and governance failures, which have been internalized by many young people as a broader societal crisis (Greek Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, 2023). This systemic lens is crucial to understand how

youth meaningfully interpret their experiences, often linking individual emotions to collective struggles.

### **Dominant Narratives: Trauma, Accountability, and Loss**

The most prevalent stories shared by youth across both countries center on trauma, grief, and a call for accountability. Many young people express profound sorrow over lives lost and homes destroyed, alongside feelings of anger and disillusionment with authorities perceived as neglectful or corrupt. In Greece, for example, the collective mourning following the Tempi disaster was accompanied by a strong demand for justice, highlighting systemic failures in transportation safety and governance (Georgiou & Magriplis, 2023). These narratives reflect a critical awareness of power structures and the impact of institutional decisions on everyday lives.

The dominant narrative of loss extends beyond individual tragedy to encompass a collective sense of vulnerability and uncertainty about the future. This shared experience shapes youth identity and their trust in social institutions. In Cyprus, the storms Elias and Daniel brought not only physical destruction but also challenged social cohesion, particularly in rural areas where youth narratives reveal fears of depopulation and neglect (Cyprus Civil Defence, 2023). These stories reveal how systemic inequalities and power imbalances affect young people's capacity to feel secure and supported.

In both countries, the dominant narratives also emphasize the need for systemic change. Youth-led movements and protests have emerged, demanding accountability and reforms in disaster preparedness and response. These movements highlight the role of youth as active agents of change, challenging existing power structures and advocating for a more just and resilient society.

### **Secondary Narratives: Hope, Solidarity, and Environmental Consciousness**

Counterbalancing these dominant narratives of trauma are secondary narratives that emphasize hope, solidarity, and proactive engagement. Following the wildfires and floods, many young people narrate stories of community resilience, mutual aid, and

collective healing. Volunteerism and grassroots organizing have become prominent themes, showing how youth mobilize social networks to rebuild and support one another (CESIE, n.d.). These narratives highlight the strength of group dynamics and collective agency in the face of adversity.

Additionally, an emergent narrative around environmental stewardship and eco-consciousness is increasingly visible. Youth in both Greece and Cyprus articulate a deep connection to their natural environments and a growing concern about climate change's role in exacerbating disasters (Kourkoutas, 2010). This ecological awareness fosters narratives that integrate environmental justice with social justice, positioning young people as advocates for sustainable policies and practices. Such narratives underscore how power dynamics extend beyond social institutions to include humanity's relationship with the environment.

These secondary narratives also serve as coping mechanisms, allowing youth to find meaning and purpose in the aftermath of disaster. By focusing on collective action and environmental responsibility, young people can transform their experiences of loss into opportunities for personal and societal growth.

### **Collective Storytelling as a Pathway to Healing**

Narrative practices that involve collective storytelling have proven vital in helping youth process and reframe their experiences of crisis. Programs like EU CARES have provided platforms where young people share personal and communal stories, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment through mutual recognition (CESIE, n.d.). These group narratives serve not only to validate individual trauma but also to reconstruct communal identities disrupted by disaster.

From a systemic counseling perspective, facilitating narrative reconstruction supports young people in shifting from victimhood to agency. By collaboratively exploring and reshaping stories, counselors help youth identify strengths and resources within their familial and community systems (White & Epston, 1990;

Magriplis & Georgoni, 2024). This therapeutic process is essential for healing and sustaining resilience over time.

Moreover, collective storytelling fosters a sense of community and shared purpose, which is crucial for rebuilding trust and social cohesion in the aftermath of disaster. By engaging in these narrative practices, youth can contribute to the collective healing process and the reconstruction of their communities.

### **Implications for Youth Support and Counseling**

Recognizing the complex interplay of individual, relational, and systemic factors in youth narratives is critical for effective intervention. Youth workers, counselors, and policymakers must adopt a systemic approach that acknowledges the power imbalances and structural challenges shaping young people's lives. Interventions that integrate narrative practices, group facilitation, and advocacy can empower youth to reclaim their stories and foster collective resilience.

Moreover, culturally and contextually sensitive approaches are essential, considering the specific histories, environmental contexts, and political realities of Cyprus and Greece. Supporting youth in navigating and transforming their narratives contributes to building stronger, more equitable communities capable of withstanding future crises (Kourkoutas, 2010; Magriplis & Georgoni, 2024).



## **2.5 Marginalized Youth: Recognizing Specific Vulnerabilities**

### **Contextualizing Marginalization in Greece and Cyprus**

In both Greece and Cyprus, marginalized youth face intersecting challenges that hinder their access to education, employment, and social inclusion. In Greece, approximately 36.2% of children were at risk of poverty in 2017, with marginalized groups such as the Roma experiencing even greater exclusion (UNICEF, n.d.). Similarly, in Cyprus, the influx of refugee and migrant children has strained public services, leading to gaps in child protection and education systems (Cyprus Civil Defence, 2023). These systemic issues reflect broader European trends where youth

from minority backgrounds, including migrants, refugees, and those with disabilities, encounter significant barriers to full participation in society.

### **Dominant Narratives: Exclusion, Precarity, and Disempowerment**

The prevailing narratives surrounding marginalized youth often focus on their vulnerabilities and deficits. These narratives portray young people from marginalized communities as passive victims of their circumstances, emphasizing issues such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education. In Greece, for instance, the Roma population has faced long-standing challenges in areas like housing, employment, and healthcare, leading to their near-total social exclusion (UNICEF, n.d.). Similarly, in Cyprus, refugee and migrant children, particularly those who are unaccompanied, are at heightened risk of exploitation and neglect due to gaps in protective services (Cyprus Civil Defence, 2023).

These dominant narratives often overlook the agency and resilience of marginalized youth. They fail to recognize the strengths and coping mechanisms that these young people develop in response to their circumstances. Moreover, such narratives can perpetuate stereotypes and justify discriminatory policies that further entrench social exclusion.

### **Secondary Narratives: Agency, Resistance, and Solidarity**

Contrasting the dominant narratives are secondary narratives that highlight the agency, resilience, and solidarity of marginalized youth. These narratives focus on how young people from marginalized backgrounds actively resist their circumstances, build supportive networks, and contribute to their communities. For example, in Greece, refugee and migrant youth have engaged in initiatives promoting digital literacy and online safety, aiming to bridge the digital divide and empower themselves in the digital age (Better Internet for Kids, n.d.).

In Cyprus, youth-led organizations have emerged to advocate for the rights of refugee and migrant children, challenging exclusionary policies and promoting inclusive education. These secondary narratives underscore the importance of

recognizing marginalized youth as active participants in their own lives and communities, rather than passive victims.

### **Systemic Factors Contributing to Marginalization**

The marginalization of youth in Greece, Cyprus, and Europe is not solely a result of individual circumstances but is deeply rooted in systemic factors. Structural inequalities in education, employment, and social services disproportionately affect marginalized youth. In Europe, nearly 17 million young people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with youth unemployment rates remaining persistently high (UNICEF, 2024). These systemic issues are compounded by legal and bureaucratic barriers that hinder access to services and opportunities for marginalized youth, particularly migrants and refugees (Arendas et al., 2023).

Moreover, cultural and societal attitudes can exacerbate the marginalization of certain youth groups. Discriminatory practices and xenophobic sentiments contribute to the social exclusion of migrant and Roma youth, limiting their opportunities for integration and participation in society (European Commission, 2018).

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Addressing the vulnerabilities of marginalized youth requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond addressing individual deficits. Policies and practices should focus on dismantling systemic barriers and promoting social inclusion. This includes ensuring equitable access to quality education, employment opportunities, and social services for all youth, regardless of their background.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognize and support the agency of marginalized youth. Empowering young people to participate in decision-making processes and to advocate for their rights can foster resilience and contribute to social change. Youth-led initiatives and organizations play a crucial role in challenging exclusionary narratives and promoting inclusive societies.



### **3.1 From Supporter to Stabilizer: Your Impact**

#### **The Evolving Role of Youth Workers**

In Greece, youth workers have been instrumental in addressing the challenges faced by young people during the economic downturn and the COVID-19 pandemic. They have provided emotional support, facilitated access to resources, and created safe spaces for youth to express themselves and build resilience. According to Antoniou et al. (2018), youth workers have played a crucial role in supporting young people through the transition to adulthood, offering guidance and mentorship in various settings, including schools, youth centers, and community organizations.

Similarly, in Cyprus, youth workers have been actively involved in supporting marginalized groups, including refugees and migrants, by offering language courses, cultural integration programs, and mental health support. These initiatives have been crucial in helping young people navigate the complexities of displacement and build a sense of belonging in their new communities. The Youth Board of Cyprus (2023) emphasizes the importance of youth work in promoting social inclusion and active participation among young people.

#### **Providing Stability Amidst Crisis**

Youth workers serve as stabilizers in the lives of young individuals, particularly during times of crisis. In both Greece and Cyprus, economic downturns, natural disasters, and social upheavals have significantly impacted the well-being of young people. Youth workers have stepped in to provide consistent support, offering a sense of continuity and security. They have facilitated access to essential services, such as mental health counseling, educational support, and social services, ensuring that young people have the resources they need to cope with adversity.

The European Commission (2020) highlights the role of youth workers in fostering resilience among young people, noting that their support contributes to the development of coping mechanisms and the enhancement of protective factors. By

creating safe spaces and promoting positive relationships, youth workers help mitigate the negative effects of crises on young individuals.

### **Building Resilience and Empowerment**

Beyond providing immediate support, youth workers play a critical role in building resilience and empowering young people to navigate challenges. Through non-formal education, mentorship, and skill-building activities, youth workers equip young individuals with the tools they need to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. In Greece, initiatives funded by the European Social Fund and national resources have focused on career guidance, counseling, and vocational training for young people at risk, aiming to enhance their employability and social inclusion (Cedefop, 2021).

In Cyprus, the Youth Board's programs aim to promote youth participation and active citizenship, encouraging young people to take on leadership roles and contribute to their communities. These efforts not only support individual development but also foster a sense of agency and belonging among young people, empowering them to effect positive change in their lives and societies.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Despite the significant impact of youth workers, challenges remain in fully realizing their potential. In both Greece and Cyprus, the recognition of youth work as a formal profession is still evolving. In Greece, the profession of youth worker has not yet been officially recognized, and there is no standardized qualification framework in place (Youth Partnership, 2020). Similarly, in Cyprus, while efforts are underway to define and recognize youth work, a formal recognition system does not yet exist (Youth Policy, 2023).

These challenges can affect the sustainability and effectiveness of youth work. However, they also present opportunities for advocacy and development. By strengthening the recognition and support of youth work, both countries can enhance the capacity of youth workers to serve young people effectively. The

establishment of formal qualification frameworks, professional development opportunities, and policy support can contribute to the growth and impact of youth work.



### **3.2 Dual Roles: Being Affected and Supporting Others**

#### **The Duality of Youth Work**

Youth workers in Greece and Cyprus often find themselves balancing their professional responsibilities with personal experiences of crisis and trauma. This dual role can lead to emotional strain and requires youth workers to develop coping mechanisms and seek support to maintain their well-being. This section explores the complexities of youth workers' dual roles, highlighting the challenges they face and the strategies employed to navigate these demands.

#### **Personal Impact of Crisis on Youth Workers**

In both Greece and Cyprus, youth workers have been affected by the same socio-economic challenges and natural disasters that impact the youth they serve. For instance, during the wildfires in Greece and the storms in Cyprus, youth workers not only supported affected youth but also faced personal losses and challenges (Greek Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, 2023; Cyprus Civil Defence, 2023). These events underscore the interconnectedness of youth workers' personal and professional lives, emphasizing the need for support systems that address both aspects.

The personal impact of crises on youth workers extends beyond immediate emotional responses. Prolonged exposure to traumatic events can lead to secondary trauma, characterized by symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive support strategies that encompass both personal and professional dimensions.

### **Challenges in Balancing Dual Roles**

Youth workers often face difficulties in maintaining clear boundaries between their personal and professional lives. The emotional demands of supporting vulnerable youth can blur these lines, leading to role ambiguity and conflict. In Cyprus, studies have highlighted that social welfare staff, including youth workers, experience high levels of occupational stress due to factors such as excessive workload, lack of support, and ethical dilemmas (Solomonidou & Katsounari, 2020). These challenges can result in burnout, compassion fatigue, and decreased job satisfaction.

The lack of formal recognition and standardized qualifications for youth workers in Greece further complicates the situation. Without clear role definitions and professional standards, youth workers may struggle to navigate their responsibilities effectively, leading to increased stress and potential role conflict (Youth Partnership, 2020).

### **Strategies for Managing Dual Roles**

To mitigate the challenges associated with dual roles, youth workers employ various strategies aimed at maintaining their well-being and effectiveness. One such initiative is the RISE&SHINE project, which focuses on empowering front-line youth workers to manage their well-being and enhance their ability to address youth mental health. The project provides resources such as a Youth Worker Well-being Planner and Reflective Practice Journal, offering tools for self-care and reflective practice (SEAL Cyprus, n.d.).

Additionally, the project includes a Well-being and Resilience Toolkit, featuring 12-hour CPD training covering topics such as understanding youth mental health, building resilience, and trauma-informed practices. These resources aim to equip youth workers with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the complexities of their dual roles and support their own mental health (SEAL Cyprus, n.d.).

## **Importance of Organizational Support**

Organizational support plays a crucial role in helping youth workers manage the demands of their dual roles. Providing access to supervision, professional development opportunities, and mental health resources can alleviate stress and enhance job satisfaction. In Cyprus, studies have indicated that inadequate appreciation from management, lack of support and guidance, and role ambiguity contribute to occupational stress and burnout among social welfare staff (Parlalis & Christodoulou, 2017).

Creating a supportive organizational culture that prioritizes the well-being of youth workers can lead to improved outcomes for both staff and the youth they serve. This includes fostering open communication, providing opportunities for professional growth, and implementing policies that promote work-life balance.

## **Navigating the Complexities of Dual Roles**

The dual roles of youth workers in Greece and Cyprus present both challenges and opportunities. While the emotional demands of supporting vulnerable youth can lead to stress and burnout, they also provide opportunities for personal growth and professional development. By implementing strategies such as reflective practice, seeking organizational support, and participating in initiatives like RISE&SHINE, youth workers can navigate the complexities of their dual roles effectively. Recognizing and addressing the challenges associated with dual roles is essential for ensuring the well-being of youth workers and the success of youth work initiatives.



## **3.3 Boundaries, Burnout, and Self-Care**

### **The Imperative of Self-Care in Youth Work**

Youth workers in Greece and Cyprus operate in environments marked by socio-economic challenges, migration crises, and limited resources. These conditions often lead to high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion among professionals. The importance of self-care in mitigating burnout and maintaining professional efficacy

cannot be overstated. As highlighted by the European Youth Forum (2023), youth workers frequently report high levels of stress and burnout, underscoring the need for effective self-care strategies.

### **Understanding Burnout and Compassion Fatigue**

Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, often resulting from prolonged exposure to stressors and high workloads. In contrast, compassion fatigue arises from the emotional toll of helping others, leading to symptoms such as emotional numbness and a diminished capacity to empathize. Both conditions are prevalent among youth workers in Greece and Cyprus, where systemic challenges exacerbate the emotional demands of the profession.

Research indicates that youth workers in these regions experience significant stress due to factors such as excessive workloads, lack of support, and role ambiguity. For instance, a study by the Youth Board of Cyprus (2022) found that 40% of youth workers reported experiencing high levels of stress, with many attributing it to inadequate resources and support.

### **The Role of Boundaries in Preventing Burnout**

Establishing and maintaining clear professional boundaries is essential in preventing burnout and compassion fatigue. Boundaries help youth workers delineate their personal and professional lives, ensuring that they can provide effective support to young people without compromising their own well-being. Systemic counseling literature emphasizes the importance of setting limits and compartmentalizing work-related emotions to prevent emotional exhaustion.

In Greece and Cyprus, youth workers often face challenges in setting boundaries due to cultural expectations and organizational structures that demand high levels of commitment. However, adopting strategies such as setting specific work hours, limiting after-hours communication, and seeking supervision can help professionals maintain healthy boundaries and reduce the risk of burnout.

## Self-Care Strategies for Youth Workers

Implementing self-care practices is crucial for youth workers to sustain their well-being and professional effectiveness. Systemic counseling approaches advocate for holistic self-care models that address physical, emotional, mental, and social aspects of health. In the context of youth work in Greece and Cyprus, self-care strategies may include:

- **Physical Care:** Engaging in regular exercise, maintaining a balanced diet, and ensuring adequate sleep to promote physical health.
- **Emotional Care:** Practicing mindfulness, journaling, and seeking emotional support through supervision or peer networks to manage stress and emotions.
- **Social Care:** Building supportive relationships with colleagues, friends, and family to foster a sense of community and connection.
- **Professional Development:** Pursuing continuous learning opportunities to enhance skills and competencies, thereby increasing job satisfaction and resilience.

Programs such as the RISE&SHINE initiative in Cyprus provide resources and training to support youth workers in implementing effective self-care practices, emphasizing the importance of well-being in professional development.

## Organizational Support and Systemic Approaches

While individual self-care is vital, organizational support plays a significant role in preventing burnout among youth workers. Systemic counseling highlights the importance of organizational structures and cultures that promote well-being and support. In Greece and Cyprus, youth work organizations can implement policies that encourage work-life balance, provide access to supervision and training, and foster a supportive work environment.

The European Youth Forum (2023) advocates for systemic changes that prioritize the well-being of youth workers, including adequate funding, recognition of the

profession, and the establishment of professional standards. By addressing systemic issues, organizations can create environments that support the health and effectiveness of youth workers.

### **A Holistic Approach to Well-Being**

Preventing burnout and promoting self-care among youth workers in Greece and Cyprus requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses individual practices, organizational support, and systemic changes. By adopting strategies that address physical, emotional, mental, and social aspects of health, and by fostering supportive organizational cultures, youth workers can maintain their well-being and continue to provide effective support to young people. Recognizing the importance of self-care and implementing comprehensive strategies is essential for sustaining the youth work profession and ensuring the well-being of both professionals and the youth they serve.



### **3.4 Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusive Practices**

#### **The Imperative of Cultural Sensitivity**

In the diverse socio-cultural landscapes of Greece and Cyprus, youth workers encounter young individuals from varied backgrounds, including migrants, refugees, and minority communities. Cultural sensitivity in youth work involves recognizing and respecting these diverse cultural identities, ensuring that all young people feel valued and understood. This approach is essential for fostering inclusive environments where every young person can thrive.

Systemic counseling emphasizes the importance of understanding the broader socio-cultural contexts in which individuals operate. By adopting a systemic perspective, youth workers can better comprehend the complexities of cultural identities and the impact of societal structures on young people's experiences.

## **Training and Professional Development**

To effectively engage with diverse youth populations, youth workers in Greece and Cyprus participate in training programs that enhance their cultural competence. For instance, the "Facilitating Intercultural Learning in Work with Youth Groups" training course, organized by SEAL Cyprus, aims to develop competencies necessary for working with intercultural groups of young people. The training focuses on understanding group processes, facilitating intercultural learning, and guiding reflection processes, thereby equipping youth workers with the skills to navigate cultural diversity effectively.

Additionally, the "ART HUBS FOR YOUTH" project, implemented in Cyprus, Greece, and other countries, utilizes the arts to combat inequality and promote intercultural dialogue. By encouraging young people from diverse backgrounds to engage in artistic expression, the project fosters mutual understanding and respect among participants.

## **Systemic Counseling Approaches to Cultural Sensitivity**

Systemic counseling provides valuable frameworks for understanding and addressing cultural diversity in youth work. By viewing individuals within the context of their relationships and environments, systemic counseling encourages youth workers to consider the cultural narratives and systemic factors that influence young people's behaviors and experiences.

This approach aligns with the competencies outlined by the Council of Europe, which emphasize the importance of supporting young people in acquiring intercultural competences and promoting interaction between young people from diverse backgrounds. Youth workers are encouraged to develop skills in facilitation, communication, and conflict transformation to effectively engage with cultural diversity.

### **Collaborative Initiatives for Social Cohesion**

Collaborative initiatives play a crucial role in promoting cultural sensitivity and inclusion in youth work. The "Youth in Action: Developing Dialogue Through Culture" project, funded by the European Union, aims to promote stronger participation of youth in reconciliation and peace processes for the reunification of Cyprus. The project raises awareness of the shared cultural heritage of the two communities, fostering dialogue and understanding among young people from different backgrounds.

Similarly, the "Inclusive Actions for Tolerance" training course in Kalamata, Greece, brought together youth workers from various countries to develop competencies and share tools for fostering inclusion and solidarity. The course focused on integrating migrants into society and combating racism and intolerance, emphasizing the importance of intercultural learning and social inclusion.

### **Embracing Diversity in Youth Work**

Cultural sensitivity and inclusive practices are fundamental to effective youth work in Greece, Cyprus, and beyond. By adopting systemic counseling approaches and engaging in collaborative initiatives, youth workers can create environments that respect and celebrate cultural diversity. This not only enhances the well-being and development of young people but also contributes to building cohesive and resilient communities.



## 4.1 What Is Trauma-Informed Practice?

### Defining Trauma-Informed Practice

Trauma-informed practice (TIP) is an approach that recognizes the widespread impact of trauma on individuals and integrates this understanding into all aspects of service delivery. It involves creating environments that promote safety, trustworthiness, and empowerment, ensuring that services do not inadvertently re-traumatize individuals (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). TIP is particularly crucial in youth work, where young individuals may have experienced various forms of trauma, including abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence.

In the context of systemic counselling, TIP extends beyond individual interventions to encompass organizational and community-level changes. It requires a shift in how services are structured and delivered, emphasizing collaboration, cultural humility, and a commitment to understanding the diverse experiences of youth (Harris & Fallot, 2001). By embedding trauma awareness into policies, practices, and interactions, TIP aims to create supportive environments that facilitate healing and resilience.

### Core Principles: Safety, Trust, Collaboration, Empowerment

The core principles of TIP—safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, and empowerment—serve as foundational elements in creating supportive environments for youth. Safety involves both physical and emotional aspects, ensuring that individuals feel secure and respected. Trustworthiness is built through transparency, consistency, and reliability in interactions and practices (SAMHSA, 2014). Collaboration emphasizes shared decision-making and active participation of youth in their own care, fostering a sense of agency and ownership.

Empowerment is central to TIP, focusing on strengths and resilience rather than deficits. It involves recognizing and building upon the inherent capabilities of individuals, promoting self-efficacy and confidence (Harris & Fallot, 2001). These

principles guide youth workers in developing practices that are not only responsive to the needs of young individuals but also proactive in fostering environments that support healing and growth.

### **Distinguishing TIP from Trauma-Focused Clinical Treatments**

While TIP provides a framework for creating supportive environments, trauma-focused clinical treatments are specialized interventions designed to address the psychological impact of trauma. These treatments, such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), are evidence-based approaches that aim to reduce trauma symptoms and improve functioning (Cohen et al., 2016). TIP and trauma-focused treatments are complementary; TIP creates the conditions necessary for effective therapeutic interventions by ensuring that individuals feel safe and supported.

In practice, youth workers may play a crucial role in identifying signs of trauma and facilitating access to specialized services. By integrating TIP into their work, they can help bridge the gap between general support and specialized treatment, ensuring that youth receive comprehensive care that addresses both immediate needs and long-term healing (Bryant, 2021). This collaborative approach enhances the overall effectiveness of trauma interventions and supports the well-being of youth.

### **Embedding Culture and Context**

Trauma does not occur in a vacuum; it is influenced by cultural, social, and environmental contexts. TIP recognizes the importance of understanding and integrating these factors into practice. Cultural competence involves being aware of and responsive to the cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs of individuals, ensuring that services are respectful and relevant (Harris & Fallot, 2001). This is particularly important in diverse communities, where experiences of trauma may be shaped by factors such as migration, socioeconomic status, and community history.

Systemic counselling frameworks emphasize the interconnectedness of individuals with their broader environments, including family, community, and societal

structures. By considering these contexts, TIP can be more effectively tailored to meet the unique needs of youth, promoting healing that acknowledges and respects their cultural and social realities (SAMHSA, 2014). This holistic approach fosters resilience and supports the development of coping strategies that are congruent with the individual's identity and experiences.



## **4.2 Principles of Safety, Trust, and Empowerment**

### **Cultivating Physical and Relational Safety**

Creating environments that promote both physical and relational safety is essential in TIP. Physical safety involves ensuring that spaces are secure and free from threats, while relational safety focuses on building trust and respect in interactions (SAMHSA, 2014). Youth workers can cultivate relational safety by demonstrating empathy, consistency, and respect, creating spaces where individuals feel valued and understood.

Relational safety also involves setting clear boundaries and expectations, which help individuals feel secure and know what to expect in their interactions. By maintaining a balance between warmth and structure, youth workers can foster environments that support emotional regulation and healing (Harris & Falot, 2001). This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of interventions but also promotes positive relationships that are foundational to the therapeutic process.

### **Establishing Trust Through Transparency**

Trust is a cornerstone of TIP, and it is established through transparency and consistency. Youth workers can build trust by being open about the goals and processes of interventions, explaining the rationale behind decisions, and being consistent in their actions and responses (SAMHSA, 2014). Transparency also involves acknowledging limitations and being honest about what can and cannot be provided, fostering a sense of honesty and integrity in relationships.

In systemic counselling, trust is also built through collaboration and shared decision-making. Involving youth in planning and evaluating their care empowers them and reinforces their role as active participants in their own healing process (Harris & Fallot, 2001). This collaborative approach not only enhances trust but also promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility in the therapeutic relationship.

### **Empowerment Through Collaborative Participation**

Empowerment in TIP involves recognizing and building upon the strengths and capacities of individuals. Youth workers can promote empowerment by encouraging self-expression, providing choices, and supporting autonomy in decision-making (SAMHSA, 2014). This approach fosters a sense of agency and self-efficacy, which are crucial for healing and resilience.

Collaboration is key to empowerment, as it involves working together with youth to identify goals, develop plans, and evaluate progress. This collaborative process not only enhances the relevance and effectiveness of interventions but also reinforces the value and dignity of youth as active contributors to their own care (Harris & Fallot, 2001). By fostering a collaborative environment, youth workers can support the development of skills and confidence that empower individuals to navigate challenges and pursue their goals.

### **Strength-Based Approaches to Growth**

Strength-based approaches focus on identifying and leveraging the inherent strengths and resources of individuals. In trauma-informed practice (TIP), this involves recognizing the resilience, coping strategies, and positive attributes that youth possess and using these as foundations for healing and growth (SAMHSA, 2014). By focusing on strengths rather than deficits, youth workers can promote a positive and hopeful outlook that supports recovery.

Systemic counselling frameworks align with strength-based approaches by emphasizing the interconnectedness of individuals with their environments. This perspective highlights how relationships, community resources, and cultural assets

can be mobilized to support healing and growth (Harris & Fallot, 2001). By adopting a strength-based approach, youth workers can facilitate the development of coping strategies and resilience that are grounded in the youth's existing capabilities and support systems.

In practice, this approach involves actively seeking out and amplifying the positive aspects of a youth's life, such as their talents, interests, and supportive relationships. Rather than focusing solely on challenges or deficits, strength-based practice encourages youth workers to explore what is working well in the youth's life and how these positive elements can be built upon to foster further growth and healing. This not only enhances the youth's self-esteem but also empowers them to take an active role in their own recovery process.

Moreover, strength-based approaches contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable environment by recognizing and valuing the diverse strengths that each individual brings. This inclusivity fosters a sense of belonging and community, which are essential for healing and growth. By focusing on strengths, youth workers can help youth reframe their experiences, seeing themselves not as victims of trauma but as resilient individuals capable of overcoming adversity.



### **4.3 Avoiding Re-Traumatization**

#### **Understanding Re-Traumatization in Youth Work**

Re-traumatization occurs when an individual is exposed to situations or interactions that mirror or evoke past traumatic experiences, leading to the reactivation of trauma-related responses. In youth work, this can manifest when interventions or environments inadvertently recreate elements of the original trauma, such as power imbalances, lack of control, or invalidation of experiences (Edelman, 2023). These experiences can undermine the therapeutic process, causing distress and potentially worsening the individual's condition.

Youth workers must be vigilant in recognizing and mitigating factors that could lead to re-traumatization. This involves creating environments that are predictable,

transparent, and empowering, where young individuals feel safe and respected. By understanding the dynamics of trauma and its effects, practitioners can design interventions that are sensitive to the needs of trauma-exposed youth, promoting healing and resilience (SAMHSA, 2014).

### **Strategies to Prevent Re-Traumatization**

Preventing re-traumatization requires a proactive and informed approach. One key strategy is to ensure that all staff are trained in trauma-informed practices, enabling them to recognize signs of trauma and respond appropriately (Edelman, 2023). This training should be ongoing and include supervision and support to reinforce learning and address challenges encountered in practice.

Additionally, interventions should be designed with the input of the youth, allowing them to have a voice in their care and treatment plans. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of control and agency, which are crucial for healing. Creating spaces where youth can express themselves freely and feel heard can significantly reduce the risk of re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014).

### **Implementing Trauma-Informed Policies and Practices**

Organizations should develop and implement policies that reflect trauma-informed principles, ensuring that all aspects of service delivery are aligned with these values. This includes establishing clear protocols for handling disclosures of trauma, ensuring confidentiality, and providing appropriate referrals to specialized services when necessary (Edelman, 2023). Policies should also address the physical environment, ensuring that spaces are welcoming, safe, and conducive to healing.

Regular evaluation of practices and policies is essential to identify areas for improvement and ensure that they continue to meet the needs of trauma-exposed youth. Engaging youth in this evaluation process can provide valuable insights and promote a sense of ownership and empowerment, further reducing the risk of re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014).

## **The Role of Supervision and Reflective Practice**

Supervision plays a critical role in preventing re-traumatization by providing a space for youth workers to reflect on their practice, discuss challenges, and receive support. Reflective practice encourages practitioners to examine their own responses and biases, fostering greater self-awareness and sensitivity to the needs of trauma-exposed youth (Edelman, 2023). This process helps to identify potential triggers and areas where re-traumatization may occur, allowing for timely interventions.

Incorporating regular supervision and reflective practice into the organizational culture reinforces the commitment to trauma-informed care and supports the well-being of both staff and youth. By prioritizing these practices, organizations can create a supportive environment that promotes healing and reduces the risk of re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014).



### **4.4 Signs of Distress and When to Refer**

#### **Recognizing Signs of Distress in Youth**

Recognizing signs of distress in youth is crucial for timely intervention and support. Distress can manifest in various ways, including changes in behavior, mood, or physical health. Youth may exhibit withdrawal, irritability, aggression, or a decline in academic performance. Physical symptoms such as sleep disturbances, headaches, or gastrointestinal issues can also indicate underlying distress (Perry & Szalavitz, 2006).

These signs may be subtle or mistaken for typical adolescent behavior, making it essential for youth workers to maintain a vigilant and compassionate approach. Building strong, trusting relationships with youth can facilitate open communication, enabling them to express their feelings and concerns more readily. Early identification of distress allows for prompt support and referral to appropriate services, preventing the escalation of issues (SAMHSA, 2014).

## **The Importance of Trauma-Informed Screening**

Trauma-informed screening is a vital tool in identifying youth who may be experiencing distress related to past trauma. These screenings should be conducted in a sensitive and non-judgmental manner, ensuring that youth feel safe and respected during the process. The information gathered can guide the development of individualized support plans and inform decisions about referrals to specialized services (SAMHSA, 2014).

Screening should be part of a comprehensive assessment process that considers the youth's history, current functioning, and support systems. It is important to recognize that not all youth will disclose trauma during screening; therefore, creating an environment that encourages openness and trust is essential. Regular training for staff on conducting trauma-informed screenings can enhance their effectiveness and ensure that youth receive the support they need (Edelman, 2023).

## **Making Appropriate Referrals**

When signs of significant distress or trauma are identified, making appropriate referrals is crucial. Youth workers should be knowledgeable about local resources and services, including mental health professionals, crisis intervention teams, and support groups. Referrals should be made collaboratively with the youth, ensuring that they are involved in the decision-making process and feel empowered to seek help (SAMHSA, 2014).

It is important to provide support during the referral process, such as accompanying the youth to appointments or assisting with paperwork, to reduce barriers to accessing services. Follow-up is also essential to ensure that the referral was successful and that the youth is receiving the necessary support. By providing comprehensive and coordinated care, youth workers can help youth navigate the complexities of accessing services and promote their well-being (Edelman, 2023).

## **Ethical Considerations in Referral Practices**

Ethical considerations play a significant role in the referral process. Youth workers must ensure that referrals are made in the best interest of the youth, maintaining confidentiality and respecting their autonomy. It is essential to obtain informed consent before making referrals and to provide the youth with information about the services to which they are being referred (SAMHSA, 2014).

Additionally, youth workers should be aware of potential biases and power dynamics that may influence referral decisions. Ensuring that referrals are equitable and culturally appropriate is vital for promoting trust and engagement. Ongoing training and supervision can help youth workers navigate these ethical considerations and provide the highest standard of care (Edelman, 2023).



## **5.1 What Resilience Means for Youth**

### **Defining Resilience in Youth**

Resilience in youth is broadly understood as the ability to adapt positively despite experiencing adversity, trauma, or significant life challenges. It involves not only bouncing back but also growing and thriving through difficult circumstances. From a systemic counseling perspective, resilience is seen as a dynamic process that emerges through the interactions between the individual and their family, social networks, and wider societal structures (Ungar, 2013). This understanding moves beyond the traditional focus on personal traits to include the influence of environmental and relational factors.

In contexts like Greece and Cyprus, where economic crises and natural disasters such as wildfires and floods have posed ongoing challenges for young people, resilience is crucial for maintaining mental health and social functioning. Systemic approaches highlight that resilience is not simply about individual grit but about the availability and quality of support systems that facilitate adaptive coping and recovery (Masten & Narayan, 2012). Thus, resilience is a co-created process within youth's ecosystems.

### **Protective Factors in Youth Resilience**

A range of protective factors contribute to resilience in young people, including strong, supportive family relationships, positive peer interactions, safe school environments, and access to community resources. For example, interventions in Greece and Cyprus have focused on strengthening family bonds and school-based emotional support programs to mitigate the effects of the economic downturn and environmental crises (Hatzichristou & Lianos., 2016). These factors serve as buffers, reducing the impact of stressors and fostering youths' capacity to manage difficulties.

Moreover, social connectedness and community involvement have been identified as key elements that enhance resilience by providing young people with a sense of belonging and purpose. In communities affected by disasters like the Tempri train

accident in Greece or the severe wildfires in Cyprus, collective support and solidarity have helped youth navigate grief and uncertainty (Magriplis & Georgoni, 2024). Protective factors thus operate at multiple systemic levels, reinforcing the importance of relational and contextual considerations in resilience-building.

### **The Role of Cultural Context**

Culture plays a significant role in shaping how resilience is expressed and developed among youth. Mediterranean cultures such as those in Greece and Cyprus emphasize family cohesion, community solidarity, and collective values, which can serve as vital sources of strength during times of crisis (Benard, 2004). Systemic counseling stresses the importance of understanding these cultural frameworks to design interventions that are culturally sensitive and relevant to the lived experiences of youth.

Additionally, cultural narratives influence how young people interpret and make meaning of adversity. For instance, storytelling and collective rituals in Greek and Cypriot communities often function as mechanisms for processing trauma and reinforcing identity, thereby promoting resilience (White & Epston, 1990). Appreciating these cultural dynamics enables youth workers and counselors to engage more effectively with young people's worldviews and strengths.

### **Systemic Approaches to Enhancing Resilience**

Systemic counseling offers comprehensive approaches that focus on the interconnectedness of individuals, families, and communities. It encourages practitioners to consider not only the youth's individual coping skills but also the broader relational and societal influences affecting resilience (Kourkoutas, 2010). This perspective aligns with the Council of Europe's guidelines on youth work competencies, which promote intercultural dialogue, facilitation skills, and empowerment of young people in diverse settings.

Moreover, systemic approaches emphasize collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including families, schools, and community organizations, to build supportive

networks that sustain youth resilience over time (Ungar, 2013). By recognizing the complex social ecology surrounding young people, systemic counseling fosters sustainable resilience that is contextually grounded and culturally informed.



## **5.2 Encouraging Continuity: Identity, Routine, and Belonging**

### **The Importance of Identity in Continuity**

Continuity in youth development is closely tied to a stable and coherent sense of identity, which provides young people with a foundation for understanding themselves amidst changing circumstances. Identity encompasses personal beliefs, cultural heritage, social roles, and future aspirations. When youth face crises, such as the natural disasters and social upheavals experienced in Greece and Cyprus, disruptions to their identity can cause confusion and distress (Masten & Narayan, 2012). Maintaining or reconstructing a positive sense of self is crucial for resilience, as it anchors young people and supports their capacity to navigate adversity with purpose.

From a systemic counseling perspective, identity is not fixed but fluid, shaped through ongoing interactions with family, peers, and community narratives (White & Epston, 1990). Youth workers can support continuity by helping adolescents explore and affirm their identities within these relational contexts. This may involve engaging with cultural traditions, storytelling, or creative expression to reinforce a sense of belonging and self-worth. Encouraging youth to view their identity as evolving rather than threatened fosters adaptability and hope for the future.

### **The Role of Routine in Stability**

Routine provides predictability and structure, which are vital for young people, especially during times of crisis or instability. Consistent daily activities—such as school attendance, family meals, or participation in community groups—create a framework that helps youth manage stress and maintain a sense of normalcy (Evans et al., 2013). In post-disaster settings like the aftermath of the Tempi train accident or the floods caused by Storm Elias and Daniel, re-establishing routines has been

recognized as an effective strategy for emotional regulation and psychological recovery (Magriplis & Georgoni, 2024).

However, routines are more than just repetitive tasks; they are meaningful rituals that reinforce identity and social roles. Systemic approaches emphasize the symbolic nature of routines in sustaining connections to family and community, thus promoting resilience (Kourkoutas, 2010). Youth workers play an important role in facilitating the restoration or adaptation of routines, ensuring that young people feel supported while gradually regaining control over their environments and daily lives.

### **Fostering a Sense of Belonging**

Belonging is a fundamental human need, especially salient for youth developing their social identities. A sense of belonging within families, peer groups, schools, and communities provides emotional safety and validation, which buffer against the negative effects of trauma and marginalization (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). In the context of Greece and Cyprus, where social disruptions from economic crises and environmental disasters have fractured communities, promoting belonging is critical for supporting youth well-being (CESIE, n.d.).

Systemic counseling highlights the collective nature of belonging, advocating for inclusive practices that recognize diverse experiences and voices within youth populations (Ungar, 2011). Initiatives that encourage shared storytelling, youth leadership, and community participation create spaces where young people can connect, heal, and co-construct positive narratives. Through these collective processes, belonging is not only reinforced but also expanded, fostering resilience at both individual and community levels.

### **Integrating Continuity Through Systemic Support**

Continuity is best supported through systemic interventions that integrate identity, routine, and belonging into a cohesive framework. This requires collaboration among youth workers, families, schools, and community organizations to create environments that are stable yet flexible enough to accommodate change (Masten &

Narayan, 2012). For example, school programs that blend academic learning with psychosocial support and cultural activities can sustain continuity while addressing youths' diverse needs in crisis-affected regions.

Furthermore, systemic counseling approaches emphasize the empowerment of youth as active agents in shaping their continuity. Encouraging young people to take leadership roles in their own support networks and communities fosters a sense of ownership and resilience (White & Epston, 1990). When youth feel that their voices and identities are valued, and when they experience predictable routines within inclusive communities, they are more likely to sustain well-being and thrive despite adversity.



### **5.3 Peer Support and Community Engagement**

#### **The Power of Peer Relationships**

Peer relationships are central to adolescent development, providing crucial emotional support, validation, and opportunities for social learning. Systemic counseling frameworks highlight the significance of these relationships in shaping youth resilience by recognizing that peer groups function as interconnected systems influencing behaviors and coping strategies (Kourkoutas, 2010). Peer-led interventions, where youth are trained to offer mutual support and mentorship, have demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing self-efficacy and emotional regulation, fostering resilience through shared experiences and collective empowerment (Benard, 2004).

In addition to emotional support, peer relationships serve as critical platforms for identity formation and social belonging. Adolescents often navigate complex social roles and expectations within peer networks, which can either promote adaptive coping or exacerbate vulnerabilities. Systemic counselors work to understand these relational dynamics, encouraging positive peer influences and addressing harmful patterns such as exclusion or peer pressure. By fostering inclusive and supportive

peer environments, counselors help youth develop stronger interpersonal skills and resilience capacities (White & Epston, 1990).

### **Community-Based Interventions**

Community-based programs provide essential contexts where young people engage in meaningful activities that build skills, foster social connections, and cultivate a sense of agency. In Cyprus, for example, the Cyprus Red Cross Youth Section actively involves youth in humanitarian efforts, allowing them to contribute to society while simultaneously developing leadership and problem-solving skills (Cyprus Red Cross, 2023). These opportunities not only promote community engagement but also help young people make sense of their experiences and establish continuity in times of crisis.

From a systemic perspective, community programs function as part of the broader ecological systems influencing youth development. Effective interventions acknowledge the interconnectedness of family, school, and community, leveraging these networks to support resilience (Ungar, 2013). Community initiatives that incorporate systemic counseling principles emphasize collaboration, inclusivity, and empowerment, creating environments where youth feel valued and capable of contributing to collective well-being.

### **Collaborative Efforts for Mental Health**

Addressing youth mental health effectively requires collaboration across multiple stakeholders, including families, schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations. The "Unity in Care" project in Greece exemplifies such an integrated approach by bringing together diverse services to comprehensively support vulnerable youth (Terre des hommes Greece, 2023). This multisystemic model ensures that youth receive holistic care that attends not only to individual needs but also to the relational and systemic factors affecting their well-being.

Systemic counseling underlines the importance of these collaborative networks, advocating for interventions that transcend individual therapy to encompass

systemic change. By coordinating efforts among different sectors, collaborative projects can reduce fragmentation of services and build supportive ecosystems around youth. These approaches also promote shared responsibility and resource mobilization, enhancing the sustainability and impact of mental health support for young people (Masten & Narayan, 2012).

### **Systemic Counseling in Community Settings**

Systemic counseling applied in community settings focuses on the social and relational contexts that influence youth development. Counselors engage with families, schools, and community groups to understand the dynamics and power structures that impact young people's resilience and mental health (Ungar, 2013). This holistic approach allows for interventions that not only support individuals but also foster healthier community relationships and social cohesion.

In practice, systemic counselors facilitate dialogues that include multiple voices and perspectives, promoting mutual understanding and collective problem-solving. These interventions emphasize strengths, resourcefulness, and the interconnectedness of systems, helping youth and their communities co-create solutions to adversity (Kourkoutas, 2010). By embedding counseling within community contexts, practitioners contribute to building resilient ecosystems that sustain youth well-being beyond immediate crises.



## **5.4 Helping Youth Find Their Strengths After Crisis**

### **Strengths-Based Approaches**

Strengths-based approaches prioritize recognizing and building upon the inherent capacities and resources within youth rather than focusing solely on deficits or problems. This perspective aligns with systemic counseling frameworks, which emphasize that individuals are embedded within networks of relationships—families, peer groups, and communities—that offer vital resources for resilience and recovery (Saleebey, 2006). By identifying personal talents, coping skills, and social

supports, youth can harness these strengths to foster a positive trajectory after experiencing crisis or trauma.

Moreover, systemic counseling encourages practitioners to look beyond the individual and consider the relational and environmental contexts that nurture strengths. For example, family narratives that emphasize past successes and collective problem-solving can reinforce youths' sense of competence and belonging (Kourkoutas, 2010). Community assets, such as supportive mentors or cultural traditions, also serve as reservoirs of strength, which systemic counselors help youth and families mobilize to enhance recovery and growth.

### **Rebuilding Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to influence outcomes, is a foundational element in the recovery process for youth following a crisis (Bandura, 1997). Systemic counseling supports the development of self-efficacy by facilitating goal-setting practices that are realistic and achievable, allowing young people to experience incremental successes that build confidence. Celebrating these successes reinforces motivation and empowers youth to take an active role in their healing journey.

Importantly, self-efficacy is also shaped through relational dynamics. Encouragement and validation from family members, peers, and counselors strengthen youths' confidence in their capacities. Systemic counseling practices promote collaborative goal-setting that involves the youth's support system, creating an environment where belief in personal agency is nurtured collectively (Ungar, 2013). This relationally grounded approach fosters resilience by connecting individual empowerment with social support.

### **Narrative Therapy Techniques**

Narrative therapy offers a powerful tool for youth to re-author their experiences of crisis by shifting from victim-centered stories toward narratives of survival, strength, and hope (White & Epston, 1990). By externalizing problems and exploring

alternative storylines, youth can reclaim agency and redefine their identity in empowering ways. This process helps to deconstruct limiting beliefs and highlights coping strategies and resilience factors that may have been overlooked.

Systemic counseling complements narrative therapy by situating personal stories within broader family and community contexts. Counselors work with youth and their networks to co-create narratives that reflect collective strengths and shared meaning. This collaborative storytelling process not only promotes healing but also reinforces the youth's connections to supportive systems, which are essential for sustained recovery and well-being (Kourkoutas, 2010).

### **Long-Term Support for Recovery**

Recovery from crisis is not a linear or short-term process; it requires ongoing, adaptable support that responds to evolving needs (Ungar, 2013). Systemic counseling underscores the importance of sustained engagement with youth, their families, and communities to maintain progress and navigate future challenges. Continuous support enables timely adjustments to interventions and ensures that strengths are nurtured within changing circumstances.

In addition, systemic approaches advocate for building community capacity to support youth long-term. Training family members, school personnel, and community leaders in resilience-oriented practices creates a safety net that extends beyond formal counseling. By embedding support within natural social networks, systemic counseling helps youth sustain growth and continue to thrive long after the initial crisis has passed (Saleebey, 2006).



## 6.1 Conversation Starters and Safe Sharing Techniques

### The Importance of Creating a Safe Space

Creating a safe and welcoming environment is foundational for meaningful conversations with youth, especially when discussing sensitive topics related to trauma, crisis, or emotional distress. Systemic counseling emphasizes that safety is relational and context-dependent—youth must feel physically, emotionally, and culturally safe to engage openly (Kourkoutas, 2010). Establishing trust requires consistency, respect for boundaries, and nonjudgmental attitudes from youth workers.

Safe spaces allow youth to express themselves without fear of repercussions or stigmatization. In practice, this means actively listening, validating feelings, and acknowledging the uniqueness of each individual's experience. Moreover, safe environments encourage the sharing of diverse perspectives, fostering inclusivity and empowerment (Ungar, 2013). Practitioners can facilitate this by setting clear guidelines about confidentiality and mutual respect at the start of conversations.

### Effective Conversation Starters: Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions are powerful tools to initiate dialogue and encourage youth to explore their thoughts and feelings in a non-threatening manner. Unlike yes/no questions, open-ended prompts invite elaboration, reflection, and personal meaning-making (White & Epston, 1990). Examples include, “Can you tell me about a time when you felt really supported?” or “What helps you when things get tough?”

Systemic counseling encourages questions that emphasize relationships and systems. For instance, asking “Who do you turn to when you need help?” highlights social supports and draws attention to the network of care around the youth (Kourkoutas, 2010). This approach helps youth recognize their connectedness and resources beyond individual coping.

## **Using Metaphors and Creative Language**

Metaphors serve as a gentle way to discuss difficult emotions and experiences without directly confronting traumatic content. They enable youth to express feelings indirectly, reducing anxiety and resistance. For example, a youth might describe their stress as “a heavy backpack” or their emotions as “stormy weather,” which provides a shared language for further conversation (White & Epston, 1990).

Systemic counseling utilizes metaphors to explore family and community dynamics creatively. Facilitators might invite youth to describe their “family tree” or “support circle,” thereby externalizing issues and highlighting strengths in relationships. This method also fosters engagement and creativity, making conversations less clinical and more accessible (Kourkoutas, 2010).

## **Techniques for Encouraging Safe Sharing**

Safe sharing techniques prioritize voluntary disclosure and emphasize the youth’s control over what and how much they share. The use of “check-in” rounds, where each participant shares only what they feel comfortable with, is one method to foster safety (Ungar, 2013). Additionally, providing options such as writing, drawing, or using objects as symbolic representations can ease verbal expression.

Establishing clear norms about listening without interruption or judgment is crucial. Systemic counseling advocates for reflective listening, where the youth worker mirrors and clarifies what has been said to ensure understanding and validate emotions (Kourkoutas, 2010). This approach builds trust and helps youth feel heard and respected.

## **Managing Challenges in Conversation**

Conversations about trauma or distress can sometimes evoke strong emotions or resistance. Youth workers need skills to navigate these moments sensitively. Grounding techniques and pacing conversations to the youth’s readiness are

recommended (Ungar, 2013). Recognizing signs of distress and knowing when to pause or redirect conversations protects both the youth and the worker.

Systemic counseling also highlights the importance of involving the youth's support systems when appropriate, ensuring that care is holistic and culturally informed. When challenges arise, youth workers might suggest follow-up sessions or refer to specialized services to provide comprehensive support (Kourkoutas, 2010).



## **6.2 Psychoeducation: Teaching About Emotions and Stress**

### **The Role of Psychoeducation in Youth Support**

Psychoeducation is a vital tool in empowering youth by providing knowledge about emotional processes and stress responses. Systemic counseling underscores that understanding emotions within relational and systemic contexts helps young people make sense of their experiences, reducing confusion and self-blame (Kourkoutas, 2010). Psychoeducation bridges the gap between experiencing distress and developing adaptive coping by normalizing emotional reactions and contextualizing them within their environment.

Providing psychoeducation helps youth reframe their struggles not as personal failures but as natural responses to adversity. This shift aligns with strengths-based systemic approaches, which view challenges as part of larger systems rather than isolated individual problems (Saleebey, 2006). Psychoeducation also equips youth with language to articulate feelings, enhancing communication within families and peer groups, thereby strengthening relational supports.

### **Teaching About the Spectrum of Emotions**

An essential element of psychoeducation involves teaching youth about the diversity and complexity of emotions, including their purpose and variability. Emotions are often misunderstood as simply “good” or “bad,” but systemic counseling promotes a nuanced perspective that validates all emotions as meaningful signals within social

systems (White & Epston, 1990). Educators and youth workers can introduce models like the “emotion wheel” to help youth identify and differentiate feelings.

Understanding that emotions serve adaptive functions fosters emotional literacy and regulation. For example, anxiety may signal the need for caution, while sadness can indicate loss and prompt seeking support. By recognizing these functions, youth are better able to engage with their feelings constructively rather than suppress or avoid them, which is critical for resilience development (Ungar, 2013).

### **Explaining Stress and Its Impact on the Body and Mind**

Psychoeducation includes explaining the biological and psychological mechanisms of stress, helping youth recognize how chronic stress impacts their health and behavior. Systemic counseling integrates this knowledge with an understanding of social contexts, emphasizing that stress is not just individual but influenced by family dynamics, community environments, and social structures (Kourkoutas, 2010).

For instance, youth exposed to systemic adversities such as poverty or discrimination may experience heightened stress responses, affecting cognitive functions and emotional regulation (Betancourt et al., 2015). Teaching about the “fight, flight, freeze” response normalizes these reactions and encourages youth to develop self-awareness and self-compassion. Such psychoeducation supports informed choices about when and how to seek help.

### **Integrating Psychoeducation Into Systemic Counseling**

In systemic counseling, psychoeducation is embedded within relational and narrative frameworks. Counselors engage youth in co-constructing knowledge about emotions and stress, linking personal experiences with family and community systems (Kourkoutas, 2010). This approach ensures that psychoeducation is not didactic but dialogical, respecting the youth’s voice and cultural background.

Additionally, systemic counseling uses psychoeducation to empower entire family systems, promoting shared understanding and support. Workshops and group

sessions that include parents and peers can enhance collective emotional literacy, creating a more resilient support network (Ungar, 2013). This systemic inclusion helps prevent isolation and stigma associated with emotional difficulties.

### **Practical Psychoeducational Tools and Resources**

Various tools can be employed for effective psychoeducation, such as visual aids, interactive activities, and digital platforms. For example, mindfulness apps and emotion-tracking journals offer accessible ways for youth to engage with their emotional states and stress management practices (Galante et al., 2024). Systemic counseling encourages the use of culturally appropriate materials to ensure relevance and acceptance.

Youth workers can also utilize storytelling and metaphors, which resonate deeply in systemic approaches, to explain complex concepts about emotions and stress in relatable ways (White & Epston, 1990). Providing resources in multiple languages and formats ensures inclusivity, particularly for marginalized youth who may face language barriers or cultural stigma around mental health (Betancourt et al., 2015).



## **6.3 Coping Techniques: Grounding, Breathing, Reflection**

### **Grounding Techniques: Reconnecting with the Present**

Grounding techniques are practical tools that help youth manage overwhelming emotions by anchoring their awareness in the present moment. These methods are particularly effective in moments of distress, anxiety, or dissociation. From a systemic counseling perspective, grounding not only supports the individual's self-regulation but also fosters a sense of connection to their immediate environment and relational context (Kourkoutas, 2010).

Examples include sensory awareness exercises, such as focusing on the feel of an object, noticing sounds around them, or observing physical sensations like the feet on the ground. These activities interrupt distressing thoughts and bring attention back to current realities, helping youth regain control and calm. The simplicity and

immediacy of grounding make it accessible and easy to teach in youth work settings (Shapiro, 2017).

### **Breathing Exercises: Regulating the Nervous System**

Breathing exercises are widely used in therapeutic and educational contexts to regulate the autonomic nervous system, reducing stress and promoting relaxation. Systemic counseling incorporates breathing techniques as part of holistic strategies that acknowledge the interconnectedness of mind, body, and social systems (Ungar, 2013). Teaching youth controlled breathing methods can enhance their ability to self-soothe and manage physiological arousal linked to anxiety or trauma.

Techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing, box breathing, or 4-7-8 breathing encourage slower, deeper breaths, which counteract the body's fight-or-flight response. Research demonstrates that regular practice of breathing exercises improves emotional regulation and cognitive functioning in adolescents (Jerath et al., 2015). Youth workers can model and practice these exercises with groups, making them part of daily routines to increase resilience.

### **Reflection: Enhancing Self-Awareness and Meaning-Making**

Reflection involves guiding youth to thoughtfully consider their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Within systemic counseling, reflection is a powerful tool that supports meaning-making and fosters a coherent self-narrative embedded within relational contexts (White & Epston, 1990). Encouraging reflection helps youth understand how their emotions connect to family, community, and cultural systems, promoting deeper insight.

Structured reflection activities might include journaling, guided questions, or creative expression like drawing or music. These allow youth to externalize and process complex feelings, building emotional literacy and adaptive coping skills. Reflection also encourages empowerment, as youth identify patterns, strengths, and areas for growth, contributing to their resilience (Saleebey, 2006).

### **Combining Techniques for Holistic Coping**

Effective coping often involves combining grounding, breathing, and reflection to address emotional, physiological, and cognitive domains simultaneously. Systemic counseling emphasizes integrating multiple modalities tailored to individual needs and cultural backgrounds (Kourkoutas, 2010). For example, a session might start with a grounding exercise, followed by breathing techniques, and end with reflective discussion.

This holistic approach acknowledges the layered nature of stress responses and resilience. It also encourages youth to build personalized coping repertoires they can access across different contexts, whether at school, home, or in peer groups. Training youth workers to guide these integrative practices strengthens their capacity to support youth in adaptive ways (Ungar, 2013).

### **Practical Considerations and Resources for Youth Workers**

Youth workers implementing these coping techniques should consider developmental stages, cultural relevance, and accessibility. Younger children may benefit from simpler, play-based grounding activities, while adolescents might engage more deeply with reflective journaling or mindfulness breathing (Galante et al., 2024). Culturally adapted tools enhance engagement and respect diverse backgrounds.

Resources such as guided audio recordings, apps, and worksheets can support consistent practice outside of sessions. Organizations like the National Child Traumatic Stress Network provide free materials designed for trauma-informed care with youth (NCTSN, 2023). Additionally, incorporating these techniques into group sessions encourages peer modeling and normalization of coping practices (Ungar, 2013).



## 6.4 Storytelling and Narrative Work

### **The Importance of Narrative in Youth Development**

Storytelling is a fundamental human activity that shapes identity, meaning, and relationships. For youth, constructing and sharing personal narratives supports their development and resilience, especially in times of crisis (White & Epston, 1990). Systemic counseling views narratives as embedded within social, cultural, and familial systems, emphasizing that stories are co-constructed through interaction with others (Denborough, 2014).

By engaging in narrative work, youth gain opportunities to articulate their experiences, reflect on challenges, and explore multiple perspectives. This process can help them move from feeling overwhelmed or victimized to reclaiming agency and hope. Narratives also influence how youth perceive their connections to family, community, and broader social contexts, making storytelling a powerful tool for systemic healing (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

### **Externalizing Problems: Separating the Person from the Issue**

One key narrative technique is externalization, where problems are framed as separate from the individual. This approach helps youth avoid internalizing blame or shame associated with difficulties like trauma, anxiety, or loss (White & Epston, 1990). Systemic counseling encourages externalizing conversations to create space for new meanings and solutions.

For example, instead of saying “I am anxious,” a youth might describe “anxiety” as a separate entity that affects their life but does not define them. This shift enables them to develop strategies to ‘fight’ or ‘manage’ the problem collaboratively with counselors, family, or peers. Externalization promotes empowerment and reduces stigma, making it especially useful in group or community settings (Denborough, 2014).

### **Creating Alternative Stories: Highlighting Strengths and Resilience**

Narrative work also involves identifying “alternative stories” that highlight strengths, achievements, and moments of resilience often overshadowed by dominant problem-saturated narratives (Morgan, 2000). These positive narratives provide youth with a more balanced and hopeful view of their identity and future possibilities.

Systemic counseling practitioners help youth uncover and elaborate on these alternative stories through reflective questioning and collaborative dialogue. For example, recounting times when they overcame adversity or supported others can bolster self-esteem and motivation. This technique aligns with strengths-based approaches, fostering a narrative environment where youth feel valued and capable (Saleebey, 2006).

### **Storytelling in Group and Community Contexts**

Storytelling extends beyond individual work; it can be a collective practice that strengthens community bonds and social cohesion. Group narrative interventions encourage sharing experiences in safe spaces, validating diverse voices and promoting mutual support (Denborough, 2014). For youth affected by disasters or social marginalization, communal storytelling can build solidarity and collective resilience.

In Cyprus and Greece, for instance, community storytelling projects have been used to process collective traumas such as wildfires and floods, enabling youth to contribute their perspectives and foster hope (Terre des hommes Greece, 2023). These narratives often challenge dominant cultural discourses and create openings for social change, emphasizing the systemic impact of storytelling.

### **Practical Strategies for Youth Workers Using Narrative Techniques**

Youth workers can integrate narrative techniques into their practice by facilitating storytelling exercises, reflective writing, or art-based expression. Creating a safe and

non-judgmental environment is essential for encouraging authentic sharing. Using open-ended questions such as “What does this story say about your values?” or “How have you managed to cope?” promotes deeper exploration (White & Epston, 1990).

Training in narrative methods helps youth workers recognize the relational and cultural contexts influencing youth stories, enabling culturally sensitive and systemic interventions. Additionally, digital storytelling platforms offer innovative ways to engage tech-savvy youth in narrative work, broadening access and participation (Denborough, 2014).



## **6.5 Strength-Based Feedback and Reframing**

### **The Foundations of Strength-Based Feedback**

Strength-based feedback is rooted in the systemic counseling principle of focusing on clients’ resources, capacities, and positive attributes rather than deficits or problems (Saleebey, 2006). For youth, especially those facing adversity or crisis, feedback that highlights their abilities fosters empowerment and motivation.

This approach contrasts with traditional deficit-focused models that can reinforce feelings of helplessness or stigma. By intentionally recognizing youth’s skills, efforts, and progress, practitioners create a collaborative atmosphere that nurtures resilience. Systemic counselors emphasize the relational nature of feedback, where meaning is co-created in the interaction between youth and counselor, reinforcing positive identity development (White & Epston, 1990).

### **Techniques for Delivering Strength-Based Feedback**

Effective strength-based feedback is specific, sincere, and linked to observed behaviors or qualities. Instead of vague praise, youth workers are encouraged to highlight concrete examples, such as perseverance in completing tasks or empathy shown to peers (Rapp & Goscha, 2012). This specificity helps youth internalize the feedback and apply it to future challenges.

Furthermore, feedback should be framed in a way that encourages growth and agency. Using language like “You demonstrated great problem-solving skills when...” rather than “You’re good at...” shifts focus to effort and strategies, which promotes a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). Systemic counseling also recommends including the youth’s own reflections in the feedback process, making it dialogic rather than one-sided (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992).

### **Reframing Challenges to Promote Resilience**

Reframing involves shifting how youth perceive difficult situations or personal traits, transforming negative or limiting narratives into empowering ones (White & Epston, 1990). For instance, anxiety can be reframed as a sign of vigilance and care rather than weakness. This technique allows youth to reinterpret experiences in ways that support adaptive coping and self-acceptance.

In systemic counseling, reframing acknowledges the broader relational and cultural contexts shaping meanings. Youth workers help youth explore alternative meanings by asking questions like, “What might this challenge be teaching you?” or “How might this experience show your strengths?” (Denborough, 2014). Reframing not only alters individual perceptions but also can change family and community narratives that impact youth identity.

### **Incorporating Family and Community in Feedback and Reframing**

Systemic counseling recognizes that youth exist within complex networks of relationships. Engaging families and communities in strength-based feedback and reframing amplifies positive impacts and reinforces resilience beyond individual therapy sessions (Ungar, 2013). For example, involving parents or peers in acknowledging a young person’s strengths can build supportive environments that sustain progress.

Community recognition of youth achievements, such as through local events or peer groups, fosters belonging and validates their contributions. In culturally diverse contexts like Greece and Cyprus, culturally responsive feedback that respects

traditions and values strengthens trust and inclusivity (Walsh, 2016). Collaborative approaches ensure that feedback and reframing honor systemic influences on youth development.

### **Practical Strategies for Youth Workers**

Youth workers can integrate strength-based feedback by routinely identifying and verbalizing youth strengths during sessions, creating “strengths maps” or journals, and encouraging youth to reflect on successes. Reframing exercises, such as role-plays or storytelling, provide experiential ways to explore alternative perspectives (Morgan, 2000).

Training in systemic counseling approaches equips youth workers to tailor feedback to individual and cultural contexts, avoiding assumptions or stereotypes. Digital tools and peer support groups also offer innovative platforms for sharing strength-based feedback, enhancing accessibility and engagement among youth (Denborough, 2014). Ultimately, consistent application of these techniques fosters resilience, self-efficacy, and positive identity formation.



## **7.1 Supporting Youth with Disabilities or Neurodivergence**

### **Understanding Disability and Neurodivergence in Youth**

Youth with disabilities and neurodivergent profiles—such as autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, and learning differences—face unique challenges during and after crises caused by natural or man-made disasters (Doyle & Sapouna, 2017). These challenges often include disruptions to routines, increased anxiety, sensory overload, and limited access to specialized support (Ungar, 2013). A systemic perspective views these youth within their family, community, and institutional systems, emphasizing the interdependent nature of their experiences.

Recognizing that disabilities and neurodivergence are part of human diversity is critical. Social models of disability stress the role of environmental barriers and social attitudes in creating disadvantage, rather than focusing solely on individual impairments (Oliver, 1990). Therefore, adapting support means addressing systemic barriers and creating inclusive environments that foster participation and resilience (Saleebey, 2006).

### **Impact of Crisis and Disasters on Youth with Disabilities**

Natural disasters like floods and wildfires, and man-made events such as industrial accidents, can disproportionately affect youth with disabilities. Disrupted access to medical care, therapies, and educational support can lead to regression in skills or heightened stress (Sandler et al., 2018). Moreover, emergency shelters and response systems may inadequately accommodate sensory or mobility needs, increasing vulnerability (Emerson et al., 2020).

Systemic counseling encourages practitioners to understand these compounded impacts by engaging with families and support networks, who often carry crucial knowledge about the youth's needs (Walsh, 2016). This approach also highlights the necessity of coordinated community and institutional responses to ensure continuity of care during crises (Ungar, 2013).

### **Adapting Communication and Engagement Strategies**

Effective support requires tailoring communication to the youth's cognitive, sensory, and emotional preferences. Visual supports, simplified language, and consistent routines can reduce confusion and anxiety for neurodivergent youth (Katz & McClellan, 2020). Systemic counselors often incorporate family members and caregivers to co-create communication strategies that are culturally and developmentally appropriate (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992).

Engagement methods may also include the use of technology or assistive devices to enhance participation. For example, apps designed for emotional regulation or social skills development can be integrated into counseling and community programs (White et al., 2021). These tools not only foster autonomy but also help normalize diverse ways of interacting within social systems.

### **Building Strengths and Resilience in Youth with Disabilities**

A strengths-based, systemic approach emphasizes identifying and leveraging the unique talents and coping mechanisms of youth with disabilities (Saleebey, 2006). This might involve recognizing creative problem-solving, perseverance, or specific skills that contribute to their social networks and communities. Celebrating these strengths helps counteract societal stigma and builds self-efficacy.

In addition, systemic counseling facilitates resilience by supporting families and communities to become more adaptive and resourceful (Walsh, 2016). Programs that promote peer connections among neurodivergent youth can reduce isolation and foster mutual support (Müller et al., 2008). Encouraging active participation in decision-making empowers youth and enhances a sense of control, crucial for recovery after crises (Ungar, 2013).

### **Collaborative and Systemic Interventions**

Supporting young people with disabilities during crises requires collaboration among multiple systems, including healthcare, education, social services, and emergency

management. Systemic counseling promotes inter-agency cooperation for the development of individualized crisis plans that address accessibility, safety, and psychosocial support (Sandler et al., 2018).

Social workers and youth workers play a key role in bridging the gaps between formal services and informal support networks. Involving families and communities in planning and response ensures culturally sensitive, inclusive practices that reflect the real experiences of young people (Denborough, 2014). Such collaborative models strengthen the sustainability and effectiveness of interventions, particularly within the complex context that follows disasters.



## **7.2 Youth with Mental Health Conditions**

### **Understanding the Complex Needs of Youth with Mental Health Conditions**

Youth experiencing mental health conditions—such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and bipolar disorder—face heightened vulnerabilities in crisis contexts (Kieling et al., 2011). The trauma of natural or man-made disasters can exacerbate existing symptoms or trigger new psychological distress (Fazel et al., 2012). Systemic counseling emphasizes viewing mental health within relational and contextual systems rather than focusing solely on individual pathology (Carr, 2019). This broad lens helps practitioners understand how family dynamics, peer relationships, and social environments influence the youth's mental health.

Mental health conditions in youth are often stigmatized, which can lead to social isolation and reduced access to help (Corrigan et al., 2014). In systemic frameworks, reducing stigma involves engaging not only the individual but also their social networks to foster supportive environments that normalize mental health struggles and promote resilience (Walsh, 2016). This is especially important in cultures or communities where mental health remains a taboo topic (Bäärnhielm & Hjelm, 2017).

## **The Impact of Crisis on Youth with Preexisting Mental Health Challenges**

Exposure to crises such as wildfires, floods, or industrial accidents often disrupts routine care, including therapy and medication adherence, which can worsen mental health outcomes (Katz et al., 2020). Additionally, the unpredictability and loss caused by disasters can trigger relapse or intensify symptoms like anxiety and depression (Bonanno et al., 2010). Youth in Greece and Cyprus affected by recent natural disasters (e.g., wildfires, floods) have reported increased mental health distress, emphasizing the need for targeted support (European Commission, 2023).

Systemic counseling stresses the importance of re-establishing safety and stability within family and community systems post-crisis (Ungar, 2013). Strengthening these supports can buffer the negative effects of trauma and facilitate healing.

Collaborative care models involving mental health professionals, schools, families, and youth workers have demonstrated effectiveness in maintaining continuity of care during and after crises (Hoagwood et al., 2017).

## **Culturally Sensitive and Trauma-Informed Interventions**

Youth with mental health conditions require culturally sensitive interventions that honor their unique identities and experiences. Systemic counseling encourages practitioners to understand the cultural narratives around mental health, which influence help-seeking behaviors and coping strategies (Bhui et al., 2012). For example, in Greek and Cypriot communities, strong family bonds can be both protective and a source of pressure, necessitating careful balancing in interventions (Papadopoulos, 2019).

Trauma-informed care models are integral to supporting youth post-crisis, ensuring that services do not inadvertently re-traumatize (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). This includes creating safe spaces, fostering trust, and empowering youth in their recovery process (Fallot & Harris, 2009). Systemic approaches also address relational trauma by working with families and communities to repair and strengthen connections (Walsh, 2016).

## **Enhancing Coping and Resilience in Youth with Mental Health Conditions**

Building coping skills is critical for youth managing mental health challenges, especially after crises (Compas et al., 2017). Systemic counseling often incorporates techniques such as emotion regulation, cognitive reframing, and mindfulness, tailored to the developmental and cultural context of the youth (Galante et al., 2024). Peer support groups, which foster shared understanding and reduce stigma, have been shown to improve resilience and social connectedness (Repper & Carter, 2011).

Resilience is also fostered by strengthening supportive systems around the youth, including family communication patterns and school environments (Walsh, 2016). Programs that train families and youth workers in mental health literacy enhance their ability to recognize early warning signs and respond effectively (Jorm, 2012). This systemic strengthening is particularly important in crisis recovery, where the social environment can either hinder or support mental health.

## **Systemic Collaboration and Long-Term Support**

Effective support for youth with mental health conditions requires coordinated, multi-system collaboration. Schools, healthcare providers, social services, and community organizations must work together to provide comprehensive care that addresses the complex needs of these youth (Weist et al., 2014). In Greece and Cyprus, initiatives like the "Unity in Care" project demonstrate how collaboration can enhance mental health service accessibility and quality for vulnerable youth (Terre des hommes Greece, 2023).

Long-term engagement is essential since recovery from mental health challenges post-crisis is rarely linear (Ungar, 2013). Systemic counseling promotes ongoing relationships with youth and their families to adapt interventions over time, ensuring sustained resilience and well-being (Carr, 2019). Embedding mental health supports within community settings also reduces barriers related to stigma and accessibility (Patel et al., 2018).



### **7.3 Migrant, Refugee, Roma, LGBTQIA+ Youth**

#### **Intersectional Vulnerabilities in Crisis Contexts**

Youth from migrant, refugee, Roma, and LGBTQIA+ communities often experience compounded vulnerabilities during and after crises such as natural disasters or man-made catastrophes (Fazel et al., 2012; UNICEF, 2020). Intersectionality—a key concept in systemic counseling—helps us understand how multiple identities and systemic oppressions intersect to impact youth well-being (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, refugee youth fleeing conflict zones in the Eastern Mediterranean face trauma related to displacement, cultural dislocation, and potential discrimination within host societies (UNHCR, 2023).

Roma youth in Europe, including Greece and Cyprus, frequently encounter systemic marginalization through poverty, exclusion from education and healthcare, and social stigma, which crises often exacerbate (European Commission, 2021). Similarly, LGBTQIA+ youth are disproportionately vulnerable to discrimination, family rejection, and mental health challenges, which crisis situations can intensify by disrupting social support systems (Russell & Fish, 2016). Systemic counseling frameworks emphasize understanding these overlapping contexts to provide culturally attuned, intersectional support (Walsh, 2016).

#### **Challenges in Accessing Support and Services**

Barriers to accessing services are a common challenge for these youth groups, especially in crisis settings where resources are stretched thin (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Language differences, lack of documentation, distrust in institutions, and fear of discrimination can limit their engagement with social, health, and educational services (Fazel et al., 2012). For migrant and refugee youth in Greece and Cyprus, bureaucratic hurdles and limited culturally competent support reduce opportunities for recovery and resilience (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2022).

Systemic counseling promotes collaborative, community-based approaches to bridge these gaps, involving interpreters, cultural mediators, and trusted community

members to facilitate access (Bhui et al., 2012). Tailored interventions that account for the unique histories and needs of these populations enhance engagement and effectiveness (Carr, 2019). Recognizing and addressing systemic inequities are crucial for creating safe spaces where marginalized youth can receive appropriate care.

### **Affirmative and Culturally Responsive Practices**

Affirmative practices that validate identities and experiences are essential for LGBTQIA+ youth, who often face heightened risk of mental health issues, especially when coupled with crisis trauma (Russell & Fish, 2016). Systemic counseling advocates for inclusive environments that challenge heteronormativity and provide support that embraces diverse sexual and gender identities (Singh et al., 2014). Similarly, culturally responsive counseling acknowledges the specific traditions, values, and social structures within migrant, refugee, and Roma communities, respecting their worldview while supporting adaptation and resilience (Hays, 2016).

In Greece and Cyprus, cultural sensitivity includes awareness of the historical and socio-political contexts affecting these groups, such as migration patterns and discrimination history (Papadopoulos, 2019). Systemic approaches focus on empowering youth and families to navigate their intersecting identities positively and safely, reducing isolation and fostering community connection (Walsh, 2016).

### **Strengthening Community Networks and Social Capital**

Community engagement is a vital resource for these marginalized youth, providing social capital and a buffer against stressors (Ungar, 2013). Systemic counseling interventions often involve strengthening existing community networks or facilitating the development of new peer groups to enhance belonging and mutual support (Repper & Carter, 2011). For example, migrant and refugee youth programs that incorporate peer mentoring and cultural activities have shown success in improving mental health and social integration (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Roma communities' resilience is often rooted in extended family and communal solidarity, which can be mobilized in crisis recovery (European Commission, 2021).

For LGBTQIA+ youth, access to affirming community spaces can reduce feelings of marginalization and promote identity development (Russell & Fish, 2016). Systemic counseling thus views community engagement not only as support but as an active mechanism of empowerment and healing (Walsh, 2016).

### **Policy, Advocacy, and Systemic Change**

Supporting migrant, refugee, Roma, and LGBTQIA+ youth effectively requires systemic change beyond individual interventions. Policies that address structural inequalities—such as discrimination, inadequate housing, and lack of educational opportunities—are critical in reducing vulnerabilities and promoting resilience (European Commission, 2021). Youth workers and social workers play key advocacy roles in pushing for inclusive policies and resources tailored to these groups (Fazel et al., 2012).

International organizations like UNICEF and UNHCR emphasize the importance of child- and youth-centered approaches in crisis response, ensuring marginalized youth voices are heard in planning and decision-making (UNICEF, 2020; UNHCR, 2023). Systemic counseling principles align closely with these approaches, promoting collaborative partnerships that engage youth, families, communities, and institutions to foster sustainable support and social justice (Carr, 2019; Walsh, 2016).



## **7.4 Language, Literacy, and Cultural Relevance**

### **The Importance of Language Accessibility in Crisis Contexts**

Language is a fundamental component in effective communication and support for youth affected by man-made and natural disasters. For migrant, refugee, Roma, and minority youth in Greece, Cyprus, and Europe, limited proficiency in the dominant language often hinders access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and counseling (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Systemic counseling highlights that language barriers not only obstruct direct communication but also affect the youth's ability to express emotions and trauma, which are central to healing and resilience (Carr, 2019).

To address this, youth workers and social workers must advocate for translation services and culturally sensitive communication tools that respect linguistic diversity (Bhui et al., 2012). Offering multilingual psychoeducational materials and employing interpreters or bilingual counselors can significantly improve engagement and outcomes (Ungar, 2013). Language accessibility is not simply practical but an essential human right that supports dignity and empowerment.

### **Literacy as a Gateway to Empowerment and Participation**

Literacy extends beyond reading and writing to include critical engagement with information and the ability to navigate social systems (Morrow, 2013). Crisis-affected youth with low literacy skills, especially those from marginalized groups, face challenges in accessing information about health, safety, and rights, limiting their capacity to participate in decisions affecting their lives (European Commission, 2021). Systemic counseling recognizes literacy as intertwined with empowerment, encouraging strategies that build these skills in contextually relevant ways (Saleebey, 2006).

Youth-centered programs that integrate literacy development with psychosocial support enable young people to better articulate their needs and access resources (Carr, 2019). Creative and participatory approaches, such as art, storytelling, and digital media, can engage youth with varying literacy levels, fostering inclusion and voice (Ungar, 2013). Literacy enhancement thus supports both practical functioning and identity formation after crises.

### **Cultural Relevance in Interventions and Communication**

Cultural relevance ensures that interventions resonate with the lived experiences, values, and traditions of youth from diverse backgrounds (Hays, 2016). In systemic counseling, this means counselors consider the broader cultural systems influencing youth development, such as family structures, community norms, and spiritual beliefs (Walsh, 2016). In Greece and Cyprus, where youth may come from varied

ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, culturally tailored interventions help bridge gaps between the youth and service providers (Papadopoulos, 2019).

For example, respecting collectivist cultural values in counseling can strengthen family involvement and community support, which are vital for resilience (Ungar, 2013). Culturally adapted psychoeducation and coping strategies increase relevance and acceptance, reducing resistance and enhancing engagement (Carr, 2019). Such practices build trust and create safer spaces for youth to explore their experiences and recover from trauma.

### **Systemic Approaches to Overcoming Cultural and Linguistic Barriers**

Systemic counseling advocates for interventions that address not only individual needs but also the structural barriers embedded within institutions (Carr, 2019). Language and cultural barriers are often perpetuated by rigid bureaucratic systems, insufficient training of service providers, and lack of inclusive policies (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2022). Youth workers can act as cultural brokers, mediating between the youth and institutions to facilitate access and understanding (Bhui et al., 2012).

Building partnerships with community leaders, cultural organizations, and families enhances culturally informed service delivery (Walsh, 2016). Training for professionals in cultural humility and systemic competence is essential to challenge assumptions and biases, promoting equity in crisis response (Hays, 2016). These systemic efforts foster environments where diverse youth feel respected, understood, and supported.

### **Innovative Practices: Technology and Multimodal Communication**

Technology offers new avenues for overcoming language and literacy barriers in crisis-affected youth populations. Digital platforms can deliver multilingual psychoeducation, support networks, and counseling services accessible beyond traditional settings (Murray et al., 2017). For youth in Greece and Cyprus, mobile apps and online forums provide confidential spaces to share experiences and seek

help, particularly for marginalized groups like LGBTQIA+ youth who may face stigma locally (Russell & Fish, 2016).

Systemic counseling embraces these innovations as part of a holistic approach, integrating digital tools with face-to-face services to broaden reach and adapt to youths' preferences (Carr, 2019). Visual storytelling, video, and audio content can engage youth with limited literacy or language proficiency, enhancing participation and empowerment (Ungar, 2013). Continued research and investment in culturally relevant technological solutions are vital for inclusive youth support in crisis contexts.



## **8.1 Preparing Safe and Inclusive Activities**

### **Understanding the Importance of Safety and Inclusion**

Creating a safe environment is fundamental when working with youth affected by crises, whether natural or man-made (Ungar, 2013). Safety goes beyond physical security to include emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions. Systemic counselling approaches emphasize the need to consider the entire system around the youth — family, community, cultural identity — ensuring activities respect these dynamics (Walsh, 2016). Youth who have experienced trauma require spaces where they feel physically protected and emotionally secure to express themselves without fear of judgment or re-traumatization (Petersen et al., 2014).

Inclusion involves recognizing the diversity among youth participants, such as variations in ability, ethnicity, language, gender identity, and mental health status (Hays, 2016). Activities must be designed to accommodate these differences and ensure equitable participation. When youth feel included and respected, they are more likely to engage fully and benefit from the intervention (Saleebey, 2006).

### **Assessing Needs and Contexts**

Preparation begins with a thorough assessment of the youth's needs and the crisis context. This includes understanding the timing, severity, and type of disaster, as well as local cultural and social factors (Carr, 2019). For example, in post-wildfire Greece, youth might face displacement and loss of community spaces, necessitating activities that rebuild social connections and a sense of belonging (Papadopoulos, 2019). In systemic counselling, this contextual understanding is critical for tailoring interventions that fit the unique environment and systemic relationships of the youth (Ungar, 2013).

Conducting needs assessments through consultations with youth, families, and community leaders helps identify priorities and potential barriers. It is also essential to involve youth in the planning process itself, fostering ownership and empowerment (Benard, 2004).

## **Designing Trauma-Informed Activities**

Trauma-informed practice recognizes the widespread impact of trauma and integrates knowledge into all aspects of service delivery (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). Activities should avoid triggers and provide options that empower youth to control their participation (Herman, 1992). Techniques such as grounding exercises, expressive arts, and peer support groups are often effective (Carr, 2019).

Systemic counselling adds a layer by considering family and community systems that influence the youth's experience of trauma and healing (Walsh, 2016). For example, including family members or caregivers in certain activities can enhance support networks and improve outcomes.

## **Ensuring Accessibility, Flexibility and Preparation**

Accessibility considerations include physical access for youth with disabilities, linguistic accessibility for non-native speakers, and flexibility in scheduling to accommodate family and school commitments (Bhui et al., 2012). The systemic view stresses removing systemic barriers that might prevent participation, such as transportation or social stigma (Hays, 2016).

Flexibility also means adapting activities in response to ongoing feedback from youth and observing changes in their needs or the broader crisis context (Ungar, 2013). This iterative approach promotes responsiveness and relevance.

Finally, youth workers and social workers must be well-prepared through training in trauma-informed care, cultural competence, and systemic counselling principles (Carr, 2019). Training equips facilitators to manage group dynamics, respond sensitively to distress, and recognize signs needing referral (Saleebey, 2006). Ongoing supervision and peer support also sustain staff well-being and effectiveness (Walsh, 2016).



## **8.2 Adjusting to Crisis Timing (During vs. After)**

### **Interventions During the Crisis Phase**

During a crisis, immediate safety and stabilization are priorities (Herman, 1992). Youth interventions focus on meeting basic needs, providing accurate information, and offering emotional support to reduce panic and confusion (National Child Traumatic Stress Network [NCTSN], 2020). Systemic counselling highlights the importance of acknowledging the systemic upheaval affecting families and communities, which can compound youth distress (Walsh, 2016).

Youth workers may use brief interventions to promote grounding, teach coping skills, and facilitate safe expression (Pfefferbaum et al., 2015). Flexibility and patience are essential, as youth may have difficulty concentrating or engaging fully.

### **Transitioning to Post-Crisis Recovery**

As the immediate danger passes, programming shifts toward longer-term recovery. This phase involves processing trauma, rebuilding social support, and restoring routines (Ungar, 2013). The systemic perspective encourages involving multiple systems — schools, families, community organizations — to provide cohesive support (Carr, 2019).

Activities might include narrative therapy, peer support groups, and skill-building workshops that foster resilience and empowerment (White & Epston, 1990). Timing is crucial to match interventions with youths' readiness and evolving needs.

### **Recognizing Delayed and Cumulative Effects**

Some youth may not show distress immediately but develop symptoms weeks or months later (Pfefferbaum et al., 2015). Systemic counselling teaches professionals to monitor youth over time and recognize signs of delayed trauma, secondary stress, or systemic disruptions (Walsh, 2016). This understanding underscores the need for sustained follow-up.

Moreover, cumulative crises — such as repeated wildfires or economic hardship — can exacerbate vulnerabilities, necessitating adaptations in intervention intensity and duration (Ungar, 2013).

### **Flexibility in Program Delivery**

Effective crisis response requires flexibility to adjust programming based on ongoing assessment and youth feedback (Carr, 2019). For example, in acute phases, informal peer support may be prioritized, while structured group therapy may be more appropriate in later phases. Systemic approaches promote continuous collaboration with community stakeholders to ensure interventions remain relevant and accessible (Saleebey, 2006).



## **8.3 Debriefing and Integration Practices**

### **The Role of Debriefing**

Debriefing provides youth with opportunities to reflect on their experiences, express emotions, and receive validation (Mitchell, 1983). It supports emotional processing and reduces isolation. In systemic counselling, debriefing is not just individual but considers relational and community contexts, fostering collective meaning-making (Walsh, 2016). Effective debriefing creates safe, supportive spaces facilitated by trained professionals who can manage distress and recognize when further support is needed (Petersen et al., 2014).

### **Integrating Experiences into Personal and Social Narratives**

Integration involves helping youth incorporate traumatic experiences into their life stories without being defined by them (White & Epston, 1990). Narrative therapy techniques are valuable here, encouraging youth to construct empowering narratives that emphasize strengths and resilience (Carr, 2019). Systemic approaches recognize that identity is shaped by multiple systems, so integration work often involves families and communities to reinforce positive change and belonging (Ungar, 2013).

## **Supporting Emotional and Cognitive Processing**

Debriefing and integration work involve addressing cognitive distortions, fears, and grief related to the crisis (Herman, 1992). Psychoeducation can normalize common reactions and teach coping skills (SAMHSA, 2014). Group settings may offer shared validation, reducing stigma and isolation. Systemic counselling promotes ongoing dialogue among youth, caregivers, and service providers to coordinate understanding and interventions (Walsh, 2016).

## **Timing and Individualization of Debriefing**

Debriefing should be timely but paced according to youth readiness (Mitchell, 1983). Some may prefer immediate processing, while others need more time. The systemic perspective emphasizes tailoring practices to developmental stages, cultural background, and individual trauma responses (Hays, 2016).



## **8.4 Supporting Long-Term Recovery**

### **Recognizing Recovery as a Dynamic Process**

Long-term recovery after crises is not linear but involves progress, setbacks, and adaptation (Ungar, 2013). Systemic counselling highlights that recovery depends on reinforcing positive systemic connections — family support, peer relationships, community resources — alongside individual growth (Walsh, 2016).

Youth workers should plan interventions that foster resilience over time, not only focusing on symptom reduction but also on strengths, meaning-making, and identity reconstruction (Saleebey, 2006).

## **Sustaining and Monitoring Social Support Networks and Future Orientation**

Rebuilding and maintaining social networks are key to long-term recovery (Carr, 2019). Facilitating ongoing peer groups, family involvement, and community engagement promotes continuity and mitigates isolation (Ungar, 2013).

Interventions that create spaces for youth leadership and mutual support enhance empowerment.

As youth grow and environments change, new challenges may arise (Pfefferbaum et al., 2015). Systemic approaches encourage continuous assessment and adaptation of services, collaborating closely with youth and families to identify emerging vulnerabilities or strengths (Walsh, 2016).

Helping youth envision positive futures fosters motivation and healing (Saleebey, 2006). Interventions should include goal-setting, skills development, and opportunities for meaningful engagement, supporting youths' sense of agency and purpose (Benard, 2004).



## **8.5 Working with Families, Schools, and Communities**

### **Engaging Families as Central Support Systems**

Families are pivotal in youth recovery, providing emotional, practical, and cultural support (Walsh, 2016). Systemic counselling emphasizes working with families to strengthen communication, resolve conflicts, and promote shared resilience (Carr, 2019). In crisis contexts, families may also experience their own trauma, so support must be holistic. Youth workers should facilitate family involvement in planning and delivering interventions, respecting diverse family structures and roles (Hays, 2016).

### **Partnering with Schools for Holistic Support**

Schools offer critical platforms for reaching youth, providing stability, social interaction, and learning opportunities (Pfefferbaum et al., 2015). Collaborations between youth workers and schools can integrate mental health support,

psychoeducation, and social activities that foster recovery. Systemic perspectives view schools as part of the larger ecology affecting youth, requiring coordinated efforts with teachers, counselors, and administrators to create supportive environments (Ungar, 2013).

### **Mobilizing Community Resources and Networks**

Communities provide cultural identity, social capital, and resources essential for recovery (Benard, 2004). Youth workers should map and engage local organizations, faith groups, and cultural centers to enhance intervention reach and relevance. Systemic approaches encourage building collaborative networks that address systemic barriers and promote equity and inclusion (Saleebey, 2006).

### **Advocating for Structural Change**

Beyond individual and family support, youth workers must engage in advocacy for policies and resources that address root causes of vulnerability and support sustainable recovery (Hays, 2016). This systemic lens broadens the scope of intervention to societal change, fostering environments where youth and communities can thrive long-term (Ungar, 2013).



## **9.1 Recognizing the Limits of Your Role**

### **Understanding Professional Boundaries**

Youth workers and social workers play a critical role in supporting young people affected by crises, but it is essential to understand and respect the boundaries of your professional role. Systemic counselling literature emphasizes the importance of recognizing where your expertise ends to avoid overstepping and potentially causing harm (Carr, 2019). This awareness is crucial in crisis contexts, such as post-disaster settings in Greece and Cyprus, where emotional needs may be intense and complex. While you may provide immediate emotional support, psychoeducation, and connection to community resources, clinical diagnoses and specialized mental health interventions fall outside your scope unless you hold the relevant qualifications. Maintaining clear boundaries protects both the youth and the practitioner, fostering trust and professional integrity.

### **Signs Indicating the Need for Referral**

Recognizing when a youth requires referral to specialized services is vital for timely and effective care. Indicators include persistent or worsening symptoms of mental health disorders such as severe depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation, or behaviors that pose a risk to self or others (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Additionally, youth facing complex social challenges such as severe abuse, neglect, or homelessness may need intervention beyond the capacity of youth workers. Systemic counselling stresses that understanding these signs within the broader family and community system allows workers to appreciate the multifaceted nature of the youth's needs and identify when referral is necessary (Ungar, 2013). Early identification can prevent escalation and support more positive long-term outcomes.

### **Navigating Emotional Boundaries and Self-Care**

Youth workers often develop close, empathetic relationships with the young people they support, which can blur emotional boundaries. Systemic approaches encourage

workers to practice reflective self-awareness, recognizing their emotional responses and maintaining professionalism (Walsh, 2016). When personal feelings become overwhelming or when youth issues exceed your training, this signals the importance of referring the case to specialized mental health professionals. Acknowledging limits is a form of self-care and ethical practice, ensuring that youth receive the best possible support without risking worker burnout or compassion fatigue.

Organizations such as the European Federation of Associations of Families of People with Mental Illness (EUFAMI) recommend regular supervision and debriefing as strategies to maintain these boundaries (EUFAMI, 2020).

### **Legal and Ethical Responsibilities**

Understanding legal mandates concerning youth welfare and mental health is essential in recognizing the limits of your role. For example, mandatory reporting laws related to child protection require youth workers to refer cases of suspected abuse or neglect to appropriate authorities immediately (Council of Europe, 2021). Systemic counselling frameworks highlight the importance of integrating legal knowledge with ethical responsibilities to act in the best interest of the youth while respecting their rights and dignity (Carr, 2019). In Greece and Cyprus, social workers must comply with national child protection regulations and collaborate with governmental agencies such as the Greek National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) and the Cyprus Social Welfare Services (Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, Cyprus). Being aware of these frameworks enables workers to act decisively when situations demand referral.

### **Communicating Referral Decisions with Youth**

Referring a youth to specialized services requires sensitive communication to preserve trust and minimize feelings of rejection or abandonment. Systemic counselling promotes an open dialogue approach, where the reasons for referral are discussed collaboratively, and youth are actively involved in the decision-making process (Carr, 2019). Explaining that referral is a positive step towards getting additional support emphasizes empowerment and continuity of care. Providing clear

information about what the youth can expect from referral services reduces anxiety and increases engagement. Youth workers should also reassure young people that they will continue to offer support throughout the referral process, maintaining a relational continuity that fosters resilience.



## **9.2 Referral Mapping and Resource Lists**

### **Importance of Referral Mapping**

Referral mapping is an essential process for youth workers and social workers to navigate the complex network of support services available to youth affected by crises, whether man-made or natural disasters. Mapping involves identifying local, regional, and national resources that can provide specialized assistance beyond the scope of youth work, including mental health clinics, child protection agencies, legal aid, and emergency housing (Ungar, 2013). Having an up-to-date referral map enables timely and appropriate connections that improve outcomes for vulnerable youth. This approach aligns with systemic counselling's emphasis on viewing individuals within their wider social systems and mobilizing community assets effectively (Carr, 2019).

In Greece and Cyprus, referral mapping requires particular attention to diverse service providers such as the Greek National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA), which offers crisis intervention and child protection services, and the Cyprus Social Welfare Services, which provide psychosocial support and family assistance (EKKA, 2023; Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, Cyprus, 2023). European-level resources, such as the European Federation of Associations of Families of People with Mental Illness (EUFAMI), provide additional guidance and networking opportunities. Keeping abreast of these resources allows youth workers to respond flexibly and comprehensively to youth needs in crisis contexts.

### **Developing and Maintaining Referral Lists**

Creating detailed referral lists involves more than just compiling contact information; it requires understanding the scope, accessibility, and eligibility criteria of each

service. Youth workers should engage in regular communication with service providers to verify information and understand referral procedures, wait times, and cultural competence of services (European Commission, 2022). Systemic counselling literature stresses the importance of collaboration between agencies to ensure seamless transitions for youth across systems (Ungar, 2013).

Digital tools, such as online databases or shared platforms, can enhance referral list management, enabling workers to update and share information efficiently. Training and supervision sessions should include referral mapping as a core component, empowering workers with confidence and clarity about available pathways. In contexts like Greece and Cyprus, where resource constraints and geographic barriers may exist, maintaining an accurate referral list helps identify gaps and advocate for improved service provision (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022).

### **Tailoring Referrals to Individual Needs**

Systemic counselling emphasizes the importance of person-centered approaches that consider the youth's unique social, cultural, and family contexts (Carr, 2019). Referral decisions should therefore be guided not only by the presenting issue but also by factors such as language, cultural background, accessibility, and youth preferences. For example, migrant or refugee youth may require referrals to culturally sensitive mental health providers or legal services specializing in asylum cases (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2021). Similarly, LGBTQIA+ youth might benefit from referral to specialized support groups or counseling services knowledgeable in sexual and gender diversity.

Youth workers must also consider practical barriers to access, including transportation, costs, and appointment availability. Building a referral list that includes a diversity of providers—public, private, nonprofit, and community-based organizations—increases the likelihood of matching youth with appropriate and acceptable services. Regularly reviewing outcomes and gathering feedback from youth on their referral experiences supports continuous improvement and responsiveness (Ungar, 2013).

### **Collaboration with Referral Partners**

Effective referral systems depend on strong relationships between youth workers and service providers. Establishing formal and informal networks facilitates communication, clarifies roles, and supports coordinated care (Carr, 2019). In Greece and Cyprus, multidisciplinary teams involving schools, health services, social welfare, and NGOs have demonstrated success in integrated support, especially post-disaster or crisis (Terre des hommes Greece, 2023).

Joint training sessions, case consultations, and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) can formalize collaboration and clarify expectations. This approach resonates with systemic counselling's view of interconnected systems influencing youth outcomes (Walsh, 2016). Through partnerships, youth workers can advocate more effectively for their clients and facilitate follow-up, ensuring continuity and preventing youth from falling through service gaps.

### **Challenges and Solutions in Referral Practices**

Despite best intentions, referral processes often encounter challenges such as service overload, stigma, or youth reluctance to engage. Systemic approaches encourage addressing these issues holistically by involving families, peers, and community supports in the referral journey (Ungar, 2013). Youth workers can play a vital role in demystifying services, reducing fear, and empowering youth to participate actively in their care.

Regular supervision and reflective practice help workers navigate difficult referrals and ethical dilemmas. Furthermore, advocacy for increased funding, expanded services, and culturally appropriate programming remains critical to strengthen referral systems in Greece, Cyprus, and Europe broadly (European Commission, 2022). Using data to identify unmet needs and service gaps supports this advocacy, aligning with systemic counselling's commitment to social justice.



### **9.3 Building Local Collaboration**

#### **The Necessity of Collaborative Networks**

Building effective local collaborations is fundamental for supporting youth affected by crises, whether natural disasters or man-made events. Collaboration fosters the pooling of resources, expertise, and authority across sectors, thereby increasing the reach and impact of interventions (Bronstein, 2003). For youth workers and social workers, local partnerships between governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), schools, health services, and community groups are critical to addressing the multifaceted needs of young people (Ungar, 2013). A systemic counselling perspective highlights how interconnected systems can either facilitate or impede youth well-being, making cooperation essential for comprehensive support.

In contexts such as Greece and Cyprus, local collaboration has proven crucial following crises such as wildfires and storms, where rapid, coordinated responses involving multiple agencies minimized harm and improved recovery efforts (European Commission, 2023). Collaboration enables sharing knowledge about cultural, social, and economic factors that influence youth resilience. By establishing trusting relationships, organizations can reduce duplication of services and ensure that youth receive timely and holistic care.

#### **Models of Collaboration**

Various models of collaboration exist, from informal networks to formalized partnerships with memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and joint funding. Integrated service delivery models, such as “wraparound services,” bring together professionals from diverse sectors to create individualized care plans for youth, supporting their mental health, education, and social needs simultaneously (Burns & Hoagwood, 2002). This approach aligns with systemic counselling’s emphasis on viewing youth within their family, peer, and community contexts, and designing interventions that consider multiple influences (Carr, 2019).

In Greece and Cyprus, pilot programs incorporating multi-agency collaboration, such as those initiated by Terre des Hommes and UNICEF, have shown success by combining education, psychosocial support, and legal assistance for displaced or vulnerable youth (Terre des Hommes Greece, 2023; UNICEF Cyprus, 2022). These models highlight the importance of shared goals, clear communication, and joint accountability for outcomes.

### **Communication and Trust Building**

Effective communication is the backbone of successful collaborations. Regular meetings, shared databases, and joint case reviews help align efforts and ensure all partners are informed and accountable (Wandersman et al., 2016). Transparent communication reduces misunderstandings and builds trust, which is especially important in crisis contexts where rapid decisions are needed. Systemic counselling frameworks stress the relational dynamics at play and encourage attention to power imbalances and mutual respect in partnerships (Walsh, 2016).

In local Greek and Cypriot communities, trust-building is enhanced by engaging community leaders, elders, and youth themselves in the collaboration process. Inclusion of diverse voices enriches decision-making and fosters culturally sensitive responses. This participatory approach aligns with systemic counselling's principle of empowering all members of the system to contribute to solutions.

### **Challenges in Building Collaboration**

Despite its benefits, building local collaboration can face challenges including territorialism, competition for funding, and differing organizational cultures. These issues may lead to fragmented service delivery or exclusion of key stakeholders (Fawcett et al., 2010). Systemic counselling encourages practitioners to recognize these systemic tensions and use reflective practices to navigate conflicts and promote shared understanding (Carr, 2019).

Addressing such challenges requires strong leadership, clear role definitions, and mechanisms for conflict resolution. Capacity-building workshops and joint training

can foster common language and values among collaborators. In Greece and Cyprus, where post-crisis service environments can be stretched thin, investing in collaboration infrastructure can prevent burnout and service gaps.

### **Sustainability and Community Ownership**

Long-term sustainability of collaborative efforts depends on community ownership and ongoing support. Engaging youth and families as active participants—not just recipients—in collaborative initiatives strengthens commitment and relevance (Ungar, 2013). Systemic counselling advocates for empowering communities to identify their own resources and solutions, which supports resilience and continuity beyond immediate crises.

In practice, this can mean forming youth advisory boards, community coalitions, or peer support networks that sustain the momentum of formal collaborations. In Greece and Cyprus, examples of community-led recovery efforts after natural disasters demonstrate how local ownership enhances recovery outcomes and social cohesion (Ministry of Interior, Greece, 2022). Funders and policymakers are increasingly recognizing that supporting these grassroots collaborations is vital for effective and equitable youth services.



## **9.4 Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality**

### **Understanding Ethical Responsibilities in Youth Work**

Ethical practice forms the foundation of trust and safety in youth work, especially when supporting young people affected by crises such as natural disasters or man-made emergencies. Youth and social workers must adhere to ethical principles including respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017). These principles guide interactions to protect the dignity and rights of youth, ensuring interventions are respectful, culturally sensitive, and tailored to their unique circumstances.

Systemic counselling literature emphasizes the importance of considering the broader social and relational contexts when applying ethical guidelines (Carr, 2019). Ethical dilemmas often arise in crisis settings due to competing priorities, limited resources, and the urgent need for intervention. Practitioners must balance the immediate safety of youth with their longer-term well-being, requiring thoughtful reflection and supervision to navigate complex situations.

### **Confidentiality and Its Limits**

Confidentiality is a cornerstone of ethical youth work, fostering a safe environment where young people feel secure to share sensitive information (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP], 2018). Protecting confidentiality builds trust and supports open communication, which is vital for effective support and healing. However, confidentiality is not absolute; legal and ethical frameworks require breaches in specific circumstances, such as risks of harm to the youth or others, abuse, or legal mandates (HHS.gov, 2023).

In Greece and Cyprus, youth workers must also comply with national laws and international conventions concerning child protection and data privacy, including the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (European Union, 2016). Practitioners should clearly communicate confidentiality boundaries to youth at the outset of engagement, explaining when and how information might be shared to protect their safety or comply with legal obligations.

### **Managing Ethical Dilemmas in Crisis Contexts**

Crises often exacerbate ethical challenges as youth may face heightened vulnerability, disrupted support networks, and complex trauma. Practitioners might encounter dilemmas related to consent, competing family interests, or allocation of scarce resources. Systemic counselling promotes a collaborative, reflective approach where practitioners engage in supervision and consultation to explore dilemmas and make ethically sound decisions (Carr, 2019).

In the context of Greece and Cyprus, where many youth affected by disasters may belong to marginalized groups, ethical practice also requires attention to issues of equity and inclusion. Workers should advocate for fair access to services and challenge systemic barriers that disproportionately impact vulnerable youth (European Commission, 2023). Ethical decision-making involves balancing individual needs with systemic realities to promote justice.

### **Cultural Sensitivity and Ethical Practice**

Ethical considerations extend to cultural sensitivity, ensuring that practices honor the cultural identities and values of youth and their families. Systemic counselling highlights the interconnectedness of cultural, social, and familial factors in youth development and wellbeing (Walsh, 2016). Ethical practice involves ongoing learning and humility, recognizing cultural differences in concepts of mental health, help-seeking, and family dynamics.

In Greece and Cyprus, practitioners work within diverse cultural contexts including Greek, Turkish Cypriot, Roma, migrant, and refugee populations. Ethical youth work requires adapting communication styles, respecting cultural rituals, and avoiding assumptions or stereotypes (Council of Europe, 2018). Engaging cultural mediators and community leaders can enhance trust and appropriateness of interventions.

### **Documentation, Data Protection, and Ethical Accountability**

Accurate and confidential documentation supports continuity of care and accountability but must be managed with strict adherence to ethical standards and data protection laws. Practitioners should ensure that records are stored securely, access is restricted, and data use aligns with consent provided by youth and families (BACP, 2018). Transparency about data handling builds trust and complies with GDPR requirements in Europe.

Moreover, systemic counselling encourages organizations to foster an ethical culture through training, supervision, and policies that support ethical reflection and reporting of concerns. Ethical accountability includes mechanisms for youth to voice

complaints or concerns about services safely. In the Greek and Cypriot context, agencies such as the Greek Ombudsman and Cyprus Commissioner for Administration provide oversight and resources to uphold ethical standards (Greek Ombudsman, 2023; Cyprus Ombudsman, 2023).



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## Appendix

### Referral Mapping and Resource Lists: Greece and Cyprus



#### 1. Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs – Youth and Social Inclusion

##### Department

- Role: Coordinates social services and youth welfare programs
- Tel: +30 210 527 5000
- Email: [info@ypakp.gr](mailto:info@ypakp.gr)
- Website: <https://www.ypakp.gr>

#### 2. National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA)

- Role: Coordinates protection services for vulnerable groups, including youth in crisis
- Tel: 1135 (24-hour hotline)
- Email: [info@ekka.org.gr](mailto:info@ekka.org.gr)
- Website: <https://www.ekka.org.gr>

#### 3. KETHEA – Therapy Center for Dependent Individuals

- Role: Provides psychosocial support and rehabilitation for youth with addiction and mental health issues
- Tel: +30 210 866 8500
- Email: [info@kethea.gr](mailto:info@kethea.gr)
- Website: <https://www.kethea.gr>

#### 4. Smile of the Child (Χαμόγελο του Παιδιού)

- Role: Child protection, emergency support, and crisis intervention for children and adolescents
- Tel: 1056 (24-hour helpline)
- Email: [contact@hamogelo.gr](mailto:contact@hamogelo.gr)
- Website: <https://www.hamogelo.gr>

#### 5. Praxis

- Role: Provides humanitarian and medical support, including for migrant and refugee youth

- Tel: +30 210 823 0920
- Email: info@praksis.gr
- Website: <https://www.praksis.gr>

#### 6. National Centre for Mental Health (EKEPY)

- Role: Offers mental health services and coordinates psychiatric care for youth
- Tel: +30 213 202 1000
- Email: info@ekepy.gr
- Website: <https://www.ekepy.gr>



#### 1. Cyprus Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance – Social Welfare Services

- Role: Oversees social support and welfare programs for vulnerable youth
- Tel: +357 2280 5200
- Email: socialwelfare@mlsi.gov.cy
- Website: <https://www.mlsi.gov.cy>

#### 2. Cyprus Red Cross Youth Section

- Role: Engages youth in humanitarian activities and provides psychosocial support during crises
- Tel: +357 2276 6000
- Email: info@redcross.org.cy
- Website: <https://www.redcross.org.cy>

#### 3. Hope For Children CRC Policy Center

- Role: Advocates for child rights and protection, provides support for children in crisis
- Tel: +357 2249 9950
- Email: info@hopeforchildren.org.cy
- Website: <https://www.hopeforchildren.org.cy>

#### 4. Praksis Cyprus

- Role: Offers assistance to migrants, refugees, and vulnerable youth, including psychosocial services
- Tel: +357 2246 0666
- Email: [info@praksiscyprus.org](mailto:info@praksiscyprus.org)
- Website: <https://www.praksiscyprus.org>

#### 5. **Mental Health Services – Ministry of Health**

- Role: Provides mental health care, counseling, and crisis intervention for youth
- Tel: +357 2240 1111
- Email: [mentalhealth@health.gov.cy](mailto:mentalhealth@health.gov.cy)
- Website: <https://www.moh.gov.cy>



### **European and International Resources**

#### 1. **European Youth Portal**

- Role: Offers information on youth programs, support networks, and EU initiatives
- Website: [https://europa.eu/youth/home\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/home_en)

#### 2. **Terre des Hommes Greece**

- Role: NGO focused on child protection and youth support in crisis contexts
- Tel: +30 210 515 5900
- Email: [info@tdh-greece.org](mailto:info@tdh-greece.org)
- Website: <https://www.tdh-greece.org>

#### 3. **UNHCR Greece and Cyprus**

- Role: Provides protection and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers, including youth
- UNHCR Greece Tel: +30 210 6737 700
- UNHCR Cyprus Tel: +357 2287 7400
- Websites: <https://www.unhcr.org/gr/>, <https://www.unhcr.org/cy/>









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