



MIND IN BALANCE PEOPLE IN FOCUS

Practical resources for Youth Workers
on topics of Mindfulness, Inclusion,
Non-judgment and Diversity for
better mental health.



Co-funded by
the European Union

CONTENT

<u>Chapter 1: Introduction</u>	1
What is MIND for Mental Health?	2
Why MIND matters in youth work	5
European and rural realities	6
MIND baseline research and results	7
Inspiration behind this booklet	16
How to use the booklet	17
<u>Chapter 2: Diving into Mind</u>	18
2.1 Mindfulness in Youth Work	19
How it fits youth work	20
Instant Tools: Step-by-Step Practices for Youth	22
#1 Breathing Practice: “Anchor Breath”	23
#2 Grounding Practice: “5-4-3-2-1 Body Scan”	24
#3 Reflection Practice: “3 Good Things”	25
Why Adaptations Matter + General Tips & Tricks	26
2.2 Exploring Inclusion & Diversity	27
Creating safe and inclusive learning spaces	29
Activity: Our Safe & Brave Space Charter	32
Cultural Sensitivity	36
Activity: Circles of My Identities	40
Tools for Inclusive Facilitation	44
Activity: Inclusive Session Design Lab	48
Adaptations for Diverse Groups	51

CONTENT

2.3 Non-Judgment & Reducing Stigma	53
Working with biases and assumptions	55
NVC and reflective practice	56
Mental health stigma in youth environments	58
What this looks like in practice	60
Toolbox: simple activities for youth work	62
1. Pause before the story	63
2. Mindful pair conversation	65
3. Group agreements for safer space	67
4. "I am... but I am not..."	69
5. Check-in: weather report	71
2.4 Youth Empowerment & Resilience	74
Non-formal education approaches	76
Building self-confidence, agency, and participation	78
Linking mental health with employability and active citizenship	80
<u>Chapter 3: From Reflection to Action</u>	82
Tools, exercises, methods from partners	84
TOOL #1: Emotional Soundtrack Walk	85
TOOL #2: Creative art techniques for stress reduction	91
TOOL #3: The Non-Judgmental Listening Lab	95
TOOL #4: One Step Forward	101
TOOL #5: My COVID Story	106
MIND Dissemination Activities	108
Activity #1: The Mosaic of Athena	109
Activity #2: Wheel of Life Areas	115
Activity #3: MeTime Cards and Reflection	121
Activity #4: Creative Art and Self-Discovery	127
Adapting the Activities	134

CONTENT

<u>CHAPTER 4: Guided Meditations, MIND Podcast Series</u>	136
Introduction to MIND Podcast: Eva and Jana introduce MIND project	139
Guided Meditations	140
1. What is meditation? with Sofiya	141
2. Yoga Nidra (Deep Relaxation Meditation)	142
3. ThetaHealing®-Style Guided Visualization	143
4. Meditation for Overthinking	144
5. MIND Guided Meditation	145
Youth Work and Mental Health	146
1. Podcast: Permaculture, volunteering, and mental health with Ati	147
2. Podcast: Youth work and its struggles with Vincenzo	148
3. Podcast: Youth workers on mental health with Apostolis, Rui & Maria	149
Personal Stories	150
1. Severe depression story with Rossana	151
2. Cancer and mental health with Federica	152
3. Toxic relationships and personal boundaries with Jasmina	153
4. Migration with Sorour, Sofiya, and Dariia	154
5. Anxiety with Adél and Novela	155
6. Antidepressants with Novela	156
7. Long COVID with Benedikt	157
8. Spirituality and mindset with Tina	158
<u>CHAPTER 5: Next Steps</u>	159
Summary & Next Steps	160
Ways to stay connected	161
Erasmus+ Project Results Platform Link	162
MIND Consortium	164
Project Information	165



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS MIND FOR MENTAL HEALTH?

MIND stands for **Mindfulness, Inclusion, Non-Judgment, and Diversity** - a practical framework designed to empower **youth workers** in addressing **mental health challenges** among European youth, particularly in **rural and under-resourced areas**. This approach integrates mindfulness practices to foster **present-moment awareness**, inclusion to ensure **equitable access** for disadvantaged groups like those facing economic or geographical barriers, non-judgment to destigmatize issues such as **anxiety and depression**, and diversity to embrace varied backgrounds, including **LGBTQIA+ youth and refugees**.

Rooted in non-formal education, MIND responds to rising mental health struggles exacerbated by academic pressure, post-COVID effects, social media, and conflicts like the war in Ukraine. It equips youth workers with evidence-based tools - drawn from mindfulness resources like breath awareness and body scans - for immediate use in creating supportive environments that build resilience, active citizenship, and employability.

This booklet, an Erasmus+ project output from partners in Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, and Hungary, offers sustainable digital resources like guided exercises and podcasts to promote long-term European cooperation in youth mental health work. By prioritizing MIND, youth workers can help young people thrive, turning challenges into opportunities for holistic well-being.

MINDFULNESS

Present-moment breath/body awareness reduces stress and can build youth resilience.



INCLUSION

Equitable non-formal access for disadvantaged & rural youth that can support fighting stigma.

NON-JUDGMENT

Open, compassionate view that aims to destigmatize mental struggles, anxiety and depression in youth.



DIVERSITY

Values LGBTQIA+, refugees, people with diverse abilities for inclusive mental health.



**By its very nature,
mindfulness requires
ongoing cultivation... as
supportive and nurturing
communities and
societies.**

Jon Kabat-Zinn

WHY MIND MATTERS IN YOUTH WORK

MIND matters in youth work today because young people across Europe are facing rising mental health pressures linked to insecurity, digital stress, and wider social crises. In rural and under-resourced areas, these pressures are often intensified by isolation, stigma, and limited access to support.

Youth work is uniquely placed to respond because it can create safe, inclusive spaces where young people feel heard, respected, and supported.

MIND gives youth workers a practical framework for doing this through mindfulness, inclusion, non-judgment, and diversity.

Used well, MIND can help youth workers support well-being while also strengthening participation, belonging, and equal access to opportunity with and among young people.

EUROPEAN AND RURAL REALITIES

At the European level, youth mental health is now widely recognized as a key issue for policy, practice, and youth participation. Recent European youth resources highlight that almost one in two EU respondents has experienced emotional or psychosocial problems such as feeling depressed or anxious, showing how common these challenges have become.

In rural and under-resourced contexts, the need is even sharper because young people often face additional barriers such as distance, fewer services, limited transport, and stronger stigma around asking for help. European youth and rural youth resources note that rural communities can experience isolation, underdevelopment, weaker access to support, and a sense that decision-makers are far away.

The MIND booklet turns awareness into practical support, helping youth workers reduce stigma and build safer spaces. It brings mental health support closer to young people, especially in rural communities.

WHY MIND NEEDS BASELINE RESEARCH

The MIND project (Mindfulness, Inclusion, Non-Judgment & Diversity for Mental Health) responds to rising anxiety, depression and other mental health difficulties among European youth, combined with unequal access to support, especially in rural and under-resourced areas. Contributing factors include academic pressure, social expectations, economic uncertainty, social media overuse, post-COVID impacts and the war in Ukraine, all of which shape young people's sense of safety and belonging.

To design practical tools for youth workers rather than purely theoretical resources, the partners started with a baseline survey in January 2026 to understand how MIND topics are already perceived and practised in local youth work.

Key numbers from the January 2026 baseline

- Research Associates surveyed: 16 (aged 20-24)
- Gender split: 9 female, 7 male
- Countries of residence: Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary
- Economic obstacles reported: 31,3%
- Cultural differences: 25%
- Social barriers: 18,8%
- Geographical barriers: 12,5%
- Health-related issues: 12,5%
- Disability/special needs: 6,3%
- EU deaths by intentional self-harm(2020): 47,252 (0,9% of all deaths)

Who took part and why

The survey involved 16 research associates from Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany and Hungary, with citizenship backgrounds spanning at least eight countries and diverse sexual orientations. They are volunteers, youth workers, trainers, project managers and organisational leaders, many with 6–15+ years of experience in local and international youth work, including Erasmus+ and ESC projects.

They joined the MIND project out of a strong desire to support young people, reduce stigma, and bring their own experiences with mental health, therapy, yoga, meditation or journaling into their professional practice. For them, mental health is “a main passion” and “a base of future society”, and MIND offers a way to combine personal and professional knowledge in a structured, European framework.

Youth mental health barriers in partner communities

Respondents describe youth in their communities as facing intertwined challenges of anxiety, loneliness, social pressure and lack of purpose or direction. A “lack of belonging” and weaker communication skills in face-to-face situations are frequently linked to constant connectivity and comparison through digital media.

Academic demands, family expectations and societal standards add stress and self-doubt, while climate grief, political and economic uncertainty create “anxiety for the future”. More severe issues—depression, eating disorders, self-harm and psychological exhaustion—appear as cumulative outcomes of these pressures, especially where support is hard to access.

Structural barriers and “fewer opportunities”

The baseline shows that youth workers themselves face barriers commonly associated with “fewer opportunities”, which also affect the young people they work with. Economic obstacles (31.3%), cultural differences (25%) and social barriers (18.8%) are most frequently reported, followed by geographical and health-related barriers (each 12.5%) and disability or special needs (6.3%).

These figures illustrate how material hardship, discrimination, mobility constraints and health issues combine to limit participation in education, mobility and youth programmes, increasing mental health risks for disadvantaged youth, particularly in rural areas.

Gaps in current youth work and MIND competences

Youth workers report that mental health in their programmes is often addressed reactively - only when problems become visible - instead of as a regular, preventive strand of youth work. Many young people hesitate to join activities due to fear, anxiety or feeling “not good enough”, so those most in need of support are often the hardest to reach.

Stigma and taboos around mental health, sexuality and minority identities remain strong in some communities, making open conversations and help-seeking difficult. At the same time, youth workers note that young people live in a fast-paced, information-saturated environment but rarely learn practical skills in mindfulness, emotional regulation, non-judgmental listening and inclusive communication—and that they themselves need accessible tools and training to teach these competences confidently.

How MIND concepts are understood by practitioners

The survey shows that mindfulness is understood as present-moment awareness (“being here and now”), awareness of emotions, thoughts and body, and a non-judgmental “small pause” that enables thoughtful responses instead of impulsive reactions. Inclusion is seen as creating conditions where all can participate according to their abilities, feel safe, welcome and able to be themselves, grounded in human rights, equality and equity.

Non-judgment is described as suspending prejudice, trying to understand before criticising, accepting people as they are and listening openly so that trust can grow. Diversity is understood as the natural variety of backgrounds, identities and abilities which, when represented and valued, “makes communities richer and more interesting” and strengthens communities. These practitioner-based definitions give the MIND booklet a language that resonates with real youth work practice, rather than only with academic theory.

Supportive environments and help pathways

Across countries, a “supportive environment that prioritizes mental well-being” is seen as a safe, non-judgmental space where young people can be themselves, share difficult feelings and make mistakes without fear of ridicule or punishment. Creating such environments requires time, trust, active listening, regular check-ins and clear boundaries, as well as a careful balance between challenge and support so that youth can grow without being pushed into distress.

The January 2026 results also compile contact information for local mental health services and helplines in partner countries, providing youth workers with concrete referral options when young people need specialised or clinical support. This helps bridge non-formal youth work and formal services, ensuring that the booklet is connected to real pathways of help and not only to self-help content.

How the MIND booklet and digital resources can be used

Respondents intend to use the MIND booklet and digital resources (podcasts, guided meditations, motivational materials) as practical tools within workshops, youth exchanges, training courses, retreats and local activities, particularly with disadvantaged or marginalised youth. The booklet is seen as a starting point for activities and discussion, while the audio resources can function as free, 24/7 support, helping young people calm their minds, notice emotions and practise simple mindfulness techniques even outside organised programmes.

Youth workers are encouraged to share these resources with colleagues, teachers, social workers and partner organisations, extending the impact beyond the immediate project participants and strengthening European cooperation around youth mental health and inclusion. In this way, the baseline survey and this part serves as some sort of an anchor of the MIND booklet, connected in real needs and practices, making it a practical, evidence-based tool for youth workers across different contexts.



**MIND begins where
statistics meet stories:
in youth workers who
turn awareness into
daily, concrete care for
young people's mental
health.**

INSPIRATION BEHIND THIS BOOKLET

This resource brings together several different formats so people can use it in the way that suits them best. It includes practical activities, short explanations, mindfulness exercises, and ideas for discussion. It also connects to digital resources such as podcasts, guided meditations, and an online library of materials.

This mix of formats makes the booklet easy to use in both live and digital settings. Some parts are ideal for quick workshop activities, while others work well for deeper reflection or self-practice.

Together, these formats help users move from understanding MIND to actually applying it in everyday youth work.

HOW TO USE THE BOOKLET

The MIND booklet is designed as a practical resource for trainers, youth workers, and organizations that want ready-to-use ways to support mental well-being, inclusion, and dialogue. It can be used in training courses, team meetings, workshops, local youth activities, and follow-up dissemination work. The booklet is meant to be flexible, so each user can adapt the content to their group, setting, and level of experience.

Trainers can use it as a source of methods, inspiration, and reflection prompts when preparing sessions on mental health and group work. Youth workers can pick individual activities, apply them directly with young people, or use them to build more supportive everyday practice. Organizations can use the booklet to strengthen internal capacity, share a common approach, and extend the project results through local and international activities.



2

C H A P T E R

DIVING INTO MIND

2.1 MINDFULNESS IN YOUTH WORK

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to the present moment with curiosity, openness, and without harsh judgment. In simple terms, it means noticing what is happening in your body, thoughts, and emotions right now, instead of being carried away by worries about the past or future.

In youth work, mindfulness helps young people - and youth workers - manage stress from school pressure, social media, identity struggles, or uncertain futures. It builds emotional safety, trust, and better group connections.

Why it works: Evidence from research

- Reduces stress & anxiety: Studies show mindfulness lowers stress, anxiety, and depression in youth, especially those facing chronic challenges.

- Boosts self-regulation: Improves focus, emotional control, compassion, and resilience - key for at-risk or disadvantaged youth.
- Enhances youth workers' capacity: Helps workers stay present, model calm, and create inclusive spaces.

Mindfulness isn't about "emptying your mind" or forcing positivity. It's observing experiences with acceptance and self-compassion, reducing mental health stigma.

How it fits youth work

Short practices like breathing pauses or body scans fit anywhere - no equipment needed. Adaptation for diverse age groups, group sizes, or rural settings. For youth workers, it can be considered a self-care activity against burnout.

Making it inclusive:

Making sure you express that the activities are voluntary, non-judgmental, varied (e.g., movement for active youth).

Don't forget that: Mindfulness strengthens inclusion, resilience, and mental health support in daily practice.



**Our ability to reach unity in
diversity will be the beauty
and the test of our
civilization.**

Mahatma Gandhi

INSTANT TOOLS: STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICES FOR YOUTH GROUPS

These 3 simple, evidence-based practices (breathing, grounding, reflection) are ready for immediate use in youth work. Each takes 3-10 minutes, works for groups of 5-30, and adapts to rural/outdoor settings or diverse needs (e.g., shorter for restless youth, seated for accessibility).

Why these practices?

They build calm, focus, and self-awareness, reducing stress and boosting inclusion. No experience needed - model them yourself!

Start with a quick intro: "This helps us notice our breath/body/thoughts without judging - it's okay if your mind wanders!".

#1 Breathing Practice: "Anchor Breath" (3-5 min)

Aim: Calms the nervous system, eases anxiety. Great pre-activity to focus energy.

Steps:

1. Sit/stand comfortably (circle optional). Feet on ground, hands on lap.
2. Close eyes softly (or gaze down). Notice your natural breath—no changing it.
3. Feel your belly rise/fall (or chest/nostrils). Count silently: In 1-4, out 1-4.
4. If mind wanders (it will!), gently return to breath. Say "Thinking" kindly.
5. End with 1 deep breath. Share 1 word: "Calm?" "Busy?"

Adaptations for diverse groups:

- Younger (10-14): "Dragon breath" with roars.
- Teens (15+): Add music/timer app.
- Rural/outdoor: Breathe with wind/trees.
- Neurodiverse/ADHD: Stand/fidget OK.
- Fewer opportunities: 1:1 first, eyes open.
- LGBTQIA+/diverse: "Your breath, your way."

#2 Grounding Practice: "5-4-3-2-1 Body Scan" (5 min)

Aim: Boosts body awareness, reduces overwhelm. Perfect for conflict/de-escalation.

Steps:

1. Sit/stand tall. Feet rooted, notice contact with floor/chair.
2. Name five things you see (e.g., "Tree, shoe...").
3. Four things you touch (e.g., "Clothes, air...").
4. Three things you hear (e.g., "Birds, breath...").
5. Two things you smell (e.g., "Grass, hands...").
6. One thing you taste (sip water/mint if needed).
7. Scan body quickly: Tense? Tight spots? Breathe into them.
8. Share: "What grounded you?"

Adaptations for diverse groups:

- Younger: Use toys/pics.
- Teens: Phone-free.
- Rural/outdoor: Nature focus (earth/birds).
- Neurodiverse/ADHD: 3 senses, add movement.
- Fewer opportunities: Gentle, skip scan if needed.
- LGBTQIA+/diverse: Body-positive cues.

#3 Reflection Practice: "3 Good Things" (5-10 min)

Aim: Builds gratitude, counters negativity. Good for an end-of-session ritual for positivity.

Steps:

1. Circle up. Think of 3 things today that felt okay/good (small: "Friend smiled").
2. One by one, share (pass if shy). Notice feelings in body/heart.
3. Pause & breathe between shares - feel group energy.
4. Reflect together: "What surprised you? How does noticing change things?"
5. Close: Group breath, thumbs up.

Adaptations for diverse groups:

- Younger: Draw/emojis.
- Teens: Journal/app.
- Rural/outdoor: Campfire style.
- Neurodiverse/ADHD: Pairs, short turns.
- Fewer opportunities: Pass OK, positives only.
- LGBTQIA+/diverse: Safe shares, affirm all.

Why Adaptations Matter + General Tips & Tricks

Youth groups are diverse - ages, backgrounds, abilities, cultures. Rigid practices exclude; adaptations ensure everyone feels safe, included, & valued. Here are some general tips:

- **Voluntary first:** "Join if you want - pass anytime." Builds trust.
- **Scale smart:** Low energy? 1/2 time. High? Add movement/music.
- **Debrief always:** "What worked? Felt weird?" Co-create next.
- **Model vulnerability:** Share yours: "My mind wandered too!".
- **Sensory toolkit:** Fidgets, mats, timers for neurodiverse.
- **Rural/outdoor boost:** Nature = free enhancer (walks, stones as anchors).
- **Cultural fit:** Ask: "Any traditions to blend?" (e.g., local breaths).
- **Self-care rule:** Practice daily yourself - stay grounded.
- **Track simply:** Post-it feedback: "Calm level 1 - 5?" Adjust.
- **Troubleshoot:** Giggling? Laugh together. Resistance? Short demo/story.

2.2 EXPLORING INCLUSION & DIVERSITY

When we speak about mental health and wellbeing of young people, especially in rural and under-resourced areas, it is never only an “individual issue”. It is also about the spaces they grow up in, the messages they receive about who belongs, and the opportunities they have to be seen and heard. Youth work has the potential to offer something different: community spaces where diversity is welcomed, power is shared, and each young person can bring their full story without fear of ridicule or exclusion.

Building such spaces does not happen by accident. It requires youth workers to intentionally create safe and brave learning environments, to become more sensitive to cultural and social differences, and to use facilitation tools that include rather than filter out those who do not fit the “norm”.

In this chapter, we explore how the values of MIND—Mindfulness, Inclusion, Non-judgment and Diversity—can become visible in the way we design activities, hold groups and respond to the realities of European youth today. The chapter is organised in three parts.

First, we look at how to create safe and inclusive learning spaces, with concrete ideas on group agreements, emotional safety and working in rural and under-resourced contexts.

Second, we dive into cultural sensitivity and intercultural learning, exploring how identity, power and privilege shape our work with young people.

Third, we share practical tools for inclusive facilitation that youth workers can directly apply in Erasmus+ projects and local activities—ready-to-use methods, checklists and reflection questions that help translate values into daily practice.

CREATING SAFE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING SPACES

Youth work is often described as “creating safe spaces” where young people can experiment, learn and simply be themselves. But safety does not only mean a room without physical violence; it also means emotional, psychological and social safety. For many young people facing discrimination, poverty or stigma in their communities, the youth space might be one of the few places where they can breathe out and feel accepted as they are.

An inclusive learning space is co-created. Instead of the facilitator deciding all the rules, the group is invited to agree together on how they want to speak, listen and treat one another. Typical elements are confidentiality, the right to pass, no hate speech, speaking from “I” instead of “you”, and a shared responsibility to interrupt discrimination when it appears. This co-creation already models participation and gives young people practice in naming their needs and boundaries.

At the same time, many youth workers now speak not only about “safe” spaces but also about “brave” spaces. Brave spaces acknowledge that, when we address topics such as gender, racism, mental health or violence, discomfort and tension are part of the learning. Here the role of the facilitator is to hold a structure where difficult things can be said and heard, while still protecting participants from humiliation, attacks or re-traumatisation. Mindfulness can be a practical ally: short grounding exercises, breathing together or checking in with feelings help both the facilitator and the group to notice when emotions rise and to respond instead of reacting.

In rural and under-resourced settings, creating safe and inclusive spaces comes with extra challenges. Youth workers may have limited rooms, little privacy, and communities where “everyone knows everyone”, which can increase fear of gossip or stigma. Internet access might be weak, transport options limited and services for mental health or social support far away.

In such contexts, a safe space may be a mobile youth centre, a corner of a school, an outdoor spot or a digital group that meets regularly and is intentionally framed as a supportive community. What matters is not the perfect room but the quality of relationships, the clear agreements and the facilitator's commitment to inclusion.

Throughout this section, we invite youth workers to reflect on their own power and responsibility. As adults, we control many aspects of the space: who is invited, how time is used, which behaviour is allowed and which reactions we show. A mindful, reflective youth worker uses that power transparently and ethically, explains decisions, admits mistakes and opens channels for feedback.

In this way, young people learn that safety is something we all contribute to, and that even in small village contexts it is possible to co-build spaces where difference is welcomed rather than feared.

Activity: Our Safe & Brave Space Charter

Aim: To co-create a set of group agreements that support safety, inclusion and “brave” conversations, especially around mental health, identity and diversity.

Opening and purpose (5–10 min)

- Explain that you want to build the space together so everyone can feel as safe as possible and still be able to speak honestly about important topics.
- Briefly name typical barriers young people face (fear of judgment, gossip, discrimination, past negative experiences in groups).

Individual reflection (5–10 min)

- Ask participants to think quietly and, if helpful, close their eyes for one minute.
- Guiding questions on a flipchart: “What do I need to feel safe here?”, “What should not happen in this group?”, “What helps me speak up when I feel shy or different?”.
- Give them 3–5 minutes to note ideas on sticky notes or paper.

Small group sharing (10–15 min)

- In pairs or trios, ask them to share one or two needs and one or two worries.
- Invite them to cluster similar ideas on a flipchart (e.g. “respectful language”, “confidentiality”, “no one forced to share personal stories”).

Plenary co-creation of the charter (15–20 min)

- Bring everyone together around the flipcharts.
- Ask: “Looking at all these ideas, what agreements do we want to adopt as a group?”
- Facilitate a short discussion and write 6–10 clear, positive statements starting with “We...”, e.g. “We listen without interrupting”, “We do not use racist, sexist, homophobic or ableist language”, “We have the right to pass”.

Brave space element (5–10 min)

- Introduce the idea that some topics may feel uncomfortable, and that discomfort can be part of learning, as long as we respect the agreements.
- Add 1–2 agreements to support “brave” dialogue, e.g. “We take responsibility if we hurt someone and are open to learning”, “We talk from our own experience, not for whole groups”.

Closing and visibility (5 min)

- Invite everyone who agrees to sign the charter with their name or symbol.
- Hang it in a visible place and refer back to it in future sessions.

Adaptations for diverse groups

Low literacy / language barriers:

- Use pictograms or simple drawings for key agreements (ear for listening, heart for kindness, zipper for confidentiality).
- Invite participants to speak their ideas and have a peer or co-facilitator write or draw them.

Trauma-sensitive / mental health focus:

- Emphasise “right to pass” and “share only what feels safe”.
- Avoid pressuring participants to sign; they can show agreement by a gesture instead.

Rural and small-community settings:

- Acknowledge openly that “everyone knows everyone” and that confidentiality is more complex.
- Add a specific agreement on not spreading stories outside the group, and discuss what that realistically means in their context.

Mixed-ability groups (physical, sensory, neurodivergent):

- Check that the space is physically accessible (chairs arranged flexibly, enough space for wheelchairs or mobility aids).
- Offer different ways to contribute (speaking, writing, drawing, using stickers), and allow extra processing time for those who need it.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Every youth group is culturally diverse, even when everyone seems to come from “the same place”. Culture is more than nationality; it includes language, religion, gender and sexual identity, social class, disability, rural or urban background, and the many subcultures young people inhabit offline and online. Being culturally sensitive as a youth worker means staying curious about these layers of identity and aware of how they shape access to opportunities, power and voice.

Cultural sensitivity starts with our own self-reflection. Tools such as “our personal journey with diversity” or “circles of my multicultural self” help facilitators and young people explore which aspects of their identities are most important for them, where they experienced pride and where they experienced pain or exclusion. These methods make visible that no one is “just” a migrant, “just” a village boy or “just” a girl with a disability; every person is a unique combination of stories, strengths and vulnerabilities.

When we know more about ourselves, it becomes easier to recognise how we may also hold unexamined privilege or biases.

Intercultural learning in non-formal education is not only about exchanging traditional food or dancing together. It also means looking critically at stereotypes, discrimination and the power relations between majority and minority groups.

Activities like “Four Corners” on controversial statements or “crossing the line” invite participants to physically position themselves and see how experiences in the room are distributed.

When young people see who crosses the room for questions about poverty, racism, mental health or discrimination, they often gain a deeper understanding of structural inequalities in their own communities.

For youth workers, cultural sensitivity also means how we react in the moment. When a young person makes a sexist joke, uses a racist expression or questions someone's gender identity, ignoring it maintains harm, but public shaming can also close the conversation.

Mindfulness again offers a resource: taking a breath, noticing our own reactions, and choosing a response that is clear about boundaries and at the same time invites learning.

For example, a facilitator might say: "In this space we do not use that word because it hurts people."

Let's talk about why it is problematic," and then open a brief dialogue instead of simply telling the person to "stop".

Within Erasmus+ projects and other international activities, cultural sensitivity also includes practical preparation: clear communication about expectations, using simple and inclusive language, checking accessibility needs, and designing reflection spaces where participants can process intercultural experiences in their own way.

In rural contexts, "intercultural" may mean bringing together young people from different villages, minority groups or abilities who seldom meet as equals. Whether local or international, the principle is the same: cultural sensitivity is not a separate topic, but a way of doing youth work that is attentive, respectful and ready to question "how we always do things".

Activity: Circles of My Identities

Aim: To help participants explore multiple aspects of their identity, reflect on pride and pain connected to these identities, and build empathy and cultural sensitivity in the group.

Opening and purpose (5–10 min)

- Explain that we all have many identities (e.g. daughter, gamer, Roma, village kid, Muslim, queer, person with disability) and that no one can be reduced to just one label.
- Emphasise that people only share what feels safe and that there is no obligation to talk about topics they are not ready to share.

Drawing identity circles (10–15 min)

- Give each participant a sheet with one large circle in the middle and 4–6 surrounding circles, or ask them to draw it.
- In the centre, they write their name or a symbol that represents them.
- In the surrounding circles, they write or draw aspects of their identity that feel important to them right now (e.g. “big sister”, “rural youth”, “Christian”, “non-binary”, “artist”, “anxious person”).

Stories of pride and pain (10–15 min)

- Ask participants to choose one identity where they feel especially proud and one where they have experienced difficulty, exclusion or misunderstanding.
- Invite them to reflect individually and, if they wish, note short key words next to those circles.

Sharing in pairs or small groups (15–20 min)

- In pairs or trios, participants can share their circles and—only if they feel comfortable—the story of pride and/or difficulty connected to one of their identities.
- Suggest listening questions: “What surprised you?”, “What did you recognise from your own life?”, “What did you learn about your partner?”.

Plenary reflection (10–15 min)

- Bring the group back and ask a few volunteers to share insights (not detailed personal stories unless they strongly wish to).

- Guiding questions: (1) “How is this different from the way people usually label you?” (2) “What does this tell us about stereotypes?” (3) “How can this help us be more sensitive in our youth work activities?”

Closing (5 min)

- Highlight that cultural sensitivity begins with knowing our own stories and being curious about others without assuming we already know them.

Adaptations for diverse groups

Low literacy / language barriers:

- Encourage drawing symbols, colours or images instead of writing words.
- Allow participants to write in their own language or use a mix of words and pictures.

Participants with strong experiences of trauma or discrimination:

- Make it very clear that they can skip the “pain” part or only share in writing, not aloud.
- Consider doing only “stories of pride” if the group is not ready for deeper sharing yet.

Younger or less verbally expressive groups:

- Shorten the reflection and focus more on noticing how many different identities exist in the room.
- Use movement: invite people to stand up when you read a category (e.g. “who identifies as a carer?”, “who feels close to nature?”) to show diversity visually, keeping it non-sensitive.

Online / digital version:

- Use an online whiteboard or simple slide template where each participant can draw or type their circles.
- Encourage camera-off option during reflection for those who feel more comfortable that way.

TOOLS FOR INCLUSIVE FACILITATION

Inclusion becomes real when it is visible in the way we plan, facilitate and evaluate our activities. Inclusive facilitation is not a special technique only for projects “about” diversity; it is a competence we bring to every workshop, youth exchange, club meeting or online session. It combines awareness (who is in the room, who is missing, who is speaking), skills (adapting methods, managing dynamics, communicating clearly) and attitudes (openness, patience, non-judgment).

Before an activity, inclusive facilitation starts with careful planning.

Youth workers can map possible barriers: is the space physically accessible, is there public transport, are there participation costs, is the language understandable, and are there digital barriers for online elements?

Talking directly with young people—especially those with fewer opportunities—about what they need to be able to participate is one of the simplest and most effective inclusion strategies. When young people help to co-design the programme, timing, and methods, they are more likely to feel ownership and to stay engaged.

During the activity, inclusive facilitation is visible in many small decisions. The facilitator varies methods so that young people with different learning styles can participate—mixing movement, visual work, small groups, individual reflection, creative arts and digital tools. They pay attention to who speaks most and invite quieter voices, without forcing anyone to share more than they want to.

They notice when the group's energy drops or when some participants seem lost or overwhelmed, and they are ready to adapt the plan rather than “push through” for the sake of completing an agenda.

In this process, existing non-formal education methods and European toolboxes are valuable allies. Activities such as the “Six Thinking Hats” or “World café” for managing diverse perspectives, world café for discussing power and discrimination, or music-based inclusion activities offer structured formats where different voices can be heard and respected

Many of these methods can be easily adapted for small groups, low-resource settings or mixed-ability groups by simplifying questions, changing the timing or using more visual materials.

Including short mindfulness pauses—like a minute of silent breathing, a body scan while standing, or a simple “how is your weather inside?” check-in—can help regulate emotions and keep the group grounded when working on heavier topics.

After the activity, inclusive facilitation continues with reflection and follow-up. Instead of only asking “Did you like it?”,

youth workers can include questions such as “Did you feel safe to speak?”, “Was there anything that made participation difficult?” and “What could we change next time to make this space more inclusive?”.

Analysing who attended and who did not, who stayed until the end and who dropped out, gives important feedback on whether the activity truly reached the young people it aimed to include. Over time, this reflective cycle helps youth workers and organisations to build more accessible, resilient and inclusive practices, contributing to stronger European cooperation in mental health-aware youth work.



Inclusion is not inviting young people into our spaces; it is co-creating spaces that belong to them.

Unknown

Activity: Inclusive Session Design Lab

Aim: To support youth workers (or a youth leader group) in designing or re-designing one session using inclusive facilitation principles: barrier mapping, diverse methods, and attention to mental health and participation.

Set the challenge (5–10 min)

- Divide participants into small groups (3–5 people).
- Ask each group to choose a real upcoming session (e.g. local workshop, Erasmus+ activity block, online meeting) or give them a common scenario (e.g. “2-hour workshop on mental health stigma with mixed-ability rural youth”).

Barrier mapping (10–15 min)

- Give each group a large sheet divided into four areas: Before, During, After, and Context.

- Ask them to brainstorm possible barriers for participation and inclusion in their chosen session (e.g. transport, costs, language level, physical accessibility, emotional safety, digital access, time of day).
- Invite them to mark which groups of young people might be most affected (e.g. those with disabilities, working youth, young carers, LGBTQ+ youth).

Designing an inclusive session (20–25 min)

- Now each group designs or re-designs their session to reduce barriers and increase participation.
- Prompt them to include: (1) At least one method that works for different learning styles (visual, movement, discussion, individual reflection). (2) At least one concrete element to support emotional safety and mental health (check-in, right to pass, grounding exercise, debrief). (3) Measures for accessibility (language, space, timing, breaks, online/hybrid options).

- They outline: aim, main steps, methods, and specific inclusion measures.

Peer feedback carousel (15–20 min)

- Groups present their session design in 5 minutes each.
- After each presentation, others offer feedback using three questions: (1) “Who might still be excluded or struggle to participate?” (2) “Where is mental health taken into account?” (3) “What is one more inclusive adaptation you could add?”

Individual commitment (5–10 min)

- Ask each participant to note one concrete adjustment they will implement in their next real session.
- Optionally, they can share in pairs for accountability.

Adaptations for diverse groups

Mixed experience levels among youth workers / leaders:

- Pair more experienced facilitators with newer ones.
- Offer “inclusion cards” with prompts (e.g. “language simplification”, “quiet corner”, “peer support”) that groups can select from if they feel stuck.

Limited time or attention:

- Focus only on one phase (e.g. “During the session”) and one barrier type (e.g. “emotional safety” or “physical accessibility”).
- Turn it into a quick “clinic”: each group brings a real problem and others give 3 quick inclusion ideas.

Transnational / multilingual teams:

- Encourage groups from different countries to share contrasting realities (e.g. transport in rural Latvia vs. rural Italy) to avoid one-size-fits-all solutions.

- Provide a simple template in easy English and invite groups to note key elements in their own language as well.

Youth-adult co-facilitation:

- Involve young people themselves in this design lab as equal partners.
- Make sure youth voices lead the identification of barriers and proposed solutions, not only adult assumptions.



Inclusion means making sure every young person has a place at the table; diversity means recognising that the table is stronger because everyone brings something different.

Unknown

2.3 NON-JUDGMENT & REDUCING STIGMA

Working with young people means meeting them at moments when they may feel uncertain, defensive, overwhelmed, or misunderstood, so a non-judgmental approach is central to trust and participation rather than an optional extra. In the MIND project materials, non-judgment is described not as the absence of opinions, but as a conscious effort to pause, avoid immediate conclusions, and try to understand before reacting.

This matters in practice because young people are more likely to speak honestly, take part, and ask for support when they sense they will not be shamed, labelled, or dismissed.

This is especially important in youth work settings where many young people are already carrying pressure linked to school, family expectations, loneliness, social media comparison, uncertainty about the future, or fear of not fitting in.

Survey participants in the MIND project repeatedly described supportive environments as spaces built on safety, trust, active listening, and the freedom to make mistakes without fear of ridicule or rejection. For youth workers, this means that the emotional climate of a group matters just as much as the programme itself.

Non-judgment also connects directly with inclusion. Inclusion is not only about who is physically present in the room, but about whether people feel they belong, whether they can participate according to their needs, and whether their differences are treated with respect rather than suspicion.

A young person may attend an activity and still feel excluded if they are met with stereotypes, pity, silence, or subtle signals that they are “too much,” “too sensitive,” or “not the right fit”. For this reason, reducing judgment and reducing stigma are both practical tasks in everyday youth work.

Working with biases and assumptions

Every youth worker brings experience, values, habits, and blind spots into their practice. Bias is not always loud or intentional; often it shows up quietly, in the stories we tell ourselves about a young person before we know them well, or in the meaning we attach to their behaviour too quickly.

A participant who avoids eye contact may be read as disinterested, while in reality they may be anxious, tired, overwhelmed, culturally reserved, or simply unsure whether the space is safe for them.

This is why reflective practice is so important. Rather than asking, “What is wrong with this young person?”, a more useful question is, “What might be happening for this young person, and what am I assuming?”.

That small shift changes the role of the youth worker from evaluator to curious supporter.

It also helps prevent common patterns of exclusion, especially for young people who already face social, cultural, geographical, economic, or health-related barriers.

Training resources used in inclusive youth work stress the value of helping participants examine stereotypes, privilege, identity, and the gap between how people define themselves and how others judge them. This is useful not only for participants, but for facilitators too. A youth worker who is willing to notice their own automatic reactions is better able to respond with fairness, humility, and care.

Non-violent communication and reflective practice

Young people do not only remember what was said; they also remember how it felt to be spoken to. Tone, pacing, facial expression, interruption, sarcasm, and rushed advice can all communicate judgment, even when the words themselves sound supportive.

In contrast, communication that is calm, respectful, and attentive helps create the psychological safety that many young people need before they can speak openly.

A helpful principle here is to separate observation from interpretation. Saying “I noticed you were quiet during the activity” leaves space for dialogue, while saying “You were clearly not interested” closes it down. This kind of communication aligns with mindfulness-based practice, which values observation, emotional awareness, and responding rather than reacting impulsively.

It also supports the kind of group culture where young people feel listened to instead of analysed.

Reflective practices strengthen this process. The MIND survey highlights regular check-ins, journaling, intentional pauses, and opportunities for self-awareness as practical ways to support mental well-being in youth settings.

Complementary mindfulness resources also show how simple exercises such as mindful conversation, observing without judgment, and compassionate communication can help people slow down, listen more fully, and become more aware of their own reactions.

For youth workers, these are not abstract techniques; they are concrete ways to bring more steadiness into difficult or emotional moments.

Mental health stigma in youth environments

Stigma is not always obvious. Sometimes it appears in jokes, avoidance, gossip, pity, discomfort, or the assumption that mental health struggles are signs of weakness, attention-seeking, or lack of resilience.

In the MIND project findings, participants identified stigma as a continuing barrier in local youth contexts, especially where mental health is only addressed after problems become visible rather than through ongoing preventive work.

In some communities, especially in rural or under-resourced settings, stigma is reinforced by silence, taboo, or a lack of trusted language for talking about emotional well-being.

The effect is serious. When young people expect judgment, they are less likely to ask for help, less likely to participate fully, and more likely to hide distress until it becomes harder to manage. This is particularly important for young people facing multiple pressures at once, including anxiety, loneliness, identity struggles, family pressure, discrimination, and social comparison amplified by digital life.

A youth environment can therefore either reduce stigma by normalising conversations about well-being, or deepen stigma by treating vulnerability as a problem to hide.

Reducing stigma begins with everyday practice. It means using respectful language, avoiding labels, normalising support-seeking, challenging harmful jokes or stereotypes, and making space for different experiences of mental health without turning them into spectacle.

It also means recognising that prevention matters: young people should not have to be in crisis before emotional well-being becomes relevant in youth work.

This fits well with the MIND project's goal: to give youth workers easy-to-use tools that help young people build strength, feel included, and talk openly about mental health.

What this looks like in practice

A non-judgmental youth work environment is not one where everything is permitted or where boundaries disappear. It is one where expectations are clear, dignity is protected, and mistakes are treated as opportunities for reflection and learning rather than humiliation.

Young people still need structure, but they also need to know that structure will not be used against them.

In practice, this can include:

- Asking open questions before making conclusions about behaviour.
- Naming what was observed rather than assigning motives.
- Building regular moments for reflection, check-ins, or quiet self-awareness.
- Challenging jokes, labels, and comments that reinforce shame or exclusion.
- Creating agreements with the group that support respect, confidentiality, and listening.
- Remembering that belonging is built through many small interactions, not one big intervention.

At its heart, non-judgment is a practice of making more room: more room for complexity, more room for difference, more room for honesty, and more room for young people to be unfinished human beings without being reduced to a stereotype.

Toolbox: simple activities for youth work

They build on MIND project priorities by helping youth workers create safe, inclusive spaces where young people can express themselves without fear of judgment and develop practical skills for self-awareness, listening, and respectful communication.

These activities are designed to be low-threshold, easy to adapt, and suitable for youth groups that may be new to reflection, mindfulness, or conversations about stigma.

1. Pause before the story

Aim: Help young people notice how quickly assumptions are formed and practice curiosity instead of instant judgment. This supports the non-judgmental approach described in the MIND survey, where understanding before criticising was seen as central to trust and safe interaction.

Time: 10–15 minutes

Group size: 4–20

Materials: None, or a few printed situations

How to do it:

- Read out a short situation, for example: “A participant is silent all afternoon,” or “A young person rolls their eyes during a group task.”
- Ask participants to first write or say their first assumption.
- Then ask: “What are three other possible explanations?”
- Invite a short group discussion on how assumptions affect the way people are treated.

Reflection questions:

- What was your first automatic interpretation?
- What changed when you looked for other explanations?
- How can quick assumptions affect inclusion in a group?

Facilitator tips:

- Use everyday examples, not extreme ones; that keeps the exercise relatable and safer.
- Remind the group that the goal is not to feel guilty for having assumptions, but to become more aware of them.
- If the group is quiet, model the exercise with your own example first.

2. Mindful pair conversation

Aim: Strengthen listening, attention, and non-judgmental communication. This activity reflects the value placed in the MIND survey on active listening, openness to dialogue, and creating trust through respectful interaction.

Time: 10 minutes

Group size: Any even number

Materials: Timer

How to do it:

- Put participants in pairs.
- Give a simple topic such as: “A place where I feel calm,” “Something people often misunderstand about young people,” or “What helps me feel included.”
- Person A speaks for 2 minutes while Person B only listens.
- Person B then reflects back: “What I heard you say was...”
- Switch roles.

Reflection questions:

- How did it feel to speak without interruption?
- How hard was it to listen without preparing your own answer?
- What helps people feel truly heard?

Facilitator tips:

- Offer the option to pass if someone does not want to share something personal.
- Encourage listeners to focus on words, tone, and body language rather than trying to fix the speaker's problem.
- Keep topics light to medium unless the group already has strong trust.

3. Group agreements for safer space

Aim: Co-create a group climate where respect, confidentiality, and participation are clear and shared. MIND survey responses stressed that supportive environments are built through safety, trust, structure, and agreed boundaries rather than good intentions alone.

Time: 15-20 minutes

Group size: 16-30

Materials: Flipchart or paper, markers

How to do it:

- Ask the group: “What helps people feel safe, respected, and included here?”
- Write every suggestion visibly.
- Cluster ideas into 5–7 short agreements, for example: “Listen without mocking,” “Step up, step back,” “No one has to share personal stories,” “Confidentiality with care.”
- Ask everyone if they can agree to these and whether anything is missing.

Reflection questions:

- Which agreement matters most to you personally?
- What does respect look like in practice, not just in words?
- What should happen if an agreement is broken?

Facilitator tips:

- Keep agreements short and practical; long lists are harder to remember.
- Return to the agreements during the session, especially if tension appears.
- Treat agreements as living tools, not decoration on the wall.

4. “I am... but I am not...”

Aim: Challenge stereotypes and make room for more complex identities. Inclusion training materials highlight the importance of self-definition and of questioning the gap between how people define themselves and how others label them.

Time: 15-20 minutes

Group size: 6-20

Materials: Paper and pens

How to do it:

- Ask participants to complete the sentence: “I am , but I am not .”
- Example: “I am quiet, but I am not unfriendly.”
- Participants can share in pairs, small groups, or the whole group, depending on trust levels.
- Debrief around stereotypes and how they affect belonging.

Reflection questions:

- What stereotype were you pushing back against?
- Where do these stereotypes come from?
- What happens when people are reduced to one label?

Facilitator tips:

- Give participants the option to keep their sentence private or share only in pairs.
- Avoid forcing disclosure around sensitive identities.
- Go first with your own example to lower pressure and model honesty.

5. Check-in: weather report

Aim: Offer a simple emotional check-in without requiring deep self-disclosure. MIND findings show that regular check-ins and intentional reflection can help youth workers stay responsive to emotional needs and group dynamics.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Group size: Any

Materials: None

How to do it:

- Ask each participant to describe how they feel as a type of weather: sunny, foggy, stormy, mixed, windy, and so on.
- If appropriate, invite one sentence of explanation.
- Remind participants that they can pass.

Reflection questions:

- Was it easier to speak through metaphor than direct emotion words?
- What did you notice about the group energy today?
- How can we respond to each other with care when energy is different?

Facilitator tips:

- This works well at the start or end of a session.
- Do not overanalyse people's answers in front of the group.
- Use it as information for facilitation, not as a test of participation.



**Every young person deserves
to be heard without fear of
judgment; when we replace
labels with understanding, we
create space for healing,
growth, and belonging.**

Unknown

Facilitators notes

Not every activity fits every group, and the survey we did amongst youth workers strongly suggests that young people need approaches that are flexible, preventive, and adapted to their emotional state, context, and readiness. It is often better to do one simple exercise well than to rush through several activities with no real safety or reflection.

A few practical reminders:

- Start with lighter activities before moving into identity, stigma, or personal experience.
- Always offer the right to pass.
- Avoid turning sharing into pressure or performance.
- Notice whether the group needs energy, grounding, silence, or movement.
- End with a stabilising question such as “What is one thing you are taking with you?”

2.4 YOUTH EMPOWERMENT & RESILIENCE

After exploring mindfulness, inclusion, and non-judgment, this chapter shifts the focus toward action: how young people can grow in confidence, take part more fully in their communities, and build resilience through meaningful participation.

Youth empowerment is not only about encouraging individual strength; it is about creating the conditions in which young people feel trusted, included, and able to shape what happens around them.

In youth work, resilience is not something young people are expected to develop alone. It grows through supportive relationships, safe learning environments, practical opportunities, and approaches that value participation over perfection.

This is where non-formal education becomes especially important: it offers flexible, experiential, and youth-centred ways of learning that help young people discover their strengths, test their ideas, and learn from others.

This chapter looks at how youth workers can support that process in practice. It explores how non-formal education can be used to create empowering learning spaces, how self-confidence and agency can be strengthened through participation, and how mental health connects directly to employability and active citizenship.

Together, these elements show that well-being is not separate from social participation — it is one of the foundations that makes it possible.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION APPROACHES

Non-formal education is one of the most effective ways to support youth empowerment because it places young people at the centre of the learning process. It is voluntary, participatory, and based on experience, which means that young people are not simply receiving information — they are actively involved in shaping the learning itself.

For youth workers, this matters because non-formal education creates space for reflection, creativity, dialogue, and collaboration. It allows young people to learn in ways that feel relevant to their lives, their needs, and their reality. Rather than focusing only on formal outcomes, non-formal education values process: the way young people communicate, cooperate, take initiative, and build confidence over time.

In the context of mental health, this approach is especially useful because it reduces pressure and opens space for trust. It helps young people feel safer to express themselves, make mistakes, and try again.

In this way, non-formal education becomes more than a method — it becomes a supportive environment for growth.



**Education is the most
powerful weapon which you
can use to change the world.**

Nelson Mandela

BUILDING SELF- CONFIDENCE, AGENCY, AND PARTICIPATION

Self-confidence grows when young people experience that their voice matters and that their actions can have an effect. In youth work, this does not happen through encouragement alone, but through real opportunities to contribute, decide, lead, and reflect on their own development.

Agency is closely connected to this process. It means having the ability to make choices, influence one's environment, and act with a sense of purpose. When young people are given meaningful roles and responsibilities, they begin to see themselves not only as participants, but as contributors.

This shift can be powerful, especially for those who have experienced exclusion, low self-esteem, or repeated messages that they are not capable.

Participation is the bridge between personal confidence and social empowerment.

When young people are invited into group decision-making, project planning, peer activities, or community action, they practise speaking up, cooperating, and taking ownership.

These experiences help them develop both inner strength and outward visibility, which are essential for long-term resilience.



**The most common way people
give up their power is by
thinking they don't have any.**

Alice Walker

LINKING MENTAL HEALTH WITH EMPLOYABILITY AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Mental health is not separate from employability or active citizenship; it directly affects how young people learn, work, communicate, and engage with the world around them.

A young person who feels overwhelmed, isolated, or insecure may struggle to take part fully in education, volunteering, or employment opportunities, even when the opportunities are available.

This is why youth work has an important role in connecting well-being with life skills. Supporting mental health can help young people build the resilience, focus, communication, and adaptability they need in work and community settings.

At the same time, experiences of volunteering, group projects, and civic engagement can strengthen mental health by creating a sense of purpose, belonging, and contribution.

Active citizenship is also part of this picture. When young people are supported to take part in their communities, express their views, and act on issues that matter to them, they develop both confidence and responsibility.

In this sense, employability and citizenship are not separate goals from mental health — they are practical expressions of it.

In this sense, employability and citizenship are not separate goals from mental health — they are practical expressions of it.



**There is no health without
mental health.**

World Health Organization



3

CHAPTER

FROM REFLECTION
TO ACTION

This final section brings the booklet from reflection into action. Some of the practical activities and approaches introduced here may already be visible in earlier chapters, where the ideas behind MIND are first explored; this section brings them together more deliberately as a collection of tools, exercises, and methods contributed by the partners in this project.

It also includes short stories and case studies from real youth work practice, showing how MIND can be applied in different contexts and with different groups of young people.

The aim is simple: to offer ideas that are ready to use, adapt, and share. Whether you are looking for a short grounding exercise, a group reflection method, or inspiration from another organisation's experience, this section is designed to support everyday youth work in a flexible and realistic way.

TOOLS, EXERCISES, AND METHODS FROM PARTNERS

This sub-chapter gathers a selection of practical methods developed and used by partner organisations in their work with young people. It includes exercises that support mindfulness, emotional awareness, inclusion, and non-judgment, with an emphasis on activities that youth workers can adapt to different settings, group sizes, and levels of experience.

The intention is not to present a fixed recipe, but to share methods that can be translated into local practice. Some tools are short and simple, others more reflective, but all are meant to help youth workers create safe, engaging, and supportive spaces for young people.

TOOL #1: EMOTIONAL SOUNDTRACK WALK

Contributing Organization: EYCB Czech Republic

Author Name(s): Klára Pechová (inspired by Jon Kabat-Zinn)

Which MIND element(s) does this tool address?

Mindfulness, Inclusion, Non-judgment, Diversity, and Mental Health Awareness.

How this tool supports mental health in youth work:

As a youth worker, you can use this tool to help young people regulate their anxiety by gently shifting their attention from internal stress to external sensory awareness through walking and grounding. It gives your participants a safe way to express their emotions non-verbally and without judgment, making it highly accessible for youth who might struggle to articulate how they feel. Ultimately, the shared silent experience helps you build a stronger sense of group safety and acceptance.

When to use it:

This is a perfect activity to run at the start of a workshop when you need to calm anxiety, ground the room, and get everyone present.

Target group:

Mixed groups of young people aged 12-30.

Group size:

5-20 participants. (It works best in smaller groups where you can easily maintain a calm, focused environment).

Duration: 15-30 minutes.

Preparation needed:

You just need to find a quiet indoor or outdoor space that is suitable for slow walking. You won't need any special materials, though you might want to bring some paper and pens in case your participants want to reflect on their experience afterward.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. **Introduction (3 min):** Explain to your group that you will be going on a slow, mindful walk to explore their “emotional soundtrack” for the day. Reassure them that there is no right or wrong experience here, and absolutely no pressure to speak.

2. **Slow Walking (5–10 min):** Guide your participants to walk slowly in silence. Encourage them to focus on their steps, their breathing, and the sounds around them, bringing their awareness to their bodies and the present moment.

3. **Inner Soundtrack Reflection (5 min):** Ask your group to imagine: “If your current emotional state had music, what would it sound like?” Prompt them to think about the tempo, volume, and mood. Remind them that this is an internal exercise and remains non-verbal.

4. **Group Pause & Expression (5 min):** Bring everyone together to form a circle. Invite each participant to express their experience using just one word, a simple gesture, or even just by sharing a moment of silence.

5. **Closing (3 min):** Lead a short grounding moment with a shared group breath. Remind your youth that everyone has different emotional “soundtracks,” and all of them are completely normal and valid.

Facilitation Tips:

1. **Less is more:** Keep your instructions minimal and speak slowly to support a calming atmosphere.
2. **Hold the space:** Do not try to interpret or evaluate the expressions your participants share. Just let them be.
3. **Embrace the quiet:** Allow silence to be an active, comfortable part of the process rather than rushing to fill it.
4. **Match their speed:** Adapt the walking pace to the slowest participants in your group to ensure no one feels left behind.
5. **Keep it safe:** Maintain a non-pressuring atmosphere at all times so your youth feel entirely secure.

Debriefing & Reflection Questions:

Use these questions to help your group process the activity:

1. How did it feel to move in silence together as a group?
2. Did you notice anything change in your body or your mind during the walk?
3. What “soundtrack” best described your state at the beginning of the walk versus the end?
4. How was it to express yourself without having to find the right words?
5. What did you notice about others in the group while we were walking?

Adaptations for Different Contexts:

1. **Online/Hybrid settings:** Have participants do a slow, mindful movement around their own room while keeping their awareness on sounds and their breath.
2. **Youth with fewer opportunities or high-stress environments:** You can shorten the activity to 10–15 minutes, focusing purely on the walking and the one-word sharing to keep the threshold for participation very low.

3. Different cultural contexts: If the concept of a "soundtrack" doesn't resonate, you can replace it with locally meaningful metaphors like the weather, nature, or colors.

Is this method rooted in a specific approach?

This method is inspired by Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), originally developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

WHY this tool matters:

In many youth settings across Central Europe, young people are experiencing intense levels of academic pressure, social comparison, and anxiety - especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. We've noticed that many youth struggle to verbalize their emotions in group environments, often out of fear of judgment from their peers. We rely on this tool because it provides a low-threshold, non-verbal entry point into emotional awareness, which is especially useful in school-based youth work. It champions inclusion by allowing every single participant to engage at their own emotional and communication level.

TOOL #2: CREATIVE ART TECHNIQUES FOR STRESS REDUCTION

Contributing Organization: Association
Better Me

Author Name(s): String art - Mary Everest
Boole; acrylic pouring - David Alfaro Siqueiros;
pendulum art - Tom Shannon

**Which MIND element(s) does this tool
address?** Mindfulness

How this tool supports mental health in youth work:

Uses creative techniques like acrylic pouring, pendulum pouring, and string art to help participants relax, reduce stress, and improve mood by focusing on colors and the flowing process. It encourages mindfulness, creativity, and self-expression without requiring prior artistic skills, promoting acceptance of unpredictability and a sense of play.

When to Use:

As a stand-alone, full-time workshop.

Target Group & Group Size:

Mixed age groups (15 and above), including youth work, people with disabilities, developmental difficulties, or hearing impairments. Accommodates a maximum of 5–30 participants.

Duration:

- Acrylic pouring: 30–45 minutes
- Pendulum pouring: 30–45 minutes
- String art: 1–1.5 hours

Preparation & Setup:

- **Acrylic Pouring:** Requires at least 10 acrylic colors, wood glue, silicone oil, water, plastic cups, painting canvases, a blow torch, and stirring sticks. Tables must be covered with plastic protection.
- **Pendulum Pouring:** Requires acrylic colors, paper, plastic gloves, and a DIY pendulum setup (a stick placed across two tall objects with a plastic cup suspended by strings, featuring a small hole in the bottom).
- **String Art:** Requires wooden boards, nails, colorful thin knitting strings, hammers, and scissors.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

- **Acrylic Pouring:** Mix one part Drvofix, one part paint, a little water, and 2–3 drops of silicone oil in a cup until it reaches a honey-like consistency. Layer different colors into a single cup, place a canvas face-down on top, flip it over, and lift the cup to let the paint flow. Tilt the canvas to cover the edges and let dry for 48 hours.
- **Pendulum Pouring:** Place paper under the pendulum. Cover the hole of the cup with a finger, pour in the paint, release, and let the pendulum swing freely over the paper to create patterns.
- **String Art:** Pre-hammer nails into the wooden board to form a shape. Tie a string to a starting nail and wind it around subsequent nails systematically (e.g., every fourth nail) to build up geometric patterns.

Facilitation & Reflection Tips:

- Materials can be easily upcycled (e.g., unraveling old sweaters for string, using broom handles and boxes for the pendulum stand).
- Ask participants how they feel before and after the workshop to help them reflect on their levels of relaxation and stress relief.

Evidence Base - Is this method rooted in a specific approach?

This tool is backed by evidence-based practices explored in Art Therapy. If you want to take a deeper dive into the science behind how creative expression reduces stress and supports mental health, you can explore these two resources:

- <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5836011/>
- <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/409159> *(Note: This is the second link provided in the document) *
<https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/409159> *



The right tool is not just an activity—it is a bridge that helps young people express themselves, learn from one another, and turn shared experiences into meaningful change.

Unknown

TOOL #3: THE NON-JUDGMENTAL LISTENING LAB

Contributing Organization: NaturKultur
Germany

Author Name(s): Aleksandar Čičković

Which MIND element(s) does this tool address?

Mindfulness, Non-judgment, and Mental Health Awareness.

How this tool supports mental health in youth work:

By guiding your youth to practice deep, non-reactive listening, you help them regulate their impulse to "fix" others and instead provide high-quality emotional support. This creates a powerful culture of psychological safety where participants feel truly seen and heard without fear of criticism, significantly reducing feelings of social isolation and anxiety in your group.

When to use it:

Use this as a core skill-building session when you want to foster peer support and deep empathy among your group.

Target group:

Youth aged 15-25, fellow youth workers, peer-mentors, and volunteers in social settings.

Group size:

4-30 participants (The activity is done in pairs).

Duration:

30–45 minutes (Flexible depending on how deep the speaking rounds go).

Preparation needed:

Find a quiet room where pairs can sit face-to-face with enough distance so they can hear each other without too much background noise. You'll need a timer or a soft bell. No other materials are required, though having a flipchart handy for the "Summarizing" instructions is very helpful.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

- 1. The Intro (5 mins):** Explain the difference between simply "hearing" and "non-judgmental listening." Remind them that most people listen to "fix," "give advice," or "judge," but today, they are listening only to understand.
- 2. The Duo Setup (2 mins):** Have participants find a partner (ideally someone they don't know well) and sit face-to-face. Label them Partner A and Partner B.
- 3. Round 1 - The Gift of Speech (5 mins):**
Partner A speaks for 3-4 minutes about a current challenge or "how I am really doing." Partner B acts as a "Silent Anchor." They cannot speak, ask questions, or interrupt. They use only their eyes, facial expressions, and body language to show presence.
- 4. The Mirroring (3 mins):** Partner B now has 2 minutes to summarize only the emotions and needs they heard, starting with: "It sounds like you felt... and what you needed was..." Remind them they are strictly forbidden from giving advice or sharing their own stories.

5. **The Switch (8 mins):** Repeat the process with Partner B as the speaker and Partner A as the listener.

6. **The Group Harvest (10-15 mins):** Bring the whole group back into a circle to share how the experience felt.

Facilitation Tips:

- **The Power of Silence:** Remind participants that if the speaker runs out of words before the time is up, they should both just sit in silence. This "shared silence" is a powerful part of mindfulness.
- **No Advice Zone:** Be very firm about the "No Advice" rule. Young people (and youth workers!) often have a reflex to try to "save" people; remind them that simply being heard is the "saving" part.
- **Body Language:** Encourage listeners to lean in and keep their phones and distractions completely away to maximize the feeling of inclusion.
- **Soft Transitions:** Use a soft bell or a calm voice to end rounds so you don't "shock" the emotional space.

Debriefing & Reflection Questions:

- Use these questions to help your group process the activity:
- How did it feel to speak for 3 minutes knowing you wouldn't be interrupted or judged?
- As a listener, what was the hardest part about not giving advice or telling your own story?
- How does it feel in your body when your partner mirrors your feelings correctly?
- How would our group change if we used this "Listening Lab" style in our daily conversations?

Adaptations for Different Contexts:

- Online/Hybrid settings: Use breakout rooms for the duos. Use an online timer that is visible to everyone or broadcast messages to the rooms when it is time to mirror or switch.
- Youth with fewer opportunities or lower literacy: Instead of verbal mirroring, the listener can pick 1-3 visual cards (like from the game "Dixit") that they feel best represent the speaker's story.

- Different cultural contexts: In cultures where direct eye contact is seen as disrespectful, allow participants to sit "shoulder-to-shoulder" or look at a neutral object while listening.

Is this method rooted in a specific approach?

- This method is rooted in Active Listening (developed by Carl Rogers) and Non-Violent Communication (Marshall Rosenberg). It also draws heavily from Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), specifically the pillars of non-judging and having a "Beginner's Mind."

Why this tool matters:

At NaturKultur in Bremen, our youth face intense post-pandemic social anxiety and pressure to constantly "perform" or hide their struggles. These "Listening Labs" create a vital space for radical acceptance, directly combating the rising social isolation and mental health challenges we see in our community.

TOOL #4: ONE STEP FORWARD

Contributing Organization: NaturKultur
Germany

Author Name(s): Dariia (originally found by
COMPASS)

**Which MIND element(s) does this tool
address?**

Inclusion, Non-judgment, and Diversity.

**How this tool supports mental health in
youth work:**

As a youth worker, you can use this workshop to help participants develop deep empathy by stepping into someone else's shoes. Through role-based movement and reflection, your youth will explore diverse life experiences, challenge their own assumptions, and learn to understand perspectives completely different from their own.

When to use it:

This is a powerful activity to use when addressing conflict in a youth group, or when you need to build empathy and highlight structural inequalities.

Target group: Youth aged 15-25.

Group size: 20-30 people.

Duration: 1 hour.

Preparation needed:

You will need a large room where participants can stand in a line and walk forward. Prepare the role cards and the list of statements in advance. Crucial: Review and update the statements to fit your specific group, removing or adjusting any that might be too sensitive or triggering for your current participants. Have your debriefing questions ready.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

Phase 1: Energizer (10 mins): Start with the "HI-HA-HO" energizer to get the group moving. Stand in a circle. The person in the middle shouts "HI!" and points at someone with both arms forward. That person shouts "HA!" and raises their arms upward. The two neighbors shout "HO!" and swing their arms toward the selected participant. The middle person then points to someone else to continue the sequence.

Phase 2: Getting into Character: Hand out role cards randomly. Tell participants to keep their roles a secret. Ask them to sit down, read their card, and "put on the costume" of their character. Help them get into role by reading reflection questions slowly (e.g., What was your childhood like? How much money do you earn? What excites you?).

Phase 3: The Line-Up: Ask participants to remain absolutely silent and line up beside each other like on a starting line.

Phase 4: The Statements: Read out your list of situations/events one at a time (e.g., "You have never encountered any serious financial difficulty," or "You are not afraid of being stopped by the police"). Tell participants to take one step forward if they can answer "yes" to the statement. If not, they stay where they are. Pause between statements so people can look around and note their positions.

Phase 5: The Reveal: At the end, invite everyone to take note of their final positions and reveal their roles to the group. Give them a couple of minutes to shake off the role before moving to the debrief.

Facilitation Tips:

- Know your group: Be highly aware of the group dynamics and prepare the statements and roles accordingly.
- Protect vulnerable youth: Make sure that if there are very sensitive participants, they do not get a role that hits too close to home (for example, do not give a refugee role to a participant who is a refugee themselves).
- Prioritize feelings first: During the debrief, check in on how the participants feel first, and give them ample space to express those emotions before moving into analytical questions.
- Embrace the pause: Tell them beforehand that there is no such thing as an "uncomfortable silence" in this room. Give them time to think. If no one speaks for 10 seconds, simply rephrase the question.

Debriefing & Reflection Questions:

Use these questions to process the experience (approx. 15-35 mins):

- Let's do a quick round: How do you feel in one word? (After the round: Who wants to share why they feel like that?)
- For those who moved at least 3 or 4 times: What was the feeling?

- For those who did not move, or only moved 1 time: What was the feeling seeing other people move? How would you describe it?
- When you moved forward past other people, how did you feel about them? When other people moved next to you but you stayed, how did you feel?
- What do you see in this exercise from real life? Does this mirror society in some way? How?
- What can we do in real life to make sure people who are 'behind' are not left out?

Local Context Story - WHY this tool matters:

German youth face rising mental health challenges driven by academic pressure, post-COVID anxiety, and isolation. At NaturKultur, we use this tool to visibly expose how invisible barriers—like discrimination or mental health stigma—impact a young person's future. By physically demonstrating these unequal starting points, the exercise builds deep empathy and empowers participants to recognize structural inequalities and co-create safer, more inclusive spaces.

TOOL #5: MY COVID STORY

Contributing Organization: Association
Better Me

Author Name(s): Vincenzo Giannone

**Which MIND element(s) does this tool
address?** Mindfulness

**How this tool supports mental health in
youth work:**

Focuses on reframing negative experiences (such as the pandemic) or processing sad events by transforming them creatively through music and expression.

When to use it:

Processing a difficult or sad event.

Target Group & Group Size:

Youth aged 16–28; designed for around 30 participants.

Duration:

1 hour + half a day for composing music.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. **Setup:** Mark two distinct zones in a room with "YES / Agree" and "NO / Disagree" signs. Provide musical instruments (guitars, percussion, etc.).
2. **The Debate Jam:** The facilitator asks a series of reflection questions regarding their experience during the pandemic (e.g., "Did you feel vulnerable?", "Did you show solidarity to someone at that time?").
3. **Movement & Music:** Participants move to the side of the room corresponding to their answer. Each group then takes turns trying to explain their perspective or change the other side's mind by playing instruments and singing an extemporaneous, improvised song.
4. **Harvest:** Use the themes and emotions uncovered during the debate as the foundation for a subsequent songwriting and reflection session.

MIND DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

Practical activities for mindfulness, inclusion, non-judgment, and diversity

This section presents four activities implemented by MIND project partners during dissemination. Each activity translates one or more MIND principles into a practical experience that can be adapted for youth clubs, schools, libraries, summer camps, community spaces, and informal gatherings.

The activities are intentionally varied. Some use movement and teamwork, while others invite quiet reflection, creative expression, or gentle conversation. They can be used as complete sessions or as individual exercises within a longer programme.

ACTIVITY #1: THE MOSAIC OF ATHENA

Age group: 6–15 years

Group size: Approximately 20–40 participants

Time: 60–75 minutes

Setting: Outdoor space or large indoor area

Main MIND links: Inclusion, diversity, mindfulness, non-judgment, teamwork

Why to use it:

The Mosaic of Athena is an energetic, screen-free team game in which participants memorise and recreate a colourful image. The activity combines movement, concentration, communication, and creativity. Its main learning value comes from the way participants must work across age groups and abilities: the fastest or oldest participants cannot succeed alone, and every team member contributes to the final result.

The game also creates opportunities to practise patience and non-judgment. The image is intentionally complex, so mistakes are likely. Participants learn that blaming someone does not improve the result; listening, encouraging one another, and trying again are more effective.

Materials

- One large, highly detailed coloured master image of Athena or another meaningful figure.
- Four blank copies of the same image.
- Four sets of crayons, markers, or coloured pencils.
- Cones, chairs, or other markers for four team bases.
- One clearly marked viewing station.
- Optional: a timer or whistle.

No smartphones, cameras, or digital devices are used during the activity.

Preparation:

- Place the master image at a viewing station some distance from the team bases. Put one blank template and one set of colouring materials at each base. Make sure the route between the bases and the viewing station is safe and accessible.
- Divide participants into mixed teams. Aim for each team to include different ages, confidence levels, and abilities. Explain that the activity is not only about finishing quickly. Teams will also be observed for cooperation, encouragement, fair participation, and inclusion.

Steps

1. Introduce the challenge. Explain that teams must recreate the master image without carrying paper, taking photographs, or using phones. Participants may only use their memory and communication skills.
2. Create mixed teams. Divide the group into four teams, making an effort to mix ages and backgrounds. Explain that every person must take a turn as a runner.
3. Explain the relay. One participant from each team runs or walks to the viewing station, studies one part of the image, and returns to describe what they saw. The team then adds that information to its own template.
4. Rotate participants. After each turn, the next team member travels to the viewing station. Encourage teams to organise themselves, but do not allow one person to take over the whole task.

5. Support mindful teamwork. At the base, participants focus on colouring and listening. Remind them to ask questions respectfully, accept that memories may be incomplete, and avoid blaming others when information is misunderstood.
6. Complete the mosaic. Continue until a team finishes its template or the agreed time ends. The final result should be compared with the original image.
7. Evaluate the result. Consider accuracy, but also the quality of cooperation. A team that finishes first is not automatically the winner if some members were excluded or not given a chance to participate.
8. Close with a group reflection. Bring everyone together and invite them to share what they noticed about teamwork, focus, age differences, and supporting one another.

Reflection questions

- What helped your team work well together?
- How did your team include younger or less confident participants?
- What happened when someone made a mistake?
- Was it easier to remember the image alone or to communicate it to others?
- What did you notice when you had to work without phones or internet?
- What was more important: speed, accuracy, or cooperation?

Facilitator tips

- Use walking instead of running if the space or group requires it.
- Give younger participants meaningful roles, such as choosing colours, remembering shapes, or checking details.
- Watch for dominant participants who interrupt or take over. Invite quieter participants to lead a turn.
- Avoid presenting mistakes as failures. Ask, “What information do we have, and what can we try next?”
- If the group is large, appoint one facilitator or assistant per team..

- Do not make the activity competitive if competition could exclude participants. Teams can also work toward a shared goal of recreating the image together.

Implementation example

The activity was implemented at a summer camp in Rapšach, Czech Republic, on 20 July 2026, with 40 children aged 6–15. The mixed-age format allowed participants to practise cooperation between older and younger children while remaining physically active and fully offline.



ACTIVITY #2: WHEEL OF LIFE AREAS

Age group: Older adolescents and adults;
adaptable for younger participants

Group size: 4–12 participants

Time: 45–75 minutes

Setting: Calm indoor or outdoor space

Main MIND links: Mindfulness, self-awareness,
emotional balance, non-judgment

Why to use it:

The Wheel of Life Areas helps participants pause and look at different parts of their current life. Instead of focusing only on problems, the activity invites a balanced view: What is going well? What needs attention? What kind of support or small change might be helpful?

The exercise is not a test and does not measure whether someone has a “good” or “bad” life. It is a personal snapshot. Participants are encouraged to observe their situation without judging themselves and to choose one realistic next step.

Possible life areas (adapt categories to group):

- Physical health and energy.
- Mental and emotional well-being.
- Family and close relationships.
- Friendship and social connection.
- Study, work, or volunteering.
- Rest and sleep.
- Creativity and play.
- Nature and environment.
- Personal growth.
- Meaning, values, or purpose.
- Finances or practical security.
- Digital habits and screen time.

Materials

- Paper with a circle divided into sections, or blank paper and pens.
- Coloured pencils or markers.
- Optional: cushions, calm music, or tea.

Preparation

- Create a calm atmosphere. Explain that participants will not be required to show their wheel or reveal private information. The aim is personal reflection, not comparison.

If the activity is part of a longer session, begin with a short breathing practice, gentle stretching, or a quiet body-awareness exercise. This gives participants time to arrive in the space before reflecting.

Steps

1. **Introduce the wheel.** Explain that each section represents an area of life. Participants can use the suggested categories or create their own.
2. **Choose the areas.** Invite participants to select between six and ten areas that are meaningful to them. Make clear that some areas may be more important in their current situation than others.
3. **Rate each area.** Ask participants to mark how satisfied, supported, or balanced they currently feel in each area on a scale from 1 to 10. The scale is personal; there are no correct answers.
4. **Create the wheel.** Participants connect the marks to create a shape showing their current balance. They may use colours, symbols, or words instead of numbers if that feels more comfortable.

1. **Observe without judgment.** Invite participants to look at the wheel quietly. Ask them to notice what stands out, without labelling the wheel as successful or unsuccessful.
2. **Identify resources.** Participants choose one area that already gives them strength and one area where a small amount of support or attention could help.
3. **Choose one next step.** Each person writes one realistic action for the following week. The step should be specific and manageable, such as contacting a friend, taking a short walk, reducing one unnecessary commitment, or scheduling time for rest.
4. **Share by choice.** Participants may share their observations in pairs or in the full group. They can also simply share the next step without explaining the whole wheel.
5. **Close the activity.** Invite everyone to take one slow breath and name one quality they want to bring into the coming week, such as patience, courage, balance, or self-kindness.

Reflection questions

- Which area is asking for more attention, which one gives you energy or support??
- Did anything surprise you while completing the wheel?
- What happens when you look at your situation with curiosity rather than criticism?
- What is one small step that feels realistic this week?
- Who or what could support you in taking that step?

Facilitator tips

- Do not ask participants to justify their scores.
- Avoid suggesting that the wheel must become perfectly balanced. Different life periods require different priorities.
- Encourage small actions rather than ambitious plans.
- Be mindful that topics such as finances, family, health, or identity may be sensitive.
- Offer alternative ways to participate, such as using images, colours, or symbols.
- If someone identifies a serious concern, listen calmly and follow the organisation's safeguarding or referral procedures.

Optional opening practice

Invite participants to stand or sit comfortably. Ask them to notice three points of contact between their body and the ground or chair. Then guide three slow breaths and invite them to notice their current energy without trying to change it.

Implementation example

The activity was planned for a small group in Zagreb, Croatia, with approximately fifteen participants. It was organized as an open air event called MINDful picnic.

The informal garden setting supported relaxed conversation and allowed participants to stay afterwards to share their experiences.



ACTIVITY #3: METIME CARDS AND MINDFULNESS REFLECTION

Age group: Older adolescents and adults

Group size: 4–20 participants

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Setting: Outdoor route followed by a quiet indoor or outdoor space

Main MIND links: Mindfulness, self-care, self-awareness, non-judgment, personal empowerment

Why use this activity?

Young people and youth workers often notice what they lack more easily than what they already possess. This activity creates space to recognise personal strengths, skills, experiences, and supportive resources.

It begins with a mindful walk and continues with reflection using MeTime cards or any set of strength-based cards.

The purpose is not to rank competences or create a perfect self-care plan. Instead, participants practise noticing what helps them cope, connect, recover, and take care of their well-being. The activity ends with one practical step that can be tried during the following week.

Materials

- MeTime cards or cards with words such as patience, humour, creativity, courage, listening, flexibility, curiosity, rest, movement, connection, and asking for help.
- Paper and pens.
- Optional: bubbles for a playful sensory focus during the walk.
- A timer.
- A quiet walking route and a comfortable reflection space.

Preparation

Choose a safe route that allows participants to walk slowly without needing to navigate traffic or other hazards. Place the cards in the reflection area. Explain that participants may choose cards that represent qualities they already have, qualities they use sometimes, or qualities they would like to develop.

Steps

1. **Arrive in the space.** Invite participants to stand quietly for a moment and notice their breathing, posture, and surroundings.
2. **Introduce the mindful walk.** Explain that the group will walk in silence for part of the route. Participants can notice colours, sounds, textures, smells, temperature, movement, and thoughts.
3. **Walk slowly and safely.** Encourage participants to keep a comfortable distance and move at a pace that allows observation. The aim is not exercise or conversation; it is presence.
4. **Add a sensory focus.** If appropriate, offer bubbles as a playful invitation to notice shape, movement, light, and disappearance. Participants can also simply observe without using them.

1. **Return to the reflection area.** Give participants a few quiet minutes to settle. Ask them to notice whether anything feels different from the beginning of the activity.
2. **Explore the cards.** Spread the MeTime cards out. Invite participants to choose three to five cards that represent strengths, experiences, skills, or resources that support their well-being.
3. **Reflect individually.** Participants write or think about why each card was chosen. They can describe a situation in which that quality helped them.
4. **Share in pairs or small groups.** Participants explain one or two choices to others. Listeners practise asking curious questions rather than giving advice.
5. **Choose one competence to develop.** Each participant selects one card connected to a quality they would like to strengthen.
6. **Create a one-week action.** Participants complete the sentence: “During the next week, I will practise this quality by...” The action should be concrete and realistic.
7. **Close with a commitment.** Invite participants to share their action if they wish. Finish with a brief appreciation of the group’s attention and participation.

Reflection questions

- What did you notice during the walk that you might usually overlook?
- Which card was easiest to choose? Which was more difficult?
- What personal quality has helped you through a difficult situation?
- Which resources do you already have around you?
- What is one quality you would like to strengthen?
- What small action could help you practise it this week?

Facilitator tips

- Offer a silent or low-stimulation alternative for participants who find group walking uncomfortable.
- Do not interpret a participant's card choice for them. Ask what the card means in their experience.
- Make clear that asking for help can also be a strength.
- Avoid turning the activity into a performance of positivity. Participants may choose cards connected to rest, boundaries, grief, uncertainty, or vulnerability.

- If cards are not available, write qualities on paper slips or invite participants to create their own.
- Keep the final action achievable. A small action repeated is more useful than an impressive plan that cannot be maintained.

Implementation example

The German national team implemented the activity in Bremen, Germany, in late July 2026. The session followed the structure of a mindful walk, individual MeTime card selection, shared reflection, and the creation of a practical well-being action for the following week.



ACTIVITY #4: CREATIVE ART AND SELF- DISCOVERY WORKSHOP

Age group: 7–12 years

Group size: 4–15 participants

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Setting: Library, classroom, youth centre, or creative workshop space

Main MIND links: Mindfulness, emotional awareness, self-expression, non-judgment, creativity

Why use this activity?

Children do not always have the words to explain how they feel. Creative work can provide another language. This workshop uses colours, animals, shapes, and simple book-making to help children identify and express emotions in a playful, non-judgmental way.

The activity does not ask children to draw realistically or produce a “good” artwork. The focus is on exploration. Children are invited to notice emotions, give them form, and discover that feelings can change, move, and coexist.

Materials

- A4 paper, one sheet per participant.
- Coloured pencils, crayons, markers, or paint.
- Child-friendly books for inspiration.
- Optional: examples of colours, animals, and shapes associated with different emotions.
- A large table or floor space.
- Optional: calm background music.

Preparation

Arrange the room so children can move comfortably and access materials independently. Display a selection of children's books or images that can inspire colours, animals, and shapes. Keep the atmosphere relaxed and avoid displaying a model that children might feel they need to copy.

Steps

1. **Welcome the group.** Explain that the workshop is about exploring emotions through art. There is no right or wrong way to draw.

1. **Brainstorm emotions.** Ask children to name emotions they know. Include familiar examples such as joy, anger, sadness, fear, calmness, love, excitement, boredom, and surprise. Remind them that people may experience the same emotion differently.
2. **Connect emotions with images.** Invite children to suggest colours, animals, sounds, movements, or shapes that could represent different emotions. Emphasise that these associations are personal; no colour belongs to only one emotion.
3. **Create a mindful scribble.** Give each child an unfolded A4 sheet. Ask them to make a random scribble on one side, slowly and without planning what it will become. They can vary the pressure, speed, and direction of the line.
4. **Make the zine.** Fold the paper into an eight-page mini-book or use a simple fold-and-cut method demonstrated by the facilitator. Each page can represent one emotion or one part of an emotional journey.
5. **Illustrate the emotions.** Children use colours, shapes, animals, and figures to represent their chosen emotions. They may draw realistic pictures, abstract designs, or a mixture of both.

1. **Transform the scribble.** Return to the original random shape. Invite children to look at it with curiosity and add legs, arms, a head, or other details to turn it into a playful character.
2. **Colour freely.** Encourage children to fill the spaces in whatever way feels interesting. Remind them that the aim is discovery, not perfection.
3. **Create a closing image or message.** Children can add a final page showing how emotions move or change. A possible message is: “Emotions flow through us.”
4. **Share by choice.** Children may show one page, explain one colour or animal, or simply keep their artwork private.
5. **Close the session.** Invite the group to notice one emotion they are leaving with and one thing they enjoyed about the creative process.

Reflection questions

- Use language appropriate to the age group:
- Which emotion was easiest to draw?
- Which colour or animal did you choose, and why?
- Did your idea change while you were drawing?
- What happened when you stopped trying to make the picture perfect?
- Can two different emotions appear together?
- What can help when a difficult emotion visits us?

Facilitator tips

- Avoid asking, “What is this picture supposed to be?” Ask instead, “Would you like to tell me about it?”
- Do not assign meanings to children’s drawings.
- Offer a wide range of materials and allow children to work in different ways.
- Include movement breaks, especially with younger children.
- Use simple emotional language and accept that some children may prefer to talk about colours or characters rather than feelings directly.

Reflection questions

- Use language appropriate to the age group:
- Which emotion was easiest to draw?
- Which colour or animal did you choose, and why?
- Did your idea change while you were drawing?
- What happened when you stopped trying to make the picture perfect?
- Can two different emotions appear together?
- What can help when a difficult emotion visits us?

Facilitator tips

- Avoid asking, “What is this picture supposed to be?” Ask instead, “Would you like to tell me about it?”
- Do not assign meanings to children’s drawings.
- Offer a wide range of materials and allow children to work in different ways.
- Include movement breaks, especially with younger children.
- Use simple emotional language and accept that some children may prefer to talk about colours or characters rather than feelings directly.

- Never require a child to share personal experiences behind an artwork.
- If a child expresses serious distress, respond calmly and follow the organisation's safeguarding procedures.
- During hot weather or in a small group, shorten the introduction and allow more time for independent creation.

Implementation example

The workshop was held in a welcoming library environment for children aged 7–12. A smaller group of six participated during a heatwave, which allowed for calm individual support. The library expressed interest in hosting further workshops on emotions, creativity, and self-discovery.



ADAPTING THE ACTIVITIES

These four activities can be adapted to different ages, group sizes, abilities, and cultural contexts. The most important principle is to preserve the purpose of the activity while changing its format where necessary.

- Replace running with walking, rolling, or a team relay adapted for different mobility needs.
- Offer drawing, writing, speaking, movement, or silent participation as alternatives.
- Use local stories, symbols, animals, and images rather than assuming one cultural reference will speak to everyone.
- Keep reflection voluntary and avoid pressure to disclose personal experiences.
- Use pairs or small groups when full-group sharing feels too exposed.
- Build in pauses, water breaks, and sensory choices.
- End with a clear transition so participants leave feeling grounded rather than emotionally open without support.

Across all four activities, the facilitator's role is not to produce a perfect outcome. It is to create the conditions for attention, participation, curiosity, and respectful connection. That is where the MIND principles become visible in practice.



4 CHAPTER

GUIDED MEDITATIONS,
MIND PODCAST
SERIES

WELCOME - WE HOPE YOU ARE ALL EARS

Welcome to the Podcasts section of the MIND Booklet - a dynamic audio library designed to equip youth workers with practical, evidence-based tools rooted in Mindfulness, Inclusion, Non-judgment, and Diversity (MIND). These podcasts address pressing mental health challenges faced by European youth, particularly in rural and under-resourced areas, offering guided meditations, expert insights, personal testimonies, and innovative methods like music therapy for emotional resilience.

This collection features 4-5 podcast series, each with 5 episodes (approx. 5-30 minutes).

Key themes include:

Podcast #1: Eva and Jana introduce the Erasmus+ MIND project, its vision, partners, and key activities - from the training in the Czech Republic to the booklet, podcast library, and retreat in Hungary.

Podcasts #2: Guided Meditations – Short, accessible guided meditations for youth workers and young people. Use them in groups or alone to build presence, calm, and self-awareness—rooted in the MIND values.

Podcasts #3: Youth Work and Mental Health – Podcasts by and for youth workers, exploring burnout, boundaries, resilience, and the realities of the profession.

Podcasts #4: Personal Stories – Real voices sharing honest experiences with depression, anxiety, illness, migration, and more. These stories remind us we're not alone—and offer hope and connection.

Recordings are accessible via platforms like Spreaker, YouTube, or the project website, these resources promote sustainability through Erasmus+ sharing, fostering European cooperation and long-term competences. Use them in sessions for non-formal learning, enhancing inclusion and mental well-being - start listening today to empower youth as active citizens.

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION TO MIND WITH EVA AND JANA

Eva and Jana introduce the Erasmus+ MIND project, its vision, partners, and key activities - from the training in the Czech Republic to the booklet, podcast library, and retreat in Hungary.

GUIDED MEDITATIONS

Easy tools for youth workers to build mindfulness in youth groups

Picture a group of young people in a rural youth center, stressed from school, family, or just life. This podcast gives you ready-to-use guided meditations to help them pause and recharge.

In the next podcast you will be able to explore: what meditation is, its science-backed benefits for stress and focus, and what it can't fix (no quick fixes, but real support).

Then the real magic - practical exercises. These are flexible for workshops, one-on-ones, or self-use. Evidence-based, inclusive, and non-judgmental — ideal for under-resourced settings where youth need simple, sustainable mental health tools.

We hope you enjoy these podcasts and find calm in the practice!

GUIDED MEDITATIONS



1. WHAT IS MEDITATION? WITH SOFIYA

Sofiya explains meditation as learning to be present, not “thinking about nothing,” and outlines its benefits and limits for mental health. She also shares simple tips for turning meditation into a sustainable daily habit.

GUIDED MEDITATIONS



2. YOGA NIDRA (DEEP RELAXATION MEDITATION)

Yoga Nidra is a guided practice for deep relaxation while the mind stays awake, shifting attention inward to breath, sensations, and visualization. It supports relaxation, self-awareness, and inner transformation.

GUIDED MEDITATIONS



3. THETAHEALING®-STYLE GUIDED VISUALIZATION

This meditation blends guided visualization with energy-based imagery and affirmations to support relaxation, emotional regulation, and positive thinking.

GUIDED MEDITATIONS



4. MEDITATION FOR OVERTHINKING

This meditation helps shift attention to the body, activate the parasympathetic nervous system, and create inner spaciousness to reduce mental noise.

GUIDED MEDITATIONS



5. MIND GUIDED MEDITATION

This guided meditation cultivates mindfulness while exploring the MIND values—Mindfulness, Inclusion, Non-judgment, and Diversity—through breath, body awareness, and reflection on compassion and shared humanity.

YOUTH WORK AND MENTAL HEALTH

Youth workers hold space for young people's mental health—but who holds space for them?

This podcast series turns the lens onto youth workers themselves, exploring how mindfulness, inclusion, non-judgment, and diversity show up in their daily work and inner lives.

In these episodes, you'll hear how volunteering on a permaculture farm becomes a path to healing, and how youth workers navigate pressure, burnout, and the struggle for professional recognition. Guests share honest reflections on boundaries, stress, funding insecurity, and the emotional weight of caring for others with limited support.

These stories link theory to practice: mindful self-care, inclusive teams, and non-judgmental peer support aren't extras - they're essentials for sustainable youth work.

We hope you enjoy these podcasts and feel seen in your vital role!

YOUTH WORK AND MENTAL HEALTH



1. PERMACULTURE, VOLUNTEERING, AND MENTAL HEALTH WITH ATI (34 MIN)

Ati from Hungary introduces a permaculture farm in Italy where European Solidarity Corps volunteers live and work. The episode explores how routine, discipline, community, and connection to nature support young people dealing with addiction, depression, and other mental health challenges.

YOUTH WORK AND MENTAL HEALTH



2. YOUTH WORK AND ITS STRUGGLES WITH VINCENZO (65 MIN)

Vincenzo shares his journey of burnout, manipulation, and rebuilding in youth work, highlighting the importance of therapy, boundaries, and self-care. His story is a powerful reminder of resilience and the need to balance organisational demands with personal well-being.

YOUTH WORK AND MENTAL HEALTH



[Click to open the external podcast link](#)

3. YOUTH WORKERS ON MENTAL HEALTH WITH APOSTOLIS, RUI AND MARIA (33 MIN)

Three youth workers share their perspectives on the profession: balancing high expectations, managing stress and relationships, setting boundaries, and coping with overwhelm and burnout. They also discuss the financial instability of project-based funding and the struggle for youth work to be recognised as a profession.

PERSONAL STORIES

This podcast series brings real voices to the MIND pillars—Mindfulness, Inclusion, Non-judgment, and Diversity—through honest personal stories from across Europe.

In these episodes, you'll hear how theory meets life: how mindfulness helps in tough moments, how stigma and exclusion shape mental health, and how non-judgmental listening creates space for healing. Guests share experiences with depression, cancer, toxic relationships, long COVID, migration, anxiety, antidepressants, and spirituality.

These stories are peer learning in action. They remind listeners they're not alone, offer practical coping ideas, and give youth workers real material for workshops, discussions, or reflection. Inclusive, evidence-informed, and rooted in lived experience—ideal for under-resourced settings where connection matters most.

We hope you enjoy these podcasts and feel less alone in your journey!

PERSONAL STORIES



1. SEVERE DEPRESSION STORY WITH ROSSANA (68 MIN)

Rossana from Italy shares her journey with severe depression from adolescence to adulthood, including late diagnosis, suicide attempts, psychotherapy, medication, and finding new meaning. She highlights the importance of asking for help and critiques misleading mental health content on social media.

PERSONAL STORIES



2. CANCER AND MENTAL HEALTH WITH FEDERICA (61 MIN)

Federica, 36, recounts her breast cancer diagnosis at 35, surgeries, chemo, radiotherapy, and induced menopause. She reflects on the mental health impact of a life-threatening illness, the role of her support network and humour, and how psychiatric support helped her cope.

PERSONAL STORIES



3. TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS AND PERSONAL BOUNDARIES WITH JASMINA (46 MIN)

Jasmina defines toxic relationships and shares how a 10-year friendship became manipulative and controlling. The episode explores red flags in friendships, the process of setting boundaries, and the strength needed to leave dysfunctional relationships.

PERSONAL STORIES



4. MIGRATION WITH SOROUR, SOFIYA, AND DARIIA (89 MIN)

Three young women from Iran and Ukraine share their migration stories: leaving home, starting over in a new culture, facing administrative and job-market barriers, and rebuilding their lives. They discuss adaptation, belonging, and the resilience that connects their different journeys.

PERSONAL STORIES



5. ANXIETY WITH ADÉL AND NOVELA (37 MIN)

Adél and Novela, both in their twenties, talk about their experiences with anxiety—one recently diagnosed, the other struggling since age 10. They describe triggers like school stress and unsafe environments, psychosomatic symptoms, and their mixed experiences with psychologists and coping strategies.

PERSONAL STORIES



6. ANTIDEPRESSANTS WITH NOVELA (20 MIN)

Novela discusses the stigma around antidepressants for depression, including myths about toxicity, shame, “easy ways out,” and personality change. The episode addresses how stigma blocks help-seeking and explores other ways to manage depression and challenge mental health misconceptions.

PERSONAL STORIES



7. LONG COVID WITH BENEDIKT (41 MIN)

Benedikt describes how long COVID transformed his life from active and social to living with fatigue, post-exertional malaise, headaches, and sleep problems. He reflects on medical uncertainty, different therapies, and the social and mental health impact of this invisible chronic illness.

PERSONAL STORIES



7. SPIRITUALITY AND MINDSET WITH TINA (22 MIN)

Tina, a psychology graduate from Kyrgyzstan, shares her understanding of spirituality as a lifelong path of building inner strength. She distinguishes spirituality from religion and explains how her core values - non-judgement, empathy, and friendship - shape her mindset and daily life.



5

C H A P T E R

NEXT STEPS

SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS

The MIND booklet has equipped you with practical, evidence-based tools to integrate Mindfulness, Inclusion, Non-judgment, and Diversity into your youth work. You now have methods to foster mental well-being, create inclusive spaces, and support young people facing anxiety, stress, or social exclusion.

Your possible next steps:

- **Apply one tool this week** — choose a mindfulness exercise or inclusion activity from the booklet and test it with your group.
- **Reflect and adapt** — after each session, note what worked, what didn't, and how young people responded.
- **Share locally** — run a short workshop for colleagues in your organisation to spread MIND practices.
- **Plan forward** — identify one mental health challenge in your community and design a small MIND-based intervention.

HOW TO CONNECT WITH PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

The MIND partnership spans four countries — Czechia, Croatia, Germany, and Hungary — united by a shared commitment to youth mental health and inclusion. Continuing these connections amplifies impact and opens doors for future collaboration.

Ways to stay connected:

- **Join the MIND network** — reach out to partner organisations (European Youth Centre Břeclav, Udruga Better Me, NaturKultur e.V., YOPA Hungary) to exchange ideas, co-create activities, or plan joint local events.
- **Use existing platforms** — connect via the European Youth Portal, EPALE, or SALTO-YOUTH to find partners with similar interests in mindfulness, mental health, or inclusion.
- **Attend relevant events** — look for Erasmus+ training courses, contact-making seminars, or youth worker exchanges focused on mental health and well-being.

ERASMUS+ PROJECT RESULTS PLATFORM LINK

All MIND project outputs — including this booklet, podcasts, guided meditations, and training materials — will be published on the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform. This ensures long-term visibility, accessibility, and sustainability across Europe.

Why it matters:

- **Open access** — anyone can download, adapt, and use MIND resources in their local context.
- **Erasmus+ visibility** — your contribution becomes part of the official EU project database, increasing reach and credibility.
- **Inspiration for others** — your work can spark new initiatives, partnerships, or adaptations in other countries.

Once the project concludes (November 2026), search for "MIND – Mindfulness, Inclusion, Non-Judgment & Diversity for Mental Health" or use the project number KA210-YOU-2C33B5A4 on the platform to access all materials.

Link: [Erasmus+ Project Results Platform](#)

By sharing openly, you multiply the impact of your work far beyond your local group — contributing to a Europe-wide movement for mindful, inclusive youth work.



**Strong networks turn
individual efforts into
collective change. Stay
curious, stay connected.**

-

Universal Truth

MIND CONSORTIUM

European Youth Centre Břeclav (CZ)

 www.eycb.eu

 info@eycb.eu

Udruga Better Me (HR)

 www.bettermecroatia.com

 info@bettermecroatia.com

NaturKultur e.V. (DE)

 www.naturkultur.eu

 info@naturkultur.eu

Európa Ifjúsága Egyesület - Youth of Europe Association (HU)

 europaifjusaga IG



Project Title: Mindfulness, Inclusion, Non-Judgment & Diversity for Mental Health

Project Acronym: MIND

Project Number: KA210-YOU-2C33B5A4

Duration: December 2025 – November 2026
All MIND project outputs are available on the

Erasmus+ Project Results Platform:

[🔗 erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects](https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects)
(Search: "MIND" or project number KA210-YOU-2C33B5A4)



Co-funded by
the European Union

Disclaimer: Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.