



# MINDFUL PATHWAYS TO MENTAL HEALTH FOR YOUTH- ZENG

MindBalance Curriculum

PROJECT NUMBER: 2024-3-FR02-KA210-YOU-000286699

Well-being Lab, Avec Nous, and  
Equaline  
2025 July



AVEC  
NOUS



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. The views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or of the Agence Erasmus+ France Jeunesse & Sport (Agence du Service Civique). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



# INTRODUCTION

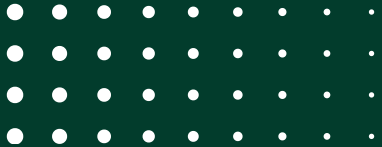
## About the project

Mindful Pathways to Mental Health for Youth (ZenG) is an Erasmus+ Small-Scale Partnership (KA210-YOU) dedicated to addressing the growing mental health challenges faced by young people across Europe. The project equips youth professionals, educators, and trainers with practical mindfulness and emotional intelligence tools to better support young people in managing stress, anxiety, and emotional regulation.

By combining research-based needs analysis, innovative non-formal education methods, and the development of digital and face-to-face training resources, ZenG strengthens the capacity of youth workers and organizations to create inclusive and supportive environments. The project brings together partners from France, Sweden, and Greece, who work jointly to promote mental well-being, resilience, and social inclusion among youth, particularly those from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds.

Through structured training, curriculum development, and wide dissemination, ZenG contributes to long-term improvements in youth mental health and fosters resilient, mindful communities across Europe.





# CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK & GUIDELINES FOR USE

## 1. About the curriculum

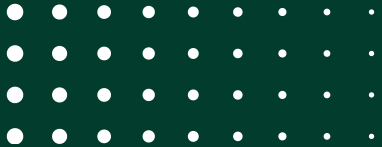
The MindBalance Curriculum provides youth professionals, educators, and trainers with the knowledge and skills necessary to guide young people in overcoming challenges such as stress, anxiety, and emotional regulation. By developing and implementing a comprehensive set of non-formal learning modules, the curriculum directly supports the project's aim of equipping practitioners with practical tools to strengthen mental health and well-being.

By building the capacities of youth workers, the curriculum contributes to the creation of supportive and inclusive environments where young people can thrive. The modules are flexible, evidence-based, and adaptable to diverse and unconventional contexts, ensuring that the project's impact reaches a wide range of communities. This allows youth professionals to address the unique mental health needs of young people from different backgrounds, including those who are marginalized or vulnerable.

Grounded in the project's Research and Needs Analysis, the curriculum responds to widespread experiences of chronic stress, anxiety, emotional overload, and lack of preventive support among young people. Rather than adopting a clinical or therapeutic approach, MindBalance focuses on prevention, emotional regulation, self-awareness, and community-based support. The development of these non-formal educational materials has led to a comprehensive and practical set of tools designed for both young people and the professionals who support them. Through continuous testing and refinement, the curriculum ensures that its methods remain effective, evidence-based, and responsive to real needs.

One of the key outcomes is the empowerment of youth professionals, who gain new skills and practical strategies they can immediately apply in their work. These professionals leave the program better prepared to create inclusive spaces and to provide meaningful mental health support. In the long term, this curriculum strengthens emotional intelligence and resilience, helping improve mental health outcomes for young people across diverse communities.





## 2. Target group

The primary target group of the MindBalance Curriculum is:

- Youth workers and youth professionals
- Educators, trainers, facilitators, and volunteers
- Staff and practitioners working with young people in non-formal or informal settings

The curriculum is suitable for use in:

- Youth centres and youth organisations
- NGOs and civil society initiatives
- Schools and universities (non-formal activities)
- Community spaces and informal learning environments
- Blended or low-threshold digital contexts

Indirectly, the curriculum benefits young people aged 18–30, particularly those experiencing stress, anxiety, emotional difficulties, or barriers to access and inclusion.

## 3. Pedagogical Approach

The MindBalance Curriculum is grounded in non-formal education (NFE) methodologies. Learning is understood as an active, participatory, and experiential process rather than a transmission of expert knowledge.





### **Key pedagogical principles include:**

- Learning by doing through practical exercises and workshops
- Experiential learning, including body-based and reflective practices
- Peer-to-peer exchange and shared reflection
- Safe and voluntary participation, allowing participants to engage at their own pace
- Reflection and dialogue as core learning tools

The curriculum avoids clinical language, diagnosis, or therapy-oriented approaches. Youth professionals are positioned as supportive facilitators, not mental health practitioners.

## **4. Evidence-Based Foundation**

The curriculum is informed by the ZenG project's Research and Needs Analysis, with the first version primarily grounded in national research findings from Sweden. Key insights shaping the curriculum include:

- The prevalence of chronic stress and anxiety rather than short-term distress
- Strong links between mental health challenges and systemic pressures, such as academic demands, employment insecurity, financial stress, and social expectations
- Significant barriers to accessing formal mental health support, especially for marginalized groups
- The effectiveness of preventive, body-based, and community-oriented practices

Research findings are translated into practical learning objectives, exercises, and facilitation guidance, ensuring relevance without reproducing the research itself.





## 5. Curriculum Structure

The MindBalance Curriculum consists of three interconnected modules, forming a clear learning pathway from individual awareness to collective support.

### Module 1 – Inwards: Mindfulness & Self-Awareness

Focuses on:

- Awareness of stress and emotional states
- Mindfulness as an everyday, accessible practice
- Nervous system regulation and grounding
- Developing self-awareness as a foundation for wellbeing

### Module 2 – From Inwards to Outwards: Building Emotional Intelligence & Resilience

Focuses on:

- Emotional awareness and emotional regulation
- Understanding and working with stress and anxiety
- Developing coping strategies and resilience
- Strengthening self-trust and emotional competence

### Module 3 – Community: Creating Inclusive & Supportive Spaces

Focuses on:

- Belonging, inclusion, and psychological safety
- Creating supportive group environments
- Peer support and community-based approaches
- Working effectively with marginalized or vulnerable young people

Each module is designed to be stand-alone, while also contributing to a coherent overall learning journey.

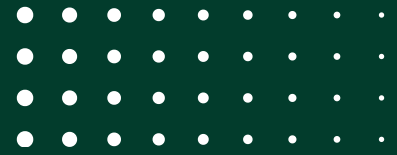
## 6. Module Design Principles

To ensure consistency and feasibility across partners, all modules follow a shared design logic:

- Concise theory: short, accessible, practice-oriented explanations
- Practical focus: 2–3 workshops per module
- Reflection: light reflection workbooks with journaling prompts and self-assessment tools
- Adaptability: activities suitable for diverse and unconventional settings
- Accessibility: low-threshold participation and flexible delivery

The emphasis is on quality and usability rather than volume.





## 7. Inclusivity, Accessibility, and Adaptation

Inclusivity is a core principle of the MindBalance Curriculum. Modules are designed to be adaptable to diverse cultural, social, and personal contexts.

Facilitators are encouraged to:

- Use clear, non-clinical, and inclusive language
- Offer alternatives to activities when needed (e.g. eyes open/closed, movement/sitting)
- Respect different comfort levels with sharing and reflection
- Be attentive to the needs of marginalized, migrant, neurodivergent, or vulnerable participants

Each module includes Accessibility & Adaptation Tips to support inclusive facilitation in real-life youth work settings.

## 8. Guidelines for Facilitators

When using the MindBalance Curriculum, facilitators should:

- Treat participation as voluntary, never forced
- Create a safe and non-judgmental environment
- Emphasise that the activities are not therapy
- Encourage curiosity rather than performance or “doing it right”
- Be transparent about boundaries and referral pathways when deeper support is needed

Facilitators are encouraged to adapt language, timing, and activities to suit their specific context and group.

## 9. Use and Adaptation of the Curriculum

The MindBalance Curriculum is designed to be:

- Delivered as a full programme or in selected modules
- Integrated into existing youth work activities
- Adapted to different time frames and settings
- Updated as new research results from partner countries become available

The modular structure supports flexibility, scalability, and sustainability, while maintaining a shared pedagogical foundation across partners.



## 10. Expected Outcomes

Through the MindBalance Curriculum, youth professionals are expected to:

- Strengthen their confidence and competence in supporting youth mental wellbeing
- Gain practical mindfulness and emotional intelligence tools
- Enhance their ability to create inclusive and supportive spaces
- Contribute to preventive, human-centred approaches to youth mental health

Ultimately, the curriculum aims to empower youth professionals to support young people in managing stress, anxiety, and emotional challenges in ways that are accessible, inclusive, and sustainable.





# MODULE 1 – INWARDS: MINDFULNESS & SELF- AWARENESS

**Author: Well-being Lab**

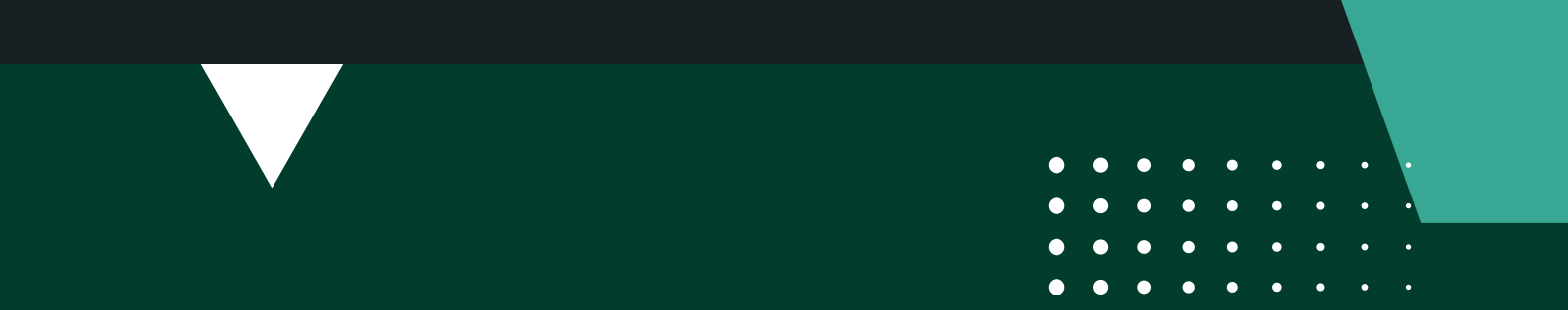
## **1. Module Overview**

Module 1 focuses on mindfulness and self-awareness as foundational skills for mental wellbeing. Research findings highlight that many young people experience ongoing stress, emotional overload, and difficulty recognising their internal states. These challenges often remain unaddressed due to limited access to preventive support and low-threshold tools.

This module supports youth professionals in understanding and introducing accessible, everyday mindfulness practices that help young people reconnect with their bodies, emotions, and present-moment awareness.

The module emphasises mindfulness as a preventive, non-clinical tool, suitable for non-formal and diverse youth work settings. It also encourages practitioners to reflect on their own wellbeing and regulation, recognising that self-awareness is a prerequisite for supportive and ethical youth work.





## 2. Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Understand mindfulness as a practical tool for stress awareness and regulation
- Recognise signs of stress and emotional overload in themselves and young people
- Apply simple mindfulness and grounding exercises in non-formal settings
- Support young people in developing basic self-awareness skills
- Reflect on their own wellbeing and role as facilitators

## 3. Theoretical Background

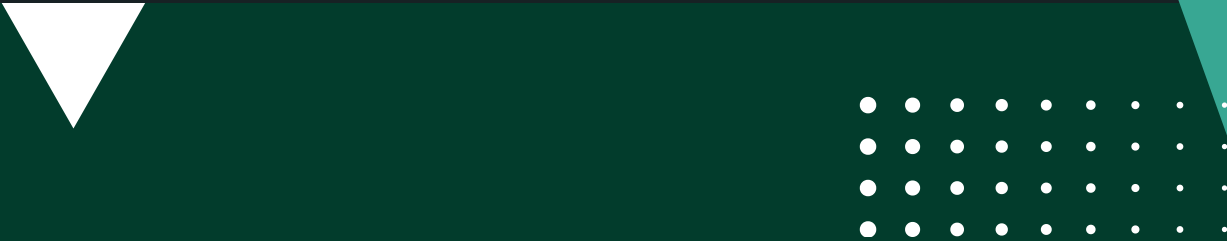
This module introduces key concepts that underpin the practical workshops, using clear, non-clinical language and a youth work perspective. The theory is intended to support understanding and facilitation, not to provide academic or therapeutic training. It offers a slightly deeper conceptual grounding so that youth professionals feel confident explaining why the practices matter.

### 3.1 Stress and Emotional Overload in Everyday Life

Research findings from Sweden highlight that many young people experience continuous, low-to-medium intensity stress rather than isolated crisis moments. Common sources include academic pressure, uncertainty about future employment, financial insecurity, social expectations, discrimination, and constant digital stimulation. Over time, this prolonged stress can lead to emotional overload, fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, sleep problems, and reduced emotional awareness. These findings explain why the mental health of young people (aged 10–24) became a core priority of the WHO European Framework for Action on Mental Health (EFAMH) 2021–2025, because these formative years are critical for developing autonomy, self-regulation, and social skills that influence well-being for a lifetime. Significant efforts were directed toward building resilience in this group, particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the socioemotional functioning of adolescents and young adults (European Commission, 2021).

In youth work settings, stress may not always be expressed verbally. It often appears through disengagement, withdrawal, agitation, difficulty participating, or reduced motivation. Understanding stress as a normal physiological and emotional response, rather than a personal failure, is an important first step in prevention-oriented youth work. That is why building supportive environments is important so that youth can feel comfortable discussing their feelings. Besides supportive families, peer support groups can be established, allowing teens to connect over shared experiences, which can greatly influence their mental health and help them navigate complex emotions during this developmental phase. By fostering a sense of community and belonging, teens are more likely to seek help when they need it.





Healthy coping mechanisms are crucial for managing stress and anxiety effectively. Encouraging teens to explore various outlets, such as physical activities, arts, or mindfulness practices, can lead to better emotional balance. Regular exercise, simple walking, engaging in nature, meditation and journal writing can be immensely beneficial in managing stress and anxiety. Open conversations about these strategies help normalize their use and encourage regular practice. Fostering resilience in teenagers equips them to handle stress more effectively in the long run (Your Health Magazine, 2025).

### **3.2 Mindfulness in Non-Clinical Contexts**

In the MindBalance Curriculum, mindfulness is understood as present-moment awareness: the ability to notice thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations as they arise, with curiosity and without judgement.

Mindfulness is not presented as:

- therapy or psychological treatment,
- meditation training with specific spiritual or religious connotations,
- or a performance-based technique that must be done “correctly”.

Instead, mindfulness is framed as a basic human capacity that can be strengthened through short, simple, and accessible practices. This framing makes mindfulness particularly suitable for non-formal education and inclusive youth work contexts. An example of such simple accessible practices is the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 grounding technique that will be exercised later during “Workshop 2: The Resilience Anchor” in module two (Mosunic., 2023)

### **3.3 The Mind–Body Connection**

Stress and emotions are experienced not only cognitively, but also physically and emotionally. Common bodily stress signals include muscle tension, shallow breathing, restlessness, headaches, or fatigue. Emotional signals may include anxiety, irritability, numbness, or feeling overwhelmed. Mindfulness practices help young people (and practitioners) to reconnect with bodily signals, which often appear before emotions or thoughts are fully recognised. This awareness supports earlier intervention and reduces the risk of emotional escalation.



### 3.4 Self-Awareness as a Foundation for Emotional Regulation

Self-awareness refers to the ability to notice internal experiences—sensations, emotions, thoughts, and behaviours—in the present moment. It is a foundational skill for emotional regulation, resilience, and healthy relationships. Self-awareness means having a clear perception of your strengths, weaknesses, values, and motivations. This insight allows us to make more deliberate choices and respond to situations in ways that align with our true self rather than reacting impulsively.

#### The Components of Self-Awareness

- Emotional Awareness: Understanding our feelings as they arise and recognising how they influence our decisions and interactions.
- Self-Reflection: Regularly taking time to think about our experiences, behaviours, and emotional responses.
- Mindfulness: Being present in the moment, observing our thoughts and feelings without judgement.
- Self-Understanding: Recognising our values, beliefs, and patterns that shape your behaviour in relationships.

Self-awareness is not a fixed trait—it can be developed through practice and intentional effort. Its impact is far-reaching, particularly in the context of relationships. It helps us identify when we are being overwhelmed by emotions such as anger, jealousy, or sadness. Recognising these feelings early enables us to:

- Regulate our responses: Instead of reacting impulsively, we can take a moment to process our emotions and respond in a measured way.
- Avoid destructive patterns: By understanding our triggers, we can prevent recurring cycles of conflict or emotional withdrawal.
- Enhance resilience: Learning to cope with negative emotions builds resilience, making it easier to navigate challenging situations in relationships.

Finally, self-awareness helps us to have greater empathy and understanding for others because it helps us see things from another's perspective, and it enhances conflict resolution.

Different strategies to cultivate self-awareness include mindfulness meditation, journaling, seeking constructive feedback from trusted friends, family, or a counsellor, and engaging in mindful communication practices (Ward, 2025).

For youth professionals, cultivating self-awareness supports:

- ethical and reflective practice,
- clearer personal and professional boundaries,
- greater emotional attunement when working with young people.

Youth workers inevitably model the skills they introduce. This module therefore emphasises self-awareness for both practitioners and young people, recognising that regulation and presence cannot be taught only at a theoretical level.

### 3.5 Micro-Mindfulness Practices in Youth Work

Micro-mindfulness practices are very short, simple mindfulness or grounding practices that can be integrated into everyday activities without special preparation, equipment, or long timeframes. Examples include noticing three breaths, feeling one's feet on the ground, or pausing briefly before starting an activity. They are simple practices that invite us to pause and come home to the body. They take only a minute or two, yet can bring a surprising sense of calm, clarity, and presence. Rather than waiting for the “right time” to practise, micro-mindfulness helps us weave awareness into the everyday moments of life (Anderson, 2025)

Micro-mindfulness practices are particularly relevant in youth work because they:

- are low-threshold and accessible,
- fit into informal and unpredictable environments,
- do not require participants to close their eyes or sit still for long periods,
- can be used preventively, not only when stress is already high.

These practices help normalise self-awareness as part of daily life rather than as a separate or exceptional activity.

Micro-meditation and traditional meditation both aim to bring you back to the present moment, but they differ in how they fit into daily life. Traditional meditation is a structured practice that usually involves setting aside dedicated time in a quiet space for deeper reflection and mental reset, while micro-meditation is brief, flexible, and woven into everyday moments without requiring special time or conditions. Neither is better than the other—they simply meet different needs, much like a nourishing meal versus a sustaining snack, and both can support wellbeing in meaningful ways (Calm, 2025).

Practicing micro-mindfulness for only a few minutes on a daily basis has extensive positive long-term benefits for the mind as well as the body. Some of them are reducing stress, increasing focus and productivity, improving mood, and enhancing self-awareness (Bosu, 2023).

## 4. Practical Workshops

Workshop 1: Mapping the Inner Landscape

Aim:

To support participants in recognising their internal state as a dynamic “landscape” and developing embodied awareness of stress and regulation without judgement.

Focus:

- Interoception (awareness of internal bodily sensations)
- Dynamic awareness rather than static meditation
- Curiosity toward internal change
- Normalising fluctuation in emotional states

Suggested duration: 30 minutes

Group size: Flexible

Materials needed:

- Paper and coloured pens (recommended)
- Optional: body outline template (available at the end of this document)

Step-by-step description of activities:

1. Introduction – The Inner Weather (5 minutes): Introduce the idea that internal experience is like weather:

- Sometimes calm
- Sometimes stormy
- Always changing

Emphasise:

We are not trying to change the weather – only to notice it.

1. “Scan & Sketch” Somatic Mapping (10 minutes): Instead of a classic body scan, guide participants through:

- Close or soften the eyes.
- Slowly bring attention through the body.
- Notice areas of warmth, tightness, heaviness, openness, energy, numbness.
- Instead of analysing, they draw or colour these sensations on paper.

No artistic skill required – just colour, lines, shapes.

This turns mindfulness into embodied creative mapping.

- Movement Shift Experiment (7 minutes): Invite participants to:

- Stand up.
- Change posture intentionally (e.g., round shoulders vs. open chest).
- Walk slowly with tension.
- Then walk with grounded, slower steps.

Ask them to notice:

- How posture influences internal state.
- How movement changes breath and attention.

This introduces embodied regulation in a direct way.

Micro-Regulation Experiment (3 minutes): Ask participants to:

- Place one hand on the chest or abdomen.
- Take one slow breath.
- Notice if even 5% of their internal “weather” shifts.

Emphasise small change – not transformation.

Reflection questions for participants:

1. What did your “inner landscape” look like today?
2. Did anything shift during movement?
3. What surprised you about your body awareness?
4. How could creative mapping help young people express stress safely?

## Workshop 2: Understanding Stress Signals

Aim:

To help participants identify and name physical, emotional, and mental signs of stress in themselves and young people.

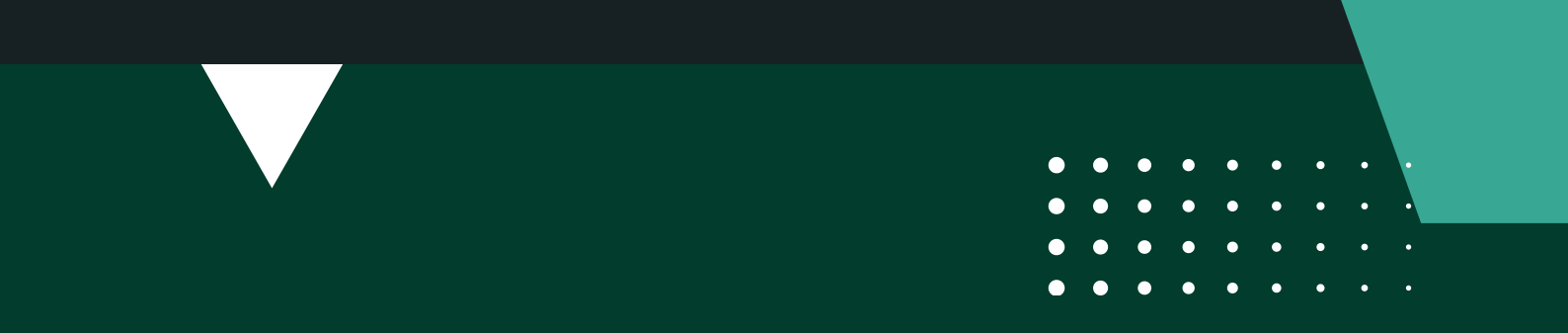
Focus:

- Identifying physical, emotional, and mental signs of stress
- Building vocabulary for internal experiences

Suggested duration: 30 minutes

Group size: Flexible

Materials needed: Paper, pens, flipchart or whiteboard



Step-by-step description of activities:

1. Check-in (5 minutes): Invite participants to briefly share one word describing their current state.
2. Input (5 minutes): Explain that stress can appear in the body, emotions, and thoughts, and that these signals vary between individuals.
3. Stress mapping exercise (10 minutes): Ask participants to map where and how they notice stress (e.g. body outline, lists, or symbols).
4. Small-group sharing (5 minutes): Invite sharing in pairs or small groups, focusing on patterns rather than personal stories.
5. Group discussion (5 minutes): Discuss common stressors faced by young people and how these may show up in behaviour.

Reflection questions for participants:

1. Where do you notice stress most clearly?
2. Which stress signals are hardest to recognise?
3. How might this awareness support your work with young people?

Workshop 3: Presence Under Pressure (Optional)

Aim:

To help participants experience how their internal state directly influences group dynamics and youth engagement.

Focus:

- Presence as invisible leadership
- Regulation under mild stress
- Simple embodied micro-interventions
- Real-life youth work situations

Suggested duration: 30 minutes

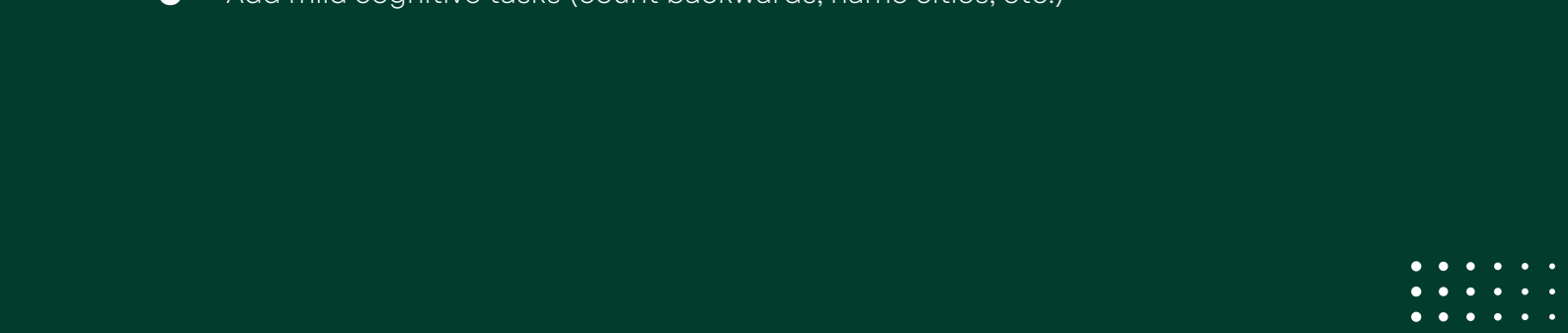
Group size: Flexible (works best with 6–20 participants)

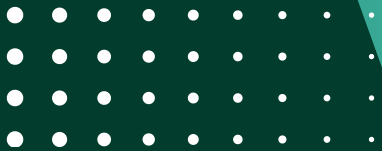
Materials needed: Open space

Step-by-step description of activities:

1. Controlled Chaos Simulation (2–3 minutes): Ask participants to walk freely around the room.

Then introduce instructions gradually:

- Walk faster.
  - Avoid eye contact.
  - Change direction frequently.
  - Add mild cognitive tasks (count backwards, name cities, etc.)
- 



Create mild, playful chaos – not overwhelming.

After 2–3 minutes, stop suddenly.

Ask:

Notice your breathing.

Notice your shoulders.

Notice your thoughts.

No discussion yet.

1. The 60-Second Reset (1-2 minutes): Guide a very simple embodied reset:

- Stand still.
- Widen peripheral vision (look softly at the room edges).
- Drop shoulders.
- Slow exhale slightly longer than inhale.
- Feel your feet pressing into the floor.

Keep it practical. No abstract explanation.

1. Repeat Chaos Simulation (2-3 minutes): Restart the walking chaos activity (faster pace, direction changes, light cognitive task).

After 1–2 minutes, say:

“Without stopping, begin to:

- Slow your exhale slightly.
- Drop your shoulders.
- Soften your jaw.
- Feel your feet touching the floor.
- Widen your peripheral vision.”

They keep moving while doing this.

The key principle:

They regulate during movement, not after stopping.

Reflection questions for participants:

1. What shifted after the reset?
2. What changed the second time?
3. Did internal regulation influence your behaviour?
4. Did you feel more stable or focused?
5. Could you regulate without stopping the activity?
6. How might this help during real youth work situations?



## 5. Reflection Workbook

The reflection workbook supports continued learning beyond the workshops and can be used individually or between sessions.

- What signals tell me that I am stressed or overwhelmed?
- Which mindfulness practices feel most accessible to me?
- How can I model self-awareness in my work with young people?
- What small practices could I introduce in my context?

### 6. Accessibility & Adaptation Tips

- Offer options instead of instructions (e.g. eyes open or closed)
- Avoid long periods of stillness if not appropriate
- Use simple, non-abstract language
- Emphasise choice and voluntary participation
- Adapt exercises to sitting, standing, or moving formats

## 7. Resources & References

Anderson, N. (2025). Micro-Mindfulness: Three Simple Practices for Everyday Calm. [online] ISoM. Available at: <https://www.isom.co/post/micro-mindfulness-three-simple-practices-for-everyday-calm> [Accessed 20 Jan. 2026].

Bosu, D. (2023). The power of pausing: Embracing micro-mindfulness - Medito Foundation. [online] Medito Foundation. Available at: <https://meditofoundation.org/blog/the-power-of-pausing-embracing-micro-mindfulness> [Accessed 20 Jan. 2026].

Calm Blog. (2025). Stressed and short on time? Here's how to try micro-meditation. [online] Available at: <https://www.calm.com/blog/micro-meditation> [Accessed 20 Jan. 2026].

Mosunic, C. (2023). 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 – a simple grounding exercise to calm anxiety. [online] Calm Blog. Available at: <https://www.calm.com/blog/5-4-3-2-1-a-simple-exercise-to-calm-the-mind> [Accessed 20 Jan. 2026].

Ward, E. (2025). Self-Awareness in Relationships: The Key to Deeper Connection and Lasting Trust -. [online] Wellnesscounsellingservice.com. Available at: <https://wellnesscounsellingservice.com/self-awareness-in-relationships-the-key-to-deeper-connection-and-lasting-trust/> [Accessed 20 Jan. 2026].

WHO European framework for action on mental health 2021–2025. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2022. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

Your Health Magazine (2025). A Guide To Spotting Early Warning Signs And Supporting Teen Mental Health. [online] Your Health Magazine. Available at: <https://yourhealthmagazine.net/article/mental-health/a-guide-to-spotting-early-warning-signs-and-supporting-teen-mental-health/> [Accessed 20 Jan. 2026].

### Additional Useful Resources

Douglas, L. (2022). F\*ck anxiety: 101 ways to soothe anxiety, stop the panic + get back to your badass self. Kansas, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing.



# MODULE 2 – FROM INWARDS TO OUTWARDS: BUILDING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE & RESILIENCE

**Author: EQUALINE**

## 1. Module Overview

Module 2 serves as the bridge between individual internal awareness and the external expression of emotional health. While Module 1 established the foundation of noticing internal states, this module focuses on the active management and regulation of those states to build long-term resilience. Research highlights that young people often feel overwhelmed by systemic pressures, such as economic uncertainty and social expectations, which manifest as chronic stress and anxiety.

The purpose of this module is to equip youth professionals with non-clinical tools to help young people navigate these "outward" challenges. By focusing on emotional intelligence (EQ), we provide a framework for young people to transform reactive impulses into deliberate, resilient responses. This is essential for youth workers operating in diverse, non-formal contexts where emotional regulation is a prerequisite for effective participation and personal development.

## 2. Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- **Identify and Label Complex Emotions:** Move beyond basic stress recognition to understand the nuances of emotional states and their triggers.
  - **Apply Regulation Strategies:** Utilize practical, body-based and cognitive tools to manage anxiety and prevent emotional escalation in real-time.
  - **Develop Personal Resilience Maps:** Create individualized coping strategies based on their unique stressors and strengths.
  - **Strengthen Emotional Self-Trust:** Build confidence in their ability to handle challenging situations without becoming overwhelmed.
  - **Model Emotional Competence:** For practitioners, to demonstrate healthy emotional regulation as a foundation for ethical youth work.
- 

## 3. Theoretical Background

### 3.1 Understanding the "Outwards" Shift

The transition from "Inwards" to "Outwards" represents the cognitive move from simply noticing a feeling (as established in Module 1) to deciding how to act upon it. Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in this context is defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage our own emotions while recognizing their impact on our interactions with others and the world around us.

### 3.2 The Mechanics of Stress and Anxiety

Building on the physiological focus of the previous module, Module 2 explores the cognitive and emotional "loops" of anxiety. Anxiety is often a future-oriented response to perceived threats, such as academic failure or social rejection, that keeps the nervous system in a state of high alert. These resilience tools specifically address the systemic pressures (academic, financial, and social) identified in the project's research phase as primary drivers of youth mental health challenges. Resilience is not characterized by the absence of this stress, but by the capacity to "bounce back" or navigate through it using adaptive coping mechanisms rather than avoidant ones.

#### 3.3 Coping Strategies vs. Defense Mechanisms

- Adaptive Coping: Refers to intentional actions, such as mindful communication, seeking peer support, or physical movement, that actively process the emotion.
- Emotional Regulation: This is the "pause" between a stimulus and a response. This module emphasizes tools that help young people expand this pause, allowing them to choose a response that aligns with their personal values rather than reacting impulsively.

### 3.4 Resilience as a Skill, Not a Trait

Resilience is developed through the repeated practice of emotional regulation. In youth work, we foster this by creating "brave spaces" where young people can experience moderate challenges in a supportive environment. This allows them to test, refine, and internalize their emotional tools in a safe, non-formal learning context.

## 4. Practical Workshops

### Workshop 1: Navigating the Emotional Weather

Aim:

This activity aims to help participants move beyond basic stress identification to accurately recognize and label a wider range of emotions. By using the metaphor of "weather," young people can observe their feelings as temporary states that pass through them, reducing the sense of being "stuck" in a difficult emotion.

Focus:

- Developing emotional vocabulary and literacy.
- Understanding the temporary nature of emotional states.
- Recognizing the physical and mental "forecasts" of emotional shifts.

Suggested duration: 30 minutes.

Group size: Flexible (5–20 participants).

Materials needed: Flipchart, colorful markers, and post-it notes.

Step-by-step description of activities:

1. Introduction (5 minutes): The facilitator explains that emotions, like the weather, are constantly changing and that while we cannot control the weather, we can choose our "outfit" (our response).
2. The Emotional Map (10 minutes): Participants are asked to write down different emotions on post-it notes and place them on a flipchart. The facilitator then helps group them into "Weather Systems" (e.g., Anxiety as a "Thick Fog," Anger as a "Thunderstorm," Joy as "Sunshine").
3. Individual Forecast (5 minutes): Participants sit quietly and identify their "current weather." They reflect on what physical sensations (e.g., tight chest, shaky hands) tell them a specific "storm" is coming.
4. Weather Report Sharing (10 minutes): In pairs, participants share their current "forecast" and one tool they use to stay safe during an emotional "storm".

Reflection questions for participants:

-What physical sensations helped you identify your "current weather"? > Facilitator Aim: To help participants recognize the physical precursors to emotion and the mind-body connection.

-How does it feel to view an emotion as a temporary weather state rather than a permanent part of who you are? > Facilitator Aim: To foster a non-judgmental awareness and decrease the sense of being "stuck" in a difficult emotional state.

-What "gear" (support or tools) do you need when the weather becomes difficult? > Facilitator Aim: To identify and normalize the use of healthy coping mechanisms and support systems.

Workshop 2: The Resilience Anchor

Aim:

This activity provides participants with a physical and mental "anchor" (a grounding technique) to use during moments of high stress or emotional overload. It bridges the gap between inner awareness and outward regulation by teaching a practical tool that can be used discreetly in public or social settings.

Focus:

- Nervous system regulation and immediate grounding.
- Building self-trust through reliable self-soothing techniques.
- Applying mindfulness in real-life, "outward" scenarios.



Suggested duration: 30 minutes..

Group size: Flexible (min 5 participants).

Materials needed: None (can be supplemented with small "worry stones" or physical tokens if available).

Step-by-step description of activities:

1. Opening Discussion (5 minutes): Briefly discuss "triggers"—outward situations that cause us to lose our balance (e.g., public speaking, a difficult text message, or a crowded space).
2. The 5-4-3-2-1 Technique (10 minutes): The facilitator guides participants through a grounding exercise: Identify 5 things you see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.
3. Creating the Anchor (10 minutes): Participants choose a physical "anchor" point on their body (e.g., pressing their thumb and forefinger together or feeling their feet heavy on the floor). They practice the 5-4-3-2-1 technique while holding this anchor to "lock in" the feeling of being grounded.
4. Action Plan (5 minutes): Participants identify one specific upcoming "outward" situation where they plan to use their Anchor.

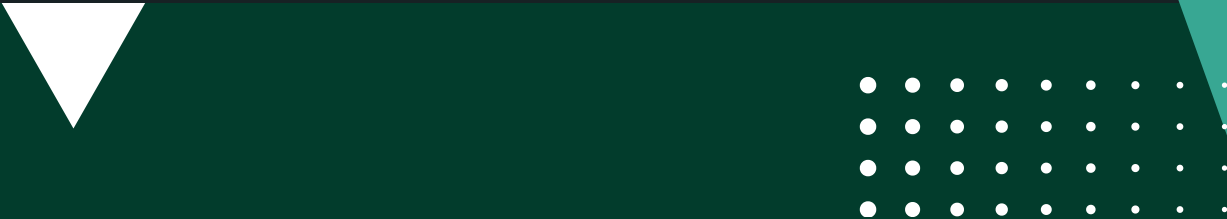
Reflection questions for participants:

Which of the five senses felt most effective in bringing you back to the present moment? >

Facilitator Aim: To encourage self-discovery of which low-threshold grounding tools work best for the individual.

In what "outward" situations would this anchor be most useful for you? > Facilitator Aim: To move from theoretical understanding to practical, real-life application in youth work or personal settings.





Reflection questions for participants:

-Which external "arrows" felt the heaviest before you identified your internal strengths? > Facilitator Aim: To help participants differentiate between external systemic pressures and their internal capacity to manage them.

-How does knowing your "shield" is made of your own skills change your perspective on stress? > Facilitator Aim: To shift the view of stress from a personal failure to a physiological response that can be managed.

-How can you help a peer recognize their own shield when they feel overwhelmed? > Facilitator Aim: To introduce the concept of peer support and community-based resilience.

#### 5. Reflection Workbook

The reflection workbook is designed for participants to use individually between sessions or after the module is completed to solidify their learning and monitor their emotional growth.

#### Self-Reflection Prompts:

- Identifying Triggers: Write down three specific "outward" situations (e.g., social gatherings, deadlines, conflict) that usually cause you to feel emotionally overwhelmed.
- Regulation Check-in: The next time you feel a "storm" coming, try the 5-4-3-2-1 technique. Afterward, record how your physical tension changed on a scale of 1 to 10.
- Building Self-Trust: What is one situation this week where you successfully "paused" before reacting? How did that choice align with your personal values?.
- Modeling for Others: How can I use the "Emotional Weather" metaphor when talking to a young person who is currently struggling with their feelings?.

#### 6. Accessibility & Adaptation Tips

To ensure the MindBalance Curriculum is inclusive and safe for all young people, facilitators should apply these practical adaptations:

- Digital Tools for Diverse Learners: Utilize the ZenG digital platform, including instructional videos and guided meditation audios, to support participants with lower literacy or those who prefer visual and auditory learning over text-heavy materials. These tools provide a low-threshold entry point for marginalized youth to engage with emotional regulation at their own pace.
  - Sensory Sensitivity: For grounding exercises like the "Resilience Anchor" (5-4-3-2-1), some participants may find certain senses (like smell or touch) overwhelming. Allow them to focus only on one sense (e.g., "5 things I see") if that feels safer or more grounding.
  - Cultural Context: Emotional expression and mental health stigma vary across cultures. Avoid labeling emotions as "good" or "bad"; instead, focus on whether a response is "helpful" or "unhelpful" in a specific context to maintain a non-judgmental environment.
  - Neurodiversity: Provide clear, written instructions for workshop steps to support different processing styles. For participants who find stillness difficult or anxiety-inducing, encourage exercises to be practiced while walking or standing rather than sitting still.
  - Choice-Based Participation: Always emphasize that participation and sharing in pairs or groups is strictly voluntary. If a participant does not want to share their "weather report" verbally, allow them to represent it through a drawing, a single color, or a silent reflection.
- 

## 7. Resources & References

Anderson, N. (2025). Micro-Mindfulness: Three Simple Practices for Everyday Calm. [online] .ISoM. Available at: <https://www.isom.co/post/micro-mindfulness-three-simple-practices-for-everyday-calm>

Bosu, D. (2023). The power of pausing: Embracing micro-mindfulness. [online] Medito Foundation. Available at: <https://meditofoundation.org/blog/the-power-of-pausing-embracing-micro-mindfulness>.

Calm Blog. (2025). Stressed and short on time? Here's how to try micro-meditation. [online] Available at: <https://www.calm.com/blog/micro-meditation>.

Douglas, L. (2022). Fck anxiety: 101 ways to soothe anxiety, stop the panic + get back to your badass self.\* Kansas, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing.

European Commission. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on the socioemotional functioning of adolescents and young adults. Brussels: European Commission.

Eurofound. (2021). Living, working and COVID-19 survey. [online] Available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/>.

Mosunic, C. (2023). 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 – a simple grounding exercise to calm anxiety. [online] Calm Blog. Available at: <https://www.calm.com/blog/5-4-3-2-1-a-simple-exercise-to-calm-the-mind>.

Ward, E. (2025). Self-Awareness in Relationships: The Key to Deeper Connection and Lasting Trust. [online] [Wellnesscounsellingservice.com](https://wellnesscounsellingservice.com). Available at: <https://wellnesscounsellingservice.com/self-awareness-in-relationships-the-key-to-deeper-connection-and-lasting-trust/>.

WHO Regional Office for Europe. (2022). WHO European framework for action on mental health 2021–2025. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

Your Health Magazine. (2025). A Guide To Spotting Early Warning Signs And Supporting Teen Mental Health. [online] Your Health Magazine. Available at: <https://yourhealthmagazine.net/article/mental-health/a-guide-to-spotting-early-warning-signs-and-supporting-teen-mental-health/>.



# MODULE 3 – COMMUNITY: CREATING INCLUSIVE & SUPPORTIVE SPACES

**Author: AVEC NOUS**

## **1. Module Overview**

Community is not simply a backdrop to young people's mental health – it is one of its most powerful determinants. Research conducted across the three ZenG partner countries (France, Sweden, and Greece) consistently found that young people experiencing stress, anxiety, and emotional difficulties do not primarily turn to clinical services for support. Instead, they turn to their peers, their communities, and the informal spaces around them. Yet for many young people – particularly those from marginalized or vulnerable backgrounds – these communities are not experienced as safe, welcoming, or affirming. Geographic isolation, social exclusion, discrimination, language barriers, and institutional mistrust can make community spaces a source of additional stress rather than a source of belonging.

Module 3: Community responds directly to this reality. It equips youth workers, educators, and facilitators with the knowledge, tools, and practical skills needed to intentionally build inclusive, psychologically safe group environments where every young person can be seen, heard, and supported. Drawing on principles from community psychology, trauma-informed practice, and non-formal education, this module moves beyond individual mindfulness techniques to explore how belonging, peer support, and collective care can be embedded into everyday youth work practice. Participants will examine what makes spaces genuinely inclusive, learn to work more confidently with diverse and marginalized groups, and develop concrete approaches for fostering trust, peer connection, and resilience within their teams and communities.



## 2. Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Explain the concept of psychological safety and its role in supporting young people's mental health and engagement.
- Identify the key conditions that enable inclusive, supportive group environments to develop and thrive.
- Apply practical facilitation strategies to foster belonging, trust, and peer connection in their settings.
- Recognise and respond to the specific challenges and strengths of young people from marginalized or vulnerable backgrounds.
- Design or adapt existing group activities and spaces using trauma-informed and inclusive principles.
- Reflect critically on their own practice and the dynamics of the groups and communities they work with.
- Support peer-to-peer connection and community-based approaches to mental well-being within their organisations.

## 3. Theoretical Background

### 3.1 Why Community Matters for Youth Mental Health

Across Europe, young people's well-being is closely tied to the quality of their social environments. The ZenG research found that in Greece, Sweden, and France alike, informal peer support, trusted adults, and safe community spaces were the most commonly cited sources of coping and resilience – far outpacing formal mental health services. This aligns with a substantial body of research in community and developmental psychology, which consistently shows that belonging and social connection are foundational to emotional health.

The concept of belonging – the felt sense that one is accepted, valued, and included within a group – is a core psychological need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When this need is unmet, the consequences are significant: increased stress and anxiety, lower self-esteem, reduced motivation, and greater vulnerability to depression and social withdrawal. Conversely, environments that actively cultivate belonging are associated with improved emotional regulation, greater resilience in the face of adversity, and higher levels of engagement and participation.

For marginalized young people – including those from migrant or refugee backgrounds, those experiencing poverty or unemployment, LGBTQ+ youth, neurodivergent young people, and those in rural or under-resourced areas – the stakes are even higher. The ZenG research found that these groups face 'double barriers': the everyday stressors that all young people experience, compounded by experiences of discrimination, invisibility, institutional mistrust, and limited access to support. Community-based approaches that centre inclusion and psychological safety are not just helpful for these young people; they are essential.

### 3.2 Psychological Safety and Inclusive Spaces

Psychological safety, originally developed in organisational contexts by Amy Edmondson (1999), refers to the shared belief within a group that it is safe to take interpersonal risks – to speak honestly, ask questions, admit mistakes, express emotions, and be oneself – without fear of shame, ridicule, or punishment. In youth work, psychological safety translates into the quality of the relational environment: whether young people feel they can show up as they are, without performing, masking, or withdrawing.

Creating psychologically safe spaces requires consistent, intentional facilitation. Key facilitator behaviours include modelling vulnerability and authenticity, responding to all contributions with curiosity and respect, establishing clear group agreements, acknowledging and naming group dynamics openly, and actively interrupting behaviours that undermine safety (such as mockery, dismissiveness, or exclusionary language). Psychological safety is not created once and maintained automatically; it must be actively tended through every session and interaction.

Inclusion goes beyond access. A space may be technically open to all while remaining culturally, linguistically, or relationally inaccessible to many. Genuinely inclusive environments actively welcome difference, represent diverse perspectives and experiences in their content and facilitation, accommodate a range of participation styles and communication preferences, and take concrete steps to remove barriers – whether practical (cost, transport, language), relational (distrust, stigma), or structural (lack of representation, discriminatory norms).

### 3.3 Trauma-Informed Practice in Community Settings

Many of the young people that youth workers support have experienced adverse events, chronic stress, or trauma. These experiences shape how young people relate to authority, trust, group dynamics, and their own bodies and emotions. Trauma-informed practice is not a therapy model; it is a set of principles that guides how facilitators approach their work to avoid re-traumatisation and to actively support safety and healing.

The six core principles of trauma-informed practice (SAMHSA, 2014) are particularly relevant for inclusive community spaces:

- Safety – ensuring physical and emotional safety for all participants
- Trustworthiness and transparency – being clear about expectations, roles, and boundaries
- Peer support – valuing the healing power of connection and shared experience
- Collaboration and mutuality – reducing power imbalances and fostering shared ownership
- Empowerment and choice – centering the strengths and agency of participants
- Cultural, historical, and gender issues – recognising how context shapes experience and identity



These principles do not require facilitators to become therapists. Rather, they provide a framework for creating environments where young people with diverse and complex experiences can participate safely, and where harmful patterns are less likely to be inadvertently reproduced.

### **3.4 Peer Support and Community-Based Well-Being**

Peer support – the intentional use of shared experience, empathy, and mutual aid between people with similar backgrounds or challenges – is one of the most evidence-based and widely valued approaches in youth mental health. The ZenG research found that across all three countries, peer relationships were the primary source of support that young people turned to in times of difficulty. Youth workers similarly identified peer connection as a key pathway to resilience.

Structured peer support programmes in youth settings have been shown to reduce feelings of isolation and shame, build communication and empathy skills, increase help-seeking behaviour, and strengthen community cohesion (Mead et al., 2001). Unlike professional interventions, peer support operates on the basis of equality and reciprocity – both the supporter and the supported benefit from the relationship. In the context of the MindBalance curriculum, peer support is not an add-on; it is a core pedagogical and therapeutic resource.

Community-based well-being approaches move the locus of support from the individual or the clinic to the collective and the environment. Rather than asking ‘what is wrong with this young person?’, they ask ‘what does this community need to be a place where every young person can thrive?’ This shift has profound implications for how youth workers design activities, structure groups, use physical spaces, and engage with families and wider systems.

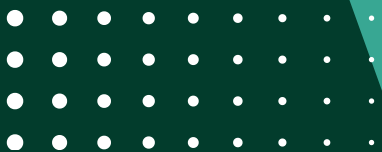
## **4. Practical Workshops**

Workshop 1: Mapping belonging: What makes a space feel safe?

Aim:

Participants will explore and articulate what makes spaces feel inclusive and psychologically safe, drawing on their own experience and the experiences of the young people they work with. They will create a shared ‘map of belonging’ that can be used as a reference for their own practice.





Focus:

- This activity encourages participants to reflect on what makes a safe space and their role in contributing to this.

Suggested duration: 90 minutes

Group size: 10-20 participants

Materials needed: Large sheets of paper, coloured markers, sticky notes (three colours), pens, a clear wall or board space

Step-by-step description of activities:

1. Warm up (15 mins): Open with a brief body-based grounding exercise: ask participants to take three slow breaths, notice where they are sitting, and recall a moment – at any point in their life – when they felt truly welcomed and included in a group or space. Invite 2–3 participants to briefly share their memories with the group. What was present in that space? What did it feel like in their body?
2. Activity 1 (25 mins): Divide participants into small groups of 3–4. Give each group a large sheet of paper and markers. Ask each group to draw a simple outline of a space they work in (a room, a youth centre, an outdoor area). They will need to agree together what space they will choose to focus on as a group and discuss aspects of the space as they draw it.

Using sticky notes, groups place: GREEN notes for what currently helps young people feel safe, welcomed, and included; ORANGE notes for what creates barriers or makes some young people feel excluded; YELLOW notes for things they wish they could change or add.

Groups discuss: Who feels most at home here? Who might not? What are they not seeing?

1. Activity 3: Bring the groups together for a gallery walk: each group briefly presents the space they have drawn together.

Facilitate a collective discussion using the following prompts: What patterns do you notice across the maps? What surprised you? What are the most common barriers for marginalized young people in your contexts? What conditions consistently appear in the 'safe' spaces?

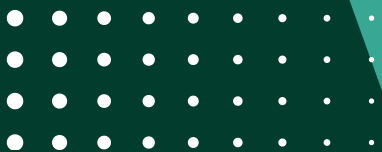
Introduce the concept of psychological safety (see Theoretical Background) and invite participants to connect it to what they have just mapped.

Summary of theory:

- Psychological safety is a group environment where individuals feel safe to speak openly, take risks, and be themselves without fear of judgment or punishment.
- In youth work, it depends on the quality of relationships and whether young people feel accepted without needing to hide or perform.
- It requires active, ongoing facilitation, including modelling authenticity, showing respect, setting clear agreements, and addressing harmful behaviours.
- Inclusion is more than access—spaces must actively welcome and support diverse identities, experiences, and ways of participating.
- Truly inclusive environments remove practical, relational, and structural barriers and ensure representation and accessibility for all.

Can you think of some examples of how you can ensure psychological safety? (These answers could be elicited from the group, or you could refer to facilitators checklist)





Reflection questions for participants:

Ask each participant to identify ONE concrete thing they will change or introduce in their setting to make it more inclusive.

Participants share their commitment with a partner.

Close with a brief collective reflection: 'In one word, what does belonging feel like?' Go around the circle.

## Workshop 2: Building bridges: Peer connection and community care practices

Aim:

Participants will practise facilitating peer connection in groups and explore how community-care practices can be embedded into regular youth work sessions. They will leave with at least three ready-to-use exercises for their settings.

Focus:

- Approaches to develop bonds and understanding between a disparate group of young people

Suggested duration: 90 minutes

Group size: 8-20 participants

Materials needed: Cards with scenario prompts (provided below and available as a separate part at the end of this document), open floor space, journals or notebooks, calm background music (optional)

Step-by-step description of activities:

Warm up (15 mins): Begin with a 'Connection Circle': participants stand in a circle. The facilitator calls out a prompt and those who identify with it take one step forward. Prompts include: 'Step forward if you have ever felt like an outsider in a group'; 'Step forward if someone has ever made you feel seen at a difficult moment'; 'Step forward if you have supported a young person through a hard time'.

After each step, participants take a moment to look at who stepped forward. No words needed.

1.Activity 1 (30 mins): Introduce three peer-connection practices that can be used in youth work sessions. Demonstrate each briefly, then allow participants to experience them in pairs or small groups:

- **ACTIVE LISTENING PAIRS:** Pairs take turns to speak for 2 minutes on a topic of their choice. The listener does not respond, advise, or ask questions – only listens with full attention. Debrief: What did it feel like to be listened to without interruption?

- **CHECK-IN CIRCLE:** Participants share a brief response to: 'Right now I feel [emotion] and I need [one thing]'. The group receives each share in silence, without comment.

- **AFFIRMATION ROUNDS:** Each participant writes their name at the top of a sheet of paper. Sheets are passed around the group; each person writes one genuine strength or quality they see in that person.

Debrief briefly: What did you notice? What did it feel like to be seen?

2.Activity 2 (25 mins): In groups of 3–4, participants receive a scenario card describing a challenging community dynamic (e.g., a new migrant young person who is silent and disengaged; a dominant participant who talks over others; a group that has experienced a conflict and is fragmented).





3.Groups discuss: What peer-support or community-care practice might help here? What does the facilitator's role look like? What risks do you need to be aware of?

Groups briefly share their approaches with the wider group.

Reflection questions for participants:

Participants spend 5 minutes in their journals responding to: 'What community care practice will I bring to my next session? What conditions do I need to create for it to work?'

Closing: Each participant shares one word or phrase about what community means to them in their work.

The facilitator closes by affirming the collective wisdom in the room and noting that building community is itself an act of well-being.

Facilitation notes

- The Connection Circle warm-up can be emotionally activating. Ensure participants know they can pass on any prompt.
- Scenario cards can be adapted to reflect the specific national or local context of participants.
- Affirm that there is no single 'right' response to any scenario – the goal is reflective practice and peer learning.

Workshop 3: Working Effectively with marginalised young people

Aim:

Participants will deepen their understanding of the specific barriers and strengths of marginalized young people (including migrants, NEET youth, those with disabilities, and rural youth), and develop more confident, strengths-based, and culturally sensitive facilitation approaches.

Focus:

- Helping youth workers and young people to reflect on barriers they and others face, and how this impacts on their lives

Suggested duration: 90 mins

Group size: 8-20 participants

Materials needed: Case study handouts, Privilege Walk instruction cards, reflection journals, flip chart and markers

Step-by-step description of activities:

Warm up (15 mins): Open with a brief reflective prompt: 'Think of a young person you have found most difficult to engage. What do you know about the barriers they face? What might their strengths be?'

Participants share with a partner. Then open briefly to the wider group: What are the most common challenges facilitators face in engaging marginalised young people?

- Activity 1 (30 mins): A structured reflective exercise (adapted for indoor use) in which participants physically move forward or backward in response to statements reflecting structural advantage and disadvantage.
- 



Example statements: ‘Take a step forward if you grew up speaking the main language of the country where you live’; ‘Take a step back if you have ever experienced discrimination because of your background, appearance, or identity’; ‘Take a step forward if you have always had reliable access to internet and a device for learning’.

After the walk, participants sit in their final positions and reflect: What do you notice? What feels uncomfortable? What does this tell you about the young people you work with?

**Important:** Facilitate this exercise with care and sensitivity. Ensure participants know they can pass on any step. This is not about inducing guilt – it is about building empathy and awareness.

- Activity 2; (Provide groups of 3–4 with a case study of a marginalised young person (e.g., a 22-year-old refugee woman who speaks limited local language and has recently arrived in a new city; a 19-year-old young man from a rural area who is not in education, employment, or training and feels invisible in his community).

Groups identify: What are the barriers this young person faces? What might their strengths and assets be? What approaches could help this person feel safe, included, and supported in a community space? What adaptations would they need?

Group presentations: Groups present their case to the wider group. The facilitator draws out common themes and introduces the concept of asset-based community development.

Reflection questions for participants:

Individual journaling: ‘What is one assumption I hold about marginalised young people that this module has challenged? What do I want to do differently?’

Group sharing: Popcorn-style shares (participants contribute when ready, no order).

Close with a collective commitment: each participant states one adaptation they will make to their practice to better include a marginalised young person they currently work with.

Facilitators notes:

The Privilege Walk can bring up strong emotions, particularly for participants who have themselves experienced marginalisation. Have a quiet space available and check in with participants after.

Avoid positioning marginalised youth only as ‘vulnerable’ – consistently centre their strengths, agency, and resilience throughout the activity.

Scenario cards should be reviewed and adapted for cultural appropriateness in each national context.





## 5. Reflection Workbook

The following prompts are designed to support participants in integrating the learning from Module 3 into their own practice. They can be used as personal journalling exercises, discussed in pairs or small groups, or revisited between sessions. Participants should engage with them at their own pace and in a way that feels safe and meaningful.

### Reflection Prompt 1 – Belonging in My Own Life

Think of a time in your life when you genuinely felt you belonged – when you were truly seen, accepted, and valued as yourself within a group or community. What was present in that environment? Who helped to create it? Now think of a time when you felt excluded or invisible. What was missing? What impact did that have on you?

How do these experiences shape the way you approach your work with young people today?

### Reflection Prompt 2 – My Community Space

Think about one of the spaces or groups you currently facilitate. Who feels most at home there? Who might feel less included, and why? What barriers – practical, relational, or cultural – might be making it harder for some young people to participate fully?

What is one change – small or large – that you could make to your space, your facilitation style, or your programme to make it more genuinely inclusive?

### Reflection Prompt 3 – Peer Connection in Practice

Recall a moment when you witnessed a meaningful peer connection between young people in a group you facilitated. What made it possible? What did you do (or not do) as a facilitator that created the conditions for it to happen?

If peer connection in your groups is limited, what do you think gets in the way? What would it look like to intentionally build more peer support into your regular sessions?

### Reflection Prompt 4 – Working with Difference

Think of a young person you have found it most challenging to engage or support. What do you know about the barriers they face? What assumptions might you be holding about them?

What would a strengths-based, trauma-informed approach look like when working with this young person? What support might you need to provide it?



## 6. Accessibility & Adaptation Tips (Examples)

The following guidance is intended to support facilitators in delivering Module 3 across a wide range of settings, group compositions, and contextual conditions. These are practical suggestions, not prescriptive rules – facilitators are encouraged to adapt them to their specific national, organisational, and community contexts.

### Physical and Environmental Accessibility

- Ensure the physical space is accessible to participants with mobility needs. If an activity requires standing or moving (e.g., the Privilege Walk), always offer seated alternatives and make these feel equally valid.
- Allow participants to choose where they sit or stand within the space. Avoid fixed, formal seating arrangements that replicate hierarchies.
- Provide materials in multiple formats where possible (visual, verbal, written) to accommodate different learning styles and literacy levels.
- If delivering in a multilingual context, have key instructions available in writing in all relevant languages. Use bilingual co-facilitators or interpreters where possible.

### Emotional Safety and Trauma-Informed Facilitation

- Always begin sessions with a brief check-in and grounding exercise to support participants in feeling present and safe.
- Establish clear group agreements at the start of the module (e.g., confidentiality, the right to pass, speaking from personal experience). Revisit them if needed.
- Avoid activities that require participants to disclose personal trauma or sensitive experiences to the wider group. All reflection prompts should make clear that sharing is voluntary.
- Have a quiet, private space available for participants who become overwhelmed during sessions. Check in with them gently and without pressure.
- Be aware that topics of exclusion and marginalisation may be personally activating for some facilitators as well as participants. Seek peer support or supervision when needed.

### Adapting for Specific Groups

- NEET youth and young people with limited prior engagement: Begin with very low-threshold activities focused on practical, concrete tasks before moving to reflective exercises. Build in multiple opportunities for movement and choice.
- Migrant and refugee young people: Ensure cultural sensitivity in all case studies and scenarios. Avoid activities that ask participants to identify or disclose their status. Use visual and tactile materials as alternatives to language-heavy tasks.
- Neurodivergent young people: Offer clear structure and predictability. Provide written instructions alongside verbal ones. Build in regular movement breaks. Reduce sensory overload where possible (dim lighting, quiet music).
- Rural or geographically isolated groups: Where in-person delivery is not feasible, adapt activities for hybrid or fully online formats. Prioritise activities that build relational connection, as participants may have limited access to peer networks.
- Mixed experience groups (youth workers alongside young people): Adjust facilitation language and scenarios to ensure relevance for all. Use paired or small-group work to enable cross-generational exchange.

### Online and Blended Delivery

- Workshops 1 and 2 can be adapted for online delivery using collaborative digital tools (e.g., shared virtual whiteboards for mapping activities, breakout rooms for small-group work, online journals for reflection prompts).
- The Privilege Walk in Workshop 3 can be adapted to an online format using an anonymous polling tool, allowing participants to respond to statements privately before a collective debrief.
- When delivering online, allow extra time for transitions and technical difficulties, and build in brief wellbeing check-ins between activities.

### 7. Resources & References

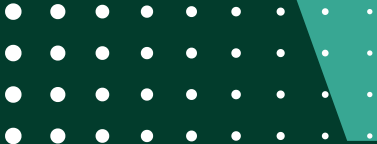
#### Recommended Resources for Facilitators

Mead, S., Hilton, D., & Curtis, L. (2001). Peer support: A theoretical perspective. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 25(2), 134–141.

Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5–14.

Zarobe, L., & Bungay, H. (2017). The role of arts activities in developing resilience and mental wellbeing in children and young people: A rapid review of the literature. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 137(6), 337–347.

World Health Organization (2021). *Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2030*. Geneva: WHO.

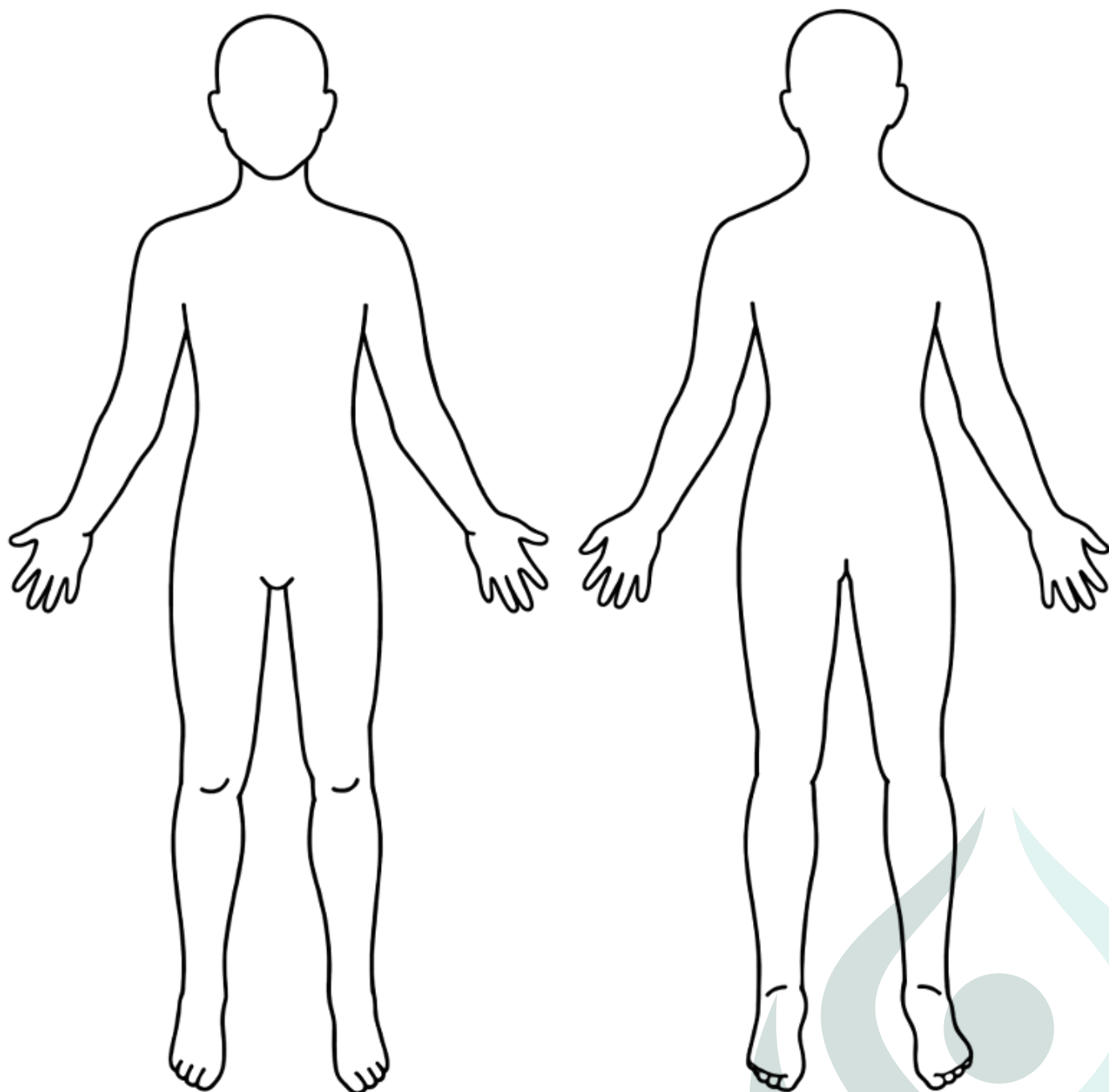


## Key References

- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383.
- European Commission (2023). *State of Health in the EU: Companion Report 2023*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Mead, S., Hilton, D., & Curtis, L. (2001). Peer support: A theoretical perspective. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 25(2), 134–141.
- SAMHSA (2014). *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Viking.
- ZenG Project Consortium (2025). *ZenG – Mindful Pathways to Mental Health for Youth: Research and Needs Analysis Report*. Erasmus+ KA210-YOU.
- 



## Printable for Module 1 / Workshop 1: Mapping the Inner Landscape





# MINDFUL PATHWAYS TO MENTAL HEALTH FOR YOUTH- ZENG

MindBalance Curriculum

PROJECT NUMBER: 2024-3-FR02-KA210-YOU-000286699

Well-being Lab, Avec Nous, and  
Equaline  
2025 July



AVEC  
NOUS



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. The views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or of the Agence Erasmus+ France Jeunesse & Sport (Agence du Service Civique). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.