

SELF-ACTIVATION

A Toolkit of Non-Formal Education Activities
for Self-Awareness, Mental Health and Active Participation

Project	Self-ACTivation
Type	Erasmus+ Youth Exchange
Location	Kaunas district, Lithuania
Participants	30 young people from 6 countries
Developed by	Mind to Mind and project partners

Practical activities tested during a youth exchange and designed for adaptation by youth workers in different contexts.

About the Toolkit

Self-ACTivation is a collection of non-formal education activities developed and implemented during a youth exchange in Kaunas district, Lithuania.

The project was created from the observation that young people today have many opportunities and choices, but can also experience feelings of being lost, overwhelmed and uncertain about their identity and direction.

The project aimed to provide young people with space to step back from everyday challenges and explore solutions rooted in self-awareness, nature, community-building and active participation.

The programme combined creative activities, outdoor experiences, reflection, teamwork, mental health education and environmental awareness. The project involved 30 young people from 6 countries. Its objectives included increasing awareness of mental health, exploring ecological anxiety, developing resilience, strengthening self-identity and self-efficacy, and encouraging everyday action towards environmental protection.

The activities presented in this toolkit were tested during the youth exchange and can be adapted by youth workers to different groups and contexts.

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1. MINDFULNESS WALK IN NATURE

Main topic

Self-awareness, mindfulness, nature and stress management

Aim

To encourage young people to slow down, connect with their surroundings and become more aware of their thoughts, emotions, senses and physical sensations.

Target group

Young people.

Group size

The activity can be adapted to different group sizes. During Self-ACTivation, it was implemented with the project participants.

Duration

Approximately 60 minutes.

Materials

No specific materials are required.

Setting

A natural environment such as a park, forest, riverside or another suitable outdoor space.

Activity description

Participants take part in a mindful walk in nature. The activity encourages them to slow down, observe their surroundings and pay attention to their senses.

During the walk, participants practise breathing exercises, mindful walking techniques and short reflection pauses.

They are encouraged to notice:

- what they can see;
- what they can hear;
- what they can smell;
- what they can physically feel;
- what thoughts and emotions arise.

The purpose is not to reach a destination quickly, but to experience the surroundings and the present moment.

Reflection

- What did you notice during the walk?
- Did you notice something that you would normally overlook?
- How did your body feel?
- What emotions appeared?
- Was it easy to slow down?
- Could you use mindful walking in your everyday life?

Learning outcomes

The activity encourages self-awareness, mindfulness, relaxation and reflection. It can also help participants explore their relationship with nature and practise simple techniques for managing stress.

Implementation in Self-ACTivation

The activity was implemented during a visit to Vilkija. Participants walked near the river, practised breathing and mindful walking techniques, and took short reflection pauses.

2. ECOLOGICAL ANXIETY WORKSHOP

Main topic

Ecological anxiety, mental health and environmental action

Aim

To help young people understand ecological anxiety, explore ways of coping with it and identify achievable actions that can contribute positively to environmental change.

Target group

Young people.

Group size

Adaptable to different group sizes.

Duration

Approximately 90 minutes.

Materials

Paper, pens, markers and materials for group brainstorming.

Activity description

The activity begins with an introduction to ecological anxiety from a psychological perspective.

Participants are then divided into small groups and invited to discuss environmental issues that cause concern and the ways in which environmental problems can affect emotions and everyday life.

The groups brainstorm possible ways of managing ecological anxiety and identify practical actions that individuals can take.

Each group develops a plan of achievable actions that can help participants manage feelings of ecological anxiety while contributing positively to environmental change.

The groups present their ideas to one another.

Reflection

- What environmental issues make you feel worried?
- How can environmental problems affect our emotional well-being?
- What helps you cope with these feelings?
- What actions can you realistically take?
- How can individual actions contribute to wider environmental change?

Learning outcomes

Participants increase their awareness of ecological anxiety, explore coping strategies and identify practical actions related to environmental protection.

Implementation in Self-ACTivation

The workshop was included in the project programme as a combination of psychological information, small-group discussion, brainstorming and practical action planning.

3. IN MY SHOES

Main topic

Empathy, mental health and understanding different life experiences

Aim

To encourage participants to explore different life circumstances, develop empathy and reflect on factors that can influence people's mental health and everyday experiences.

Target group

Young people.

Group size

Adaptable to different group sizes.

Duration

Approximately 90 minutes.

Materials

Papers with different personal stories or life situations.

Activity description

Prepare short descriptions of different people and their circumstances.

Examples used during the activity included situations such as a young parent struggling to care for a family, a student experiencing depression, and a person experiencing financial difficulties.

Participants stand in a line. Each participant receives a paper describing a particular person's situation.

The facilitator reads questions connected to everyday life. For example: "Do you struggle financially?", "Do you have difficulty starting your day?", "Do you have enough support from other people?"

Participants respond according to the person they are representing: step forward if the answer is yes; step backwards if the answer is no; remain in place if the answer is neutral or uncertain.

As the activity continues, participants can observe how differently people move depending on their circumstances.

Reflection

After the movement activity, discuss how it felt to represent another person's situation and what participants noticed.

- How did you feel while representing another person?
- Was it easy to imagine their situation?
- What factors can influence someone's mental health?
- Did anything surprise you?
- How can we become more understanding towards people whose experiences are different from our own?

Learning outcomes

Participants develop empathy, self-awareness and a deeper understanding of different life experiences and mental health challenges.

Implementation in Self-ACTivation

The activity was implemented as a role-based movement exercise followed by a discussion about emotions, challenges, empathy and mental health.

4. I SEE, I FEEL, I IMAGINE, I AM...

Main topic

Self-awareness, identity and creative self-expression

Aim

To encourage participants to explore how they perceive themselves and express their thoughts, emotions and identity through art.

Target group

Young people.

Group size

Adaptable to different group sizes.

Duration

Approximately 30–60 minutes.

Materials

Paper and drawing or painting materials.

Activity description

Participants are invited to create a visual representation of themselves.

They are given time to draw or paint how they currently see themselves.

The activity then develops through the following sentences:

I see...

I feel...

I imagine...

Participants complete the sentences according to their own experience and connect them with their artwork.

In the second phase, participants use the phrase I am... and are encouraged to reflect on what they have created and formulate statements about themselves.

Reflection

Participants can present their artwork to the group and explain what they have chosen to represent. Sharing should remain voluntary, creating a safe environment for personal expression.

- What did you discover about yourself?
- Was there something that was easier to express through art than through words?
- Did your perception of yourself change during the activity?
- Which “I am...” statement is most meaningful to you?

Learning outcomes

Participants explore self-identity and emotions through creative expression and develop their ability to reflect on how they perceive themselves.

Implementation in Self-ACTivation

The activity was implemented as a self-representation exercise. Participants created paintings, completed the reflection sentences and shared their drawings with others.

5. VIDEO CREATION: YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

Main topic

Mental health, social media, identity and creative communication

Aim

To encourage young people to explore contemporary mental health challenges through creative media while developing communication, teamwork and storytelling skills.

Target group

Young people.

Group size

Adaptable to different group sizes.

Duration

Approximately 2–2.5 hours.

Materials

Smartphones or cameras, paper and pens.

Activity description

Participants are divided into small groups. Each group receives or chooses a topic related to young people's mental health.

Suggested topics include:

- social media pressure and comparison;
- identity confusion and self-discovery;
- lack of purpose or direction;
- peer pressure and risky behaviours;
- burnout and other mental health challenges.

Groups discuss the topic and identify the main message they want to communicate. They develop an idea for a short video or social media reel, deciding what situation to show, what message to communicate, who will participate and how the story will develop.

Participants then film their videos and present them to the whole group.

Reflection

- Why did you choose this topic?
- What message did you want to communicate?
- What did you learn while creating the video?
- How can social media be used to raise awareness?
- What message would you like other young people to hear?

Learning outcomes

Participants explore important mental health issues, develop communication and storytelling skills, practise teamwork and use creative media as a tool for awareness-raising.

Implementation in Self-ACTivation

During the project, participants were divided into five groups and created short videos or reels addressing social media pressure and comparison, identity confusion and self-discovery, lack of purpose, peer pressure and risky behaviours, and burnout and other mental health challenges.

6. FUTURE RIVER

Main topic

Self-expression, personal development, future aspirations and European values

Aim

To encourage participants to reflect on their experiences, emotions, discoveries and hopes for the future through creative expression.

Target group

Young people.

Group size

Adaptable to different group sizes.

Duration

Approximately 2 hours.

Materials

Paints, paper and natural materials such as pebbles or other objects collected from the surrounding environment.

Activity description

Participants are invited to create a personal symbol representing their emotions, experiences, discoveries and hopes for the future.

They can use colours, shapes, natural objects and other creative elements to develop their individual symbol.

Participants are given time to work individually and reflect on what they want their creation to represent.

The activity also introduces reflection on European values, including human dignity, freedom, equality and cultural diversity. Participants are invited to connect these values with their own experiences during the project.

Reflection

Participants present their creations to the group and explain the meaning behind their symbols.

- What does your symbol represent?
- What have you discovered about yourself?
- What would you like to take with you after this experience?
- Which European value is particularly meaningful to you?
- What do you hope for your future?

Learning outcomes

Participants reflect on their personal development, express emotions creatively and explore their identity, hopes and future direction. The activity also creates an opportunity to connect personal development with European values and active citizenship.

Implementation in Self-ACTivation

The activity was used as a final creative activity of the youth exchange. Participants created personal symbols using paints and natural elements and connected their creations with their experiences, hopes and European values.

Facilitation Notes

These activities can be used separately or combined into a longer programme. Youth workers can adapt the duration, group size, level of discussion, materials, setting and reflection questions according to the needs and context of their participants.

When activities involve personal experiences or mental health topics, facilitators should create a respectful and supportive environment and make participation in personal sharing voluntary.

The activities are designed as non-formal education methods and can be adapted according to the needs and context of different groups of young people.

About the Project

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Type	Erasmus+ Youth Exchange
Location	Kaunas district, Lithuania
Participants	30 young people
Countries represented	6
Developed by	Mind to Mind and project partners

The project focused on young people's mental health, ecological anxiety, resilience, self-identity, self-efficacy, environmental responsibility and active participation. The programme combined non-formal education, outdoor activities, creative expression, reflection, teamwork and intercultural learning.

The toolkit was created to share practical activities tested during the project and to support other youth workers in adapting them to their own work with young people.

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