

CREATED BY PARTICIPANTS OF 'EMBRACE E+' TRAINING COURSE

2026

TOOLKIT FOR YOUTH WORKERS

SAFER SPACES & EVENTS

FOR YOUTH GROUPS



TOOLKIT

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ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

01 INTRODUCTION

This toolkit was developed by participants of the Embrace E+ training course. Its purpose is to support youth workers in creating safer environments where individuals can express themselves authentically, without fear of judgment.

It provides a range of practical and effective methods that youth workers can apply in their work and educational activities.



02 BEFORE CARE



Check the weather and environment – Consider the weather and the physical environment before the activity. Make sure participants have access to water, shade, warmth, appropriate clothing and any other resources they may need to feel comfortable and safe.

Make the daily schedule visible – Display the plan for the day in a clearly visible place. Include activities, breaks and important practical information. Choose one consistent place for updates, so that participants always know where to look for the information.

Make bathrooms inclusive – Consider making bathrooms gender-neutral to make the space more LGBTQIA+ inclusive. If the bathrooms of the location are gendered, consider covering the gendered signs with a sign saying 'Bathroom', or with drawings of what kind of facilities are available in that specific bathroom.



03 OPENING THE SPACE

Allow time to arrive – Give participants enough time to mentally and physically “arrive,” before starting an activity. Sometimes, a slower transition helps people feel more present and connected to the group.

Create an inclusive welcome – Create a non-judgemental and consent-based space. Explicitly communicate that people of different genders, religions, sexual orientations, nationalities, languages, neurotypes and backgrounds are welcome. You can open the space on the first day by preparing a printed text containing these acknowledge in the form of e.g. 10 sentences. Give everyone a copy and ask who wants to read the first sentence out loud, then invite the 9 people next to them to each read a sentence. If desired, the whole thing can be repeated afterwards. Everyone gets to keep the copy, and/or hang them on the wall too.

Welcome all feelings – Acknowledge that participants may arrive with different emotions. Speak up about all the different feeling and perspectives with an open welcoming attitude. Make space for all of these experiences.

You can start the session by saying „Welcome to everyone who is tired and everyone who feels energized. Welcome to everyone who is excited to be here and everyone who would rather be somewhere else for any reason. Welcome to everyone who feels very included in this group and everyone who is still searching to be included in it,,



03 OPENING THE SPACE

Create a group agreement – Share the group principles at the beginning. Place them in the middle of the circle and invite participants to add their own suggestions. Provide extra paper so everyone can contribute. The last principle could be: “Behave in such a way that we don't need to create new rules,,. It can also be a combination of group principles/rules (e.g. “Don’t enter space XY,,) and collective group agreements (e.g. rules for phone use), to honour fixed rules, but also to make sure that creating the group agreements is a genuine collective process.

If possible, make the agreement on the rules active and explicit – e.g. by raising hands, saying “yes,,, or signing names. Invite any doubts or concerns and give real weight to everyone’s consent. This will make it easier to uphold the rules collectively throughout the process.

Explore consent and boundaries – Discuss about consent and boundaries. Consider including more explanation about what consent means and all the domains it applies to (like talking with someone who is sitting in silence, supporting someone who feels emotional, or giving advice).

You can, for example, use the F.R.I.E.S. framework or the wheel of consent. As group, create a poster showing how to ask for and communicate consent in different situations and put it on a visible board for daily reminders.



03 OPENING THE SPACE

Create a clear approach to late arrivals – If people arrive late or the group starts sitting in a way that excludes some participants, be confident enough to say: “Let’s form a real circle, people..”. This helps create a sense of inclusion and shared presence. Also feel free to close a space after X minutes, so new people cannot come in anymore, as this can disrupt a group process.

Agree on non-verbal hand signals – (e.g. “Louder, please!,,, “I agree,,, “I appreciate your words!,,). Use them consistently throughout the session (without interrupting someone). Make hand signals visible and accessible. At the beginning, explain that you will write down all the hand signals and assign them a number. During the process, acknowledge them with a head gesture that you have seen them. This helps participants trust that their signals are being noticed and that they will have the opportunity to speak.

Examples:

- Agreement: Shake hands or click fingers.
- Speak louder: Move both hands up and down with palms facing upwards.
- Clarification: Make an “L, shape with your index finger and thumb to indicate a language difficulty or the need for clarification.
- Speaking order: Raise one finger when you want to speak. Raise two fingers if you are second in line, three if you are third and so on. You can decide between v1 (moving ‘spots’ after someone has spoken) or v2 (just keep your number to avoid confusion).



03 OPENING THE SPACE

Include pronouns – Invite participants (for example during an introduction circle) to share the pronouns they use. Agree on a respectful approach for situations where someone's pronouns are not remembered. For example, the group can agree to use gender-neutral they/them pronouns rather than making assumptions. This is also a great way to practice using gender-neutral pronouns.

Introduce the space – Give participants a short orientation at the beginning. Show them where to find essential facilities such as toilets, exits, drinking water and any other relevant areas.

Share responsibility for group agreements – Decide in advance how the group will collectively take responsibility for its agreements. Consider distributing roles where appropriate (e.g. by inviting participants to act as „timekeepers“ that make sure everyone is on time and time is respected). This way, responsibility is shared across the group, strengthening a sense of agency, fosters mutual care and increases predictability.





04 HOLDING THE SPACE

Thorough explanations – Explain every activity or invitation clearly before asking participants to take part. Describe what will happen, what the boundaries are and what choices participants have. Leave enough time for questions and check whether everyone understands the invitation before starting.

Create space for everyone to participate – Use inclusive invitations throughout the session and make space for different perspectives and ways of participating. For example: “The diversity within our group brings unique perspectives and can enrich everyone’s experience...,,



04 HOLDING THE SPACE

Make participation an invitation – Do not force participation. Present participants an invitation and respect each person's right to choose, whether and how they want to participate.

Offer different ways of participating – Provide several ways of engaging with an activity. For example, allow participants pure observation, allow them not to communicate with others.

Be transparent as a facilitator – If you don't know something, say so. If you made a mistake, say so. Learning is a vulnerable space for all of us. Being open about what you don't know can help create a more non-hierarchical and trusting environment.

Invite and facilitate connection and getting to know one another – Starting with dyads and smaller groups can create a safer path to connection for larger group work later in the process.

Allow space for integrative silence and the organic tempo – Leave room for silence between activities and invitations whenever the schedule allows. Do not feel the need to fill every quiet moment. Allow participants time to process their experiences, reflect and move between activities at their own pace.

Use a "Sharing Circle,, ritual – Create a regular moment where participants can share what feels alive within them: Gratitude, struggles, personal experience, etc. Make sharing voluntary and allow participants to pass if they do not want to speak.



05 CLOSING THE SPACE

Practise self-gratitude – Include an opportunity for participants to acknowledge themselves at the end of the programme or activity. For example, after an activity such as “Touch the shoulder of somebody who...”, invite participants to recall moments they inspired themselves/were grateful for themselves and touch their own shoulders with hands of the opposite arms (creating a gesture of self-hugging).

Ask participants to share “What I take with me,, – Invite participants to briefly reflect on what they are taking away from the experience. This can be shared in one word, one sentence, or a short phrase. Participants can also choose to pass. Remind them that if they don’t want to share with the group, they can write (or draw) it down on a piece of paper instead, so they can keep it as a personal takeaway.

Create space for reflection and feedback – Use pairs or small groups to give participants space to reflect on their experience. Invite them to share thoughts, feelings, discoveries or questions that emerged during the process.



06 AFTERCARE

Offer 1 on 1 time – Set a time and place where participants can reach you in case they need/want to share something that needs attention in private. Give regular reminders that everyone can come to you if they need anything to feel safe. Also display the information on the information board.

Ask for feedback – Ask for feedback and give the option to do so one on one, in case a person is not comfortable sharing in front of the entire group. Consider using an anonymous survey so you keep on improving and take people's opinions into consideration.





07 ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This is a great first step and there are more acknowledgements to be made!

But even if it's just the beginning,
it opens the door to an important conversation!



We wish you the best and a lot of luck on this journey!

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